

Student Focus Group Protocol Spring 2024

Overview

- **Objective:** Understand how middle and high school students conceptualize and categorize 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 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 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 experiences in school or your grade. We would like to record the conversation today for our records.

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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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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. As you may have remembered, you took a survey about two months ago about your math engagement. For the next 60 minutes, we will be asking you different questions

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about your engagement in math and other subjects in order to strengthen the questions asked in that survey. Let's get started!

1. Think about your classmates who are the most engaged in your math class, what do they do that other students don't do?
 - *Follow up prompt:* What is something in math class that only the engaged students do? How do they interact with the teacher?
2. Think about three people who come to mind when you hear the word "math person." What about their characteristics or behaviors make them a math person?
 - *Follow up prompt:* What specific skills do they have?
3. Think about people who do math for fun, who comes to mind? What do they do differently than other people?
4. Think about a subject you are confident in or really like. What does that feel like?
 - *Follow up prompt:* What does it look like?
 - *Follow up prompt:* What would make you feel more confident and excited about math class?
5. Think about a time when you did well in math, what steps did you take to get there?
 - *Follow up prompt:* How are the steps in math different from other subjects?
6. Think about your favorite teacher. How would you describe that teacher?
 - *Follow up prompt:* How is that teacher different from others?
 - *Follow up prompt if time permits:* Think about your favorite math teacher? How would you describe that teacher? How is that teacher different from others?
7. Describe your "study sheets and notes" for math class.
 - *Follow up prompt:* Where do you get them?
 - *Follow up prompt:* Do you use these study sheets and notes?
8. Think about a time when you felt highly supported in your learning in class. What made you feel supported? What did the support you received look like? Who did you get support from?
 - *Follow up prompt for high school students only:* How, if at all, has the support you receive in math changed now that you're in high school? For example, who you get support from, when you get support, where you get support, and how you get support?
9. What role, if any, do you see math playing in your future goals?

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10. How do you use math outside the classroom?

11. Do you think other people think of you as being good at math? Why or why not?

12. What are your after-school commitments?

- *Follow up prompt:* What do you call these things? For example, sports and clubs are often called "extracurricular" is there a better word to use for the activities you described besides "commitments"?

13. *If there is time:* Sometimes it can be hard to complete the work that is assigned. If you have ever experienced this, could you please share some of the reasons why you were unable to complete your work?

14. What is one thing you love about learning math?

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