

INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION SCIENCES

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WEBINAR:

ADDRESSING CHRONICALLY LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS:

GRANT OPPORTUNITIES AT THE

INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION SCIENCES

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THURSDAY

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PROCEEDINGS

Slide One:

DR. RUBY: Hello, everyone. I am Allen Ruby at the Institute of Education Sciences, and I'm talking today about grant opportunities to address chronically low-performing schools here.

Slide Two:

The agenda for today's webinar is to give a little bit of background on the Institute of Education Sciences and the grant programs we have and then go specifically to two new grant programs we'll be holding with an October deadline date: the National Research and Development Center on Scaling Up Effective Schools and the Chronically Low-Performing Schools Research Initiative.

Slide Three:

Just a little background on IES. We have a Director chosen by the President, with the consent of the Senate, and he works with a Board. And under him are four Centers: the first, the National Center for Education Statistics, which is responsible for the large surveys and the data sets that come out of them that you may be familiar with, such as the NAEP and the NELS and the ELS; the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, which does large-scale evaluations usually through contracted research; and then the two grant-making centers, the National Center for Education Research and the National Center for Special Education Research.

Just a note about the program officers in both of these centers. Their jobs are both to support applicants and then work with grantees after the grants are made. You should feel comfortable contacting any program officer if you have questions about the application. At the same time, they are not involved at all in the peer-review process so they can offer you only advice on how to get through it. They really are not involved in the actual decisionmaking, which gives them greater flexibility in working with applicants beforehand.

Slide Four:

The way to think about our research objectives for these grants is trying to find out what works in enhancing students' academic achievement, looking at and identifying what doesn't work, so that we don't spend future time and resources on using it, and identifying that way other approaches to addressing the same issues; and then, because no intervention usually works for everyone or in every place, trying to find out what works for whom or where or doesn't work for whom or where.

Slide Five:

Our outcomes of interest are focused on students, as I mentioned before, on academic achievement, and this is defined usually by grade levels. For preschool, the outcomes of interest are school readiness, which includes prereading and writing, early math and science and social development, as well as in the Special Education Center, development outcomes for infants and toddlers with disabilities. And there is, then, one

difference between the Education Research Center and the Special Education Research Center in that the Education Research Center starts in preschool with students above grades three or four, while the Special Education Research can start from birth if disabilities are identified.

When we get to kindergarten through 12th grade, we are looking at such outcomes as reading, writing, math, and science academic outcomes; behaviors that are required for students to learn in school; and also for postschool opportunities—successful transitions to postschool opportunities—primarily for Special Education students. Other indicators may be something like high school graduation or disciplinary outcome and retention.

Then for postsecondary, the focus is really on enrollment persistence and completion, especially by groups that have traditionally not completed postsecondary education. For adult education, the outcomes are focused on basic reading, writing, and math.

Slide Six:

Usually, the inputs we're looking at or evaluating, or what we call "conditions of education," fall under such things as curricula, instruction, assessments, the quality of the education workforce—such as teachers, teaching assistants, or principals—and then systems-level programs and policies. Any one of these first four could also fall under the systems-level programs.

For example, you might be looking at an initial use of a curriculum in the classroom or developing a way to increase teacher quality in mathematics, or you might be looking at the use of the curriculum across the whole district or a state, and that would be more of a policy approach. This is another reason to talk to your program officer is where does your idea fit best.

Slide Seven:

And then looking at the grant programs we had available in the 2010 year our main program of grants is the Education Research and the Special Education Research Grant Programs. This is where most of our topics and grants fall under.

This year in June, we also had a Postdoctoral Research Training Grant Program, but that is not being competed in October.

We have five National Research and Development Centers for competition in October. Three are in the Education Research Center, and two are in the Special Education Research Center. And then the one we will be talking about today is the Center on Scaling Up Effective Schools.

In June, but not in October, we also had a competition for Statistical and Research Methodology in Education. We have another program on the Evaluation of State and Local Education Programs and Policies. That will be competed in October, as well. We have a new initiative on Reading for Understanding in October, and the other initiative is

the Chronically Low-Performing Schools Research Initiative.

And if you're interested in the code or the numbers following each of these, 84.305 stands for the Center on Education Research, and 84.324 stands for the Special Education Center. And then the letters actually stand for the specific grant program.

Slide Eight:

One point I wanted to make is that most of this work on chronically low-performing schools can be done under our existing grant programs. If you were looking at a specific topic, such as how can we improve reading and writing among these students, or math and science, or social and behavioral and teacher quality, there are special grant programs for each of those.

At the same level, at the policy level, we have an Education Policy Finance and Systems grant and a Middle and High School Reform grant, and these two can address many of the topics regarding low-performing schools.

The reason why I want to make sure that you're aware of these existing grants is that as we'll see, the center, the new center, and the new initiatives are very focused on identifying practices and implementing them in schools.

There may be other approaches—there are other approaches to improving chronically low-performing schools. For example, there are whole-school reform approaches, which the argument there is you need to address all the major problems and obstacles at the same time in order for any individual practice to succeed.

There are also process approaches, and under these approaches, they may consider the process of determining what problem to address and what practice to use to address them as just as or even more important than the actual practice being implemented. And my feeling here is that applicants who want to use this type of approach or these type of approaches may be frustrated by the new Center and the new initiatives because they're focusing on a very small number of discrete practices and then implementing them in a set of schools. There's not a whole-school reform going on, and there's really not a focus on the process of the implementation.

In that case, people who are interested in this approach might be more interested in applying to our existing grant programs where these will fit. If you wanted to do a whole-school reform program in an elementary school, you might come in under the Education Policy Program. If you wanted to do it under the middle and high school, then you could come into that grant program as well.

Slide Nine:

Let me start with the new Center, the National Research and Development Center on Scaling Up Effective Schools. This will be one of the three R&D centers being competed for at the National Center for Education Research. We have a single request for applications for all three of them, the 84.305C, and this Center is under Part 3, Topic 1.

