



Support for School Improvement Grant School Districts and Schools

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Request	01243

According to the U.S. Department of Education¹, School Improvement Grants (SIGs) are awarded to state departments of education (SDEs) to make competitive subgrants to school districts that show the greatest need for the funds and the strongest commitment to provide the resources needed to significantly raise student achievement in their lowest-performing schools.

States that have received these grants are charged with monitoring grant implementation and supporting their school districts. To inform its work in this area, an SDE that is served by the Southeast Comprehensive Center (SECC) has inquired about how other states are supporting SIG school districts and schools. Specifically, if a state is using a blended approach to provide such support, does it include a mix of coaching, online training, Indistar, or a similar web-based school improvement tool?

The following is a discussion of the procedure for selection of materials for this report, general limitations, and specific information that pertains to state support for SIG school districts and schools.

PROCEDURE

The Information Request team took the following actions to obtain information for this report:

- Contacted 49 state departments of education that have received SIG funds and reviewed information provided by staff from 12 (in bold below) state agencies that responded to SECC's communication about SIG support—**Alabama**, **Alaska**, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, **Georgia**, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, **Kansas**, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, **Maryland**, **Massachusetts**, Michigan, **Minnesota**, **Mississippi**, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, **North Carolina**, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, **Texas**, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, **Washington**, West Virginia, **Wisconsin**, and Wyoming

¹ From U.S. Department of Education Announces Awards to Nine States to Continue Efforts to Turn Around Lowest-Performing Schools, U.S. Department of Education, February 2014.

- Conducted online searches—through EBSCO Academic Search Elite, ERIC, Google, and Google Scholar—to look for research studies, white papers, policy briefs, etc., that examined ways that states are supporting schools, using a combination of these terms: blended approach to student achievement; blended learning; building school district capacity for SIG schools; coaching; core leadership practices enacted in challenging schools; creating school clusters for LEAs; district coaching of principals; district context in supporting SIG schools; district guidance (support) for SIG schools; educational reform; evaluation, SIG, district (state) support structure; impact of district leadership on student achievement; institutionalize student achievement strategies in SIG schools; local school board leadership impact on student achievement; low-performing schools; online training; positive behavioral support; school board role in school turnaround; school improvement; school improvement grant schools; school reform; staff development; state coaching of local school districts; state department of education role in school turnaround; state educational reform; state support for SIG schools; sustaining student achievement; teacher embedded professional development; and virtual coaching

Following the literature searches, the team reviewed 14 resources and selected 10 for inclusion in this request based on the selection criteria. The criteria were as follows: (a) publication date within the past 10 years; (b) state practices in force as of January 2007 (initial implementation year for the SIG program); and (c) content addresses interventions, strategies, or best practices for school improvement. The selected resources consist of 8 reports, 1 brief, and 1 edited volume from the following sources: the Center for American Progress, Center for School Turnaround, Center on Education Policy, Mass Insight Education and Research Institute, and Research for Action. To view abstracts of these publications, see the Resource Summaries section of this request.

GENERAL LIMITATIONS

The education field does not appear to have a strong evidence base around the use of blended approaches—coaching, online training, web-based school improvement tools, etc.—to support SIG school districts and schools. Therefore, materials for this request focus on various non-peer-reviewed documents, such as policy briefs written by education organizations, white papers, and summaries of our communication with various SDE personnel.

The selected resources discuss implementation of School Improvement Grants in various states including California, Idaho, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee. However, only two of the resources provide detailed information on the use of a coaching model or virtual coaching (Research for Action, 2008; Scott, McMurrer, McIntosh, & Dibner, 2012). Also, please note that the information provided by the 12 states that responded to SECC's query is experiential and describes the states' practices. The request team did not attempt to determine if these state-level practices are supported by a research base.

The request team provides the above comments to assist stakeholders in making informed decisions with respect to the information presented. SECC does not endorse any practices or guidelines described in this request.

OVERVIEW

As stated earlier, the Information Request team contacted 49 states to obtain information about SIG support for school districts and schools. The query centered on this key question (repeated from page 1 of this report): If a state is using a blended approach to provide such support, does it include a mix of coaching, online training, Indistar, or a similar web-based school improvement tool?

Staff members from 12 state departments of education—Alabama, Alaska, Georgia, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, North Carolina, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin—responded to SECC’s communication. Based on a review of the information provided, seven states (Alabama, Georgia, Kansas, Minnesota, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Washington) indicated that their approaches to providing SIG support involve a combination of online training, coaching, and the use of a web-based school improvement tool. The other states mentioned one or two of these elements. Through reviews of the above state-based information and the selected resources (see next page), the request team found that states are offering various types of support, which are highlighted in Table 1.

TABLE 1. TYPES OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANT SUPPORT PROVIDED BY VARIOUS STATES	
Advanced Placement courses and mathematics and science initiatives in high schools	MA
Community outreach programs and dedicated staff	ID, MD
Extended learning time	ID, MI
Focus on school climate	ID, MA, MI
Incentives for students and teachers	ID
Online training and in-person coaching	AL, GA, KS, MN, MS, NC, WA, WI
Professional development on leadership, data use, instructional strategies, and other topics	CT, GA, MA, ME, NC, NH, NJ, PR, RI, VT
School-based literacy and math instructional coaches	PA
SIG support team, school support team, school improvement specialists, transformation coaches, or similar staff	AK, GA, IA, ID, MI, MN, MS, NC, TX
State-level coaches or assistants to work with teachers	ID, MD, MI, MS
Tools, resources, and assistance with creating initial improvement plans	CT, GA, MA, ME, MS, NH, NJ, PR, RI, VT
Web-based school improvement tool (Indistar or other tool)	AL, GA, KS, MN, MS, WA, WI
Note: Information for Mississippi was updated on 4/4/14, based on additional feedback from the agency.	

