

# Study of School Turnaround (SST)

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## Draft High School Principal Interview Protocol and Consent Form

February 2011

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## Study of School Turnaround (SST)

District:	Interviewer:
School:	Date/Time:
Interviewee:	

### Interview: High School Principal

#### 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.

#### *Study of School Turnaround (SST)*

As you probably know, I work for an independent non-profit research organization called the American Institutes for Research, and we are under contract with the U.S. Department of Education to study how School Improvement Grant (SIG) implementation unfolds, and more specifically, the decisions and strategies schools, districts and states undertake, and the constraints they face as they work to implement intervention models intended to improve student outcomes. 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 SIG implementation experiences from a diverse array of SIG grantees

#### *Privacy*

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.

#### *Recording*

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

Do you have any questions before we begin?

**Note to interviewer:** Throughout the interview, possible probes are set aside following each general question. Asking these questions may help to move the interview pace or may prompt a less talkative respondent. However, **do not feel you need to ask each of these probes (except where noted)** it is likely that the respondents will cover many of these issues when responding to your initial inquiry. Keep the tone conversational and comfortable.

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## PRINCIPAL BACKGROUND AND SCHOOL CONTEXT

**1. Can you tell me a bit about your background in schools? How did you come to be a principal at this school? When?**

*Probe as necessary:*

- *[If school is charter]* Do you work for an EMO or CMO?
- Were you brought in as a replacement for principal who left the school?
- Where were you before you were principal at this school? *[If previously principal:]* Were you in a low-performing school? Were you in a high school?
- Why were you placed or did you apply to be principal at this school?

**2. I'd like to start by asking you to tell me about your school. I know that every school is unique, with unique circumstances that influence daily life. How would you describe your school to someone who has never been here before, including its strengths and challenges? (IIIA.1, IIIA.3, IIIA.5, IIIA.7, IIIA.11)**

*Things to listen for:*

- Faculty: capacity (e.g., teacher knowledge and skills), commitment, turnover
- Structures (e.g., Departments/clusters, specialized classes)
- Students (diversity of student population, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, ELL, SPED)
- Community
- Funding level

**3. How do you view your role as principal? What is your main priority as principal? (IIIB.4, IIIC.1)**

*Things to listen for:*

- Fostering a coherent instructional vision and strategies
- Supporting the faculty and staff members in the change process
- Creating opportunities for professional learning, e.g. PD, coaching, fostering collaboration
- Monitoring instruction and student learning, e.g., observing classrooms, meeting with teachers to discuss students' progress, tracking progress of individual students, etc.
- Managing the internal environment, e.g., building a leadership team, motivating students and teachers, managing facilities, etc.
- Managing the external environment, e.g., meeting with parents, communicating with the district, building support from external organizations, etc.

**4. What are your activities in a typical day/week? (IIIB.4)**

*Probe as necessary:*

- What percent of your day/job is spent on instruction and learning (what's going on in the classroom) and what percent is taken up by the "external environment"?
- How often do you get into the classrooms during a typical week?

**5. Do you rely on other staff to assist you with your leadership responsibilities (e.g., department heads, teacher leaders, etc.)? If yes, who are they and what types of leadership roles do they play? (IIIB.4, IIIC.1)**

*Things to listen for:*

- Fostering a coherent instructional vision and strategies

- Creating opportunities for professional learning, e.g. PD, coaching, fostering collaboration
- Monitoring instruction and student learning, e.g., observing classrooms, meeting with teachers to discuss students' progress, tracking progress of individual students, etc.
- Managing the internal environment, e.g., building a leadership team, motivating students and teachers, managing facilities, etc.
- Managing the external environment, e.g., meeting with parents, communicating with the district, building support from external organizations, etc.

