



NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Title I School Improvement Grant Program

Executive Summary

The US Department of Education just released the final regulations and state application for the Title I School Improvement Grant (SIG) Program. This program will provide over \$3.5 billion of grant funds to the states to help turn around low-performing schools. This is **7 times** as much as states received last year. The SIG application also has major ramifications to a state's Race to the Top application. Below is a summary of the major provisions of the program, the major changes in the program as compared to last year, and how the National Institute for School Leadership can help a state to be successful.

“There are no good schools without good principals. It simply does not happen.”
- Secretary Arne Duncan
U.S. Dept. of Education

Key Provisions

- Grant Amount: Due to the Stimulus Funds injected into the program, states will receive a massive increase in funding – about 7x last year's grant amount.
- Grant Period: The USDOE is inviting states to ask for a waiver to allow school districts to receive three-year grants.
- Deadline: Applications must be received by USDOE no later than February 8, 2010. A state will receive its grant when its application is approved.
- Eligible Schools: Eligibility will again be for schools that are on the NCLB “needs improvement” list. However, the USDOE wants states to also target low-performing secondary schools that are Title I eligible but do not receive Title I funding.
- Distribution method: States will sub-grant 95% of the funds to school districts that have eligible schools. States are being asked to give priority to districts that are the most in need and have the highest level of commitment.

Key Changes

- Race to the Top Implications: The USDOE was careful to align the SIG definitions and requirements with the RttT grant application under the Turning Around Low Performing Schools category. Therefore, it is important that states make sure that their RttT proposal is consistent with their SIG application.



- Focus: The USDOE is encouraging states to focus their efforts on the lowest performing schools that are in schools in need of improvement status under NCLB (SINI schools). To accomplish this, they have asked states to do four things. First, states must identify the 5% of SINI schools that are the LOWEST performers (called Tier I schools). Second, states must identify Title I eligible secondary schools that would have been on the list of lowest performers had they received Title I funding (called Tier II schools). Third, states must develop a sub-grant process that gives priority to school districts that have Tier I and Tier II schools. Fourth, states must provide grant winning school districts that have Tier I schools with \$500,000 per Tier I school per year.
- More Aggressive Intervention in Schools: The USDOE is encouraging states and districts to utilize more aggressive strategies to intervene in the Tier I and Tier II schools. In fact, districts that receive a SIG grant must use one of the following four intervention models in each of its Tier I and Tier II schools:
 1. Turnaround model: Replace principal and at least 50% of the staff, adopt a new governance structure, and implement an improved instructional program.
 2. Restart: Convert school to a charter school or contract with company to run school.
 3. Close school: Enroll existing students in higher performing schools.
 4. Transformation model: Implement required changes that fall into the following four categories – developing and increasing teacher and school leader effectiveness; comprehensive instructional reform strategies; increasing learning time and creating community-oriented schools; and providing operational flexibility and sustained support.
- More Money: As mentioned earlier, states will be receiving 7x as much funding as they had received in previous years. Also, the states and districts are being encouraged to ask for a waiver so that financial support can be provided to the Tier I & II schools for three years.
- More State Resources: To assist the states with the extra workload associated with this program, the USDOE has made several changes. First, the USDOE will be providing the states with their 5% share of the program grant right away. Second, the USDOE has increased the state portion of Title I funds by .3% to .5%. Third, the 1003(a) hold back funds, calculated at 4% of the states' regular Title I allocation, will increase by 50% for this year and next due to the Title I funds included in the Stimulus Fund. These can be used to support the SINI schools as well.

“NISL has helped us create turnaround artists and has assisted principals to drive their schools from good to great.”

**- Gerald Zahorchak
Pennsylvania Education
Secretary**

How NISL Can Help

The National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) provides powerful professional development programs to equip principals to be turnaround artists. Over 4,000 school leaders have completed our flagship Executive Development Program during the last four years, including statewide implementation projects in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. The \$11 million,



four-year R&D effort created a “shovel-ready” world-class curriculum and high quality delivery system that allows innovative states to begin their implementation efforts today.

There is now a strong consensus in the research community that school leadership is one of the key factors impacting student achievement, particularly in low performing schools. For example, the Wallace Foundation commissioned a study on school leadership in 2004. The researchers reviewed hundreds of studies and concluded that “the total (direct and indirect) effects of leadership on student learning account for about a quarter of total school effects.” They went on to state that the “demonstrated effects of successful leadership are considerably greater in schools that are in more difficult circumstances. . . and that there are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader.”

The USDOE, aware of the important role that principals play in turning around low performing schools, is encouraging states to tackle the issue of principal quality:

1. In the final regulations, the only two intervention models that leave the school open and being run by the district call for the school principal to be replaced.
2. In the final regulations, the USDOE gave several examples of how states could use the accelerated 5% payment and extra Title I funds. The examples included “initiating State or regional efforts to recruit and develop principals to serve in persistently lowest-achieving schools.”
3. In the Fall when the USDOE released the draft regulations, they held a webinar to communicate with interested parties. In the presentation, the USDOE urged states to begin “now” to put in place the structures needed for a successful SIG implementation effort using 1003(a) funds including to “recruit and train turnaround and transformation principals, school leaders and teachers.”

Finally and most importantly, the SIG program regulations provide any state with the opportunity to implement a high quality principal leadership program. The SIG program guidelines explicitly allow states to use a portion of the 95% to directly provide assistance in implementing school reform strategies or arrange for them to be provided on a statewide basis (see page 5 of final regulations). In other words, a state could utilize a portion of the SIG subgrant pool to provide direct service to the SINI schools, including leadership development for principals and other school leaders.

NISL welcomes the opportunity to be a partner in your state’s successful turnaround strategy. For more information about NISL, please contact Rich Moglia-Cannon at 202-378-2164 or rcannon@ncee.org or visit our website at <http://www.NISL.net>. More information about the SIG program can be found at the USDOE website via the following link: <http://www.ed.gov/programs/sif/applicant.html>.