It will be in a cooperative agreement, with \$1 to \$2 million a year, direct and indirect, for up to 5 years, and the expectation is that the majority of the funds, up to three-quarters, will be used to address the focused program of research, and I will get more into what I mean by that. But this focused program of research is to be created by a set of tightly-linked studies that build off each other or inform one another rather than just loosely connected studies on the same topic done by different people.

The remainder of the funds are for supplemental studies and leadership activities and the administration of both of these, and I will also discuss what I mean by those two terms.

Slide Ten:

The rationale behind creating such a center is that these chronically low-performing schools do exist and have resisted years of attempts to reform them. The decisionmakers at the state, district, and school level really don't have access to a wide range of policies, programs, and practices with strong evidence for improving these schools. I'm going to use the term "practices" throughout the rest of the talk to stand for policies and programs and practices together. That doesn't mean you shouldn't be considering both policies and programs for this Center.

As a result, what we have are districts and schools trying out many different practices, sometimes at the same time, and they don't always have the opportunity or the capacity to evaluate them. On one hand, they're acting as sort of incubators of intervention, trying out new policies, but on the other hand, they're not necessarily generating the results that would tell us which of these policies should then be more broadly used, and, additionally, they themselves may be spinning their wheels trying out unvalidated programs and then dropping them when they don't seem to work.

The purpose of this Center is, one, to take advantage of the use of these practices going on at the district and school level but to try to link up the schools with researchers in order to identify successful ones and then to develop ways of transferring them to other schools and continuing to evaluate them and make the results more generalizable.

Someone did ask, "*Are you using a standard definition of "chronically low-performing schools?"*" and, as we'll get to, the answer is no. We are actually asking the applicants to propose their own definition when they identify which schools they'll be working with, and I think one reason for that is because there is no standard definition. We wanted to leave it open to the applicant to decide what is an appropriate definition for the work they'll be doing.

Slide Eleven:

Okay. Let's discuss now what I meant by "the focused program of research," which is really composed of six steps; first, to identify schools that are effectively serving underachieving populations in a district or a consortium of districts serving a similar population. What do I mean by "effective" is that, again, it's sort of the applicant who

will make the definition. But these are students who traditionally are not succeeding and are maybe making up our chronically low-performing schools, but, in a smaller number of schools, they actually are doing well; and, secondly, to identify the practices of these effective schools that these schools are using when they serve these low-performing student populations.

The third step is then to develop these practices into a form that can be served, transferred to schools serving a similar student population, but not successfully.

Slide Twelve:

And then fourth is to create a system to support the adoption of these practices at the chronically low-performing schools.

Fifth is to evaluate the implementation of these practices as they are being used in these chronically low-performing schools as to their impact on student achievement as well.

And sixth is to learn some lessons, if necessary, to revise both the practices and the way the implementation is being supported in the chronically low-performing schools. So it is a very long development process.

And, actually, let me go back and say one point. In some ways, this is different than our existing grant programs because we are actually combining several steps together here. We're combining what we would call a Goal 1, or identification, study where you're trying to identify something, in this case, acceptable practices; a Goal 2, a development project where we're trying to develop a new intervention. What we're trying here is develop—take those practices and develop them into a way that can be used by other schools; and then part of a Goal 3, to evaluate the impact of these practices and to evaluate the fidelity of their implementation. What this program is giving us is a chance to put together three goals in one, and that makes it somewhat different than our existing grant program.

Slide Thirteen:

The center of your application would be the Project Narrative, which would be composed of five topic areas, and a peer-review panel will score each of these areas, as well as giving an overall score. Looking at the significance of the focused program of research, and then your research plan for carrying it out, and then some other Center activities, the supplemental studies and leadership activities, and then your management and institutional resources and your personnel—and all this is to be put within 35 single-spaced pages.

Slide Fourteen:

Let me go over each of those sections now. First is the Significance, and this is where you're really describing and justifying the selection of the students, schools, and districts you'll be working with. There is an expectation that in your application, you will come in with a district or a set of districts serving the same type of population, and the

individual schools will all be on board when you come in, allowing you to start up very quickly, and not only that, that you'll know something about them as well, that you'll be familiar with them.

For example, you'll describe the schools and districts you're working with and the type of student population of the schools you are addressing here. You want to know are there—there are different types of low-performing students, different types of groups, and so you may be—you may have selected to work with one type of these groups.

Also, the grade range of the schools you'll be working in, within K-12. It's not expected that you would work from elementary school up through high school. You can pick elementary, middle, high school. If your district happens to have K through 8 or 6 through 12, you may want to work with those types of schools.

Discussing then, again, what are the districts doing already for their low-performing schools, and then you're going to identify—you're showing that here is a district serving a chronically low-performing population. And here are some—and it contains both schools that are not successful with this population, but it is also containing some schools that are effective in serving this population. You need to identify where those schools are, and then you need to show that there is data available for this work, so is there a good student data system. Can you link it well to the teachers so that you will be able to track student performance over time?

And, finally, you want to be able to show that the schools and the districts are willing and able partners in this work, so that they are going to work together with you to identify these practices, to develop them, to implement them, and to evaluate them, and that they fully understand their role.

And this role can run the gamut, of course, from them being more just supportive to them actually taking part and setting up some mechanisms where, for example, setting up some of their effective schools as lab schools or something, allowing you easier access and actually allowing teachers from other schools to come in and see what's going on. This is wide open at this point, but it's got to be made clear that they are fully supportive of the work to be done and will go from that initial identification all the way through the evaluation process with you.

Slide Fifteen:

On your Research Plan, here, again, you are going to identify the effective schools and practices and how you're going to do it; and this is a point where you'll also have to set out what you mean by chronically low-performing schools. There are several examples, I think, in the Request for Applications. You can use test scores. You can use dropout or graduation rates. You could use ranking in the states or the districts. You could compare to NAEP scores, see where they would show up on the NAEP exam. That's open to you. It's just that you need to justify it.

