
Appendix A.1: District Budget Officer Interview Protocol and Consent Form

District Budget Officer Interview Protocol

District/State:	Interviewer:
Interviewee(s):	Date/Time:
Interviewee(s)' Role(s): (select all that apply) <input type="checkbox"/> District finance officer <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	

Information for the Interviewer

For more than 50 years, Title I of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* has aimed to improve the prospects of children in high-poverty schools by providing additional funding for their schools to develop educational services that will improve student outcomes.

Although the Title I policy began by targeting services to eligible students—low achievers in high-poverty schools—the program has increasingly emphasized schoolwide services based on research showing that schools can improve student outcomes by adopting whole-school strategies. Title I’s schoolwide program (SWP) provisions allow schools the flexibility to serve all students in the school and thereby design whole-school reforms. Unlike their targeted assistance (TA) counterparts, SWP schools also are allowed to commingle Title I funds with funds from other federal, state, and local programs. This study aims to obtain a better understanding of how SWP flexibility may translate into programs and services that can improve student performance.

PAY ATTENTION TO:

- Title I Interventions. How SWP and TAP schools use Title I funds to select and implement interventions (RQ1)
- Resource Allocation. How Title I funds are allocated to SWP and TAP schools (RQ2)
- Decision Making. How decisions are made about how to use and allocate Title I funds and who is involved (RQ2)
- Schoolwide Programs. How SWP schools use Title I funds in ways that would not be permissible in TAP schools (RQ3)
- Professional Development. State and district supports to school leaders on Title I (RQ2)
- Policy Context. Relevant state and district policy factors that affect Title I implementation (RQ2, RQ3)

By the end of this interview, you should have details and examples for each of these areas.

Introduction

Key points to convey to the respondent:

- This is a study conducted by American Institutes for Research on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education. The purpose of the study is to explore the implementation of Title I programs, focusing on the interplay among school decision making, use of funds, and implementation of educational practices supported by Title I and other funds.
- **This is not a compliance study; our purpose is solely to provide policymakers and the general public with insight regarding local experiences with Title I programs.**
- We are conducting case studies of Title I schools in a subset of the nation's states and districts. We also are administering a nationally representative survey of district officials and school principals to collect data from a wider range of respondents. In addition to the case studies and survey, our team is reviewing district and school budgets and policy documents available to guide the implementation of Title I schoolwide and targeted assistance programs.
- The study's results will be discussed in a final report that will be available publicly. The main purpose of this study is to share your perspectives and experiences with policymakers as they continue to refine policy and technical assistance on important issues related to Title I.
- We will not include any information in our public reporting that identifies your district. However, officials at the U.S. Department of Education will know that districts in your state participated in this study. In addition, staff from the U.S. Department of Education will see notes from our interview, but the notes we share will be reviewed and edited to ensure we do not include any information that could identify you or your district.
- We know that you are very busy, and we appreciate your time. We anticipate that this interview will take approximately 60–90 minutes.
- We would like to record this conversation so that we can be sure we have an accurate record of our conversation. We will not share this recording with anyone outside the research team, and we will delete the recording after the final report is complete. Is that okay with you?
- You may discontinue your participation in this interview at any time. Throughout the course of the interview, if we touch on topics that you believe to be sensitive for any reason, please bring that to our attention, and we will not include these comments either in public reporting or in discussions with the U.S. Department of Education.

If asked why or how the district was selected for the study:

- The districts and schools for the study were selected on the basis of a number of factors. We wanted to include larger and smaller districts and schools that are located in different regions of the country and include both Title I schoolwide and targeted assistance programs. We also selected schools on the basis of school characteristics, including school level (elementary, middle, and high), enrollment, and demographics, to ensure variation in the sample.

District Context & Respondent Role

I would like to start with some questions about your district's context and history, so that I can understand your district and the schools it serves better.

Question	
1. How would you describe your district to someone who has never been here before, including its strengths and challenges?	Probe for: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>What are the specific strengths of your district?</i>• <i>How would you describe your students?</i>• <i>How would you describe the degree of teacher and staff turnover?</i>• <i>How would you describe parent and community involvement in your school?</i>• <i>For a rural district:</i> <i>What challenges does being in a rural setting present?</i>
2. Can you tell me about your position in the district and the role you play with regard to Title I schools?	Probe for: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>What are your primary responsibilities?</i>

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Use of Title I Funds and Decision-Making Process

I would like to now talk more about the use of Title I funds in your district's schools and the Title I planning and decision-making process related to how funds and resources are allocated to SWP and TAP schools. Prior to coming here today, we were able to review some of the information we collected through the survey responses that were collected from your district. We'll reference that information at times, but we aren't using these data for any compliance or evaluation purposes. We are primarily interested in how funding and allocation decisions are made in your district and what factors affect the Title I budgeting and planning process.