For additional information provided by the 12 states mentioned previously, refer to Table A1, State Support for School Improvement Grant School Districts and Schools, in Appendix A.

RESOURCE SUMMARIES

Center for Mental Health in Schools. (2009). State Education Agencies & Learning Supports: Enhancing School Improvement. Los Angeles, CA: Author. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED507601.pdf>

This report focuses on the need for states to move from a compliance approach to improve student achievement toward capacity building through student learning and support. The authors begin the report by looking at how state agencies currently guide and support districts through state department of education websites on policy, intervention frameworks, and the operational structure needed to address barriers to learning.

The report offers a guide (Exhibit 1, p. 3) that SDEs may use to create a system that will effect change and improve learning opportunities by building local district and school capacity. However, the report does not offer any specific strategies that states have used or can use to support SIG schools.

Center on Education Policy. (2012). Changing the School Climate Is the First Step to Reform in Many Schools With Federal Improvement Grants. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED533561.pdf>

This report is a summary of the key findings from case studies by the Center on Education Policy (CEP), which highlighted school climate as a critical element during the first year and a half of SIG implementation in Idaho, Maryland, and Michigan. The report illustrates the research evidence that confirms the importance of school climate in establishing a positive environment for student learning. Although each state used a variety of strategies, all reported improvements in school climate as their greatest success after the first year of implementation. This allowed them to focus on improving curriculum and instruction. The strategies employed by each state included the following (pp. 6–14).

Idaho

In Idaho, efforts to change school climate have lead to better staff morale and student engagement. The state took several actions: (a) hired a community coordinator to provide outreach to parents and assist with improving school climate, (b) instituted a variety of incentives to motivate students, and (c) provided incentives for teachers (pp. 12–14).

Maryland

To address the affect of poverty on student achievement, Maryland focused on implementing services to improve students' overall well-being. These strategies included establishing community outreach programs and hiring dedicated staff: (a) school-level social workers, (b) a coordinator of student services to facilitate coordination of service providers for SIG schools, (c) a specialist to track student absenteeism related to physical and mental health issues, and (d) behavior specialists to help manage student behavior with positive intervention strategies (pp. 6–9).

Michigan

Michigan focused on creating a culture of collaboration and reflective practice to empower and support structural changes in schools by (a) implementing extended learning time, (b) utilizing a new external provider, and (c) hiring a SIG team to coordinate improvement strategies (pp. 10–11).

Herbert, L., Gleason, S., Urbana, C., & Charlotte North Education Development Center, Inc. (2009). How Eight State Education Agencies in the Northeast and Islands Region Identify and Support Low-Performing Schools and Districts, Summary, Issues & Answers. (REL 2009-No. 068). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED504359.pdf>

This report shares the story of how eight state education agencies provided support to low-performing schools and districts as identified by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). The SEAs were from the Northeast and Islands Region, specifically, Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, and Vermont. The researchers conducted interviews and focus groups of SEA staff and consultants that worked directly with the identified schools and districts. The research team also reviewed documents and resources from the agencies.

Three research questions led the team's work (p. ii):

1. What criteria do state education agencies use to identify schools and districts as low-performing, and how many schools and districts are placed in each category under the NCLB Act?
2. What services and other supports and interventions do the state education agencies use with low-performing schools and districts?
3. What rationales do state education agency staff use for their approaches to school and district improvement?

The study found that each of the states and territories differs in its approach and its implementation of the requirements of NCLB. However, the research team noted that each agency's services included the following (p. iii):

- Tools, templates, and consultation on an initial school or district assessment and on developing improvement plans
- Consultation after initial planning that ranged from telephoning local administrators to assigning weekly on-site service providers for each school or district
- Professional development, for example, in-school workshops and cross-school institutes on leadership, data work, and instructional strategies in literacy or mathematics

Nevertheless, the research team also established that each region takes different approaches to increase student achievement from the state level. This report only reflects the "voices and perspectives" of the state agency staff; districts and schools may have their own stories on the interventions and support provided by the state.

This report contains four appendices. Appendix A is a glossary of terms used in the report. Appendix B explains the requirements and terminology of NCLB. The methodology of the study is outlined in Appendix C. Appendix D provides a summary of the interventions utilized by the SEAs as well as the rationales for the interventions. The report also contains a reference list and 10 tables apart from the appendices.

Mass Insight Education & Research Institute. (2009). Closing the Achievement Gaps: An Annual Massachusetts Report on Performance-Based High School Interventions and Turnarounds. Boston, MA: Author. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED538305.pdf>

This report is developed annually by Mass Insight to serve as an outline of public high school interventions and turnaround initiatives in the state of Massachusetts (MA). In the introduction, the MA excellence agenda, which emphasizes Advanced Placement (AP) courses and math and science initiatives, is shared. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) performance is discussed as well as Massachusetts' minority populations' AP results. Information on federal and state legislation also is provided with an emphasis on Race to the Top (RttT), 1003(g), and state turnaround legislation.

A description of the Mass Math and Science Initiative (MMSI), which is funded by a \$13.2 million grant from the National Math and Science Initiative (NMSI), is given priority in this report. Adequate yearly progress (AYP) data reflecting the increase in the number of MA schools that are in corrective action and restructuring is also a component of the introduction.

A section of the document describes excellence (or lack of) at high schools throughout the state. AP qualifying scores of minority students are given, along with the need to increase access for students overall. More performance data from the MMSI is given, and measurable goals for MA are identified. Data reflecting incremental changes that have taken place in low-performing high schools are provided. However, "even the state's deepest interventions" have not brought forth comprehensive change. High-performing/high-poverty high schools are highlighted as proven models for change through their use of the Mass Insight Readiness Model and Partnership Zones. Proposed state and RttT goals also are identified for "putting Massachusetts schools on the path to success."

This report includes a listing of sources for each of the data points included in the document.

