



**Evaluation of Flexibility Under *No Child Left Behind*:
Volume III—The Rural Education
Achievement Program (REAP Flex)**



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(REAP Flex)**

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Executive Summary

Flexibility is a lever for change that occupies an increasingly prominent place in federal strategies for educational improvement. Although often implemented in complex ways, the basic logic underlying its approach can be summarized quite succinctly. Flexibility assumes that local districts are in the best position to identify the most serious problems facing schools and students and determine how to solve them. Consequently, these districts should be given greater decision-making authority to utilize resources, including federal funds to the programs for which they will do the most good.

The reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)* as amended by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)* provides additional flexibility to local school districts while simultaneously requiring increased accountability. This study focuses on the additional funding flexibility offered to rural school districts under the following portions of the Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP), which is part of *NCLB*. This includes two central parts of REAP:

- **REAP Flex:** This program does *not* provide additional funding but does allow eligible districts considerable flexibility in using funds they receive by formula under the following *ESEA* programs:
 - Title II, Part A (Improving Teacher Quality State Grants)
 - Title II, Part D (Educational Technology State Grants)
 - Title IV, Part A (Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities)
 - Title V, Part A (State Grants for Innovative Programs).

- The districts may use these funds for authorized activities under one or more of the following *ESEA* programs:
 - Title I, Part A (Improving Achievement for Disadvantaged Children)
 - Title II, Part A (Improving Teacher Quality State Grants)
 - Title II, Part D (Educational Technology State Grants)
 - Title III (Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students)
 - Title IV, Part A (Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities)
 - Title IV, Part B (21st-Century Community Learning Centers)
 - Title V, Part A (State Grants for Innovative Programs).

- **Small, Rural School Achievement (SRSA) Grants:** This program provides additional funding for qualifying school districts. The additional funds must be spent under the same programs as the REAP Flex authority.

Several factors set REAP Flex apart from other *NCLB* flexibility programs. First, 100 percent of funding in applicable programs can be used for any activity authorized in one or more of the *ESEA* programs listed above, without regard to statutory set-asides. Second, there is no application process. A list of eligible districts is published each year by the U.S. Department of Education, and, in order to use the program, an eligible district simply has to notify its state education agency of its intent to do so by the notification deadline established by the state.

Finally, REAP Flex is widely used—more than 4,000 districts nationwide are eligible, and more than 50 percent of those districts notified their state that they planned to participate in FY 2005. These unique aspects of REAP Flex make it a particularly interesting example of funding flexibility.

The following five research questions guided the study:

- 1) To what extent do districts make use of the various flexibility provisions in REAP Flex? What are the characteristics of school districts that exercise this authority?**
- 2) In districts exercising REAP Flex, how are they using this flexibility and which programs are affected?**
- 3) What educational goals or objectives do districts choose to focus on with these funds?**
- 4) Do districts that exercise REAP Flex authority make progress in the areas or priorities toward which they targeted eligible funds?**
- 5) How well does REAP Flex meet the needs of school districts to effectively use federally derived educational funding?**

A nationally representative sample of districts eligible for REAP Flex was surveyed in order to examine these questions, supplemented by case study interviews in a small subset of the districts. For questions 4 and 5, the survey did not include outcome measures, so it is only possible to offer some preliminary findings related to these questions. The districts chosen to participate in the surveys and interviews were selected so as to obtain a representative sample based on the number of students in the district and poverty level. A total of 361 REAP-eligible districts responded to the survey, and 12 completed case study interviews. The data were collected between October 2005 and February 2006.

There were four primary findings:

- 1. Half of eligible districts participated in the REAP Flex program.**
- 2. REAP Flex authority was most often used to provide additional funds for services under Title I, Part A. Districts also commonly used REAP Flex to focus on programs related to Title V, Part A (State Grants for Innovative Programs), and Title II, Part D (Educational Technology State Grants). The program funds most commonly used for other program purposes came from Title II, Part A (Improving Teacher Quality State Grants), and Title IV, Part A (Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities).**

3. **Districts focused their efforts on targeting low-performing student subgroups and raising reading and math outcomes via improvements in technology and teacher quality.**
4. **The primary reason eligible districts *do not* participate in REAP Flex is a lack of information. The main reason districts *do* participate is to address funding restrictions.**

Half of eligible districts participated in the REAP Flex program.

Just over half of the eligible districts surveyed reported using REAP Flex (51 percent). The data revealed that the group of REAP Flex participants is a relatively stable one. Districts using the program planned to continue to use it, and generally had used it in the past.

There were several notable differences between REAP Flex participants and nonparticipants. Those that chose to take advantage of REAP Flex authority were significantly more likely to have received SRSA grant money in the past. They also were significantly more likely than nonusers to have more than 8 percent of their total funding come from the federal government. Further, REAP Flex participants had slightly lower total revenue than nonparticipants. Total revenue (from local, state, and federal sources) for users was approximately \$2.9 million, while total revenue for nonusers was approximately \$3.4 million, though this difference was not statistically significant.

A final difference between participants and nonparticipants was in their relative educational priorities. Asked to identify which areas of concern their districts were prioritizing, participants more frequently mentioned mathematics, English or language arts, and elementary students than did nonparticipants. These priorities appeared to shape their use of REAP Flex authority.

REAP Flex authority was most often used to provide additional funds for services under Title I, Part A. Districts also commonly used REAP Flex to focus on programs related to Title V, Part A (State Grants for Innovative Programs), and Title II, Part D (Educational Technology State Grants). The program funds most commonly used for other program purposes came from Title II, Part A (Improving Teacher Quality State Grants), and Title IV, Part A (Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities).

Almost 80 percent of REAP Flex participants reported using the flexibility to maintain a stable level of effort for ongoing activities that had been affected by budget cuts. Case studies revealed that often it was a reduction in Title I, Part A, funding that needed to be offset by using REAP Flex. Thus, it is not surprising that the largest amount of funds were used for program purposes aligned with Title I, Part A (Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged). While Title I, Part A, was the program area in which districts utilized the largest amount of eligible funds, the total increase in spending from previous years was less than 10 percent.

In contrast, the average amount districts used for purposes consistent with Title V, Part A (State Grants for Innovative Programs), increased by more than 400 percent over previous years. Case

study participants explained that this program has the most preexisting flexibility, and so using funds for program purposes consistent with it was practical from a managerial perspective. The only other program where spending increased more than a 100 percent was Title II, Part D (Educational Technology State Grants), which coincides with the high priority districts put on technology to reach their REAP Flex goals described below.

REAP Flex authority was used to target particular student groups and academic outcomes via improvements in technology and teacher quality.

District superintendents generally made the decisions about whether to participate and how to use funds for other purposes under REAP Flex. In over 90 percent of participating districts, the superintendent was involved in deciding how eligible funds would be used. The actual spending of funds was generally described as easy and routine, and 60 percent of participants reported that a financial officer managed or oversaw the process.

Three uses of REAP Flex were predominant: targeting particular student groups or academic outcomes; maintaining a stable level of effort for ongoing activities that had been affected by budgetary constraints; and providing greater funding for high-priority programs. The focus on high priority programs encompassed other primary uses, as high priority programs tended to focus on particular student groups or academic outcomes.

Just over 80 percent of REAP Flex participants reported using the authority in order to target particular student groups or outcomes. Based on the priorities listed above, it is not surprising that math and reading were the only two subject areas consistently targeted by REAP Flex. In their free response answers, many district officials explained that their goals when utilizing REAP Flex were related to assessment scores in these two subjects. Several districts also reported focusing on increasing test scores for particular Title I student subgroups.

Districts reported using two primary strategies to promote their goals under REAP Flex. Improving technology—including computers, printers, software, and support—was the most common tactic. Teacher quality initiatives were a relatively close second. Participating districts reported using funds on professional development for current teachers, recruiting new highly qualified teachers, and paying salaries.

The survey also collected information about the uses of Small, Rural School Achievement (SRSA) grant money because the program is so closely related to REAP Flex. The goals and strategies for SRSA money were similar to those for REAP Flex. The goals were improvement in math and reading scores for all children, especially those in Title I subgroups; the tools were technology and teacher quality initiatives.

Ultimately, assessments regarding the effectiveness of REAP Flex in helping districts meet AYP goals are limited to participant reports. Not enough time has accrued to gather sufficient achievement data, and even if it had, it would be difficult to separate the effects of the program from other factors.

The primary reason eligible districts did not participate in REAP Flex was a lack of information. The main reason districts did participate was to address funding restrictions.

The majority of the interviewed district officials using REAP Flex reported being happy with the program.

There were three primary reasons eligible districts reported that they did not use REAP Flex: a lack of information, a belief that the existing funds in applicable programs would not be significant enough to make a real difference, or a lack of need for additional flexibility.

Over a third of nonparticipants felt that they did not have enough information about REAP Flex to make an informed decision to use it. Even districts that participated in REAP Flex often exhibited a misunderstanding about what REAP Flex entails. The most common mistake was confusion related to the names of the program (e.g. SRSA Grant money was often called the REAP Flex money).

Another 25 percent of REAP Flex nonparticipants made a more informed decision not to use REAP. These district officials believed that funds from eligible programs would not be enough to matter. Indeed, 50 percent of all nonparticipants reported that their interest in REAP Flex would be higher if additional federal programs were eligible under REAP Flex. It is important to note, however, that as with every potential change mentioned in the survey, a higher percentage of current REAP Flex users (approximately 60 percent) also said that this modification would increase their interest.

Finally, 40 percent of districts that chose not to use REAP Flex did not see a need for additional flexibility. From the perspective of these nonparticipants, the program offered no additional benefits they were interested in, and thus they chose not to participate in the program.

Users chose to exercise REAP Flex authority because of the limited monetary allocations in each applicable program and because of declining enrollment and funding. The limited amount of funding initially allocated to each district under each federal program made it hard for these small, rural districts to carry out effectively the intent of the federal Title. REAP Flex allowed them to use these funds to fully support high-priority programs. Small and often declining enrollments further decreased the initial allocations and made the added flexibility provided by REAP Flex even more important.

District officials explained in case study interviews that they often used funds for Title I, Part A, activities in order to compensate for cuts in their allocations to this program from the previous year. REAP Flex allowed them to maintain the level of services previously provided under Title I, Part A, despite the reduced funding.

These three findings combined suggest that REAP Flex is a popular program among those districts that use it, but that its biggest challenge has been, and continues to be, thorough dissemination of information about the program.

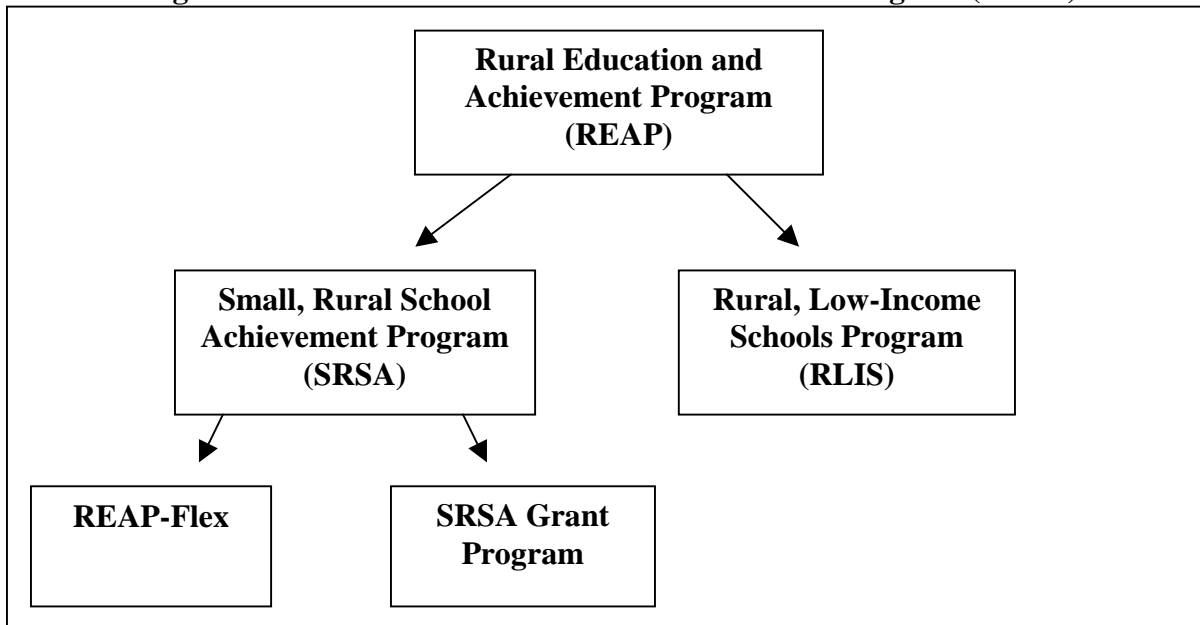
1. Introduction

The REAP Flex Program

This study focuses on flexibility provisions in the Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) provision of *NCLB*. Specifically, it addresses REAP Flex, a program that allows rural districts additional control over how to spend portions of their federal funding. REAP Flex is part of a series of *NCLB* flexibility initiatives aimed at rural schools.

REAP Flex is only one piece of the REAP. REAP consists of two major grant programs, one for small, rural districts known as the Small Rural School Achievement Program (SRSA) and another for low-income, rural districts called the Rural and Low-Income Schools Program (RLIS). SRSA has two parts: the SRSA grant program administered by the federal government and REAP Flex. For many small, rural school districts, the amount of formula-based program funding they receive from individual federal programs may be too small individually to support significant school improvements. The SRSA grant program aims to help these districts by increasing the amount of federal funds available to them. REAP Flex additionally allows these districts the opportunity to leverage their limited resources for more effective uses consistent with local needs. RLIS, on the other hand, is comprised solely of a state administered grant program intended for rural districts too large to be eligible for SRSA (for an organizational diagram of REAP, see Exhibit 1).¹

Exhibit 1
Organization of Rural Education and Achievement Program (REAP)



Source: Information for this exhibit was obtained from the U.S. Department of Education’s Guidance on the Rural Education Achievement Program report, released June 2003. Exhibit created by the Urban Institute, 2006.

¹ Districts eligible for SRSA are automatically ineligible for RLIS.

This report addresses REAP Flex with a more limited discussion of the SRSA Grant Program. The REAP Flex program allows districts to use eligible federal funding for a set of eligible program purposes under *ESEA*, while the SRSA Grant Program gives districts additional money that must be used to support the same type of activities as those authorized by REAP Flex. District eligibility for both of these programs is based on a combination of attendance, population density and location. Eligible districts must meet two criteria:

1. A total average daily attendance of less than 600 students, *or* serve only schools that are located in counties that have a population density of fewer than 10 persons per square mile, and
2. Serve only schools that the have an NCES school locale code of 7 or 8 (as assigned by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics) or that are located in an area defined as rural by a state governmental agency.² In instances in which a state agency defines the area where a district is located as rural, the secretary of education must agree to the rural designation with the concurrence of the state education agency before the district may participate in REAP Flex.

These two criteria are the only determinants of eligibility for participation in REAP Flex. In order to receive SRSA grant money, however, a district must meet these criteria *and* submit an application. Once this application is submitted, a formula determines the amount of grant money awarded to the district. This money can be spent in any of the applicable programs. Eligible districts considerable flexibility in using funds they receive by formula under the following *ESEA* programs:

- Title II, Part A (Improving Teacher Quality State Grants)
- Title II, Part D (Educational Technology State Grants)
- Title IV, Part A (Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities)
- Title V, Part A (State Grants for Innovative Programs).

The districts may use these funds for authorized activities under one or more of the following *ESEA* programs:

- Title I, Part A (Improving Achievement for Disadvantaged Children)
- Title II, Part A (Improving Teacher Quality State Grants)
- Title II, Part D (Educational Technology State Grants)
- Title III (Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students)
- Title IV, Part A (Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities)
- Title IV, Part B (21st-Century Community Learning Centers)
- Title V, Part A (State Grants for Innovative Programs).

² A school receives a locale code of “7” if, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, it is located in a place that is outside of a core-based statistical area (CBSA) and has a population of fewer than 2,500 persons. A school receives a locale code of “8” if, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, it is located in a place that is inside an CBSA and has a population of fewer than 2,500 persons.

