

The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study,
Kindergarten Class of 2022-23 (ECLS-K:2023)
Focus Groups with School Administrators,
Teachers, and Parents

Volume I

OMB #1850-0803 v.264

Submitted by
National Center for Education Statistics
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Attachments:

- Attachment 1: Elementary School Administrators Focus Group Recruitment Screener, Online
- Attachment 2: Elementary School Administrators Focus Group Recruitment Screener, In-person
- Attachment 3: Elementary School Administrators Focus Group Consent Form, Online
- Attachment 4: Elementary School Administrators Focus Group Consent Form, In-person
- Attachment 5: Elementary School Administrators Focus Group Protocol (Moderator's Guide)
- Attachment 6: Elementary School Administrators Focus Group ECLS Value Statements
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Justification

The following material is being submitted under the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) generic clearance agreement (OMB# 1850-0803), which provides NCES the capability to improve data collection instruments by conducting testing, such as usability tests, focus groups, and cognitive interviews to improve methodologies, survey questions, and/or delivery methods.

NCES conducts the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS) program to provide descriptive data on the educational activities of the U.S. population. The ECLS program provides national data on children's status at birth and at various points thereafter; children's transitions to nonparental care, early education programs, and school; and children's experiences and growth through the eighth grade. The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2022-23 (ECLS-K:2023) will be the fourth cohort in the series of early childhood longitudinal studies that began with the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99 (ECLS-K) and continued with the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B) and the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010-11 (ECLS-K:2011). The purpose of the ECLS-K:2023 will be to provide important information on children’s early learning and development, preschool early care and education experiences, transition into kindergarten, and progress through the elementary grades, building upon knowledge acquired from the previous Early Childhood Longitudinal Studies. Data from the ECLS-K:2023 will yield policy-relevant information by (1) providing current data on the cohort of students to be selected in the early 2020’s and their progress through the elementary grades, (2) providing data relevant to emerging policy related domains not measured fully in the prior ECLS studies, and (3) allowing cross-cohort comparisons of the educational experiences of children attending school before and after the advent of new federal laws and policies. The data collections will be carried out for NCES by Westat, with the Educational Testing Service (ETS) as the subcontractor developing the child assessments and Hager Sharp as the subcontractor developing the respondent communication materials.

As in its sister studies, the ECLS-K and the ECLS-K:2011, the ECLS-K:2023 is designed to provide data that can be used to analyze the relationships between a wide range of family, school, community, and individual variables and children's development, early learning, and performance in school. Information will be collected directly from the child, including the use of direct cognitive assessments with the children in reading and math, and in the later rounds, child questionnaires. Information will also be collected from the child’s parents/guardians, teachers, and school administrators. While all of these components will be included in the study, the ECLS-K:2023 will be designed such that the child will be the unit of analysis; the study will also be representative at the school level at the kindergarten year.

The ECLS-K:2023 will be a kindergarten cohort study (as such, the “base year” for the study is considered the students’ kindergarten year); however, the ECLS-K:2023 will go beyond its predecessor kindergarten cohort studies by adding a preschool round of data collection. In the spring of 2022, households in selected primary sampling units (PSUs) will be geocoded and screened for the presence of a child who will be in kindergarten the following fall, in which cases web surveys (with a paper survey option) will be collected from the child’s parent or guardian. These children will then be added to the cohort of 2022-23 kindergartners. Collecting parent data starting in preschool enables the study to measure influences on children before school entry, including their home environments and access to early care and education. The preschool data collection procedures are being field tested in 2020. The full OMB clearance package for this field test was approved in November 2019 with a change memo approved in January 2020 (OMB #1850-0750 v.21).

Recruitment and retention for the ECLS-K:2023 creates a unique challenge. School administrators and teachers are often over-committed and may be unwilling to spend time answering study questionnaires. They will have their own expectations about the value of the ECLS-K:2023, and recruitment materials will need to address these expectations. In addition, school administrators and teachers are essential intermediaries for parents and students and, therefore, are best positioned to ensure the success of the study. Parents may also be wary of allowing their children to participate in assessments like ECLS-K:2023. In addition to their fears of over testing, parents may be concerned about the amount of personal data collected on their children and may be reticent to allow their children to participate in a longitudinal study over time, records personally identifiable information (e.g., children’s names and birthdates), and has access to school records.¹ The proposed research is intended to gain a better understanding of these and other factors so as to improve recruitment materials for the ECLS-K:2023 and, ultimately, support the successful implementation of the study.

This request is to conduct eight focus groups with elementary school administrators, kindergarten teachers, and parents of kindergarten children in the spring of 2020. The focus groups will test messaging regarding the ECLS-K:2023, ask respondents to share their feedback on recruitment materials, and allow NCES to better understand respondents’ perceived benefits of and barriers to participating in the ECLS-K:2023. NCES aims to increase participation in the study among these audiences by ensuring the relevance, clarity, and ease of use of recruitment materials. The resulting information from the spring 2020 focus groups will guide recruitment strategies and tailored materials development for the ECLS-K:2023.

