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# **Appendix B: School Budget Officer Interview Protocol and Consent Form**

## School Budget Officer Interview Protocol

<b>District/State:</b>	<b>Interviewer:</b>
<b>Interviewee(s):</b>	<b>Date/Time:</b>
<b>Interviewee(s)' Role(s): (select all that apply)</b> <input type="checkbox"/> School budget 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 (not just Title I-eligible students) 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 are designed to improve student performance.

#### **PAY ATTENTION TO:**

- **Title I Interventions.** How SWP and TAP schools use Title I funds to select and implement interventions and resources to improve the performance of low-achieving, high-poverty students, including how interventions in SWP schools compare with those in TAP schools (RQ1)
- **Resource Allocation Processes.** How SWP and TAP schools make decisions about allocations of Title I funds (RQ1)
- **Decision Making.** How decisions are made about how to use Title I funds in SWP and TAP schools, including who is involved at the district and school levels, what data inform the decisions that are made, and the extent to which schools have authority or autonomy in the decision-making process (RQ2)
- **Schoolwide Programs.** The extent to which SWP schools use Title I funds in ways that would not be permissible in TAP schools and any perceived barriers or advantages associated with commingling or coordinating funds from different sources (RQ3)
- **Professional Development.** Any training the state or district provides to support school leaders’ understanding and implementation of Title I (RQ2)
- **Policy Context.** Relevant state and district policy factors that affect Title I implementation, including supports for Title I school leaders, approach to Title I (compliance versus support for improved outcomes), monitoring activities, other state or district initiatives, other challenging or facilitating contextual factors (RQ2, RQ3)

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***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 nationally representative surveys of district officials and school principals to collect data from a wider range of respondents. In addition to the case studies and surveys, 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?
- Your participation is completely voluntary—you may skip any question you feel that you would like to skip. Through 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.

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## School Context & Respondent Background

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### Question

1. How would you describe your school to someone who has never been here before, including your school's strengths and challenges?

**Probe for:**

- *What are the demographics of your school?*
- *What are the school's recent successes?*
- *How would you describe the degree of teacher and staff turnover?*
- *How would you describe parent and community involvement in your school?*

2. Can you tell me about your position at the school and the role you play with regard to its Title I program?

3. Just to confirm, your school has a [TAP or SWP]. Is this correct?

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## Use of Funds and Decision-Making Process

**Note to Interviewer (for reference only, NOT to be read to respondent):** Review the school's Title I plan prior to the interview. Keep the improvement strategies listed in the plan in mind in proceeding with this line of questioning and probe as appropriate.

### Question

4. **Are you familiar with the specific services or strategies your school is implementing to improve student outcomes? If yes, could you describe these?**

**Probe for:**

- *How have you prioritized these strategies?*
- *Are these long-standing or newly initiated approaches to improving student outcomes in your school?*

**SPECIFIC EXAMPLES**

- *Academic or non-academic interventions to address needs of low-performing students*
- *Personnel such as content specialists or coaches*
- *Personnel to reduce student-teacher ratios (e.g., aides or paraprofessionals)*
- *Other personnel like school counselors or behavior specialists*
- *Extended day programs*
- *Social-emotional support or wraparound services*
- *Academic and/or non-academic interventions to address needs of English learners, students with disabilities*
- *Other supplies, materials, technology*
- *Community or family programs*
- *Facilities improvements*

5. **The next set of questions I ask you will delve deeper into what Title I funds are used for in your school, but first, could you briefly describe how Title I funds support the services and strategies we just discussed?**

**Listen for:**

- *Title I provides extra resources to fund/support services and strategies*
- *Title I encourages coherent needs assessment and planning*
- *Title I allows for the commingling/coordination of funds to support improvement efforts*

***Now I'd like to talk about your school's Title I budget more specifically.***

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6. Do you know the amount of your total Title I allocation for 2015-16?

**Probe for:**

- **If yes**, how does the district communicate this information to you?
- **If no**, do you know how you could access that information if you wanted it?

7. I understand that this total amount includes a portion of funds that the district controls and a portion of funds that you can use at your discretion (see survey data). Is this correct?