**6. At the school level, what kind of support do you receive to implement the changes in your school? From the School Improvement Team? Other school staff? Do you think you have the support you need to achieve you goals? Why or why not? (IB.4, IIB.6, IIB.7, IIB.8)**

**7. How much autonomy does your school have and for what kinds of decisions? [Interviewer will have a sense of what autonomy means in each state/district.] (IIIA.1)**

**8. Why do you believe this school has remained low-performing year after year? What has hindered improvement? (IIIA.3)**

**9. Generally speaking, what do you think your school needs to improve student performance? What is your vision for making these improvements? (IIIA.1, IIIA.2, IIIA.4, IIIA.7, IIIB.4)**

***Things to listen for:***

- Funds
- Expertise (e.g., about effective practices, struggling students, etc.)
- Data needs
- Staff capacity
- Teacher quality
- Parent involvement

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## **REFORM AND SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES**

**10. I'd like to talk about how the school plans to use the School Improvement Grant (SIG). First, how was the decision made regarding the overall SIG model to use in this school? Who was involved in the decision? [insert name of SIG intervention model]. (IIB.1, IIB.4, IIB.5, IIIC.7, IIIC.6)**

***Probe as necessary:***

- Do you know what the rationale for this choice was?
- How were you involved in this decision?
- Were your school's departments/clusters or staff involved in this decision?

**11. Could you describe the specific strategies your school [is now beginning /is planning] to implement to improve student outcomes? What will you do first? What is the overall plan? (IIIB.1, IIIB.3, IIIB.7, IIIB.6a-e, IIIB.3f, IIIB.8, IIA.1, IIA.2, IIIC.3, IIIC.6)**

***Things to listen for:***

- Instructional/pedagogical strategies
- Strategies to meet the needs of specific groups of students, e.g., ELLs, special education students, the lowest performing students
- Curriculum changes (which subjects?)
- Changes in use of time (before, after, or during the school day)

- Personnel changes
- Discipline policies
- School safety
- Student supports
- Parent and community engagement

***Probe as necessary:***

- Have you already implemented th(is/ese) change(s) at this school, or is this year a planning year? What has been done so far this year?
- Why were these strategies or combinations of strategies chosen (e.g., after an assessment of needs?) Do you think they will address the most important challenges facing this school?
- How are these strategies different from or similar to reforms your school has tried in the past? How well-integrated are these strategies with other strategies or programs in this school?
- How [do/will] you support students most at risk of academic trouble?

**12. Is your high school organized into departments or clusters? If yes, what role do the departments/clusters have in the implementation of these strategies aimed at improving student outcomes? (IIIB.1, IIIB.3, IIIB.7, IIIB.6a-e, IIIB.3f, IIIB.8, IIA.1, IIA.2, IIIC.3, IIIC.6)**

***Things to listen for:***

- Instructional/pedagogical strategies
- Curriculum changes (which subjects?)
- Changes in use of time (before, after, or during the school day)
- Personnel changes
- Discipline policies
- School safety

***Probe as necessary:***

- Is the role of the departments/clusters in implementing these strategies shared equally? Why or Why not?
- Did departments/cluster participate in the selection of these strategies (e.g., after an assessment of needs?)?
- How will the departments/clusters share responsibility for implementing these strategies?

**13. How is the school monitoring its progress? How will you know if your school is successful? Who is responsible for monitoring? (IIIB.3)**

***Probe as necessary:***

- Do the departments/clusters play a role in monitoring progress?
- What indicators of student success will be used? What will be the data sources?
- How do/will you assess students' instructional needs?
- How do/will you assess and improve staff capacity, i.e., evaluate teachers?
- What data will you use? How will you use the data?

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**SUPPORT FROM DISTRICT AND EXTERNAL PROVIDERS**

**14. What services has your district provided to you as a SIG school? To what extent are these additional services, i.e., services non-SIG schools don't receive? (IIB.7, IIIB.3g)**

***Listen for/probe if appropriate:***

- What technical assistance has been provided so far? (content, frequency, etc.)
- Have particular departments/clusters been targeted for district support?

