

Study of School Turnaround (SST)

Draft District Administrator Interview Protocol and Consent Form

February 2011

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Study of School Turnaround (SST)

District:	Interviewer:
School:	Date/Time:
Interviewee:	Interviewee's Role:

Interview: District Official

Introduction

Thanks again for taking the time to speak with me this morning/afternoon. Before we start, I'd like to provide a little background on our work, and answer any questions you might have for me.

As you probably know, I work for an independent non-profit research organization called the American Institutes for Research, and we are conducting a study for the U.S. Department of Education on the implementation of the School Improvement Grants under ARRA. The study is taking place in 5 states, 12 districts, and 60 schools throughout the country; they were selected so that the study could collect information on implementation of the SIG from a diverse array of SIG grantees. We have collected as much information as possible through publicly available documents such as *[Interviewer: give examples of documents reviewed]*.

More specifically, we want to learn about the change process that schools go through as they are working to turn around a history of low performance. Because external support providers play an important role in this process, we want to gain your perspective on the SIG grant program.

I want to assure you that all information obtained today will be treated in a manner that carefully protects your privacy, in accordance with the Education Sciences Institute Reform Act of 2002, Title I, Subsection (c) of Section 183. Only selected research staff will have access to data. We will NOT present results in any way that would permit them to be identified with you or any other specific individual. No personally identifiable information, such as your name or your district or school affiliation, will be disclosed to anyone outside the project. We also will not share what you and I discuss with other people in this district. Our study will identify the states that we visit, but will not disclose the names of the districts or schools in each state. Also, you should know that your participation is voluntary, and you do not have to respond to any questions you do not want to. Please let us know at any time if you would prefer not to participate.

I'd like to ask you to sign a consent form before we begin. It outlines some of the issues I've just mentioned with regard to privacy. Please take a minute to read it and let me know if you have any questions. There are two copies, one is for your records, and the other, to be signed by you, is for me to keep in my files

If you don't mind, I would like to record this interview simply for note-taking purposes. No one outside of our research team will hear the recording, it is only for my own reference to improve the accuracy of my notes. If you would like me to turn off the recorder at any point, just let me know. Would that be OK?

Different schools and districts have had different experiences and chosen different improvement strategies as a result of the SIG grants, so some of the questions may be more or less applicable to your situation. If at any point, you'd like clarification on any of my questions, feel free to interrupt me.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

DISTRICT CONTEXT

1. I'd like to start by asking you to tell me more about your district. How would you briefly describe your district to someone who has never been here before, including its strengths, challenges, and priorities? (IIA.2, IIA.15, IIA.12, IIA.4)

Things to listen for:

- The students?
- The schools and differences among schools?
- The faculty? (Quality? Shortages?)
- The fiscal context?
- Relationship with the school board?
- Administrator turnover?
- Other school reform efforts?

2. [If not addressed in question 1] About how many schools in your district would you describe as persistently low-performing? (IIA3)

3. Why do you believe these schools in your district continue to be low-performing year after year? What has contributed to their low performance? What has hindered improvement? (IIA2, IIA6, IIA8)

Probe as necessary:

- How do elementary schools differ from high schools in what contributes to low performance and what they need to improve?
- Are there any federal, state or district policies, practices and/or contractual agreements that may have (inadvertently) contributed to these schools' low performance? (for example, seniority rules, school choice options, etc.)

Things to listen for:

- Characteristics of the students; parents; community?
- Leadership?
- Teacher capacity?
- Resources?
- School climate (e.g., safety, discipline policies)

4. What do you think these persistently low-performing schools need in order to improve?

SIG MODEL SELECTION

I'd like to talk about the School Improvement Grants more specifically. I understand that you have [insert number] of schools in your district that are receiving SIG funds.

5. Just to confirm, were you involved in the process of selecting schools to include in the district's SIG application?

6. Did you believe that the list of SIG-eligible schools (as determined by the state) targeted the schools that were most in need of improvement? Why or why not? Were there schools left off the list that you thought needed SIG funds and assistance? (IIB.2, IIC.3)

7. What was the district’s strategy for identifying the schools to include in the SIG application? Were there any SIG-eligible schools for which the district did not seek funding? If so, why did the district make this decision? Why was each case study school chosen? (IIB.2, IIC.3)

Probe as necessary:

- Who made these decisions? Did the state provide any guidance?
- Were schools and/or the community involved? If so how?
- What was the rationale for selection of schools? Their past efforts to improve?
- For how many schools did you apply for SIG funds? Did you decide to try to serve all of these schools in their SIG grant? Why or why not?
- If SIG-eligible schools were not funded, was it because they did not wish to adopt any of the intervention models (e.g., because they wanted to retain the current principal)?

Things to listen for:

- Tier I, II, III schools
- Availability of funds from other funding streams and how these relate to SIG funds.

8. [Site visitors will have definitions of the models to refer to as necessary.] What was your involvement in the decisions about which intervention model—school closure, turnaround, restart, or transformation—each SIG school would implement? Who else was involved in making these decisions? (IIB.1)

Probe as necessary:

- Who made these decisions? Did the state provide any guidance?
- Were schools and/or the community involved? If so, how?
- Have you (or your district) had any prior experience with reconstitution?

