

APPENDIX A: Notification Letter for Sample Recruitment

Chief State School Officer/State Superintendent

[Date]

[Name]

[Position]

[Street Address]

[City, State, ZIP]

Dear [Chief State School Officer/State Superintendent]:

I am writing to inform you about the U.S. Department of Education's upcoming Study of Weighted Student Funding (WSF) and School-Based Budgeting Systems (SBB), an important new study examining how districts allocate funds and resources to their schools. I would like to take this opportunity to explain the purpose of the study and to ask for your cooperation and support in this important endeavor.

The purpose of this study is to understand different systems for allocating resources to schools including school-based budgeting practices and weighted student formulas. We are interested in the variation in implementation of such systems; the outcomes in terms of levels of principal autonomy, transparency of resource allocation, and equity of resource distribution; the interactions of WSF and SBB systems with school choice policies; and the challenges each district may have faced in undertaking such changes to their budgeting and planning systems. This study is not an evaluation of districts/schools in your state. Information gathered in this study will help policymakers understand how prevalent these practices are and under what conditions they work well. In 2017, the study will include:

- *Surveys* with a national sample of approximately 400 school district administrators and 679 principals including [X] districts and [Y] schools in your state.
- *Case studies* with a sample of nine case study districts ([including X in your state/your state has not been selected for case studies]) that will involve up to seven in-person interviews with district officials and school staff involved in WSF system administration and a review of relevant documents and analysis of budget and fiscal data.

The upcoming study has been approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB clearance number XXXX-XXXX). While participation in this study is not required, we would be appreciative if you could encourage all of the selected district administrators and principals within your state to participate in this important study. Full participation of all districts invited is essential since the study sample design does not allow for substitutions of those selected, and so that we can understand the experiences of all types of districts. A list of sampled districts in your state is found on the reverse side of this letter.

The time required to complete the survey is estimated to be 20 to 30 minutes, including the time to review instructions, gather the data necessary, and respond to each question. All respondents submitting completed surveys will receive a \$25 gift card as a token of our appreciation.

[IF CASE STUDY DISTRICT] The time required for the case study visit is estimated to be a day-long visit to your district, with interviews averaging 60 minutes each, varying based on the respondent's position in the district or school.

The U.S. Department of Education has contracted with American Institutes for Research (AIR) to undertake this study. The study team will begin contacting districts and schools in the next several weeks to secure their cooperation, and I hope you will encourage districts to participate in this important study.

Should you have any questions, or if you would like to discuss this study further, please feel free to contact the project officer, Oliver Schak of the U.S. Department of Education, at 202-453-5643 or Oliver.Schak@ed.gov. You also may contact the project director, Jesse Levin of AIR, at 650-376-6270 or jlevin@air.org.

We thank you in advance for your cooperation and support. This study will be a useful source of information for Congress, the U.S. Department of Education, other policy-makers, and educators.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Bell-Ellwanger
Director, Policy and Program Studies Service