

**School Improvement Grant (SIG)
Frequently Asked Questions
3/1/2010 CHANGES MADE AND ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS ADDED**

**Nevada Department of Education (NDE)
School Improvement Grant (SIG)
ARRA and FY10 Section 1003(g) Funding**

The USDOE released Interim Final Requirements for the SIG program in mid-January that outlined some important changes made to the Final Requirements released in early December 2009. These changes were based on the Consolidated Appropriations Act passed by Congress in mid-December. Please refer to the questions indicated with an * for these important changes. Any additional changes made to existing questions are indicated with **; additional questions have been added at the end based on further questions from districts.

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1. How much funding is available through the SIG funding?

School Improvement Grants (SIG) funds totaling \$3.546 billion will be allocated to all states on a formula basis by the U.S. Department of Education (USED). Nevada's portion of the SIG funds that may be awarded to eligible districts totals \$22.362 million.

**** 2. Which districts are eligible to apply for SIG funds?**

A district may apply for a SIG award if it has one or more schools that *qualify under NDE's definition of a Tier I, Tier II, or Tier III school. Please see Question 3 for these definitions.*

3. Which schools may be served with SIG funds?

Tier I: The persistently lowest-achieving 5% of the Title I-served INOI schools are identified as the foundation of the Tier I list of schools. Added to this list of schools are any Title I-served high schools with graduation rates of less than 60 percent over the past four years. Both of these groups comprise the Tier I school list.

Tier II: An eligible district may also apply if it has Title I-eligible but not served secondary (middle or high) schools that are as equally low achieving: the lowest 5% of these schools (or the lowest 5 schools, whichever number is greater) comprise the foundation of the Tier II list. Added to this list are any Title I-eligible but not served high schools with graduation rates of less than 60 percent over the past four years. Both of these groups comprise the Tier II school list.

Tier III: The remaining Title I-served INOI schools comprise the Tier III school list.

4. Which schools in Nevada have been identified as Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III schools?

This list has been provided to district superintendents, Title I directors, and other district personnel for the eligible districts. This information should be obtained from applicable district personnel.

*** 5. How is funding generated for a district's SIG application?**

A district may apply for an amount between \$50,000 and \$2,000,000 per year for each Tier I, Tier II, or Tier III school that the district proposes to serve with this grant. The maximum funding available to the district each year is determined by multiplying the total number of these schools that the district proposes to serve by

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\$2,000,000. There is also a waiver from USDE that would allow the state and district to extend the period of funding availability. This waiver allows a district to apply for up to \$2,000,000 per year for each school it proposes to serve with SIG funds for a period of up to three years, although the expectation is that the maximum amount would probably not be necessary in years two and three.

* 6. How can funding be reallocated within a district's SIG application?

This question no longer applies since a district may now apply directly to serve a Tier II school through the changes made in December within the Consolidated Appropriations Act. Funding can therefore be allocated based on the interventions selected for each identified Tier I and Tier II school, or for services to be provided at Tier III schools.

** 7. How were schools identified as being the persistently lowest-achieving?

To identify the persistently lowest-achieving schools, the state must take into account both:

- The academic achievement of the “all students” group in a school in terms of proficiency on the State's assessments in ELA and mathematics combined, and
- The school's lack of progress on those assessments over a number of years in the “all students” group.

Proficiency was based upon the percent proficient, or the percent of the tested student body that scored in the proficient range in math and English/Language Arts (ELA) in 2008-09 on the State's CRTs. For K-8 schools, this included students in grades 3-8. For high schools, this included students' best scores on High School Proficiency Examination results in their high school career through the spring of their 11th-grade year. Proficiency was determined for math and ELA for each school. Schools were assigned two ranks on the bases of math percent proficient and ELA percent proficient, respectively. For this criterion, the K-8 schools and high schools were ranked independently due to differences in student participation requirements and opportunities to test (i.e., high school retests).

