

## A. Interview with the VPSC Project Director and Staff

(Data collection: 2006-07)

### 1. Definition of the VPSC Initiative

- 1.1 What activities or staff are being supported with VPSC funds? [*Use the revised proposal budget as a starting point, but be prepared for changes to have occurred.*]
- 1.2 Is it reasonable to define the initiative according to how the funds are being spent? If not, provide some other rationale for defining the initiative. [*Also check the revised proposal budget.*]
- 1.3 Describe the VPSC initiative in 2-3 short sentences.
- 1.4 How participatory was the *planning process* that was used in developing the VPSC initiative? [*Probe mainly for parent and school participation, and describe the nature of the participation.*]
- 1.5 What were the main problems encountered in *planning* (not implementing) the VPSC initiative?
- 1.6 What have been the main problems encountered in *implementing* the VPSC initiative?

### 2. Identity of the Schools Involved in the VPSC Initiative

- 2.1 Define the breadth of the initiative across its participating schools:

2.1.1 Academic years covered by implementation (not including planning year):	_____
2.1.2 No. and grade level of sending schools:	_____
2.1.3 No. and grade level of receiving schools or sites, by district: [ <i>Also see Qs. 7.1 and 8.1 below.</i> ]	_____
2.1.4 No. and grade level of remaining schools, by district: Within this number, no. and grade level of schools that might become sending schools in the near future: [ <i>Define criteria used.</i> ]	_____ _____ _____

- 2.2 Describe any “zone” pattern and how zones were defined. [*If possible, obtain a map of the schools and of the zone pattern.*]
- 2.3 How were the sending and receiving schools identified to be part of the initiative? [*If related to school performance, obtain documentation of such performance.*]
- 2.4 Were any logically eligible schools “exempted” from becoming sending or receiving schools? [*If YES, please describe.*]
- 2.5 What are the grades for which choice options can be exercised (e.g., the entering grade for each school, but not the other grades)?
- 2.6 About how many students are eligible to transfer, due to the VPSC initiative, by grade level (and school, if possible)?
- 2.7 About how many seats will be created at receiving schools, due to the VPSC initiative, by grade level (and school or site, if possible)? [*Also see responses to Qs. 7.1 and 8.1 below.*]
- 2.8 How did the district estimate the number of seats available at receiving schools? [*Also comment on the quality of the procedures and data used by the district.*]
- 2.9 What is the schedule of tuition transfers, if any, that accompanied the student transfer?

**3. Student Assignment Criteria and Procedures**

- 3.1 What criteria have been used to define students eligible for transfer, and what source of data is used to review whether students are eligible?
- 3.2 How and when do the eligible students indicate whether they want to transfer, and how many potential receiving schools may they identify? [*Obtain an application form and review a sample of the completed forms.*]

<p>3.2.1 Do they have to indicate, explicitly, that they wish to stay at their present school? _____</p> <p>3.2.2 How does the date when the VPSC choice applications are due coincide with the application dates for other choice options—e.g., to charters, magnets, or any other special schools? _____</p> <p>3.2.3 Identify the location(s) where the applications must be submitted and the rationale for selecting the location(s): _____</p>
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3.3 What criteria are used in deciding to approve a transfer? [*Confirm the criteria through documentation and discussions with others, including parents, if possible.*]