While the SRSA Grant Program and the REAP Flex Program apply to the same set of federal programs, districts do *not* have to receive an SRSA Grant in order to exercise REAP Flex authority. REAP Flex is therefore not exclusive to the grant program. Its intention is solely to give small, rural districts greater freedom to spend funds they receive under certain federal programs to better meet their particular needs. Enhancing flexibility is considered especially important for such districts because the amount of formula-based funds they receive within a particular federal program may be insufficient to support significant school improvement efforts. While no additional resources are provided to participating districts, REAP Flex authorizes the districts to use a substantial body of existing federal funds for any educational purpose consistent with the broad goals of *NCLB*.

One particular goal of REAP Flex is to support activities that help participants reach adequate yearly progress (AYP). REAP guidelines mandate a review of SRSA grant recipients and REAP Flex participants after three years to determine their continuing eligibility for the two programs. Those districts that fail to meet AYP after participating in REAP for three years become ineligible for REAP Flex unless they agree to spend all “applicable funding”—program funds eligible for use with other programs—on improvement activities authorized under Section 1116.

Several factors set REAP Flex apart from other *NCLB* flexibility programs. First, there are no “set-asides” or limits on how much money may be utilized from eligible program funds. One hundred percent of applicable funds can be used for a broad range of activities authorized by REAP. Second, there is no application process for districts to participate in the program. The only requirement is that districts notify states of their intent to exercise the REAP Flex authority by the deadline established by the state. Finally, unlike many other flexibility provisions, REAP Flex is widely used. During the 2005–06 school year (the most recent year for which data is available), 4,781 districts nationwide were eligible to exercise REAP Flex. According to data submitted by states through the Consolidated State Performance Reports, 53 percent of districts notified their states that they would participate.³ For these reasons, REAP Flex presents a particularly interesting example of flexibility worthy of further study.

As part of a larger study of federal flexibility programs, the U.S. Department of Education commissioned the Urban Institute to conduct a study of the REAP Flex program nationally. This included collecting nationally representative survey data and conducting a series of case studies of districts eligible to use REAP Flex. Five research questions guided the larger study of flexibility, as well as this report, which focuses on REAP Flex:

- **Question 1: Use of REAP Flex and Characteristics of Users**

To what extent do districts make use of the various flexibility provisions in REAP Flex?
What are the characteristics of school districts that exercise this authority?

- **Question 2: Patterns of Exercising REAP Flex**

³ These eligibility and participation figures exclude New Jersey because this information was not provided on the state performance report.

How are districts exercising REAP Flex using this flexibility and which programs are affected?

- **Question 3: Strategic Planning for Flexibility**

What educational goals or objectives do districts choose to focus on with these funds?

- **Question 4: REAP Flex Progress**

Do districts that exercise REAP Flex authority make progress in the areas or priorities toward which they targeted eligible funds?

- **Question 5: Flexibility Needs**

How well does REAP Flex meet the needs of school districts to effectively use federal educational funding?

2. Methodological Design

This study used survey and interview data⁴ to provide a description of the REAP Flex program participants and nonparticipants, as well as examining how participants exercise flexibility. Only REAP Flex eligible districts were included in the sample. The data were collected between October 2005 and February 2006. Responses to surveys sent to REAP-eligible districts generated the quantitative data (see Appendix A for the survey). Interviews with survey respondents, both REAP Flex users and nonusers, supplied the qualitative data (see Appendix B for interview protocols).

⁴ A full explanation of the methodology can be found in Appendix A.

3. Results

Who Uses REAP Flex: Characteristics of Users and Nonusers of REAP Flex

Fifty-one percent of the survey respondents used REAP Flex in 2004–05. Of the 335 districts that responded to the survey, 60 percent notified their state education agencies that they would use REAP Flex during the 2004–05 school year. Of these, however, 15 percent did not actually employ REAP Flex.⁵

Preliminary examinations of the data suggested that a district with a high percentage of students in poverty or a high percentage of federal funding in their overall budget were more likely to use REAP Flex. However, while there were notable differences between users and nonusers in these two categories, the differences were not statistically significant (see Exhibit 2). In a related analysis, when percentage of federal funding was broken into a categorical variable (in which high federal funding was defined as greater than 8 percent of total funding, low federal funding as less than 8 percent of total funding), differences became significant. A higher percentage of users belonged to the high funding group than nonusers and this difference was statistically significant ($p < .05$). This difference is logical: for districts receiving a high rate of federal funds, exercising REAP Flex allows them flexibility over a larger portion of their budget than it would allow districts with less total revenue from the federal government.

Additionally, an analysis of whether the percentage of a district's total revenue that was eligible under REAP Flex provisions could distinguish between users and nonusers, showed that while districts that used REAP Flex had a higher percentage of eligible funds than nonusers, this difference was not statistically significant. However, again an analysis using a categorical variable for high and low eligible funding indicated a statistically significant difference, signaling that users are more likely than nonusers to have a high percentage of their total revenue be eligible funds. Finally, there were no statistically significant enrollment differences between districts exercising and those not exercising the REAP Flex authority.

Districts that had ever received a SRSA grant had significantly higher odds of using REAP Flex. Almost 68 percent of REAP Flex participants had received a SRSA grant in the past compared to only 48 percent of nonparticipants. This may be because SRSA grant recipients are more knowledgeable about REAP Flex considering that SRSA grant funds and applicable funds under REAP Flex may be used with identical title programs.

⁵ The subgroup of 37 districts that notified their state of the district's intent to use REAP Flex but were ultimately nonusers merited further examination. In many ways, this group looked very similar to nonusers as a whole. The mean amounts of percent federal funding were nearly identical (9.4 percent for non-notifiers vs. 9.1 percent for notifiers), as were their total revenue from local, state, and federal sources (\$3.4 million vs. \$3.5 million for non-notifiers vs. notifiers) and percent of students living in poverty (15.6 percent vs. 15.0 percent for non-notifiers vs. notifiers). The subgroup appeared more like REAP Flex *users* in terms of familiarity with REAP Flex; on a 4-point scale, with 4 being the most familiar and 1 the least familiar, the subgroup of nonusers that notified their states averaged 3.8 while REAP Flex users averaged 3.6 (nonusers averaged 2.9). The subgroup fell below both REAP Flex users and nonusers in terms of average daily attendance (ADA). While REAP Flex users and nonusers have ADA of 307 and 315, respectively, the the subgroup of nonusers that notified their states had an ADA of 254. Finally, this subgroup falls between REAP Flex users and nonusers in terms of having received SRSA grants in the past (59 percent for the subgroup vs. 67 percent and 45 percent for users and nonusers, respectively).

Exhibit 2
Descriptive Comparison of REAP Flex Participants vs. Nonparticipants

	REAP Flex Participants	REAP Flex Nonparticipants	Difference Between Participants and Nonparticipants
Percent Poverty ^a	16.9%	15.5%	1.5%
Percent Federal Funding ^b	11.1%	9.4%	1.7%
Percent Eligible Funding ^c	2.1%	1.7%	0.5%
Ever Received SRSA	67.4%	48.5%	19.0%**
Average Daily Enrollment ^d	307.8	300.7	7.1

^a Based on the percent of school age children in the district living below the poverty line (2000 Census data).
^b Percent Total Revenue comprised of federal funding (based on 2003 CCD data).
^c Percent Total Revenue comprised of REAP eligible federal programs (not counting Title I, Part A, Title III, or Title IV, Part B).
^d Based on 2003 CCD data.

Exhibit reads: There were 19 percent more REAP Flex participants that had received SRSA grants in the past than nonparticipants.

Note: ** Statistically significant differences (p<.01).

Source: District Administrator Survey #7 and data sources cited above.

Users also appeared to differ from nonusers in terms of their initial allocation of federal funds and total revenue. In each of the federal funding categories in which changes in allocation might occur as a result of the REAP Flex program, users had a notably larger initial allocation of funds than nonusers with the exception of SRSA grant money, in the case which nonusers received larger allocations (see Exhibit 3). However, more REAP Flex participants received SRSA grants than nonparticipants.

Interestingly, while REAP Flex participants received, on average, more federal funding in REAP Flex eligible programs, REAP Flex nonparticipants had higher average total revenue. This suggests that compared to their nonparticipant counterparts, users of REAP Flex had less money overall to work with and yet had more REAP Flex applicable funding. This finding is not surprising since, as mentioned above, REAP Flex participants were more likely to have a higher percentage of their total budget comprised of federal funding. Although these are interesting results, it is important to note that with the exception of SRSA grant amounts, none of the funding differences—either in a particular federal program allocation or total revenue—reached statistical significance. This is in large part because there was a large range of funding amounts among both users and nonusers of REAP Flex, so that while on average REAP Flex participants

have larger federal program allocations and total revenue, there is a substantial overlap in these areas between districts participating and not participating in REAP Flex.

Exhibit 3
Mean Revenue by Program, REAP Flex Participants vs. Nonparticipants

	Mean Allocation for the 2004–05 School Year (in dollars)	
	REAP Flex Participants	REAP Flex Nonparticipants
Title I, Part A		
Improving the Achievement of Disadvantaged Children	\$86,772	\$82,228
Title II, Part A		
Improving Teacher Quality State Grants	\$22,398	\$17,960
Title II, Part D		
Educational Technology State Grants	\$2,954	\$2,238
Title III		
Language Instruction for LEP and Immigrant Students	\$1,295	\$953
Title IV, Part A		
Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities	\$2,493	\$1,949
Title IV, Part B		
21st-Century Community Learning Centers	\$2,376	\$1,721
Title V, Part A		
State Grants for Innovative Programs	\$2,626	\$2,102
SRSA Grant Award		
Grants from Small Rural School Achievement Program	\$19,464*	\$22,956*
Total Revenue		
From All Sources	\$2,882,577	\$3,384,072

Exhibit reads: REAP Flex participants received a mean average of \$86,772 in Title I, Part A, funds, while REAP Flex nonparticipants received a mean average of \$82,228 in the same category.

Note: * Statistically significant differences ($p < .05$). Total revenue from listed federal programs does not add to total revenue from all sources. Total revenue includes funds from state, local, and federal sources.

Source: District Administrator Survey #14 and 21.

The survey results revealed that REAP Flex users tended to be a relatively stable group over time and prior use of REAP Flex was a significant predictor of future use. Of the REAP Flex participants in the study, 81 percent had used REAP Flex prior to 2004–05 and 93 percent of them planned on using it again in 2005–06 (see Exhibit 4). In contrast, only 14 percent of nonusers had previously taken advantage of REAP Flex provisions. A slightly larger group of nonusers, 37 percent, reported that they were planning on using REAP Flex in 2005–06. The large and significant differences between users and nonusers in whether they had used REAP Flex in the past or planned to do so in the future indicated that previously using REAP Flex was a significant indicator of future use.⁶ Based on these findings, it appeared that once districts employed REAP Flex, they found enough benefits from the program to warrant continued use.

⁶ While some districts may not have previously been eligible for REAP Flex, this would only represent a small number of districts, as the number of eligible districts have not changed substantially from year to year.

Exhibit 4
Usage Patterns of REAP Flex Participants vs. Nonparticipants

	REAP Flex Participants	REAP Flex Nonparticipants	Difference Between Participants and Nonparticipants
Used REAP Flex Prior to 2004–05	81%	14%	67%**
Planned to Use REAP Flex in 2005–06	93%	37%	56%**

Exhibit reads: Eighty-one percent of REAP Flex participants had taken advantage of REAP Flex prior to 2004–05 and 93 percent planned on using it in 2005–06.

Note: ** Statistically significant differences ($p < .01$).

Source: District Administrator Survey #12, 13, 24, and 25.

Users placed a significantly higher priority on English and mathematics outcomes than nonusers, as well as on elementary students in general when assigning a priority level to various areas of potential need. While districts participating in REAP Flex indicated higher priority on English and math, nonparticipating districts also indicated that these were relatively important. On a three point priority scale with three indicating high priority, nonparticipant districts assigned an average priority level above two points for English, math, and elementary students. REAP Flex participants had a significantly lower priority level for transportation for Title I school choice students than nonparticipants. Users were significantly less likely than nonparticipating districts to place priority on this area. In this case, the average district response for both groups was below two, indicating that it was of lower priority for districts than English and mathematics outcomes and elementary students for both participants and nonparticipants. However, transportation was a relatively low priority for both participants and nonparticipants (see Exhibit 5 for all potential priorities).

These differences in priorities corresponded with how REAP Flex participants implemented the flexibility authority in their district. The highest percentage of participating districts reported using REAP Flex to address English or language arts outcomes (77 percent) and mathematics outcomes (73 percent). An even higher percentage of districts reported using REAP Flex to address the needs of elementary students (87 percent).

Exhibit 5
Mean Priority Level of and REAP Flex Usage for Areas of Possible Need
(1=Low Priority, 3=High Priority)

	REAP Flex Participants	REAP Flex Nonparticipants	Percent of Participants Who Used REAP Flex to Address Need
Instruction			
Highly qualified teachers	2.4	2.1	47%
Highly qualified paraprofessionals	2.1	2.0	33%
Curriculum and instructional materials	2.5	2.5	66%
Educational technology	2.6	2.6	67%
Support for Special Programs and Services			
Extended-time programs	2.0	2.0	30%
Summer Programs	1.9	2.0	22%
Supplemental educational services (SES) provided under Title I	2.0	1.9	30%
Transportation for Title I school choice participants	1.2**	1.4**	3%
Performance on Specific Academic Outcomes			
English or Language Arts	2.7**	2.5**	77%
Mathematics	2.8**	2.6**	73%
Science	2.4	2.5	38%
Attendance rates	1.9	1.9	14%
Graduation rates	1.9	1.7	13%
Other	1.8	1.7	22%
Performance of Specific Student Groups			
Racial and ethnic minorities	1.7	1.7	28%
Low-income students	2.5	2.5	65%
Students with disabilities	2.2	2.2	39%
Limited English Proficient (LEP students)	1.5	1.7	22%
Students in low-performing schools	1.5	1.5	19%
Kindergarten and pre-K students	2.1	2.2	42%
Elementary students	2.6**	2.4**	87%
Middle school students	2.4	2.4	67%
High school students	2.1	2.0	46%

Exhibit reads: REAP Flex participants gave performance on English or language arts outcomes a mean average priority rating of 2.7 while nonparticipants gave the same area a mean average priority rating of 2.5.

Note: ** Statistically significant differences (p<.01) between participants and nonparticipants.

Source: District Administrator Survey #17 and 23.

How Districts Use REAP Flex: Patterns of Exercising Flexibility

Several findings stand out when examining how school districts use REAP Flex:

- Superintendents are the district officials with the most authority and oversight of REAP Flex.
- On average, Title I, Part A, received the greatest utilization of funds, and Title V, Part A, received the greatest percentage increase in funds after districts exercised REAP Flex.
- REAP Flex participating districts planned to use eligible funds to target student groups and outcomes, maintain activities affected by budget constraints, and to increase funding for high priority programs.
- REAP Flex participating districts used the program to focus on mathematics, reading, technology, and teacher quality initiatives.
- SRSA grant recipients used their additional funds to address the same priorities and goals as REAP Flex users.

Administration of REAP Flex

District superintendents were most often involved in decisions relating to the use of REAP Flex funds. Almost 92 percent of districts participating in REAP Flex indicated that the superintendent decided which of the eligible funds to use with REAP Flex. School boards, financial officers, and general administrators for federal programs frequently took part in the decisions as well, but their involvement was varied and less universal. No more than 42 percent of participating districts indicated the involvement of these other district entities in REAP Flex decisions (see Exhibit 6).

Roles varied slightly more in the management and oversight of REAP Flex. Superintendents were still the most common actor—83 percent of districts reported that the superintendent was involved in management or oversight. However, the superintendents had slightly more help in the day-to-day management of the funding programs—financial officers were active in this aspect of the REAP Flex program in 61 percent of participating districts. School boards and general federal funding administrators were also involved in the oversight process in nearly 40 percent of districts.