- Are there additional resources available to you for professional development? For other purposes?
- Are these different than before you received the SIG grant?
- Are these services available to all schools in the district or just SIG recipients?
- Has the district supported any facilities improvements or are any planned?

**15. What, if any, other organizations provide support or assistance to this school? Please describe them. What role have you, the departments/cluster and/or school staff had in selecting these providers? Please explain. (IIIA.5)**

*Listen for/probe on if not mentioned:*

- Organizations that provide after school programs?
- Health or social services?
- Private funders?

**16. How useful/relevant has the assistance provided from the different sources been in addressing identified needs?**

**17. [Ask if not addressed in response to question 1] Is your school now working with a Charter Management Organization or Education Management Organization? (IIIA.9)**

*Probe as necessary:*

- How would characterize the school's relationship with [name of organization]?
- When did they begin working with this school?
- How were they selected to work with this school?
- [ask if principal not employed by CMO/EMO]:
- Who made that decision? Were you involved in the decision?
- How satisfied are you with the work of this organization to date? Why?

## **STAFF**

**18. Have there been any changes to personnel this school year? Were any teachers or other staff replaced? If so, which staff were replaced, and why? Where did replaced staff go? Where did new staff come from? (IIIA.8, IIIB.3a, IIIB.3b)**

*Probe as necessary:*

- How were these decisions made?
- Who made these decisions?
- Do you have discretion or authority to hire staff for your school? If so, is your discretion greater than before the SIG grant? Different from other schools in the district?
- Any changes in policies regarding teacher licensure/certification and/or teacher replacement/assignment?
- What are the characteristics of the new staff?

**19. [If not addressed earlier] Has this school had any trouble finding the kind of teachers you need for your students? Has it been more difficult to find qualified teachers in particular content areas or specialties? Are there any special incentives for teachers to work in this school? (IIIA.7, IIIA.8, IIIB.3)**

**20. Do you believe the staff in your school have the capacity to implement the new reforms being asked of them? What additional support do they need, if any? (IIIA.8, IIIB.3)**

**21. Are the staff in your school participating in professional development or learning activities designed to help them implement the SIG-funded strategies? What are they? Please describe. (IIIB.3g)**

***Things to listen for:***

- What is the form of professional development?
- Who participates?
- What is the content?
- How frequent, over what time frame, how many hours?
- Embedded in the school day?

***Probe as necessary:***

- Do staff participate in other professional development, not specifically related to SIG strategies? Can you describe this PD briefly?
- Do you (the principal) participate in PD activities related to SIG program? Other professional development? (Please describe.)

**22. In general, how would you characterize the feelings of the school staff towards the school? Toward the school's improvement efforts? Are teachers generally supportive of these efforts?**

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## **USE OF FUNDS**

*[Note: The Interviewer will need to obtain the school's budget prior to the interview. Areas of interest include: (a) planned expenditures and (b) use SIG funds. Additionally, the interviewer will be prepared to ascertain information on specific resource allocations (dependent on the level of detail in the budget), and the degree to which the principal is aware of those resource allocations.]*

**23. Earlier, you told me about the strategies you are implementing to improve achievement in your school. Have you been involved in identifying the sources of revenue that will be used to support these improvement efforts? If yes, what are they? (IIA.5, IIIB.2)**

**24. Can you tell me how you (or the district) have applied different sources of funds to different strategies, e.g., instructional coaches, additional/new teachers, professional development student supports, etc.? [Interviewer ask specific questions to clarify information in the budget] (IIB.2)**

**25. [If not explicitly addressed in prior question] How, specifically, are School Improvement Grant funds being used in your school this school year? (IIIB.2)**

***Things to listen for:***

- Overall strategies (class size reduction? Additional supports for low-performing students?)
- Did you hire additional staff? For what purpose? (e.g., instructional coaches, tutors)
- Improving instructional programs
- Extending learning time
- Supplies/materials/technology
- Professional development
- Facilities improvements
- Other support?