McMurrer, J., & McIntosh, S. (2012). State Implementation and Perceptions of Title I School Improvement Grants Under the Recovery Act: One Year Later. Washington, DC: The George Washington University Center on Education Policy. Retrieved from <http://www.cep-dc.org/displayDocument.cfm?DocumentID=398>

This report was produced by the Center on Education Policy with the assistance of the National Title I Association. It shares the results of a survey that examined states' experiences in using the funds made available with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) for the School Improvement Grant program. The survey collected information from state Title I directors for the period from November 2011 through January 2012 and detailed their experiences in using ARRA SIG grant funding with new implementation requirements. The survey examined state processes for renewing SIG grants, state assistance to schools, and general perceptions of the ARRA SIG program.

Forty-six states and the District of Columbia responded to the survey with these key findings (p. 2):

- States are generally positive about ARRA SIG requirements.
- The transformation school improvement model remains the most popular model chosen by schools in responding states.
- Most states responding to the survey (35 of 46) renewed all ARRA SIG awards made in 2010–2011 for 2011–2012.
- All responding states reported providing technical assistance to ARRA SIG-funded schools and their districts, and most are providing other types of assistance.
- More than half of the responding states indicated that they had an adequate level of state-level expertise and staff to assist ARRA grant recipients.
- Most states reported external providers assisted with implementing the ARRA SIG program during the first year.

McMurrer and McIntosh outlined state perceptions that addressed the ARRA SIG program requirements, improvement models and their effectiveness, state awards and renewal funding, and state assistance and monitoring of SIG implementation. All states reported providing some type of technical assistance to districts receiving funding during the first year of the ARRA SIG program. Federal guidelines require monitoring of school-level implementation and require state agencies to provide technical assistance. A list of technical assistance provided during Year 1 is reported in Figure 7 (p. 12). Most states indicated their intention to maintain the same level of technical assistance during Year 2 of the grant. In addition, of the 46 states that responded to the survey, 43 reported that state agency personnel are charged with the responsibility of monitoring the implementation and oversight of ARRA SIG reforms. Box C (p. 15) provides details regarding the states' capacity to perform monitoring and support tasks.

This report provides a list of technical assistance options that could prove useful to the reader. It includes references, a study methods appendix, five figures, and two information boxes.

Quillin, J. (2011, June). Snapshot of SIG: A Look at Four States' Approaches to School Turnaround. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. Retrieved from http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2011/06/pdf/sig_report.pdf

This report is a follow-up of a study performed by Stanford researchers Martin Carnoy and Susanna Loeb that focused on accountability systems in the nation's schools during the 1999–2000 school year. Their study suggested that some states with strong accountability systems at the beginning of NCLB had an advantage over states with less rigorous accountability systems in positively addressing the needs of chronically low-performing schools. Motivated by the significant increase in funding under ARRA, Quillin examined SIG program implementation in four states: California, Illinois, North Carolina, and Tennessee. The case study provides a history of the SIG program, its goal of turning around struggling schools, U.S. Department of Education (ED) funding, and the grant requirements regarding improvement and interventions.

The case study analyzed information provided by districts and schools receiving SIG funds during the 2010–2011 school year, SDE representatives, and NAEP data, and offered four main findings (p. 2):

1. Some districts were reluctant to apply for SIG.
2. Some states and districts resisted implementation.
3. Quality data systems improved how funds were distributed.
4. Refined accountability systems helped target funds.

Quillin described the implementation process in each of the four states and outlines state agency support provided during the first and second years of the grants. Each state provided on-site monitoring, required monthly or quarterly reports from schools, and provided some form of regional support. External/lead partners were assigned as consultants in one of the states, and one state assisted schools with self-monitoring. Support provided beyond the second year of the SIG grants was not noted.

The author offered recommendations for reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to address challenges in the grant guidelines and requirements, the application process, and the technical assistance to states regarding eligibility.

This report includes an appendix, endnotes, and information about the funding agency as well as about the author.

Research for Action. (2008). Links to Learning and Sustainability: Year Three Report of the Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative. Philadelphia, PA: Author. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED504284.pdf>

This report is the third and final report of a three-year evaluation study of the Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative (PAHSCI) by Research for Action (RFA). PAHSCI is a high school reform model that was established through a three-year public-private partnership lead by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE). To achieve the goal of improving students' literacy and achievement in all subject areas, the reform model utilizes school-based literacy and math instructional coaches to integrate research-based literacy practices across the curriculum. Another goal of PAHSCI is to link and sustain learning for individuals, schools, districts, and the state.

To assist with the evaluation study on the efficacy of PAHSCI, RFA utilized surveys, interviews, and on-site observations focused on the following questions (p. 10):

1. How did the role of coaches evolve and change, and how did they and the larger initiative respond to the challenges they faced?
2. How did instructional coaching and mentoring and its various components shape what happened in classrooms and the professional learning communities within a school and district?
3. How was student engagement and learning influenced by changing teacher practice associated with professional learning in PAHSCI?
4. How did PAHSCI align and build learning and leadership within and across linked participating PAHSCI sites?
5. What lessons were generated by participation in PAHSCI?

The author discussed the following six key lessons learned from the PAHSCI model (pp. 51–53):

- PAHSCI's plan to take on large-scale change across diverse statewide sites with an eye to sustainability was a huge and complex undertaking.
- Instructional coaching required coaches to use a complex set of skills, talents, and abilities as they worked within a specific school and district context.
- The PLN framework as a set of strategies to address adolescent literacy and student performance was applicable across content areas.
- There were identifiable factors that support and impede sustainability.
- PAHSCI frontline implementers (teachers, coaches, partner organizations, and mentors) adopted innovative strategies to cope with contextual difficulties and diverse needs.
- The development of a stronger professional community and new leadership opportunities were significant outcomes of PAHSCI for individuals, organizations, and at the state level.

The report includes references, appendices, and information about the authors.