The case study interviews confirmed these results. In general, developing financial strategies was seen as the purview of superintendents; hence, they were also primarily responsible for administering REAP Flex. One superintendent stated that in the decision-making processes related to REAP Flex:

... I was the key actor. That's all there is to it. And, of course, ... I inform my board and I keep them informed, but as far as the key actors, that's going to be me.

Superintendents did not work alone, however. As the quote above indicates, they frequently answered to boards and committees. Additionally, many superintendents consulted with

financial officers or federal program administrators for help in assessing district needs and understanding program guidelines. One superintendent mentioned consulting with a “comprehensive local education plan committee that deals with the major areas that we look at.” A leader in another district explained a local requirement that decisions related to federal programs such as REAP Flex “involve parents and teachers and all kinds of people.” The case studies indicated that the superintendent usually led the process, but often involved other district administrators or community members.

**Exhibit 6
Authority and Oversight of REAP Flex**

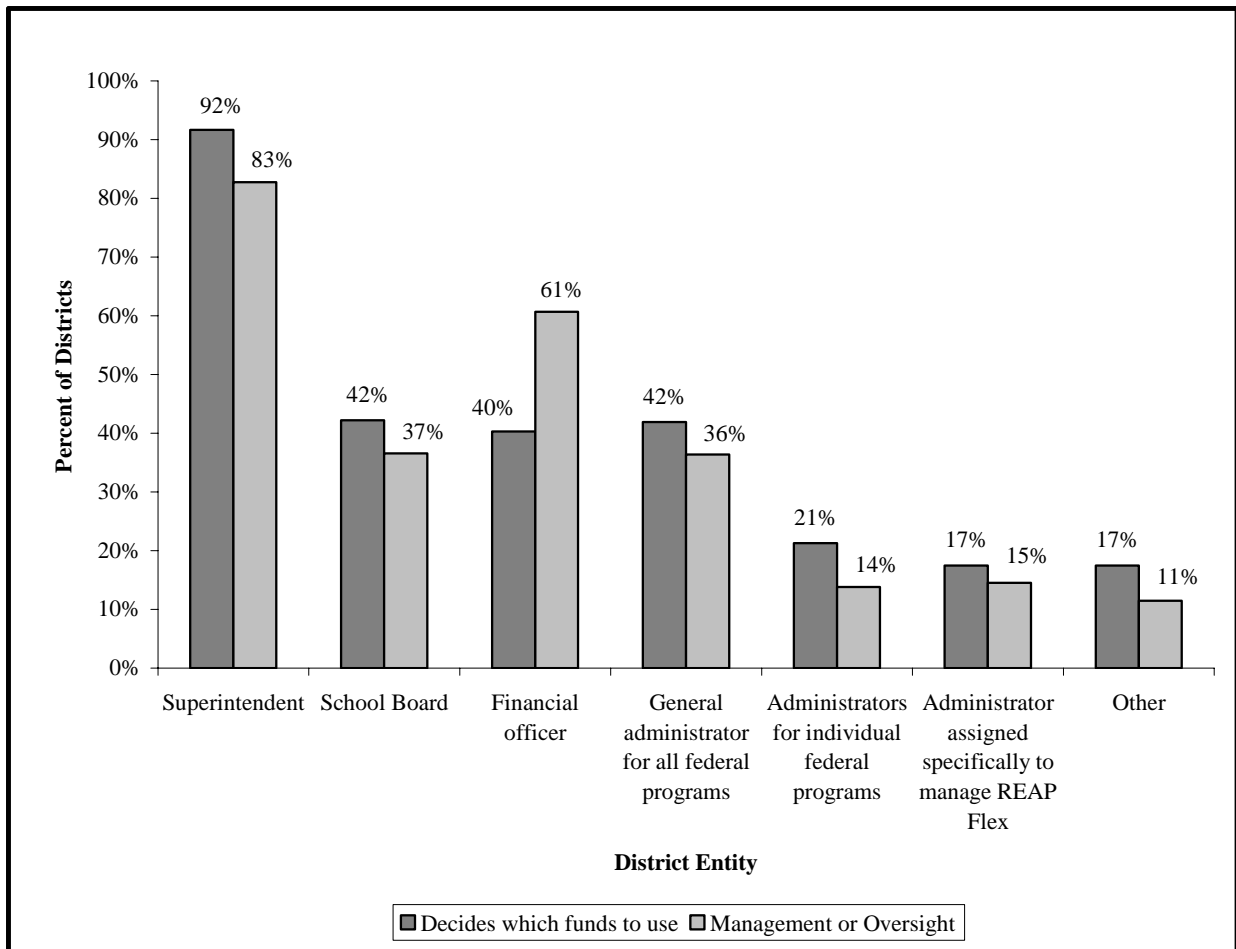


Exhibit reads: In 92 percent of districts that used REAP Flex, superintendents decided which funds were used in the program while in 83 percent, superintendents provided management or oversight of the REAP Flex program. Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 because districts could mark multiple responses. Source: District Administrator Survey #18.

While superintendents also participated in the oversight and management of the REAP Flex program, they were more dependent on federal program administrators and financial officers as the people to actually carry out these responsibilities. Explaining the way the day-to-day work of exercising REAP Flex was carried out, one federal program administrator explained that he did most of the work:

The way I do this is I work with not only [the superintendent], but I also work with his encumbrance clerk, and we sit down and we go through the budget and we make sure that everything is coded properly, they send me a copy of all claims, and I look to make sure that they're coded properly according to the budget before we ever send them to the [state] Department of Education.

Another superintendent explained, “We have a business manager who maintains those records.” Results from the case studies confirmed a high level involvement by financial officers with the administration and management of REAP Flex accounting.

Many small districts, however, were not set up in a traditional manner and their experiences with REAP Flex differed from these patterns. A few of the districts interviewed encompassed only one school and did not have an active superintendent. In such cases, REAP Flex decisions were still carried out by a head administrator (e.g. the principal) with supplemental support from financial officers. One such administrator elaborated on the multi-faceted role required in such a small district:

My roles and responsibilities. I'm the principal. I'm also the librarian. I have a degree in library science. But it just depends. The school is small. I have taught music in the past. I taught kindergarten. ... I do the federal programs, and I'm the transportation director. And, I mean, just everything that you do all in one role, kind of, since it's a very small school. ... The county superintendent acts as our [district] superintendent, but, really, they just sign off on paperwork that I do. ... My clerk does the actual sending the application and that kind of thing. ... Our financial records are kept through our county superintendent's office, and so what I do is I get a printout from them every month, a statement of expenditure from them every month. And I just keep track of how much we have left and where it went.

A superintendent in a similar situation was in charge of the federal funding accounting process but made an effort to gather input from others:

I'm the K-12 principal here, and I am pretty much the person that runs the place. We have a part-time superintendent [who] comes two days per month. And so, I am in charge of scheduling, administration, discipline. I work with the business manager on budgets and things like that. If it needs [to be] done, I usually am in charge of getting it done. ... My business manager is more acclimated to [REAP Flex] than I am, and that's why I visit with her a lot about, you know, where and how we can spend this money. ... The business manager and [I] discussed [REAP Flex], and we actually presented it to the board of education and told them what we were trying to do because of this stuff, and they said, “Go for it!”

As these examples suggested, the case study interviews revealed the numerous roles and responsibilities of many district leaders in rural districts. In only a few interviews was it apparent that a district principal or federal programs administrator handled REAP Flex responsibilities almost entirely independent of an active superintendent. The survey responses also indicated that this was an uncommon arrangement.

Patterns of REAP Flex Reallocation

The REAP Flex legislation permits districts to use applicable funding for authorized activities under a number of *ESEA* programs. In order to examine the second research question, this section identifies those changes that were most popular among districts using REAP Flex:

The survey results indicated that on average districts used the largest average dollar amount (\$6,318) for activities in Title I, Part A. While Title I, Part A received the biggest influx of new dollars, it represented less than 10 percent average increase in funding to this program. The largest boost in funding in terms of *percentage increase* for any applicable program was for activities in Title V, Part A—State Grants for Innovative Programs, which more than quadrupled (an average gain of \$5,200). A final notable pattern of use was the increase in funding to Title II, Part D—Educational Technology State Grants. On average, districts used \$2,180 for the technology program (see Exhibit 7 for a complete list of monetary changes after exercising REAP Flex authority). Thus, while Title I, Part A, was the biggest beneficiary in terms of absolute dollars, Title II, Part D, and Title V, Part A, both received a far larger influx of funds compared to their initial allocations.

Exhibit 7
Difference in Use of Funds After Exercising REAP Flex

Funding Category	Mean Movement of Funds (in dollars)	Percent of Districts That Used Nonprogram Funds in Program Area	Percent of Districts That Used Program Funds in Nonprogram Area
Title I, Part A			
Improving the Achievement of Disadvantaged Children	\$6,318	34%	25%
Title II, Part A			
Improving Teacher Quality State Grants	-\$7,673	15%	58%
Title II, Part D			
Educational Technology State Grants	\$2,183	18%	43%
Title III			
Language Instruction for LEP and Immigrant Students	\$1	4%	20%
Title IV, Part A			
Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities	-\$763	5%	58%
Title IV, Part B			
21st-Century Community Learning Centers	\$1,200	1%	17%
Title V, Part A			
State Grants for Innovative Programs	\$5,203	28%	36%

Exhibit reads: On average, \$7,673 of Title II, Part A, funds were spent in non–Title II, Part A, programs.

Fifteen percent of districts spent non–Title II, Part A, funds in Title II, Part A.

Note: Negative numbers indicate that, on average, more money intended for a particular program was used for nonprogram purposes. Percent of districts that used program funds in nonprogram areas based only on districts that had initial program funding allocations greater than \$0.00.

Source: District Administrator Survey #21.

Case study interviews provided additional insight into districts' common use of funds for Title V, Part A, purposes. One REAP user utilizing money from Title V, Part A, for other purposes explained that it made sense from a management perspective, because there was less paperwork and more flexibility for funds allocated to State Grants for Innovative Programs. Another district official gave an example of such flexibility: the district used all of its money intended for Title II, Part A, on the State Grants for Innovative Programs instead in order to change the school nurse position from part-time to full-time. In the case studies, districts indicated that Title V, Part A, provided them the most flexibility in the use of REAP Flex eligible funds.

The programs that experienced the largest decrease in expenditures after districts started using their funds for other purposes were Title II, Part A—Improving Teacher Quality State Grants, and Title IV, Part A—Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities. The Teacher Quality State Grants experienced an average decrease of \$7,673. This represented the largest average decrease in terms of dollars. The Safe and Drug Free Schools program experienced the largest decrease as a percentage of average allocation—on average, a third less funds were available after utilizing REAP Flex. Not only did these programs show the largest decrease in the amount used for the original program purposes, but the largest percentage of districts (58 percent) participating in REAP indicated that they used funds from these two programs for other eligible purposes.

The case study results provided additional information about districts' reasons for using these funds for other programs and closely aligned with the results from the surveys. Two district officials in the case study interviews said they used money from Title II, Part A, for Title I activities "because of the requirement of Title I to have professional development constitute a minimum of 5 percent [of Title I funds]." District officials saw this requirement as duplicating the efforts they would have made in Title II, Part A, and thus used money for Title I program purposes so that they could better leverage the available resources. Another district official also utilized funds under Title I in order to concentrate on professional development.

Other case study districts provided additional understanding as to why districts would use Title IV, Part A, funds for other program purposes. One case study respondent noted, "It's tough for us to spend \$4,000-plus just on drug-free schools, you know, in a small school district." A superintendent from a different district agreed, and explained its decision to use money from Safe and Drug-Free School programming for other purposes:

There's other money out there available for the things that we need to purchase with our Safe and Drug-Free Schools money. ... [We] have a lot of materials already purchased, kits and things that have to do with the drug-free curriculum ... and so we are still doing what's required for Safe and Drug Free Schools. ... But we have not had to use those funds—we had some other resources available so we transferred the funds.

These examples show that some of the districts interviewed found that they could better target funds to meet the district and student needs by utilizing REAP in programs other than Title IV, Part A. The case study interviews provided explanations about fund reallocations that aligned

closely with the survey results. The next section examines how districts used the funding to target specific goals and undertake related initiatives.

Goals and Initiatives of Districts Using REAP FLEX

Approximately 80 percent of participating districts hoped to use REAP Flex to target particular student groups or outcomes, maintain the intensity of activities that had been affected by budgetary constraints, and increase the amount of federal funds available for high-priority programs (see Exhibit 8). Sixty-five percent of districts indicated that they used REAP Flex to initiate new activities that would otherwise not be possible, while 53 percent concentrated federal resources for a smaller number of programs.

**Exhibit 8
Uses of REAP Flex**

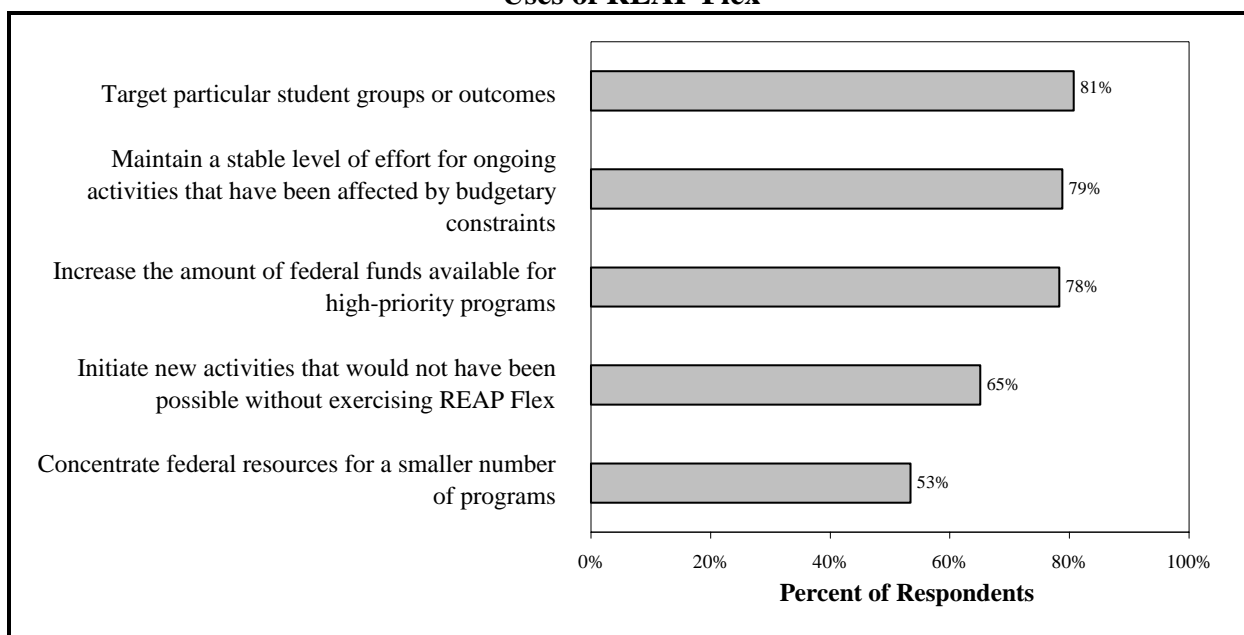


Exhibit reads: Eighty-one percent of districts using REAP Flex use it to target particular student groups or outcomes.

Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 because districts could mark multiple responses.

Source: District Administrator Survey #20.

In free response answers, districts using REAP Flex mentioned two subject areas most frequently—math and reading. Of the participating districts that provided free response answers, 23 percent identified math and 22 percent identified reading as areas in which they target funds. These goals were often specific to particular assessment tools. For instance, one district expressed a desire to “get 90 percent of students to score successfully on math and reading portions of [State] Core Curriculum Test.” Another stated that its goal was that “by 2007, 90 percent of students will be rated proficient or better as tested by [State Achievement Test] and CRT reading and math examinations. ... Students will rate themselves at a 3 or better (on a 4.0 scale) in use of technology/computer skills as measured by TAGLIT.”⁷

⁷ CRT means “Criterion-Referenced Test.” TAGLIT stands for “Take a Good Look at Instructional Technology.”