In the next set of questions, we'll be referring to each of the schools in your district participating in the study: **X, Y, and Z schools**.

Question	
3. Are you familiar with the specific services or strategies your district is implementing this year? If yes, could you describe these to me?	Probe for: <i>SPECIFIC EXAMPLES</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Academic or non-academic interventions to address needs of low-performing students</i>• <i>Personnel</i>• <i>Extended day programs</i>• <i>Social-emotional support or wraparound services</i>• <i>Academic and/or non-academic interventions to address needs of English learners, students with disabilities</i>• <i>Other supplies, materials, technology</i>• <i>Community or family programs</i>• <i>Facilities improvements</i>
4. Are there specific services or strategies your district would like Title I schools to focus on this year?	Probe for: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Are Title I schools required or just encouraged to use these strategies?</i>• <i>Why did your district decide to prioritize these strategies?</i>

Now I'd like to talk about your district's Title I budget and the case study schools' budgets more specifically.

5. Which of the case study schools have schoolwide Title I programs? Which of the schools have targeted assistance programs?	Probe for: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>How long has each school had this Title I status?</i>
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Question

6. How does your district determine the amount of discretionary funds that will be allocated to SWP and TAP schools?

Probe for:

- *What are the key activities or factors that affect these decisions?*
- *Does the decision process differ for SWP and TAP schools?*
- *When does the district notify schools of their Title I budget for the coming year?*
- *Are Title I spending and allocation decisions made prior to the start of the school year or throughout the school year?*
- *How long after being provided projected funding do schools have to complete their Title I plans and budgets?*

7. Next, could you please walk me through the planning and budgeting process for Title I, from when it begins to when key decisions are made?

Probe for:

- *When does this process begin?*
- *Where does Title I fit into this process?*
- *Is it part of the district's larger planning and budgeting process or separate?*
- *Why is this approach to planning taken?*

8. How would you describe the involvement of district, school, and non-school personnel in the planning and decision-making process for the use of Title I funds?

Probe for:

- *Which district staff are involved? How much influence do these individuals have?*
- *Which school staff are involved, and how do they communicate their schools' needs to the district decision makers? How much influence do school staff have?*
- *How influential is the involvement of non-school personnel, such as parents and community members, on the decisions that are made?*
- *Are there certain activities or decisions that district and school staff are more involved/have greater influence over in than others?*

Question

9. To what extent does the Title I budgeting process rely on data?

Probe for:

- *What factors are considered?*
- *What data are used?*
- *How does the district determine each school's needs?*
- *Does the process for SWP schools and TAP schools look different in your district? How?*

10. Overall, how would you describe the level of flexibility that schools have in determining how to spend their Title I budgets?

11. From a budget perspective, are there any advantages that you see to a school having a schoolwide Title I program versus a targeted assistance program? Are there any disadvantages?

Probe for:

- *Can you describe some specific examples?*
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Commingling and Coordination of Funds

Notes to Interviewer (for reference only, NOT to be read to respondent):

- Re-emphasize that this is not a compliance study and that the study's purpose is solely to provide policymakers and the general public with insight regarding local experiences with Title I programs.
- Review guidance on [how SWP schools can use Title I funds](#). SWP schools are expected to use the flexibility available to them to integrate services and programs with the aim of upgrading the entire educational program and helping all students reach proficient and advanced levels of achievement. In addition to coordinating and integrating services, SWP schools may combine most federal, state, and local funds to provide those services. By combining (sometimes referred to as commingling) funds from federal, state, and local sources, an SWP school can address its needs using all of the resources available to it. This gives a school more flexibility in how it uses available resources to meet the specifically identified needs of its students. Exercising this option is intended to maximize the impact use of the resources available to carry out the SWP.
- Review guidance on [how TAP schools can use Title I funds](#). For TAP schools, Title I funds may be used only for programs that provide services to eligible children identified as having the greatest need for special assistance. In addition, records must be maintained that document that Title I funds are spent on activities and services for only program-eligible students. While spending on Title I services may be coordinated with spending on services supported by other funding sources, dollars from each source must be tracked separately to those students.

I would now like to learn more about how Title I funds may be coordinated or commingled with other funding sources to support school improvement efforts and meet the needs of your students.

Question

12. Could you tell me about how Title I funds are used in conjunction with any other federal, state or local funds to support improvement strategies?

