

# Appendix D. District Interview Protocol

# Study on Sustaining the Positive Effects of Preschool

## *District Interview Protocol*

Interviewer \_\_\_\_\_ Interviewee ID # \_\_\_\_\_

Site \_\_\_\_\_ Date/Time \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Introduction**

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My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I work for American Institutes for Research (AIR). We've been contracted by the U.S. Department of Education to conduct case studies on sites that are implementing particular programs to support early elementary students.

As you may know, the purpose of the study is to document characteristics of programs and policies in early elementary school that support student growth and development, such as PK–3 alignment, differentiated instruction, and other programs designed to sustain the advantages of preschool. We are interested in learning more about the theoretical or practical background of these programs, how they are implemented, how they are sustained and funded, and their outcomes.

I want to reassure you that your *responses to this interview will be used only for research purposes*. Though your site's name will appear in the final report, we will not provide your name in any reporting or to anyone outside the study team, except as required by law. Because we are producing case studies of only a small number of named sites, it may be possible for a reader to identify you based on the data that we report, even though your name will not be used. If there is information that you do not want shared directly in any reporting, please let me know. I will now give you a consent form that provides more details about the study and your rights as a participant.

Do you have any questions about the study?

I plan to audio record this session, solely for our note-taking purposes. Only research staff will use the audio recording, and we'll destroy it when the project is done. Is that okay with you?

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### **Role and Previous Education-Related Experience**

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1. I'd like to start by asking you to tell me a bit about yourself. Briefly, how did you come to be in this position at [NAME OF DISTRICT]?

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### **District Characteristics**

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2. In one or two sentences, how would you describe any unique features of your district or schools to a colleague from another district?

3. You mentioned on the pre-interview survey that  $X\%$  of your kindergartners attended preschool programs. Do you have any information about the quality, nature or focus of those programs?

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### **Approach to Program or Strategy and Implementation**

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My next questions focus very specifically on [PROGRAM]. One purpose of this study is to help other districts and schools think about whether a similar program could work in their context.

4. I understand this program involves [BRIEFLY DESCRIBE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROGRAM FROM BACKGROUND RESEARCH]. Can you tell me more about all the activities involved?
  - a. Are you focusing on one particular subject matter or goal for students?
  - b. Are you specifically recruiting or providing services to certain subgroups of students?
  - c. What are the most important aspects of this program?
5. Can you tell me about the ways you are involved with [PROGRAM] day to day?
  - a. Besides yourself, who else at the district is involved with the program and in what ways?
6. What are the explicit goals of [PROGRAM]?
7. In what areas of student performance would you most like to see improvement as a result of your program?

*If any of these are mentioned, be sure to get details (such as specific goals and rationale):*

- Higher achievement in certain content area
- Better attendance
- Reduced placement in special education
- Reduced grade-level retention
- Better social or behavioral outcomes

8. What research, theory, or experiences informed the development of [PROGRAM]?
9. Who was involved in the design of the program?
10. Did the initiative involve any approval processes, such as a grant application, new funding streams, or formal adoption by a school board?
11. Has the program changed or evolved since its inception? If so, how?
12. [WE ALREADY HAVE (XX DOCUMENT)] OR [WE DO NOT HAVE ANY WRITTEN DOCUMENTS on (PROGRAM)]. Are there [other] written resources that document [PROGRAM] and its components or development?
  - a. Could we get a copy of those?

13. Let's talk about when the program was first rolled out into the schools. When was [PROGRAM] first implemented?
- Can you describe what was needed initially to roll out [PROGRAM]?
  - What did the schools stop doing, or how did the schools make time, to begin this initiative? How did the district decide to prioritize the [PROGRAM]?

*If not mentioned, ask:*

- What staff training was needed?
  - What resources were required?
  - What had to be done to ensure staff buy-in to the program? Parent buy-in?
  - What was the timeline for the rollout? Was it rolled out all at once, or was there a phased-in implementation?
14. In what ways does the district monitor fidelity of the program's implementation? In other words, how do you know if the program is being rolled out as intended?
15. How is [PROGRAM] funded? Has the funding source changed over the course of the program's design and implementation?
16. What was the cost of developing and implementing this program initially? What were the start-up costs?
- [If there is an outside funding source:]* What types of personnel and nonpersonnel costs did the district cover? What types of personnel and nonpersonnel costs did [FUNDING SOURCE/ORGANIZATION] cover?
17. What are the ongoing costs of continuing [PROGRAM]?

**ASK QUESTIONS IN THE TWO SECTIONS BELOW, DEPENDING ON WHICH TOPIC(S) IS A FOCUS FOR THE SITE VISIT.**

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**TOPIC 1: PK–3 Alignment**

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I'd like to talk a little more about PK–3 alignment efforts at the school level.

18. Are assessments aligned, connected, or coordinated across grades? If so, how?
- Did the district need to make any changes to ensure this alignment?