When addressing their priorities in reading and math, many districts targeted particular student groups for these outcome goals. One free response answer indicated that the district used REAP Flex to “improve the reading and math skills of elementary school [students].” Other subgroups referenced included low-income students, juniors in high school, students not meeting proficiency, and students in “kindergarten and early elementary school.” These targeted educational priorities fall neatly within the math and reading goals of *No Child Left Behind*. At least one district representative explained in a case study interview that their REAP Flex objectives, like all of their districtwide goals, did not have much room for fluctuation—a focus on math and literacy was “pretty well mandated by *NCLB*.”

Districts reported focusing their REAP Flex-eligible monies on two primary goals—improving technology and increasing teacher quality. Technology and teacher quality improvements were, in turn, focused on increasing student outcomes in literacy and math. Of the participating districts that provided free response answers, 22 percent indicated that they supported technology programs or activities with money from eligible programs under REAP Flex. Districts reported that they purchased laptops, computers, printers, software, and other equipment. A district leader from one of the case study interviews explained that teachers in his district now “have the opportunity to take their students and use some computer-aided software that runs concurrently with the curriculum, with the path skills and so forth that they’re supposed to be teaching within the classroom.” This was an opportunity that would not have been available without REAP Flex.

Respondents also frequently reported using REAP Flex flexibility to fund teacher quality initiatives. This category included professional development, salary, benefits, and recruitment. District officials explained in interviews that using funds for other program purposes often allowed them to support additional teacher time, which led to smaller class sizes in math and reading. It also occasionally funded teacher and paraprofessional time in a way that allowed for “extra help—one-on-one—for students who need it.” These variations on reduction of the student-to-teacher ratio all fall into the broad strategy of “teacher quality initiatives,” and were described in the context of efforts to meet the district’s educational goals.

This finding may at first glance appear contradictory because, as noted above, many districts used Title II, Part A, funds for other purposes. However, districts used Title II money consistently with other program purposes in order to target particular teacher quality issues. For example, district officials indicated that they used money for Title I programming, because they could then use funds to recruit and retain high quality teaching staff in their district.

In general, district leaders indicated that they viewed REAP Flex as one of the factors aiding their efforts at improving student outcomes through the opportunity to better target funds. One district interviewed, however, stated that the student gains could not be tied to the district’s participation in REAP Flex. The district stated that it would be working toward the same goals and using similar strategies whether or not they had the authority to use funds for other program purposes and that the amount of eligible funds under REAP Flex was not enough to make a substantive difference.

Other case study respondents did not share this sentiment. While no evidence gathered in this survey could show that any of these activities *cause* changes in academic achievement, many district officials interviewed believed that their REAP Flex strategies and activities helped their students to perform better and learn more. One administrator said:

Each individual school in [my state] has [its] own AYP. You start out at a certain level, but each year that level is expected to go up so many points. And, like I said, so far, we've been able to do that each year. And, quite frankly, I really feel like being able to use this REAP money ... for the math and reading has helped us.

Other district officials interviewed said that their students have been making progress in the last few years but were hesitant to link the gains directly to REAP Flex. As one principal said, “It’s part of a huge picture, so it’s hard to say, for me. It’s not the only factor. ... But it certainly is beneficial.” Although the results only offer limited information about the relationship between REAP Flex and student outcomes, many districts indicated that REAP Flex was useful for targeting federal funds to better meet district and student needs. Thus, REAP Flex was part of a larger strategy used to meet *NCLB* goals.

Along similar lines, several district representatives interviewed believed that REAP Flex had helped close the achievement gap in their districts. One reported that the additional flexibility associated with REAP Flex “allows us to get more resources and to do more things to help alleviate those gaps.” An official from another district pointed to smaller classes and more tutors (both facilitated by REAP Flex) as developments that have helped close the gap. A representative from a third district said that REAP Flex helped the district bring “the tail end up a little bit” by enabling it to focus more on lower performing students. Again, it is difficult to isolate the effects of REAP Flex. Nonetheless, districts believed REAP Flex had helped close the achievement gap by allowing them to target funds and programs at low-performing students.

Uses of SRSA Grant Money

SRSA Grant Program gives small, rural districts additional money that must be used to support the same type of activities as those authorized by REAP Flex. In order to receive SRSA grant money, a district must submit an application. Once this application is submitted, a formula determines the amount of grant money awarded to the district. SRSA grants are closely related to the REAP Flex authority because SRSA grants must be spent on the same type of activities as REAP Flex funds. For this reason, data were collected regarding the use of SRSA grant money. Just under 60 percent of all REAP Flex eligible respondents had received money through this program in the past and 71 percent of respondents were familiar with the program. Several REAP Flex participants and nonparticipants were interviewed about their experiences with SRSA grants. The majority of interviewees reported that they had had sufficient information about SRSA, had few problems with the application process, and found access to the funds satisfactory. One superintendent described the process of accessing SRSA funds as “a little paperwork on the front end, setting it up and doing the [accounting], direct deposit, and the

requests set up. My biggest problem is remembering my password from one year to the next.” Another superintendent described the SRSA grants as “one of the very best federal programs that I’ve ever seen for the simple reason it’s easy to apply for the money.”

Exhibit 9 shows the most common uses of SRSA grant funds. Over 50 percent of recipients of SRSA grants used the funds for technology; over a third used SRSA funds to improve teacher quality. These findings are discussed in greater detail below.

Exhibit 9
Uses of SRSA Grant Funds

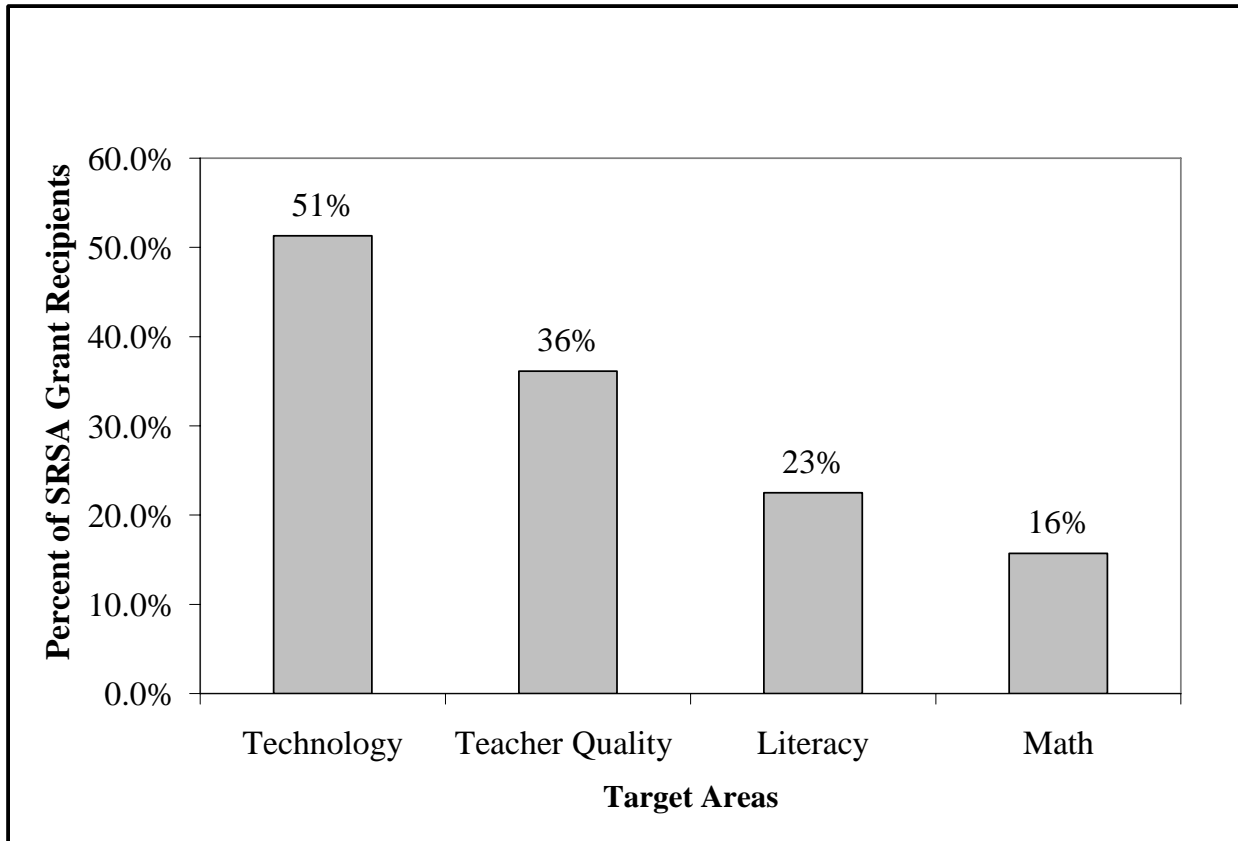


Exhibit reads: Fifty-one percent of SRSA grant recipients used their grant money to fund technology initiatives in their district.

Note: Data were generated by free response item on the survey in which 191 of 194 SRSA grant recipients responded. Percentages do not sum to 100 because the same district could mention multiple uses of grant funds.

Source: District Administrator Survey #8.

Districts generally reported similar goals and services when discussing REAP Flex and SRSA grants. These uses are all authorized under the statutory guidelines. This may reflect the two programs’ similarities—the fact that they both affect the same federal programs—or it may be an example of *NCLB*’s reading and math focus reaching all federal programs. As discussed above, many districts reported math and literacy goals because that was what their state tests or *NCLB* required. The SRSA grant money and the money used under REAP Flex were all targeted in much the same way—to support technology and teacher quality initiatives—and in pursuit of the same goals—math and reading improvement. Two-thirds of district respondents reported

using SRSA grants to improve literacy in the district, and one quarter to improve math skills. In targeting these two main goals using REAP Flex and SRSA grants, rural districts were fulfilling the intent of the statute.

Just over 50 percent of respondents reported using SRSA grant money to support technology programs. Many of the districts noted that SRSA grants were used to upgrade computer labs, purchase computers and printers, and improve Internet services available to students. In addition, one district stated that SRSA grant funds were used to improve safety and technology equipment. Districts also mentioned that SRSA grants were used to purchase educational software aimed at improving student academic skills, especially in reading and math.

This extra funding for technology appeared to be especially important for districts with high poverty or low total revenue. As one grant recipient explained, “The funds are used to supply the students with up-to-date technology that would otherwise be unavailable to them in a small, rural district having over 70 percent of students receiving free and reduced price meals.”

Thirty-six percent of districts reported using SRSA grants to fund teacher quality initiatives. These districts used SRSA grants to recruit, retain, or train highly qualified teachers. The districts utilized the SRSA grant to pay for salaries—both for new teachers and to transfer some teachers from part-time to full-time. This money also often supported professional development, such as training sessions and summer enrichment programs. One respondent that focused on teacher quality initiatives explained, “The monies were used for hiring highly qualified teachers, supporting teachers to become highly qualified through tuition reimbursements, and providing a five-day new teacher orientation and professional development workshop.” One district reported using the SRSA grant to fund a seminar for grade-school teachers conducted by an expert in math instruction. Interviews with district representatives revealed that one district used SRSA grants to recruit and retain teachers, a serious problem faced by rural districts.

Several districts also reported using SRSA grants for things other than technology and teacher quality initiatives. For instance, they purchased math and reading enhancement books as well as publisher programs for reading and math. Districts also used the SRSA grant to purchase books for the school library. Another district was able to expand their pre-K and kindergarten classes from half-day to full-day programs.

As a parallel program to REAP Flex and part of a larger array of flexibility programs under *NCLB*, the similarities between the use of SRSA grant monies and REAP Flex eligible funds is not surprising. One primary difference between the two programs is that districts must apply for an SRSA grant, but not for REAP Flex authority. Thus, district leaders’ choices to use or not use REAP Flex cannot be attributed to a high administrative cost of applying. The following section examines in greater detail why districts choose to participate or not participate in REAP Flex.

The Decision to Use REAP Flex

Familiarity with the REAP Flex Program

Survey data showed that **88 percent of districts were somewhat or very familiar with the REAP Flex program** (see Exhibit 10). Because REAP Flex is not a mandatory program, all eligible districts surveyed faced a choice about whether or not to use it and gathered information to make this choice. These districts were more familiar with REAP Flex than with any of the other flexibility programs, with 88 percent of districts responding that they were somewhat or very familiar with the program. Familiarity with other federal flexibility programs varied from less than 30 percent for Waivers or Ed Flex to over 80 percent for Transferability and Title I, Schoolwide Programs.

Exhibit 10
Familiarity With Federal Funding Flexibility Programs

Program	Not familiar/ Familiar in name only	Somewhat/ Very familiar
REAP Flex	12%	88%
Title I, Schoolwide Programs	15%	85%
Transferability	16%	84%
Consolidation of Administrative Funds	45%	55%
Local Flex	52%	48%
Waivers or Ed Flex	71%	29%

Exhibit reads: Eighty-eight percent of districts report being somewhat or very familiar with REAP Flex.

Source: District Administrator Survey #1.

Case study interview respondents confirmed this high rate of familiarity with REAP Flex. As one respondent put it, “With the technology and the Internet and everything, we always seemed to be able to figure out or find what we were looking for.” Most districts representatives interviewed were familiar with the program; however, two of the districts indicated that the survey for this study was the first time they had heard of the program. Not surprisingly, neither of these districts participated in REAP Flex.

Although district survey results showed a high rate of familiarity with REAP Flex, district officials in a number of case study interviews confused the name of the program with that of the SRSA grant program. For instance, when asked how its SRSA money was spent, one district respondent noted that they focused on improving technology and that they could not have done so “without the REAP grant.” Another respondent answering the same question referred to the “REAP monies” used to upgrade computer labs. This is likely due to the fact that both REAP Flex and the SRSA grant program are a part of the Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP). In addition, the connection between specific initiatives within the district and the part of the program that brings additional funds to the district might be stronger for district leaders than the association with a program that allows for reallocating existing funds.

Sources of REAP Flex Information

As stated above, most districts reported a fairly high level of familiarity with REAP Flex. This level comes from information provided by a variety of sources. Districts were asked about the usefulness of potential sources of information about the REAP Flex program.

The survey findings indicated that the highest percentage of districts (approximately 75 percent) find information from their state education agency somewhat or very useful (see Exhibit 11).

**Exhibit 11
Usefulness of Sources of REAP Flex Information**

Information Source	No Information From Source	Not Useful	Somewhat/Very Useful
Information or technical assistance provided by the state	22%	3%	75%
Workshop or information sessions	34%	4%	61%
U.S. Department of Education Web site or publications	33%	8%	59%
Regional providers of technical assistance	42%	5%	52%
Professional organizations	57%	9%	34%
Direct communication with U.S. Department of Education staff	57%	9%	34%
Other	84%	2%	15%

Exhibit reads: Seventy-five percent of respondents found state information somewhat or very useful.

Note: The majority of districts that report getting REAP Flex information from “Other” sources mentioned their county office of education.

Source: District Administrator Survey #4.

State education agencies were not the only sources of REAP Flex information. Over 50 percent of respondents reported that workshops and information sessions, the U.S. Department of Education Web site or publications, and regional providers of technical assistance were a somewhat or very useful source of information. Approximately one-third of districts responded that professional organizations and direct communication with U.S. Department of Education staff were a somewhat or very useful source of information. In the other category, the most common source mentioned as somewhat or very useful was the county office of education.

The case study results confirmed the survey findings. The majority of case study respondents also mentioned state officials as their primary source of information and guidance about exercising REAP Flex. Districts noted that the state provided them with information about both the uses and restrictions associated with REAP Flex funds, including potential restrictions related to AYP or school improvement status. One superintendent explained, “We’re in constant contact with the state department [of education] from the beginning where we start to ... talk about next year’s allocations and next year’s application process, all the way through to the approval.”

State employees also provided more than technical guidance—one district did not even know REAP Flex existed until a state supervisor brought it to the district’s attention.

