

# Ramp-Up Implementation Study

## Focus Group Protocol

### Introduction and Welcome (5 min.)

Hello, my name is [fill in name]. Thank you for coming in today.

I am from **the Midwest Regional Educational Laboratory** and helping me today is [fill in name of assistant]. REL Midwest is conducting this focus group as part of our study of the Ramp-Up to Readiness intervention, a study in which your school is participating. Today, we want to better understand the programs, services, activities, and resources provided to students in [fill in name of high school] to prepare them for college. We also want to understand your experiences this year in implementing the Ramp-Up to Readiness program. This information will become part of a study report describing the effects of the Ramp-Up to Readiness program.

Please note that when we say “college,” we mean a two-year college, four-year college or university, community college, or career or technical college. To begin, I have to go over some logistics with you. We’ve estimated that this focus group will take 90 minutes. During these 90 minutes, I will ask questions about the Ramp-Up program and other college-readiness supports offered in your school. We hope that you will feel free to attempt to answer the questions as best you can based on the experiences you have had here at [fill in name of high school]. Some of these questions will ask you to estimate the percentage of students who participate in a particular activity. Please just do your best to provide an estimate. We will have a 10-minute break at [XXXX time, 50-minute mark].

My role and the role of [fill in name of assistant] will be to ask questions, moderate the discussion, and record major themes and feelings expressed by focus group participants.

### Consent

As stated in the study consent form that you have previously signed, all data being collected will be kept confidential by REL Midwest and American Institutes for Research (the third-party evaluator). You have the right to discontinue your participation in this data collection process at any time without consequences.

### Confidentiality

Let me just highlight one issue that is discussed in the consent forms. It is impossible to write down everything that you say today, so we will be recording the focus group conversation so that we can go back and listen to the discussion to make sure that we did not miss anything. Anything that is discussed will remain confidential. The audiorecordings will be transcribed and then erased. We will not identify any focus group participants in the transcriptions.

Are there any questions before I begin?

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is XXXX.XXXX, OMB expiration date is XXXX, XX, 2014. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 90 minutes per respondent, including the time to review instructions, gather the data needed, and complete and review the information collected. Participation in this data collection task is voluntary.

Per the policies and procedures required by the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002, Title I, Part E, Section 183, responses to this data collection will be used only for statistical purposes. The reports prepared for this study will summarize findings across the sample and will not associate responses with a specific school, district, or individual. Any willful disclosure of such information for nonstatistical purposes, except as required by law, is a class E felony.

If you have any comments concerning the accuracy of the time estimate(s) or suggestions for improving this form, please write to: U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC 20202. If you have comments or concerns regarding the status of your individual submission of this form, write directly to: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, 555 New Jersey Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20208.

## Introductions

Before beginning with the questions and turning on the audiorecorder, let's go around the room and introduce ourselves. Please say your name and your role here at **[fill in name of high school]**.

Now, we are beginning with the questions. I'll turn on the audiorecorder and start asking questions.

**Notes to focus group moderator:** The purposes of this focus group are to understand (1) the extent to which treatment schools faithfully adopt the program model, and what enables them or prevents them from doing so; and (2) the degree to which the intervention model differs from the services and activities underlying the business-as-usual comparison condition.

If participants are reluctant to estimate percentages when asked, probe for more than 25 percent or less than 25 percent, more than 50 percent or less than 50 percent, or more than 75 percent or less than 75 percent.

## Background Information

The Ramp-Up to Readiness program is offered to high schools throughout Minnesota. The developers note that there is no single way to implement the program because of variations in local context, but there are elements of Ramp-Up that are to be implemented in all settings. Today, we'd like to gather a better understanding of how the program has been implemented at **[fill in name of high school]**. First, I'll ask questions about whether and when you completed key implementation activities. This will be followed by questions on the Ramp-Up curriculum, tools, professional development, your school culture, the challenges and success of implementation, and to what extent you think Ramp-Up is changing the college readiness of students' in your school.

Thank you for joining us today.

## Fidelity of Implementation Questions for Early Implementing Ramp-Up Schools

### A. Ramp-Up Annual Plan Activities

In the fall, your school filled out the Ramp-Up to Readiness Annual Plan indicating when your school was planning to complete key actions. I would like to discuss some of these actions.

**[Note to moderator: have a copy of the Annual Plan to refer to]**

1. Have there been any changes over the school year in who serves on the Ramp-Up leadership team or who serves as the Ramp-Up coordinator?

*[Probe if yes: Why did a change occur?]*

1. How often did the Ramp-Up leadership team meet this school year to guide and monitor Ramp-Up implementation in your school?

