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# JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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## Facility Focus Group Conversations Suggested Guidelines

### What is a Focus Group?

A focus group is a small group conversation guided by a facilitator that is used to learn more about opinions on a designated topic to guide future action. In Newmarket, the Focus Group conversations will be approximately one hour long and will be one of the data collection sources used to assist the community in making informed decisions.

### How are Focus Groups Different from Other Group Discussions?

There are three primary differences between focus group conversations and other group discussions:

1. The group is guided to stay on topic and not to stray
2. A trained facilitator is present to keep the conversation on course
3. The group's composition and discussion are planned ahead of time in an environment which encourages the participants to express their opinions and respond to the facilitator's questions

### Why are Focus Groups Used?

Focus groups assist leaders/organizations gain an understanding of how a group or community views the various options and/or needs it faces. Because focus groups are a structured and facilitated environment that encourages participants to express their opinions, they have the potential to yield a large quantity of detailed information in a relatively short time. In this respect they are similar to a needs survey. However, a needs survey is typically developed with closed-ended, narrow questions which are scored. Responses to focus group conversations are typically spoken, open-ended questions which are relatively broad and qualitative. They have more depth and variety in questions and get closer to what people are really thinking and feeling.

Advantages of conducting focus groups over a needs survey is the depth and complexity of responses gathered and the potential of what participants can learn from each other. Disadvantages include the "time factor" of the focus groups themselves and people potentially feeling uncomfortable speaking in a small group setting.

### What Is Needed to Conduct the Focus Group Sessions?

- An experienced facilitator to lead the process and encourage participants to actively engage in the process, to talk openly, to express their opinions and to respond respectfully to others within the group
- A recorder to ensure that people's ideas are documented
- A process to determine how invitations will be sent out to ensure a representative sampling of all opinions
- Logistics identified: Dates, times, locations, how long, how many groups (see below)?
- A list of questions prepared (see below)

### After the Focus Group Sessions:

- Review the data to identify emerging patterns, common themes, new questions that arise and conclusions that seem true
- Share the results with stakeholders
- Use the results to address the situation

**Proposed Focus Group Questions:**

**(Engagement Questions, Exploration Questions, Exit Questions)**

- What are your thoughts and preferences on the three options being considered for the Junior/Senior High School facilities (tuition, renovation/addition, new facility)?
- From your perspective what needs to happen to move the community in making a decision?
- Are there recommendations or suggestions you have for the JAC?
- Are there other things that you would like to share before we wrap up?

**Details to be Determined:**

- Recruiting/Inviting Focus Group Participants (ideally maximum 12 attendees per session)  
Sample invitation attached
- Parental Permission for Student Focus Group Sessions
- Scheduling (one hour per focus group) and RSVPs; will work with principals to develop
- Arrange for comfortable room, convenient location, and room with privacy, arrange for some light refreshments such as coffee, water, snacks