

# Study of School Turnaround (SST)

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## Draft School Improvement Team Focus Group Protocol and Consent Form

February 2011

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## Study of School Turnaround (SST)

<b>State:</b>	<b>Interviewer:</b>
<b>Date/Time:</b>	<b>Interviewee:</b>

### Focus Group: School Improvement Team

#### Introduction

Good afternoon/morning. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am from AIR/Mathematica Policy Research/DIR. I am part of an independent research team that is studying schools' use of the school improvement grants awarded in 2010. The 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 the implementation of the SIG from a diverse array of SIG grantees.

To help us better understand how [SCHOOL NAME] is using its school improvement resources, we would like to ask you some questions about the school's improvement efforts and the role of the school improvement team in these efforts.

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'm recording the discussion so I don't have to take detailed notes and can listen carefully to what you are saying. No one outside of the research team will have access to the tape. We will not share this recording or notes from this session with the school or district administration. In addition, our reports will never identify you by name. Instead, we will combine information from this discussion with information from discussions our team is holding in other schools. Participants' comments will be reported as, "One person felt that. . ." or "About half of the participants did not agree with..." The recording is just to help me remember what you say.

I hope you will feel free to be open and frank in our discussion. I ask that none of you share what you hear with others outside the group. 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.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Let's get started. [HIT THE RECORD BUTTON].

I have hit the record button. Everyone in the room has consented to being recorded.

**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 inquiry. Keep the tone conversational and comfortable.

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## INTRODUCTIONS

**1. Let's start by introducing ourselves. Please tell me your name, your position at the school, how long you have been at the school, and how long you have been on the school improvement team.**

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## THE SCHOOL

**2. What would you say are the school's three best features? Why?**

**3. What are the three biggest challenges the school is facing? (IIIB.1)**

**4. In general, how would you characterize the feelings of the school staff towards the school? How about students? The community? (IIIB.8)**

**5. How would you describe the leadership at this school? (IIIB.5)**

*Probe, if necessary:*

- Who provides leadership?
- To what extent does the principal delegate leadership/management responsibilities to others?

**6. In general, how supportive do you feel the district is towards the school?**

**7. Why do you think this school has remained low-performing year after year? What has hindered improvement? (IIIB.1)**

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## THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

**8. What is the mission of the SIT? Who provides guidance to the SIT on its specific responsibilities?**

**9. What are the SIT's specific responsibilities? (IIIA.10, IIIB.1, IIIB.3, IIIB.6, IIIB.8)**

*Probe, if necessary: How is the SIT involved in:*

- Analyzing and using school-, teacher-, and student-level data?
- Improving instructional practices?
- Meeting the needs of specific groups of students, e.g., ELLs, special education students, the lowest performing students
- Assessing availability/access to student supports?
- Identifying professional development needs and opportunities and other teacher supports?
- Evaluating teachers?
- Considering alternative teacher compensation/incentive packages?
- Improving the school climate (e.g., safety, school discipline?)

**10. [Note: If some have continued to serve on the SIT]: How have these responsibilities changed over time? Why?**

**11. Are there other efforts underway at the school in which the SIT is not involved but you think it should be? Please describe.**

**12. To what extent does the work of the SIT influence the school's policies and improvement strategies? (IIIB.4, IIIB.5)**

*Probe, if necessary:*

- Can you provide some examples of improvement strategies?

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## **SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS**

*Now, I'd like to hear from you about the school's improvement efforts and the SIT's role in those efforts.*

**13. How do you think [SIG/the improvement approach and strategies identified for the school] will address the issues we discussed facing the school? Please describe how you think specific strategies will work to improve the school. (IIIB)**

**14. How are these strategies different from others the school has tried and/or implemented in the past? To what extent have the previous strategies been successful? Why? (IIIA.1)**

**15. To what extent do you think the school and its leadership have the capacity to initiate these improvement approaches and strategies? (IIIB.4, IIIB.5)**

*Probe:*

- Does the principal have the appropriate leadership skills?
- Does the school have sufficient support from the district and other stakeholders?

**16. What is the school's plan for assessing how the current plan/efforts affect the school's and its students' performance? To what extent is the SIT involved in these plans/efforts? (IIB.9)**

**17. How do you see the [SIG/school improvement approaches and strategies] affecting your work at the school?**

*Probe, if not already addressed:*

- As a member of the SIT?
- As a teacher/or other staff role?

**18. [Note: The member of the SIT may not know about funds, depending on the responsibilities and composition of the team. Please be attuned to team responsibilities and tailor this question appropriately.] Do you know what sources of revenue will be used to support the improvement efforts? Are the different sources applied to different strategies, e.g., instructional coaches, additional/new teachers, professional development, student supports, etc. How is this different from previous years, if at all? (IIIB.2)**

**19. To what extent will the SIG be supporting these strategies? Do you know if there are there any *restrictions* on how the school uses the SIG funds?**

**20. What was the SIT's role in developing the school's plans for using the school improvement grant funding? (IIB.1) Please describe.**

**21. How are other school stakeholders—i.e., other school staff, parents, the community—providing input or involved in the school’s improvement efforts? (IIB.7)**

*Probe if not already addressed:*

- Have you been satisfied with their level of involvement? Why or why not?

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## **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE**

**22. [Note: Ask only if relevant] Is your school working with an external support provider? This might be someone from a private organization, or someone from an organization affiliated with the state or district. Generally, we’re interested in knowing who, from outside your school, is helping with your improvement efforts. (IIB.7)**

*Probe, if necessary:*

- Who provided the assistance – district, state, or other provider?
- What was the SIT’s role in selecting the external support provider?
- What is the SIT’s role in assessing the external support provider’s ongoing work in the school and its teachers?
- Please provide specific examples of the type of assistance.

**22. How would you characterize the quality of the assistance the SIT or school has received in its efforts to improve the school? Please indicate the source of the assistance—district, state, or other provider. (IIB.7)**

*Probe, if necessary:*

- Have you felt that the provider understood your school and its needs?
- If you’ve initiated a request for help, to what extent was the assistance in line with the issue for which you sought help?
- Was the assistance provided in a timely way?

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## **CLOSE**

**23. What are your expectations for where the school will be next year? In five years?**

**24. Are there any other comments you’d like to share with us about the SIG grant program specifically or your school improvement efforts in general?**

**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 School Improvement Teams (SITs) in SIG schools seek to meet the needs of ELL students. They will be asked of SITs that have ELL students at their schools.*

**1. What challenges and constraints do you face in addressing the needs of ELL students at your school? And how do you address them? Are there any state or district policies that would be helpful in addressing those challenges? (IIB.6, IIIA.2)**

**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)**

**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](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:** \_\_\_\_\_