

Script for Focus Groups

#1 The Present – Assets and Challenges

The first question of the evening

Is about the present.

Every organization, every entity has its strengths and its weaknesses –

or as I like to call them assets and challenges.

Different groups see these in different lights.

So we are interested in your view on this as [teachers, parents, students, community members].

Please take a minute to think

About what you consider North Kingstown's greatest asset.

What makes this school district really great,

that you would never want to lose?

Then think about its greatest liability.

What hinders, or hampers this school district,

that you would like to overcome?

Use the paper you have in front of you to jot down your answers

and then we'll go around the table to check out our present reality.

(Do a quick round robin of the responses, noting themes and original ideas.)

#2 The Future – Seven Strategies

OK, Thank you for that good start.

The second question is about the future,

and more specifically about what you feel is more important

to assure the successful future of

the North Kingstown School system.

(Pass out seven strategies.)

The handout I am passing around

lists seven strategies

that the Rhode Island Department of Education

has developed as its key expectations

of all RI school districts.

RIDE's assumption is that each school district

must be able to perform well in each of these strategy areas

to achieve its mission and objectives.

RIDE is encouraging all school districts

to adopt these strategies

in their strategic planning process

to help create a common language

for goal setting and as the basis for RIDE evaluation

of school districts.

- 1. Leading the Focus on Learning and Achievement** – providing leadership to maintain a constant and productive focus on learning and achievement, and communicating what students need to know and what is needed to ensure that students reach the goals set for student learning and development.
- 2. Ensuring Equity and Adequacy of Fiscal and Human Resources** – the district addresses different kinds and different levels of student needs including academic, social, developmental, and health; the district distributes its fiscal resources in relation to student need.
- 3. Guiding the Selection and Implementation of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment** – curriculum is aligned with the mission and goals for student learning, and with district and state standards for literacy, numeracy, and other academic proficiencies, and has embedded assessments to gauge learning and adjust instruction to maximally promote each student’s learning.
- 4. Recruiting, Supporting and Retaining High Quality Personnel** – the district actively and inventively recruits candidates in ways that result in hiring staff with the highest qualifications possible, and supports staff to make them as effective as possible in their work e.g. mentoring, professional development.
- 5. Using Information for Planning and Accountability** – planning, continuous improvement, use of technology.
- 6. Engaging Families and the Community** – using a variety of ways to connect with families and the community, especially connecting with parents concerning the learning of the children; involving parents and community members on committees and teams, letting the community know about the school system’s plans, successes, and needs.
- 7. Ensuring Safe and Supportive Environments for Students** – firm and constructive policies about school culture and behavior; positive learning environments with the greatest individual freedom that is consistent with the safety of every member of the school community.

We are going to spend some time on these strategies because this year is the first time that the North Kingstown School District will be integrating these strategies into their long-range plans.

And so we want to hear from you about what you think of these strategies. What do they mean to you? And how do you think the North Kingstown School District is doing in these areas. Where is it strong? Where it must improve? And what are your best ideas for the future?

I am guessing that we have a good group To address these areas tonight. So let’s begin.

The first question is about priorities.
As you look at this list of seven,
and from where you sit as a [teacher, parent, student, community member]
which of these seven requirements
deserve the greatest focus over the next five years
in order to achieve your mission?

Of course all these items are important.
But usually they are not all equally important
in all districts at all times.
There are always areas of priority depending on the goals of the district
and where each school district is in each of the strategy areas.

I would like you to take a few minutes
to look over the list and select your top three items.
Put your ideas on paper if you like.
Then we will go around the table
and have a discussion on why you picked those three.

*(Allow 4 minutes. Then hold a discussion to gather feedback on areas of importance to them,
and reasons why. This will cover strengths and weaknesses.)*

#3 North Kingstown School District Plan

Thank you for that good work and excellent discussion.
Now let's take the plan a step further.
(Pass out strategies with objectives.)

What you are receiving now is the same RIDE strategies
With objectives that have been developed to date.
What I would like to do now
is to ask you to take a few more minutes
to review these objectives and then,
keeping in mind our previous discussion
jot down your ideas for other objectives actions or initiatives.
Things you would think will make the plan
better, more successful
things you yourself would like to be a part of.
Then we will have a brief roundtable discussion
about these additional ideas to add to the list.
You do not have to have an idea for all seven.
just go wherever your ideas take you.
You may also comment on anything that is already there.

Use the paper provided to jot down ideas
so that when we go around

it will be easier.

Thanks. I will check back with you in 10 minutes.

If you need more refreshments to keep you going please help yourself.

(after 10 minutes)

Ok, let's see what you came up with.

I know this is not a lot of time to think

about all the possibilities

but it is the group discussion

that really makes things come to life.

Let's give it a shot.

(Hold discussion of ideas. Establish where the energy is around certain strategies, themes, explore these areas more with the group, look for causes, solutions, ways to advance the ideas, and possible road blocks to success. End result should be enhancements to the plan, and a sense of areas where teachers are most interested.)

Thank group. Express appreciation for their participation and ideas. Let them know the next steps. Ask for final thoughts, suggestions. Thank them again.