WELCOME TO THE MEASURING AND IMPROVING STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING TOOLKIT STUDENT FOCUS GROUP!

To be read by the facilitator

This group discussion is part of a tool called the Measuring and Improving Student-Centered Learning (MISCL) Toolkit. The Toolkit includes a suite of instruments developed by RAND Corporation in partnership with the Nellie Mae Education Foundation. The purpose of this group discussion is to hear your opinions about your school experiences, how students learn in your school, and how challenging your schoolwork is. The information you share is intended to be used alongside surveys of district leaders, school leaders, teachers, and students to provide a snapshot of student-centered learning (SCL) opportunities in your school.

This is *not* a test. There are *no right or wrong* answers. We want to know what you think about your school experiences.

This group discussion should take about one hour.

We will focus on a small set of strategies that define SCL, based on input from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, which supported the development of this discussion guide. The five SCL strategies are:
- Learning is personalized to align with students' needs, interests, and pace.
- Learning is challenging, engaging, and meets students where they are in a competency-based framework.
- Learning happens anytime, anywhere.
- Learning opportunities promote student agency and ownership.
- Learning is informed by data.

We will keep everything you say confidential, and we will not link anything said in this group to any individual. We may use quotations for reporting purposes but they will be anonymous. We ask that you respect each other's privacy and keep these comments confidential, as well. However, we cannot guarantee that, so please do not say things you don't want others to hear.

This is your chance to support and improve SCL in your high school. Please don't pass on this opportunity!

Thanks so much for your help.

Before we begin the group discussion, I would like to review a few ground rules:

- I'm going to ask some questions and I'd like to give everyone a chance to give their opinions. You don't have to answer every question but I would like to hear from everyone at some point.
- Only one person should speak at a time.
- Feel free to ask questions of each other and to respond to what others are saying, whether you agree or disagree. We ask that you talk about your own experiences or use examples and opinions that you agree with. If you hear something that you disagree with, make sure to clearly state that you disagree and explain why.
- There are no right or wrong answers, so don't worry about having a different opinion than someone else. But please do respect each other's answers or opinions.
- Please, do not share or repeat what is said here outside of this room.
- Any questions before we begin?

[Note to facilitator: Throughout the discussion, probe on whether students have had similar or different experiences, and ask for specific examples. To gather information on equity of SCL strategies or practices, ask whether such practices are evenly applied for all students (e.g., do all students have the opportunity to choose learning materials, or only some).]

First, I have some quick background questions about you.
[Omit these background questions if this information is already known.]

1. **What grade are you in?**

2. **For how many years have you attended this school?**

STUDENT FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Part 1. Personalization of Learning

3. Do your teachers address your individual learning needs, and if so, how? How many teachers do this, how often?

   Probe on how frequently teachers assess what students know before starting a new unit or topic and whether all teachers do this

   Probe on whether students can skip the "seat time" for a course if they can show they know the material

4. How much choice do you have in the topics or skills (content) you work on in your classes? How frequently do you make these choices and what are some examples of choices you make? Can you make these choices in all your classes? Why or why not?
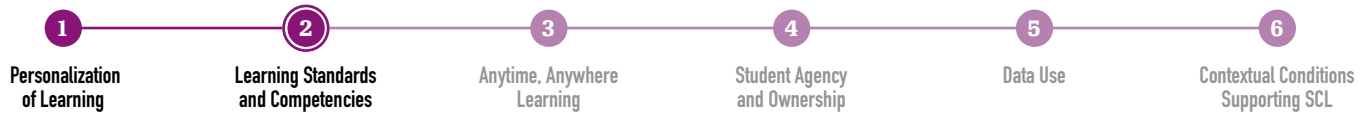
   Probe on choice of learning materials (e.g., books or computer software)

   Probe on choice of instructional strategies (e.g., group work, independent work, whole class discussion)

   Probe on choice of how to demonstrate they've learned the material

5. How much choice do you have in your daily schedule – what classes you attend each day? How much of a voice do you have in your yearly schedule – what classes you take throughout the year? Can you give some examples?

   Probe on whether students can skip units or lessons or entire classes if they can demonstrate they have learned the material

1 — Personalization of Learning

2 — Learning Standards and Competencies

3 — Anytime, Anywhere Learning

4 — Student Agency and Ownership

5 — Data Use

6 — Contextual Conditions Supporting SCL

Part 2. Learning Standards and Competencies

6. How do you know what you need to learn in order to pass your English, mathematics, science and social studies classes?

   Probe on whether students are given a specific list of topics or skills and when (e.g., the beginning of the course, beginning of a unit)

7. How do you show what you have learned in your English, mathematics, science and social studies classes? Do all students show what they have learned in the same way, and at the same time?

   Probe on traditional tests, quizzes, homework assignments and projects, and via electronic courseware and how often they are used
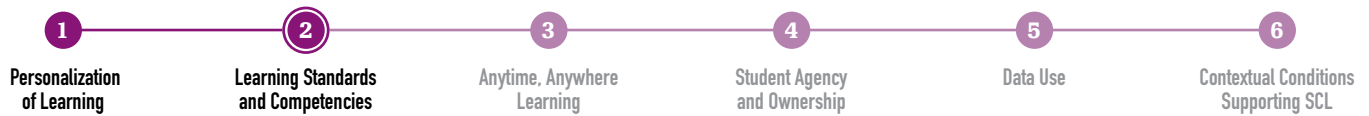
   Probe on non-traditional methods such as performance tasks, or longer-term, complex projects and how often they are used

   Probe on whether students take quizzes and tests when they are ready to take them

   Probe on extent to which the ways they are assessed are fair, and allow them to show what they have learned

8. Do your teachers provide you with feedback, grades, or other ways of letting you know how you did on a quiz, test, or assignment? How do you use this information? Do you do anything differently as a result?