Lack of progress was based upon whether schools had made progress on those assessments. Growth was determined as the change in a school's percent proficient in math and ELA across the most recent four-year period for each school. For example, a school's math and ELA changes in percent proficient from 2005-06 to 2006-07, from 2006-07 to 2007-08, and from 2007-08 to 2008-09 were computed. These changes were summed to determine each school's total growth over the four-year period. Schools were assigned two ranks on the bases of math growth and ELA growth, respectively. For this criterion, the K-8 schools

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and high schools were ranked independently due to differences in student participation requirements and opportunities to test (i.e., high school retests).

A total of four ranks (i.e., math proficiency, ELA proficiency, math growth, ELA growth, respectively) were computed for each school. The ranks were summed to derive a total rank value for each school; each of the four ranks was weighted equally. Including all schools (i.e., K-8 and High School) in the final ranking, the total rank values were used to identify the lowest five percent of schools.

*** 8. What if the state does not have sufficient SIG funds to award, for up to three years, a grant to each eligible district that submits an approvable application?**

If this should occur, the state must give priority to districts in the following order:

- First- districts that apply to serve Tier I or Tier II schools (regardless of how many Tier III schools they intend to serve);
- Second - Districts that have only Tier III schools.

*** 9. What must a district include in its SIG application to the state?**

NOTE: NDE is developing the district application to include:

In addition to any other information that the state may require, the district must:

- (1) Identify the Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III schools the district commits to serve, and identify which intervention model will be implemented at each Tier I and Tier II school;
- (2) For each Tier I and Tier II school that the district commits to serve, demonstrate that the district--
 - Has analyzed the needs of each school and selected an intervention for each school.
 - Has the capacity to enable each school to implement, fully and effectively, the required activities of the school intervention model it has selected;
- (3) If the district is not applying to serve each Tier I school, explain why it lacks capacity to serve each Tier I school;
- (4) Describe actions it has taken, or will take, to:
 - Design and implement interventions consistent with the final requirements;
 - Recruit, screen, and select external providers, if applicable, to ensure their quality;
 - Align other resources with the interventions;

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- Modify its practices or policies, if necessary, to enable it to implement the interventions fully and effectively; and
 - Sustain the reforms after the funding period ends;
- (5) Include a timeline delineating the steps it will take to implement the selected intervention in each Tier I and Tier II school identified in the district's application;
- (6) Describe the annual goals for student achievement on the state's assessments in both reading/language arts and mathematics that it has established in order to monitor its Tier I and Tier II schools that receive SIG funds;
- (7) For each Tier III school the district commits to serve, identify the services the school will receive or the activities the school will implement;
- (8) Include a budget indicating the amount of SIG funds the district will use to--
- a. Implement the selected school intervention model in each Tier I and Tier II school it commits to serve;
 - b. Conduct district-level activities designed to support implementation of the selected school intervention models in the LEA's Tier I and Tier II schools; and
 - c. Support school improvement activities, at the school or district level, for each Tier III school identified in the district's application;
- (9) Consult with relevant stakeholders, as appropriate, regarding the district's application and implementation of school improvement models in its Tier I and Tier II schools;
- (10) Include the required assurances; and
- (11) Indicate any waivers that the district will implement with respect to its SIG funds.

*** 10. Must a district identify every Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III school located within the district in its SIG application?**

No, a district need not identify every Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III school located within the district in its application; a district need only identify the Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III schools that it commits to serve with SIG funds. A district **MUST** serve all Tier I schools that it has the capacity to serve; however, a district is not required to serve Tier II schools.

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11. What school improvement strategies must a district implement in a Tier I or Tier II school with SIG funds?

A district must implement one of the following rigorous interventions in each Tier I and Tier II school that the district commits to serve, provided it has demonstrated the capacity to implement each selected intervention fully and effectively.

Turnaround: The district must implement each of the following strategies:

- Replace the principal (please see Question 20, #1 for additional information on potential flexibility in this area) and grant the principal sufficient operational flexibility to implement a comprehensive approach;
- Screen and measure the effectiveness of existing staff who can work within the turnaround environment to meet the needs of students and rehire no more than 50%; select new staff;
- Adopt a new governance structure;
- Use data to identify and implement a new or revised instructional program that is research-based and vertically aligned from one grade to the next as well as aligned with state academic standards;
- Implement such strategies as financial incentives, increased opportunities for promotion and career growth, and more flexible work conditions that are designed to recruit, place and retain effective staff with the skills necessary to meet the needs of the students in the turnaround school;
- Provide ongoing, high-quality, job-embedded professional development that is aligned with the school's comprehensive educational program and designed with school staff to ensure that staff is equipped to facilitate effective teaching and learning and has the capacity to successfully implement school reform strategies;
- Promote the continuous use of student data to inform and differentiate instruction;
- Establish schedules and implement strategies that increase learning time for students and staff; and
- Provide appropriate social-emotional and community-oriented services and supports for students.

