Study of School Turnaround (SST)

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Draft State Administrator Interview Protocol and Consent Form

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Policy Research, Inc.

Study of School Turnaround (SST)

State:	Interviewer:
Date/Time:	Interviewee:

Interview: State Administrator

Introduction

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

Study of School Turnaround (SST)
- Evaluation funded by the U.S. Department of Education
- American Institutes for Research is an independent contractor conducting these interviews
- 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
- As a reminder, the study team, in consultation with ED, selected [*list selected districts]* in [*state]* for the study
- Collected as much information as possible through publicly available documents such as *[Interviewer: give examples of documents reviewed]*
- Today's focus is on questions that we have not been able to address through these other sources
- Because the interview focuses on state policy, we are not able to ensure full privacy, but we will protect respondents' privacy and will not attribute quotes.

Recording
- In order to capture the large amount of data your responses will provide, your interview will be digitally recorded. This recording may be shared with others within our evaluation team, but only for the purposes of analysis. Is it ok to begin recording now?
- [Press *2] There will be a brief pause and an automated voice will indicate that recording has begun.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Note to interviewer: The "state administrator interview" may be used for up to three different state interviews. Please use your knowledge of each respondent's responsibilities to identify appropriate questions and tailor the interview.

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 as "be sure to address"); it is likely that the respondent will cover many of these issues when responding to your initial inquiry. Keep the tone conversational and comfortable.

Prior to the interview, be sure to review the state SIG application, selected districts' SIG applications, the state department of education's website, and any other relevant extant data. You should be familiar with topics such as:
- *SIG implementation in the state*
- *State accountability system and assessments*
- *Statewide system of support*

ADMINISTRATOR BACKGROUND

1. How would you describe your current role in the state education agency?

Probe, if necessary:
- What are your major responsibilities?

STATE CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES

2. I would like to know a little about how you perceive the current educational context (i.e., fiscal environment, political environment, etc.) in your state. (IA.2, IA.6)

Important probes; be sure to address the following:
- Fiscal environment (i.e., level of school spending, relative budget cuts, distribution of spending)
- Stakeholder relations and political conflict (strength of state teacher union, other key stakeholders)
- Degree of local autonomy (centralized state versus decentralized decision-making)
- Characteristics of districts, schools (i.e., urbanicity) and student population (i.e., racial composition, ELL population, etc.)

3. If not addressed above, are there particular challenges you are facing now? How would you characterize your State's ability/capacity to meet these challenges? (IA.2, IA.6)

STATE SIG IMPLEMENTATION
[Year 1 only]

*[**Note:** Review the state SIG application for evaluation criteria.]*

4. Could you please describe your state's approach to awarding the School Improvement Grants? (IB.2)

Important probes; be sure to address the following:
- Strategy for allocation of funds: How did your state prioritize SIGs to districts?
  - Did the state try to fund as many districts and schools as possible? If so, how?
  - Did the state target funds to the lowest-performing schools? If so, how?
  - Did the state use the funds to target high schools? Is this different from prior practice?

- *[Ask only if the state opted to use the additional flexibility granted in the interim final requirements]* How did your state's decision to identify schools that were made newly eligible through the interim final requirements impact your state's ability to provide SIG funds to the lowest-performing schools?
- How did your state ensure that each district's SIG was of sufficient size and scope to implement the selected intervention models fully and effectively in each identified school?

5. What guidance, if any, did the state provide to districts regarding the selection of their SIG schools' and/or the schools' intervention models? (IB.4)

6. What role did the state play in recruiting, screening, and selecting external support providers? Did the state have a role in determining their quality? If so, please explain. (IB.6)

7. Does the state provide for any on-going professional development opportunities for external support providers? Please explain. (IB.6)

STATE SIG IMPLEMENTATION & OTHER SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS

8. Beyond SIG, what is the state doing to support and improve chronically low-performing schools? (IA.1, IA.3, IA.5)

> *Probe, if necessary:*
> - What is the rationale for the state initiatives?
> - What are the defining features of these state school improvement efforts?

9. How does SIG align with other state and federal school improvement efforts?

> *Probe, if necessary:*
> - To what extent is there administrative and fiscal coordination at the state level among SIG and other state and federal school improvement initiatives?
> - To what extent did your state use the same strategies for SIG in its efforts under Race to the Top (if applicable) or other state and federal school improvement initiatives?
> - Did the state allocate funds from other sources to support improvement efforts?
> - Compared to other reform efforts in your state, what makes SIG unique?

