

**Appendix K:
District Program Officer
Interview Protocol and Consent Form
for the Study of
Weighted Student Funding (WSF) and
School-Based Budgeting (SBB) Systems**

District Program Officer Interview Protocol

District: State:	Interviewer:
Interviewee(s):	Date/Time:

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 investigate the funding policies associated with school-based budgeting systems to see whether implementing such systems lead to changes in the way in which resources are allocated. Specifically, it examines: the structure of SBB systems; the outcomes of such systems in terms of the level of principal autonomy, transparency of resource allocation, empowerment of school stakeholders in the decision-making process, and equity of resource distribution; the interactions of SBB systems with school choice policies; and the challenges districts may have face in implementing these systems.
- **This is not an evaluation of your district’s performance. Rather, this is an exploratory investigation to learn more about the different experiences districts have had in developing and implementing their SBB systems.**
- As part of this study, we are conducting case studies of nine study districts that have implemented WSF systems, which include interviews with district and school staff, as well as an in-depth analysis of audited fiscal files and budget data. In addition, we are administering a nationally representative survey of district officials and school principals to better understand the perceptions of practitioners in both SBB and non-SBB districts and schools regarding their funding and resource allocation practices.
- The study’s results will be discussed in a final report that will be available publicly. Given the interest in learning from the specific experiences of districts implementing WSF systems, we will name the case study districts; however, we will not include any information in our public reporting that identifies schools or individuals. In addition, while staff from the U.S. Department of Education will see notes from our interviews, the notes we share will be reviewed and edited to ensure that we do not include any information that could identify individuals or specific schools. The study team will make sure that access to all data with identifiable information is limited to members of the study team. We will not provide information that identifies you or your school(s) to anyone outside the study team, except as required by law.
- We know that you are very busy, and we appreciate your time. We anticipate that this interview will take approximately 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 like with no consequence. 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.

Do you have any questions for us about the study?

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

- The districts for the study were selected because they are all using a WSF system to allocate funds to schools. We aimed to include a set of case study districts that are diverse with respect to geographic location, age of WSF system, and formula design.

District Context

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

Question	
<p>1. How would you describe your district to someone who has never been there before, including your district’s strengths and challenges?</p>	<p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are the district’s recent successes?</i> • <i>How would you describe the degree of teacher and staff turnover? How does this compare to other nearby districts?</i> • <i>What are your students’ greatest or most unique needs?</i>

WSF Goals and Strategies

Note to interviewer: Items marked with ‘*’ indicate topics that require the respondent to reflect on circumstances and activities before and around the initial implementation of the WSF system. If the respondent was not employed by the district at the time or does not recall historical details, consider reframing the item to focus on *current* implementation or skip the item, as appropriate.

Question	
<p>2. In introducing a WSF system, what issues was your district intending to address? *</p> <p><i>[For districts with mature WSF systems only] Have the aims of the system changed at all since then? If so, how and why? *</i></p>	<p>Listen for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Flexibility/autonomy of general funds, categorical funds; equity with which general or categorical funds are distributed to schools</i> • <i>School choice</i> • <i>Per-pupil allocations; actual versus average teacher salaries; staff mobility</i> • <i>Transparency, predictability; innovation</i> • <i>Staff and community engagement</i>
<p>3. How does your district’s WSF system relate to the issues you mentioned?</p> <p><i>[If respondent indicated changes in aims of the system in Q2] Have you adapted the system to respond to its shifting aims? If so, how and why? *</i></p>	<p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are the most important components of your district’s WSF system?</i> • <i>Why do you think these pieces [make/will make] a difference in addressing these issues?</i>

Question	
<p>4. How [do/will] you know if your district is successful in reaching these goals?</p>	<p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What benchmarks or indicators [are/will] be used to measure progress toward these goals? What are the data sources? • How [do/will] you use the data?

