

Parent Focus Group Design
Estimated Total Time: 90 minutes

BACKGROUND

Holding a parent focus group is a useful approach for gathering parent perspectives on what are the barriers and challenges to ensuring children succeed in school and do not drop-out. Ideally focus groups would be supported by facilitator and note taker and held in the primarily language(s) spoken by participating families. If multiple languages are spoken, all of the times below should be lengthened to allow for translation. As you will see below, we also suggest encouraging discussion in pairs or triads through the focus group process to make sure everyone feels comfortable.

SUGGESTED PROCESS

I. Welcome, Overview & Introductions (10 minutes)

A. Start by welcoming everyone to the focus group and letting participants know that the purpose is to solicit parent perspectives about how to make sure all children succeed rather than drop-out of school. These perspectives will be used to inform the development of a drop-out prevention plan for _____ as well as summit on drop out prevention to be held _____.

B. Ask each person to briefly state their name as well as the number and grade level of their children.

II. School Success Warm Up *Paired Discussion* (20 minutes)

A. For 5-8 minutes, Ask each participant to find a partner to discuss the following two questions:

- 1) What most helps your child succeed to in school?
- 2) What makes it hard for your child to succeed?

B. After giving participants a chance to talk to each other, ask them to take 2 minutes to write down at least 1 idea for what helps (on a green sticky) and 1 ideas for what is hard (on a pink sticky.)

C. Ask parents to post their stickies up on a large white sheets of paper . One should be labeled "What helps Your Child Succeed in School?" and the other "What Makes It Hard for School Success?" When participants post their responses, they should identify if there are any similar ideas and if so, group them together. If not, then they should start a new category. If multiple languages are spoken – you may need to assign someone bilingual to help to the person group their ideas (and if possible add a quick translation of the sticky.)

- D. Once all the stickies have been posted, ask the group to review what is up on the charts. The facilitator should then call attention to the emerging groups or trends.

III. **Proposed Framework for Parent Engagement** (15 – 20 minutes)

- A. Explanation: We are exploring a possible framework for thinking about how parents can really make a difference around their children's success. We are thinking that an effective approach is to focus parents on by supporting the 3As:
 - 1. **Attendance Every Day:** Ensure children go to school regularly
 - 2. **Achievement Every Year:** Monitor and help children make satisfactory progress each year
 - 3. **Attainment Over Time:** Set high expectations for children and plan for attaining their long-term goals
- B. Ask participants to discuss with a partner for 3-4 minutes What do you think about these 3As as a focus? Do they make sense to you? What don't you like about this?
- C. Open up for comments/discussion in large group

IV. **Identifying Needed Parent Support** (20 minutes)

- A. Explanation: The purpose of this exercise is to clarify how parent, schools and community agencies could be working together to ensure that parents have the tools, skills and information they need to ensure children succeed in school.
- B. Matrix: Present matrix. Consider having a large version of this matrix posted as well as handouts that each individual can have for taking personal notes.
- C. Ask participants to discuss the matrix in pairs and come up with ideas for what each of the key stakeholder groups could do. They should write down the ideas on stickies so they can then be posted. If this is group of parents with children of different ages, you might encourage parents to use different colors to indicate the age of their child (e.g. elementary, middle or high school). Participants should, again, group similar ideas together.
- D. After results have been posted, the group should review the results and offer any reflections on trends or issues identified through this process.

V. **Closing** (5 minutes)

Facilitator thanks everyone for their participation.