

# Study of School Turnaround (SST)

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## Draft External Support Provider Protocol and Consent Form

February 2011

**Note to the interviewer:** *There are many different types of external support providers who may be working with SIG schools. Some may be affiliated with a private organization that specializes in management of low-performing schools. Others may be under contract with the district to focus on a specific aspect of the school, such as mathematics, special education, or leadership. Still others may be affiliated with the state, and have worked through the state system of support in the past. Before conducting this interview, you should obtain background information on the key support providers, their affiliation, and role in the school, so you can appropriately tailor these questions.*

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB number. The valid OMB control number of this information collection is XXXX-XXXX. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 60 minutes per interview. If you have any comments concerning the accuracy of the time estimates(s) or suggestion for improving this form, please write to: U.S. Department of Education, Washington, 20202-4651. If you have comments or concerns regarding the status of your individual submission of this form, write directly to:

Institute of Education Sciences, US Department of Education, 555 New Jersey Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20208.



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## Study of School Turnaround (SST)

Support Provider(s):	Interviewer:
District:	Interviewer:
School(s):	Date/Time:

### Interview: Support Provider(s)

#### 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 (called SIG) 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 collection information on implementation of the SIG from a diverse array of SIG grantees. 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 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?

I have four main areas that I would like to discuss with you today. First, I would like you to tell me about your own background in education and how you became a school support provider. Next, I'd like to talk about the structure of the support you provide to SIG schools including your role and responsibilities, and how you interact with the principal and teachers at the SIG school or schools you support. Finally, I'd like to know what you think might be some potential outcomes of the support you provide to the schools.

**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**; it is likely that the respondent will cover many of these issues when responding to your initial inquiry. Keep the tone conversational and comfortable.

Support Provider(s) Background

**1. First, I'd like to know a bit about your background. What is your expertise? What kind of training have you had?**

*Probe, if necessary:*

- What is your background in education? Were you ever a teacher or administrator?
- Do you have a particular area of expertise? Please describe.
- What types of schools do you work with most often? (Elementary, middle, high? Traditional vs. charter?)
- How many years have you been involved with support for low-performing schools?

**2. [If the external provider is part of an organization] How long have you been affiliated with [name of organization]? What is the background or expertise of the organization? What kind of training does your organization provide?**

*Probe, if necessary:*

- How many low-performing schools does your organization work with?
- Does the organization only work in the district, or state? In how many other districts/states does the organization work?

**3. How many schools are you currently working with? How many are low performing?**

*Probe, if necessary:*

- Do you work specifically with low-performing schools? How did you come to work with struggling schools?
- How many SIG schools, specifically?

**4. [If working with multiple schools] Do you primarily focus on a particular type of low performing school?**

*Probe, if necessary*

- Do you focus on high schools or elementary schools?
- Do you support schools with a particular need based on your expertise?
- Do you focus on a particular part of support (e.g., leadership, instruction, etc.)?

**5. How and when did you come to be the support provider for the [insert name] school?**

*[Note: Try to get specific information for how a provider is matched or connected with a school.]*

*Probe, if necessary*

- *[If working for a larger organization/or state]* Are you assigned a particular region or state?
- Did you respond to a request from the state or district for proposals to become a provider for this particular district/state?
- When did you start working with this district and/or [case study] school(s)?

**6. What are your main responsibilities/roles within this school? To whom are you responsible?**

*Probe, if necessary.*

- Who hired you/your organization? The state, district, school?
- What are your responsibilities as listed in your contract?
- How and to whom are you held accountable for the work you do?

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## SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

*[Note: The external provider support provider may be working with several case study schools in a district or across the state. In these instances, the following questions should be asked for each case study school.]*

**7. Let's talk about the [case study] school you're working with. Can you tell me a little about the school context? What do you think are the key features that we should know about the school?** (IIIA.1, IIIA.2) *[Note: early in the process, the support provider may still be learning about the school context.]*

**Probe, if necessary:**

- What are the top three challenges facing this school? Why do you think the school has remained low performing year after year?
- What do you know about reform activities the school has been working on already?

**8. [Ask in first site visit only] What was your first introduction to the school like? Please describe.** (IIIB.1, IIIB.4, IIIB.7)

**Probe, if necessary:**

- Were you introduced by the SEA or LEA staff?
- Did you meet with school administrators and/or faculty?
- How are you received by principals and faculty?
- Did you have any sort of public meeting?
- Did you look at data? (test scores, etc.) or conduct a needs assessment?

