



IDAHO MASTERY EDUCATION NETWORK

TEACHER FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

This focus group protocol aims to understand how well teachers are implementing the Mastery Learning Framework and the perceived impact of the IMEN pilot work. The protocol is intended to help you gather insights, perspectives, and points of confusion to support future work at your school and in IMEN cohorts. The guiding questions can also be customized depending on the unique needs, challenges, and victories of your unique group of teachers.

Conducting the Focus Groups

In order to understand how teachers feel about the Mastery Learning Framework and Staging Guide and where they are succeeding and struggling in implementing it, it is important that you create an environment that fosters community, discussion, honesty, and reflection. Begin with the general questions provided below, and then add customized questions that are general as well as specific to the 5 levels of the Logic Model. Sample questions for these 5 different levels are provided below. You are encouraged to use your discretion and understanding of the group to customize the questions asked and to determine the amount of time spent discussing each question.

Moderation tips:

Begin your focus group by sharing a bit about yourself and your goals for this focus group.

- The purpose of this focus group is to stimulate a discussion about:
 - How you feel about the Logic Model and various levels of this competency framework
 - Teaching in accordance with this model
 - How your students are receiving and responding to this framework
 - Any additional support that you may need in successfully implementing mastery-based education

Allow folks to share a bit about themselves as well before you get started:

- This will allow for different people to warm up to communicating in this space and add a sense of familiarity between people who are there in case they do not know each other well
- Example prompts include: Name, years at the school, favorite thing to do outside of teaching, why you are a teacher in the first place, something you're looking forward to right now, etc.

Let teachers know that confidentiality is a fundamental part of focus groups:

- Nothing that is shared during the focus group will be individually attributed to anyone in future discussions, reiterations, or changes to this model
- Encourage teachers to also keep what is shared in the focus group to themselves to maintain the confidentiality and honesty of the environment intact



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Sometimes, certain voices or opinions can dominate a focus group. To get a full range of opinions and encourage folks to share, try the following:

- After asking a question, and even after certain folks have answered a question, allow silence to exist. Wait before further prompting teachers to allow for teachers who are gathering their thoughts or more reserved to speak.
- If someone shares an idea, ask follow up questions, such as “Does anyone else have a similar experience or perspective that they would like to talk about? How about anyone who has a different take on this issue?”
- If you notice that someone has been quiet for a while or perhaps seems disengaged, ask them if there is anything they would like to add during one of those silent moments.

Remain neutral in order to allow folks to answer openly and honestly:

- Do your best to minimize your facial responses and reactions to things that folks say
- If there is a period of silence after you ask a question, do not begin to answer it based on how you feel. Allow for teachers to sit in silence to think about how they feel and how they would answer the question

Because you are conducting many different focus groups:

- Make sure that you are asking the same question to all of the groups to get a good understanding of various opinions around the same topics and discussion points
- If you are recording, make sure that your recording tools can capture the voices of everyone in the room based on how they are positioned
- If possible, have a flipchart or some type of board ready where you can write down key points and thoughts that folks are bringing up
 - Sometimes, having a visual guide can help members of the focus group think through what has been said and what they would like to add
 - This will also allow for personal reflection during the focus group

Protocol (General Questions)

Follow along below to see the general questions to ask during this focus group. If there is a long silence after any of these, feel free to prompt the teachers by asking a sub-question or adding in your own follow up question to encourage sharing. It may be helpful to have copies of the logic model available.

1. How would you describe your understanding of the Logic Model and the different levels of it?
 - a. Are there specific levels that you feel like you understand less than others? What are they and why?
2. What kinds of support did you have in implementing these in your classrooms?
 - a. What types of support would have helped more?

