

Study of School Turnaround (SST)

Draft Elementary School Teacher 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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Study of School Turnaround (SST)

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

Focus Group: Elementary School Teacher

Teacher Name	Grade	Subject Area

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 questions. Keep the time conversational and comfortable.

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 Considerations

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 our discussion simply for note-taking purposes. No one outside of our research team would hear the audio file, 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?

TEACHER BACKGROUND

1. I'd like to start by talking a bit about your background, including how long you've been a teacher and what your role(s) has been in this school. (IIIA.7, IIIA.8)

Things to listen for:

- How many years have you worked at this school? In what capacities, e.g., dept. chair, coach, group leader, technology mentor?
- What do you currently teach at this school (grade/subject area)?
- How many years have you worked in this district? [*If teacher is new*], Where were you teaching prior to this school? How were you recruited?
- [*If teacher serves additional role(s)* (e.g. instructional leader)], What are your responsibilities for those role(s)?

YOUR SCHOOL

2. Now let's talk about the whole school. Can you tell me a bit about your school? How would you describe this school to someone who has never been here before? What are its greatest strengths and challenges? (IIIA.1, IIIA.5, IIIA.7, IIIA.9, IIIA.10, IIIA.11, IIIA.12)

Probe as necessary:

- What did you hear about the school before you started teaching here? Is it different from what you are experiencing now?

3. Do you think the school staff share a common vision about the ways to approach these challenges? If so, what is that vision? If not, why not? (IIIA.12, IIIB.4)

- Do you think teachers and school leaders share a common vision?
- Do you think teachers share a common vision?

4. To what extent do you think the school's environment is conducive to teaching and learning? (IIIA.12, IIIB.8)

- How does the school leadership deal with behavioral issues? Safety issues?
- Does your school have academic and behavioral standards? Do they promote or hinder success?
- What kinds of support do you have in dealing with behavioral issues?
- Does the school have high expectations for its students?

IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

Note to the focus group leader: Teachers may not be familiar with all aspects of the strategies the school is adopting, in which case the phrasing of these questions may need to be modified to refer to the school's improvement efforts this school year more generally.

5. Are there some core improvement strategies or approaches that the school as a whole is following to reach its improvement goals? What are they and do you think they are appropriate or likely to be effective?

6. Can you describe some of the specific improvement strategies that are, or will be, adopted at your school this school year? (IIIB.3, IIIB.4, IIIB.5, IIIB.6, IIIB.7, IIIB.8)

Things to listen for:

- Are there specific processes or strategies the schools are expected to implement?
 - Instructional/curricula approaches
 - Meeting the needs of specific groups of students, e.g., ELLs, special education students, the lowest performing students
 - Use of time (e.g., before, during or after school) for training, common planning time, implementing programs, etc.
 - Staff, additional positions; support staff, e.g., guidance counselors
 - Use of data/assessments
 - Student supports
 - Community/parental involvement
 - Improve school climate (e.g., discipline, safety)

Probe as necessary:

- Do you know why your school is embarking on these strategies?
- Do you know the order in which the strategies are/will be implemented and why?

7. Do you think the improvement strategies fit the needs of the school? Are these strategies similar or different from prior practice? (IIIA.1, IIIB.1, IIIB.6, IIIB.8, IIIC.5)

8. Have you or other teachers had a role in selecting or developing these improvement strategies? Please describe. (IIIA.9, IIIB.5)

Probe as necessary:

- Who, at the school level, is expected to be involved in implementing these strategies?
- What was/is your role in implementing these strategies?

9. How did you find out about the reform efforts that are taking place this school year in your school? How are teachers kept informed? (IIIB.7)

Probe as necessary:

- Who let you know?
- Do you feel like you received adequate information?
- Do you feel like your opinions and experiences were taken into account?
- Are all teachers on board?
- What are your expectations?

10. What types of support have you received this school year to assist you in your teaching and to implement the reforms? (IIIB.3, IIIB.4, IIIB.6, IIIB.7)

Probe as necessary:

- Who do you turn to for assistance?
- Where does this support come from (e.g. state, district, community partnerships, support provider, PD)?
- Are there adequate opportunities during the school day/week for you to interact with others regarding teaching?
- Tell me more about the professional development you have participated in this year (e.g., content, frequency, format i.e., embedded in the school day)?

- Has the support been enough for you to feel prepared to make changes? Will you be getting additional support?
- Are the supports you have received this school year different than prior support? Explain.

11. What do you think is the likelihood that the recently adopted or planned improvement strategies will have an impact in your school over time? Why or Why not? If so, what do you think the impact will be? (IIIB.1)

Probe as necessary:

- Short term within this year
- Long term within a few years

12. What will be the greatest challenges to implementing these strategies?

Probe as necessary:

- What are your thoughts on why this school has remained low performing year after year? What has hindered improvement?

CLOSE

13. I know these improvement initiatives in your school are relatively new, but do you have any reflections on the process so far? [Interviewer provide examples of how the SIG resources have been used based on improvement strategies discussed in the earlier questions]

Probe as necessary:

- Do you feel that certain components might be more difficult to implement than others? Why?
- Do you think that certain components are what the school needs? Why or why not?

14. Is there anything I haven't asked you about your school that you'd like to comment on?

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

ELL STUDENTS

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

1. Are there any practices you or your school have implemented that you feel have been particularly successful with your ELL students? What are they and why do you think they have been successful? (IIIB.6)

2. Do you receive any support regarding ELL instruction? Any professional development specific to ELL students? Please describe the support and who provides it. (IIIB.3)

Probe as necessary:

- Are there any differences in what mainstream vs. ELL teachers receive?

**Study of School Turnaround
Informed Consent: Teacher 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 teachers 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: _____