Then the Research Plan will also talk about how you will develop these practices

and a system to support their transfer and then how you will implement them in the noneffective schools, and how you will evaluate their practices in the noneffective schools and how you will revise them. We'll talk a little bit about each of these.

Slide Sixteen:

For example, how are you going to reliably distinguish between more and less effective schools using direct measures of student achievement? I mentioned some of those before. Then, how are you going to actually go in and determine that practices that the effective schools are using and are not being used in the less effective schools?

Here, again, we are not giving a great deal of guidance. We are asking that you propose the method to do these two steps, and then that method will be evaluated by the peer-review panel. But as you propose the method, if you're going to use databases, you should describe them in enough detail so that the peer-review panels can determine that the analyses can actually be done.

You should also describe—if you're going to do any primary data collection—you may want to go into the effective schools to see what they're doing and go into the low-performing schools to see what they're doing to identify the differences and practices.

Then you should describe how you're going to collect that data, what measures you're going to use, their reliability and validity, and what is the sample that's involved, and then you will describe the actual data analysis for each of these.

It may be helpful to take a look at our Education Research Grant Request for Applications under the description of Goal 1, which supports this type of work and other cases.

Slide Seventeen:

Then the second step is your actual development. What are the procedures you'll be using to develop the way you'll take these practices and be able to move them to other schools? Just thinking a lot about this, you'll probably need materials that are actually used with the practice, and then you will use materials that document the practice so somebody can read about what this practice is. You may have training material, and then you'll have to discuss the process for how you're going to support chronically low-performing schools to adopt the practice. And here it may be useful to look at the section of our Education Research Grant Program Request for Applications for Goal 2, which is the development grant that supports this type of development work.

In addition, it's useful at this point to develop the procedures to measure how well the practice is implemented in schools. This will be important when you do a fidelity of implementation analysis, and then to discuss what procedures you'll use for revising the materials and the process based on what you find when you implement them in the chronically low-performing schools.

Slide Eighteen:

Finally—not finally, but, in addition, then the next step is implementation. You need to set out how you’re going to support the implementation of these practices in a set of chronically low-performing schools, and you may want to provide a general model, as you won’t have the specific practices for the application. But you’ll definitely want to set out some specific roles and responsibilities of the schools, districts, and researchers—this, again, showing that the schools and districts realize that they’ll be very involved in this work and that they’ll have to take on a role doing this over the whole 5 years.

Slide Nineteen:

Then you’ll be doing an evaluation. You’ll be evaluating at least three things, which, first, a system that you put together to support implementation; how well does it work? Then the implementation, the actual implementation in the noneffective schools, so this will be your fidelity of analysis. And then the actual impacts on outcomes, both the proximal outcome, the practices to address, and then, additionally, some of the distal outcomes—maybe some of the student achievement outcomes, such as the standardized test scores or something of that nature.

You’ll want to describe the measures you’ve developed for each, or that exists for each, and their validity or reliability, and, if you need to, you can develop measures to defend, and then what design you will use that will allow you to attempt to draw causal conclusions in this assessment. Again, here, we’re leaving this open to the applicant to decide.

There is some discussion of single-case methods as one approach to doing this that could work in the period of time available in the probably small number of schools available for you to work in unless—there may be cases where some of the practices can actually be done at the student level or classroom level, in which you could use randomized trials. But, if not, single case may offer an alternative, but it is not a required alternative if you have a different design that you believe will be just as effective.

Slide Twenty:

Finally, how are you intending to use what you learned from the implementation and evaluation to revise the practices and also to revise the method for supporting the implementation of the practices in these schools? Again, looking at Goal 2 in the Education Research Grant RFA may give you some ideas on how to run this or how to do this as an iterative process over time.

Slide Twenty-one:

Just to sum up on the focus program of research, this is the section that is given the most weight in the peer review, and you should be able to lay out clearly what your objectives are, what your methods are, the analysis plan, a management plan to coordinate this work, time table or a timeline of the work, and your expected outcomes. These are the kinds of things we’re looking for.

Slide Twenty-two:

The other Center activities include supplemental research projects, which are determined in conjunction with the Institute of Education Sciences, but we're asking that you provide two examples of possible projects. These are quick-response research secondary analysis studies that can be done in less than a year. They would complement the work you're doing, and we're just asking for a short description of two examples, two to three paragraphs apiece, but also a description showing that you have the capacity to do such work.

Slide Twenty-three:

Then there are the national leadership activities also done in cooperation. These include such things as position papers, holding meetings, holding conferences, and there is no expectation that you would detail these at this time, but you can—you should provide just two examples of such possible activities and, again, showing that you would have the capacity for doing such work.

Slide Twenty-four:

Important, because this is a large Center with a lot of actors usually involved; here we'll have schools, districts, and maybe research institutions combined. How will this Center be managed? What are the procedures for coordinating among the different groups and the individuals? Showing that the primary institution has the resources to support the Center and showing that if you are a research institution that you have the ability to work with and in schools and districts, partly showing that you've had past experience doing this work, and also again stressing that the schools and districts realize that they are partners in this work and are willing to take part as such.

For-profit or not-for-profit developers of curriculum or materials and distributors can be included in this work if you would like to, but, again, you need to show how their objectivity will be maintained. While they may be involved in implementation and development, they probably shouldn't be involved in the evaluation.

Slide Twenty-five:

Then, describing your personnel—excuse me—showing that you have personnel with expertise for all the work that you're proposing to do, so just making a clear relationship between who's working, what their expertise is, and what their job is inside the Center or what role they will take in the Center, what work they will carry out. You'll need expertise in the grade level that you're working with, and the student population and the education practices you'll be working on, although you may not know those as yet.

You need people with general expertise in education practice, methodology people, people with expertise working with districts and schools, management expertise and leadership expertise, and it's important to have district or state personnel on the research team. It would be very useful to have several of the high-ranking people in the district, either, you know, somebody like a superintendent or assistant superintendent in the field or maybe somebody in charge of the office of the grade level you're working with, just to ensure that the district is on board, and if you want the state on board as well,

that's fine, and that there will be good communication with the leadership of the district and leadership of the research team.