Check whether the following student assignment criteria are used; if YES, state the criterion:	Present	Criterion
3.3.1 <i>Proximity</i> preferences (e.g., 50 percent of the seats are reserved for students who live near enough to walk to school: [ <i>Note whether these families still have to fill out a choice application.</i> ])	_____	_____
3.3.2 <i>Racial fairness</i> guidelines (e.g., the ratio of Whites and non-Whites cannot vary more than 10 percentage points from that of the district as a whole):	_____	_____
3.3.3 <i>Socioeconomic fairness</i> guidelines (e.g., the ratio of students eligible for free or reduced lunch cannot vary more than 10 percentage points from that of the district as a whole):	_____	_____
3.3.4 <i>Sibling</i> preferences:	_____	_____
3.3.5 <i>Special provisions</i> , if any, for students requiring bilingual or special education programs:	_____	_____
3.3.6 <i>Substitution</i> rules when available seats, especially those designated by proximity, race, or socioeconomics, are undersubscribed:	_____	_____
3.3.7 <i>Lottery</i> or <i>random assignment</i> when seats are oversubscribed (and especially whether separate lotteries in effect exist for different subgroups of seats—e.g., Whites and non-Whites): [ <i>If used, describe the lottery or random assignment procedure.</i> ]	_____	_____
3.3.8 Whether and how a transferring student will receive <i>supplemental services</i> :	_____	_____
3.3.9 Whether and how an eligible but non-transferring student will receive <i>supplemental services</i> :	_____	_____
3.3.10 Whether the program maintains a <i>waiting list</i> , and how late in the semester students can still transfer, if a seat becomes vacant:	_____	_____
3.3.11 Whether the students originally enrolled in the receiving schools can be displaced:	_____	_____

3.4 Have there been any complaints regarding the student assignment process:

3.4.1	By students and their families? [If YES, describe.]	_____
3.4.2	By sending schools' staff? [If YES, describe.]	_____
3.4.3	By receiving schools' staff? [If YES, describe.]	_____
3.4.4	By any other relevant parties? [If YES, describe.]	_____

3.5 How has the district's student population changed, relative to the population of school-age children?

**4. Parent Notification Procedures**

- 4.1 How did parents participate (and how many participated) in the planning of the choice program and especially in the design of the parent information center?
- 4.2 When were parents first notified of the choice options supported by the VPSC initiative? [Obtain a copy of the written notification.]
- 4.3 What feedback information is collected to assure that all parents are being properly informed about their choice options?

**5. Parent Information Center(s) (PICs)**

- 5.1 What district-wide enrollment does the PIC cover, and how many students is it actually serving? [Depending upon the choice program, the number of applicants for transfer may only be a portion of the total student enrollment—obtain both numbers.]
- 5.2 What are the physical characteristics of the PIC's location?

5.2.1	Access conditions (e.g., parking and public transportation):	_____
5.2.2	Physical facility (e.g., in a high school; working atmosphere):	_____
5.2.3	Hours and days of operation:	_____
5.2.4	No. of different languages spoken by staff, and match to student population:	_____

- 5.3 Enumerate the PIC's staff, by title and FTE. Also note the supervisory relationships and to whom the PIC director reports in the district.
- 5.4 Enumerate the outreach activities undertaken by the PIC during the past school year. Also, give some estimate of the frequency of each type of activity:

	How often?
5.4.1 Home visits or individual conferences with school (or choice) staff:	_____
5.4.2 Use of mass media:	_____
5.4.3 Use of community or neighborhood events or facilities:	_____
5.4.4 Other:	_____

- 5.5 How have these outreach activities been adjusted, if at all, from year to year?
- 5.6 How does the PIC know that its outreach activities are sufficient in reaching all eligible families? [*Cite the actual data used by the PIC in developing this knowledge.*]
- 5.7 What is the nature of the parent survey (sample and instrument), if any, conducted by the PIC, and how are the survey results used?
- 5.8 How does the PIC work with individual schools? [*If YES to any of the following, please describe*]:

5.8.1 The PIC maintains up-to-date information about the schools' enrollments:	_____
5.8.2 The PIC arranges tours of the schools:	_____
5.8.3 The PIC encourages schools to develop their own marketing materials:	_____
5.8.4 The PIC helps the schools to disseminate information about themselves:	_____

**6. Transportation Support within VPSC Initiative**

6.1 Were VPSC funds used to support new transportation services? *[If YES, please describe.]*

6.1.1 Purchase of buses:	_____
6.1.2 Hiring of drivers:	_____
6.1.3 Increases in drivers' salaries:	_____
6.1.4 Revamping of technological infrastructure (e.g., computerized bus routes):	_____