While the majority of districts indicated that there was at least one source of information that was somewhat or very useful to the district about the REAP Flex program, there were some distinct differences in the sources of information used by districts participating in the program and those not participating in the program (see Exhibit 12). **For example, 81 percent of REAP Flex participants consulted with the state. In contrast, 55 percent of nonparticipants had consulted with the state about the program.** However, in three of the 13 states (Montana, Oklahoma and South Dakota) that had at least ten district survey respondents, there was both a higher than average level of participation in REAP Flex (at least 60 percent of surveyed districts used the program) and a higher percentage of nonparticipating districts (more than 60 percent) reported consulting with the state or attending a workshop about the program. This may indicate that these states were particularly active in informing their rural districts about the program.

Exhibit 12
Sources of REAP Flex Information Consulted by REAP Flex Nonparticipants
Compared to Sources Consulted by Participants

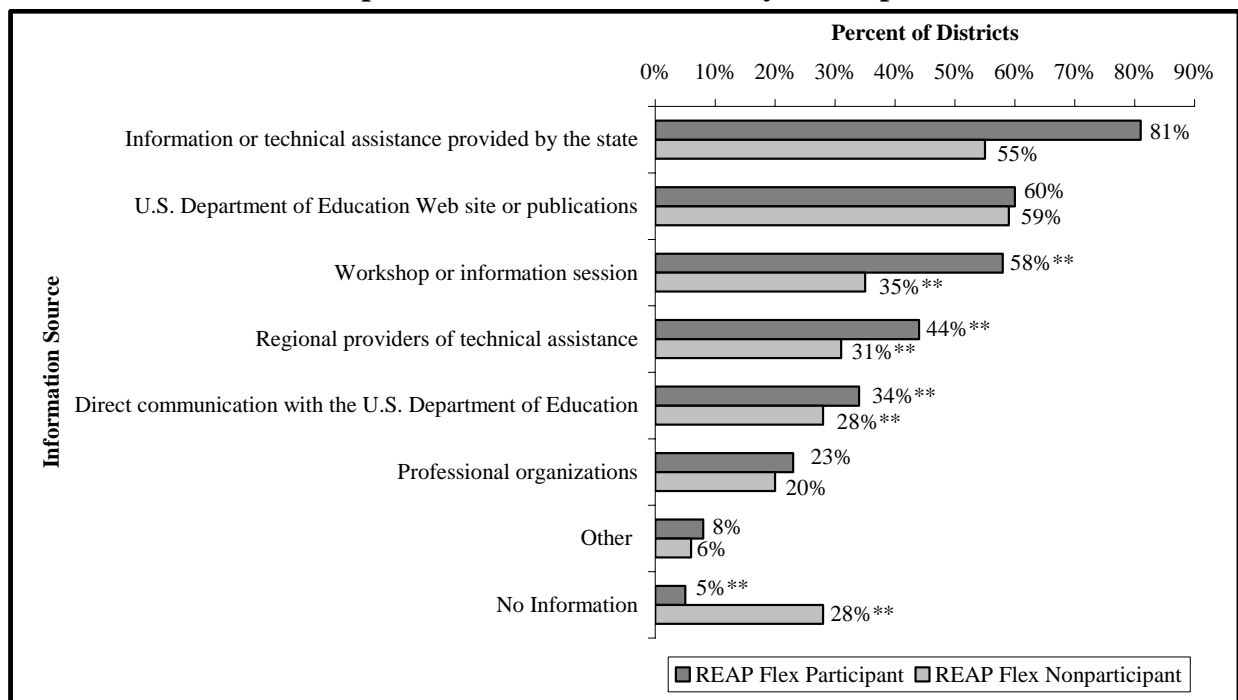


Exhibit reads: Eighty-one percent of REAP Flex participants received information or technical assistance regarding REAP Flex from the state, while 55 percent of nonparticipants received information from this source. Notes: Percentages do not add to 100 because districts could select multiple responses. ** Statistically significant differences (p<.01) between participants and nonparticipants. Source: District Administrator Survey #4.

Furthermore, 28 percent of nonparticipating districts did not consult any source of information about REAP Flex. This may indicate either that the districts have not looked for information about the program or that they do not have access to potential sources of information about the program. According to regression analysis, these nonparticipating districts that reported having

less information were not different from participating districts in either size or resources. Thus, there was no obvious explanation as to why they did not receive any information about REAP Flex.

Reasons Districts Use REAP Flex

Unlike districts that chose not to participate in REAP Flex, only 5 percent of districts using the program reported having no information about it. The reasons for using REAP Flex were previewed in Exhibit 8 (page 17). **Almost 80 percent of respondents said they used the program in order to maintain a stable level of effort for ongoing activities that have been affected by budgetary constraints, and over 50 percent said they used REAP Flex to concentrate federal resources for a smaller number of programs.**

The free response items on the survey and the case study interviews allowed district officials to elaborate on these reasons for participating. **They agreed that funding restrictions like those mentioned above were a major reason for exercising REAP Flex. Further, they explained that small and declining enrollment played a substantial part in creating these funding difficulties.**

Prior to the implementation of REAP Flex, many district administrators indicated that the restrictions placed on federal education funds prevented them from effectively using all available funds. For example, one respondent explained that initial allocations under REAP Flex programs are “too small to be effective by themselves because our district is so small.” Variations upon this theme were the most common answers given in an open-ended survey question asking users why they chose to use REAP Flex.

The case study interviews confirmed this finding. One district leader reported, “Each individual allocation is not enough to really do anything effectively, but if you can move all that into a certain area ... [it] is certainly better than spending little amounts of money in other areas that aren’t really effective.” Another district representative agreed, emphasizing the minimal impact of poorly funded programs: “When you have such a little amount of money—and in our case it was just like a thousand dollars or a little bit more—for each one of those programs, it was difficult to do anything meaningful for the kids.” Many district administrators chose to implement REAP Flex as a means of increasing the effects of a particular program by reallocating funds whose impact had been minimal in other programs.

The small and often declining enrollment numbers in rural districts eligible for REAP Flex led to situations like the ones described above. Because the amount of eligible funds a district receives is partly determined by enrollment, any reduction in enrollment makes a big difference in the federal funding allocated. The impact is that much greater when a district has a small student population to begin with. One district official reported losing 100 students in the past six years; as a result their “operating funds ... dramatically decreased.” Another district’s enrollment decreased by approximately one-third in recent years. REAP Flex users found that the declining funding made effective use of funds even more important and saw REAP Flex as an opportunity to efficiently redistribute and utilize federal education funding.

While these were overwhelmingly the two most common reasons given by all users of REAP Flex for participating in the program, an interesting pattern of explanations emerged when analyzing the survey free response and case study interview data. Districts with less than 15 percent of school-aged children living in poverty focused only on the attractiveness of the flexibility measures of REAP Flex, while districts with high poverty cited both the benefits of flexibility *and* the pressures of reduced federal funds. This may be because high-poverty districts are more affected by the reduction in the federal program funds because their students have additional needs.

Reasons Districts Do Not Use REAP Flex

Districts chose not to use REAP Flex for reasons that fall into two broad categories: insufficient information and a perception that REAP Flex’s benefits would be relatively limited (see Exhibit 13). Almost one quarter of respondents reported being entirely unaware of REAP Flex and one-third of respondents said they did not have enough information about the program to make an informed decision. In contrast to those nonusers, there was a group of “aware” nonusers—districts that made a conscious decision *not* to use REAP Flex, knowing what it offers. These districts offered three main explanations: the largest group (39 percent) indicated that they already had adequate levels of flexibility; approximately 24 percent of districts indicated that the amount of eligible funds was too small to implement desired activities even after exercising REAP Flex; finally, 9 percent of districts reported that the accounting burden of REAP Flex was a major influence on their decision not to use the program.

**Exhibit 13
Major Influences Respondents Cited as Reasons Not to Use REAP Flex**

Top 5 Reasons	Percent of REAP Flex Nonparticipants
District already had enough flexibility over use of funds without REAP Flex	39%
Did not have enough information about REAP Flex to make an informed decision	33%
Was not aware of REAP Flex option	24%
Amount of funds in applicable categories would have been too small to effectively carry out desired activities even after exercising the REAP Flex option	24%
Accounting requirements associated with REAP Flex would have been burdensome	9%

Exhibit reads: Thirty-nine percent of REAP Flex nonusers reported already having enough flexibility as a major influence in their decision not to use REAP Flex.

Notes: Less than 5 percent of districts claimed other major (or even minor) influences on their decision not to use REAP Flex. Percentages do not sum to 100 because districts could give multiple reasons for not using REAP Flex.

Source: District Administrator Survey #11.

The case study interviews supported the survey finding that many nonusers did not use REAP Flex because of a lack of information. As noted earlier, two of the four nonparticipating districts that completed the case study interviews indicated that they had not heard of REAP Flex prior to receiving the survey. One nonuser believed that the district had implemented REAP Flex when in fact, it had not done so. When REAP Flex was described to the nonuser, the response was, “This REAP Flex is something I need to look into a little further to see if we can use it, but we haven’t been.” The same school official also reported, “I wasn’t really informed that much about it.” While these sentiments cannot be taken as representative of all nonusers, they illustrate the survey finding that some district administrators lacked sufficient information about the program’s details and, in some cases, its existence.

The case study interviews also confirmed that some nonparticipating districts perceived the benefits of REAP Flex as limited. In the other two nonrespondent district case study interviews, district representatives made informed decisions not to participate in REAP Flex. One district official was aware of REAP Flex but chose to maintain previous funding procedures explaining, “In prior years it was fine because ... we were using the carry-over. And then when we needed it, it was handy for it to be there for us to use.” In other words, the district already had sufficient money to fund its educational programs. The school official appreciated the benefits of REAP Flex but did not see the added flexibility as necessary or beneficial given current funding levels.

Increasing Interest in REAP Flex

The reasons why district officials use or do not use REAP Flex start to shed light on potential modifications of the program that could increase its appeal. The data collection instruments asked districts directly what could be changed about REAP Flex that would make them more interested in the program.

What is particularly striking about the results is that while all potential changes offered in the survey would increase interest in the program, REAP Flex users were significantly more likely to indicate that these changes would cause their interest in the program to be somewhat or much higher. **For example, the most popular change to REAP Flex for both users and nonusers was allowing applicable funds to be used for activities authorized under a larger number of federal programs** (see Exhibit 14). Seventy-one percent of current users would have increased interest in REAP Flex if this change were made while 63 percent of nonusers would be more interested. Similarly, nearly 70 percent of participating districts indicated that they would be more interested in the program if accounting requirements were relaxed or assistance was offered to maintain necessary records. Sixty percent of nonparticipating districts indicated that this change would increase their interest in the program. The majority of REAP Flex users also indicated that including additional federal programs in REAP Flex or decoupling the program from AYP status would increase interest in the program. This was the case for less than half of nonparticipating districts.

Exhibit 14
Reaction to Potential Changes to the Terms of the REAP Flex Provision, Given as Percent of Respondents for Whom the Change Would Cause Their Interest in REAP Flex to Be Somewhat or Much Higher

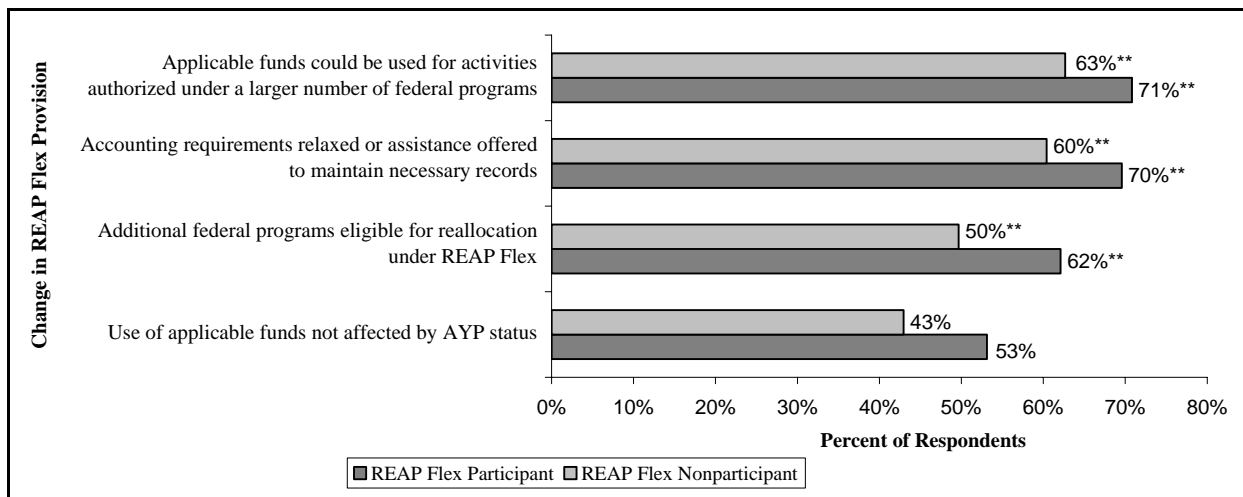


Exhibit reads: Seventy-one percent of participating districts reported that their interest in REAP Flex would be somewhat or much higher if funds could be used for activities authorized under a larger number of federal programs. Notes: Percentages do not sum to 100 because districts could mark multiple responses. ** Statistically significant differences ($p < .01$) between participants and nonparticipants. Source: District Administrator Survey #16.

Case study interviews again confirmed the survey findings. For example, participating districts explained that simplifying accounting procedures would make the program more appealing, which was the second most popular proposed change on the survey.

Most REAP Flex users interviewed in the case studies had no complaints about REAP Flex and did not identify any potential improvements. As one district official indicated, “It does allow us to be flexible... flexible enough to move it to where they actually have a need and use it better.... It’s a far better way to spend the money than the way we had it before.” Another official agreed, stating, “I don’t think there’s anything bad about it.” A principal at another school expressed a similar sentiment: “I don’t know that I’ve ever heard a negative comment about it... Negatives? I don’t have any.” Other district leaders explained that federal funds and flexibility in the use of these funds were essential.

Interviews with nonusers did not identify any improvements that would make REAP Flex more attractive. District officials from two of the nonparticipating districts had not previously known about REAP Flex and therefore were unable to identify improvements. District officials from the other two nonuser districts indicated that they were now using REAP Flex (after not participating in 2004–05) and were pleased to be participating in the program.

4. Conclusion—Summary of Findings

The aim of this study was threefold: first, to investigate the characteristics of districts participating in REAP Flex; second, to look specifically at how districts exercised REAP Flex and the types of activities that received additional support as a result of reallocation of eligible funds; and finally, to examine the factors that lead districts to participate or not participate in REAP Flex. These three areas also embody the central findings of the survey and case study interviews. Districts participating in REAP Flex indicated a high-level of satisfaction with the program, while districts not using the program often appeared to lack adequate information to understand the potential benefits of exercising REAP Flex authority.

Half of Eligible Districts Participated in the REAP Flex Program. While 60 percent of surveyed districts notified their state that they planned to use the program, 51 percent of survey respondents *actually* participated in the program. The districts using REAP Flex tended to participate for multiple years, indicating that district derived enough benefit from the program to warrant continued use. This finding was confirmed by the positive description of the program both in the survey results and the case study interviews. In fact, as one case study respondent suggested, “It’s the best thing that’s ever happened to small districts.”

In many ways, districts participating and not participating in REAP Flex appeared similar. Not surprisingly, both groups of districts were small and served approximately 300 students. The most notable difference was that districts that received a SRSA grant were significantly more likely to participate in REAP Flex. SRSA grant recipients already had to use funds for the same type of activities authorized under REAP Flex. Participation in REAP Flex therefore may have seemed a logical extension of participation in the SRSA grant program.

Districts used REAP Flex authority to target particular student groups and academic outcomes. Participating districts placed a high priority on improving mathematics and language arts outcomes and on elementary school students. In fact, participants placed significantly higher priority on mathematics, language arts and elementary students than did nonparticipants. Given these priorities, it is not surprising that districts overwhelmingly reported use of REAP Flex to target particular student groups or activities and to increase the amount of federal funds available for high-priority programs. In their free response answers, many districts explained that their goals when utilizing REAP Flex were related to improving assessment scores in these two subjects.

