

Student Focus Group Protocol Fall 2024

Overview

- **Objective:** Understand how classroom climate and identity impact middle and high school student math engagement
- **Time Required:** 60-minutes
- **Facilitators:** At least two facilitators are needed
- **Structure:** Semi-structured focus group
- **Participants:** Middle and high school students
- **Incentives:** \$50 gift card
- **Supplies:** Audio recorder, Flip chart paper, Post-it notes, printed identity cards, pens/markers, sign-in sheet
- **Location:** In-Person

Prior to the Focus Group

- Obtain parental consent and student assent forms from participants
- Have students sign-in on this slip (print prior to meeting and cut into strips)
- Share information with participants about when and where the focus group will be occurring
- Update protocol prior to Fall 2024 focus groups
- Print two sets of identity cards

Introduction (5 minutes)

Welcome. Hello, my name is [SAY NAME] and I am [INSERT RELEVANT POSITION]. [Introduce other staff who are present.] Child Trends, Search Institute, and McREL International, which are non-profit education research organizations, are partnering to understand your engagement in math. This focus group is part of a research study. The purpose of this research is to better support Black and Latino students' engagement in math. We think the best way to do that is to listen and learn from the experiences of individuals, like yourselves. Our conversation today will last about 60 minutes.

Informed assent. Participation in today's conversation is voluntary. Perspectives and experiences that you share today will be kept confidential. This means we will not tell anyone outside of the researchers on this study what was said in the group, and we will not use your names in the written report for this study. You will not benefit personally from participating in this focus group. You may feel uncomfortable answering certain questions, but you may refuse to answer any questions you are not comfortable answering or leave the focus group at any time. If you would like to leave the focus group, please let me know. Your decision to participate will not have an impact on your

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Learn more about the Adapted Measure of Math Engagement at <https://www.childtrends.org/project/adapted-measure-of-math-engagement>.

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experiences in school or your grade. We would like to record the conversation today for our records.

Are you willing to be recorded?

If the participant is not willing to be recorded, ask if they would be willing to proceed with the focus group without recording it. Instead, the facilitator will take notes during the discussion. If this option is acceptable, document how the focus group was processed on your notes.

Do you have any questions?

If the participant agreed to be recorded, say the following: Since you have agreed to be recorded, I will need you to provide your consent verbally when I turn on the recording.

Turn on record and ask the following: Do you agree to participate in this focus group as I have described it to you, including agreeing to be recorded?

The participants should say “yes” one at a time into the recording. Thank the participants and continue with the focus group.

Establish group norms. Before we get started, we wanted to have a couple community agreements while we're in this space together:

- There are no right or wrong answers. It's okay to say, “don't know.” You also do not have to answer questions that you do not want to answer.
- There are no bad questions. If you are confused about a word or what we are asking, let us know and we will strive to clarify what we are saying.
- At some point, I may have to interrupt you and move onto another question. Know that I value your perspectives and experiences, but we may need to move on for the sake of time.
- Some people may have different opinions, and that's okay. We can disagree with each other respectfully and talk about our different viewpoints.
- We're really interested in your own personal experiences and opinions, but there may be a time when you want to share a story or experience of a friend that you think is really important. That is okay, but do not share their name if you do.
- Please don't share what is said during our focus group after we leave the meeting. What is said during the focus group should stay private.

Ice Breaker (5 minutes)

Let's start by getting to know each other. Share your made-up name and one sentence about something that you enjoy learning about either inside or outside of school. *Start with yourself and move to the right clockwise to each participant.*

Brainstorm and Gallery Walk Activity (30 minutes total)

As I shared in the introduction, we are conducting this focus group to better understand your

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engagement in math. As you may have remembered, you took a survey in February about your math engagement. For the next 60 minutes, we will be doing two activities and asking you different questions about your engagement in math to strengthen the questions asked in that survey. Let's get started!