That doesn't mean they have to be on for a great deal of time. They may only be on for 5 percent or 10 percent, but they're on enough that you know you'll have regular meetings with these people, and they'll update you on what the district is planning, and you'll update them.

As well, you can have lower-ranking people, substantive people in the district and the state on the team for longer periods of time, so they can take a greater role in the work to be done.

Let me just check. That's where I'm going to end the talk on the Center. I just wanted to check if there was a question or two regarding the Center. I don't see any at the moment.

Slide Twenty-six:

I'm going to go on now to the Chronically Low-Performing Schools Research Initiative, also a new program set up to be a cooperative agreement with about a quarter of a million to 650,000 a year, direct and indirect, for 5 years, although it is possible to ask for larger amounts if you can justify them.

We're expecting that depending on the peer-review process that there will be multiple awards made. There will be multiple projects going on at the same time; and what makes this slightly different is that we'll be requiring some cooperation among all the projects. We'll have two specific meetings a year in Washington for all the projects to get together, plus, all the projects will attend the IES Research Conference, for a total of three meetings a year.

What we're hoping to do at those meetings is that the teams will share their work, share their results. They may be doing some similar work; they may be doing some very different work. But we'd like them to cooperate on not only critiquing each other's work and discussing ideas for improving it, but in some cases, as some teams may identify or develop successful practices, other teams may want to also evaluate them in their schools as a way of increasing their generalizability.

In a sense, what we're trying to create is sort of an applied brain trust working on the same topic that can be a focus for this work and inform each other. It will be important that applicants come in with the understanding that they will be sharing their results and may be critiquing other folks' results and taking critiques for their own results and responding to them, that this is not just a stand-alone individual project.

Slide Twenty-seven:

The rationale, again, is that we have these chronically low-performing schools. The decisionmakers regarding them lack access to practices with strong evidence for improving such schools, and what we're trying to do here is develop a menu of promising

practices that principals can implement with district support or districts can implement with principal support. What's going to happen is each project is going to be asked to develop at least two interventions, although only one will need to be detailed in the application.

You see, in some sense, this is balancing the Center. The Center is saying there hopefully are effective practices out there that the schools and districts are already using. Let's identify them, evaluate them, and then put them out there for other people to use; and, in this case, we're saying there may be practices that people want to test out and develop, and test out in the schools that are coming out from the research community or from other sources, and then we want to test these and make them available. So it's two approaches with the same goal in mind.

Slide Twenty-eight:

The format of the application is somewhat different. It has four sections: the Significance, the Research Plan, the Personnel, and the Resources. Again, these will be individually evaluated and scored by the peer-review panel, along with a total score, and the work is to be described within a 25 single-spaced Research Narrative.

Somebody asked, "*Can the two interventions be connected and part of an integrated strategy?*" Let me go a little bit further on. Let me go a little bit further, and I'll come back to that.

Slide Twenty-nine:

First, under the Significance. What we're asking people to do here is to create a diagnostic framework for evaluating the factors contributing to low performance. This is creating a model of why the schools that you want to work with are chronically low-performing, and so this should be based on existing theory and research results, and perhaps your own work in the district or the schools you want to work with.

And this framework would identify key problem points in the inputs and processes of these schools, and this should be detailed enough that if you gave it to another principal, they could look at it, think about their school, and say, well, my school works well with this area, this area, and this area. But here are the key areas or junctures that I'm having problems with that are reducing the performance of my school.

Slide Thirty:

The framework will then be used for you to identify two specific problem areas to be addressed by your project. You want to justify your choice of these problem areas, how these areas are preventing success, and also what are the impacts, potential impacts of solving them or partially solving them; how great a contribution will they make to chronically low-performing schools.

I think it gets back to the question: Can the two interventions be connected? We're asking you to look at two different problem areas. Those problem areas may be related and connected to some extent, but we're really asking you—they are separate problem areas. So you may—they may not be—they may be integrated together, but they

may not be. It's going to depend on how close together the problem areas are.

Slide Thirty-one:

Now, in the application, while we're asking—while under the grant, you're going to develop at least two interventions to address at least two problem areas; the application only needs to describe one intervention. You have more space to address that intervention.

You want to describe your intervention and the practices that make it up. You want to discuss the theory of change behind it. So you want to justify it theoretically and empirically, how it will work, and you also want to contrast it to what is existing practice and what's the theory behind the existing practice, and why this intervention should work better. You're going to say what you're going to do and why is it better than what's going on now.

Slide Thirty-two:

Let me take a look at a couple of questions that have come in. Someone had asked *“Is the page limit for the narrative 25 pages or 35 pages?”* The page limit for the Center is 35 pages. The page limit for the Chronically Low-Performing Schools Initiative applications are 25 pages. If you go back to the initial discussion of the Center, you'll see it is slightly longer—it has 5 sections and 35 pages, while applications for the initiative have 4 sections and a total of 25 pages.

Someone is asking *“As stated, we will be identifying two schools, one school that is demonstrating student achievement with high-risk populations and one low-performing school. And my question is, must both schools be from the same district?”*

The school—my guess is you'll probably want to work with more than two schools, and, actually, let me stop. I think this question is more—I'm sorry. This question is really relevant to the Center because the Center is going to be working with the schools demonstrating student achievement with high-risk populations and then trying to transfer practices it uses to the low-performing school.

My guess is, one, you'll want to work with more than two schools. You'll want to try to transfer this material, these practices, to more than one school to see if they work in more than one school; and, yes, you're going to want to work with schools within the same district or districts serving the same student population. And the reason you'll want to—it's more effective to work with one district—is that all the schools will have the same district requirements and the same district procedures, which will make your work a lot easier. If you want to work in several districts, I think a reason for that is because you'll be working with a larger number of schools, and you'll want to draw from them first.

