

# **Appendix F. K–3 Teacher/Program Staff Focus Group Protocol**

# Study on Sustaining the Positive Effects of Preschool

## *K–3 Teacher/Program Staff Focus Group Protocol*

Interviewer \_\_\_\_\_ Focus Group ID # \_\_\_\_\_

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

---

---

### **Introduction**

---

---

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 supported/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?

---

---

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

---

---

1. I'd like to start by asking each of you to tell me your name and what grade you teach [or what role you play in the program]?

---

---

### **Connections to Preschool**

---

---

Our research is focused on making connections between early elementary school and earlier preschool experiences that students may have had. Therefore my next set of questions focus on preschool and preschool-related data you might collect.

2. Do you know approximately what percentage of students in your class attended preschool?
3. What differences in cognitive, academic, or social-emotional skills, if any, do you see between students who attended preschool and those who did not?

---

---

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

---

---

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]. Can you tell me more about all the activities involved?
  - a. What does this look like in your classroom?
  - b. What do you think are the most important aspects of this program?
5. Let's talk about when the program was first rolled out at your school. What do you know about what changes in staffing, policy, curriculum, or other areas were required to first roll the program out at your school?
  - a. What did teachers need to get started, in terms of training, guidance, or extra resources?
  - b. What did you and the school stop doing, or how did you make time, to begin this initiative?
6. How does the school communicate with parents about the program elements, goals, or vision of [PROGRAM]?
  - a. What messages do you emphasize?
  - b. What methods of communication do you use?
  - c. What questions about [PROGRAM] have you gotten from parents, if any?
  - d. Do parents play an active role in the [PROGRAM]? How? Is there training for parents on their role?

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

---

---

#### **TOPIC 1: PK–3 Alignment**

---

---

I'd like to talk a little more about PK–3 alignment efforts at your school or in your district.

7. Are assessments aligned, connected, or coordinated across grades? If so, how?

*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?

8. 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. How do you assure children are learning new material and not repeating something they learned the prior year? How do you know what other teachers from preschool through Grade 3 are doing in their classrooms?
  - b. Is there time to meet with teachers from different grade levels and from preschool? When? Is the time sufficient?
  
9. Does your school have any collaborative efforts with preschool programs?
  - a. *If these collaborations exist:* What types of activities does this collaboration involve?
  
10. How do you receive training or support to align instructional practices across prekindergarten to Grade 3?
  - a. Can you describe any ongoing training?
  - b. Do teachers have dedicated time to meet with teachers in other grades?
  - c. How is data used and shared across grades?
  - d. How, if at all, are preschool teachers included in this training and support?
  - e. What is helpful about the support, and what would you change?
  
11. *If pre-interview survey indicates that student mobility is a problem:*
  - a. How do you account for student mobility in your teaching – if some students miss a portion of the PreK-grade 3 span and enter the program later? Is it difficult to catch them up?
  
12. *For any new teachers:* What was the orientation process for [PROGRAM] when you came to this school? To what degree was it adequate or inadequate for you?

---



---

## **TOPIC 2: Differentiated Instruction**

---



---

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

13. *If not already discussed:* Can you describe any particular approaches that you use to differentiate instruction?
  
14. How do you or other teachers in your classroom work with children at different skill levels?
  - a. Can you describe how and whether students are placed in groups or assigned to specific classrooms or teachers? *If applicable:* How long do these grouping assignments last?
  
15. How do you identify the individual needs of students? How is student progress monitored?
 

*If not mentioned, ask:*

  - a. How is assessment used? How often are children assessed?
  
16. What resources and tools help you effectively differentiate instruction with students?
 

*If not mentioned, ask:*

- a. How, if at all, are curricula or other materials and resources used?
- b. How, if at all, is technology used?
- c. How, if at all, are small groups used?

17. How are you trained or supported on differentiation strategies?

- a. What is helpful about the training or support you have received, and what would you change?

18. How do you work with students with higher skills or competencies?

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

---

---

**Other Specific Interventions or Supports**

---

---

19. 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 20-24:*

20. What role do you play in that program?

- a. Is this a role you applied for? What skills are needed for the position?

21. How do you work with other teachers or staff at the school?

22. What type of student participates in [PROGRAM]?

- a. What type of student is eligible and ineligible to participate?
- b. Are you specifically providing services to certain subgroups of students?

23. What guidance do you receive from the district about the program's goals or activities?

24. How much autonomy do you have in implementing program activities?

---

---

**Outcomes**

---

---

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

- a. *If interviewee reports effect:* For which outcomes have you seen gains and how are these documented? Have you seen gains for any particular student groups?
- b. *If no effect:* What do you think are the barriers to seeing more gains?

---

---

**Success, Challenges, and Sustainability**

---

---

26. Overall, what is working well with [PROGRAM] at your school?

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

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

28. What challenges have you had in implementing this program, and what steps did you take or may still be needed to address them?

*If mentioned, be sure to get details (extent of challenge, how addressed):*

a. Teacher turnover

29. Is [PROGRAM] an approach that will or should continue for the long term, in your opinion?

30. Are there resources you need to continue your work with [PROGRAM]?

31. 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?

32. Those are all the questions I have. Is there anything else you'd like to share with me today in regard to [PROGRAM]?