

Attachment 2-A  
Moderator's Guide

**National Household Education Surveys Program 2019 (NHES:2019) Low  
Response-Propensity Parents Focus Groups**

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National Center for Education Statistics  
Institute of Education Sciences  
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Washington, D.C.

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# **The National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES)**

## **Appendix 2-A. Moderator's Guide:**

### **Parents Focus Group**

#### Research Questions:

- What value do parents perceive NHES has in education?
- Does the format of NHES influence parents' motivations to participate?
- What information do parents use when deciding whether or not to participate in a survey like NHES? Who do they consult?
- What barriers prevent or discourage participation in NHES?
- What would minimize these barriers for parents?
- What factors might motivate parents to participate in a voluntary survey such as NHES?
- Does the U.S. Census Bureau "brand" help in motivating parents to complete the survey?
- Does the \$5 bill included in the survey motivate parents to complete it?
- What are the perceived benefits of participation for schools?
- What current or potential NHES messages or materials do parents find relevant, useful, and informative?
- What would be the most effective channels, formats, and materials to use to communicate with parents?
- What other groups or people (e.g., teachers, community organizations) would be effective in influencing parents on this topic, and what would be the best way to reach those influencers?

#### **INTRODUCTION (10 MINUTES)**

My name is Christina Nicols and I work for Hager Sharp, an independent communications company, working on behalf of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), which is a part of the U.S. Department of Education.

Today we are talking to you in a focus group session. It allows us to talk with people in a bit more depth than when using other methods, such as surveys. We are looking to get your honest opinions. I will be asking questions, which are meant to generate discussion. There are no right or wrong answers. I encourage you to express your opinion even if it might be different from other participants. We want all types of viewpoints – positive, negative, and everything in between. We do not have to come to any consensus on what we talk about. Your individual opinion is important so I would like to hear from everyone. We will be audio and video recording the session so that I have a record of the discussion to write my report. Once the report is written we will destroy the recordings.

Your feedback will be used only for the purposes of our report and may not be used for any other purpose except as required by law. No names will appear in the summary report about what we learn through this focus group. If at any time you decide you do not want continue, that is your choice and you may stop. Before we begin, do you have any questions about what I just said?

Draft materials will be presented along with other information. I want to point out that these are not materials that I have developed, so you will not flatter me or insult me by anything that you say. My job is to ensure that we cover everything that we need to cover and that I keep the discussion going. I have no stake in the outcome of the discussion.

I'd like everyone to introduce themselves. Let me start (MODERATOR INTRO). Now, tell me about yourself. When you do, please be sure to tell me your name (first name is okay), what age or grade(s) your child(ren) is in, and anything else you'd like to tell us about yourself.

## **REACTIONS TO MATERIALS ABOUT NHES (40 MINUTES)**

- Let's talk about a survey called the National Household Education Survey or NHES.

What, if anything, have you heard or do you know about NHES?

[HAND OUT PACKETS WITH ADVANCE LETTER, SAMPLE SURVEY, \$5 BILL, AND RETURN ENVELOPE]. You all have an envelope of materials in front of you. Let's not open it just yet. First, let's look at the envelope.

- This is the information you would receive in the mail at your home address if you were asked to participate. What would you be most likely to do with this piece of mail? (Throw it out? Open it? Give it to someone else in your household?)

For those who said they would open it – what are some reasons why?

For those who said they would not open it or it would get thrown away – What are some reasons why?

What changes could we make to the envelope to make it seem important enough for you to open it? (Probe: prominent Census seal? Department of Education seal? Better indication of what's inside?)

Now, let's open the envelope and take a look at the materials.

- What was your overall reaction to the packet of materials? Let's start with <Name> and have everyone give me one statement about their reaction to the materials.
- Now I'd like you to glance through it as you would if you had decided that you would open it. Identify the piece you would read first, and look it over.
- [GIVE PARTICIPANTS A MOMENT TO REVIEW PACKETS, THEN GO AROUND TO EACH PARENT AND HAVE EACH ONE NAME THE PIECE THEY WOULD READ FIRST AND WHAT MADE THEM SELECT THAT PIECE.]
- At this point, what are your thoughts on NHES?
  - Is there anything that appeals to YOU about completing the survey?
  - What are some potential drawbacks or issues regarding completing the survey that you can identify?

PROBE:

- Maybe the time it takes to complete it, or the nature of the survey?
- Please take a few minutes to look through the rest of the packet. Based on the materials that you read and anything else that you may know about NHES how would you react if you were asked to participate?
  - What factors would you consider? Timing of the survey, time involved for you to

complete it, \$5 incentive...