*[Probe if no: What challenges did you face in meeting quarterly?]*

2. Do all students at **[name of high school]** use a technology platform (e.g., Naviance or MCIS) as part of the Ramp-Up program?

*[Probe if yes:*

- a. Which platform?
- b. Did students use this platform prior to implementing Ramp-Up?
- c. To what extent is the technology platform integrated with Ramp-Up advisories or workshops?

*Probe if no:*

- d. What challenges have you faced in adopting a technology platform?]

3. Have you conducted any internal evaluation of your school's implementation of Ramp-Up or progress on improving college-readiness indicators (e.g., taking advanced courses, completing college enrollment activities)?

*[Probe if yes:*

- a. Have you discussed your findings with staff at the College Readiness Consortium?
- b. Did you make any changes to instructional practices based on your review of the data?

*Probe if no:*

- c. What challenges have you faced in conducting internal evaluations of the Ramp-Up program?]

### B. Ramp-Up Curriculum

Now, I would like to talk about the Ramp-Up advisories and workshops.

5. Thinking about the Ramp-Up weekly advisories...
  - a. What percentage of students do you estimate received all 28 lessons?

*[Probe if less than 100 percent: Which students did not receive all 28 lessons and why?]*

- b. How long did the lessons last?

*[Probe if less than 30 minutes: Why did the lessons last less than the planned 30 minutes?]*

- c. How much time were advisors provided to prepare and learn about the lesson content prior to teaching it?
- d. Was the amount of time provided to advisors to prepare and learn the lesson content adequate?

*[Probe if not: How much time would have been adequate?]*

6. Thinking about the Ramp-Up workshops...

- a. How many workshops were held over the course of the year?

*[Probe: Did the number of workshops differ by grade-level (i.e., did Grade 10 students receive fewer than Grade 12 students)?]*

*Probe if less than five: What challenges did you face in delivering all five workshops?*

*Probe if more than five: Most Ramp-Up schools schedule five workshops. Why did your school decide to have additional ones?]*

- b. What were the topics of these workshops?

*[Probe: Were they differentiated by grade?]*

- c. When were the workshops offered?
- d. On average, how long did these workshops last?
- e. Who taught the workshops (i.e., the same staff teaching the Ramp-Up advisories or different staff)?
- f. What percentage of students do you estimate attended all the workshops?

*[Probe if less than 100 percent: Which students did not attend and why?]*

### **C. Ramp-Up Tools**

Next, I would like to talk about the tools used in the Ramp-Up program, specifically the Readiness Rubric or Postsecondary Plan.

7. Thinking specifically about the Postsecondary Plan...

**[Note to moderator: Show an example of the Postsecondary Plan to remind participants what it is]**

- a. What percentage of all students completed a Postsecondary Plan this school year?

*[Probe if less than 100 percent: Which students did not complete a Postsecondary Plan and why?]*

- b. What percentage of students discussed the Postsecondary Plan with a teacher/advisor or counselor as part of the course registration process?

*[Probe if less than 100 percent: Which students did not review their Postsecondary Plan with a teacher/advisor or counselor? Why? Were there times other than course registration when the Postsecondary Plan was reviewed with students?]*

- c. Can you provide an example of how you discussed the Postsecondary Plan with a student?

- d. How do school staff engage with parents using the Postsecondary Plan?

*[Probe: How often do school staff talk with parents about their student's Postsecondary Plan? What percentage of parents talks to school staff about their student's Postsecondary Plan?]*

- e. Is the student's Postsecondary Plan stored electronically for your review and review by students or parents?

*[Probe if not: Why?]*

- 8. Thinking specifically about the Readiness Rubric...

**[Note to moderator: Show an example of the Readiness Rubric to remind participants what it is]**

- a. What percentage of students completed the Readiness Rubric three times this year?

*[Probe if less than 100 percent: What percentage of students completed the Readiness Rubric at least twice? What percentage of students completed it at least once? Which students did not complete the Readiness Rubric three times this year? Why not?]*

- b. How often did school staff review the rubric with students this school year?

- c. Can you provide an example of how you discussed the Readiness Rubric with a student?

- d. How do school staff engage with parents using the Readiness Rubric?

*[Probe: How often do school staff talk with parents about their student's Readiness Rubric? What percentage of parents talks to school staff about their student's Readiness Rubric?]*

- e. Is the student's Readiness Rubric stored electronically for your review and review by students or parents?

- 9. Did school staff experience barriers in talking to parents about their child's Readiness Rubric or Postsecondary Plan (e.g., language barriers)?

*[Probe if yes: How did your school address those?]*

#### **D. Professional Development**

- 10. At the beginning of the school year, were four hours spent introducing staff to the Ramp-Up program?

