

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PROTOCOLS

*How do I engage teachers,
students and families?*



This tool includes focus group protocols for engaging students, parents and teachers. Focus groups are designed to gain an understanding of stakeholders' perspectives, experiences and aspirations for a future assessment system.

Guidance:

These focus group protocols are designed to last between 45-60 minutes, but can be adapted to be shorter or longer. The facilitator will ask participants open-ended questions to prompt in-depth discussion of their feelings, experiences and wishes surrounding assessment.

- + The facilitator will begin each session by welcoming participants, explaining the purpose and context, and asking participants to briefly introduce themselves. The facilitator will explain that the focus group session will be recorded, and the information collected will be kept confidential and names will not be used.

Purpose:

Depending on what stage your state is at in the through-year process, these focus groups could serve a few different purposes:

- + Understand issues in current assessment system
- + Provide input on test design and needs
- + Help you to build user personas, or archetypal users whose goals and characteristics represent the needs of a larger group of users, to guide the design of your through-year assessment system.

Student Focus Group Protocol

Sample Script:

Today we want to chat about what you like about your school, classroom and community. We also want to hear about what could make your school experience better, particularly with regards to tests.

There are no right or wrong answers. I will ask you to share some stories with me about your school, classes and community. Your thoughts are important and will help us continue making school a great place for you. We hope you'll be as honest as possible in your reflections, as your name will not be shared with anyone. Any questions before we start our conversation?

Before we jump in, it would be great to get to know a little bit about each other. Let's go around and share:

- + Your name
- + Current grade and where you go to school
- + A TV show you're currently watching (optional Icebreaker question)

Section 1: Reflecting on Current Assessment Experiences

We want to start this conversation by learning about your experiences with testing at school.

- + Could you tell me about the last time you took a test in school? What did you like about the test? What did you find difficult?
- + How did you feel about the test when you were taking it? What kinds of things help you do your best on the day of a test? What are things that got in the way of you doing your best? (Probe on: confidence, focus, distractions, time, what was behind the feeling)
- + How do you like to prepare for tests? What do your teachers do to help you prepare for tests?
- + Tell me about your favorite question you ever had on a test (prompt to describe features of the item)

Section 2: Test Results

Now we are going to spend some time talking about test results and what you do when you get your test results back.

- + When you receive your results/scores from a test, what do you do? Does this change depending on what kind of test it is?
- + Do you talk to your teacher about the results of tests? What kinds of things do you discuss with them about tests?
- + Do you talk to your family about the results of tests you take in school? What kinds of things do you discuss with them about tests?

Parent Focus Group Protocol

Sample Script:

Today we want to chat about your experiences with your child's school, particularly when it comes to testing. We also want to hear about what could make your school experience better.

There are no right or wrong answers. I will ask you to share some stories with me about your child's school, classes and community. Your thoughts are important and will help us continue making school a great place for your child. We hope you'll be as honest as possible in your reflections, as your name will not be shared with anyone. Any questions before we start our conversation?

Before we jump in, it would be great to get to know a little bit about each other. Let's go around and share:

- + Your name
- + Your children's ages and the schools they attend
- + A TV show you're currently watching (optional Icebreaker question)

Section 1: Reflecting on Current Assessment Experiences

We want to start this conversation by learning about your child's experiences with testing at school.

- + Could you tell me about your experience with your children taking tests in school?
 - + Probe on: through-your such as interims (e.g. weekly quizzes), end of year summative (e.g. state required testing)
- + How do you help your child prepare for these tests? What kinds of things do you do to support your child in preparing for tests at school?
- + What kinds of things does your child tell you about their experiences with taking tests at school? What kinds of questions do they ask you about taking tests?
- + What does your child say about their feelings about taking tests? How do you feel about the tests and exams your child takes at school?
- + Are there any things that get in the way of your child doing their best on tests at school?

Section 2: Communication Around Assessments

We want to ask some questions about how your child's teacher and school communicates with you around your child's test results.

- + How does your child's teacher and/or school communicate with you about the tests they administer to your child? How do they share the results of the tests with you?

Teacher Focus Group Protocol

Sample Script:

Today we want to chat about your experience with testing, and particularly your state’s summative assessment, and how that can be improved for the future.

There are no right or wrong answers. I will ask you to share some stories with me about your school, classes and community. Your thoughts are important and will help us as we think about improving our state’s assessment system. We hope you’ll be as honest as possible in your reflections, as your name will not be shared with anyone. Any questions before we start our conversation?

