

# Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)



## Monitoring and Evaluating Covid-19 Mitigation Strategies In K-12 Schools: Focus Group Guide

Updated Nov. 13, 2020 [Print](#)

## Tools for K-12 schools

### **Monitoring and Evaluating Mitigation Strategies in K-12 Schools**

Understand the impact of COVID-19 mitigation strategies. Includes example questions, indicators, and data sources

### **Checklist: Monitoring and evaluation for K-12 schools**


Steps to develop a useful and feasible monitoring and evaluation plan

### **Interview guide**

Understand individual perceptions and experiences with mitigation strategies in K-12 schools

### **Focus group guide**

Learn about perceptions and experiences with mitigation strategies from small groups

This [focus group guide](#)  contains sections that are adaptable for your local context. This tool is intended to help the moderator obtain more in-depth information about perceptions and experiences of mitigation strategies used to reduce the spread of COVID-19 when schools are in in-person learning mode. The tool is intended for government professionals in public health or education, school district administrators, or administrators of K-12 schools who are interested in conducting their own data collection. It may also be adapted for other settings. Local Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines should be explored and implemented as required prior to conducting focus group activities and/or data collection activities.

- Potential focus group participants could include school or school district administrators, school faculty and staff, school-age children, or parents or guardians of school-age children.
- Each individual focus group should be made up of similar individuals, so the number of focus groups will depend on how many different types of groups from which you want to gather information.
- Each individual focus group should include a manageable number of participants (generally no more than 8-10, but potentially fewer if virtual) and should not exceed 120 minutes.
- Focus groups can be conducted by phone, web conference or in person (ensuring appropriate COVID-19 prevention strategies are in place).

# Selecting Focus Group Questions

Depending on your needs and local context, you should select the questions provided in this focus group guide that are most relevant to the evaluation questions you have identified and the in-depth information you are seeking from participants about their perceptions and experiences of mitigation strategies.

- The tool can be adapted for the different audiences identified above. For example, parents may not be aware of all prevention strategies implemented in their child's school so the moderator would want to adapt or delete this question depending on the local context and level of involvement of that specific group of parents (e.g., parent-teacher association members versus non-members).
- The specificity of the focus group guide will depend on the purpose of the focus group and the sociodemographic characteristics (age, gender, race and ethnicity, education level, and income) of the focus group participants.
- Not all the focus group questions are relevant for all focus group participants. The questions might be developed or modified for different audiences and presented in separate formats.

You can add, remove, or change the focus group questions below to align with the purpose of the focus group and your evaluation questions, and to fit within the time allotted to conduct the focus group.

## Introduction and Welcome

Welcome and thank you for being here today. My name is **[your name]** and I will be the moderator for today's discussion. I am an **[insert role]** at **[organization or agency name]**. The purpose of this discussion is to get feedback on the prevention strategies your school implemented to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Prevention strategies are actions that people and communities, such as K-12 schools, can take to reduce the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19. Some examples of these prevention strategies for COVID-19 are handwashing, physical distancing (you may have heard of social distancing) and wearing a mask.

Your experience and opinions are very important to us. We are especially interested in learning about the prevention strategies implemented at **[your school district or school name]**, the factors that helped or didn't help your school in implementing these strategies, and how these strategies may have impacted student's health (including social, behavioral, and mental) and academic achievement at your school.

The format we are using is a focus group that will take no more than **[X minutes]**. A focus group is a conversation that focuses on specific questions in an environment that is safe from the influence and judgement of others. I will guide the conversation by asking questions that each of you can respond to. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Just be honest. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering. If you like, you can also respond to each other's comments. It is

my role to make sure everyone gets to participate. **[Notetaker's name]** is here to take notes and keep track of the time. We would like to record this focus group. The recording will not be heard by anyone outside of this project. The recording will only be used to make sure **[notetaker's name]** notes are correct.

Before we get started, I want to let you all know the information that we learn today will be compiled into a final report. The report will include a summary of your comments and some recommendations. It may be shared with the Superintendent, other district leaders, or public health professionals. This focus group is anonymous and confidential.

