



A Guide to School Improvement Grant Implementation

Part 1: SIG Summary

The federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) program provides funding to states to implement dramatic school turnaround initiatives in the state’s lowest performing schools. In order to qualify for funding, State Education Agencies (SEAs) must submit an application to the U.S. Department of Education that identifies the state’s lowest performing schools and its strategy for awarding competitive grants to districts for whole school reform.

When a state receives funding, Local Education Agencies (LEAs) may submit applications to the state outlining their plan to reform the state’s lowest performing schools. LEAs must choose one of four models for these schools: Transformation, Turnaround, Restart, and Closure. Districts with more than nine SIG-eligible schools may not implement the transformation model in more than half of its schools. According to an Education Sector report titled “A Portrait of School Improvement Grantees Nationwide,” 74 percent of all SIG schools will implement the transformation model.

The table below lists SIG funding levels since 2007 — the first year in which Congress awarded funding.

Fiscal Year	Amount
2012	\$535
2011	\$535 million
2010	\$546 million
2009	\$3.5 billion (<i>\$546 million regular appropriations; \$3 billion ARRA*</i>)
2008	\$491 million
2007	\$125 million

* ARRA is the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

Changes to SIG in the Congressional Appropriations Process

Congress made several important changes to the SIG program in the FY 2010 Consolidated spending bill to improve the quality of reforms and increase state flexibility. These changes included the following:

- LEAs may use SIG grants to serve any Title I-A eligible school that has not made adequate yearly progress (AYP) for at least two years or is in the State’s lowest quintile of performance based on proficiency rates, and, in the case of secondary schools, states must prioritize those schools with graduation rates below 60 percent. This gives states greater flexibility to serve schools identified for improvement that didn’t meet the state’s previous definition for persistently low performing schools. The US Department of Education interpreted this in guidance to mean that states could identify any elementary school in its Tier I category that missed AYP for two *consecutive* years or was in the lowest quintile of performance and is no higher achieving than the highest achieving elementary school in the state’s persistently lowest achieving category. The guidance also permitted states to include any secondary school in its Tier II category that did not make AYP for two *consecutive* years or was in the lowest quintile of performance and is no higher achieving than the highest achieving elementary school in the state’s persistently lowest achieving category. All remaining schools that did not meet AYP for at least two years (did not have to be *consecutive* years) could be included in Tier III.
- The Secretary may establish a maximum subgrant size of \$2,000,000 per school.

Since Congress passed a continuing resolution in Fiscal Year 2011 to retain FY 2010 spending levels, the above language was retained. Congress passed a new appropriations bill in Fiscal Year 2012 which extended the language above through 2012 and added the following:

- The Secretary may reserve up to five percent of school improvement funds for State and local capacity building. The Department will provide more details as it releases information for the Fiscal Year 2012 competition.
- Congress also included language in the report accompanying the omnibus legislation, encouraging the Department to require that all schools receiving SIG funds have a plan in place for addressing the academic and non-academic needs of their students, including improving the overall school climate where necessary, in addition to addressing factors such as the use of time, instructional practices, and professional development and supports. Although report language is not legally binding, it sends a strong signal from Congress to the Administration that congressional leaders would like to see applications address the social factors impacting student learning.

Part 2: Identify Opportunities for Innovation & Flexibility

Enhance Existing Models

The four federal school improvement models should serve as a starting point for innovative school reform. However, states have the flexibility to enhance the four federal school improvement models. For example, in Alabama, the state added the "Alabama Transformation Model" to the list of potential models, which integrates the SEA's Response to Instruction (Rtl) framework. LEAs selecting this model are required to hire a "District Grant Coach," who will be trained by the SEA in the school improvement process and Rtl. The District Grant Coach will work directly with LEA personnel to build instructional capacity in Tier I, II and III schools.

In Illinois, the state board of education laid out a series of conditions that each LEA had to address in its SIG application. These conditions served as an addendum to the federal requirements. They include:

1. Extended time
2. Improved transitions from middle to high school
3. Operational flexibility for school leaders
4. New governance structure at the LEA
5. Use of a lead partner
6. Improved hiring practices
7. Adoption of teacher/principal evaluation
8. High quality professional development
9. Improved family and community outreach
10. Monitoring for implementation
11. Effective, appropriate budget
12. Coherence of overall SIG plan

States should, at a minimum, integrate the following conditions into future competitions:

1. Develop a state turnaround model that satisfies the minimum federal requirements but goes beyond to incorporate state priorities such as STEM education, Early College High Schools, or Systemic-Technology Integration.
2. A guarantee that no other partner operates within the school without a subcontract.
3. A plan for replacing traditional learning structures with programs, technology, and community supports that enable 24/7 learning.
4. A plan to provide customized professional development to prepare educators for the explosion of new teaching roles required to support anytime, anywhere learning.