Design

On behalf of NCES, Hager Sharp will conduct eight (six in-person and two online) 90-minute focus groups with elementary school administrators, kindergarten teachers, and parents of children in kindergarten to understand their perceptions of the ECLS-K:2023, how they would respond if selected to participate in the study, and whether there may be more effective language and/or visuals for study recruitment than have been currently developed.² Table 1 provides a configuration of the eight focus groups.

¹ Personally identifiable information is not released in any ECLS reports or files that are available to the public.

² Given uncertainty around the rapidly evolving coronavirus pandemic at the time of this volume’s development, screeners and consent forms for online groups for kindergarten teachers and parents of children in kindergarten were included in the package for review in case they are needed. The decision was made to follow current ED guidance about in-person events and meetings. As of late March 2020, ED’s contracting office issued direction that in-person meetings must be cancelled through mid-May. Because of this, all focus groups described in this package will be held online using the corresponding Appendix materials for the online mode.

Table 1. Focus group configuration

Participants	Number of Focus Groups	Type of Group	Location
Elementary school administrators	4	1 in person	Oklahoma City, OK
		1 in-person	Richmond, VA
		2 online	GoToMeeting
Kindergarten teachers	2	1 in-person	Oklahoma City, OK
		1 in-person	Richmond, VA
Parents of children in kindergarten	2	1 in-person	Oklahoma City, OK
		1 in-person	Richmond, VA
Total Number of Focus Groups	8		

The six in-person focus groups will be conducted in two different locations: Oklahoma City, OK and Richmond, VA, with one group of elementary school administrators, one group of kindergarten teachers, and one group of parents of children in kindergarten in each location. The two online focus groups with elementary school administrators will be conducted through an online platform such as GoToMeeting from the Hager Sharp offices in Washington, DC. Once ten eligible participants for each group are recruited—a number that allows for in-depth collection of information—the sessions will be scheduled for May 2020.

The research questions to be addressed during the focus groups for each participant type are provided in attachments 5, 12, and 19 (Protocol: Moderator’s Guide). During their focus groups, elementary school administrators will be presented with the following materials to test what information about the ECLS-K:2023 is the most compelling to them, and to elicit their feedback and suggestions about what would motivate them and other elementary school administrators to participate the study:

- Attachment 6: Elementary School Administrators Focus Group ECLS Value Statements
- Attachment 7: Elementary School Administrators Focus Group ECLS Letter
- Attachment 22: Elementary School Administrators Focus Group ECLS Frequently Asked Questions Fact Sheet

During their focus groups, teachers will be presented with the following materials to test what information about the ECLS-K:2023 is the most compelling to them, and to elicit their feedback and suggestions about what would motivate them and other kindergarten teachers to participate the study:

- Attachment 13: Kindergarten Teachers Focus Group ECLS Value Statements
- Attachment 14: Kindergarten Teachers Focus Group ECLS Letter
- Attachment 23: Kindergarten Teachers Focus Group ECLS Study Overview Fact Sheet
- Attachment 24: Kindergarten Teachers Focus Group ECLS Alternative Study Overview Fact Sheet

During their focus groups, parents of children in kindergarten will be presented with the following materials to test what information about the ECLS-K:2023, and to elicit their feedback and suggestions about what would motivate them and other parents of children in kindergarten to participate the study, as well as what would be motivating to have them allow their children to participate as well:

- Attachment 20: Parents Focus Group ECLS Value Statements
- Attachment 21: Parents Focus Group ECLS Letter

- Attachment 25: Parents Focus Group ECLS Study Overview Fact Sheet
- Attachment 26: Parents Focus Group ECLS Alternative Study Overview Fact Sheet

Each focus group session will include up to ten participants with varying demographic characteristics—a number that allows for in-depth collection of information. Topics of the discussion will focus on identifying the benefits participants associate with ECLS-K:2023 participation, the barriers they perceive to participating, which of the sample ECLS-K:2023 recruitment materials they believe would be most and least useful as well as suggested improvements to each, and their suggestions for factors that may increase response rates for the ECLS-K:2023. Each focus group session will last approximately 90 minutes. A trained researcher working from a moderator’s guide (attachments 5, 12, and 19) will lead the participants through a discussion, while other (approximately three to four) team members will observe and take notes on the participants’ comments and suggestions, which they will later compile into a summary report. The sessions will be video- and/or audio-recorded. The recordings will be destroyed as soon as the final report is finalized, and participant names will not be included in the report.

Recruiting Potential Participants and Paying Participants

Hager Sharp will work with a national recruitment firm (such as Fieldwork National) to recruit for the online focus groups with elementary school administrators. Hager Sharp staff will work with local research facilities in Oklahoma and Virginia to recruit participants for the in-person groups with elementary school administrators, kindergarten teachers, and parents of children in kindergarten.