- What questions would you have?
  - What specific information would you need or want in order to decide whether or not to participate (like confidentiality assurance, time to complete, sample procedures, how the information will be used)?
  - How would you make the decision to participate or not? For example, who would be involved in the decision?
  - What would be most helpful to you in deciding to complete the survey and mail it in?
- Now let's talk specifically about the letter [hold it up to show group]: Please read along with me as I read it aloud.
    - Is this letter useful to you?
      - What made it useful/not useful?
    - What did you like about it?
    - What didn't you like?
    - Was anything confusing or hard to understand?
    - Was anything missing?
    - How believable was this information?
    - How relevant was the information to you? Did it speak to you (as opposed to someone in a different position or role)?
    - What did you think about the length?
    - How does this compare to the information that you receive on other types of surveys, such as the Census?
    - Does the letter motivate you to fill out and return the survey?
      - If yes, what is most motivating about it?
      - If no, what would make it more motivating?
  - What would you change about this letter to make it more likely that people will read it?
  - What is your reaction to the \$5 bill included in the packet? Does it make you more or less likely to complete and mail in the survey?
    - Why?
    - Did the materials tell you why the \$5 bill was included? What did you think of the reason?
  - We've been talking about what materials you found useful. Is there anything missing from the packet that you would find helpful? What else would you find helpful?
  - What would motivate you the most to complete and mail in the survey?

Now, let's talk specifically about the survey itself....

### **BARRIERS AND BENEFITS TO COMPLETING THE SURVEY (20 MINUTES)**

- In your packets, we have included a sample questionnaire for the NHES survey. Let's talk specifically about the sample survey questionnaire:
  - Does the sample survey form seem straightforward to you?
  - Do you think you would have any difficulties in filling it out? [If yes, what are some of the

difficulties you foresee?]

- How long do you think it would take you to fill out the questionnaire?
- Would you be more inclined to participate if it was available online?
  
- How likely would you be to participate in NHES if you were selected to take the survey?  
NOTE: You are not being asked to participate. Nothing you say in this group will commit you to participating. We want to gauge your reaction to the concept of participating in NHES.

[FOR USE ONLY WITH PARTICIPANTS WHO RESPONDED NEGATIVELY]

- Is there anything that may change your mind about participating in NHES?
  - Would something about the survey need to change? What? (PROBE FOR timing, access, time required, etc.)
  
- If *one* thing could change about NHES, what would be most important to increase the likelihood that you would participate?
  
- Are there any other barriers that you see to participating in NHES? Are there any other concerns or negative reactions that you have?
  
- Let's talk a little more about the benefits to participating in NHES. What do you think would be the benefits of having you participate in NHES? (PROBE FOR benefits to schools in community)
  
- Which of these benefits is most important to you?

### **VALUE OF EDUCATION SURVEYS (10 MINUTES)**

- Let's talk broadly about education-related surveys that parents are asked to take. Are you aware of any surveys like that? Do any come to mind?
  
- Have you ever participated in any education-related surveys that were mailed to you? Do you know anyone who has participated?
  
- What is your overall reaction to such surveys? What questions or concerns do you have about these surveys?
  
- What about the U.S. Census - Have you participated in the U.S. Census? (The last one was in 2010.)
  - (If YES) - What was your experience like in filling out the U.S. Census (Probe: Was it easy or hard? How much time did it take?)
  - (If NO) – Have you had an opportunity to participate in the Census? What are some reasons why you decided not to participate?
  
- Of the other surveys you have participated in:
  - Which was the easiest? What makes it easy?
  - Which was the most difficult? What makes it difficult?

- What benefits do these surveys offer? Are they necessary or not necessary? How is the information used?

Let's say you were to participate in a survey. What would be the most compelling reason in your view to do so?

- After thinking about your experience with the Census and other surveys, does it make you think differently about whether or not you'd take the NHES?
  - Would you be more likely or less likely to take it? Or about the same?
  - What makes you think differently?

## **RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION (10 MINUTES)**

- This packet represents one way to communicate about NHES with parents like you.
- Where does a packet of materials rank on the list of best ways to communicate with you?
- What would work better or be preferable to you? PROBE:
  - In-person visit?
  - Telephone call?
- Would you be more likely to complete the survey if you knew other parents in your community were completing it?
- How helpful would it be to have access to a short video that provides an overview of NHES?
- Would any additional resources be helpful for encouraging your participation?
- Where do you get information about what's happening in education? About what's happening in your school system?
- Where would you go to get additional information about NHES? What would be most convenient for you?

## **CONCLUSIONS**

- Do you have any additional comments about these materials, NHES, or surveys in general?
- Thank you.