



School Improvement Grants, FY 2010

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) has applied for School Improvement Grants (SIG) in the 2010 fiscal year. The U.S. Department of Education has allocated \$546 million for School Improvement Grants in fiscal year (FY) 2010. These funds will be distributed proportionally to all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Pennsylvania also retains over \$35 million in SIG funds from the 2009-10 fiscal year; in the 2009-10 school year Pennsylvania awarded \$102,738,620 to 58 schools representing 17 local education agencies.

Qualifying for a SIG grant

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) has produced a list of schools eligible to receive SIG funds. ***This list differs from the 2009 eligibility list.*** In order to qualify for FY 2010 funds, a school must be designated as a Tier I, Tier II, or Tier III school on the new list. Districts that apply for SIG funds must apply for funding for every Tier I and Tier II school, unless they can demonstrate a lack of capacity to serve all eligible schools within those two categories.

A Tier I school is a Title I school in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring that is identified by the state as a “persistently lowest-achieving school.” A state may also identify as a Tier I school an elementary school that is eligible for Title I, Part A funds that has not made adequate yearly progress for at least two consecutive years or is in the lowest quintile of performance based on proficiency rates on the PSSA and is no higher achieving than the highest-achieving school identified by the state as “persistently lowest-achieving.”

A Tier II school is a secondary school that is eligible for but does not receive Title I, Part A funds and is identified by the state as a “persistently lowest-achieving school.” A state may also identify as a Tier II school a secondary school that is eligible for Title I, Part A funds that has not made adequate yearly progress for at least two consecutive years or is in the lowest quintile of performance based on proficiency rates on the PSSA and is no higher achieving than the highest-achieving school identified by the state as “persistently lowest-achieving” or that has had a graduation rate below 60 percent over a number of years.

A Tier III school is a Title I school in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring that is not a Tier I or II school. A state may also identify as a Tier III school a school that is eligible for Title I, Part A funds that has not made adequate yearly progress for at least two years or is in the lowest quintile of performance based on proficiency rates on the PSSA and does not qualify as a Tier I or Tier II school.

PDE has produced a list of all Tier I, Tier II and Tier III schools in the Commonwealth. The list is available online:

http://www.education.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/federal_programs/7374/school_improvement_grant_%28sig%29/797379

Four intervention models. Each Tier I and Tier II school that is included in their district’s application for SIG funds must implement one of four “school improvement” models. These models mimic the models included in the federal Race to the Top program and are the same as the models utilized by the SIG program in the 2009 funding year. In districts with nine or more Tier I or Tier II schools participating in the SIG program, the transformation model cannot be used in more than 50 percent of the schools.”School

improvement” models cannot be implemented in ways that contradict state statute or the collective bargaining agreement. Furthermore, the district must demonstrate that the selection of a specific model is based upon an assessment of need within the school.

PSEA recommends that local leaders advocate for the implementation of the transformation model.

Transformation model: A district implementing the transformation model in a participating school must implement each of the following strategies:

- Replace the principal who led the school prior to commencement of the transformation model;
- Use rigorous, transparent, and equitable evaluation systems for teachers and principals that take into account data on student growth as a significant factor as well as other factors such as multiple observation-based assessments of performance and ongoing collections of professional practice reflective of student achievement and increased high school graduation rates; and are designed and developed with teacher and principal involvement;
- Identify and reward school leaders, teachers, and other staff who have increased student achievement and high school graduation rates and identify and remove those who, after ample opportunities to improve their professional practice, have not done so;
- Provide staff ongoing, high-quality, job-embedded professional development that is aligned with the school’s comprehensive instructional program and designed with school staff to ensure they are equipped to facilitate effective teaching and learning and have the capacity to successfully implement school reform strategies;
- Implement strategies such as financial incentives, increased opportunities for promotion and career growth, and more flexible working conditions to recruit, place, and retain staff with the skills necessary to meet the needs of the students in a transformation school;
- Use data to identify and implement an instructional program that is research-based and vertically aligned from one grade to the next as well as aligned with State academic standards;
- Promote the continuous use of student data to inform and differentiate instruction in order to meet the academic needs of individual students;
- Establish schedules and strategies that provide increased learning time;
- Provide ongoing mechanisms for family and community engagement;
- Give the school sufficient operational flexibility to implement a comprehensive approach to substantially improve student achievement and increase high school graduation rates; and
- Ensure that the school receives ongoing, intensive technical assistance and related support from the district, state, or a designated external lead partner organization.

Turnaround model: A district implementing the turnaround model in a participating school must undertake the following tasks:

- Replace the principal and grant the principal sufficient operational flexibility;
- Use “locally adopted competencies” to measure the effectiveness of staff, screen all existing staff, rehire no more than 50 percent and select new staff;
- Provide appropriate socio-emotional and community-oriented services and supports for students;
- Implement strategies such as financial incentives, increased opportunities for promotion and career growth, and more flexible working conditions to recruit, place, and retain staff with the skills necessary to meet the needs of the students in the turnaround school;
- Adopt a new governance structure which may include requiring the school to report to a “turnaround office” or hiring a “turnaround leader” who reports directly to the Superintendent or Chief Academic Officer;
- Use data to identify and implement an instructional program that is research-based and vertically aligned from one grade to the next as well as aligned with State academic standards;
- Promote the continuous use of student data to inform and differentiate instruction in order to meet the academic needs of individual students;
- Establish schedules and implement strategies that provide increased learning time; and

- Ensure that the school receives ongoing, intensive technical assistance and related support from the district, state, or a designated external lead partner organization.

Restart model: A restart model is one in which a district converts a school or closes and reopens a school under a charter school operator, a charter management organization (CMO), or an education management organization (EMO). A restart model must enroll, within the grades it serves, any former student who wishes to attend the school.

School closure: School closure occurs when a district closes a school and enrolls the students who attended that school in other schools in the district that are higher achieving. 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.

Issues to Consider

Implementation timeline. FY 2010 SIG funds should be used to implement one of the four intervention models in Tier I and Tier II schools in the 2011–2012 school year. The application process for local districts in Pennsylvania is expected to open no earlier than January, 2011, with Tier I and II school award announcements coming no earlier than April 2011. This will require rapid implementation of large-scale reforms, particularly in Tier I and Tier II designated schools.

Collective bargaining. SIG Guidelines do not supersede state statute or collective bargaining agreements. USDOE recognizes that implementation of a selected intervention model may require negotiation. Local leaders should be closely engaged in the SIG application process to ensure that collective bargaining agreements are honored.

Requirement to participate. Districts are not required to apply for SIG funds; however the money is substantial, and political and pragmatic pressures may make it difficult not to apply. Districts in Pennsylvania that apply for a SIG grant must apply one of the four intervention models in each of its Tier I and Tier II schools unless the district demonstrates that it “lacks sufficient capacity to do so” in its funding application submitted to the state.