CHALLENGES TO SIG IMPLEMENTATION

10. How, if at all, have other state policies influenced your state's ability to implement the SIG intervention models fully and effectively? Has your state needed to make (or considered making) any systematic changes in state policies to implement SIG? If yes, please describe. (IA.4)

> *Important probes; be sure to address the following:*
> - Authority to takeover a school due to low performance
> - Charter restrictions
> - Right to work
> - Existing state accountability system
> - Staffing policies, e.g., teacher evaluation systems, certification, replacement/assignment

11. What role have unions and collective bargaining played in the process of deciding whether and how to change staffing at SIG schools? To what extent has this role varied across the SIG districts/schools? (IA.6)

12. How would you characterize the capacity of districts to implement the School Improvement Grants? How has district capacity changed since the implementation of the SIG, among these districts? (IIA.2)

> *Probe, if necessary:*
> - How would you describe:
>   ○ Personnel capacity (i.e., staff leadership/expertise, number of teachers, etc.)
>   ○ Infrastructural capacity (i.e., data systems, technology, etc.)

○   Political capacity (i.e., school board support, union buy-in, etc.)

STATE SUPPORT

13. What technical assistance does your state either directly or through a designee provide <u>specifically</u> to districts and schools involved in SIG? [*Years 2 and 3 only*] How has the state changed its approach to providing technical assistance since the SIG grants have been rolled out? (IB.2, IB.4, 1B.6)

> *Probe, if necessary:*
> - *[Year 1 only]* What technical assistance and other support did your state provide to districts in developing their subgrant applications?
> - Who are the support providers? What background do they have?
> - Is support available for all participating districts and schools? Are some districts and schools prioritized over others?
> - How long are support providers in the districts and schools (days in the school year and years)? How many districts and schools is each support provider responsible for?
> - Are there specific frameworks, processes or strategies that support providers are expected to implement?
> - Have support providers established an effective rapport with school and district staff or has there been resistance?
> - How often do support providers communicate with the state? How do they communicate (email, reports, meetings)?

14. How does the state evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the support provided by the support providers?

*[**Note**: Make sure to review the components of the statewide system of support. Ask only if not previously addressed.]*

15. How is the statewide system of support integrated with or connected to SIG? Can you provide instances of integration and/or duplication? (IA.3)

> *Listen for:*
> - Same (or different) support providers
> - Same (or different) school improvement framework/theory of action
> - Level of intensity of support

MONITORING & EVALUATION

16. How [will/does] the state monitor each district's implementation of the intervention models?

> *Listen for:*
> - Who is responsible for monitoring? How frequently?
> - What, if any, actions are taken in response to monitoring?

17. The federal guidelines specify that the state is responsible for determining whether to renew a district's SIG if one or more of its Tier I or Tier II schools are not meeting the district's annual goals, or if one or more of its Tier III schools are not meeting the district's annual goals. How [will/does] your state evaluate whether SIG schools are meeting their annual goals?

> *Important probes; be sure to address the following:*
> - [*Years 2 and 3 only. If the state discontinued any SIGs*] For the current (201X–1X) school year, your state discontinued XX School Improvement Grants.
>   ○ Why were these district's SIGs discontinued?
> - [*Years 2 and 3 only.*] Were there any districts considered for elimination, but renewed? Please describe.
> - Is there an action plan for districts and schools no longer receiving SIG funds?

CLOSE

Considering all that we have talked about so far, I have a few concluding questions to ask.

*[**Note***: This question is not high priority. Please include this question as time allows.]*

18. Thinking about the SIG-funded districts/schools that we selected for our case studies are there any important details that you think we should know about? (IB.5)

> *Probe, if necessary:*
> - How well is each school implementing its respective intervention model?
> - How well is each school meeting its goals specified by its district?
> - For those schools in our study implementing the same intervention model, how does its implementation look the same across schools? Different across schools?

19. What are the greatest strengths and weaknesses of the implementation of the School Improvement Grants in your state this year? [*Years 2 and 3 only*] How are these different from your thoughts of [last year/a few years ago]?

20. [*Years 2 and 3 only*] What steps has your state taken to sustain the SIG reforms after the funding period ends? (IB.4)

21. Are there any topics I might have overlooked or additional details you think we should know about?

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

Study of School Turnaround
Informed Consent: State 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 state administrators to participate in interviews. You will be interviewed about topics such as decisions with regard to intervention models, allocation of SIG funds, strategies to support chronically low-performing schools, and integration of SIG activities with accountability, assessment, and support systems. 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 states are implementing SIG funds.

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. Our state-level data collections, by their very nature, focus on policy topics that are in the public domain. Moreover, it would not be difficult to identify Title I and school improvement directors in each state and thus determine the identity of our state-level respondents. Having acknowledged that, we will endeavor to protect the privacy of you, and as with district- and school-level respondents, we will avoid using your names in reports and attributing any quotes to specific individuals. We will primarily report on the numbers of schools that engage in specific practices, thus avoiding reference to specific schools.

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:** _____

State: _____