Initial Implementation of WSF

Question	
<p>5. As we understand, your district adopted a WSF system in [list school year]. Is that correct?</p> <p>Are you aware of how the WSF system came about in your district? Were school leaders or other school-level staff involved in the decision-making process about the design and/or launch of the WSF system? If so, how? *</p> <p>6. What was the original reaction from schools about implementing the WSF system? Has their response changed over time? If so, how? *</p> <p>7. I understand the following categories of students are given weights under your WSF system: [list student weight categories]</p> <p>Are there categories of student needs (e.g., at-risk, English learners, special education) that you think should be included in the formula, but are not? Why?</p> <p>8. How are funding allocation decisions different under the WSF system compared to the previous system? *</p>	<p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which particular school staff were involved? • [If applicable] What, if any, role did the teachers' union have in the process? The school board? • Were you involved in the process? Who else at the district level was involved? How? <p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did the district experience a problem of schools feeling like there were "winners" and "losers" under the WSF system, as some schools got more money and others got less? • Was there any opposition to the new WSF system? If so, what were their objections? <p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [For <u>all</u> WSF districts] How were the values of the weights determined? * • [For districts with mature WSF systems] How often are the weights reviewed and modified? • [For districts with new WSF systems] Are there plans to review and adjust the weights, as necessary? If so, how frequent will these reviews be? <p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did the distribution of funds to schools change after WSF implementation? • How did changes in the distribution of funds affect small schools and other less traditional schools such as charters?

Successes, Challenges, and Effects of the WSF System

Question	
<p>9. What successes has your district experienced in implementing the WSF system? Can you describe any factors that may have enabled these successes?</p>	<p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [For districts with mature WSF systems] <i>Have the successes in implementation changed over time? If so, in what ways? *</i>
<p>10. What challenges has your district faced in implementing a WSF system? How well has your district been able to address these challenges, and how? *</p>	<p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Obtaining buy-in from district- or school-level staff, unions, school board, parents, other community stakeholders?</i> • <i>Technical capacity?</i> • <i>Challenges for small schools or charter schools?</i> • <i>Were there any unpredicted challenges?</i>
<p>11. How has the distribution of funding under the WSF system affected the opportunities of students with particular educational needs to succeed relative to others?</p>	<p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>For which groups of students?</i> • <i>Has the budgeting/planning process created an incentive for schools to attract students who require additional resources to educate? Why or why not?</i>
<p>12. What, if anything, did the budgeting/planning process allow schools to do that they would not have been able to do otherwise? We are specifically interested in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting students with special subgroups • Using different programs or instructional practices 	<p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Were any additional non-academic supports added?</i> • <i>How much have these changes varied across schools within your district?</i> • <i>What steps, if any, has the district taken to promote different programs or instructional practices? Are there any future plans?</i> • <i>Are there any specific instructional or related services needed to meet the needs of the students in your district that are lacking?</i>

Ongoing Implementation of WSF / Decision-making Process

Question	
<p>13. Could you please walk me through your district’s annual planning and budgeting process, from when it begins to when key decisions are made?</p>	<p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>When does this process begin?</i> • <i>When and how is information on school allocations provided to schools?</i> • <i>When are schools’ initial spending plans due? How does the amount of planning time compare to the amount before WSF was introduced? *</i> • <i>When and how does the district review these initial plans and work with schools to revise the plans?</i> • <i>When are schools’ final plans due?</i> • <i>Who are the key stakeholders involved in the process? What are their roles?</i> • <i>As part of the process, do you conduct a needs assessment? What other data are used?</i>
<p>14. [If not addressed in Q13] At the school level, are school-level stakeholders other than principals—school leadership teams, teachers, other school staff, parents, students, and other community members—involved in the budgeting and program planning process? How would you describe their level of involvement?</p>	<p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How has the level of involvement of these stakeholders changed in response to the WSF policy?</i> • <i>How does the level of involvement of these other school-level stakeholders vary across schools in your district? Why?</i> • <i>What steps, if any, has the district taken to promote the involvement of school staff in the WSF process? Parents and community members? Are there any future plans? [If respondent indicates parents are involved] How do the district and schools ensure the involvement of a diverse and representative set of parents?</i> • <i>What are the benefits and challenges of involving school-level staff and community stakeholders in the process?</i>

Question	
<p>17. What educational services or decisions are provided to schools by the district? Which are available for them to purchase from your district, and which can schools purchase from outside vendors? Why?</p>	<p>Listen for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Complexity of state and federal law (e.g., special education)</i> • <i>Economies of scale</i> • <i>School leadership capacity and preference</i> • <i>District philosophy</i> <p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Does your district have a “central services” market— that is, a menu of network and central services where you can choose whether to buy services from the district or from outside vendors? If so, what services are included? How does it operate?</i> • <i>How would you describe the current balance between district and school control?</i> • <i>Would you like to see the district or schools have more control over school-level expenditures?</i>
<p>18. How transparent is the current resource allocation process to stakeholders, including school board members, principals, teachers and other school staff, parents, and other community members?</p>	<p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What steps, if any, has the district taken to increase transparency?</i> • <i>[If applicable] What successes or failures have you encountered in attempting to increase transparency?</i> • <i>Have changes in transparency affected the degree to which schools are held accountable for results?</i> • <i>What kinds of questions have you and your staff received from schools about fund allocations?</i> • <i>Are school budgets sufficiently predictable or stable for schools to effectively plan and budget from year to year?</i>
<p>19. Are school budgets sufficiently predictable or stable for schools to effectively plan and budget from year to year? Why or why not?</p>	<p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Are schools able to retain staff from year to year?</i> • <i>[If respondent was in the district prior to the start of WSF] How does the level of stability compare to the process prior to the new WSF system?</i>

