

Principal Notification Letter

[letter to be sent to schools after initial phone call to principal to determine willingness to participate in the case study sample]

[date]

Dear [name of principal]:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the Study of Education Data Systems and Decision Making. The purpose of the study is to document the availability of education data systems, their characteristics, the prevalence and nature of their use in districts and schools, and the conditions and practices associated with effective data usage. In addition to collecting survey data from a national sample of districts, we will also be conducting site visits to 15 schools to provide a much more in-depth understanding of how school staff use data systems and the influence of the data on instructional practice. Included with this letter is a brochure that provides additional information about the study.

The case study data collection will take place in the first half of the 2006-07 school year. During our visit we would like to talk to you and interview the following members of your school staff: your technology coordinator (if this position exists in your school), 4 to 6 active practitioners of data-driven decision making, and 4 to 6 teachers who represent average use. During our visit, we will conduct teacher focus groups and/or interviews depending on teacher schedules. In addition, we plan to ask teachers to show us the types of data that they have examined in the past, as well as to respond to several mock-ups of hypothetical student data designed to resemble typical data representations in widely implemented systems.

We recognize that participation in this study will require time and energy from you and your staff, however, your participation is vital to developing principles for designing systems and practices that support frequent and effective use of data to inform decision making. We will work closely with you and your staff to establish a site visit schedule that will minimize the burden associated with our data collection activities. Please note that we will provide participants with an executive summary of our findings that will include information on promising practices regarding data-driven decision making in schools.

The information that is collected for this study will be treated in a confidential manner. Reports prepared for the Department of Education will contain no individual or school or district identifiers. Participating schools will be acknowledged in the final report for their cooperation, but they will not be identified in the text of any report unless model practices are highlighted, in which case permission will be obtained from you before the information is included in the reporting. All participants will be informed of the purposes of the data collection and the uses that may be made of the data collected, and provided with a consent form that outlines privacy rights.

The study is being conducted by SRI International under contract with the U.S. Department of Education. One of the evaluation researchers will contact you shortly to begin making arrangements for data collection. If you have any comments or questions regarding the study, please contact the Deputy Director, Christine Padilla, at 650-859-3908 or via e-mail at christine.padilla@sri.com. Thank you very much for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Timothy J. Magner
Director, Office of Educational Technology

Bernadette Adams Yates
Director, Policy and Program Studies
Service