Restart: The district converts or closes a school and reopens it under a charter school operator or a charter management organization (CMO), both of which are prohibited under state law, or an education management organization (EMO) that has been selected through a rigorous review process.

Closure: The district closes the school with students who attended the school reassigned to other, high-achieving schools within the LEA; these other schools should be within reasonable proximity to the closed school and may include, but are not limited to, charter schools or new schools for which achievement data are not yet available.

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Transformation: LEA must implement each of the following strategies:

- Develop and increase teacher and school leader effectiveness by—
 - Replacing the principal who led the school prior to commencement of the transformation model (please see Question 20, #1 for additional information on potential flexibility in this area);
 - Using rigorous, transparent, and equitable evaluation systems for teachers and principals that take into account data on student growth, use multiple observation-based performance assessments, increased graduation rates, and are developed with teacher and principal involvement;
 - Identifying and rewarding school leaders, teachers, and other staff who, in implementing this model, have increased student achievement and high school graduation rates;
 - Identifying and removing those who, after ample opportunities have been provided for them to improve their professional practice, have not done so;
 - Providing staff ongoing, high-quality, job-embedded professional development that is aligned with the school's comprehensive instructional program and designed with school staff; and
 - Implementing such strategies as financial incentives, increased opportunities for promotion and career growth, and more flexible working conditions that are designed to recruit, place, and retain staff with the skills necessary to meet the needs of the students in a transformation model.
- Implement comprehensive instructional reform strategies that includes—
 - Using data to identify and implement research-based instructional programs that are aligned with state academic standards and vertically aligned between grades, and
 - Promoting continuous use of individualized student data to inform and differentiate instruction to better meet the individual academic needs of students.
- Extend learning time and create community-oriented schools by—
 - Establishing schedules and strategies that provide increased time for enhanced student learning and enrichment, teacher collaboration and planning; and
 - Providing ongoing mechanisms for family and community involvement.
- Provide operating flexibility and sustained support in implementing a comprehensive approach to improve student achievement and increase high school graduation rates, and ensure that the school receives ongoing, intensive technical assistance and related support from the LEA, SAEA, or designated external provider.

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12. If an LEA wishes to serve a Tier III school, must it provide SIG funds directly to the school?

No. A district may “serve” a Tier III school by providing services that provide a direct benefit to the school. Accordingly, a Tier III school that a district commits to serve must receive some tangible benefit from the district’s use of SIG funds, the value of which can be determined by the district, but the school need not actually receive SIG funds. For example, a district might use a portion of its SIG funds at the district level to hire an outside expert to help Tier III schools examine their achievement data and determine what school improvement activities to provide based on that data analysis. Similarly, a district might provide professional development at the district level to all or a subset of its Tier III schools.

13. Are there any particular school improvement strategies that a district must implement in its Tier III schools?

No. A district has flexibility to choose the strategies it will implement in the Tier III schools it commits to serve. Of course, the strategies the district selects should be research-based and designed to address the particular needs of the Tier III schools.

14. How can a district demonstrate that it has the capacity to use SIG funds to provide adequate resources and related support to each Tier I and Tier II school it commits to serve in order to implement fully and effectively one of the four school intervention models?

A district can demonstrate that it has the capacity to use SIG funds to provide adequate resources and related support to each Tier I and Tier II school it commits to serve by addressing a number of matters. For example, the district might emphasize the credentials of staff who have the capability to implement one of the school intervention models. The district might also indicate its ability to recruit new principals to implement the turnaround and transformation models. The district might also indicate the support of its teachers’ union with respect to the staffing and teacher evaluation requirements in the turnaround and transformation models, the commitment of its school board to eliminate any barriers and to facilitate full and effective implementation of the models, and the support of staff and parents in schools to be served. In addition, the district should indicate through the timeline required in its application that it has the ability to get the basic elements of its selected models up and running by the beginning of the 2010–2011 school year.