Rhim, L. M., & Redding, S. (Eds). (2014). The State Role in Turnaround: Emerging Best Practices. San Francisco, CA: WestEd. Retrieved from <http://centeronschoolturnaround.org/staterole/>

This edited volume features several chapters written by leading researchers and practitioners to examine the role of state education agencies in school turnaround efforts. The chapters explore a variety of topics on school turnaround with emphasis on providing SEAs with guidance on practical application of research and best practice. In addition, the organization of each chapter consists of a brief literature review, an extensive discussion of examples from SEAs or proposed SEA practices, and action principles to guide leadership roles to support school turnaround efforts.

Throughout the chapters, examples depict various states' activities to support school turnaround efforts. Four broad lessons emerged from the states (p. 160):

- Data is key, but turning data into information requires thought and care.
- Strong, professional relationships between and among key actors at all levels (school, district, state) that are focused on turnaround can greatly facilitate progress.
- Turnaround involves many aspects of the system, thereby making alignment and coherence within states even more essential.
- Timing is everything.

This document includes references at the end of each chapter.

Scott, C., McMurrer, J., McIntosh, S., & Dibner, K. (2012). Opportunities and Obstacles: Implementing Stimulus-Funded School Improvement Grants in Maryland, Michigan, and Idaho. A Policy and Practice Analysis Brief. Washington, DC: The George Washington University Center on Education Policy. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED532799.pdf>

This report by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) takes a look at the first year of ARRA SIG funding. The act targets SIG funds given to the lowest 5% of schools in each state and also requires the use of one of four school improvement models. The authors of the report looked at ARRA SIG in the states of Idaho, Maryland, and Michigan to represent different geographic locations and different types of schools and their school improvement models.

In addition to data collected for the above states, the authors used the previous 6 years of CEP research in Maryland, 8 years of research in Michigan, and other studies in California, Georgia, New York and Ohio. The authors relied on the body of knowledge gathered from these studies to inform the work of this present study. Data collected for the study included interviews and case studies that pertained to school-level implementation among low-performing schools that received ARRA SIG funds and selected schools that did not receive funds. Finally, the authors gathered additional information by reviewing ARRA SIG applications and related documents.

The authors identified key findings that were consistent among several states (pp. 2–4):

1. The state and local officials they interviewed in Maryland and Michigan had more positive views about the appropriateness of the SIG requirements than did those in Idaho.
2. Views differed among the three states about whether the amount of ARRA SIG funding was appropriate, but state and local officials in all three states expressed concern about whether reforms can be sustained after the funding ends.

3. All three states are providing some common types of monitoring and assistance to ARRA SIG schools, including assigning state-level coaches or assistants to work with leaders and teachers in the schools, requiring school progress reports, and coordinating a network of ARRA SIG grantees.
4. ARRA SIG requirements undervalue the critical role of districts in school improvement, according to state officials in Idaho and Michigan.
5. Many of the ARRA SIG schools in the study, as well as the nonrecipient schools, are using similar improvement strategies that emphasize instructional coaching, extended learning time, and a focus on school climate.
6. In Idaho and Michigan, the schools in the study that received ARRA SIG awards are undertaking more intensive and different improvement strategies than nonrecipient schools.
7. Replacing teachers and principals is the challenge most often cited by both ARRA SIG schools and nonrecipient schools in the study.
8. Officials in both the ARRA SIG schools and nonrecipient schools in the study seem optimistic that they are on the right track toward improvement.
9. State and local interviewees in all three states would like to see some changes in ARRA SIG requirements.

Only one of the key findings above addresses the topic of support to SIG schools. The authors report that all three states studied provide support to SIG schools through a variety of technical assistance options. Additionally, as stated in finding number three, all three states provide monitoring assistance which includes a blended approach involving state-level coaches, progress reports by schools, and the coordination of a network of ARRA SIG grantees.

Idaho reported that federal requirements for ARRA SIG run counter to its strategy of focusing improvement efforts on districts more than on individual schools. This leads to a strategy of district improvement as a vehicle to supporting ARRA SIG schools. However, Maryland felt that the current requirements allowed the state to build upon and improve support improvement efforts at the district level.

The authors discussed key findings from both district and state implementation of the ARRA SIG program (pp. 4–15):

1. Officials in the three states had different views about whether ARRA SIG requirements accurately identified the schools most in need of improvement.
2. All states maintained a rigorous application process for local ARRA SIG funds.
3. Officials in the three states had different views about the appropriateness of the amount of ARRA SIG funding, and some raised concerns about whether reforms can be sustained after this funding runs out.
4. States experienced unique challenges with their selected ARRA SIG models.
5. States emphasized the importance of improving district capacity to support change.
6. State assistance and monitoring showed commonalities in the three states, but each state had built on its unique past initiatives.

All three states provided a coach or assistant from the state who works with local leaders, required progress reports, and all coaches coordinated a network for ARRA SIG schools. Each state provides additional services through ARRA SIG funding that differ.

Maryland hired a coordinator of student services to make sure that service providers are supplying the correct services and communicating with other service providers. Maryland also hired a specialist to track student attendance. Maryland used RttT funds to hire behavior specialists to work in ARRA SIG schools. A department representative surveyed for the study indicated that Maryland wanted to take a holistic approach to improve student achievement. Finally, Maryland provided mental health counselors that coordinated with an external provider and has linked ARRA SIG funds and its statewide system of support together to build district capacity. Linked to this approach is the Restructuring Implementation Technical Assistance initiative that conducts program audits and identifies programs that need to be eliminated or enhanced to improve student achievement.