For example, if you're working, let's say, with chronically low-performing Hispanic students in rural districts, something of that nature, in high schools, you'll

probably need to work with a number of districts because there probably aren't that many high schools in each district. So, there, you would need to work with several districts together. But if you were working with elementary schools, it would probably be more efficient to work within, you know, the 10 or 12 elementary schools that are in—or maybe only four or five elementary schools that are within one or two districts in order to reduce the influence of differences between the districts.

Now, another question, ***“Is working with a school, a low-performing school with an Afro-American population that has high student transition; 500 students enter at some point during the year, but very few remain in the system. Will this program support transitional housing?”*** I guess I'm going to ask you to send me an e-mail about what transitional housing is. I'm not exactly sure what that means, but, again, let me point out that the practice would be a practice that the school could do. If we're talking about putting students in housing so they could maintain—stay in their same school—I don't think that's a traditional practice done by the schools.

That may be a practice done by the community, which it would be outside the scope of this grant program. But if it was a practice that the district was already considering, I guess it would be something that could be considered.

A question from an attendee: ***“Is the willingness of a particular school necessary before the application is made?”*** Well, for the Center grants, yes, because the schools and the districts should be on board. And I would say for this one as well, the school has—you're coming in with a set of schools that are willing to allow you to work in them to develop these practices. So, yes, they should be signed on to take part, and they should be very clear about what they're doing. If there's a letter coming in from the principal, it should be very clear: I understand you're going to be working in my school for 3 or 4 years, and that you'll be developing this practice, and that our school will have to make certain accommodations to try out this practice and evaluate that, and that we're willing to do this.

There is another question that says, ***“Can a nonprofit that runs programs focused on interventions targeting low-performing schools propose to research its own partnership program in partnership with the district?”***

Again, if the program is addressing a specific problem, you develop the framework, and you are addressing a specific problem, again, it's not a whole-school reform or a large-scale reform or a process reform. Yes. But you're also going to need to have someone in there to do the evaluation portion probably—well, maybe. It would be helpful to have somebody on board who maybe isn't part of the nonprofit helping with the evaluation portion of the work, but you can certainly do the development and implementation work. Yes.

Someone asked: ***“You need to identify two specific problems and one possible solution for each. Is that correct?”*** You're actually—yes, that is correct. You're going to identify. But the project you're going to be doing is going to look at a minimum of two

problems and a possible solution for each, but your proposal only needs to address one. You only need to address one problem area and then describe a possible intervention to address that problem area. If you feel it's stronger with describing both, you can do that, of course, but that's the minimum you need to describe.

A very specific question: ***“Can this program allocate additional money for extra hours contributed by the teacher toward the intervention?”*** And the answer is yes. School and district personnel can be on the grants. Their time spent in developing or implementing or evaluating the intervention can be covered by this grant.

Another specific question: ***“Do the proposed interventions have to be new interventions, or can they involve testing and interventions that we would like to extend in detailed—deepened and we have not tested this way before?”*** Yes, that's true. As long as they're addressing a problem, they can be existing interventions. As you said, that have not been evaluated rigorously already.

Someone asked about a study of the adoption of an evaluation program for teachers that would be implemented by the district and union with cooperation from the principal. I guess this is an evaluation of teachers. It says “for teachers,” and I'm not sure, but if you can link that to solving a specific problem that is blocking student achievement in these schools, that would certainly be fine as well. The point here is that it's a practice that a principal could select from with the district support to do it or a district could select from and implement it with the support of their principal.

Coming back now to the Research Plan, we're at the development of the intervention. You'll want to describe exactly what you are going to develop. You have probably done that a little bit in the Significance section, but, here, you can put it in more detail, what is the intervention you're developing.

How it will be developed? Again, looking at some of the goals, the Goal 2 discussion in our Education Research Grant Program—looking at how an iterative development process can be done where you implement, observe, and revise so that there is feedback going into you're developing. We're not looking here for something that's developed once and then tested over 5 years. What we're hoping is things will be developed and tried out within your project several times over the course of the project time period and possibly, as well as I mentioned before, between different groups as well.

You will need to set out what does “operating as intended” mean. If—so we can determine that once it's implemented, is it really implemented as you expect? And then what are measures you can use to determine that it's operating as intended? And then what data you will collect on operation? And then, how will you use this data to determine what requirements are necessary to revise this work? It would be helpful here, also, to include a draft time table of how this work will be done.

Slide Thirty-three:

In addition for the development, you want to know is it really feasible. You want

to have some idea, is this a feasible intervention for low-performing schools? You'll be developing it in a low-performing school but with a lot of support, so you need to consider, will it be easily developed and easily implemented in other schools or what may be roadblocks to it there as well.

Now, additionally, where are you going to do the developing? Here is where you should identify your participating district or districts and the schools that are going to be involved, describing their characteristics again, showing that they're serving—that they're low-performing, that they're serving under-performing populations, justifying your choice of these schools; and, again, up to the applicant to define what criteria they want to use for chronically low-performing, and that's showing that these schools meet that criteria.

Slide Thirty-four:

Okay. We have a group of questions. Let me just finish the Research Plan, and I'll turn to them.

The next step of the Research Plan is the evaluation. You want to test the promise of the intervention, and so we use the term “promise of the intervention” because you're not going to have a large enough number of schools nor the time to do a true efficacy evaluation. We don't expect you to be doing a randomized trial of 20 schools, treatment schools, and 20 control schools, but we're leaving again the design to be proposed to the applicant. What design can you use to provide probably the best evidence with such a grant, with such a number of schools and the time frame?

In the Request for Application, we offer the idea of a single-subject experimental design, allowing you to work with a smaller number of schools over time to continue to try the project—try the intervention out several different times with different schools and to compare the results.

Your focus will probably be on the proximal outcomes, with some attention to distal ones. For example, let's say you determined that attendance was a problem in your school. You implemented some sort of intervention to increase attendance, so you could track attendance, let's say, over every grading period. Over time, there could be several different outcomes over the course of a school year, and that would be your proximal outcome—how did attendance change over time.