**Probe as necessary:**

- What guidance did you receive about how SIG funds are to be used? (was it clear?)
- From whom did you receive guidance about the use of SIG funds?

**26. How much discretion do you have to allocate funds in your current school budget? Did this change this year? If so, how? (IIA.5, IIB.3, IIIA.6)**

**Probe as necessary:**

- Were you involved in making decisions regarding how SIG funds should be spent in your school?  
How is this different from how expenditure decisions are usually made, if at all?
- Over which types of expenditures do you have discretion?
- As you have allocated resources in your school, have you been able to blend funds from different sources for the same purpose?
- Are you able to make changes to budget allocations based on identified needs over the course of the school year?

**27. Have you been able to allocate funds to support everything you believe your school needs to succeed? (IIA.5, IIB.3, IIIB.2)**

**Probe as necessary:**

- Do you believe you have enough funds to ensure improved academic achievement?
- Do you believe funds are being used efficiently and effectively?
- [If no:] What are the barriers to that ideal resource allocation?

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**CLOSE**

**28. I know the SIG initiative is relatively new, but do you have any reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of the effort so far? [Interviewer may provide examples of how the SIG resources have been used based on improvement strategies and budget allocations discussed in the earlier questions]**

**Probe as necessary:**

- Do you feel that certain components might be more difficult to implement than others?
- What are some of the challenges to implementation?

**29. Is there anything I haven't asked you about the SIG initiative that you'd like to comment on?**

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

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**ELL STUDENTS**

*These questions focus on the ways that principals in SIG schools seek to meet the needs of ELL students. They will be asked of principals who have ELL students in their schools.*

**1. What challenges and constraints do you face in addressing the needs of ELL students at your school? And how do you address them? Are there any state or district policies that would be helpful in addressing those challenges? (IIIB.6, IIIA.2)**



**2. I'd like to get a sense of the overall approach to ELL instruction at each of your schools. Are there designated programs, specialized classes, supports and/or curriculum that are used school wide? How/why were they selected? Are there any strategies or programs that you have found to be particularly effective? (IIIB.6)**

*Probe as necessary:*

- Any programs or curricula indicated by the district
- Whether there is a mandated/intended curriculum in place
- Use of native language in classes with ELL students
- Interventions available to ELLs who are struggling (such as, after school program, tutoring, mentoring, academic counselors, Response to Intervention, etc.)
- Whether there is a designated ELD time during the school day and a description of what takes place during that time.

**3. Do you feel teachers at your school have the skills and knowledge needed to be successful with the ELL students at your school? Why/why not? (IIIB.3)**

*Probe as necessary:*

- Extent to which the most skilled teachers the ones teaching the classes with the largest numbers of ELLs
- Distribution of high quality/effective teachers in classes with the most ELLs
- Challenges, such as turnover, understaffed, resistance to change, etc.

**4. Do teachers at your school engage in professional learning that specifically addresses ELL instruction? If so, what? What is the district's role? (IIIB.3)**

*Probe as necessary:*

- Professional development initiatives identified by the district
- Any differences in what mainstream vs. ELL teachers receive.
- Supports provided by district and/or any assistance provided by state

**5. I'd like to get a sense of the kinds of resources (financial, human, or other) you draw on in addressing the needs of ELL students at your school. Do you receive financial resources that are targeted for ELLs? What other resources do you draw on? (IIIB.2)**

*Probe as necessary:*

- Resources identified by the district
- Any challenges associated with securing resources needed
- How resources from multiple sources—Title I, Title III and others--are coordinated and utilized to support ELLs

**Study of School Turnaround  
Informed Consent: Principal Interview**

**Purpose**

The Institute of Education Services (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 principals 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 schools 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](mailto: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](mailto: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/School:** \_\_\_\_\_