*If not mentioned, ask:*

- a. What assessments are used? How often are they given?
  - b. How is the information from assessments used?
  - c. Does your district use a Kindergarten Entry Assessment? If so, which one?
  - d. Do you receive the results of assessments for children that attended preschool, from their preschool programs? If so, how is this information used?
19. How are standards in different grades and in preschool related or aligned? How are curricula and/or other materials and resources related or aligned?
- a. What changes did the district make to standards and curricula, if any, when [PROGRAM] was implemented?
  - b. How do you assure children are learning new material and not repeating something they learned the prior year?
20. *If pre-interview survey indicates that student or teacher mobility is a problem:*
- a. I see that student mobility is a challenge in elementary schools in your district. How does the district guide schools in implementing [the program] given that some students will be at the schools for only part of the PreK–Grade 3 span?
  - b. I see that teacher mobility is a challenge in elementary schools in your district. How does the district guide schools in implementing [PROGRAM] given the fact that new teachers will not have received the original training or onboarding for [PROGRAM]?

Now I have a couple of questions about teachers.

21. To what degree are similar instructional practices used in different grades and in preschool?
22. How does the district train and support teachers to align instructional practices across Grades PK–3?
- a. Can you describe any ongoing training?
  - b. Do teachers have dedicated time to meet with teachers from other grade levels and from preschool?
  - c. How is data used and shared across grades?
  - d. How, if at all, are preschool teachers included in this training and support?
23. How do teachers for prekindergarten to Grade 3 know what other teachers are doing in their classrooms?

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## **TOPIC 2: Differentiated Instruction**

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Let's talk now about how differentiated instruction looks in district schools and classrooms.

24. *If not already discussed:* Can you describe any particular approaches that teachers use to differentiate instruction?
- a. How do teachers differentiate instruction for students with higher skills or competencies?

25. Are there specific strategies or practices used for personalizing instruction in kindergarten and first grade that are different from other grades? How are these different than strategies that teachers in later grades (Grade 2 and beyond) might be using?

26. How do schools identify the individual needs of students? How is student progress monitored?

*If not mentioned, ask:*

- a. What assessments are used?
- b. Does your district also use a Kindergarten Entry Assessment? If so, which one?
- c. How is the information from assessments used?
- d. How often are children assessed?

27. How are teachers trained and supported on differentiation strategies?

*If not mentioned ask:*

- a. Can you describe any ongoing training?
- b. In what other ways does the district support school leaders and teachers in differentiating instruction?

**ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS OF ALL INTERVIEWEES.**

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### **Other Specific Interventions or Supports**

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32. Are there any other programs or supports for early elementary students, designed to sustain the effects of preschool or otherwise support their learning and development, that we have not yet talked about?

*If yes, ask questions 33-36:*

33. If I observed a school or classroom in your district, what activities would I see related to this program?

34. Who does the program serve?

*If the following are mentioned, make sure to get details:*

- Parents
- Particular groups of students (e.g., those who attended preschool, English language learners, students with disabilities)

35. How are activities or approaches selected?

- a. What guidance do program staff members receive from the district?

36. Tell me about the [coaches/staff/teachers] who implement [PROGRAM].

*Ask if not mentioned:*

- a. How were they selected?
- b. What roles do different teachers and other staff members play?

- c. How were staff roles determined?
- d. Have these staff received any special training or professional development? If so, what did that training focus on?

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**Outcomes**

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37. You previously stated that your goals were [*restate goals from question 7*]. How do you measure progress against those goals? How do you evaluate the program?

*If not mentioned, ask:*

- a. Do you have an outside evaluator?

*If yes:*

38. What do you think are the barriers to seeing more gains?

- a. Why did you decide to hire an evaluator?
- b. What are the benefits and challenges of working with an evaluator?
- c. In what ways does your evaluator help you determine what program changes are needed?

39. What effect, if any, do you think [PROGRAM] has had on student outcomes in kindergarten through third grade?

*If interviewee reports effect:*

- a. For which outcomes have you seen gains?
- b. How are these gains measured or documented?
- c. Have you seen gains for any particular student subgroups?
- d. Have these gains been consistent over time?
- e. Can you share or point us to the data demonstrating these patterns?

*If no effect:*

- a. What do you think are the barriers to seeing more gains?

40. Has your district documented changes in teacher practices? Teacher turnover?

*If yes:*

- a. Have you seen any patterns?
- b. Can you share any data with us?

*If no:*

- a. What do you think are the barriers to seeing changes in teacher practice?

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**Success, Challenges, and Sustainability**

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41. What is working well with [PROGRAM]?

42. What aspect of [PROGRAM] needs strengthening? Why?

- a. What plans do you have to try to strengthen it?

43. What challenges have you and your colleagues experienced in implementing [PROGRAM], and what steps did you take or may still be needed to address them?

44. How does the district plan to ensure the sustainability of its work with [PROGRAM]? Are there challenges to maintaining the program's quality and success?

*If any of the following are mentioned, make sure to get details:*

- Staffing
- Professional development
- Resources (materials, funding)
- Practices (e.g., teacher practices)
- Perceptions and buy-in (e.g., from staff, parents, the school board)

45. One purpose of this study is to help other districts and schools potentially begin a similar program. What advice would you give to such districts or schools? Are there certain resources, structures, or capabilities that need to be in place for a program like this to succeed?

46. Those are all the questions I have. Are there any questions that I should ask about [PROGRAM] that I didn't? Is there anything else you'd like to share with me today in regard to [PROGRAM]?