6.2 Were school hours changed (e.g., staggered daily times or alternate school calendars) to control transportation costs? *[If so, describe and note whether the changes were related to VPSC or not.]*

6.3 Whether VPSC funds were used to support new transportation services or not, collect data prior to and during the VPSC Program on: *[If possible, obtain these data for individual schools, especially the sending and receiving schools.]*

6.3.1 The number of buses:	_____
6.3.2 The number of students riding buses:	_____
6.3.3 Average and range of trip times:	_____
6.3.4 The number of schools served each day by a single bus:	_____

6.4 How important are the augmented transportation services to the entire VPSC initiative (e.g., did parents pay for or otherwise support a portion of the existing services, before)?

**7. Capacity-Building (New Schools or Sites to Serve as Receiving Schools)**

- 7.1 How many *new* schools or sites (and how many seats), if any, were opened as receiving schools, with VPSC support? *[Also see Q. 8.1.]*
- 7.2 What are the substantive educational themes at these schools, and in what way do they reflect a diversification or replication of themes already covered by the existing schools?
- 7.3 How were the themes chosen, and did parents participate in the process?

**8. Capacity-Building (New or Expanded Programs at Existing Schools or Sites)**

- 8.1 How many existing schools or sites have been expanded or added as receiving schools (and how many seats), with VPSC support? [*The total of the schools or sites and seats in 7.1 and 8.1 should coincide with the responses to Qs. 1.4.3 and 2.7 above.*]
- 8.2 What are the substantive educational themes at these schools, and in what way do they reflect a diversification or replication of themes already covered?
- 8.3 Describe the specific actions taken to increase the capacity of the existing receiving schools: [*Check each of the following, and if YES, describe.*]

8.3.1	New educational programs (e.g., magnets or academies within the school) at the existing schools:	_____
8.3.2	Administrative changes to increase the school's enrollment capacity:	_____
8.3.3	Supplemental services to assist the transferring students:	_____
8.3.4	Professional development to assist educators in providing instruction to the transferring students:	_____
8.3.5	Other:	_____

**9. Capacity-Building (Sending Schools)**

- 9.1 Do sending schools lose funds in relation to out-transfers? [*If so, describe the procedures and the amount of funds involved.*]
- 9.2 Are the sending schools under a formal sanction category (e.g., in need of improvement, in corrective action, or restructuring), and how long have they been in the category?

9.3 Whether in a formal sanction category or not, what actions will be (or have been) taken to improve the future performance of the sending schools (check all of the following)?

9.3.1 Professional development or other educational assistance:	_____
9.3.2 Adoption of new educational practices:	_____
9.3.3 Restructuring of the school:	_____
9.3.4 Elimination of the school:	_____

**10. Relationship to Title I Provisions of NCLB**

10.1 Has the district started to offer the school choice options under the new provisions of Title I, and if so, how do these arrangements relate to those of the VPSC initiative?

10.1.1 Are different schools involved in each, or are VPSC funds used to complement the use of Title I funds for the same schools?	_____
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**11. Transferring Students and Comparisons with non-Transferring Students**

11.1 For each relevant academic year in implementing the VPSC initiative, obtain the following data (preferably noting the individual sending and receiving schools):

11.1.1 How many students were eligible to apply for transfer?	_____
11.1.2 How many applied, and how many were transferred?	_____
11.1.3 What were the main experiences in dealing with under- or over-subscription?	_____
11.1.4 What were the main lessons learned about the transfer process, and did these lessons lead to modifications in the procedures used the following year?	_____

11.2 Based on the analysis of individual student records [*such analysis may be done by the VPSC*

site], how do the transferring students compare to those eligible but not transferring, on the following characteristics?