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- b. Do you feel like you have people that can provide ongoing support if you have questions or concerns throughout the implementation process?
3. What norms have you set in your classroom that align with this Logic Model?
 - a. How do you think about your students' emotional selves and well being in your classroom?
 - b. Are there any rituals or routines that you encourage?
 - c. How do you set the tone for learning, and how often do you do this?
4. Do you feel like your students are benefitting from the mastery-education model? Why or why not?
 - a. In what ways do students move through lessons at their own pace?
 - b. How are they collaborating with one another?
5. How are learning objectives communicated to your students? Do you have performance tasks that support and align to those objectives? How do you know?
6. How do you allow for or encourage multi modes of learning and expression in your classroom?
 - a. Do multimodal experiences apply both to how you teach and how students share their learning, or is it limited to one or the other?
 - b. Do you have the resources to encourage multi modes of learning and expression?
 - c. Do students like having learning options, or do they tend to gravitate towards more conventional learning and performance methods?
7. How do you personalize feedback and conferencing in your classrooms?
 - a. What do students respond well to?
 - b. How do you know that the feedback you're giving is effective?

Protocol (Sample Questions for Various Levels of Logic Model)

Here, we provide some examples that are specific to each level of the logic model. We understand that based on your individual school demographics and needs, teachers will need varying levels of support and have different feedback, and so we advise that specific questions are customized to best fit your unique group's needs and focus areas. Remember, you will need to decide which questions to ask in advance and you will not be able to ask all of the questions in one group!

1) Competency Framework

- Do you have support in designing and implementing learning experiences that work for students on multiple performance levels of your competency continua?
- Are competency continuum laid out in a way that aligns well to multiple performance levels and tasks?
- Are college, career, and civic readiness stressed equally by the competency curriculum?



2) Performance-based Assessment System

- Do your students have multiple entry points into performance tasks based on their varying needs and background knowledge?
- Do you feel supported in your efforts to analyze and provide personalized feedback on unique performance assessments?
- How do you collaborate with your colleagues around assessment? (e.g. feedback on assessment design, analyzing student responses)

3) Responsive Pedagogy in a Flexible Learning Environment

- How do students use technology to collaborate with one another, if at all?
- Do you feel like you create a learning environment that is shaped by the needs of your students, and what stands in the way of that?
- How do your students share where they are in their academic and social journeys with you? How often are they practicing and modelling these skills that they are learning?
- Do you engage students in analyzing and reflecting on their own work, and what do you have them focus on?
- When you provide feedback to students, do you feel like they have actionable next steps that are tailored to where they are? Why or why not?
- What data do you use for moment-by-moment formative assessments, if you engage in these?

4) Learner-centered Culture and Curriculum

- How do you know that students are or aren't engaging in inquiry-based, competency-based learning cycles?
- Does your unit uphold [Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\)](#) principles? What needs to change in order for it to do so?
- How do you encourage learner autonomy in your classroom, if at all? Is this something you are struggling with implementing?
- How are your students responding to the learning arcs that you set up, if you do? Is there a specific phase of it that they are more receptive to (investigate, make meaning, synthesize, reflect).

5) Performance-based Advancement in a Culture of Learning and Growth

- Do your students progress at different speeds, and how do you encourage this?
- What policies or systems are in place for different students to track their own growth or progress in your classroom, if any? How are these communicated to students?



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- How do you make sure that all learners are progressing even if it is at different speeds?
- Do you feel like you fill a role in your students' lives beyond their academic progress? If yes, how do you ensure that your relationship with them allows for emotional development and increased senses of well-being?
- Are your students able to apply what they have learned in any meaningful way outside the school?
- Are community partnerships important to you as an educator? What do you think these partnerships provide for your students?
- Do you feel like the community partnerships created by your classroom or your school are enough? What needs to change if not?

Closing the Focus Group

Remind teachers that their ideas are very valuable and will be taken into account to better this whole process and model for future work. Share once again that this is all going to be done confidentially, and teachers should uphold that through not sharing what was discussed in the focus group with other teachers and refraining from gossip. If the findings from the focus groups will be made public, let the teachers know what to expect. Thank them for participating and ask if folks have any final questions before ending the group.