   Probe on whether they can revise or re-do assignments for a better grade, re-take tests or quizzes, etc.

1 Personalization of Learning

2 Learning Standards and Competencies

3 Anytime, Anywhere Learning

4 Student Agency and Ownership

5 Data Use

6 Contextual Conditions Supporting SCL

9. In your classes, do you move on to a new lesson or unit at the same time as everyone else?

    Probe on how frequently this happens and in how many classes

    If students move on to new units at different times, probe for the criteria that allow them to move on, e.g., demonstrating that they have learned all the material, demonstrating their learning in more than one way

10. To what extent are your classes challenging? Are they too easy, or too difficult, or a little of both? Explain?

    Probe on how many classes are too easy or too difficult

11. Do you feel like the teachers and principal have high expectations for your learning and behavior? Are the expectations the same for everybody in your school? Why do you think this, or why not?

    Probe on what the expectations for learning and personal growth are and how students know (or how expectations are communicated)
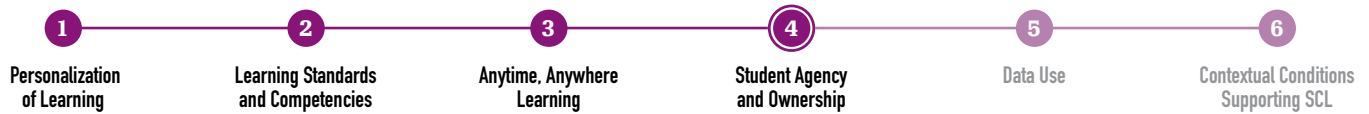
STUDENT FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Part 3. Anytime, Anywhere Learning

12. **Do you see connections between your life outside of school and what you learn in school? Can you give an example?**

    Probe on whether students use things they learned in school to solve a problem outside of school, and vice versa. Ask for an example.

13. **Can you earn credit towards graduation for things you've done or learned outside of school? Have you ever earned credit for things you've done or learned outside of school? Can you give an example?**

    If examples are needed: volunteering, a job, an internship, online classes, field trips, or travel

1	2	3	4	5	6
Personalization of Learning	Learning Standards and Competencies	Anytime, Anywhere Learning	Student Agency and Ownership	Data Use	Contextual Conditions Supporting SCL

Part 4. Student Agency and Ownership

14. What do you do if you are having trouble completing an assignment or activity, or when you don't understand something you are learning in class?

    Probe on whether they ask questions of the teacher, what the teacher tells them and whether it's helpful

    Probe on whether they ask questions of other students and whether it's helpful

    Probe on whether they draw on other resources, such as asking family members or researching online

    Probe on whether they use these strategies in all classes, or some

15. When you have ideas about how to improve instruction or anything at your school, do you feel comfortable talking to teachers or your school leaders about your ideas? Do you feel like teachers and school leaders are responsive to student ideas and opinions, and why or why not?

16. Are students involved in making decisions in the school? Can you give an example?

    Probe on whether students are systematically involved in school decisions, and ask for examples

STUDENT FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL
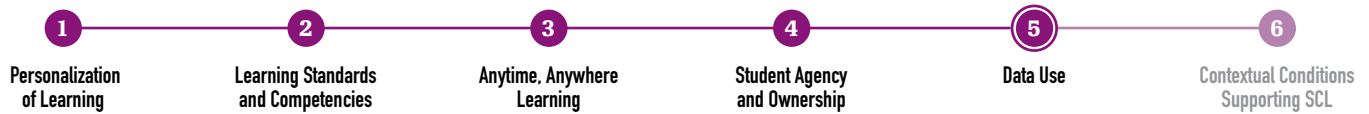
Part 5. Data Use

17. How do you know if you are doing well in school?

    Probe on what information students get information about the progress they are making in school, how they use the information, and if they do anything differently as a result

    Probe on whether they get different information in different classes, and which information is helpful

18. Do you keep track of your own progress? If so, how?

    Probe on whether students track their own progress or whether they monitor a document or report that others keep

    Probe on what kinds of information they have, do students discuss it with their teachers or parents

    Probe on how frequently students track their progress, whether they use the info to set goals, and whether they do so in all of their classes

19. How often do your teachers or other adults at school talk to you about the progress you're making in school overall? Do you do anything differently after talking with your teachers about your progress? Why or why not?

20. Do you ever sit down with your teachers and plan what you need to learn? If yes, how do you do this, and how often?

    Probe on planning with other school staff and/or family members

1	2	3	4	5	6
Personalization of Learning	Learning Standards and Competencies	Anytime, Anywhere Learning	Student Agency and Ownership	Data Use	Contextual Conditions Supporting SCL

Part 6. Contextual Conditions Supporting SCL

21. Do you feel like the teachers and other adults in your school care about you as a person?

   Probe on how they interact with adults and whether they feel like they can trust them to have their best interests in mind all the time

   Probe on whether supports and opportunities are equitably distributed among all students

22. In what concrete ways do your teachers help you to plan how to reach your goals for after high school? For example, do they help you to make connections between schoolwork and long-term plans? If not, what could they be doing?

23. How could your school make learning more student-centered?

24. Is there anything else you would like to add?