Then, at the end of the year, you might have standardized test scores to see if those actually go up, but you may not have enough time to collect enough of the annual scores to do the results. But the hope is that you'll be able to identify—is this intervention having an impact on the specific problem you identified, and then maybe having an impact on some overall school and student indicators.

Describing what your design is and what analysis you'll do with it, so, again, addressing the measures, data collection procedures, fidelity of implementation, and your analysis. It may be useful to review Goal 3 discussion in the Education Research Grant Program Request for Applications. But, again, we're not asking for an efficacy evaluation

that's described there in detail. We're not asking for a large-scale evaluation using a large number of schools.

Okay. Let me turn back to some of the questions now. ***“Does the theory of change and discussion of current practice need to be framed within the sites which we partner or education in general?”***

I would say education, in general, to start with and then—but it should be—but your schools that you're going to work with should be able to use the theory of change and the diagnostic framework. You can draw upon the general literature and results for that work.

The next question is, ***“Can grant funds be used as bonus awards to educators?”***

You know, if it's a bonus award—that's an interesting question. If it's a bonus—if the bonus is the intervention—it certainly could be if they're small enough. We can't support large bonuses—and you'll have to talk to us in person—but we've supported several other grant programs that have given bonus awards, but in many of those cases, the applicant has gone out to another funder to get the money for the bonuses because we're not allowed to give large bonuses to individuals or to schools.

“Where can I find the IES definition of cooperative agreement?”

I think I'll have to get back to you on the specifics of that. I would say the reason we use cooperative agreements is that they're more flexible, and that they let us work more directly with the grant—with the grantee—on the work to be done. As “cooperative” means that there is some give-and-take from our side; whereas, a grant, the applicant primarily has more—once the grant is given, the applicant has more authority to do the work.

“What do you mean by a process intervention?”

A process intervention may be something like bringing the school together, having the school discuss what are its key problems, having the schools do some research and decide what might be useful interventions to address those problems, and then having the school as a group implement them. That is something that could be supported on some of the other grant programs I mentioned.

It doesn't work as well in this case, because you need to come in, in your application, with a specific problem and the specific practices already in mind. You couldn't come in and say, we're going to get the faculty together; they're going to decide what the major problem facing the school is. And then we're going to search the literature and find an intervention that addresses that problem, and then we're going to implement it all together in a way that everybody agrees on. That could be done under—if you were doing that in a middle school in the Middle School Grant Program. But you can see that won't work here very well because your application has to say, here's the problem I'm

addressing, here's the intervention I'm going to develop to address that problem.

“Does the corporation need to be tax-exempt in order to apply for this grant?”

No. Any organization that has the capacity to do this work can apply for this grant. A university, a nonprofit, a for-profit institution are all capable of applying. So that, in fact, you do need to have an indirect cost agreement with the government, and that's something to check on. If you don't have one, you can get that within a month, and there's information on getting that on the website, but that's—there is no other requirement. There is no tax-exempt requirement.

“Is there a cap on the number of students served in the awarded money ratio as long as the expense is well-justified for a quality intervention?”

You know, this, I would say no, as long as it sounds reasonable. If you came in with something like—what we're trying to develop here are a set of practices that any principal could draw upon if they saw the need and the use for it.

If the practice was astronomically costly, then it would be, of course, less useful to most principals in the country than if the practice was reasonable. On the other hand, if the practice had a large impact versus a cheaper practice that had a smaller impact, again, so there's sort of a cost-effectiveness idea here. So that, again, is something maybe to talk more in detail with the project officer.

“Is there a minimum number of schools that should be included in the project?”

There is no minimum number set. The idea, though, is that you're going to—again, it's how you justify it. If you come in with one school, that's probably not going to be considered enough because you have to both develop this and try it out. You'll probably need several schools, but depending on the work to be done and how you're going to develop and evaluate it, the number of schools and the cost of the intervention, the number of schools may vary between the projects funded.

“Is there a typical length of each iteration is another question?”

The answer is no. I think that is going to come from your experience in development and the type of intervention you're doing. Some interventions probably take more time, and some can probably be iterated fairly quickly.

“Can an institution submit more than one proposal?”

If you're doing more than one intervention, yes. It might be difficult to submit the same proposal using the same schools, because if you're doing more than one intervention in the same—it probably won't work as well in the same schools, as you'll be, as you'll be conflicting with one another. It might seem more reasonable if you were doing them in a separate set of schools, unless there was some way you could set it up so

there wasn't any—there wasn't any interference between them, but an institution can certainly submit more than one proposal as long as the proposals are different in substance.

Slide Thirty-five:

Going on back to Personnel, very similar to the Center. You want to detail that you have the expertise for all the work you are doing. So improvement practices, in general, or the specific ones you'll be using—developing interventions, implementing interventions, and analyzing interventions, as well as working with teachers, schools and districts, project management. And, again, having district and state personnel with substantive research roles or substantive roles on the research team, trying to have some folks at the upper level of the district, state, and the school level to show commitment there, and, if desired, to also have some folks on there from more—doing more of the substantive work in the schools with the practices.

Slide Thirty-six:

On the Resources section, you are trying to show that all the institutions involved have the capacity to carry out the proposed work again. Here, again, you're also showing that the key decisionmakers in the state, district, and the schools fully understand and support the evaluation—having the detailed letters of support from everyone—and separating out any implementers and evaluators.

Slide Thirty-seven:

Let's see. I'm checking if there are any other substantive questions here. No, not at the moment.

I'll just go into some of the logistics. We ask for a Letter of Intent, but that due date has already passed. You can still apply, but it would be helpful if you would e-mail a paragraph describing it, just describing your project, so we can give you some feedback.

The Request for Applications that describes what we would like to see in the application is at this website, and there's the Center application, the Center Request for Applications given there, and the Initiative Request for Applications is given there.

We have also just posted a new Application Submission Guide, which gives you advice and tells you some shortcuts to making your application.

