2009-2010 Changes in SIG Guidance

The U.S. Department of Education Office of Elementary and Secondary Education issued new ESEA 1003(g) School Improvement Grants (SIG) Guidance in June 2010 (http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/sigguidance05242010.pdf) and November 2010 (http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/sigguidance11012010.pdf) to expand upon and clarify the January 2010 Guidance. In large part, newly added sections deal with how new SIG schools may be identified and clarify how FY 2009 carryover and FY 2010 funds may be spent. Several of the changes underscore the importance of family and community dialog and engagement as a critical component of a successful SIG intervention. The 2010 Consolidated Appropriations Act increased the amount that an SEA may award for each school participating in the SIG program from $500,000 annually it $2 million annually. Following are brief descriptions of sections that were modified in or added to the November 2010 Guidance.

A: Definitions

Sections A-30a through A-30k of the November 2010 Guidance explain how newly eligible schools may be identified, including how an SEA that elects to generate lists of Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III schools, must develop those lists. Sections A-17a, A-17-b and A-18 also deal with developing the State's list of persistently lowest-achieving schools.

B: Turnaround Model

B-2 adds an additional optional element of a turnaround model: implementation of a high-quality preschool program that is designed to improve the health, social-emotional outcomes, and school readiness for high-need young children.

B-3 and G-1c deal with the definition of "staff" in the turnaround model and provide information of how to determine the number of staff members that must be replaced. An LEA has the discretion to determine whether or not non-instructional staff may be included. When calculating the number of staff who must be replaced, the LEA may count total positions rather than only those positions currently filled. G-1c pertains when the LEA is taking advantage of the flexibility to continue or complete interventions that have been implemented within the last two years.

B-8 gives examples of social-emotional and community-oriented services that may be supported with SIG funds in a school implementing a turnaround model. These include, but are not limited to: (a) safety programs; (b) community stability programs that reduce the mobility rate of students in the school; or (c) family and community engagement programs that support a range of activities designed to build the capacity of parents and school staff to work together

to improve student academic achievement, such as a family literacy program for parents who need to improve their literacy skills in order to support their children's learning.

C: Restart Model

C-10 specifies that an LEA may use SIG funds to pay a CMO or EMO to operate a restart model, but only to the extent that the fee is reasonable and necessary.

D: School Closure

D1-a emphasizes the extreme importance of engaging families and the school community early in the process of selecting a school improvement model, particularly when considering school closure.

E: Transformation Model

E-10a addresses how an LEA should design mechanisms to support family and community engagement. This can involve a community-wide assessment to identify the major factors that significantly affect the academic achievement of students in the schools, including an inventory of the resources in the community that could be aligned, integrated, and coordinated to address these challenges. Family and community engagement programs in elementary and secondary transformation schools should be aligned.

E-11a gives examples of services an LEA might provide to create safe school environments that meet students' social, emotional, and health needs. These may include, but are not limited to: (a) safety programs; (b) community stability programs that reduce the mobility rate of students in the school; or (c) family and community engagement programs that support a range of activities designed to build the capacity of parents and school staff to work together to improve student academic achievement, such as a family literacy program for parents who need to improve their literacy skills in order to support their children's learning.

E-16 states that an LEA may gather data on student achievement and professional practice during the first year of SIG funding and then remove staff members who have not improved their professional practice at the end of that first year.

F: Cross-Cutting Issues

F-1 discusses how an LEA may implement a SIG model in a school operating a targeted assistance program. J-13 also deals with use of SIG funds in targeted-assistance schools during pre-implementation.

F-2 provides a timeline for implementing an intervention model using FY 2010 or FY 2009 carryover funds.

F-7a specifies than an LEA implementing a SIG model must comply with State and local laws and agreements, including collective bargaining agreements.

G: Providing Flexibility

G-3, G-5, and G-6, G-6a, G-6b describe circumstances under which an SEA may seek a waiver from the Secretary. G-7 gives the process for an SEA to apply for waivers.

H: LEA Requirements

H-3 indicated when an LEA must submit new application and H-4 specifies what the application must include.

H-4a states consult families and other members of the community in the decision-making process regarding an LEA's sig application. For example, an LEA might hold community meetings to discuss the school intervention model it is considering implementing and the reasons for it believes that the model is appropriate; survey families and the community to gauge their needs; or provide updates to families and the community about the application process and status of the LEA's application. Given the importance of family and community engagement to the success of an intervention, the open dialogue and engagement with these stakeholders should not end when an LEA's application is approved, but should continue through the implementation of the model.