11.2.1	Annual academic performance: [ <i>Start with the year prior to the initiative.</i> ]	_____
11.2.2	Demographic characteristics (White vs. non-White; school lunch vs. non-school lunch):	_____
11.2.3	Other characteristics that might account for academic differences between the two groups (e.g., number of siblings; level of parents' education; nature of parents' employment and income):	_____

## 12. Sending and Receiving Schools and Their Changes Over Time

12.1 For each sending and receiving school and for each academic year of the initiative, track:

12.1.1	The total enrollments, by grade level:	_____
12.1.2	The proportion of White and non-White students:	_____
12.1.3	The proportion of students eligible for free or reduced lunch:	_____
12.1.4	The academic performance (mathematics and reading) of all the students at the school: [ <i>Use all test data available, even for grades not necessarily affected by the VPSC initiative, not just the transferring students.</i> ]	_____
12.1.5	Obtain district-wide averages for the above, omitting the sending and receiving schools, to permit contextual comparisons:	_____

12.2 At the receiving schools, what problems have emerged that might have been associated with the transfers or transfer process, and what remedies have been put into place?

12.3 At the sending schools, what problems have emerged that might have been associated with the transfers or transfer process, and what remedies have been put into place?

12.4 What is the evidence that the sending schools have taken more serious measures to improve their performance or otherwise to become more competitive?

12.5 Is there any evidence that *potential* sending schools are taking more serious measures to

improve their performance or otherwise to become more competitive?

### **13. Contextual Conditions**

- 13.1 What other choice options and programs are available in the district (not covered by the VPSC initiative), and how many students are involved in such options or programs?
- 13.2 Have these other choice options and programs changed during the period of the VPSC initiative and that might have played a role in the preceding early outcomes?
- 13.3 Have there been any notable changes by the surrounding districts that might have played a role in the preceding early outcomes?
- 13.4 Have there been any changes in the community (e.g., residential relocation patterns) that might have played a role in the preceding early outcomes?
- 13.5 How has the district's "share" of the student population changed, relative to that of private schools? [*Obtain annual data by grade level, if possible.*]

## **B. Interview with Other Participating Persons (e.g., principals)**

(Data collection: 2006-07)

1. What is your connection to the VPSC initiative [e.g., principal or teacher at participating school, parent of participating student, other]?
2. How were you made aware of the VPSC initiative?
3. Can you briefly describe your understanding of the VPSC initiative?
4. What changes have you seen or experienced as a result of the VPSC initiative?
5. How has *student enrollment* at your school [or your child's school] changed during the past year and to what extent have these changes been associated with the VPSC initiative, compared to other conditions?
6. What changes in the *academic program* have been made as part of the VPSC initiative, and how well are these changes working?
7. What changes in *school administration* (e.g., redefining school hours or the school year) have been made as part of the VPSC initiative, and how well are these changes working?
8. How smooth or disruptive was the timing or sequence of key events in the VPSC initiative —e.g., application deadlines or parent notification dates?
9. How well do you think the VPSC initiative has been received by teachers, principals, and parents, and do you think they are sufficiently informed about any new role(s) expected of them under the initiative?
10. How has student behavior and academic performance changed, and to what extent are these changes associated with VPSC?
11. Did VPSC provide any other benefits or create any other problems that have not been addressed by the preceding questions?

## **C. Interview with the Comparison Site District and Title I Staff**

(Data collection: 2006-07)

### **Procedures**

One-day site visits will be made to comparison sites in spring of 2007 (February-May). Where the comparison sites are within the jurisdiction already covered by the VPSC Program's site (e.g., another "zone" in a VPSC district or another district within a statewide VPSC initiative), the needed data should be collected from the VPSC and related district staff.

Where the comparison sites are outside of the VPSC jurisdiction, initial contact with the sites should emphasize that our National Evaluation is: 1) covering public school choice, 2) selecting some sites where minimal choice options other than Title I, magnets, and charters are in operation, and 3) making site visits to sites that are near a VPSC Program's site but that did not receive a VPSC award. To minimize burden, the site visit will involve interviews with: the Title I coordinator and any related district staff (e.g., overseeing magnets and charters).