Slide Thirty-eight:

Because the application is done at Grants.gov, which is the federal website for grants applications in general, there may be parts of this that are not applicable to our application. So it's useful to take a look at that Application Submission Guide as well.

The Application Package is now posted for both the Center grants and the initiative. The easiest way is to go to www.grants.gov, look under—do a basic search by the CFDA number, type in 84-305, and then up will come the grants list. Then you'll click on that, the grant you're interested in, and then, under that, you click on

“Application,” and, under that, you’ll click on “Download,” and you’ll get the Application Package.

Grants.gov does have a Help Line. We strongly advise starting and completing your Application Package before the deadline of October 1, 2009, and that deadline is at 4:30.00 seconds. That is Washington, DC, time, and that is by the Grants.gov computer.

I just stress that because every deadline we do has a few people who come in after 4:30, and under our fairness guidelines, those applications are considered late. And unless there’s a very good reason for their being late, they will not be reviewed, and a good reason does not usually include a problem with the website. So what happens on October 1 is the website gets very busy. It sometimes does go down for periods of time, and people have trouble getting their applications in on time. And that’s why we always stress—try to get it in a day before or several days before.

The earliest anticipated start date would be July 1, 2010. Please build that into your timeline in either application, and you will hear—let me just say, you will probably hear—the latest you should hear is at least a month before that. Sometime in June, you should hear the status of your application.

Slide Thirty-nine:

All of the applications go through the peer-review process. They are first reviewed for compliance, which is very simple and wide open, just to make sure you met the requirements laid out in the RFA, that, you know, you’re using 12-point font, that you have 1-inch margins, the readability one, and also that you are addressing the topics. But this is a very open kind of compliance that most grant applications go right through it, unless there’s something very odd about them.

They are then assigned to a review panel, and two or three members will conduct the primary review. Normally, one reviewer is the content specialist, and one reviewer is a methodology specialist, and you need to be writing for both types of people. And then those that are rated highly will go to the full panel for their review.

Just some tips about that. At the full panel, they’ll have both specialists who know your topic and folks who are specialists in other areas of education. You’re writing for both specialists and generalists in both substance and also methodology.

It’s often helpful to have an opening sort of a quick paragraph that just lays out your work in general, so that people get an idea right up front what you’re doing and then can think about that as they read through the Significance section.

It’s always important to have very clear descriptions of your interventions so people can follow along with what you’re doing. You should not assume everyone is an expert in the intervention you’re working with. You want to be very clear and not use jargon when describing it.

It's helpful to have both a content and methods person read your application all the way through to ensure continuity; and, as I mentioned, in the Personnel section, it's also helpful to link every person to what job they'll be doing in the project. So if there's going to be a survey done and you have a survey expert, don't only say so-and-so is an expert in survey methodology and has done grant work before on surveys, but then have that last line, "and they will be responsible for the survey of implementation of our intervention at the school," just to make that easy connection.

Slide Forty:

You'll receive e-mail notification, as I mentioned, at least 1 month before the earliest start date. So you should receive notification by June of 2010, and you'll receive copies of your reviewer comments.

Slide Forty-one:

Then, just final websites here. Our general website, the Request for Applications, the Application Package. I am a program officer, and I unfortunately left off my colleague, David Sweet, who is the other program officer for both of these programs. You can contact him at david.sweet@ed.gov, as well.

Okay. Let me stop there and take some additional questions at this time.

"When you say separating implementers and evaluators, are you suggesting that a team member should not participate in both roles?"

Well, the main purpose there was the—yeah. I would say if someone was involved in the development and implementation, you certainly want them to be separated from the evaluation, or if you're using an intervention developed from outside with an outside group, you probably wouldn't want them in evaluation either.

If you have someone who is just supporting implementation and you don't feel they have a very strong—I mean, you don't see the need for a very strong link or you don't see that they're having very strong feelings toward the project, you could probably use them as an evaluator as well if there's a need for that and if you can justify the need for it.

For example, implementers may be very good at doing the fidelity of implementation because they know what implementation should look like. It certainly makes sense for them to do that, but whether they should be doing all the observations of the outcomes that will be used to evaluate it, it may be a stronger application if there is a little bit of a separation between the two.

"For folks who submitted LOIs, will we receive feedback on them?"

Yes. We actually, officially haven't received the LOIs yet. We probably will receive them next week, and then we'll be sending out our e-mails of response to them and asking if you want to talk to us in more detail about them.

Another question is, ***“Can we use this grant to build upon a body of research that is already being funded through a federal grant?”***

And, yes, you certainly can do that.

Next question is, ***“Will not sending an LOI hurt our chances?”***

It shouldn't. It will not hurt your chances. The peer-review panel does not see the Letters of Intent. They only see your application. Anybody who did send a Letter of Intent, if you need to change anything you shouldn't feel constrained by that. And then it asks, who should we send an e-mail to, and you should send it to either myself or to David Sweet.

Okay. Somebody is asking again about separating implementers and evaluators.

“Can this be accomplished at the individual personnel level or it must be institutional?”

That can be at the individual level if you have separate people; and, again, if you can make a case that an implementer should be involved in the evaluation, you should make that case as well.

“Will the application review be author-blind is another question?”

The answer is no. The Personnel section is one of the sections scored by the peer-review panel. They will be looking for expertise in all the portions of the work proposed. They will also be looking at past record of the work. If you have done development work in the past, that will be on your CVs, which are provided.

And that raises a good question: If you're applying from an institution or organization that doesn't have a strong record in this work, you may want to consider partnering with another organization that does have a stronger record.

“Does there need to be a firewall between intervention developers and implementers and those evaluating?”

Again, I think if you're the developer, the proposal will be stronger if you're also not the—if you're not the primary evaluator. As we mentioned before, you can have different people developing and evaluating, and that's probably a stronger proposal than the same person developing and evaluating. If you could even within the same institution have somewhat different team, it might be a bit stronger for that reason.