9. How did you and/or your colleagues decide which intervention model to use in which SIG schools? What criteria were considered in the decision? What was the rationale for the choice of model for each case study school? (IIB.1)

10. Were any SIG schools in your district closed? Which schools did you close, and why? What did this process entail? (IIB.1)

Probe as necessary:

- To which schools are their students now assigned?
- Where did the principals and teachers go?
- Who made these decisions?
- Are there any plans underway to monitor how the students from these closed schools are faring in the schools to which they have been transferred?

INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

Now I'd like to ask questions about specific improvement strategies—that is, what you are doing in the [case study schools] in order to improve student outcomes.

11. Is there a district-wide approach to instructional improvement planned/being implemented for the SIG schools? To what extent is the approach different from that of non-SIG schools, if at all? What specific strategies are involved in this approach? Please explain.

Things to listen for:

- Curriculum changes
- Pedagogical strategies
- Change in use of time/time for instruction (before or after or during the school day/extended day or year)
- Parent/community involvement
- Support for at-risk students

12. For [each case study school] what instructional improvement strategies are being planned/implemented? What is the rationale behind these strategies? (IIB.1, IIIB.10, IIA.1, IIA.2, IIA.5, IIC.2, IIC.6, IIC.8)

Probe as necessary:

- How prescriptive is the district on these changes? How much flexibility do schools have?

13. How will the district support these changes?

Probe as necessary:

- Are you providing different guidance for SIG schools compared to other low-performing schools in the district?
- To what extent do the instructional strategies and district support and guidance differ by intervention model (i.e., turnaround, restart, transformation)?

14. How are these instructional improvement strategies different from changes you've tried to make in the past, or from previous instructional approaches? How do priorities under the SIG program align with your previous reform efforts? (IIA.1, IIA.2)

15. What was your involvement in the decisions about specific instructional improvement strategies for SIG schools? Who else was involved? (IIA.2)

STAFF

Now I'd like to talk a bit more about the teachers and principals in SIG schools, and teacher recruitment and retention in your district.

16. Could you tell me a bit about the process for hiring teachers in your district? Generally, how are they assigned to or hired for specific schools? Have these policies changed (or plan to change) for the SIG schools? (IIA.9)

Important probes:

- What is the role of principals in selecting teachers for their schools? *[For high schools]* For selecting department chairs?
- How are teachers evaluated?

17. Has turnover among principals or teachers been a challenge at schools in your district? In any low performing schools? At any of the case study schools in particular? Please describe. (IIA.7, IIA.8)

18. Have you removed staff from any of the SIG schools?

19. [IF APPLICABLE] In SIG schools in which the principal and many staff members were replaced, how were decisions made about which staff to keep and which to let go? What was the rationale? (IIB.5, IIIA.7, IIIA.8, IIIA.5, IIA.7, IIA.8, IIA.9, IIB.5, IIA.12)

Probe as necessary:

- Who was involved in these staffing decisions? (*Things to listen for:* principals? Who else at the district?)
- If teachers from a SIG school were dismissed, were they allowed to transfer to another school in your district?
- For the SIG schools, where did you find replacement staff? Did you have any trouble finding the kind of teachers and administrators you needed for these schools? (IIA6)

20. Do you have any strategies in place to recruit and retain high quality/effective teachers? To improve the knowledge and skills of teachers through professional development? How, if at all, do these strategies differ for SIG schools and other district schools? (IIA.9, IIB.5)

Probe, as necessary:

- Use of financial incentives: for which teachers? How much? What are the requirements for these teachers?
- Union relationships and contracts
- Strategies to improve teacher working conditions
- Have they instituted professional development and/or professional learning communities?

21. Do you think the school leadership is strong enough [at case study schools] to initiate these improvement approaches and strategies? How do you know? To what extent do you think the principal has the appropriate leadership skills? Why? (IIIB.4 IIIB.5)

Probe as necessary:

- What are the leadership challenges [at case study schools]?
- How are the school leader/leadership team equipped to plan improvement strategies?

22. Are any changes in policy being made/planned that might impact the district's teaching staff? If so, please describe? (IIA.9)

Things to listen for:

- Flexibility (in staffing, budgeting)
- Union relationships/policies
- Tenure
- Evaluation
- Teacher compensation

- Teacher licensure/certification
- Teacher replacement/assignment

STATE ROLE

23. What support and guidance is your state department of education providing to your district to administer the School Improvement Grant? (1C)

Probe as necessary:

- What has been most helpful? What has been least helpful?
- Has the state issued specific rules about the implementation of the SIG program overall or about specific intervention models?
- About distribution or uses of funds?
- Are there new reporting requirements to the state for SIG districts?

SCHOOL SUPPORT AND MONITORING

I know that SIG schools are trying to implement a lot of ambitious change strategies. I'd like to talk a bit about support that is provided to SIG schools as they go through this change process.