**Preparation for Site Visits.** Prior to any site visit, field teams should collect and analyze data about the targeted area. This information will have come from several sources, including: the VPSC Program's site that is aware of (and helped to select) the comparison site, and materials gathered from the district or state Web sites.

**Assembling of Evidence and Preliminary Reports Immediately Following Site Visits.** Field teams are urged to begin the formal analysis and report-writing process as soon as a site visit has ended, though additional data may still have to be collected. Assembling data and drafting narratives proceeds more efficiently and with much higher quality if this time sequence is followed. Teams should reserve the day or two *after* the site visit for this activity, avoiding other commitments.

**Outline of Report.** The report should follow the same heading structure as the topics of inquiry described next.

### **Topics of Inquiry**

The topics below not only cover the "agenda" to be followed by the field team but also give explicit probes and examples regarding the type of evidence that is being sought. As a result, the protocol should provide guidance on how to know what to look or listen for, and how to recognize relevant evidence when it is encountered.

## 1. Public School Choice Options at This Site

Enumerate the public school choice options at this site, giving the number of schools and students involved by type of option:

- 1.1 School identified for improvement under Title I:
- 1.2 Magnet Schools (no. of schools and programs):
- 1.3 Charter Schools:
- 1.4 Other choice arrangements, including unsafe school choice and desegregation (*describe*):

*[If options were identified under 1.2, 1.3, or 1.4 above, be sure to cover Q. 3 below.]*

## 2. New Title I Choice Arrangements

How has the district started to offer the school choice options under the new provisions of Title I? (*probe for*):

- 2.1 Use of designation as a Title I school identified for improvement in defining sending and receiving schools:
- 2.2 Expanded transportation services:
- 2.3 Provision of supplemental services:
- 2.4 Expanded or improved parent notification procedures:
- 2.5 Other (*describe*):

## 3. Other, non-Title I Choice Arrangements

Describe the procedures used for the other choice options identified in Q. 1 above (*address the following questions for each type of option separately*):

- 3.1 How are eligible students defined?
- 3.2 How are students/parents notified of their choices? [*Be sure to cover all the communication modes—e.g., see Q.5 in the School Survey instrument.*]
- 3.3 What criteria are used in selecting students to exercise their choice? [*Be sure to cover all criteria—e.g., see Q3.3 in the VPSC field instrument.*]

- 3.4 What proportion of eligible students were able to exercise their choice?  
*[Also determine the proportion receiving their 1st, 2nd, etc. choices; obtain data for the past 2-3 years, if possible.]*
- 3.5 How have transportation services been affected, if at all, by the choice arrangement? *[Be sure to cover all facets of these services—e.g., see Q.6 in the VPSC instrument.]*
- 3.6 Are other choice options likely to be implemented in the future?

#### **4. Trends Associated with Choice Options**

Determine whether the district maintains records of individual students who have transferred or of the performance of sending and receiving schools. The following questions may be addressed once, even if the district has more than one choice arrangement.

- 4.1 Are there any data showing trends in academic performance by the students who have exercised their choice? *[Probe for data for the past 2-3 years, if possible.]*
- 4.2 Are there any data showing trends in academic performance by the schools involved in the choice arrangement? *[Probe for data for the past 2-3 years, if possible.]*
- 4.3 What are the district's policies, views, and preferences regarding school choice options?
- 4.4 What interest has been expressed by parents, communities, or students regarding school choice options at this district?

#### **5. Contextual Conditions**

- 5.1 Have there been any notable changes by the surrounding districts that might be relevant to either the choice options or their outcomes at this district?
- 5.2 Have there been any changes in the community (e.g., residential relocation patterns) that might be relevant to either the choice options or their outcomes at this district?
- 5.3 How has the district's "share" of the student population changed, relative to that of private schools in the area? *[Obtain annual data by grade level, if possible]*
- 5.4 Is the district implementing other approaches to school improvement as an alternative to choice?