H-6 says that an LEA must commit to serve every Tier I school unless the LEA demonstrates it lacks sufficient capacity to do so. H-7 shows how the LEA might do that.

H-12a and H-12b deal with continuation of services to previously identified Tier III schools.

H-13 summarizes how an LEA may determine which schools it must commit to serve with SIG funds.

H-19a indicates how an LEA should select external providers to assist it in turning around its persistently lowest-achieving schools.

H-21 and H-21a discuss the cap on the number of schools in which an LEA may implement the transformation model and how the cap may be affected by serving newly eligible schools.

H-25 states that the LEA should establish annual goals to cover all three years of implementation of the school intervention model, even if the second and third years will be funded out of continuation grants.

I: SEA Requirements

I-1 points out that while the FY 2010 SIG application generally asks for the same information requested in the FY 2009 application, an SEA may modify the information it provides to reflect lessons learned and changes it wishes to make.

I-3 notes that the FY 2010 application has been updated to enable an SEA to complete it electronically. In order for the Department to determine whether an SEA has made a particular assurance or is requesting a particular waiver, the SEA must "check" the box that appears next to each assurance and next to each waiver that it is requesting.

I-10a reflects the increase in the maximum per-school SIG award from $500,000 to $2 million per year and I-10b indicates that an SEA may reduce the amount it allocates each year to a particular LEA, even if the second and third years of the LEA's grant are funded through continuation grants.

I-20 specifies which year's funds an SEA should use to renew an LEA's SIG grant.

I-22 eliminates the FY 2009 requirement that an SEA carry over 25 percent of its funds if it did not serve all Tier 1 schools in the State.

I-24a gives suggestions for how an SEA can provide technical assistance to its LEAs on recruiting, screening, and selecting external providers. Some possibilities:

- Develop and discuss with LEAs sample rubrics to assess external providers;
- Distribute samples of high-quality RFPs, MOUs, or contracts with external providers;
- Provide LEAs with links to high-quality resources and tools to assess external providers;
- Provide guidance on how to assess the organizational and financial capacity of external providers; or
- Provide examples of how external providers are being used to successfully support reform efforts throughout the State.

J: Pre-Implementation

This section replaces Section J from the FY 2009 Guidance, "SIG, Race to the Top, and the State Fiscal Stabilitzation Fund." It examines how an LEA may use FY 2010 or FY 2009 carryover SIG funds to prepare for full implementation of a school intervention model at the start of the 2011-2012 school year. These funds come from the LEA's first year SIG grant.

J-2 gives some possible areas in which funds might be used for SIG-related planning activities:

- Family and community engagement

- Rigorous review of external providers (see also J-8 and J-9)
- Evaluating strengths and areas of need of current staff
- Recruiting and hiring incoming principal and staff
- Remediation and enrichment to students (see also J-10)
- Instructional materials and planning
- Professional development and support
- Data systems and analysis of baseline indicators
- Needs assessments (see also J-12)
- Development and adoption of interim assessments.

SIG funds may not be used to supplant non-Federal funds. Per J-3, an LEA may begin using FY 2010 and/or FY 2009 carryover SIG funds after the SEA has awarded the LEA a SIG grant based on the LEA's having met all requirements for having a fully approvable SIG application, including conducting a needs assessment and identifying the model that will be implemented in each school the LEA will serve with SIG funds.

Subject to State and local laws and requirements, SIG funds may be used to recruit and hire the incoming principal and leadership team, who will begin planning for full implementation in 2011-2012 (J-5). However, SIG funds may not be used to continue paying unassigned teachers who have been removed from the classroom (J-6), nor may they be used to buy out the remainder of the current principal's contract (J-7). An LEA may use SIG funds to pilot an evaluation system for teachers and principals at schools receiving funds to implement a transformation model (J-11).

An LEA may use SIG funds to conduct the rigorous review process required to select a charter school operator, CMO, or EMO (J-8). It may also use SIG funds to hire external providers to assist in planning for and carrying out activities necessary for full implementation the following year (J-9), keeping in mind that the funds must cover both activities carried out during pre-implementation and full and effective implementation the following year.

SIG funds may be used for reasonable and necessary costs of minor remodeling of school facilities to enable the use of technology that is essential for the full and effective implementation of one of the models (J-14).

K: Reporting Metrics

K-4 discusses metrics for which an SEA must report baseline data for the school year prior to the implementation of one of the four interventions. These metrics are enumerated in section III.A.4 of the final requirements (http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/2010-27313.pdf). The Department recognizes that some data simply may not be available, even through an analysis of

various sources. An SEA is not obligated to provide baseline data with respect to data that simply are not available from any source.