

REVISED September 25, 2014

Fourth Draft OMB Package, Version Two REVISED

Appendix E – Study Notification Letters

PPSS TO 10: Studies of Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) Grantees Subtask 3.5: Prepare Fourth Draft OMB Clearance Package

Contract Number GS-10F-0554N; Order Number ED-PEP-11-O-0090
SRI Project #P21494

Submitted to:

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Prepared by:

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Chief State School Officer Study Notification Letter

ED Letterhead on first page only

Date

Chief State School Officer Name and Title

Name of State School System

Street Address

City, State Zip

Dear {Chief State Schools Officer name and title}¹:

I am writing to inform you about the U.S. Department of Education's Study of **Experiences and Needs of REAP Grantees**. The purpose of the study is to understand the uses of federal Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) funds and districts' technical assistance needs related to REAP. It will include both the Small, Rural School Achievement (SRSA) and Rural and Low-Income Schools (RLIS) programs — the two components of REAP — which provide funding for rural districts to help effectively serve students in rural settings. You can learn more about this study in the attached study summary. The results of this study will help inform the Department's technical assistance efforts and the next reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

The study contains several data collection activities. The study will include interviews with all state REAP coordinators about state goals and priorities, the planning process for use of RLIS funds, the eligibility process for districts, management and distribution of SRSA and RLIS funds, and recommendations for change. At the school district level, the study will include an online survey of a nationally representative sample of REAP coordinators about the REAP eligibility determination process, administration of REAP, and challenges and technical assistance needs related to REAP, as well as telephone interviews with a subsample of 30 districts from across the nation.

The state and, where needed, district interviews are designed to take approximately one hour per interview, and the district survey about 30 minutes to complete. Formal data collection will begin in February 2015 and is expected to be completed by the end of April.

Participation in this evaluation is required under ESEA Sections 9304(a)(4) and 9306(a)(4).

The study is being conducted by SRI International and Impaq International under contract to the U.S. Department of Education. If you have any questions, you may call Andrew Abrams on the Department's staff at 202-401-1232.

We hope that you will encourage your state and districts to cooperate with this important study. We appreciate your support in making the study a useful source of information for your state, Congress, the U.S. Department of Education, and other policy makers and educators.

Sincerely,

Director, Policy and Program Studies Service

Director, Office of School Support and Rural Programs

Attachment: Study Summary

¹ CSSOs will be addressed by name, for example, "Dear Superintendent (or other title) Smith"

Sampled District Superintendent Notification Letter²

ED Letterhead

Date

Name and Title of Superintendent of Sampled District

Name of School District

Street Address (or P.O. Box)

City, State Zip

Dear {District Superintendent name and title}³:

We are writing to notify you that your school district has been randomly selected as part of a nationally representative sample to participate in the U.S. Department of Education's **Study of Experiences and Needs of REAP Grantees**. The purpose of this study is to understand the uses of federal Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) program funds and districts' technical assistance needs related to REAP. It will include both the Small, Rural School Achievement (SRSA) and Rural and Low-Income Schools (RLIS) programs — the two components of REAP — which provide additional funding for rural districts to help effectively serve students in a rural setting. The results of this study will help inform the Department's technical assistance efforts and the next reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

The study includes a survey that is expected to take approximately 30 minutes to complete. [In addition, the study has selected your school district as one of a select number to participate in a follow-up interview that takes approximately one hour.]⁴

Your district's participation is important to enable this study to provide policymakers with accurate and complete information. The survey is being conducted with a relatively small sample of school districts throughout the nation given the size of the REAP program. This sampling means your school district's participation is crucial to building a clear understanding of the REAP grantee experience, as it will be used to represent many other school districts who were not selected. Your district's participation in this evaluation is required under ESEA, Section 9306(a)(4). In addition, we have contacted your Chief State School Officer and state REAP coordinator to inform them about this study.

The study is being conducted by SRI International and Impaq International under contract to the U.S. Department of Education. The research team will e-mail [you/your REAP coordinator] shortly with a link to the survey [and again later this month to schedule an interview].⁵ If you have any questions, you may contact the research team at reap@sri.com or by calling their study toll-free number at 888-xxx-xxxx. The team will be able to answer the majority of your questions. If you still have questions after contacting the research team, they may refer you to Andrew Abrams on ED's staff at 202-401-1232.

² District superintendents are usually, but not always, REAP coordinators. In the former case, they will receive this notification from ED of their district's selection, as well as subsequent e-mails from SRI containing study participant information. In the less frequent case where the superintendent and REAP expert are two different people, the superintendent will still receive this letter, but with all references to subsequent participation replaced by references to participation of their district's REAP coordinator or person of equivalent title and knowledge.