Idaho has districts sign a performance agreement with the state that is called the Idaho Building Capacity Project. The state provides services directly to the superintendent and leadership team. A dedicated staff person is located at the school and provides coaching to the school leadership team. All schools and districts receiving ARRA SIG funds participate in the program. District focus visits are conducted and followed up with analysis and feedback to the district. Idaho also provides support to superintendents and principals of low-performing districts and schools through a series of networks of support for district and school leaders. Ways to Improve School Effectiveness (WISE) is a tool that districts and schools use with capacity builders to track progress on set goals. The state reported that having an “in” with superintendents, school boards, and business managers could assist with leveraging change at the district level.

Michigan used facilitators/monitors that visited each school weekly during the beginning of the grant, process mentors, and a partnership network to support ARRA SIG schools. All schools under NCLB improvement status were eligible to receive this type of support. At the time of the study, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) was spearheading a principals’ network as well. Finally, MDE created a list of approved service providers and required all ARRA SIG recipients to contract with one of the providers to assist the district and school with school reform. In addition, the authors reviewed school improvement efforts in ARRA SIG schools and districts. With the exception of mentioning state support covered in the previous section, no new state-level support was presented. The authors concluded the report by summarizing the research presented and by noting additional areas to be considered in future studies.

This report includes references, reports on school improvement, and a credit and acknowledgement page.

Yatsko, S., Lake, R., Nelson, E., & Bowen, M. (2012). *Tinkering Toward Transformation: A Look at Federal School Improvement Grant Implementation*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Center on Reinventing Public Education. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED532630.pdf>

This report describes a field study of select SIG schools and districts in the state of Washington. The researchers interviewed SDE staff, members of teacher unions, and school district administrators. The interviews focused on the following topics (p. 4):

- SIG application process
- Selection of models used for turnaround
- How specific turnaround plans were developed and decided upon
- SIG goals and accountability as communicated to schools by districts

- Supports districts provided (or failed to provide) to SIG schools
- General perceptions of the SIG program
- Impact to date of SIG funding

A variety of rural, urban, and suburban districts were represented in the study. A summary of the findings from the researchers is as follows (p. 6).

At the district level:

- Tight timelines and rushed negotiations with unions limited what models were chosen, as well as how they were implemented.
- Districts' communication about how grants were awarded, how they would be implemented, and the goals and consequences for failure were often confusing and incomplete.
- District oversight focused on compliance with the formal grant terms, not support for school-level efforts, and prodding to help overcome inertia.
- Federal materials strongly encouraged school-level autonomy, but districts rarely granted it.
- Districts were unable to articulate a theory of change for chronically low-performing schools.

At the school level:

- Peripheral or “kitchen sink” improvement strategies were more prevalent than focused turnaround efforts.
- Changes in human resource policies to facilitate the removal of ineffective teachers were incremental and limited by cumbersome processes.
- The connection between the stated turnaround strategy and the actual use of SIG funds was often weak.

At the state level:

- Changes instituted by the state agencies in how they support districts and schools undertaking turnaround failed to have the intended impact on the ground.

Specific case examples of districts, schools, and leadership were shared as supporting evidence for the findings. Overall, the final conclusion showed that there had been incremental changes but not bold improvement in SIG schools.

The following recommendations were provided to the U.S. Department of Education, states, and districts for SIG schools (pp. 30–33).

U.S. Department of Education:

- Eliminate the transformation option or the requirement for union sign-off on turnarounds.
- Create special SIG requirements for rural districts.
- Make it difficult to win SIG funding.
- Give more lead time for program rollout.
- Attack the knowledge gap.
- Create rigorous application requirements.

States:

- Shift from compliance manager to turnaround partner.
- Create a strong statewide turnaround infrastructure.
- Communicate why schools are undergoing transformation and what results are expected.
- Offer incentives and clear consequences to drive transformational change.
- Play an active role in cultivating the provider marketplace.

Districts:

- Ensure that successful principals don't have to be rule-breakers.
- Use due diligence to ensure that turnaround plans are bold and worthwhile.

Sources were cited throughout the document to support the findings presented in the publication.

<p>Information Requests are customized reports that are prepared to fulfill requests for information by the departments of education of the states served by the Southeast Comprehensive Center at SEDL. The requests address topics on current education issues related to the requirements and implementation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). For additional information, visit the SECC website at secc.sedl.org.</p>	
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<p>Copyright© 2014 by SEDL. SECC is one of 15 regional centers established by the U.S. Department of Education (ED). The primary goal of the regional centers is to build the capacity of the state education agencies and statewide systems of support to implement ESEA. Links to the other regional centers, the content centers, and ED may be found on the SECC website (secc.sedl.org). The contents of this publication were developed under a grant from ED. The contents do not, however, necessarily represent the policy of ED, and one should not assume endorsement by the federal government.</p>	

Appendix A

TABLE A1. STATE SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANT SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

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STATE	CONTACT	SUMMARY
<p>AL</p>	<p>Ann Allison Education Administrator School Turnaround Program Office of Teaching and Learning Office of Student Learning Alabama State Department of Education 334-353-1608 aalison@alsde.edu</p> <p>Date: February 21, 2014</p>	<p>For all districts with Priority Schools, the state of Alabama has developed a regional center approach that allows a state support coordinator to serve as the head of one of five hubs within the state. These hubs are housed at regional inservice centers whose main responsibility is professional development (PD) among designated districts. The SEA pairs these two to provide the greatest yield from PD funds, as the state support coordinator is able to communicate required training directly to the inservice center directors. Additionally, each district with Priority Schools will continue to meet with its state regional planning team (RPT) members once a month to build district capacity around the seven turnaround principles. At the end of each RPT meeting, next steps are developed with the district to ensure that district schools continue to demonstrate continuous improvement. Since Alabama’s flexibility waiver requires that Priority Schools be partnered with the SEA for 3 full years, there is ample time to help districts understand their role in the school improvement process and take ownership of their own school’s planning. The SEA begins the gradual release with districts being served as quickly as the district demonstrates an understanding of the continuous improvement processes and will then provide support to them until the school exits Priority status.</p> <p>While all Priority Schools receive instructional audits and district RPT support, Alabama’s SIG schools (both Cohorts I and II) receive blended support through the use of AlaStar online/in-person coaching, and additional professional development, as well as district RPT monthly meetings.</p>
<p>AK</p>	<p>Patricia Farren Education Specialist II School Recognition and Support Alaska Department of Education and Early Development Alaska Department of Education 907-465-2892 Patricia.farren@alaska.gov</p> <p>Date: February 21, 2014</p>	<p>Alaska has opted to defer the federally funded SIG grants for 1 year, so SIG requirements will be aligned with state initiatives, specifically implementation of teacher effectiveness and support processes.</p>