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15. What are examples of “other resources” a district might align with the interventions it commits to implement using SIG funds?

A district might use a number of other resources, in addition to its SIG funds, to implement the school intervention models in the final requirements. For example, a district might use school improvement funds it receives under section 1003(a) of the ESEA or Title I, Part A funds it received under the ARRA. The district might also use its general Title I, Part A funds as well as funds it receives under other ESEA authorities, such as Title II, Part A, which it could use for recruiting high-quality teachers, or Title III, Part A, which it could use to improve the English proficiency of LEP students.

*** 16. What is the cap on the number of schools in which a district may implement the transformation model and to which districts does it apply?**

Generally, a district may use whatever mix of school intervention models it determines is appropriate. However, a district with nine or more identified Tier I and Tier II schools may not implement the transformation model in more than 50 percent of those schools. Given that the cap only applies to a district with nine or more Tier I and Tier II schools, a district with, for example, four Tier I schools and four Tier II schools, for a total of eight Tier I and Tier II schools, would not be impacted by the cap. However, a district with, for example, seven Tier I schools and two Tier II schools, for a total of nine Tier I and Tier II schools, would be impacted by the cap. Thus, continuing the prior example, the district with seven Tier I schools and two Tier II schools would be able to implement the transformation model in no more than four of those schools.

17. What criteria must a district use to monitor each Tier I and Tier II school that receives SIG funds?

An LEA must monitor each Tier I and Tier II school that receives SIG funds to determine whether the school:

- (1) Is meeting annual goals established by the district for student achievement on the state’s ESEA assessments in both reading/language arts and mathematics (please see Question 18 for additional information); and
- (2) Is making progress on the leading indicators described in the final requirements (please see Question 19 for additional information).

18. What are examples of the annual goals for student achievement that a district must establish?

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A district must establish annual goals for student achievement on the state's ESEA assessments in both reading/language arts and mathematics that it will use to monitor each Tier I and Tier II school that receives SIG funds. Annual goals that a district could set might include making at least one year's progress in reading/language arts and mathematics, or reducing the percentage of students who are non-proficient on the State's reading/language arts and mathematics assessments by 10 percent or more from the prior year.

Note that the determination of whether a school meets the goals for student achievement established by the district is in addition to the determination of whether the school makes AYP. In other words, each district receiving SIG funds must monitor the Tier I and Tier II schools it is serving to determine whether they have met the district's annual goals for student achievement and must also comply with its obligations for making accountability (AYP) determinations.

19. What are the leading indicators that will be used to hold schools receiving SIG funds accountable?

The following metrics constitute the leading indicators for the SIG program:

- (1) Number of minutes within the school year;
- (2) Student participation rate on State assessments in reading/language arts and in mathematics, by student subgroup;
- (3) Dropout rate;
- (4) Student attendance rate;
- (5) Number and percentage of students completing advanced coursework (e.g., AP/IB), early-college high schools, or dual enrollment classes;
- (6) Discipline incidents;
- (7) Truants;
- (8) Distribution of teachers by performance level on an LEA's teacher evaluation system; and
- (9) Teacher attendance rate.

**** 20. What flexibility has the federal government provided around SIG funding to support ongoing school reform?**

The federal government has provided several significant elements of flexibility to facilitate implementation of the proposed policies through its "waiver" authority:

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1. States may award funds to continue implementation of a turnaround, restart, or transformation intervention model initiated by the district in a Tier I *or Tier II* school within the last two years. For example, if the district had replaced a principal at a Tier I *or Tier II* school within the last two years to implement improvement activities, this previous action could fall under this element of flexibility;
2. A state may seek a waiver to permit a school that implements a turnaround or restart model to "start over" in the school improvement timeline under ESEA while continuing to receive school improvement grant funds. For example, under the turnaround or restart model, a school in restructuring status would exit from that status and would not need to provide public school choice or supplemental educational services.
3. A state may seek a waiver to enable Tier I schools that operate targeted assistance programs to operate school-wide programs in order to implement the proposed intervention.
4. The federal government will waive limits on the availability of funds to permit their use over a three-year project period.