**Probe for:**

- Do you know how the district determines this amount?

8. Are you aware of the amount of funds controlled by the district? If yes, how are you informed of this amount?

**Probe for:**

- How does the district communicate to you this amount?

9. I understand your district allocated X funds for your school to use at your discretion (pull from survey data). Is this correct?

**Probe for:**

The types of staff that were reported on the survey, including:

- Teachers
- Paraprofessionals
- Instructional coaches
- EL specialists
- Curriculum coordinators
- Assessment coordinators
- Administrative staff
- Data analysts or technology support staff

10. I understand X staff in your school are supported by Title I funding this school year (pull from survey data). Is this correct?

11. Could you please describe the roles and activities of each of these personnel and how Title I funds are used to support their work?

**Probe for:**

- What are their roles and primary activities?
- Who hires them and oversees their work?
- Are these personnel funded through the funds that are controlled by the district or by the school?

For staff provided by the central district office, do you request district staff specifically, or is the decision made at the district level?

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12. I understand that Title I funds are used to fund other types of resources or services to support your improvement efforts (pull from survey data). Can you please describe what these types of non-personnel supports are and how Title I was used to fund them

**Probe for:**

- *What are these materials?*
- *Who purchases the materials?*
- *Are these funded through the funds that are controlled by the district or by the school?*

For resources provided by the central district office, do you request district resources specifically, or is the decision made at the district level?

13. 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 for the use of funds?

**Probe for:**

- *What are the key activities?*
- *When does the district notify you of your Title I budget for the coming year?*
- *Are Title I spending decisions made prior to the start of the school year or throughout the school year?*
- *How long after learning of your budget do you have to complete your Title I plan and budget?*

14. 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 at your school?

**Probe for:**

- *The involvement and influence of the following stakeholders at key points in the process: Yourself?*
  - *School improvement team members?*
  - *Other school staff?*
  - *District officials?*
  - *Non-school personnel, such as parents or community members?*

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

**Probe for:**

- *What specific types of data are used (e.g., student performance data, teacher evaluation data, attendance, graduation rates, etc.)? Does your school conduct a needs-assessment?*
- *How are the needs of your school communicated to the district?*

16. Overall, how would you describe the flexibility you have at the school level to make decisions about how Title I funds will be spent?

**Probe for:**

- *Are you required to use a district-established template? **If yes**, how much flexibility do you have within this template?*

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## Commingling and Coordination of Title I 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 extant data about the school's use of funds, including the school's Title I plan. Look for whether Title I funds are used in conjunction with any other federal categorical program funding, such as Title III, IDEA, Title II, or any state funding streams with similar purposes.
- 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.

I would now like to learn more about how Title I funds may be coordinated with other state, local, or federal funds, or commingled with other funding sources to support efforts to improve student outcomes and meet the needs of your students.

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### Question

**17. At your school, could you describe how Title I funds are used together with funds from other sources to support your efforts to improve student outcomes (for example, other federal, state, or local funds)?**

**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?*

**18. How clear or unclear are the regulations regarding the use of Title I funds, in your opinion? Can you give me some examples?**

**19. Have you experienced any challenges related to using Title I funds or trying to coordinate Title I and other funds? [note to interviewer: for SWP schools, also ask about challenges related to commingling 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?*





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## State and District Support for Title I

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### Question

20. What guidance or training, if any, has the state and district provided about using Title I funds?

**Probe for:**

*SPECIFIC EXAMPLES*

- *Online resources*
- *Guidance documents*
- *Trainings or workshops*
- *Focus of support (for example, decision making, use of funds, selecting interventions)*
- *How widely available are these supports?*
- *What other supports would be helpful?*

21. Have you been involved in any district monitoring activities related to your school's use of Title I funds?

**If yes:**

- *Please describe these activities.*
- *How are the results of the monitoring activities communicated to you?*
- *Do you know how the district uses the results of the monitoring?*

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## Conclusion

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### Question

22. Is there anything else you would like to share about the implementation of the Title I program in your school or district?

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*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](mailto: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](mailto: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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