Prioritize District-Level Improvement Activities

According to the federal SIG guidance, an LEA may use SIG funds to pay for district-level activities to support implementation of one of the four models in Tier I, II, and III schools. The Department's example of an allowable district-level activity includes hiring a district turnaround specialist to assist with school-level model implementation or to establish an early warning system designed to identify at-risk students. These funds may only support activities for schools receiving SIG funds. For example, during the 2011–2012 school year, the state of New Jersey is requiring LEAs with SIG schools to implement district wide policies and programs to improve performance at SIG schools within their boundaries.

States should be more implicit in future SIG applications about the role of districts in supporting low-performing schools. Priority should be given to LEAs with a proven strategy for transforming the role of the district to support aggressive and sustainable student achievement. States should also explore ways to use its five percent SIG set aside and four percent Title I school improvement activities set aside to promote systemic solutions such as hiring internal expertise or contracting with organizations experienced in district reform.

Expand State and LEA Capacity

Nearly every state is using the five percent allowable administrative set aside to build state capacity for monitoring, technical assistance, and evaluation activities. Twelve states are creating new offices specifically designed to support state SIG efforts. For example, the Kentucky SEA intends to create a new Office of Educational Recovery Services to build LEA and SIG school capacity. Areas of support currently provided by states include: state designated support staff, quality control measures for external providers, targeted professional development, improvement tools, and strategies to engage community stakeholders.

States should consider expanding the list above to include: 1) partnering with state institutions of higher education to develop a force of turnaround leaders with the skills to successfully transform low-performing schools; and 2) improve data systems to provide educators, students, and community stakeholders with access to real-time data on student performance.

States should also help LEAs make wise decisions regarding turnaround partners. The State should play a role in helping LEAs differentiate between quality providers and those with antiquated and unproven strategies. States like Colorado and Illinois have put out RFPs to develop a list of pre-approved providers. States can go a step farther to help match providers with SIG-eligible districts.

Prevent Backsliding of Underperforming Schools

As states shift resources and interventions to serve their lowest performing five percent of schools, states must develop strategies to prevent the next tier of schools from falling behind. A systemic approach is necessary to avoid a constant churn of schools in and out of the lowest performing category. Fortunately, the Federal Government continues to give states additional flexibility to address this problem. States that have already funded reforms in their Tier I SIG schools can now dedicate resources to Tier II and Tier III schools. Similarly, language retained from the FY 2010 omnibus permits states to dedicate SIG dollars to any Title I-A school that has missed AYP at least twice.

States should use this flexibility to create networks of breakthrough schools that provide supports for the cohort of schools on the cusp of the lowest performing schools category. These networks should implement a comprehensive

strategy to raise student achievement in a multi-school, multi-district region that includes all of the following: an aggressive school turnaround strategy that employs a portfolio of innovative school options, a commitment to any-time, anywhere learning that capitalizes on the power of educational technology, and the establishment of a cadre of turnaround leaders and educators with specialized skills to transform low performing schools.

Part 3: KnowledgeWorks' SIG Sites

KnowledgeWorks and its subsidiaries, EdWorks and the New Tech Network, have significant experience transforming persistently low performing schools in rural, suburban, and urban areas. By employing innovative portfolios of high school models in more than 100 schools in more than 25 states, these networks help formalize the pathway between high school and postsecondary success.



State	District	School	Year of Implementation
MI	Detroit Public	Central High	2010–11
MI	Detroit Public	Crockett High	2010–11
MI	Detroit Public	Finney High	2010–11
MI	Detroit Public	Ford High	2010–11
MI	Detroit Public	King High	2010–11
MI	Detroit Public	Northwestern	2010–11
MI	Detroit Public	Western International	2010–11
MI	Saginaw City	Arthur Hill High	2010–11
MI	Saginaw City	Thompson Middle	2010–11
MI	Saginaw City	Ruben Daniels Middle	2011–12
MI	Ypsilanti	Ypsilanti High	2010–11
IN	Gary Community	Roosevelt High	2010–11
MD	Baltimore	Frederick Douglass	2010–11
NY	Old Westbury	Roosevelt High	2010–11
NY	Schenectady	Schenectady High	2010–11
NY	Yonkers	Roosevelt High	2010–11
OH	Reynoldsburg	BELL Academy	2011–12



State	District	School	Year of Implementation
GA	Peach County Schools	Fine Arts and Humanities Academy	2010–11
GA	Peach County Schools	Human Services Academy	2010–11
GA	Peach County Schools	STEM	2010–11
IN	Lake Ridge Schools	Calumet High School	2010–11
IN	Gary Community School Corporation	Roosevelt Career & Technical Academy	2011–12
IN	South Bend Community School Corporation	South Bend New Tech	2011–12
MI	River Rouge School District	River Rouge New Tech High International Academy	2010–11
MI	Westwood Community School District	Westwood New Tech High School	2010–11
MI	Willow Run Community Schools	Willow Run New Tech	2011–12
OH	Akron Public Schools	John R. Buchtel	2012–13
OH	Lima Public Schools	Lima Progressive Academy	2011–12
TX	San Antonio ISD	New Tech San Antonio (or NT @ Sam Houston HS)	2011–12
TX	Belton ISD	New Tech High @ Waskow	2011–12
TX	Dallas ISD	New Tech @ A. Maceo Smith	2011–12