

# Noe Middle School Jefferson County, Kentucky

Student Focus Groups on Increasing the Involvement of Parents  
Who are in Noe's Area  
Fall, 2001

## **Facilitators' Guide**

This Guide includes these things:

- C Directions for opening your focus group
- C The full set of questions you will ask participants, p. 8
- C Hints for follow-up questions, p. 7
- C A way to keep track of time so you spend about the right amount of time on each question

*Explanation of time tracking:*

Starting on page 8, next to each question you will notice a space for the *elapsed time* and the *clock time*.

The elapsed time indicates how many minutes should have already passed in your focus group session, if you are following the time estimates for each question.

The clock time indicates the actual time, such as 9:45 AM or 10:30 AM. You will need to fill in the clock time for your focus group session, with the first entry on page 2 being your focus group starting time. Then you fill in the rest of the clock time blanks by adding time to your starting time. For example, on Question Two, the elapsed time is 20 minutes. If your session started at 9:30, then your real time here will be 9:50. This means that by 9:50 you should be starting Question Two.

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Outline Version

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**Follow this version if you prefer to use your own words.**

*(Elapsed time) 0:05 [Five minute allowance for lateness]*

*(Clock time)* \_\_\_\_\_ Welcome, introductions, preliminaries, ground rules

- ! Thank people for coming. Suggest they help themselves to snacks.
- ! Mention the focus of discussion: getting parents more involved at Noe so the school climate and student performance will be even better..
- ! Check verbally on comfort: temperature, refreshments, any needed materials.
- ! Introduce yourselves and your titles (“*We’ll be your facilitators*” or “*We’ll be guiding the conversation.*”). Don’t give personal details that could sway people’s opinions.
- ! Do introductions, using first names only. After going around once just for names, go around again with a question about something fun and interesting. [*“What is your favorite food?”* or “*What is one thing you really like to do?”* or something else] Ask people to write their names on the table cards provided.
- ! Explain that this is one of \_\_\_ groups with students that will lead to a report to be produced in December.
- ! State the ending time for the session: \_\_\_\_\_
- ! Explain the nature of the discussion.

It is aimed at getting a lot of information in short amount of time.

It is very structured.

The facilitator is fully in charge of pace (participants can relax.)

- ! Remind people about audio taping (they must have agreed to this before signing up for the session.)
- ! Explain the way in which confidentiality is protected: no names or identities are ever used in the reports from the sessions. First names used during the session are taken out of written transcripts and never used in analysis or reporting.
- ! (Optional) Ask group members after the session to separate other people's names and views when they talk about the session.
- ! Emphasize that all comments and opinions are right and valued. You will not be asking questions that have wrong answers.
- ! The purpose of the session is to see how many opinions there are about each topic. The purpose is not to reach consensus or persuade each other. Explain that members of the group were picked intentionally to be different from each other.
- ! Strongly encourage people to state their personal opinions, no matter what opinions others in the group may hold.
- ! Explain that as facilitators, you will be the guides, and you will recognize people to speak. As much as possible, encourage people to speak one at a time, but assure them that if they get lively, you will help sort it all out and get it recorded for analysis.
- ! Let people know that you may occasionally rush some section of the discussion they find interesting, and may even have to interrupt some people to move on to new topics or new speakers. On the other hand, they may notice you pulling more information from more people than they think is necessary. Remind them that you will be the one to worry about all this, and you will make your decisions based on what the sponsor needs to know.

- ! Ask people to speak for themselves alone, not for others or for the "average person."
- ! Check for agreement. (*"Those are our ground rules. Can you agree to live them during this session?"*)
- ! Ask if there are any questions.

[Now go to page 8 for the questions.]

**Follow this version if you prefer to read from the text.**

*(Elapsed time)* 0:05 [*Five minute allowance for lateness*]

*(Clock time)* \_\_\_\_\_ Welcome, introductions, preliminaries, ground rules

Thank you for coming today. We very much appreciate your taking the time to participate. The general focus of our session will be on ways to get our parents more involved in activities at Noe. The reason for the focus groups is to develop new ideas for involving parents, because great schools have lots of parent involvement, a better school climate, and better test scores.

Please help yourself to refreshments, and let me know if there is anything else you need. I am \_\_\_\_\_ and I will be the facilitator for this session. My co-facilitator is \_\_\_\_\_.

I'd like to go around now and have you introduce yourselves. Please tell us your name and \_\_\_\_\_ [”your favorite food”or “one thing that you really like to do” or something else simple and fun]

We will be finishing by \_\_\_\_\_ .

We will be having a discussion that is aimed at getting a lot of information in a short amount of time. I and my co-facilitator will guide the discussion, so you can just relax and participate. Similar sessions are being conducted with \_\_\_ other groups at Noe.

Let me remind you that the conversation will be audiotaped. We do this only for analysis, so we can review the conversation in detail and we don't have to remember or take notes. No names or identities are ever used in the reports from the sessions. First names used during the session are taken out of written transcripts and never used in analysis or reporting. After the session, a transcript is made from the audiotape. This is to protect your privacy. We ask that each of

you also hold each other's opinions in confidence. It's okay to talk about anything that is said here, so long as you don't attach someone's name to the idea or opinion.

