

Study of School Turnaround (SST)

Draft Parent/Community Focus Group Protocol and Consent Form

February 2011

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



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Policy Research, Inc.

Study of School Turnaround (SST)

District:	Interviewer:
School(s):	Date/Time:
Interviewee(s):	

Focus Group: Parent/Community

Note to interviewer: *It is important that the group be comfortable and that they be fully aware of the purpose of the discussion and how the focus group will proceed. Time is limited, so be sure to allocate time accordingly. Strive for an informal atmosphere, and encourage broad participation to the extent possible. Pass out paper and markers to make name tag tents. Then go around the room so everyone can say their first name.*

Introduction

Thank you for speaking with us today. My name is [your name] and I am here with [other site visitor]. We are part of an independent research team contracted by the U.S. Department of Education to study school improvement. The study is taking place in 5 states, 12 districts, and 60 schools throughout the country. The purpose of the study is to collect information related to the implementation, impact, costs, and benefits of the School Improvement Grant (SIG), which is part of the federal stimulus act. We are trying to understand whether and how these grants are helping schools improve education for their students.

We are not evaluating your school or your children but are trying to learn lessons that help make the program better. To do this, it is important that we hear not only from teachers and administrators but also from parents and community members. We see this as an opportunity for you to voice your opinions to the federal department of education.

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.

Would it be all right if we record our discussion for note-taking purposes? No one outside the research team will hear the recording. If at any point anyone would like me to turn the recorder off, just let me know.

We would really like to hear from each of you. There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in all of your opinions and feelings. We ask only that one person speak at a time during the discussion. If at any time you would like clarification about any of the questions, please feel free to interrupt.

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

BACKGROUND

1. Let's start by introducing ourselves. Please tell me your name, and if you are a parent, the grade(s) of your child(ren) and how many years your child(ren) has/have been at this school.

2. How are you involved in the school? Are you part of a parent organization or leadership team at this school? If so, could you tell me a little bit about what your role is?

SCHOOL CONTEXT

3. Can you tell me a little bit about this school? How would you describe this school to someone who has never been here before? What are the major strengths (what makes this a good school)? Are there some things you would like to see that would make this school better?

Probe, if necessary:

- How about safety? Is this a safe school?
- Do you think the school environment is conducive to learning? Why or why not?
- What do you think about the school leadership? Teachers?
- What kinds of things are there for children to do after school hours?

4. How does the school communicate with you about your child(ren) and what you can do to help [him/her/them] to do well in school? (IIIB.7)

Probe, if necessary:

- Are you pleased with the school staff's availability and willingness to talk with you about your child(ren) and the school?
- Is the communication adequate? Would you like more?
- *[If there are parents of ELL students]* Do you receive communications in your own language? Is there someone at the school you can talk to who speaks your language?
- *[For community members]* What does the school communicate to you about? Is it adequate? Would you like more?
- In what ways could the school be more "open"?

5. Is there someone at the school that you can go to for additional help for your child(ren) if need be? Who? How often have you met with him/her/them? For what purpose?

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

6. Is the school doing anything to address the kinds of things you mentioned earlier that you would like to see improved? (IIIA.1)

7. What other kinds of activities to improve things for students at this school have you observed or heard about? (IIIB.2, IIIB.3, IIIB.4, IIIB.6, IIIB.7, IIIB.8)

Probe, if necessary (focus on what other respondents have mentioned on the site visit):

- Changes in school leadership? Changes in staff?
- Changes in instruction?
- Use of assessments?
- Student attendance?

- School climate, e.g., discipline, safety?
- School facilities?
- Student supports?
- Other resources?
- Parent/community involvement?
- Teacher professional development, e.g., training?

- Teacher evaluations?

8. What are your impressions of these changes? How do you think they'll help improve some of the issues in the school that we've talked about?

9. In what ways are parents/community members involved in making decisions about what happens at the school? Have you been involved in any of these decisions? (IIIA.7)

Probe, if necessary:

- If yes, can you give me some examples of decisions that have been made with the help of parents/community members?
- Would you like to be more involved in decision making? How?
- What role would you like to play in making improvements at this school?

CLOSE

10. Is there anything you'd like to tell me about this school, the community, and/or your child(ren)'s learning that I haven't asked you?

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

**Study of School Turnaround
Informed Consent: Stakeholder Focus Group**

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 stakeholders to participate in focus groups. You will be asked about topics related to the change process, the quality of support, and the level and quality of implementation of improvement strategies occurring in your school. The focus groups 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. Risks may include possibly feeling coerced to take part in the focus groups, however you should know that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You will not be penalized in any way for not participating. If you decide to participate, you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Benefits

Your participation in the evaluation will contribute to an understanding of how SIG funds are implemented.

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/School: _____