- a. Can you describe the content covered that day?
- b. Which teachers had the opportunity to attend this four-hour training?
- c. How did staff respond to the introduction of the Ramp-Up to Readiness program?

*[Probe if some staff were not receptive: What were the concerns of staff about Ramp-Up?]*

- 11. How often does the Ramp-Up leadership team or coordinator provide professional development related to Ramp-Up?
  - a. How long do these professional development sessions last?
  - b. Which teachers have the opportunity to attend professional development?
  - c. How engaged are school staff during these meetings (e.g., the extent to which they participate in discussions)?
  - d. How challenging has it been to provide regularly scheduled professional development on Ramp-Up to teachers?
- 12. Have you had or are you planning a one-hour feedback session where school staff can provide feedback to the leadership team on program implementation?

#### **E. Overall Experiences With Implementation**

- 13. How have the goals or beliefs of school staff changed during the school year, if at all, with the introduction of Ramp-Up?
- 14. Has the introduction of Ramp-Up changed the way that school staff interact with parents?
- 15. What aspects of Ramp-Up worked well as you implemented the program?

*[Probe: Why did they work well?]*

- 16. What aspects of the program did not work well?

*[Probe: Why did they not work well?]*

#### **F. Ramp-Up to Readiness: Contrast Between Implementing and Non-Implementing Schools**

In February, we talked about the college-readiness programs, services, activities, and resources that **[name of high school]** provides to prepare students to enroll and succeed in college. I have a list of the supports that you named, and now I would like to ask some specific questions about each of these activities. If the school no longer offers a support that I read, please let me know.

**[Instructions to moderator: complete the following matrix by asking questions 17 – 22 for each support listed. Probe as necessary to be able to complete the matrix]**

### Matrix of College-Readiness Supports

College-Readiness Support	Participation Rate			Frequency	Intensity	Corresponding Readiness Dimension				
	10th	11th	12th			Academic	Admissions	Career	Financial	Personal/Social
Program 1										
Program 2										
Program 3										
Program 4										
Program 5										
Service 1										
Service 2										
Service 3										
Service 4										
Service 5										
Activity 1										
Activity 2										
Activity 3										
Activity 4										
Activity 5										
Resource 1										
Resource 2										
Resource 3										
Resource 4										
Resource 5										

17. Which grade does [name of support] target? [moderator to check each grade targeted]
18. What percentage of Grade 10, Grade 11, and Grade 12 students participate in or receive [name of support]?
19. How often has [name of support] been offered this school year?
20. How long does [name of support] last?
21. Which of the following does [name of support] primarily address: students' academic preparation, the college admissions process, career planning, how to pay for college, or on goal setting or achievement?

22. Are there any other college-readiness programs, services, activities, or resources that [name of high school] offers but that we haven't talked about?

I want to wrap up with a few more general questions.

### **G. Professional Development**

23. So far this school year, has the school provided staff any professional development related to preparing students for college?
- Can you describe what was provided?
  - How long did each professional development session last?
  - Who received this professional development?  
*[Probe: What percentage of teachers?]*
  - What did you find helpful or unhelpful about these materials or this professional development?

### **H. College Culture**

Next, I would like to talk about the expectations and practices of school staff for preparing students for college.

24. Thinking about the goals and beliefs of school staff...
- To what extent do school personnel here share a common goal to prepare all students for college?\*
  - To what extent do school personnel believe that college counseling is the job of school counselors, not teachers?\*
25. Thinking about the practices in your school...
- How are students encouraged to take advanced coursework (e.g., honors, dual-credit, AP, IB, or College in the Schools classes)?
  - To what extent is the curriculum at this school focused on helping students get ready for college?\*
  - Does your school collect data to assess students' college readiness?  
*[Probe if yes: How do you use this information?]*
26. Thinking about parents...
- To what extent do parents of students in this school expect their children to go to college?\*

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<sup>1</sup> An \* indicates that this question is based on a question included on a survey from the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) at the University of Minnesota.



## **I. Barriers to Implementing a Schoolwide College Readiness Program**

Finally, let's talk about implementing a schoolwide college readiness program.

27. What educational initiatives, if any, has [**name of high school**] been involved in implementing this year?

*[Clarify:*

- a. Is this initiative school-wide? What is the format of these communications (e.g., one-way versus two-way conversation)?*
- b. [If this is an early implementing school] Are staff able to successfully implement more than one initiative at a time?*
- c. [If this is a late implementing school] Do you foresee any barriers to implementing a schoolwide college-readiness initiative next year?*

**Thank you again for participating in today's focus group!**