National and local recruiters will contact potential participants by telephone people from their databases and administer to them the recruitment screener (attachments 1, 2, 8, 9, 15, and 16) to identify those who meet the eligibility criteria, namely that the respondent is a current elementary school administrator, kindergarten teacher in an elementary school, or a parent or legal guardian of at least one child who is currently in kindergarten. As an example of how the databases are populated, Fieldwork National reaches potential participants by sending out an email blast to individuals with specified demographics. The email includes a link to a programmed prescreener. Fieldwork National phone screens those who respond to the link to qualify participants for the database. They use the same method of prescreening by posting the link to the prescreener in social media outreach. They tailor the social media outreach based on the demographics they want to reach, and then phone screen the people who respond to the link. They do not add anyone to their database without the individual’s permission. To recruit participants to the online ECLS-K:2023 focus groups with elementary school administrators, Fieldwork National will decide who to call from their database based on criteria included in the recruitment screener (attachments 1 and 2), filtering the potential participants using demographic characteristics that they have already gathered in the database. They then will use the recruitment screener to fully screen potential participants and confirm they meet the eligibility criteria. Efforts will be made to ensure that participants for all focus groups reflect diversity in geographic regions, urban/suburban/rural areas, school configuration (e.g., Pre-K/K-5, Pre-K/K-6, Pre-K/K-8), and school type (e.g., private or public).

To ensure the recruitment of participants who are representative of typical ECLS-K:2023 sample members and to thank them for their time and for participating in the focus group session, as in prior NCES studies, during recruitment each participant will be offered a \$100 Amazon gift card for participation.

Assurance of Confidentiality

The statement below will be read at the start of each focus group session and presented in all written participant materials, including on the consent form (attachments 3, 4, 10, 11, 17, and 18) to be collected from each participant before the focus group. Participants will also be informed that they can leave the discussion at any time.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is authorized to conduct the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS) by the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (ESRA 2002, 20 U.S.C. §9543). The data are being collected for NCES by Hager Sharp, a U.S.-based research organization. All of the information you provide may be used only for statistical purposes and may not be disclosed, or used, in identifiable form for any other purpose except as required by law (20 U.S.C. §9573 and 6 U.S.C. §151).

All contractor staff working on the ECLS-K:2023 focus groups will sign an Affidavit of Nondisclosure for the project. Personal information (e.g., name, address) of participants will be collected for recruitment purposes, but on the data file used for analyses, respondents will be identified by an ID number only. Within 48 hours of the focus groups’ completion, the discussion notes will be edited, organized, and cleaned, and all direct identifiers will be stripped from the data set. All computer files used for this study work will be stored on secure, project-specific network drives. Only staff working directly on the data analysis portion of the project will have access to the data files. Any presentations of data in reports will not include any portions of participants’ names, and once the final report is created, all personally identifiable information will be destroyed.

Estimate of Hour Burden

Recruitment of elementary school administrators, kindergarten teachers, and parents of children in kindergarten is estimated to take about 10 minutes per individual. It is expected that up to 120 elementary school administrators, 60 teachers, and 60 parents of children in kindergarten will need to be contacted to form the desired focus groups of 80 total participants (40 elementary school administrators, 20 kindergarten teachers, and 20 parents). Each focus group will take approximately 90 minutes to conduct. There is no cost to participants beyond the participation burden time. Table 2 provides the burden estimates for this study.

Table 2. Burden estimates for ECLS-K:2023 focus groups with elementary school administrators, kindergarten teachers, and parents of children in kindergarten

Participant group		Number of participants	Number of responses	Burden hours per participant	Total burden hours
Elementary School Administrators	Recruitment of Potential Participants	120	120	0.167	20
	Focus Group Participants	40*	40	1.5	60
Kindergarten Teachers	Recruitment of Potential Participants	60	60	0.167	10
	Focus Group Participants	20*	20	1.5	30
Parents of Children in Kindergarten	Recruitment of Potential Participants	60	60	0.167	10
	Focus Group Participants	20*	20	1.5	30
Total Burden		240	320		160

*Subset of initial contact group, not double counted in the total number of participants.

Project Schedule

The schedule of activities for the ECLS-K:2023 focus groups is provided in table 3.

Table 3. Schedule for the ECLS-K:2023 focus groups with elementary school administrators

Activity	Tasks	Date ranges
Data collection	Recruit participants	April - May 2020
	Conduct two online focus groups with elementary school administrators	May 2020
	Conduct two in-person focus groups with elementary school administrators	May 2020
	Conduct two in-person focus groups with kindergarten teachers	May 2020
	Conduct two in-person focus groups with parents of children in kindergarten	May 2020
Analysis	Analyze data and produce focus group report	June 2020
Report-out meeting	Meet with NCES and Westat to discuss findings and recommendations	June-July 2020

Cost to the Federal Government

The estimated cost to prepare for, administer, and report the results of the ECLS-K:2023 focus groups with elementary school administrators, kindergarten teachers, and parents of children in kindergarten is approximately \$80,000. This cost includes salaried labor for contractor staff and other direct costs associated with organization of the sessions.