

Student Focus Group Protocol Spring 2023

Overview

- **Objective:** Understand how middle and high school students conceptualize and categorize engagement
- **Time Required:** 90 minutes in Spring 2023
- **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 and 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 Spring 2024 focus groups.

Introduction

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

This project is funded by the National Science Foundation, grant #2200437. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in these materials are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

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

Adapted Measure of Math Engagement

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 one at a time say “yes” 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

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. *Use the popcorn method to have participants move from one person to the next.*

Initial Questions

As I shared in the introduction, we are conducting this focus group to better understand your engagement in math. For the next 90 minutes, we will discuss your math classes. We will be asking seven questions. In responding to the following questions, you can think about one math class in particular or math classes in general. Let's get started!

Adapted Measure of Math Engagement

1. **If I say, “math people,” can you describe what comes to mind?** *Potential follow-up prompts: Do these people look like you? How are they similar? How are they different? Why do you think that is the case?*
2. **Tell me about your math classrooms.** *Follow-up prompts: What do they look like? What are teachers like? Do you like what you are learning? Do you feel challenged in math? What does feeling challenged look like? Do you participate in math class? What does participation look like? Do you feel supported? What does support look like?*
3. **Tell me about a time you were engaged in math.** *Follow-up prompts: What does it mean to be engaged in your math class? What were you doing when you were engaged? What did it feel like to be engaged? Who helped you engage in math? How does engagement in math look different for you from other subjects (e.g., English or Social Studies)?*
4. **How do teachers support your engagement in math?** *Potential follow-up prompts: What did your teacher do that makes you really enjoy doing math? What did your teacher do that makes you NOT want to do math?*
5. **How do your classmates support engagement in math?** *Potential follow-up prompts: Do you talk about math outside of the classroom? Do you work together in the classroom to learn? Do you work together on homework? Do you ask your friends for help in math?*
6. **What classroom, school, and/or community resources support your engagement in math?** *Potential follow-up prompts: How does the curriculum support your engagement? How does technology support your engagement? How do afterschool programs focused on math support your engagement?*
7. **What (if anything) in your personal life supports your engagement in math?** *Potential follow-up prompts: Thinking about who you are and who you want to be, how does that support your engagement? How does your family support your engagement? How do your friends support your engagement? How do other people in your community support your engagement (e.g., family friends, mentors, tutors)?*
8. **What are barriers to your engagement in math?** *Potential follow-up prompts: What makes you not engaged in math? What do you feel when you are not engaged in math? Think about how others see you, does that affect how you engage in math?*
9. **Please complete the sentence. In an ideal world, you would be most engaged in math if...**

Conclusion

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 also are included on your consent form. *Stop recording.*
Hand out gift cards.