

# Study of School Turnaround (SST)

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## Draft High School Student 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:	Date/Time:

### Focus Group: High School Students

Student Name	Grade	Gender

**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 and their grade level.

### 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 how schools are improving education for their students. We are visiting 25 schools across the country, including yours, to learn more about how the initiative is working. We are not evaluating your school or you, but are trying to learn lessons that can help make the program better. To do this, it is important that we hear not only from teachers and administrators but also from students. We see this as an opportunity for you to voice your opinions to your school system and 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.

During our session today, we will record the discussion in case we miss something in our notes, but no one outside of the research team will have access to the tape. This session will give you a chance to express your opinions about your school. We want you to feel comfortable in saying what you really think and what you really feel. We hope all of you will give us your ideas since each of your opinions is important to us. There are no right or wrong answers. You

might disagree with each other and that's okay since different people often have different experiences and different opinions. It's really okay to disagree with someone but please do it respectfully.

Also, it will also help me if you speak clearly and if you will speak one at a time. The discussion should last about one hour.

Finally, I ask that none of you share what you hear with others outside the group, so everyone can feel safe being honest.

Are there any questions before we get started?

[Press record button]. I have hit the record button. Let's begin by going around the room and having each person introduce him or herself by first name.

**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.

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## BACKGROUND

1. Please tell me what grade you're in and how long you have been at this school.

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## SCHOOL CLIMATE

2. We'd like to know about how you feel about your school. How would you describe your school to a friend who goes to a different school? (IIIB.8)

*Probe, if necessary:*

- How would you describe:
  - Your teachers?
  - Your principal?
  - Students?
  - Extracurricular activities?

3. Do you feel your school is a safe and comfortable place to learn? Why or why not? (IIIB.8)

*Probe, if necessary:*

- Are there many disruptions in your classes?
- Are there any problems associated with substance abuse or violence in your school?

4. What is your school doing to provide a safe school environment? Do you think they're doing enough? Why or why not? Have you noticed any changes in the past year? (IIIB.8)

*Probe, if necessary:*

- Possible strategies:
  - Security measures
  - Disciplinary procedures (i.e., zero tolerance)
  - Service-learning (i.e., linking classroom learning to community service)
  - Health and counseling services

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## INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

5. What are your classes like? (IIIB.6a, IIIB.6b)

*Probe, if necessary:*

- Do you feel that you are learning subjects that are important? Interesting?
- Are you and your classmates challenged by your teachers to do well? Do you feel that your teachers set high expectations for you and other students?
  - Do teachers expect you to do well in class? Do they expect you to graduate? What do you think they expect you to do after graduation?
  - Do you think teachers have different expectations for different kinds of students?
- How does what you learn in your classes relate to your experiences?

6. I would like you to think about one or two teachers who you think of as good teachers. What is it about these teachers that makes them good? (IIIB.6a, IIIB.6b)

**7. Can you tell me a little about how your classes are taught? Do you get a chance to do interesting projects or have good discussions, or is the teacher typically leading the class? (III.B.6b, III.B.6e)**

*Probe, if necessary:*

- Do you work in groups with other students?
- Do you have one-on-one time with teachers?
- What kinds of classes do you like best? Why?
- What kinds of classes do you like least? Why?

**8. How do you know if you're doing well in school, or what you still need to work on? (IIIB.6c)**

*Probe, if necessary:*

- Does your teacher or other school staff talk to you about how you are doing?
- How are you tested? How often?
  - [To ELL students, if appropriate] Do you have the same tests as other students?
  - Do you think your tests are fair? Why or why not?

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## **STUDENT SUPPORTS**

**10. If you are having difficulty in your classes, who can you turn to for help (e.g., teacher, another student, parent or family member, etc.)? If you have, has this person been helpful? Why or why not? (IIIA.10)**

*Probe, if necessary:*

- [To ELL students, if appropriate] Do you have someone you can turn to for help?

**11. Other than classes, what other kinds of supports can you get at the school? Were you referred to these supports? Are they required? (IIIA.10)**

*Probe, if necessary:*

- How about tutoring?

**12. What other kinds of activities does the school offer? How much do you and your classmates participate in these activities? Why? (IIIA.10)**

*Probe, if necessary:*

- What kinds of sports or school clubs are offered? Do you participate?

**13. Are there other activities that you wish were offered but aren't? Please describe. ? (IIIA.10)**

*[Note: Tailor the following question based on what changes the school is implementing, e.g., replacement of principal and teachers, plans to extend the school day, etc.]*

**14. What do you know about any changes that they're talking about at this school? What do you think about them?**

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## POST-GRADUATION GOALS

15. Now, I would like to ask you to think about what you would like to do after you graduate from high school. How do you think your experience in high school is going to help you to achieve your goals after graduation?

*Probe, if necessary:*

- What are your goals?

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## CLOSE

16. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about being a student here?

Thank you for sharing your thoughts and your time today. You have each been extremely valuable in helping us understand more about your classes, your teachers, and your school.

**Study of School Turnaround  
Informed Consent: Student 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 students 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.

**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.

**Confidentiality**

We will treat the information that you supply in a confidential manner. 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:** \_\_\_\_\_

**District/School:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Study of School Turnaround  
Informed Consent: Parent Consent for Student 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 students to participate in focus groups. Your student 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 child's participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your child will not be penalized in any way for not participating. If your child decides to participate, he/she may discontinue their participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which they are otherwise entitled.

**Benefits**

Your child's 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. 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 your child 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**

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**Informed Consent**

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

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Print Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Child's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**District/School:** \_\_\_\_\_