First, we will think about what makes a math classroom supportive and engaging. We will brainstorm and discuss more together. You will have time on your own to think about your own math classroom, what makes it supportive and engaging, and ideas you have on how to improve the classroom environment. You will write down your thoughts onto Post-it notes and place them around the room. We will then all walk around the room to look at each other's notes. You'll get a chance to react to people's notes by adding your thoughts. Then, we will come together as a group to discuss what we saw and learned.

Do you have any questions?

Brainstorming Questions (5 minutes)

Hand out Post-it notes and pens/markers to students.

Okay, I'm going to ask a few questions, one at a time, and I'd like you to write down any thoughts that come to mind in response to the questions. One idea per Post-it.

1. How would you describe the environment of your math classroom?
2. What in-class activities or tools help you learn math best?
3. What makes you feel supported in a math classroom? What could be improved?
4. What does it look like when you're engaged in math?
5. What helps you stay engaged in math? What would make learning math more interesting?

Gallery Walk (10 minutes)

Ask the students to place their Post-it notes at designated spots around the room and hand them Post-it notes in a single color for their reactions.

Now we will walk around the room to read all the notes. You can use your new sticky notes to add your reactions, leave questions, or share more ideas. It is okay to just read the notes too! As you review, look out for:

- Ideas you agree with
- Similar experiences that you've had
- Suggestions you like
- Questions you have

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Reflection Questions (15 minutes)

Ask the students to come back as a large group to reflect together.

Now I'm going to ask some reflection questions about what you wrote and what you saw. Anyone can respond and share their thoughts.

1. What were some common ideas or suggestions you noticed?
 - *Follow up prompt:* Why do you think these kept showing up?
2. Were there any questions you had about the notes around the room? If so, what were they?
3. What are the best ways for you to learn in math class?
4. What are the best ways for you to feel supported in math class?
 - *Follow up prompt:* What about the ways you feel supported in your learning?
 - *Follow up prompt:* How could your math teacher or school better support you?
5. What are the best ways for you to stay engaged in math class?
6. Which ideas to improve your math class interest you?

Identity and Math Class Activity (20 minutes total)

Now that we know more about what helps you learn, what helps you stay engaged in math, and what makes your math classroom feel supportive, we want to talk about how your identity affects your math class experience.

Identity Brainstorm (5 minutes)

Place identity cards in the center of the table. Hand out more Post-it notes and pens/markers to students if needed.

We have a set of identity cards to reference for this portion. Your identity is something that defines your experience, and it can be something external that's easily visible, or something internal or less visible to others. For example, some of the pieces of my personal identity are x, y, z. We have cards that say gender, race/ethnicity, role in your family, and hobbies/extracurriculars/sports. We want you to take a few minutes and brainstorm a list of things that make up your identity and you can start with what's on those cards, but you don't need to be limited by them. Again, you'll brainstorm these on Post-it notes with one identity element per Post-it note.

Group Discussion (15 minutes)

Now I'm going to ask two questions. For your initial response, I'd like you to think about your top 2-3 elements of your identity. You can hold them up or point at them to indicate your answer. And then we'll briefly discuss how the group responded to each question.

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1. What identities do you think about most often when you are in your math classroom?
After everyone indicates their response, point out similarities and ask for reflections. Ex: Most people selected gender as their response, why do you think that is? You could also ask questions about observations you have of how students chose their responses. Ex: This question seemed to be difficult for you to answer. Would anyone like to share their thought process and how they ultimately arrived at their answer?
2. What identities have the strongest impact on how you are perceived by your teacher in your math class?
Repeat the process of follow up questions from question 1
3. What identities have the strongest impact on how you are perceived by your peers in your math class?
Repeat the process of follow up questions from question 1

Finally, I have a few more questions for us to discuss:

4. How do your identities affect your relationship with teachers?
5. How do your identities affect how you engage in your math class?

Conclusion (5 minutes)

Thank you for your participation today. If you have any questions, concerns, or additional information you would like to share, email Samantha Holquist at sholquist@childtrends.org. Her name and contact information are included on your consent form. *Stop recording. Hand out gift cards.*