

## School Improvement Grant (SIG) Program

***SIGs are designed to rapidly improve states' persistently lowest-achieving schools***

Federal school improvement grants (SIG) are available to state education departments and local school districts under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. These voluntary onetime federal grants are designed to help states and districts intervene in and support “persistently lowest-achieving schools” and to rapidly improve those schools. Only the lowest 5 percent of persistently lowest-achieving Title I schools, secondary schools that are eligible for but do not receive Title I funds, and Title I secondary schools with a high school graduation rate below 60 percent are eligible to receive SIG funds.

***Minnesota received a \$34-million grant to turn around its persistently lowest-achieving schools***

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) applied to the U.S. Department of Education for SIG funds in February 2010. The application required the department to indicate how it would identify Minnesota’s persistently lowest-achieving schools as measured by rates of student proficiency and growth in reading and math and high school graduation rates. In March 2010, Minnesota received an initial grant of \$34 million. Minnesota must use the grant money to turn around its persistently lowest-achieving 5 percent of Title I schools and charter schools by September 30, 2013. The department anticipates receiving an additional \$4 million to \$5 million in SIG funds in fiscal year 2011.

***No Child Left Behind imposes sanctions on schools not making adequate yearly progress for two or more years***

The 2001 federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) imposes sanctions on Title I schools and school districts not making adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward student achievement targets. A school that does not make AYP for two or three consecutive years is in need of improvement. A school that does not make AYP for four consecutive years is in corrective action. A school that does not make AYP for five consecutive years is subject to restructuring in the subsequent two years. Eligible low-achieving schools identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring can use SIGs to help make AYP and thereby change their status. According to a 2008 Center on Education Policy report, in the 2007-2008 school year 3,500 schools in the United States, or 7 percent of all Title I schools, were subject to restructuring.

***Low-achieving schools that receive SIG funds must implement one of four school intervention models***

Persistently lowest-achieving Title I schools identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring under NCLB and Title I high schools with a graduation rate below 60 percent can apply to the MDE for SIG funds. To effect the rapid school improvement envisioned under the SIG program, participating schools must adopt one of four school intervention models:

- The turnaround model calls for replacing the school principal and at least 50 percent of the school staff
- The restart model calls for converting or reopening a school and then

placing it under a charter school operator, a charter management organization, or an education management organization

- The school closure model calls for closing a school and enrolling the students who attended the school in other, higher achieving district schools
- The transformation model calls for replacing the principal and implementing a new evaluation system to identify and reward educators who improve student outcomes and to remove educators who do not improve student outcomes

Schools that receive SIG funds must begin implementing an approved school intervention model in the 2010-2011 school year.

***Circumstances may prevent using a particular school intervention model***

Some policymakers argue that the inflexibility of the four school intervention models prevents these models from being equally available or appropriate in all schools. For example, circumstances in rural areas may limit or preclude access to qualified school staff, management contractors, or school leaders. Schools providing students with targeted programs leading to high school graduation that extend beyond traditional graduation guidelines also may be poorly accommodated under this program.

***SIG schools are arranged into three tiers to prioritize funding***

To prioritize the allocation of SIG funds, states must identify three tiers of Title I schools that qualify for SIGs, giving greatest priority to the lowest tier of chronically low-achieving schools.

- Tier I schools are those Title I schools under NCLB that are in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring, and are identified by MDE as one of the state's persistently lowest-achieving schools
- Tier II schools are eligible for but do not receive Title I funds and are identified by MDE as a persistently lowest-achieving school
- Tier III schools are those Title I schools under NCLB that are in need of improvement, corrective action, or restructuring, and are not Tier I schools

SIG-funded interventions and supports may vary by tier.

***2010 omnibus K-12 bills included provisions addressing the "persistently lowest-achieving school" designation***

Some policymakers were concerned about unintended consequences related to a school's designation as a persistently lowest-achieving school and the inflexibility of the school intervention models. To address these concerns, legislators included a SIG provision in the 2010 omnibus K-12 education bills directing the education commissioner, at the request of an affected school, to seek a federal exception to that school's lowest-achieving school designation if the affected school showed high student growth in the 2007-2008 through the 2009-2010 school years and was identified as a persistently lowest-achieving school based on its high school graduation rate or because it provided a graduation incentives program. The legislature failed to pass an omnibus K-12 education bill in the 2010 regular or special session and the SIG provision was not enacted.

**For more information:** Contact legislative analyst Lisa Larson at 651-296-8036. Also see the House Research publication *Adequate Yearly Progress Under the No Child Left Behind Act*, November 2003.

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