On the other hand, as I mentioned, if your implementer is also an excellent evaluator, you may want to use them for both, and you may want to argue how you're going to ensure that they are not unduly influenced one way or another.

The next question is, ***“Do we need to have external evaluators or an internal evaluator?”***

I think you can go with either approach. I mean, the downside of an external evaluator is that they’re expensive, and there certainly isn’t a lot of money, at least in the initiative, to support an expensive evaluation. But, again, we’re only looking for the promise of impact. We’re not doing efficacy evaluation. It may not be worthwhile to bring in an external evaluator unless they had specific skills that you lack.

“Must all schools in the project have the same two identified problems in common? Would each school or could each school have different problems?”

Since you’re going to be addressing—at least in the application—you’re addressing only one problem. The schools that you cite in the application should be having the same problem, and you’re probably going to want to work with more than one school. Now, that wouldn’t prevent you in your actual project from working in two sets of schools, one set having one problem and one set having another problem. But for this application, I think you need to have several schools with the same problem.

“Can interventions be targeted to school leaders?”

Certainly they can if the problem you think is a leadership problem and you have an intervention to address that problem. Yes, of course, and I’ll also note here that we do have a topic in the Education Research Grant Program called Education Leadership, and you may want to consider that grant program as well because that can offer you some other opportunities.

I think another question on external evaluator—again, I may have stressed this too much. I don’t think you necessarily need an external evaluator for the initiative, again, because we are only looking at the promise of the practices. I would say unless you are weak at evaluation, you don’t need an external evaluator.

The next question: ***“Is there a desire by IES for this initiative to focus on specific states or specific areas such as urban or rural or high-poverty schools in one state versus another state?”***

The answer is no. I think there may be from the peer-review panel’s point of view, if you’re addressing a chronically low-performing population, if there were two—if there was a grant—if there’s an application addressing a very widespread chronically low-performing population, that might be of more interest than a very narrow-performing population, but, on the other hand, if that narrow population is known to be in deep and constantly—I mean a very difficult population to work with, there may be interest there. But there is no focus on a state or region for this work at all.

Another question is ***“What do we mean by chronically low-performing schools?”***

This is a somewhat open term, but the idea being—and leaving it up to you to define—is these are schools that over long periods of time—5 years, 10 years—have traditionally been underperforming. It's not schools that may jump up and jump down again. Maybe they get a new principal, or they get a new intervention, and they move around a great deal. These are schools that are really, you know, traditionally, 50 percent of the kids, for example, of these high schools or 50 percent over the last 10 years are dropping out. I mean, this is a school you know—you can have a very good idea that for the next few years, you're not going to—unless something radical changes, you're not going to get much difference than the outcomes of the students there. There's a tradition that of low performance at these schools.

How to define that tradition, we are leaving up to you; and, as I mentioned before, that could be based on dropout rates, attendance rates. It could be based on achievement scores. It could be based on positions, you know, a rank position within the state that say these are the schools that consistently show up in the bottom of the 10 percent of schools in the state, or it could be, you know, linked to NAEP outcomes that these are schools with a huge percentage of their kids not performing or performing below basic levels of achievement.

Someone else asked, ***“To evaluate the promise, could you use comparative interrupted time series?”***

And certainly you could if that data was available to do that, if you're going to have the time. I mean, in some sense, single-case design where you use the same outcomes multiple times over the year is very similar to a comparative interrupted time series. Again, we're not saying you can't use comparative interrupted time series or even an interrupted time series or even some of the more traditional comparison practices. It's really what works for your intervention that will give the greatest—greatest or most—probably the most believable and most valid measures of what promise of this is, promise of these practices are.

A couple of other questions. ***“If an application is approved, what is the process for fund distribution or distribution to the project team?”***

Well, the earliest—let's say you put in you wanted to start July 1, and you were awarded a grant in June. You heard you had the grant. Then, probably, the first year of funding would be turned over to you at the beginning of the grant period, and then you would spend it. You would have to have a system set up to receive the funding from the government, and you would need to have a management system that could track your expenditures. And then traditionally, every year, you would provide an annual report of how the work was done. That annual report would be reviewed, and if it was found acceptable, then the next year's funding would be distributed to you.

“Is it possible that grants might be awarded to multiple grantees within the same state?”

Certainly. There are no restrictions. The review process is purely on the quality of the application. Applications that are scored Outstanding or Excellent have the opportunity to be funded—and so there is no looking at geographic distribution of these awards.

“Is there any possibility that the evaluation would extend beyond the three years available for implementing the intervention?”

I’m not sure where the 3 years is coming from. Both of these—both the Center and the initiative, are for 5-year programs. That’s the longest period of time we’re allowed to give funds for. There are cases where no cost extensions if you haven’t expended all your funding, can go for an additional year to carry out the work. But, beyond that, there is no opportunity to provide additional funds and continue the work.

Oh, I meant five. Okay. So somebody sent in and said they meant 5 years, and, as I mentioned, 5 years is the longest period of time we can—we can provide a grant for. And while there is an opportunity perhaps if you haven’t expended all your funds for a 1-year no-cost extension, if you can justify the need for it there. We can’t support additional years of the evaluation under this grant.

That doesn’t mean you can’t come back in year 4 and say, look, we’ve got results. This is exciting work. We want to apply for another grant, maybe not this grant, maybe for another grant under the Education Research Grant Program. We want to do a full-fledged evaluation of these practices to see if they work, and then you’re coming in with a body of evidence in support of that. That certainly is possible.

That’s the last of the questions I see. I’ll just pause for a minute to see if any other questions come in.

Let me just reiterate to please send in—if you think of any questions afterwards, please send them into David Sweet or myself, and we’ll respond to you.

Okay. Well, again, let me say thanks to everybody who tuned in today, and I’ll just reiterate, please do contact us. If you did send in a Letter of Intent, we’ll be getting in touch with you over—probably over the next 2 weeks, and over the next few months, please feel free to contact us and to discuss your idea in more detail.

Thank you again, and take care.