Before we jump in, it would be great to get to know a little bit about each other. Let’s go around and share:

- + Your name
- + Grade and subject taught, school
- + Length of time teaching
- + A TV show you’re currently watching (optional Icebreaker question)

Section 1: Reflecting on Current Assessment Experiences

We want to start this conversation by learning about your current experiences with testing.

- + How do you define assessment?
- + Tell me about your experience with testing in your district or school - what is it like when it is time to administer state or district wide assessments? What do you think about the content that is currently on assessments?
- + What is it like when you and your students receive the results of an assessment? How do you use the results of assessments?
- + Thinking about your experience with assessments, could you tell me about a time that you felt an assessment helped you improve a students’ education for the better?
 - + Can you tell me about a time when you felt an assessment wasn’t so helpful?

Section 2: Current State Summative Assessment

- + What is working is our state’s current assessment system? What changes would you like to see?
- + What is working in your district’s interim assessment system? What changes would you like to see?
- + How do you use state exams and other tests to guide your instruction and practice?

- + How do you currently measure students' progress toward end-of-year goals?
- + How connected to a curriculum do you believe the state summative test should be?
- + What kind of test score reports do you find most valuable? Why? How could tests and score reports help you use data more effectively?

Section 3: Test Results/Reports:

- + Thinking about assessment reports, what kinds of information have you found to be valuable for you to use?
- + What kinds of information on a report do you tend to overlook or ignore?
- + What would an assessment need to be able to do for it to be really valuable to you in your teaching? (probe on: features that would help adjust instruction for whole class, for individual students)
- + What are your goals when using interim and summative assessments?
- + What do you think is missing from the assessments that you have given?
- + What would an assessment need to be able to do to help your students' parents better support their children?

Section 4: New Assessments

We are working on piloting a new innovative through-year assessment system and I'd like to show you our initial thinking and a pilot design.

Show sample language about purpose/concept statements of new assessment system

- + What are your first reactions to this statement? What could be valuable or beneficial about this new system?
- + What questions do you have or what is confusing?

Show sample of test design in current stage (These questions must be adapted based on your test design)

- + What are your thoughts on this design? What is missing?
- + How would you approach administering these tests?
- + How interested would you be in administering shorter assessments closer-in to when the content is delivered vs. assessing all the content at end of year? What factors drive your preference?

Appendix: Additional resources

Sample Email Language:

Hello, I'm _____ and I work for _____. We are working with the state of _____ to pilot a new system of assessments with the goal of better addressing the needs of educators, students and parents. I am contacting you to schedule 45 minutes for a focus group (OR to ask for assistance in reaching out to parents and students). Focus group participants will be asked about their general feelings and experiences with assessments. I have the following dates and times available and can work with your availability to find a time that fits within your schedule. Please let me know which option works best for you.

Focus Group Framing Script:

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I am [Name] with _____ and we have partnered with _____ to pilot a new system of assessments with the goal of better addressing the needs of educators, students and parents.

Before we begin, as we mentioned in the email we sent ahead of this interview, we will be recording this interview to aid note taking during the interview. This recording will not be shared with anyone outside of the project team. It will be deleted at the conclusion of the project. Is that ok?

In addition, our findings will include both quotations and synthesis from the dozens of interviews and focus groups we are conducting. We want to ensure you feel comfortable openly sharing during this conversation. We will not attribute quotes to any individuals to protect your anonymity unless we reach out for your permission first. If we do, you'll have the opportunity to review and correct any quotations we attribute to you. Any questions before we begin?

Focus Group Agreements/Norms:

Before we start, we'd like to share a few group agreements and norms for this focus group:

- + Let's try to stay at one speaker at a time, so that we can hear & take notes*
- + As much as possible, let's try to keep responses focused, so that we can make sure everyone's voice is heard and shared*
- + We encourage participation from everyone present, since each person's perspective is important. We won't be calling on people to answer, but we do want to make sure everyone's voice gets heard so we invite you to un-mute as a way of "raising your hand"*
- + Build from each other's comments, to leverage the collective power of those in the room/on the call*
- + We encourage differing perspectives and want to hear if you disagree with each other, as long as we're respectful of other viewpoints*
- + We ask that you share as much as you are comfortable with sharing in response to our questions, and know that your reflections will be confidential and used in the aggregate, and not traced back to you.*