"Anonymous" means that we will not be using your names and you will not be identified as an individual in our report of this project. "Confidential" means that what we say in this room should not be repeated outside of this room. Although we hope everyone here honors this confidentiality, please remember that what you say here today could be repeated by another focus group member. So please, do not say anything that you absolutely need to keep private. The tape this interview is recorded on will be kept safely in a locked facility until it is transcribed word for word, and then it will be destroyed. May we have everyone's permission to record this focus group? *(Note to moderator: Please obtain a yes from all focus group participants before proceeding. If participant declines permission to record but is willing to participate, the session will not be recorded; however, notes will be taken. Reassure the participants that the notes will not include their names or any other information to reveal their identity.)*

Thank You. There are a few ground rules to follow during our focus group. **Focus Group ground rules:**

- The most important rule is that only one person speaks at a time. There may be a temptation to jump in when someone is talking, but please wait until they have finished.
- There are no right or wrong answers.
- You do not have to speak in any particular order.
- When you do have something to say, please do so. You can raise your hand to speak or speak up after the other person has finished speaking. There are many of you in the group and it is important that I obtain each of your views.
- You do not have to agree with the views of other people in the group.

Does anyone have any questions before we begin?

# Opening

Let's begin with introductions. *(Note to moderator: you may tell participants whether they should provide only their first name or if they are welcome to use a nickname or false name for their own comfort.)*

1. Please share with us an interesting fact about yourself or something you like to do in your free time.

***(Instruction for notetaker: begin taking notes on the focus groups discussion as the moderator asks the following question)***

I would like to give you a few minutes to think about your experiences with changes that were made in **[your school district, school, or classroom]** to reduce the spread of COVID-19. We'll talk about these changes as 'prevention strategies' *(Note to moderator: consider offering a brief overview of [mitigation strategies](#) that can help the participants better understand the mitigation strategies that may be discussed and the implementation of such prevention strategies.)*

## Implementation of Prevention

1. What prevention strategies were implemented in **[your school district, school, or classroom]** to reduce or prevent the spread of COVID-19? *(Notes to moderator: prompt if don't hear anything about the following categories: masks, physical/social distancing, keeping students in a group throughout the day (cohorts or pods), screening for symptoms at home or in school, changes to meal service, washing hands or using hand sanitizer, changes to extracurricular activities including sports)*
  - a. How were the prevention strategies implemented in **[your school district, school, or classroom]**?
  - b. When were the prevention strategies implemented in **[your school district, school, or classroom]**?
2. In your opinion, how well did **[students, teachers, staff]** follow or practice these prevention strategies?
3. What are your school plans for when a **[student, teacher, or staff]** has been diagnosed by a doctor with COVID-19 or suspected to have COVID-19?
  - a. Is there a designated area where **[students, teachers, or staff]** with symptoms of COVID-19 are asked to wait until they can go home?
  - b. Is there a number of days **[students, teachers, or staff]** with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 are asked to stay home from school? *(Note to Interviewer: Ask the interviewee to answer the best they can.)*
  - c. To the best of your knowledge, does the **[school district or school]** try to notify people who came into contact with an individual who has been diagnosed with COVID-19?

### Other question options:

1. In your opinion, what strategies were the easiest for **[students, teachers, or staff]** to implement?
  - a. What made them easy to implement?
2. In your opinion, what strategies were the hardest for **[students, teachers, or staff]** to implement?
  - a. What made them hard to implement?
3. What else can be done to help prevent COVID-19 in **[your school district, school, or classroom]**?
4. How did the **[school district or school]** communicate the prevention strategies to **[students, parents, teachers, and staff]**?
  - a. What were the messages the **[school district or school]** communicated to **[students, parents, teachers, and staff]**?
  - b. In your opinion, were these messages helpful in communicating the prevention strategies?
    - i. What was it about these messages that made them helpful?
    - ii. What was it about these messages that made them not helpful?