Districts reported two primary strategies for utilizing funds to better target their priorities. REAP Flex participants most frequently mentioned allocating funds to technology, so that the district could purchase appropriate equipment and software for their students. The second most common strategy for REAP Flex focused on teacher quality initiatives. Participating districts reported using funds to support professional development for current teachers, recruit more highly qualified teachers, and pay salaries. Districts employed these two strategies in an effort to improve student outcomes in their priority areas—math and reading. SRSA recipients also reported using their grant funds in very similar ways, including the use of technology and improved teacher quality to improve student outcomes, especially students in particularly disadvantaged subgroups.

Districts supported these strategies by using funds from Title I, Part A—Improving Achievement for Disadvantaged Children; Title II, Part D—Educational Technology State Grants; and Title V, Part A—State Grants for Innovative Programs. The first two programs listed directly relate to the goals and strategies discussed above—a focus on student subgroups and on technology. The third commonly targeted program, Title V, Part A, was identified as one with fewer administrative requirements and restrictions, and thus a favored way to target money to be used toward all educational aims.

Almost half of eligible districts do not participate in REAP Flex because they do not possess adequate information about the program or do not perceive the program as beneficial. The findings provided notable insights into why almost half of the REAP Flex eligible district respondents do not use REAP Flex. First, the findings indicated that there was substantial confusion related to the different programs available for rural districts. District officials often confused the name of the SRSA grant program with REAP and REAP Flex. In general, district officials found the repetitive nomenclature—whereby REAP Flex and the SRSA grant programs are embedded in other programs titled REAP and SRSA—difficult to understand.

This confusion was at least in part related to the fact that a substantial number of nonparticipating districts either possessed no information about the program or did not have adequate information to make an informed decision about participation. The case study results confirmed these findings as two of the four nonparticipating district officials indicated that they had not heard of the program prior to receiving the survey. Upon learning about the program through the case study process, these districts indicated that would now consider participating in the program. While the study findings showed that many districts did not have enough information about the program, other districts knew of the program but chose not to participate. The majority of these districts reported that they either did not need additional flexibility or that the funds eligible for reallocation would not be enough to matter for the district.

On the other hand, districts that *did* choose to participate in the REAP Flex program indicated that they used the flexibility to do two things. First, they were able to make effective use federal funds that individually would have been too small to be useful. Second, they were able to maintain a stable level of effort for activities affected by enrollment related budget constraints. The added flexibility helped them to weather cuts in funding to programs that otherwise may have forced them to reduce services provided to students.

Overall, the findings from the survey and case study interviews indicated that REAP Flex participants were satisfied with the program and planned to continue exercising this option for increased flexibility. Participating districts were able to use funds to better address student needs, especially in light of new pressures for improved performance. Moreover, they were using the program in accordance with the goals of the *No Child Left Behind Act*. Finally, for many nonparticipating districts, limited access to information was a barrier to participation in the program. As indicated by the survey data, any policy changes that increased awareness of the program, increased the number of federal programs in order to expand the amount of eligible funds, increased the number of programs that REAP Flex-eligible funds could be used for, reduced effect of a district's AYP status on eligibility, or relaxed accounting requirements would likely increase participation levels among eligible districts while simultaneously increasing the satisfaction of current participants.

Appendix A: Methodology

This study used survey and interview data to provide a description of the REAP Flex program participants and nonparticipants, as well as examining how participants exercise flexibility. The data were collected between October 2005 and February 2006. Responses to surveys sent to REAP-eligible districts generated the quantitative data (see Appendix B for the survey). Interviews with survey respondents, both REAP Flex users and nonusers, supplied the qualitative data (see Appendix C for interview protocols). The survey and interview protocols were developed in close collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education, and some questions were modeled after interview questions used in the Department's study, *Factors Affecting Initial Application Rates for the State-Flex and Local-Flex Programs* or Department program guidance documents. They included questions about districts' use or non-use of the REAP Flex authority in the 2004-05 school year.

Survey Participants and Data Collection

The district sample was chosen using a sampling frame that consisted of all school districts nationwide that were eligible for REAP Flex as of 2005. Any district that had participated in the National Longitudinal Study of *NCLB* was removed from consideration in order to minimize response burden. The survey was initially mailed to 368 REAP-eligible school districts nationwide. These districts were chosen in order to obtain a representative sample based on the number of students in the district and poverty level.⁸ Five districts were removed from the sample because they had consolidated with other districts and therefore no longer existed as individual entities. Additionally, one district was removed because it was deemed ineligible for REAP Flex. After removing these districts, the final sample size was 361.

Districts were given the option to fill the survey out on paper or online. After the initial mailing, four types of follow-up efforts were pursued: reminder letters, reminder phone calls, replacement packages, and offers to complete the survey with a researcher via phone. The final response rate was 93 percent, with 335 districts participating in the survey.

Case Study Participants

The second component of data collection consisted of phone interviews with officials in 12 school districts selected from among the 335 district survey respondents. When possible, the interviews were conducted with the same person who filled out the survey. The majority of case study respondents were superintendents or assistant superintendents. Other respondents included principals, federal programs coordinators, business managers, and consultants.

Preliminary analysis of the survey data suggested that users and nonusers of REAP Flex differed in two primary ways, amount of federal funding and poverty rate. Categories of respondents were created based on these differences and case study sites were selected from within those categories. A greater number of districts in which federal funding made up 8 percent or more of

⁸ Poverty level was determined by dividing the number of school aged children (5 to 17 years old) living in poverty by the total number of school aged children living in that district.

total revenue used REAP Flex than districts with less than 8 percent federal funding. Consequently, high and low federal funding was used as a selection category. Second, more districts in which at least 15 percent of school aged children live in poverty used REAP Flex than districts with less than 15 percent of school aged children living in poverty. Thus, high and low poverty was a second selection category. In order to get detailed information about decisions concerning the use of REAP Flex from a wide range of districts, survey responders were divided into eight categories (shown below) and then case study districts were randomly selected from those categories.

Exhibit A-1
Case Study Sample Selection: Number of Interviews by Category

Percent Federal Funds	Percent Students In Poverty	REAP Flex User	REAP Flex Nonuser
High	High	2	1
	Low	2	1
Low	High	2	1
	Low	2	1
	Total	8	4

Source: The Urban Institute.

While these categories were used to ensure variation among case studies, the small number of interviews made any analysis of interviews based upon these criteria nearly impossible. In addition, while a higher percentage of districts with higher levels of poverty and greater federal funding participate in REAP Flex, these differences were not statistically significant (see Exhibit 2 for additional comparisons of REAP Flex users and nonusers).

Data Preparation and Analysis

Survey data were carefully examined; every variable was checked for outliers and unusual responses. Phone inquiries verified unclear REAP Flex participation status. Preliminary review of the data revealed that some confusion had occurred over the survey questions regarding districts' total revenue. For example, in some cases districts had simply given the total of the various amounts of federal funding asked for in previous questions. In other cases, funding numbers were illogical or outside a reasonable range, such that they frequently were not enough to pay the salary of single teacher. To account for this, total revenue reported in the survey was

replaced with total revenue reported by the Common Core of Data (2003) if the survey data met one of the following two conditions⁹:

1. The sum of reported federal funds was greater than 20 percent of the total revenue reported.
2. The total revenue reported was less than the sum of reported federal funds.

Finally, the data were checked for potential non-response bias by examining potential differences between districts that responded and those that did not respond. This analysis indicated that there were no significant differences between respondents and nonrespondents for either of the two stratification variables: size and poverty level. This result combined with the high response rate made additional sample weights unnecessary.

Survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, mean differences tests, and regression analysis. Means and frequencies were calculated for each applicable survey question. REAP Flex participants were compared with nonparticipants. Linear regressions using poverty level and percent federal funding as predictors were conducted for survey questions with continuous outcomes. Logistic regressions using the same predictor variables were conducted for binary outcomes, such as the yes or no question asking whether the district participated in REAP Flex.

In addition to the data gathered from the surveys, the interview transcripts from the case studies and the free response answers generated from the survey were coded and analyzed using the research questions as a guide. This qualitative information provided illustrations of many findings generated by the survey data, as well as insights into how REAP Flex was used by districts to better target funds based on educational planning needs and district goals.

⁹ Because CCD data was from 2003 and survey data from 2004–05, only observations that met the two categories above were replaced.

Appendix B: Data Tables With Standard Errors

Presented below are data tables for all exhibits from the body of the report with standard errors where differences between participants and nonparticipants were reported.

Exhibit B-1
Descriptive Comparison of REAP Flex Participants vs. Nonparticipants

	REAP Flex Participants	REAP Flex Nonparticipants	Difference Between Participants and Nonparticipants
Percent Poverty ^a	16.9% (0.7%)	15.5% (0.8%)	1.5% (1.1%)
Percent Federal Funding ^b	11.1% (0.7%)	9.4% (0.8%)	1.7% (1.0%)
Percent Eligible Funding ^c	2.1% (0.2%)	1.7% (0.2%)	0.5% (0.3%)
Ever Received SRSA	67.4% (3.6%)	48.5% (4.0%)	19.0%** (5.3%)
Average Daily Enrollment ^d	308 (18.4)	301 (24.2)	7 (30.2)

^a Based on the percent of school age children in the district living below the poverty line (2000 Census data).
^b Percent Total Revenue comprised of federal funding (based on 2003 CCD data).
^c Percent Total Revenue comprised of REAP eligible federal programs (not counting Title I, Part A, Title III, or Title IV, Part B).
^d Based on 2003 CCD data.

Note: ** Statistically significant differences (p<.01).

Source: District Administrator Survey #7 and data sources cited above.

Exhibit B-2
Mean Revenue by Program, REAP Flex Participants vs. Nonparticipants

	Mean Allocation for the 2004–05 School Year (in dollars)	
	REAP Flex Participants	REAP Flex Nonparticipants
Title I, Part A	\$86,772	\$82,228
Improving the Achievement of Disadvantaged Children	(\$9,069.79)	(\$1,6713.14)
Title II, Part A	\$22,398	\$17,960
Improving Teacher Quality State Grants	(\$2,250.27)	(\$1,977.61)
Title II, Part D	\$2,954	\$2,238
Educational Technology State Grants	(\$406.03)	(\$475.91)
Title III	\$1,295	\$953
Language Instruction for LEP and Immigrant Students	(\$442.78)	(\$311.24)
Title IV, Part A	\$2,493	\$1,949
Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities	(\$277.24)	(\$268.02)
Title IV, Part B	\$2,376	\$1,721
21st-Century Community Learning Centers	(\$1,406.03)	(\$1,184.96)
Title V, Part A	\$2,626	\$2,102
State Grants for Innovative Programs	(\$311.21)	(\$238.42)
SRSA Grant Award	\$19,464*	\$22,956*
Grants from Small Rural School Achievement Program	(\$905.29)	(\$1,195.05)
Total Revenue	\$2,882,577	\$3,384,072
From All Sources	(\$174,256.71)	(\$359,191.28)

Note: * Statistically significant differences (p<.05).
Source: District Administrator Survey #14 and 21.

Exhibit B-3
Usage Patterns of REAP Flex Participants vs. Nonparticipants

	REAP Flex Participants	REAP Flex Nonparticipants	Difference Between Participants and Nonparticipants
Used REAP Flex Prior to 2004–05	81% (3.1%)	14% (2.8%)	67%** (4.2%)
Planned to Use REAP Flex in 2005–06	93% (2.0%)	37% (3.9%)	56%** (4.4%)

Note: ** Statistically significant differences (p<.01).
Source: District Administrator Survey #12, 13, 24, and 25.

Exhibit B-4
Mean Priority Level of and REAP Flex Usage for Areas of Possible Need
(1=Low Priority, 3=High Priority)

	REAP Flex Participants	REAP Flex Nonparticipants	Percent of Participants Who Used REAP Flex to Address Need
Instruction			
Highly qualified teachers	2.4 (0.06)	2.1 (0.07)	47%
Highly qualified paraprofessionals	2.1 (0.06)	2.0 (0.07)	33%
Curriculum and instructional materials	2.5 (0.05)	2.5 (0.05)	66%
Educational technology	2.6 (0.05)	2.6 (0.05)	67%
Support for Special Programs and Services			
Extended-time programs	2.0 (0.07)	2.0 (0.06)	30%
Summer Programs	1.9 (0.06)	2.0 (0.07)	22%
Supplemental educational services (SES) provided under Title I	2.0 (0.07)	1.9 (0.06)	30%
Transportation for Title I school choice participants	1.2** (0.04)	1.4** (0.06)	3%
Performance on Specific Academic Outcomes			
English or Language Arts	2.7** (0.04)	2.5** (0.05)	77%
Mathematics	2.8** (0.04)	2.6** (0.05)	73%
Science	2.4 (0.05)	2.5 (0.05)	38%
Attendance rates	1.9 (0.07)	1.9 (0.07)	14%
Graduation rates	1.9 (0.07)	1.7 (0.07)	13%
Other	1.8 (0.16)	1.7 (0.21)	22%
Performance of Specific Student Groups			
Racial and ethnic minorities	1.7 (0.07)	1.7 (0.06)	28%
Low-income students	2.5 (0.06)	2.5 (0.05)	65%
Students with disabilities	2.2 (0.07)	2.2 (0.06)	39%
Limited English Proficient (LEP students)	1.5 (0.07)	1.7 (0.07)	22%
Students in low-performing schools	1.5 (0.06)	1.5 (0.06)	19%
Kindergarten and pre-K students	2.1 (0.07)	2.2 (0.06)	42%
Elementary students	2.6** (0.05)	2.4** (0.05)	87%
Middle school students	2.4 (0.06)	2.4 (0.06)	67%
High school students	2.1 (0.07)	2.0 (0.07)	46%

Note: ** Statistically significant differences (p<.01) between participants and nonparticipants.

Source: District Administrator Survey #17 and 23.

Exhibit B-5
Difference in Use of Funds After Exercising REAP Flex

Funding Category	Mean Movement of Funds (in dollars)	Percent of Districts That Used Nonprogram Funds in Program Area	Percent of Districts That Used Program Funds in Nonprogram Area
Title I, Part A	\$6,318	34%	25%
Improving the Achievement of Disadvantaged Children	(\$2,416.21)	(3.6%)	(3.3%)
Title II, Part A	-\$7,673	15%	58%
Improving Teacher Quality State Grants	(\$1,259.15)	(2.7%)	(3.8%)
Title II, Part D	\$2,183	18%	43%
Educational Technology State Grants	(\$712.74)	(2.9%)	(3.8%)
Title III	\$1	4%	20%
Language Instruction for LEP and Immigrant Students	(\$2,576.77)	(1.4%)	(3.0%)
Title IV, Part A	-\$763	5%	58%
Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities	(\$657.21)	(1.7%)	(3.8%)
Title IV, Part B	\$1,200	1%	17%
21st-Century Community Learning Centers	(\$1,200.00)	(0.6%)	(2.9%)
Title V, Part A	\$5,203	28%	36%
State Grants for Innovative Programs	(\$1,041.35)	(3.4%)	(3.7%)

Note: Negative numbers indicate that, on average, more money intended for a particular program was used for nonprogram purposes. Percent of districts that used program funds in nonprogram areas based only on districts that had initial program funding allocations greater than \$0.00

Source: District Administrator Survey #21.

Appendix C: REAP Flex Authority District Administrator Survey

STUDY OF NCLB FLEXIBILITY PROVISIONS

REAP FLEX AUTHORITY DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR SURVEY

FALL 2005

To complete this survey online go to:

<http://reap.urban.org>

Username: <<Username>>

Password: <<Password>>

**Prepared By:
The Urban Institute
Education Policy Center**

**Prepared For:
U.S. Department of Education
Policy and Program Studies Service
Contract No. ED-01-CO-0080**

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 1875-0235. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 30 minutes per response, including the time to review instructions, search existing data resources, gather the data needed, and complete and review the information collection. If you have any comments concerning the accuracy of the time estimate(s) or suggestion for improving this form, please write to: U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC 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 Under Secretary, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue SW, Room 6W203, Washington, DC 20202-8240.

Dear District Official,

Thank you for your district's participation in the Study of No Child Left Behind Flexibility Provisions.

Purpose of Study: To evaluate and understand the ways in which school districts are using the provisions for enhanced flexibility over the use of federal education funding authorized under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

Sponsor: The study is being conducted by the Education Policy Center of the Urban Institute under a contract from the Policy and Program Studies Service of the U.S. Department of Education.

