



Student Attendance Focus Group Protocol

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Attendance Works
Adapted from The Baltimore Student Attendance Initiative
Safe and Sound Campaign
Baltimore, Maryland

Student Attendance Focus Group

The purpose of the student attendance focus groups are to seek students' opinions about and experiences with attending school. Select students who have different attendance patterns so you hear about a variety of experiences. The questions explore key reasons for student absenteeism and ways the schools can encourage increased attendance.

Scheduling Student Attendance Focus Groups

Focus groups preferably should take place during the regular school day. Coordinate with school administrators to identify the best date and time to hold the focus group.

Confidentiality Protocol:

Individual student names will not be collected or recorded

Individual student names will not be identified in the summary data

Materials:

Chart paper	Markers	Note-taking materials/tech	Snacks/drinks
Pictures or Skittles			

Focus Group Introduction Script

Facilitators and other members of staff introduce themselves to the group.

Facilitator Script: Thank you for agreeing to be part of the student focus group. We have asked you to be part of this discussion because we are very interested in your opinions on what helps students to get to school every day and reasons why students may not come to school. As a school we are concerned because too many students miss a few days of school each month. Students who don't attend school regularly can fall behind in their classes and their absence impacts the learning of everyone in the group.

I will be asking for your opinions and experiences with attending school here at _____(name of your school)_____. Your opinions and ideas will help us learn what to do about why students are absent and how to support students and families that need help getting to school every day.

Mr. /Mrs. _____ will be taking notes on your responses so that we remember what you believe may help students to get to school every day. We will document and share the answers to the questions we are asking you, but we will not share who gave the answers. Your personal identity will be protected, so we ask that you speak freely. (*If you are conducting interviews at more than one campus, add:* The answers you give will be added to the answers given by students from other schools that are also holding focus groups with their students.)

[Facilitator: These norms should be pre-written on a large sheet of paper and hung on the wall for students to review] Introduce norms to the group: These are behaviors that we believe are important for our group discussion, to ensure everyone feels respected and safe. Let's go over them together:

1. We will listen to our group members when they are speaking
2. We will not make a comment or laugh at someone's response
3. We will respect one another's feelings and not judge them

4. We will speak loud enough for everyone in the group to hear
5. We will enjoy the snacks and this time to share our very important thoughts

Is there anything here that someone thinks should not be? Can we all agree on these norms? Are there any norms that you would like to add?

We have one hour together to capture your perspectives.

Again, Ms. /Mr. ___ will be writing down your answers, but he/she is not taking names, only documenting your responses.

Focus Group Questions

Ice Breaker (pick one that works for you):

Use CASEL's [Community Building Circle](#) to facilitate the ice breaker. This is a quick activity to bring all voices into the room on light content before moving to the main topic. Monitor time to stay within the one-hour focus group schedule.

- Picture Protocol - a group of pictures -- they use it to tell whatever they want to talk about.
- Skittles Ice Breaker: red – favorite TV show; orange – favorite music genre; yellow – favorite food; green – favorite candy; purple – favorite thing to do after school
- Whip Around Share: Your favorite flavor OR topping for ice cream

[Note Taker: Scribe all of the students' responses in the electronic protocol.]

Probing for Frequency- To facilitate moving through the protocol within the hour, and to capture frequency please consider asking whether any other student has had a similar experience, to indicate so by a method of communication - verbal yes, raising a hand, snapping fingers, etc.

1. I would like you to think about the last time you missed school. Share the reasons why.
2. Is there anything else that you would like to add about reasons we and our friends miss school?
3. Has anyone in this group or someone you know, experienced a situation where they felt unsafe and did not want to come to school? Or, just didn't come to school because they didn't feel safe? (Ask if they feel comfortable to share the cause of the lack of safety. If not explore with student later one-to-one.)
4. ***[Facilitator: Let students know this is a two-part question. Ask one question at a time]***
 - A. What does your school do to help students who miss school often?

B. Is there anything more you would like to see your school doing to help students who are absent often?

5. How do you know that student attendance is important at your school?

6. How do you know attendance is important to your parents and family members?

7. *[Facilitator: Let students know this is a two-part question. Ask one question at a time]*
A. How do you feel about attending school every day?
B. Does attending school every day help you do well in school?

8. *[Facilitator: Let students know this is a two-part question. Ask one question at a time]*
A. Does your school contact you or your family when you miss school?
B. What kind of contact do they make? (e.g. a personal call home, a note, a robo-call, a face-to-face connection etc.)

9. If your school were to offer recognition/rewards for good attendance, what would make a difference to you and your friends? *[Facilitator: Encourage out of the box thinking. Help students to be honest about what type of recognition would really make a difference including jobs, all day bus passes, enrichment classes, drivers education help etc.]*

10. What are the programs or activities in your school that encourage you to want to come to school?

11. Do students at school name have a voice? Do you feel heard by the adults in this building?

[Thank you for sharing your experiences and opinions, your voice matters, and your input will help us develop strategies to improve attendance.]