Next, I would like to hear about things that may have helped or hindered your ability to implement the prevention strategies in **[your school district, school, or classroom]** to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

## Facilitators and Barriers

1. What did you find to be helpful when implementing the prevention strategies in **[your school district, school, or classroom]**?
2. What were the challenges that [you or your school] encountered when implementing the prevention strategies in **[your school district, school, or classroom]**?
  - a. What may have led to these challenges?
  - b. Were these challenges resolved? If so, how? If not, what prevented these challenges from being resolved?
  - c. What would have helped prevent the challenges?
3. How did the **[school district]** support the implementation of the prevention strategies?
4. What changes have been made to the prevention strategies since the start of the school year?
  - a. To the best of your knowledge, what factors contributed to **[your school district or school]** decisions to reduce or expand COVID-19 prevention strategies over **[time period; e.g., fall 2020]**?

### Other question options:

1. What trainings or resources were provided to help **[students, teachers, or staff]** implement the prevention strategies to reduce spread of COVID-19? *(Notes to moderator: This could include technology, excused absences, etc.)*
  - a. What resources provided by the **[school district or school]** were most helpful?
  - b. What resources provided by the **[school district or school]** were not helpful?
  - c. What is missing that may have been helpful for successful implementation?
2. How well do you think **[your school district, school, or classroom]** did in working to prevent or reduce the spread of COVID-19?
3. What do you think **[your school district, school, or classroom]** could have done differently to reduce or prevent the spread of COVID-19?

Next, I would like to hear your opinions about the impact of the prevention strategies on **[student, teachers, and staff]** health (social, behavioral, and mental) and academic achievements.

## Outcomes

1. How would you describe any impact the prevention strategies have had on reducing the spread of COVID-19 in your **[school district or school]** among **[students, families, teachers, or staff members]**?
  - a. How many **[students, teachers, or staff]** have been diagnosed by a medical professional with COVID-19 in **[specify time period, e.g., fall 2020]**? *(Note to moderator: Ask the focus group participants to answer the best they can.)*
  - b. How many **[students, teachers, or staff]** believed they had COVID-19, but did not get a COVID-19 test? *(Note to moderator: Ask the focus group participants to answer the best they can.)*
  - c. During the school year, were there any increases of COVID-19 among **[students, teachers, or staff]** who knew each other? *(Note to moderator: Ask the focus group participants to answer the best they can.)*
  - d. How many days was the school shut down **[specify time period, e.g., spring or fall 2020]** because of COVID-19? *(Note to moderator: Ask the focus group participants to answer the best they can.)*
2. What differences did you observe in academic outcomes among students? *(Notes to moderator: This could include student grades, level of engagement in class, comprehension of the material, and other similar outcomes.)*
  - a. How do you think fall 2020 academic outcomes compare with fall 2019 at the **[school or classroom level]**?

### Other question options:

1. How would you describe any impact the prevention strategies have had on social health outcomes (e.g., treating others with respect or developing and maintaining friendships with peers) among **[students, teachers, or staff members]**?
2. How would you describe any impact the prevention strategies have had on behavioral health outcomes (e.g., bullying, fighting, or defiance of practicing prevention strategies) among **[students, teachers, or staff members]**?
3. How would you describe any impact the prevention strategies have had on mental health outcomes (e.g., anxiety, sadness, frustration, or anger) among **[students, teachers, or staff members]**?
4. How have the prevention strategies affected different populations or groups?

Lastly, I have a few more questions for you about future implementation of prevention strategies.

## Recommendations

If you had a chance to give advice to the **[Superintendent or other district leaders]** about the prevention strategies implemented in **[your school district, school, or classroom]**, what would

### Other question options:

1. What advice would you give to **[teachers or other schools]**?
2. Do you have any other thoughts or comments you would like to share?

## Closing

Thank you so much for sharing this useful information with us. Today, we have learned **[summarize focus group information]**. I would like to remind you that any comments featuring in the final report will be anonymous. If you have any questions or concerns about today's focus group, please contact me at **[provide contact information]**.

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Content source: [National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases \(NCIRD\), Division of Viral Diseases](#)