Privacy: Responses to this data collection will be used only for statistical purposes. The reports prepared for this study will summarize findings across the sample and will not associate responses with a specific district or individual. We will not provide information that identifies you or your district to anyone outside the study team, except as required by law.

Response Burden: This survey should require approximately 30 minutes of your time.

Benefits: Your participation will help inform policy makers and educators at the local, state, and national levels about the implementation of the flexibility provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act.

More Information: If you have questions or would like more information about this study, please contact Kathleen Feehan at the Urban Institute via email (nclb-flex@ui.urban.org) or call our toll-free number 1-800-217-6741.

Thank you for your cooperation in this very important effort!

PART I: NCLB Flexibility

1. How familiar are you with the following provisions for flexibility over the use of federal funding authorized under No Child Left Behind? *Mark one response in each row.*

Type of NCLB Flexibility	Not at all Familiar ▼	Familiar with Name only ▼	Somewhat Familiar ▼	Very Familiar ▼
a. Title I Schoolwide Programs Eligible schools may integrate Title I funds with other funds to improve the regular education program for all students in the school.	①	②	③	④
b. Transferability Districts may transfer funds among a set of eligible federal programs.	①	②	③	④
c. REAP Flex Small rural districts receive additional flexibility in the use of certain federal formula funds.	①	②	③	④
d. Local-Flex Demonstration program that extends the amount of flexibility that participating school districts can exercise over certain federal funds.	①	②	③	④
e. Consolidation of Administrative Funds Districts may consolidate administrative costs for federal programs.	①	②	③	④
f. Waivers or Ed-Flex Districts may be exempted from certain ESEA requirements by Secretary of Education or their state.	①	②	③	④

2. For each kind of flexibility listed in the columns below, please indicate whether your district obtained information from one or more of the specified sources. If you did not receive any information about a particular form of flexibility, please mark “No information” in the final row.

Mark all responses that apply in each column.

Type of NCLB Flexibility

Mark all responses that apply in each column.

Information Sources	Schoolwide Title I ▼	Transferability ▼	REAP Flex ▼	Local-Flex	Consolidation Admin. funds ▼	Waivers/Ed-Flex ▼
a. U.S. Department of Education web site or publications (e.g. regulations, program guidance)	①	①	①	①	①	①
b. Direct communication with staff from U.S. Department of Education	②	②	②	②	②	②
c. Information or technical assistance provided by your state educational agency (SEA)	③	③	③	③	③	③
d. Regional providers of technical assistance	④	④	④	④	④	④
e. Workshop or information session (e.g. training for Title I coordinators)	④	④	④	④	④	④
f. Professional organizations (e.g. AASA or Council of Chief State Officers)	⑤	⑤	⑤	⑤	⑤	⑤
g. Other (Specify: _____)	⑥	⑥	⑥	⑥	⑥	⑥
h. No Information	⑦	⑦	⑦	⑦	⑦	⑦

3. During the past school year (2004-05), did your district use any of the following types of flexibility under No Child Left Behind? *Mark one response in each row.*

Type of NCLB Flexibility	Used by district in 2004-05	
	No	Yes
a. Title I Schoolwide Programs	▼ ①	▼ ②
b. Transferability	①	②
c. REAP Flex	①	②
d. Local-Flex	①	②
e. Consolidation of Administrative Funds	①	②
f. Waivers or Ed-Flex	①	②

PART II: Learning about REAP Flex

The questions in this section ask specifically about the REAP Flex provision of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Please read the following brief description of the REAP Flex provision of No Child Left Behind.

Description of REAP Flex

Small districts serving rural communities are eligible to exercise the Alternative Uses of Funds provision under the Small Rural School Achievement (SRSA) program. This provision (known as “REAP Flex”) gives participating districts the authority to use “applicable funding” for alternative uses under selected federal programs. Applicable funding refers to funds allocated on a formula basis through the following programs:

- **Title II Part A** Improving Teacher Quality State Grants
- **Title II Part D** Educational Technology State Grants
- **Title IV Part A** Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities State Grants
- **Title V Part A** State Grants for Innovative Programs

A REAP Flex district may use all or part of its “applicable funding” for activities associated with the programs above plus several others:

- **Title I Part A** Improving the Achievement of Disadvantaged Children
- **Title III** Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students
- **Title IV Part B** 21st-Century Community Learning Centers

Districts eligible to use the REAP Flex authority are also eligible to receive grant funds on a formula basis under the SRSA program. Eligible districts may use funds from **SRSA grant** allocations to carry out activities authorized under any of the seven programs listed above.

Districts not making AYP after their third year of participation in REAP Flex may continue exercising this flexibility authority, provided that all applicable funding is used for improvement activities authorized under section 1116 of ESEA.

4. Thinking specifically about REAP Flex, how useful did you find the following sources for informing your decision about whether or not to use REAP Flex? If you did not receive any information from a particular source, please mark “No Information” in the final column.
Mark one response in each row.

How useful was the information source

Information Sources	Not at all Useful	Somewhat Useful	Very Useful	No Information
	①	②	③	④
a. U.S. Department of Education web site or publications	①	②	③	④
b. Direct communication with U.S. Department of Education staff	①	②	③	④
c. Information or technical assistance provided by your SEA	①	②	③	④
d. Regional providers of technical assistance	①	②	③	④
e. Workshop or information session	①	②	③	④
f. Professional organizations	①	②	③	④
g. Other (Specify: _____)	①	②	③	④

5. Are you familiar with the Small Rural School Achievement (SRSA) grant program?

Mark one response. →

- ① No
- ② Yes

6. Has your district applied for an SRSA grant in the past?

Mark one response. →

- ① No
- ② Yes
- ③ Don't Know

7. Has your district ever received an award under the SRSA grant program?

Mark one response. →

- ① No
- ② Yes
- ③ Don't Know

8. If your district has received an SRSA grant award, in the space below please describe the way in which these funds have been used. Be sure to indicate the most recent year in which a grant was received and the specific programs, activities, or other expenses being supported by SRSA funds. Strategic planning and budget documents often include this type of information. When you return your survey, please also include copies of any such documentation related to your SRSA grant.

If your district has NOT received an SRSA grant, please write “No Grant” in the space below.

9. A district planning to use REAP Flex must notify its SEA in writing of the intent to do so. Did your district provide such notification for the 2004-05 school year?

Mark one response.

- ① No
② Yes

10. Some districts change their plans regarding the use of the REAP Flex authority during the course of a school year. Did your district actually exercise the REAP Flex authority during the 2004-05 school year?

Mark one response.

① No → *if No* → Continue to next Question

② Yes → *if Yes* → **SKIP to Question 18**

PART III-A: Questions for Districts NOT using REAP Flex

11. To what extent did the following considerations factor into your district’s decision not to use REAP Flex in 2004-05? *Mark one response in each row.*

Considerations	Influence on Decision		
	No Influence ▼ ①	Minor Influence ▼ ②	Major Influence ▼ ③
a. Was not aware of the REAP Flex option	①	②	③
b. Did not have enough information about REAP Flex to make an informed decision	①	②	③
c. District already had enough flexibility over use of funds without REAP Flex	①	②	③
d. Amount of funds in applicable categories would have been too small to effectively carry out desired activities even after exercising the REAP Flex option	①	②	③
e. District did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP), so its use of REAP Flex would have been restricted if performance did not improve in the future	①	②	③
f. District was told by SEA that it could not use REAP Flex due to its accountability status under Title I of the ESEA	①	②	③
g. District was told by SEA that it could not use REAP Flex for a reason <u>other than</u> its accountability status	①	②	③
h. Accounting requirements associated with REAP Flex would have been burdensome	①	②	③
i. Concern about the possibility of an audit	①	②	③
j. Other (Specify: _____)	①	②	③

12. Has your district used REAP Flex in years before 2004-05?

Mark one response.



- ① No
- ② Yes

13. Is your district planning to use REAP Flex this year (2005-06)?

Mark one response.



- ① Yes
- ② No
- ③ Undecided

14. The table below lists the federal programs involved in the REAP Flex authority. For each program, please indicate the amount of your district's allocation for the 2004-05 school year. If your district did not receive funds under a particular program, please enter "0" (zero) in the space provided.

Funding Category	Allocation for the 2004-05 School Year (in dollars)
Title I Part A Improving the Achievement of Disadvantaged Children	\$ _____
Title II Part A Improving Teacher Quality State Grants	\$ _____
Title II Part D Educational Technology State Grants	\$ _____
Title III Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students	\$ _____
Title IV Part A Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities	\$ _____
Title IV Part B 21st-Century Community Learning Centers	\$ _____
Title V Part A State Grants for Innovative Programs	\$ _____
SRSA Grant Award Grants from Small Rural School Achievement program	\$ _____

15. In the space below, please fill in the total amount of revenues your school district received from all sources for the 2004-05 school year.

Total district revenues from all sources
(2004-05 School Year) \$ _____
Fill in dollar amount

16. Based on the description of REAP Flex above, consider the following changes that could be made to the terms of the provision. How would each of these possible changes affect your interest in pursuing REAP Flex? *Mark one response in each row.*

Change in REAP Flex provision	Level of Interest in REAP Flex if Change is Made			
	Lower Interest ▼	About the Same ▼	Somewhat Higher ▼	Much Higher ▼
a. If additional federal programs were considered applicable funding sources for REAP Flex	①	②	③	④
b. If applicable funds could be used for activities authorized under a larger number of federal programs	①	②	③	④
c. If the use of applicable funds was not affected by a district's AYP status	①	②	③	④
d. If accounting requirements were relaxed or assistance was offered to maintain necessary records	①	②	③	④
e. Other (Specify: _____)	①	②	③	④

17. This question asks you to provide a basic educational needs assessment for your district. For each of the areas of possible need listed below, please indicate how much of a priority this area is for your district. *Mark one response in each row.*

Possible Areas of Need	Priority Level		
	Low ▼	Medium ▼	High ▼
Instruction			
a. Highly qualified teachers	①	②	③
b. Highly qualified paraprofessionals	①	②	③
c. Curriculum and instructional materials	①	②	③
d. Educational technology	①	②	③
Support for Special Programs and Services			
e. Extended-time programs (e.g. before- or after-school, weekend)	①	②	③
f. Summer programs	①	②	③
g. Supplemental educational services (SES) provided under Title I	①	②	③
h. Transportation for Title I school choice participants	①	②	③
Performance on Specific Academic Outcomes			
i. English or language arts	①	②	③
j. Mathematics	①	②	③
k. Science	①	②	③
l. Attendance rates	①	②	③
m. Graduation rates	①	②	③
n. Other (Specify: _____)	①	②	③
Performance of Specific Student Groups			
o. Racial and ethnic minorities	①	②	③
p. Low-income students	①	②	③
q. Students with disabilities	①	②	③
r. Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students	①	②	③
s. Students in low-performing schools	①	②	③
t. Kindergarten and pre-K students	①	②	③
u. Elementary students	①	②	③
v. Middle school students	①	②	③
w. High school students	①	②	③

You have completed the survey.

Thank You!

PART III-B: Questions for Districts that used REAP Flex in 2004-05

18. We would like to learn about the way in which the REAP Flex authority is administered in your district. In Column A, please indicate who is responsible for deciding which applicable funds will be used under the provision. In Column B, indicate who is responsible for overall management or oversight of the REAP Flex authority. If more than one actor shares these responsibilities, mark all responses that apply.

Responsibility for REAP Flex

Mark all responses that apply in each column.

District Actors	(A) Decisions about which funds to use under REAP Flex ▼	(B) Management or Oversight of REAP Flex ▼
a. Superintendent	①	①
b. School board	②	②
c. Financial officer	③	③
d. General administrator for all federal programs	④	④
e. Administrators for individual federal programs	⑤	⑤
f. Administrator assigned specifically to manage REAP Flex	⑥	⑥
g. Other (Specify: _____)	⑦	⑦

19. Districts choose to use the REAP Flex authority for a variety of reasons. In the space below, briefly describe why your district decided to use this form of flexibility. In particular, please be sure to include: (1) the particular goals you hoped to achieve and (2) the specific programs or activities supported by the applicable funds used under this authority. You may attach an additional sheet if you require more space to respond.

20. Has your district used its REAP Flex authority in any of the following ways?

Mark one response in each row.

REAP Flex used to	No ▼ ①	Yes ▼ ②
a. Increase the amount of federal funds available for high-priority programs	①	②
b. Concentrate federal resources for a smaller number of programs	①	②
c. Initiate <u>new</u> activities that would not have been possible without exercising REAP Flex	①	②
d. Maintain a stable level of effort for on-going activities that have been affected by budgetary constraints	①	②
e. Target particular student groups or outcomes	①	②

21. Please describe the way in which your district's use of REAP Flex has affected the way you allocate federal funds across applicable program categories.

In the first column below please indicate the amount of funding your district was allocated for the past school year (2004-05) for each program. If your district did not receive funds under a particular program, please enter "0" (zero) in the space provided. In the second column please enter the amount of funds used for activities associated with those program activities **after using REAP Flex**.

Funding Category	Allocation for the 2004-05 School Year (in dollars) ▼	Amount used for activities authorized under each program after exercising REAP Flex (in dollars) ▼
Title I Part A Improving the Achievement of Disadvantaged Children	\$ _____	\$ _____
Title II Part A Improving Teacher Quality State Grants	\$ _____	\$ _____
Title II Part D Educational Technology State Grants	\$ _____	\$ _____
Title III Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students	\$ _____	\$ _____
Title IV Part A Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities	\$ _____	\$ _____
Title IV Part B 21st-Century Community Learning Centers	\$ _____	\$ _____
Title V Part A State Grants for Innovative Programs	\$ _____	\$ _____
SRSA Grant Award Grants from Small Rural School Achievement program	\$ _____	
Total (Values in two columns should be equal)	\$ _____	\$ _____

22. In the space below, please fill in the total amount of revenues your school district received from all sources for the 2004-05 school year.

Total district revenues from all sources \$ _____
 (2004-05 School Year)

Fill in dollar amount

23. This question asks you to provide a basic educational needs assessment for your district. For each of the areas of possible need listed below, please provide **two** pieces of information. First, in **Column A** indicate how much of a priority this area is for your district. Next, in **Column B** indicate whether your district used its REAP Flex authority to address that area of need. *For each row, mark one response in Column A and one response in Column B.*

Possible Areas of Need	(A) Priority Level			(B) Used REAP Flex to address need?	
	Low	Medium	High	No	Yes
	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼
Instruction					
a. Highly qualified teachers	①	②	③	①	②
b. Highly qualified paraprofessionals	①	②	③	①	②
c. Curriculum and instructional materials	①	②	③	①	②
d. Educational technology	①	②	③	①	②
Support for Special Programs and Services					
e. Extended-time programs (e.g. before- or after-school, weekend)	①	②	③	①	②
f. Summer programs	①	②	③	①	②
g. Supplemental educational services (SES) provided under Title I	①	②	③	①	②
h. Transportation for Title I school choice participants	①	②	③	①	②
Performance on Specific Academic Outcomes					
i. English or language arts	①	②	③	①	②
j. Mathematics	①	②	③	①	②
k. Science	①	②	③	①	②
l. Attendance rates	①	②	③	①	②
m. Graduation rates	①	②	③	①	②
n. Other (Specify: _____)	①	②	③	①	②
Performance of Specific Student Groups					
o. Racial and ethnic minorities	①	②	③	①	②
p. Low-income students	①	②	③	①	②
q. Students with disabilities	①	②	③	①	②
r. Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students	①	②	③	①	②
s. Students in low-performing schools	①	②	③	①	②
t. Kindergarten and pre-K students	①	②	③	①	②
u. Elementary students	①	②	③	①	②
v. Middle school students	①	②	③	①	②
w. High school students	①	②	③	①	②

24. Has your district used REAP Flex in years before 2004-05?
Mark one response. → ① No
 ② Yes

25. Is your district planning to use REAP Flex this year (2005-06)?
Mark one response. → ① No
 ② Yes
 ③ Undecided

26. Please consider the following changes that might be made to the terms of the REAP Flex provision. How would each of these possible changes affect your interest in continuing to use this provision next year? *Mark one response in each row.*

Change in REAP Flex provision	Level of Interest in Continuing to use REAP Flex if Change is Made			
	Lower Interest	About the Same	Somewhat Higher	Much Higher
	▼	▼	▼	▼
a. If additional federal programs were considered applicable funding sources for REAP Flex	①	②	③	④
b. If applicable funds could be used for activities authorized under a larger number of federal programs	①	②	③	④
c. If the use of applicable funds was not affected by a district's AYP status	①	②	③	④
d. If accounting requirements were relaxed or assistance was offered to maintain necessary records	①	②	③	④
e. Other (Specify: _____)	①	②	③	④

You have completed the survey.

