

Purpose

This Focus Group Discussion Guide offers practical suggestions for gathering input from students about the importance of the Internet in their learning experience and lives. The information can be used to set priorities, as input for a technology plan, or to provide feedback on current educational technology practice.

Audience

The focus group is a cross section of students who reflect your community. The audience for the results may be the administration, school board, community or any other stakeholder.

Resources

Pew Internet and American Life Project report issued in August 2002: *The Digital Disconnect: The widening gap between Internet-savvy students and their schools* (<http://www.pewinternet.org/index.asp>)

Focus Groups Profile

- Gender diversity – equal numbers of girls and boys
- Economic background representative of the school and the community
- Diverse levels of academic achievement
- Approximately 10-12 students
- Try to include a cross section of students, not just technology classes

Roles and Responsibilities

- Focus group moderator asks the questions and monitors the discussion flow.
- Recorders: the conversation will be fast moving. Using two note takers helps to insure that good answers are not missed inadvertently. Note takers should try to write down everything that is said, using actual quotes, not just summarize answers
- Analyst compiles notes and information from focus groups for report or presentation to stakeholders.

Format for the Discussion Groups

- Casual discussion setting
- Circle setup
- Best if teachers are not in the room. If that is not possible due to liability or inappropriateness, please ask teachers to sit in the back and not to respond to questions.
- Do not hand out the questions to the students in advance in order to receive fresh, off the cuff opinions

- Every student needs to talk – encourage them with both verbal and non-verbal cues
- Everyone's input is important
- Solicit feedback from quiet students
- Watch for non-verbal communication cues
- Watch your own non-verbal communications cues – a focus group is about gathering information; it is not our forum to share your opinions
- Do not let any one voice dominate the discussion
- At the end of the session, have each student sign a participation sheet to follow-up with a personal thank you note
- Depending upon the students' willingness to participate, the discussion should take approximately 45 to 50 minutes

Setup

In 2002, the Pew Internet & American Life Project released a report about how high school students were using the Internet to help with schoolwork. The study had many interesting revelations about how high school students are using the Internet and some of their attitudes regarding the use of the Internet within their classes. The study was conducted with students in three large cities in the United States. NetDay is interested in seeing how students in other locations respond to similar survey questions.

- Has anyone read that report? Has anyone heard about the study?

Our purpose here today is to learn how you are using the Internet for your schoolwork. There are no right or wrong answers. Please just share with us your actual experiences and thoughts – that's what we are really interested in.

We are doing this same type of discussion groups other high schools around the country. If you are interested we can share with you what the other students said after we complete all of the discussion meetings.

Question Guide

- Ask questions generally but follow up with add-on questions if the student appears to have more to say.
- Get feedback on each question from at least half the group.
- For some of the questions it is a good idea to have the students raise their hands to answer yes or no. Your note takers should count the responses.
- Also feel free to change the order of the questions if that makes more sense for your audience.
- Plan to provide the final results to participants.

Wrap-Up

For the wrap-up, thank students again for their help. Review why you are doing this from the setup discussion. Let them know how their input will be used and offer to send

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Topic of Interest: High School Students' Internet Use & Attitudes



them the results. Remember to have them to sign in to send thank you notes. Thank their teachers or advisors for the assistance in getting the group together.

Outcomes

1. Actual notes from both note takers – do not summarize or transcribe the notes taken.
2. A description of your focus group participants based upon what you know about the school and the community. Here is an example:
 - 12 students – 7 boys, 5 girls
 - All African American
 - Mixed classes – 2 students are in a technology career training program
3. The moderator's feedback on the focus group
4. Analysis as a report, web site material, or presentation