24. If I were a principal in a SIG school in your district, can you tell me what type of support I would receive, whether from the state, the district, or another support provider? (IIB.7, IIB.8, IIC.7, IIA.10, IIA.11, IIB.5)

Probe as necessary:

- What is emphasized at [each case study school]?
- To what extent is this support different from that of non-SIG schools, if at all?
- Has the district hired additional staff for the purpose of supporting SIG schools?

Things to listen for:

- Professional development for principals/leaders (e.g., form, content, intensity?)
- Professional development for teachers (e.g., form, content, intensity?)
- Intensity of support services (how often?)
- Fit between support provider and school needs
- Consistency/coherence with school's SIG intervention model

25. [Only ask of districts that we know are working with Education Management Organizations or Charter Management Organizations, and only ask if not addressed in response to the previous question] For [each of the case study schools], how would you characterize the district's relationship with this [EMO/CMO]? How does the district coordinate with the [EMO/CMO]? (IIB.7)

Probe as necessary:

- Which educational decisions are made by the [EMO/CMO] and which by the district?
- To what degree are the [EMO/CMO]'s philosophies and strategies aligned with the district's?
- How is the [EMO/CMO] evaluated?
- What level of support is provided by the [EMO/CMO]?
- Are the staff qualified to provide support?
- Is the support consistent with the SIG intervention model?

26. How will the district measure and monitor SIG schools' success? (IIB9)

Probe as necessary:

- How will you know if SIG schools have been successful?
- What student indicators will you use?

- What data is used, and how? (e.g., student outcomes, implementation, observation of classrooms?)
- Who uses the data?
- Does the district provide any data or data interpretation training to schools?

USE OF FUNDS

I'd like to talk about the use of SIG funds in the case study schools in your district.

27. Who made decisions regarding how SIG funds should be spent in schools—the district? The principal? Others? How is this different from how expenditure decisions are usually made, if at all? (IIA.5, IIB.6)

Probe as necessary:

- What was the district's strategy for distributing these funds across the identified schools?
- Did the guidance districts gave to schools regarding how to spend SIG funds differ by intervention model?
- Do schools have the same flexibility in use of SIG funds that they do with other funds?

Listen for:

- School involvement

[Interviewer will likely have budgets from the case study schools in the district prior to the interview, and depending on how much information is included in the budget about specific resource allocations, the following questions will have to be tailored.]

28. To what extent do you expect that the SIG funds be used to support or stimulate specific improvement strategies (e.g., instructional coaches, additional/new teachers, professional development student supports, etc)? Are there any restrictions on how [case study schools] are allowed to use the SIG funds? (IIB.2, IIB.3)

29. What other sources of revenue will be used to support improvement efforts at [case study schools in the district]? Are the different sources applied to different strategies? (IIB.2)

30. I know that SIG funds will only last for three years. In choosing improvement strategies, have you given thought to sustaining the change after the SIG program? (IIB.4)

Probe as necessary:

- Are strategies under SIG carrying over to other schools in the district?

31. I understand that the district retained [\$XXXXXX] of the total the district received from the SIG at the district level. What is this money being spent on? What is the rationale behind these expenditures? (IIB.2)

CLOSE

32. What are your expectations for where the case study schools will be in a year's time? In three years' time?

33. Is there anything I haven't asked you about the SIG grant program that you'd like to comment on?

Thanks again for your time. We very much appreciate your participation in this important study.

**Study of School Turnaround
Informed Consent: District Administrator Interview**

Purpose

The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) of the U.S. Department of Education (ED) requests clearance for the data collection for the Study of School Turnaround (SST). The purpose of the study is to document over time the intervention models, approaches and strategies adopted and implemented by a subset of schools receiving federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) funds. To this end, the evaluation will employ multiple data collection strategies.

To assist with the evaluation, we are asking districts to participate in interviews. You will be interviewed about topics related to the change process, the quality of support, and the level and quality of implementation of improvement strategies. The interviews are designed to last no more than one hour.

The data collected will be used solely for research purposes. Results from the research study will be reported in annual reports as well as special topic focused research briefs.

Risks and Discomfort

There are few anticipated or known risks in participating in this study.

Benefits

Your participation in the evaluation will contribute to an understanding of how districts are working to turn around schools.

Freedom to Withdraw

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You may pass on any question that is asked and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

Privacy Considerations

We will treat the information that you supply in a manner that carefully protects your privacy, in accordance with the Education Sciences Institute Reform Act of 2002, Title I, Subsection (c) of Section 183. Only selected research staff will have access to data. We will NOT present results in any way that would permit them to be identified with you or any other specific individual. No personally identifiable information, such as name or district/school affiliation, will be disclosed to anyone outside the project.

More Information

If you would like more information about this study, you may contact the Project Director, Kerstin Carlson Le Floch, at the American Institutes for Research at 202-403-5649 or at klefloch@air.org. For questions regarding your rights as a subject participating in this research, please contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at IRBChair@air.org or toll free at 1-800-634-0797.

Informed Consent

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Print Name: _____

Position: _____

District: _____