Thank You!

Appendix D: REAP Flex Authority District Interview Protocols

1. Participants
2. Nonparticipants

The following protocols received OMB approval.

STUDY OF NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND FLEXIBILITY PROVISIONS

REAP FLEX AUTHORITY

DISTRICT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (REAP FLEX PARTICIPANT)

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today. I'm _____ from the Urban Institute in Washington, D.C. We're conducting this phone interview on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education, which has commissioned the Urban Institute to conduct a case study of School Districts' experiences with REAP Flex. The goal of this study is to provide other districts and states with information about participation in this program.

In the fall your district participated in a survey we conducted to learn about the REAP Flex provision of the *No Child Left Behind Act*. The REAP Flex authority allows districts to exercise expanded flexibility over the way they use funds allocated under certain federal programs. That survey examined the reasons districts choose to use (or not to use) REAP Flex and the ways in which participating districts are making use of this flexibility. Based on that survey, we learned that your district was using REAP Flex last year (that is, during the 2004–05 school year). Today, I would like to ask you a few questions to learn more about your district's experiences with REAP Flex.

Your responses provide extremely valuable information and we are pleased to have your participation. We would like to tape-record this interview to ensure that your responses are accurately recorded. We work very hard to keep all information you provide confidential and will not ever use your name or your district's name in connection with your responses. We will not provide any individually identifying information in reporting your responses and avoid using specific titles. We thank you in advance for providing the expertise and time needed for this case study.

Respondent Background

1. I would like to start by asking you about the work you do. Could you tell me about your roles and responsibilities in the district?

Probe if not offered:

- _____ *What is your current title?*
- _____ *How long have you been in this position with this district?*
- _____ *What is your professional background?*
- _____ *How long have you worked in the educational field?*
- _____ *What were your previous administrative or teaching positions?*

Needs for Flexibility

2. Please think back to the time before your district started using REAP Flex. Did the district feel that there were certain constraints on the use of these federal funds that prevented you from effectively addressing your local educational priorities? If so, please describe these constraints.

Probe if not offered:

- _____ *Was the funding in particular programs inadequate for needs?*
- _____ *Was the distribution of allocated funds across programs poorly aligned with educational needs?*
- _____ *Did rules and regulations of particular federal programs impose significant restrictions on the way your district used available federal funds?*

3. We will discuss your strategy for using REAP Flex in more depth shortly. But generally speaking, what prompted your district to adopt REAP Flex? Where there particular situations or events that resulted in a need for additional flexibility over the use of federal funds that REAP Flex helped you to meet?

Probe if not offered:

- _____ *Has your district experienced any difficulties in competing for federal grants awarded on a competitive basis (e.g. due to its size; limited personnel; or lack of resources to develop competitive applications)?*
- _____ *Has your district experienced any major shifts in its financial situation in recent years that required more flexibility over use of federal funds?*

Adopting REAP Flex

4. Did your district apply for an Small Rural School Achievement (SRSA) grant? If so, could you tell me about your experience with the SRSA grant program?

Probe if not offered:

- _____ *How accessible was information on SRSA grants?*
- _____ *Were the eligibility requirements and the SRSA grant formula clear?*
- _____ *Was the application process manageable?*
- _____ *How accessible are SRSA grant funds?*
- _____ *Did the district learn about REAP Flex while pursuing an SRSA grant?*

5. Could you describe the decision-making process that led to your district adopting REAP Flex?

Probe if not offered:

- _____ *Who were key actors (not identified by name) and organizations involved in this process?*
- _____ *As [respondent title], what was your role in this process?*
- _____ *Did your district consult with the local private schools when deciding whether and how to pursue REAP Flex?*
- _____ *How long did this deliberation process take? Was there sufficient time to investigate thoroughly before the deadline for notifying your state education agency (SEA)?*

6. What were the major pros and cons your district considered when deliberating over whether to exercise REAP Flex?

7. Has your district had any ongoing communication about REAP Flex with your SEA? If so, what is the nature of this dialog?

Probe if not offered:

- _____ *Did the SEA inform you that there would be restrictions or limitations on applicable fund—amounts or types of funds that could be used under REAP Flex?*
- _____ *Did the SEA inform you about restrictions on use of REAP Flex related to AYP or school improvement status (e.g. review at end of first three year period of participation)?*
- _____ *Did the SEA inform you about procedures for financial reporting?*

Strategies for Using REAP Flex

Now, I would like to talk about your district's strategy for using REAP Flex in more detail.

8. Is your district's strategy for using REAP Flex documented in a formal plan? If so, who has access to that plan?

9. What educational goals does your district hope to achieve by using REAP Flex?

Probe if not offered:

_____ *Are specific achievement outcomes targeted?*

_____ *Are other academic outcomes targeted?*

_____ *Is support for teacher or paraprofessional quality targeted?*

_____ *How do REAP Flex goals relate to your district's other educational priorities and improvement strategies?*

10. How does using REAP Flex allow you to better meet these goals? In other words, what specific activities or programs are being supported by the use of applicable funding under REAP Flex?

11. To what extent would it be possible to undertake these efforts *without* using REAP Flex?

12. Are these efforts targeted to particular groups of students? For example, does your strategy focus on specific demographic groups, low-income students, students with disabilities, students with limited English proficiency, or students in low performing schools?

13. Does your plan for exercising REAP Flex include concrete benchmarks for implementation of activities or improvement in student (or other) outcomes?

If yes ...

What are these benchmarks?

For student academic outcomes, how do these benchmarks compare to your state's annual measurable objectives for making AYP?

REAP Flex Accounting Walkthrough

The survey your district completed in the spring asked for a summary of the ways in which applicable funds were used under the REAP Flex provision for the 2004–05 fiscal year.

Based on this information, we have prepared worksheets that can be used to track the way in which funds allocated to each of the eligible federal programs were utilized under REAP Flex. These new worksheets examine the allocation and the use of REAP Flex in prior years. If specific numbers are not available, please think generally about the trends in how money has been allocated before and after exercising REAP Flex in prior years.

This section of the interview will be repeated for each year in which REAP Flex was used (starting with the first year the provision was employed). Information obtained from district surveys and other sources will be preentered into worksheets. These summaries will be sent to the respondent for review prior to the interview. Data will be updated and corrected during the interview as applicable.

Please look at the worksheets we sent you earlier, which summarize the federal funding your district receives for programs involved with REAP Flex.

14. Let's start with your district's allocations under these programs for the [200__] school year. For each of these programs, I would like you to answer several brief questions. Beginning with [program] ...

14a. What was the initial amount of the federal allocation?

14b. How much of the funding allocated to this program was utilized under the REAP Flex provision?

Summary questions after filling out the worksheet

14c. Has the way you exercised REAP Flex changed since using this provision? If yes, why have these changes occurred?

14d. Have trends in carryover funding changed for these programs over the past three years? Why or Why not?

If specific numbers are not available:

14e. What are the general trends in the use of these Title funds in the past three years? Has the amount of money used for activities after exercising REAP Flex changed in the past three years? What specific changes have occurred? Why were these changes made? Have trends in carryover funding changed in this time period? Why or why not? If they received an SRSA grant award, how was the money allocated?

15. Did exercising REAP Flex affect your district's ability to maintain services under this set of programs at levels comparable to those supported prior to using REAP Flex? If so, how was each of these programs affected?
16. Have changes in your district's AYP or school improvement status affected the way you have used REAP Flex?

Probe further if not offered:

_____ *Has making AYP (or failing to do so) resulted in a shift of priorities or targets?*

Record-Keeping and Reporting

Now I would like to ask you about the record-keeping and reporting associated with exercising REAP Flex.

17. How does your district maintain financial records for documenting the way in which applicable funds are utilized under REAP Flex?

Probe further if necessary in order to classify record-keeping methods:

_____ *How does your district document how funds are moved from one program account to another?*

_____ *Is a new separate account established for funds used under the provision?*

_____ *Do funds remain in their original account but documentation is maintained to show how those have been used?*

_____ *Is some other form of accounting used?*

18. What other financial and program information is your district required to report to state agencies as part of exercising REAP Flex? Has your district been formally reviewed or audited since it started using REAP Flex?
19. Do these record-keeping and reporting requirements differ from routine procedures (i.e., what you would be expected to do if you weren't exercising REAP Flex)? If so, did your district encounter any challenges in meeting these requirements?
20. Has the amount of time and effort your district devotes to reporting and record-keeping changed as a result of exercising REAP Flex? If so, how?
21. Has your state educational agency provided any guidance or assistance with respect to maintaining financial or programmatic documentation associated with REAP Flex?

Experiences with the REAP-Flex Provision

Now I would like to ask you some questions about your experience using REAP Flex.

22. To what extent has REAP Flex helped your district to better *utilize federal funds* to meet your local needs?
23. Earlier you described the kinds of educational activities your district supports under the federal programs associated with REAP Flex. To what extent has REAP Flex helped your district to *promote the educational activities and programs* you targeted with applicable funds?
24. In each of these areas—allocating funds and promoting activities—are there particular ways in which REAP Flex has been particularly helpful to your district? Are there areas where REAP Flex is not currently meeting your needs for additional flexibility?

Probe further if not offered:

- _____ *Could these needs for greater flexibility be addressed by revising your current strategy for using the REAP Flex authority (i.e., operating within the current rules of the provision)?*
- _____ *If not, what additional flexibility would your district need to address these needs?*

REAP-Flex and Targeted Goals

We have just discussed the ways in which REAP Flex can assist participants in directing resources to better meet local educational activities. Now I would like to ask about the extent to which REAP Flex has helped your district work towards the educational goals it has targeted. It can sometimes take a while for the effects of programs like REAP Flex to show up in certain outcomes like student achievement. So I am just asking you to share your impressions of how REAP Flex may be contributing to progress on these outcomes *so far*.

25. Earlier you mentioned some specific performance goals that your district is targeting with REAP Flex. Have you seen improvement in these outcomes since starting to use REAP Flex? How do you think REAP Flex might have contributed to these improvements?

26. Do you think REAP Flex has helped your district's efforts to make AYP? If so, how?

Probe if not offered:

_____ *Has your district AYP status changed since implementing REAP Flex?*

_____ *Has REAP Flex affected overall performance levels?*

_____ *Has REAP Flex affected gaps between high- and low-performing students (and schools)?*

Plans for Using REAP-Flex in the Future

27. Does your district plan to continue using REAP Flex?

If no ...

What are your reasons for not pursuing REAP Flex next year? Do you think you might use REAP Flex again at some point in the future?

If yes ...

Do you anticipate making any changes to your strategy? Potential changes might include: the type or amount of applicable federal funds you use under the provision; the set of activities you support with applicable funds; or the way these efforts are targeted to particular groups of students or particular outcomes.

Conclusion

28. Overall what would you say has been the best thing about using REAP Flex?

29. What is the least positive aspect of exercising REAP Flex or the part of the provision you would most like to see changed?

30. Are there any other issues that we have not talked about that you think are important for understanding your district's experience using REAP Flex?

Probe if not offered:

_____ *Are there unintended consequences—either positive or negative—as a result of using REAP Flex (e.g. related to fund allocation, support for programmatic activities, or student and teacher outcomes)?*

Thank you very much for taking the time for this interview today. Your insights will be extremely helpful in our efforts to learn more about REAP Flex.

STUDY OF NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND FLEXIBILITY PROVISIONS

REAP FLEX AUTHORITY

DISTRICT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (REAP FLEX NONPARTICIPANT)

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today. I'm _____ from the Urban Institute in Washington, D.C. We're conducting this phone interview on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education, which has commissioned the Urban Institute to conduct a case study of School Districts' experiences with REAP Flex. The goal of this study is to provide other districts and states with information about why districts may choose to participate or not participate in this program.

In the fall your district participated in a survey we conducted to learn about the REAP Flex provision of the *No Child Left Behind Act*. The REAP Flex authority allows districts to exercise expanded flexibility over the way they use funds allocated under certain federal programs. That survey examined the reasons districts choose to use (or not to use) REAP Flex and the ways in which participating districts are making use of this flexibility. Based on that survey, we learned that your district was not using REAP Flex last year (that is, during the 2004–05 school year). Today, I would like to ask you a few questions to learn more about why your district decided not to use REAP Flex.

Your responses provide extremely valuable information and we are pleased to have your participation. We would like to tape-record this interview to ensure that your responses are accurately recorded. We work very hard to keep all information you provide confidential and will not ever use your name or your district's name in connection with your responses. We will not provide any individually identifying information in reporting your responses and avoid using specific titles. We thank you in advance for providing the expertise and time needed for this case study.

Background

1. I would like to start by asking you about the work you do in your current position. Could you tell me about your roles and responsibilities in the district?

Probe if not offered:

- _____ *What is your current title?*
- _____ *How long have you been in this position with this district?*
- _____ *What is your professional background?*
- _____ *How long have you worked in the education field?*
- _____ *What were your previous administrative or teaching positions?*

2. In general, how familiar are you with the REAP Flex provision of NCLB?

Probe if not offered:

- _____ *Did you encounter any barriers to obtaining information about the REAP Flex provision?*
- _____ *Is there particular information or technical assistance that was unavailable but would have been helpful?*

If respondent is unfamiliar with the provision, describe the provision to the respondent using the text below:

REAP Flex gives participating districts the authority to use “applicable funding” for alternative uses under selected federal programs. Applicable funding refers to funds allocated on a formula basis through the following programs: Title II, Part A (Improving Teacher Quality State Grants); Title II, Part D (Educational Technology State Grants); Title IV, Part A (Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities State Grants); and Title V, Part A (State Grants for Innovative Programs). A REAP Flex district may use all or part of its “applicable funding” for activities associated with the programs above plus several others: Title I, Part A (Improving the Achievement of Disadvantaged Children); Title III (Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students), and Title IV, Part B (21st-Century Community Learning Centers).

Districts eligible to use the REAP Flex authority are also eligible to receive grant funds on a formula basis under the Small Rural School Achievement program (SRSA). Eligible districts may use funds from SRSA program grant allocations to carry out activities authorized under any of the seven programs I just listed.

3. Were you involved in your district’s decision not to use REAP Flex? If so, what was your role in that process?

Reasons for Not Using REAP-Flex

4. Could you describe to me the reasons your district has decided not to use REAP Flex? Please feel free to mention any kind of decision-making process that was involved and the major pros and cons that might have been discussed. (Please make sure that all of the probes below are covered)

Probe if not offered:

- _____ *Was the amount of funding allocated to these eligible programs a consideration in not using REAP Flex?*
- _____ *Was the particular set of applicable programs under REAP Flex a consideration? That is, would you have been more likely to use REAP Flex if a larger number of programs were considered applicable funding sources or if funds could be used for activities authorized under a larger number of programs?*
- _____ *Did your district have any concerns about its ability to maintain the accounting records necessary to document the use of eligible funds, as required under the provision?*
- _____ *The ways in which a district may use of REAP Flex can be affected by its accountability status. Specifically, districts not making AYP after the third year of participation in REAP Flex may continue exercising the flexibility authority, provided that all applicable funding is used for improvement activities authorized under Section 1116 of ESEA. Was your district's accountability status a factor in its decision not to employ REAP Flex?*

Conclusion

5. Does your district have any current unmet needs for greater flexibility over the way it uses its federal funding allocations to address local educational priorities? If so, what are these needs?
6. Are there any other issues that we have not talked about that you think are important for understanding the reasons your district decided not to use REAP Flex?

Thank you very much for taking the time for this interview today. Your insights will be extremely helpful in our efforts to learn more about REAP Flex.



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