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STATE	CONTACT	SUMMARY
<p>GA</p>	<p>Samuel Taylor Program Manager District Effectiveness Georgia Department of Education 404-657-7155 staylor@doe.k12.ga.us</p> <p>http://www.gadoe.org/School-Improvement/School-Improvement-Services/Pages/default.aspx</p> <p>Date: February 24, 2014</p>	<p>The current approach to supporting SIG schools and districts includes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>School improvement specialists</u>. A delivery model that allows the SEA and regional educational service agencies (RESAs) to provide direct contact and technical assistance to district and building leaders. • <u>Indistar</u>. A web-based platform that allows schools to adequately monitor the actions and interventions associated with school improvement plans. • <u>Federal spending milestones</u>. To support student achievement and timely spending of funds, guidelines that comply with federal expectations and milestones will be evaluated and monitored. • <u>Collaboration</u>. To provide additional resources to students, collaboration among community, district, and state departments will be enhanced. Collaboration among stakeholders will direct support and organizational structures to schools and students. • <u>Professional learning</u>. Multiple opportunities to learn and refine skills will be provided to district and building leaders. Professional learning communities include summer and district summits and an instructional coaching academy.
<p>KS</p>	<p>Sandy Guidry Early Childhood, Special Education, and Title Service Team Director Kansas State Department of Education 785-291-3097 sguidry@ksde.org</p> <p>http://www.ksde.org/Portals/0/Title%20Programs%20and%20Services/SchoolImprovement/SIG_SSEAApplcation_FY12.pdf</p> <p>Date: February 3, 2014</p>	<p>SIG schools and districts receive a variety of supports established by the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE). First, SIG schools have access to the Kansas Learning Network. All SIG, Priority, and Focus Schools purchase coaching from education consultants that are hired, trained, and supported by the Kansas Learning Network, a partnership of KSDE and state education service centers.</p> <p>Grant schools are also supported by the Technical Assistance Support Network (TASN). TASN provides technical assistance around parent involvement, multitiered system of support (MTSS), root cause analysis and many other topics that schools and districts request. KSDE and its partners have also created a website where schools and districts can peruse technical assistance opportunities that have been vetted by the Kansas Technical Assistance Team.</p> <p>Kansas has joined the Indistar team using a tool titled KansaStar. All SIG, Priority, and Focus school coaches use KansaStar for coaching logs and comments. Each school has a Kansas Integrated Innovations Team (KIIT). The KIIT consists of two KSDE administrators or education program consultants. Three times annually, KIIT provides feedback through KansaStar to assigned schools.</p>

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STATE	CONTACT	SUMMARY
<p>MA</p>	<p>Erica Adamez School Improvement Grant Programs Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 781-338-3547 eadamez@doe.mass.edu</p> <p>http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ss/dsac/services.pdf</p> <p>Date: February 19, 2014</p>	<p>Massachusetts uses a blended approach to supporting SIG schools. There is a standardized formative yearly review process conducted at each SIG school that provides districts, schools, and the state with valuable information on implementation successes and struggles. A team of district liaisons (state employees charged with supporting the 10 largest urban districts) and a SIG coordinator follow up on the findings with both technical and adaptive support for areas of weakness. The team also networks with school and district leaders to share best practices and address challenges.</p>
<p>MD</p>	<p>Tina McKnight Interim Director Program Improvement and Family Support Branch Division of Student, Family, and School Support Maryland State Department of Education 410-767-0310 tmcknight@msde.state.md.us</p> <p>http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/programs/title1/?WBCMODE=pr%252525%3E%3E</p> <p>Date: February 17, 2014</p>	<p>Maryland supports its SIG schools and Priority Schools through a cross-divisional team approach known as The Breakthrough Center. The Breakthrough Center works closely with Priority and Focus Schools in a partnership with the districts, schools, and external partners. The center identifies the precise nature and magnitude of needs and assembles customized and strategic supports and interventions to address them. Strong emphasis is placed on building the capacity of schools and districts to not only achieve turnaround but to sustain it.</p>

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STATE	CONTACT	SUMMARY
<p>MN</p>	<p>Gregory Keith Director of School Support Minnesota Department of Education 651-582-8316 Gregory.keith@state.mn.us</p> <p>http://education.state.mn.us/MD/ED/SchSup/ESEA/TitlePartA/index.html</p> <p>Date: February 6, 2014</p>	<p>The primary strategy for ongoing support is the statewide system of support. SDE staff work with SIG schools through face-to-face sessions that focus on integrating SIGs into the strategic instructional improvement plan. Monthly support is provided to principals and continuous improvement specialists through networking meetings for all SIG schools and through site visits that focus on instructional coaching. Networking meetings and on-site visits occur in alternate months. Each site receives an instructional audit as part of the grant monitoring process.</p> <p>Indistar has been used on a limited basis.</p> <p>Note: Refer to Appendix B to view Minnesota’s Statewide System of Support Program Overview.</p>
<p>MS</p>	<p>Laura B. Jones Office of School Improvement and School Recovery Mississippi Department of Education 601-359-3078 lauraj@mde.k12.ms.us</p> <p>http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/school-improvement/school-improvement-staff</p> <p>Date: February 12, 2014</p>	<p>Mississippi’s approach is a blended one. Coaches called implementation specialists, retired administrative-type educators with a track record of success, are used along with MS SOARS (Schools Obtaining Academic Results for Students), Mississippi’s version of Indistar, to help schools track and keep up with their progress on school turnaround indicators and priority school principles. Each implementation specialist is assigned four to five school sites to work with and visit on a bimonthly basis to provide technical assistance and to monitor the school leadership team’s progress.</p>

