

## School Improvement Grants Interim Final Guidance

**JANUARY 21, 2010**

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### OVERVIEW

On Thursday, January 21, a notice of new Interim Final Requirements for the School Improvement Grants (SIG) program appeared in the *Federal Register*. These changes to the program are a result of language that was included in the FY 2010 Consolidated Appropriations Act, which was signed into law by President Obama on December 16, 2009. Fundamentally, the Appropriations Act language expands the group of schools that are eligible to receive SIG funds in fiscal years 2009 and 2010.

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced the release of the final requirements for the \$3.546 billion SIGs made available from the combined *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* (ARRA) and Fiscal Year 2009 spending bill on December 10, 2009. An additional \$546 million was appropriated for the program in FY 2010. Funds under the program are distributed to States via an established formula; States then administer a competition for these funds among local school districts with the persistently lowest-achieving Title I schools that 1) demonstrate the greatest need and 2) show the strongest commitment to providing adequate resources to these schools to raise student achievement. The new language included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act does *not* alter the purpose of the SIG program.

### NEW GUIDANCE

The FY 2010 Consolidated Appropriations Act included two changes to the SIG program to further help State Education Agencies (SEAs) and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) better achieve the purpose of the SIG program by providing flexibility to serve the lowest-achieving schools regardless of their Title I status and directly provide the amounts of funding needed for full and effective implementation of the four turnaround models as detailed in the December 10 final requirements.

#### **Newly Eligible Schools**

First, the law allows SEAs and LEAs to use SIG funds to serve certain “newly eligible” schools. In particular, SIG funds may now be used to fund Title I schools that are not in “improvement, corrective action, or restructuring” and schools that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I, Part A funds, if those schools: 1) have not made adequate yearly progress for at least two years; and 2) are in the State’s lowest quintile of performance based on proficiency rates.

The primary purpose of expanding school eligibility is to better serve Tier II secondary schools that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I, Part A funds. Under the December 10 SIG final requirements, Tier II schools could be served *only* through a waiver; under the new

Appropriations language these schools are now fully eligible to receive SIG funds and to generate funding like other participating schools *without* a waiver.

The new language also extends SIG eligibility to elementary schools that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I, Part A funds, and to Title I schools that are not in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring—two groups of schools that are not included in the December 10 SIG final requirements.

#### **Award Levels**

Second, the Consolidated Appropriations Act increases the amount that an SEA may award for each school participating in the SIG program from \$500,000 annually to \$2 million annually. According to the Department of Education (ED), “this higher limit will permit an SEA to award directly the \$1 million or more annually that may be necessary for successful implementation of the turnaround, restart or transformation models in most Tier I and Tier II schools.”

#### **NEW ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER**

ED has issued these interim final requirements that help define how SEAs and LEAs may use the new flexibility the Appropriations language has provided, while maintaining the integrity of the December 10 final guidance. A State’s applications for SIG grants are due to ED on February 8. Important factors include:

- Schools identified by an SEA for inclusion in Tier I and Tier II under the December 10 final requirements remain in those tiers.
- An SEA has the *option* of adding to Tiers I and II, respectively, elementary and secondary schools that are eligible for, but may not receive, Title I, Part A funds if the schools are not higher achieving than the highest-achieving Tier I or Tier II school identified by the SEA, or in the case of secondary schools, have a graduation rate below 60 percent.
- Newly eligible schools that an SEA adds to Tiers I and II must be identified in addition to, and not instead of, the Tier I and Tier II schools identified under the December 10 final requirements; and the same school intervention models required for other Tier I and Tier II schools must be implemented.
- An SEA may add newly eligible schools that do not meet the requirements of Tiers I or II schools to Tier III and may use additional criteria to set priorities for serving Tier III schools.
- An SEA must award SIG funds to serve all the State’s Tier I and II schools that its LEAs commit to serve, and that the SEA determines its LEAs have capacity to serve, *before* awarding funds to serve Tier III schools.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

To view the new Interim Final Requirements in detail visit:

<http://www.ed.gov/programs/sif/index.html> and

<http://www.ed.gov/programs/sif/guidance20100120.doc>.