³ Superintendents will be addressed by name, for example, "Dear Superintendent Smith."

⁴ The letter will include bracketed language only for the districts selected to also participate in the interviews.

⁵ This letter will include the first part of the bracketed language for the majority of letter recipients, or the second part of the bracketed language (after the forward slash) for the minority of recipients who are not direct study participants.

We appreciate your cooperation in making the results of this study a useful source of information for your district, your state, Congress, the U.S. Department of Education, and other policymakers and educators.

Sincerely,

Director, Policy and Program Studies Service

Director, Office of School Support and Rural Programs

Attachment:
Study Summary

Study of Experiences and Needs of Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) Grantees: Summary

Background

The purpose of this descriptive study is to examine how grantees and subgrantees use REAP funds provided through the Small, Rural School Achievement (SRSA) and Rural and Low-Income Schools (RLIS) programs — on their own or in combination with other federal funds — as well as technical assistance needs related to REAP. The U.S. Department of Education will use the findings from this study to improve program operations and technical assistance and to inform discussions about REAP reauthorization.

The study is being conducted by SRI International and Impaq International under contract to the U.S. Department of Education.

Study Questions

1. What are REAP grantees' experiences of grant eligibility determination? To what extent do districts contact, or are they contacted by, the SEA regarding eligibility?
2. On what types of activities are REAP funds spent and in what proportions? What are grantees' experiences of deciding how to target funds (e.g., processes and factors, personnel and stakeholders involved, integration in larger spending decisions)? Do districts perceive a need for greater flexibility in the use of federal Title funds? How does this vary by grantee characteristic?
3. How do grantees use REAP funds in combination with other federal program funds? To what extent are other Department or other federal programs (e.g., E-Rate, USDA Rural Development grants) considered or integrated? What are the challenges in spending REAP funds?
4. How many SRSA-eligible grantees use REAP flexibility? Does the use of flexibility differ by grantee characteristics? If flexibility is not used, why not? Exactly how do SRSA grantees tend to use flexibility?
5. What are the major challenges and technical assistance needs that REAP grantees face (e.g., eligibility determination and compliance with program requirements or other)? Are there technical assistance needs that grantees perceive to be unaddressed? For what? What is the frequency of technical assistance use by grantees? By whom? For what?
6. Is there anything that districts or states would recommend changing about the REAP program administration or design?

Study Design

The study consists of: 1) a survey of a sample of approximately 1,000 SRSA grantees and RLIS subgrantee districts; 2) telephone interviews with a sample of 30 SRSA grantee and RLIS subgrantees; and 3) telephone interviews with REAP coordinators in all states receiving REAP funds. Data collection will begin in February 2015 and is expected to be completed by the end of April.

At the state level, the study will include interviews with all state REAP coordinators about state goals and priorities, the planning process for use of RLIS funds, the eligibility process for districts, management and distribution of SRSA and RLIS funds, and recommendations for change. At the school district level, the study will include an online survey of a nationally representative sample of REAP coordinators about the REAP eligibility determination process, administration of REAP, and challenges and technical assistance needs related to REAP, as well as telephone interviews with a subsample of 30 districts. The interviews will include questions about program administration, technical assistance needs, and recommendations for changing the REAP program to better meet the needs of rural districts. The surveys and interviews are intended to provide information about the REAP program as a whole and not to evaluate grantees or individuals.

Confidentiality

The study will assure confidentiality to the extent possible. The research team will keep confidential individual responses to district surveys and interviews except as may be required by law. The study may quote interview responses anonymously in the report, but will not present quotations from district interviews in any way that would permit responses to be associated with a specific school district or individual. Researchers will report some state interview responses at the state level.

If you have questions, please call SRI at (800) xxx-xxxx or email reap@sri.com. For questions about your rights as a participant in this research, you may contact SRI's Human Subjects Committee at (650) 859-2686 and reference case number XXXX-XXXX. Should SRI be unable to answer your questions to your satisfaction, they will refer you to Andrew Abrams of ED's staff at 202-401-1232.

Paperwork Reduction Act

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless such collection displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is xxx-xxxx. Public reporting burden for this collection is estimated to average 30 minutes per response for surveys; and 60 minutes per response for interviews, including the time to review instructions, search existing data resources as necessary, gather any data needed, and complete and review the information collection.

Reporting

A report will be available on the Department's website, www.ed.gov, in 2016.