21. If implementing the Turnaround model at a Tier I or Tier II school, would it be possible to move a principal to another Tier I or Tier II school?

There is nothing mentioned within the final requirements about where a principal should or could go if he/she is being replaced when implementing either the Turnaround model or the Transformation model. If the district believes that a principal who is being replaced would be able to make substantive educational improvements at another Tier I or Tier II school when he/she has not been able to do so at the current school (understanding there are a multitude of reasons why that might be the case), then the district would need to build a strong case for making such a decision. Another piece to support this would be the "ongoing, high-quality, job-embedded professional development" that the district must provide (or arrange to provide) to all staff, including the principal, when using either of these intervention models to "ensure they are equipped to facilitate effective teaching and learning and have the capacity to successfully implement school reform strategies."

22. What is the definition of staff as that term is used in within the turnaround model?

As used in the discussion of a turnaround model, "staff" includes all instructional staff, but an LEA has discretion to determine whether or not "staff" also includes non-instructional staff. An LEA may decide that it is appropriate to include non-instructional staff in the definition of "staff," as all members of a school's staff contribute to the school environment and are important to the success of a turnaround model.

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In determining the number of staff members that may be rehired, an LEA should count the total number of staff positions (however staff is defined) within the school in which the model is being implemented, including any positions that may be vacant at the time of the implementation. For example, if a school has a total of 100 staff positions, only 90 of which are filled at the time the model is implemented, the LEA may rehire 50 staff members; the LEA is not limited to rehiring only 45 individuals (50 percent of the filled staff positions).

23. Will USDE make public the SEA's SIG application?

USDE will post an SEA's application once it is approved, including its list of identified Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III schools included in the application.

24. Will NDE make public the lists of Tiers of schools and the LEA SIG applications?

NDE is not required to release the lists of Tiers of schools. However, NDE will be required to post on its website (<http://www.doe.nv.gov/Recovery/SIG.htm>) within 30 days of making SIG awards to LEAs, all final LEA applications that include the amount of the grant, the name of each school to be served, and the type of intervention to be implemented in each Tier I and Tier II school.

25. If an LEA is implementing the transformation model in an eligible school, may an LEA gather data during the first year of SIG funding on student growth, multiple observation-based assessments of performance, and ongoing collections of professional practice reflective of student achievement, and then remove staff members who have not improved their professional practice at the end of that first year?

Yes, although the principal must be replaced at the beginning of the school year. Although the federal government expects that an LEA deciding to implement the transformation model in a Tier I or Tier II school do so at the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year, there is recognition that certain components of the model may need to be implemented later in the process. For example, because an LEA must design and develop a rigorous, transparent, and equitable staff evaluation system with the involvement of teachers and principals, implement that system, and then provide staff with ample opportunities to improve their practices, the LEA may not be able to remove staff members who have not improved their professional practices until later in the implementation process.

26. In the turnaround model, can early retirement incentives be paid with SIG funds after identifying staff that should be removed, and therefore be used as part of the way to replace 50% of the staff?

No.

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27. In addition to the required elements, what optional elements may also be a part of a turnaround model?

In addition to the required elements, an LEA implementing a turnaround model may also implement other strategies, such as a new school model or any of the required and permissible activities under the transformation intervention model described in the final requirements. It could also, for example, replace a comprehensive high school with one that focuses on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). The key is that these actions would be taken within the framework of the turnaround model and would be in addition to, not instead of, the actions that are required as part of a turnaround model.

28. With respect to elements of the transformation model that are the same as elements of the turnaround model, do the definitions and other guidance that apply to those elements as they relate to the turnaround model also apply to those elements as they relate to the transformation model?

Yes. Thus, for example, the strategies that are used to recruit, place, and retain staff with the skills necessary to meet the needs of students in a turnaround model may be the same strategies that are used to recruit, place, and retain staff with the skills necessary to meet the needs of students in a transformation model. For questions about any terms or strategies that appear in both the transformation model and the turnaround model, refer to the turnaround model section of this guidance.