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STATE	CONTACT	SUMMARY
<p>NC</p>	<p>Alessandro Montanari District and School Transformation Program Administrator North Carolina Department of Public Instruction 919-835-6108 alessandro.montanari@dpi.nc.gov http://www.ncpublicschools.org/program-monitoring/grants/ Date: February 20, 2014</p>	<p>In Fall 2007, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) initiated a program for Comprehensive Support for District and School Transformation, an ambitious plan to redefine and redesign the way the agency delivers assistance. This initiative has broadened into a major agency focus on providing a statewide system of support for districts and schools sanctioned under NCLB, support for turnaround high schools and the middle schools that feed into them, and schools identified as low-performing under the ABCs of Public Education. To date, NCDPI has completed an organizational realignment to ensure that committed leadership and the right decision-making structures are in place for the support system to be successful.</p> <p>The Academic Services and Instructional Support Area within NCDPI provides extensive school, district, and regional support to low-performing and low-capacity districts coordinated through interagency roundtables as part of the redefined statewide system of support. The cadre of support staff includes needs assessment reviewers, regional leads, district transformation coaches, school transformation coaches, instructional coaches, and all Academic Services and Instructional Support staff, to include Title I consultants. Additionally, local educational agencies with Priority Schools employ the use of data within the North Carolina Indistar Tool to demonstrate that interventions are aligned to all turnaround principles, inform professional development decisions, and address the specific needs of each Priority School. Indistar is a web-based system implemented by an SEA, district, or charter school organization for use with district and/or school improvement teams to inform, coach, sustain, track, and report improvement activities.</p>
<p>TX</p>	<p>John Spence TXCC Program Associate and TEA Liaison Texas Comprehensive Center (TXCC) at SEDL 512-391-6596 John.spence@sedl.org http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=25769803880 Date: March 4, 2014</p>	<p>As part of the state’s evolving efforts to align the state and federal accountability systems, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) established the Texas Center for District and School Support (TCDSS), a state-level entity that functions to coordinate, in conjunction with TEA, system-level leadership for school improvement efforts under both the federal and state systems. In collaboration with the TCDSS, TEA developed the Texas Accountability Intervention System (TAIS), a research-based framework for continuous district and school improvement. The framework outlines a cohesive system of intervention and the implementation of policies and practices that establish the environment and support needed to effectively impact low-performing schools. Designed to aid in the development of both district and campus improvement planning, the framework provides a common language and process for addressing school improvement challenges. It is designed to show the aligned leadership and systems of support at the state, regional, district, and campus levels that will build the capacity necessary to turn around low-performing schools.</p> <p>Each district or school required to engage in the TAIS must collect and analyze data, conduct a needs assessment to determine factors contributing to low performance, develop an improvement plan addressing all areas not meeting the required performance standard, and monitor the implementation of the improvement plan. Schools must also establish a campus intervention team consisting of the following:</p>

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STATE	CONTACT	SUMMARY
		<p><u>Professional service provider (PSP)</u> – a TEA-approved member responsible for working collaboratively with district and school leadership to help facilitate district and campus supports that are aligned to the framework, ensuring implementation of all intervention requirements, and reporting progress to the agency;</p> <p><u>District coordinator of school improvement (DCSI)</u> – an individual assigned by the district and approved by TEA, and who is a district-level employee in a leadership position in school improvement, curriculum, and instruction, or another position with responsibility for student performance; the DCSI is responsible for ensuring district support for the academic achievement of each campus; and</p> <p><u>Campus leadership team (CLT)</u> – composed of key school leaders and membership determined by the principal and/or the district; the CLT is responsible for developing, implementing, and monitoring the improvement plan; monitoring student performance; and determining student interventions and support services.</p> <p>The overarching goal of the framework is to achieve continuous improvement for campuses, districts, and the state. The end goal of the system of support is accelerated achievement, sustainability, system transformation, and continuous improvement. Sustainability is the institutionalization of effective systems and processes that maintain progress over time, regardless of changing conditions. Additionally, the DCSI provides quarterly updates on the progress of identified campuses and works with PSP and TEA staff to develop sustainability plans once the campus meets safeguard targets. As prescribed in current state statute (TAC 97.1063i), the PSP will continue to work with a campus until the campus satisfies all performance standards for a two-year period. Therefore, interventions will continue for at least 3 years.</p> <p>TEA also posted a request for proposals to establish proof points for effective district-based turnaround strategies that can be replicated statewide. The purpose of the District Turnaround Leadership Initiative (DTLI) is to enable districts to own the processes and develop the leadership necessary to swiftly and systematically diagnose, intervene, and provide ongoing support to low-performing campuses, thus rapidly and permanently improving the performance of the students. The agency is contracting with the Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education (PLE) at the University of Virginia to lead this initiative. PLE, in collaboration with the Texas Comprehensive Center, institutions of higher education, and/or educator preparation programs, will institutionalize systems, processes, and procedures that enable districts to reform struggling campuses.</p>

TABLE A1. STATE SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANT SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

