

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

Principal Interview Protocol

School: 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.

School Context and Interviewee Background

I would like to start with some questions about your school's context and history so that I can better understand your school.

Question	
<p>1. How would you describe your school to someone who has never been there before, including your school's strengths and challenges?</p> <p>2. How long have you been the principal at this school? In this district?</p>	<p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the school's recent successes? • How would you describe the degree of teacher and staff turnover? • What are your students' greatest or most unique needs? <p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were your professional roles before this one? In which districts, schools, or organizations? • Who do you see as other leaders at this school?

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>3. In introducing the new budgeting/planning system, what issues was your district intending to address? *</p> <p>[For districts with mature WSF systems only] Have the aims of the system changed at all since then? If so, how and why? *</p> <p>4. How does your district's budgeting/planning system relate to the issues you mentioned?</p> <p>[If respondent indicated changes in aims of the system in Q3] Has the system been revised to respond to the shifts in aims? If so, how and why? *</p>	<p>Listen for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility/autonomy of general funds, categorical funds; equity with which general or categorical funds are distributed to schools • School choice • Per-pupil allocations; actual versus average teacher salaries; staff mobility • Transparency, predictability; innovation • Staff and community engagement <p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the most important components of your district's new budgeting/planning system? • Do you think these pieces make/will make a difference in addressing these issues? Why or why not?

Initial Implementation of WSF

Question	
<p>5. Are you aware of how the new budgeting/planning system came about in your district? If so, how would you describe the involvement of school staff in the decision-making process about the design and/or implementation of the WSF system? *</p> <p>6. What was your original reaction to this change? What was your staff's reaction? Have these reactions changed over time? If so, how? *</p>	

Ongoing Implementation of WSF / Decision-making Process

Question	
<p>7. Could you please walk me through the general process for how your school's annual site-level plan and budget are developed?</p> <p>8. We realize that each school may implement the budgeting/planning process under WSF slightly differently. At your school, what has gone well with the new budgeting/planning system? Can you describe any factors that may have enabled these successes?</p>	<p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are your specific roles and responsibilities in the process?</i> • <i>Who is involved in the decision-making process? How would you describe the role and level of involvement of:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Teachers?</i> – <i>Other school administrators?</i> – <i>District administrators?</i> – <i>Parents or community members?</i> • <i>When is the initial projected budget provided by your district? When are your initial and final spending plans due? How does the amount of planning time compare to the amount before WSF was introduced?</i> • <i>As part of the process, do you conduct a needs assessment? What other data are used? [Note to interviewer: Needs assessment refers to a systematic process to identify the district's educational strengths and the areas that need to improve and is used to prioritize the areas that most affect student achievement]</i> <p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Have the successes in implementation changed over time? If so, in what ways? *</i>

Question	
<p>9. What challenges has your school faced in implementing the budgeting/planning process? How well has your school been able to address these challenges, and how? *</p>	

Effects of the WSF System

Question	
<p>10. How does the level of funding under the current budgeting system compare to the previous system?</p> <p>11. How well do the resource allocations in your site plan for this year align with your student outcome goals?</p> <p>12. At your school, 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>13. What, if anything, did the budgeting/planning process allow you to do in your school that you 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>In general, has it gone up or down under the new system?</i> • <i>How did changes in the distribution of funds affect small schools and other, less traditional schools such as charters?</i> <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>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What specifically was it about the WSF policy that stimulated you to better support high need students or to offer different programs?</i> • <i>Were these changes for specific grade levels? Specific groups of students?</i> • <i>Were any additional non-academic supports added?</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>

Dimensions of WSF Implementation and Decision-making Process

Question	
<p>14. How would you describe your district’s approach to giving principals autonomy in decision-making?</p> <p>Over what proportion of your school’s total budget do you and your staff have decision-making autonomy? Are there any limitations or guidelines on how you may use these funds? If so, what?</p>	<p>Listen for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Autonomy for all: All principals have autonomy</i> ● <i>Earned autonomy: Autonomy granted to higher-performing, but not lower-performing schools; district more active in managing resources for lower-performing schools</i> ● <i>Tiered autonomy: Tiered levels of autonomy based on performance, growth, and school capacity; struggling schools provided more support, resources, and guidance</i> <p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Has the amount of budgetary discretion and autonomy changed over time? Do you think this amount of discretion your school has over budgets <u>should</u> change? If so, why? *</i> ● <i>Do you see any drawbacks to autonomy?</i>
<p>15. What educational services or decisions are provided by your district? Which are available for purchase from your district, and which do you 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? Can you choose to purchase outside of this menu?</i> ● <i>Do you ever meet operational resistance when trying to make purchases? When and in what ways?</i>

Question	
<p>16. What roles do teachers, parents, and community members play in the budgeting and planning process?</p> <p>17. What kinds of accountability mechanisms, if any, has your district implemented in conjunction with the new budgeting/planning process?</p> <p>How does the district monitor your school's plan and budget?</p> <p>18. How transparent is the current way in which revenues are distributed to your school?</p>	<p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <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 does your school ensure the involvement of a diverse and representative set of parents?</i> • <i>What steps have you taken within your school?</i> • <i>Has the new budgeting/planning policy increased school staff involvement? Parent and community involvement?</i> • <i>Do you see any limitations in involving school staff and community involvement in the process? If so, what?</i> <p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Are there any consequences for particular budget decisions you make? For declines in student outcomes (such as decreased autonomy)?</i> • <i>[If applicable] How have accountability mechanisms changed under the new budgeting/planning process, if at all?</i> <p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>[If principal was in the school prior to the start of WSF] How does the level of transparency compare to the process prior to the new budgeting/planning system?</i> • <i>How clear are weights for different students?</i> • <i>Is your school budget sufficiently predictable or stable for you to effectively plan and budget from year to year?</i>

Support and Training on WSF

Question	
<p>19. What communication has the district provided to you about the budgeting/planning system? How adequate or helpful has this communication been?</p>	<p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What improvements do you think the district can make?</i>

Question	
<p>20. How would you characterize the district’s approach to supporting schools with making resource allocation decisions?</p>	<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>Can you describe any technical assistance or training you or your staff have received from the district this school year around planning, budgeting, allocating resources, or aligning spending decisions with new instructional strategies?</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>[For districts with mature WSF systems] Has the role of the district in assisting schools around WSF changed at all over the past X years since implementation of the WSF? 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>21. 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"> – <i>[If applicable] 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>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 would you like to see changed about these policies?</i>

Question	
<p>22. 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>23. What changes would you make to the budgeting/planning process or the funding formula to improve its implementation or its benefits to schools? Why?</p> <p>24. Is there anything I haven't asked you about your school's budgeting/planning process that you would like to comment on?</p>	<p>Probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the following enter into school assignment decisions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Sibling preference (if student has a sibling in school already) – Neighborhood school (if school is close to home) – Other

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 identify the case study districts; however, we will not associate responses with specific schools or individuals. We will not provide information that identifies you or your school(s), 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/School: _____

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 60 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.