Support and Training on WSF

Question	
<p>20. How well do principals, teachers, and school leadership team members understand the WSF system? How prepared are they to make decisions about program planning, budgeting, and resource allocation?</p> <p>21. How would you characterize the district's approach to supporting schools with making resource allocation decisions?</p>	<p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [If not clear understanding] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>What do they know? What do you wish they knew?</i> – <i>What perceptions or misperceptions do they have?</i> • [If not prepared] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>What additional resources or supports do you think schools need to successfully implement the WSF system? Are there any plans to provide these?</i> <p>Listen for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Providing schools directives versus disseminating best practices</i> <p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Has your department provided any technical assistance or training to the schools in your district on budgeting? If yes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Who was the intended audience for the training (principals, other school administrators, school leadership teams, teachers)?</i> – <i>What was the focus?</i> • <i>Has the role of the district in assisting schools around budgeting changed at all since implementation of the WSF system? If yes, how? *</i>

Concluding Questions

I would like to end this conversation with a few questions about “lessons learned” to date about the implementation of the WSF policy.

Question	
<p>22. Are there any district-, state-, or federal-level policies that promote or create barriers to more effective implementation of the budgeting/planning policy for your school? If so, what are they?</p>	<p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Is there an impact from:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – [If applicable] <i>The district’s collective bargaining agreements?</i> – <i>District mandates and policies, such as:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » <i>Hiring and placement policies?</i> » <i>Use of average versus actual salaries in charging against school budgets?</i> – <i>State school finance system?</i> – <i>State charter school policies?</i> – <i>Other federal or state policies (e.g., accountability, curriculum and standards)?</i> <p><i>If so, what do you feel is the impact?</i></p> • <i>For those policies that have created barriers, have you been able to find ways of overcoming the issues they present?</i> • <i>What, if anything, would you like to see changed about these policies?</i>
<p>23. Does your district have a school choice policy? How is it structured? Are there ways in which the WSF system supports or discourages school choice? If so, please describe.</p>	<p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>In what ways, if any, does the district consider school choice in the implementation of the WSF system?</i> • <i>Do the following enter into school assignment decisions?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Sibling preference (if student has a sibling in school already)</i> – <i>Neighborhood school (if school is close to home)</i> – <i>Other</i>
<p>24. What changes would you make to the budgeting/planning process to improve its implementation or its benefits to schools? Why?</p>	
<p>25. Is there anything I haven’t asked you about your district’s budgeting/planning process or the WSF system that you would like to comment on?</p>	

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

**Study of Weighted Student Funding Systems and School-Based Budgeting Systems
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 the funding policies associated with school-based budgeting (SBB) systems to see whether implementing such systems lead to changes in the way in which resources are allocated. Specifically, it examines: the structure of SBB systems; the outcomes of such systems in terms of the level of principal autonomy, transparency of resource allocation, empowerment of school stakeholders in the decision-making process, and equity of resource distribution; the interactions of SBB systems with school choice policies; and the challenges districts may have face in implementing these systems.

To assist with the study, we are asking district and school staff to participate in interviews. You will be asked about the following topics: how your funding formula is structured, your role in budgeting and resource allocation decision making, and challenges and successes in WSF implementation. The interview is designed to last approximately 90 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 implementation, advantages, and challenges of SBB systems for use by state and federal policymakers to support districts.

Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. 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, Jesse Levin, at the American Institutes for Research at 650-376-6270 or jlevin@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: _____

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB number. The valid OMB control number of this information collection is ###-####. The time required to complete this interview is estimated to average 90 minutes. If you have any comments concerning the accuracy of the time estimates(s) or suggestion for improving this form, please write to: U.S. Department of Education, Washington, 20202-4651. If you have comments or concerns regarding the status of your individual submission of this form, write directly to:

Policy and Program Studies Service, Office of the Deputy Secretary, US
Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Washington, DC
20202.