Probe for:

- *What are the other sources of funding?*
- *Are these funds coordinated or are they commingled?*
- *If funds are not coordinated or commingled, why not?*

13. Are there any differences between how SWP and TAP schools use Title I funds to support their improvement efforts?

Listen for:

- *How have the case study schools in this district used funds in conjunction/coordination with other funds?*

14. How clear or unclear are the regulations regarding the use of Title I funds, in your opinion?

Question

15. Have you experienced any challenges related to using Title I funds or trying to commingle or coordinate Title I and other funds? If yes, please describe.

Probe for:

- ***If yes**, have you been able to address these challenges?*
- *What would need to be in place for you to address or mitigate these challenges in the future?*

Listen for:

- *Challenges related to SWP schools taking full advantage of the flexibility they have to commingle funds*
 - *Challenges related to district reluctance to have schools commingle funds due to auditing concerns*
 - *Challenges related to supplement not supplant*
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State and District Support for Title I Schools

Question

16. Could you describe what kinds of guidance or regulation documents for using Title I funds the district provides to schools? (*Only ask if we are not able to locate any such guidance/regulation documents on district's website*)

Probe for:

- *For schools with schoolwide programs?*
- *For schools with targeted assistance programs?*
- *How are these resources disseminated to/accessed by school leaders?*

17. Please describe any technical assistance or professional development your district has provided to the Title I schools.

Listen for:

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

- *Online resources*
- *Trainings or workshops*
- *Focus of support (for example, decision making, use of funds, selecting interventions)*

Probe for:

- *How widely available are these supports?*
- *What other supports would be helpful?*

18. Have you experienced any challenges related to helping schools understand the requirements for use of Title I funds?

Probe for:

- ***If yes**, have you been able to address these challenges?*
- *What would need to be in place for you to address or mitigate these challenges in the future?*

Listen for:

- *Challenges related to SWP schools taking full advantage of the flexibility they have to commingle funds*
- *Challenges related to district reluctance to have schools commingle funds due to auditing concerns*
- *Challenges related to supplement not supplant*
- *Challenges related to the appropriate coordination/commingling of funds*

19. Does your district conduct any monitoring of your school's use of Title I funds?

Probe for:

- *How are the results of monitoring activities used?*

Question

- *Have you experienced any challenges related to these monitoring activities?*

Listen for:**SPECIFIC EXAMPLES**

- *Site visits*
- *Title I-funded purchases*
- *Other activities*

Conclusion**Question**

20. Is there anything else you would like to share about the implementation of the Title I programs in your district?

Thank you so much for your assistance with this important project!

Study of Title I Schoolwide and Targeted Assistance Programs Informed Consent

Purpose

American Institutes for Research (AIR), under contract with the Policy and Program Studies Service (PPSS) of the U.S. Department of Education, is conducting a study of school decision making, use of Title I funds, and implementation of education practices in Title I Schoolwide (SWP) and Targeted Assistance (TAP) programs. Specifically, the proposed study will provide a comparative analysis of SWP and TAP schools that looks at the school-level decision-making process, implementation of strategic interventions, and corresponding resources that support these interventions. To this end, the study will employ multiple data collection strategies.

To assist with the study, we are asking district administrators to participate in interviews. You will be asked about the following topics: the process by which decisions concerning educational resource allocation are made; how funding flexibility under Title I policy is used; the interventions and educational resources used that are supported by Title I and other funding sources; and, how state and district policies affect both how funds are used to support the subsequent strategies and the resources that are used at schools. The interview is designed to last approximately 60 minutes.

Risks and Discomfort

There are few anticipated or known risks in participating in this study.

Benefits

Your participation in the study will contribute to an understanding of the interplay between school decision-making, use of funds, and implementation of educational practices supported by Title I and other funding sources.

Participation

Participation of Title I districts and their schools in this study is required under Section 8306(a)(4) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. However, you may choose not to respond to certain questions or discontinue the interview at any time.

Privacy

Responses to this data collection will be used only for research purposes. No part of the study involves evaluation of any individual. The reports prepared for the study will summarize findings across the sample and will not associate responses with a specific district, school, or individual. We will not provide information that identifies you, your school, or your district to anyone outside the study team, except as required by law. If there is information that you do not want shared directly in any reporting, please let me know.

We would like your consent to record the interview. Recordings will be kept in a secure location and will not be accessed by anyone outside of the study team. The audio recordings will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study. You can participate in the interview but decline to have it recorded. Additionally, if you elect to have the interview recorded, you may stop the recording at any time.

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. For questions regarding your rights as a subject participating in this research, please contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 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: _____

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