All comments and opinions are right and valued. There are no wrong answers to the questions. The purpose of the session is to see how many opinions there are about each topic. This group is deliberately made up of people with different experiences, so we are looking for lots of different views. The purpose is not to reach agreement or to persuade each other. So let me encourage you to share your ideas and opinions, no matter what opinions others in the group may hold.

As the facilitators we will be your guides, and if more than one person wants to talk, we will call on people in order. We'd like to have you speak one at a time, but if you all start talking at once we will help sort it all out and get it recorded for analysis.

We may occasionally rush some section of the discussion you find interesting, and may even have to interrupt some people to move on to new topics or new speakers. On the other hand, we may ask for more information from some people than you think is necessary. We'll worry about all of this, and be guided by what the sponsor needs to know.

We ask that you speak for yourselves, and not for other people, or for what most people think.

Those are our proposed guidelines. Does anybody have a problem with any of them?

Do you have any questions before we begin?

[Now go to page 8 for the questions.]

## **HINTS FOR FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:**

How ...

What is it about ...

Tell me more about ...

What is your experience with ...

Describe ...

Imagine ...

What caused you to ...

What features of X do you particularly like/dislike ...

When do you ...

How often do you...

Where do you ...

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## THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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(Elapsed time) 0:15

(Clock time) \_\_\_\_\_

Question 1: Here is a list of activities we have at Noe after school and during school. [Hand out the list.] Circle the activities that your parents, grandparents, or guardians attend at Noe Middle. The activities are listed above the line.

We will take these up in a few minutes, but you don't need to put your name on them. They can be anonymous.

[Wait until people seem to be finished.]

(Elapsed time) 0:20

(Clock time) \_\_\_\_\_

Question 2: Below the line there is a place for you to list those activities that you would like your parents, grandparents, or guardians to attend, if you were part of the activities. Please list as few or as many as you want.

[Wait until people seem to be finished.]

*Possible follow up question:*

C Tell us more about what makes you want your parents to be here for the events you circled.

[If needed, ask individual participants, “Tell me more,” or “Can you explain more about that?” Avoid asking too many follow-up questions to any one person, though, so you don’t make her or him feel uncomfortable.]

[Collect all the sheets from participants, and thank them for filling them out.]

(Elapsed time) 0:25

(Clock time) \_\_\_\_\_

Question 3: Imagine an activity you might like that Noe doesn’t offer right now, and tell us about a new event or activity that you would like your parents, grandparents, or guardians to attend.

*Possible follow up questions:*

- C What would make this fun for you?
- C What would make this fun for your parents, grandparents, or guardians?
- C What would help you get your parents, grandparents, and guardians to come to this new activity?

[If some of the students give very short answers, you can use some “spontaneous follow-up” questions like, “Tell us more about that,” or “Can you say more about what will make that fun for your grandparent?”]

(Elapsed time) 0:30

(Clock time) \_\_\_\_\_

Question 4: Maybe there are times when you don't want your parents, grandparents, and guardians at school. If that's true for you, please describe those times.

*Possible follow up question:*

- C What is the difference between times you do want your parents, grandparents, and guardians to come to school and times you don't want them to come?
- C Are there things Noe Middle School could do to make it easier for you when your parents, grandparents, and guardians come to school?

[Listen and watch for times when you can use spontaneous follow-up questions like "Can you say more about that?" and "Please tell us more."]

**Note: The person in the role of back-up facilitator should step outside right about now and see if the adult has any suggestions.**

(Elapsed time) 0:35

(Clock time) \_\_\_\_\_

Question 5: If there is a time when you really want your parent, grandparent, or guardian to come to school, what would you do to try to persuade them to come?

*Possible follow up question:*

[Use spontaneous follow-ups, if appropriate, such as “Tell us more about that.”]

(Elapsed time) 0:40

(Clock time) \_\_\_\_\_

Question 6: What can you and other students do to get your parents to attend more events at Noe?

*Possible follow up question:*

C If you have some “secret strategies” that you think might help other students get their parents to come to events at school, would you please share them?

[Use spontaneous follow-ups as needed, for example, “Tell us more about how that works” or, as always, simply “Tell us more.”]

(Elapsed time) 0:45

(Clock time) \_\_\_\_\_

Question 7: What can the teachers and staff at Noe Middle do to get your parents, grandparents, and guardians to attend more events at Noe?

*Possible follow up questions:*

C Imagine the best thing Noe could possibly do to help you get your parents, grandparents, and guardians to come to school. What would that be?

[Use spontaneous follow-ups if they fit in. For example, once someone has offered an idea, you could ask “Tell us more about how that would make a difference with your parent/grandparent/guardian.”]

(Elapsed time) 0:50

(Clock time) \_\_\_\_\_

Question 8: Is there anything else you would like to add?

*Possible follow up question:*

C This is your last chance! What would you like to say that you haven’t gotten to say yet?

[You can still use spontaneous follow up questions here if you have not run out of time. If people say things that could use more explaining, you can always say, “Please tell us more about that.”]

(Elapsed time) 1:00

(Clock time) \_\_\_\_\_

Thank people for coming, and say, "Goodbye."