STATE	CONTACT	SUMMARY
<p>WA</p>	<p>Andrew Kelly Assistant Superintendent Office of Student and School Success State of Washington Office of Public Instruction 360-725-4954 Andrew.kelly@k12.wa.us http://www.k12.wa.us/Title/Title/SchoolwideModel.aspx Date: March 4, 2014</p>	<p>The state of Washington Office of Public Instruction approaches all its schools that need improvement in a consistent manner, with differentiated and carefully crafted interventions, support, and accountability. This includes coaches, targeted fiscal grants (Priority and Focus Schools), and the required use of Indistar for all schools identified, regardless of “type” as their common school improvement planning tool. Schoolwide Title I plans will be integrated into this tool by the end of May 2014, and all schools will focus on implementing the rapid improvement indicators found in Indistar and organized under the seven turnaround principles.</p>
<p>WI</p>	<p>Carolyn Parkinson School Administration Consultant Title I and Education for Homeless Children and Youth Coordinator Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction 608-267-1284 carolyn.parkinson@dpi.wi.gov http://ssos.dpi.wi.gov/ssos_1003g_forms Date: February 20, 2014</p>	<p>The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction provides SIG and Priority Schools support through a number of methods. All the Priority Schools have a Department of Public Instruction (DPI) liaison. The liaison helps the school navigate the SIG requirements and use of the Indistar tool to plan improvement strategies. The liaison also serves the traditional liaison duties between the school and DPI and the school and district administration.</p> <p>Priority and SIG Schools use the Indistar tool. SIG Cohorts I and II have an assigned DPI employee that works closely with them on using the tool to plan reform.</p> <p>The DPI conducts desk monitoring by using the Indistar Coaching Comments feature to provide feedback and direction to schools on their improvement plans. Formal feedback is provided at a minimum of three times each school year. The monitoring process used by the DPI is very supportive. Each Priority or SIG School participates in three site visits each school year. At the visits, the DPI facilitates a discussion about school turnaround efforts, which includes guiding questions to help the school think more deeply about its efforts and plans. Each visit includes a review of Indistar and a discussion of progress through data analysis. Finally, each school has a DPI consultant assigned to provide technical assistance as needed. The DPI consultants lead desk monitoring for site visits.</p>

Note: The above information was provided by SDE and comprehensive center staff and was edited by SECC staff.

Appendix B

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION STATEWIDE SYSTEM OF SUPPORT PROGRAM OVERVIEW²

² From Minnesota Department of Education Statewide System of Support Program Overview, Minnesota Department of Education, January 2014. Reprinted by SEDL with permission.

January 28, 2014

Minnesota Department of

Education

Statewide System of Support

Program Overview

In 2011, the Minnesota Department of Education requested a waiver from the requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The request, which was subsequently approved by the U.S. Department of Education, described establishing Regional Centers of Excellence to implement a statewide system of support as Minnesota's strategy to offer differentiated recognition, accountability, and support for schools. The statewide system of support works exclusively with schools receiving a Focus or Priority designation because of low student achievement levels or persistent achievement gaps. The vision for the system of support is that it would establish a consistent, cohesive regional infrastructure for effectively and efficiently providing equitable access for school improvement support throughout the state.

In 2012, the Department launched three Regional Centers of Excellence, designed and implemented in collaboration with three regional education service cooperatives, to facilitate implementation of the statewide system of support. The Department made approximately three million dollars of Federal Title I funds available to the three service cooperatives to support implementation of the system of support in collaboration with Department staff. The funds supported three Center Directors and three teams of content area and school improvement specialists, called advocates, to work regionally to support schools through the system of support model.

Each advocate serves schools in two interrelated capacities. Working on-site in Focus and Priority schools, advocates serve as contacts and as coaches to guide school leadership teams in building local capacity for sustained improvement. Each school is assigned one advocate from its region as its primary contact and continuous improvement coach. While facilitating a continuous improvement cycle, each advocate also serves as a region's specialist in an area like reading, mathematics, special education, English language development, implementation science, data analysis, or charter school leadership. In this way, each school has a dedicated advocate to facilitate improvement efforts and has access to a team of specialists in its region.

The work of advocates in schools has the following three aims to support school improvement:

1. Establish and support leadership teams in schools that guide the process of continuous improvement
2. Facilitate school needs assessments based on data, and root cause analyses to inform schools' improvement planning

3. Support schools' as they develop and implement school improvement plans that lead to improved teaching and learning in schools

Advocates initially work to establish professional relationships with leadership in their respective schools. In each school, a leadership team representing multiple stakeholders is established. This team becomes the primary point of contact for the school's assigned advocate, and the advocate works directly with the leadership team to achieve the second two aims mentioned above. Much of the advocate's initial work involves building trust and community with leadership teams in schools.

Advocates often work with school principals to identify team members, build team norms and processes, and communicate the role of the leadership team. After establishing cultures of community with school leadership teams, advocates are better able to engage them in meaningful coaching conversations about continuous school improvement.

The first step in continuous school improvement planning is for an advocate to assist the school leadership team with data analysis, a comprehensive needs assessment, and a root cause analysis. With the leadership teams, advocates identify and gather relevant student achievement data and other data such as survey results, student discipline data, and teacher effectiveness data. Advocates facilitate data review for leadership teams and sometimes entire school faculties to inform needs assessments for schools. The needs assessment is based on reviewed data as well as statewide quality needs indicators.

The final step is for an advocate to assist a school with prioritizing needs and conducting a root cause analysis to focus and inform further planning.

Each Focus and Priority school is required to write, submit, continually update, and implement a school improvement plan annually. Advocates assist schools with setting goals and writing plans that are led by school leadership teams and informed by data, needs assessment, and root cause analysis. As content experts, advocates assist school leadership teams with setting appropriate goals and then identifying research-based instructional strategies that will support those goals. After plan development, advocates coach leadership teams as they monitor and tweak plan implementation using Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles.

In addition to facilitating leadership teams and improvement planning in schools, advocates act as professional development resources for schools and for their regions. Advocates in regions collaborate together to plan, facilitate, and evaluate regional professional development for school leaders and for leadership teams. This professional development builds common skills and processes in teams across schools while providing opportunities for school teams to network, share promising practices, and problem solve together.