**9. In your opinion, what are the key improvement strategies that are being implemented in [insert name] school through the SIG grant? Is there a specific sequence of intervention strategies?** (IIIB.1, IIIB.3, IIIB.6, IIIB.8, IIIC.3, IIIC.5, IIIC.6)

**Probe, if necessary:** *[Note: Listen closely for all the probes listed below, as these are central to the school improvement process. Let the respondent "tell the story" of the change process in the school, but follow up with probes that capture these critical details.]*

- Reference to specific SIG models and activities associated with the model (changes in personnel, leadership issues, instructional practices, data use/assessments, professional development, efforts to improve school climate, etc.)
- Stakeholder engagement and buy-in to change strategy
- Familiarity with SIG guidelines
- Are the improvement strategies aligned to the challenges faced by the school?
- *[If the interviewee works with multiple schools]* What are common strategies in all the schools you work with?
- *[If applicable]* To what extent are specific interventions unique to the SIG school?

**10. [Only ask if know provider has history with school] What was your role in helping the school or district determine the appropriate school improvement strategies for this school?**

**11. Do you know how the SIG funds are used to support school improvement activities? Do you know if there are additional funding sources that support improvement strategies in this school?** (IIIB.2)

**Probe, if necessary:**

- Do you know if resources are sufficient? Have funds arrived on time?

- Do you have any concerns about the use of funds?

**12. Who are the primary people that you work with in supporting this school? How frequently do you communicate with them? (IIIA.9, IIIB.5)**

***Probe, if necessary:***

- How often are you in the school, working with staff?
- What kind of rapport have you developed with school staff?

***Things to listen for:***

- Teachers, administrators, school improvement team, specialists, staff members, parents, businesses, students, other community groups
- Listen for which groups the interviewee *omits* as well

**13. If there is more than one support provider in *[insert name]* school, do your roles differ from one another? How do you interact and share information with one another? (IIIC.1)**

***Probes, if necessary:***

- How do the support providers interact and communicate?
- With what frequency do support providers discuss the school's needs and support strategies?

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## **STATE AND DISTRICT ROLES**

**14. Does the state education agency or district provide or procure training for the support providers? If yes, please describe the training. (IB.4, IB.6)**

**15. Does the state or district provide any guidelines for your role in the school, or tools that structure the SIG improvement process? (IA.3, IB.4)**

***Things to listen for:***

- School improvement framework, on-line planning tools, data tools, etc.
- SEA priorities and ways in which the SEA seeks to frame the SIG process (e.g., punitive vs. support)
- Extent to which the district shapes what the provider does in the school and provides direction

**16. In your role as a support provider for the SIG school(s), do you work with district staff? If yes, how are the district staff engaged in your work?**

***Important probes:***

- How much time is spent with district staff?
- What is the primary purpose for working with the district staff (e.g., procuring resources, building relationships, etc.)?
- *[If the respondent works with more than one SIG school]* Does this level of involvement vary by school, or by Tier?

**17. *[This may not be applicable for all support providers, depending on the organization with which they are affiliated.]* Aside from the state or district training you described, what other support do you receive professionally? Do you interact with other support providers to learn more about how they are working with SIG schools? (IA.3, IB.4, IIIC.1)**

**18. How are you held accountable for improvement in this school? For which indicators or outcomes?**

*Probe, if necessary:*

- Are there benchmarks that you are expected to attain?

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## **REFLECTIONS AND OBSERVATIONS**

**19. [Note: Do not ask during first site visit if the external support provider does not have a prior relationship with the school] Based on what you've observed so far, do you anticipate seeing improvement – either in test scores or other areas, like school culture or morale, student engagement – due to the SIG strategies over the next year? The next three years? Why or why not?**

**20. I know the SIG initiative is relatively new, but do you have any reflections on the strengths and weaknesses so far?**

*Probe, if necessary:*

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

**21. 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 external support providers in SIG schools seek to meet the needs of ELL students. They will be asked of support providers who work with schools that have ELL students.*

**1. Do you work with schools that have high concentrations of ELL students? [If yes], What challenges and constraints, if any, do you face in addressing the needs of ELL students? 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. Are the improvement strategies at [case study school(s)] aligned to the needs of ELL students? [If yes], How? [If no], What needs to be done to be more aligned? (IIIB.6)**

**3. [If the provider works with multiple schools] Are there common improvement strategies for schools with high concentrations of ELL students? Please explain. (IIIB.6)**

*Probe, if necessary:*

- Are there different improvement strategies for schools with high concentrations of ELL students and other schools? Please explain.

**Study of School Turnaround  
Informed Consent: External Support Provider 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 external support providers 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:** \_\_\_\_\_