

Handbook on **Effective Implementation of School Improvement Grants**

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Center on Innovation & Improvement

Prepared by:

- Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center
- Center on Innovation & Improvement
- Center on Instruction
- National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality
- National High School Center

This handbook is not an official Department of Education (USDE) document, and thus the reader must refer to USDE notices, regulations, requests for applications, and guidance for information with legal standing. Rather, this handbook is intended as an aid to the successful implementation of the School Improvement Grants and help in achieving rapid improvement of schools that are persistently low-achieving. Obviously, the topics explored in this handbook are more complex than can be fully explicated in one thin volume, so the handbook directs the reader to resources and references to acquire a fuller understanding of the key concepts in school turnaround and improvement.

The Department of Education announced Interim Final Requirements on January 15. Please take special note of these and any subsequent changes announced by the USDE.

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Information Tools Training

Positive results for students will come from changes in the knowledge, skill, and behavior of their teachers and parents. State policies and programs must provide the opportunity, support, incentive, and expectation for adults close to the lives of children to make wise decisions.

The Center on Innovation & Improvement helps regional comprehensive centers in their work with states to provide districts, schools, and families with the opportunity, information, and skills to make wise decisions on behalf of students.

The Center on Innovation & Improvement is administered by the Academic Development Institute (Lincoln, IL) in partnership with the Temple University Institute for Schools and Society (Philadelphia, PA), Center for School Improvement & Policy Studies at Boise State University (Boise, ID), and Little Planet Learning (Nashville, TN).

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Introduction to the *Handbook*

The Purpose of this Handbook

The purpose of this *Handbook* is to bolster the effective implementation of the intervention models and strategies outlined in the 2010 School Improvement Grant (SIG) program—section 1003(g) of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)—in order to achieve the program’s clear goal—rapid improvement of persistently low-achieving schools. Especially, this *Handbook* offers succinct and practical explanations of the SIG’s required and recommended models and strategies, references to the underlying research, and connections to useful resources.

The intended audience for this *Handbook* includes:

- state education agencies (SEAs),
- local education agencies (LEAs),
- charter management organizations (CMOs),
- education management organizations (EMOs),
- organizational partners engaged in school improvement, and
- schools engaged in rapid improvement.

How to Use this Handbook

This *Handbook* is not an official U.S. Department of Education (USDE) document, and thus the reader must refer to USDE notices, regulations, requests for applications, and guidance for information with legal standing. Rather, this *Handbook* is intended as an aid to the successful implementation of the School Improvement Grants and help in achieving rapid improvement of schools that are persistently low-achieving. Obviously, the topics explored in this *Handbook* are more complex than can be fully explicated in one thin volume, so the *Handbook* directs the reader to resources and references to acquire a fuller understanding of the key concepts in school turnaround and improvement. The editors and authors have strived for conciseness, plain language, and an emphasis on practical application of this *Handbook’s* contents.

This *Handbook* is organized into two parts. Part I frames the purposes of the School Improvement Grants, to classify schools within performance strata and identify the “persistently low-achieving” schools, and offers a framework for diagnosing a school’s performance and practice in order to target interventions and supports for rapid

improvement. Part II itemizes more than 50 strategies relevant to the School Improvement Grants, connects the strategies with research, cites available resources, and offers action principles for the SEA, the LEA, and the school.

Comprehensive Technical Assistance Centers

The U.S. Department of Education supports a system of “comprehensive technical assistance centers” consisting of 16 regional centers and five national content centers. These centers provide technical assistance primarily to state education agencies, with the regional centers directly serving the states in their regions and the content centers providing expertise, materials, and tools to aid the regional centers in their work. This *Handbook* was developed by the five national content centers:

- Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center
- Center on Innovation & Improvement
- Center on Instruction
- National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality
- National High School Center

At the time this *Handbook* was being prepared, the regional comprehensive centers were already helping their states prepare for the School Improvement Grants and related federal programs directed at turning around the nation’s persistently lowest-achieving schools. The regional centers provide a reliable bridge between the U.S. Department of Education and the states in this challenging and necessary work and will continue to assist their states in other ways as well. Likewise, the national content centers, through their websites, publications, conferences, trainings, and consultations, are a ready resource for the work of SEAs and LEAs. Please see the following directory of the comprehensive technical assistance centers; each center’s website includes abundant resources on topics related to the School Improvement Grants.

Comprehensive Technical Assistance Centers

National Content Centers

Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center

www.aacompcenter.org

WestEd

Dr. Stanley N. Rabinowitz, *Director*

The Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center is housed at WestEd in San Francisco, California.

Center on Innovation & Improvement

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The Center on Innovation and Improvement is housed at the Academic Development Institute in Lincoln, Illinois, and is a partner with Temple University's Institute for Schools and Society in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Little Planet Learning in Nashville, Tennessee.

Center on Instruction

www.centeroninstruction.org

RMC Research Corporation

Ms. Angela Penfold, *Director*

The Center on Instruction is housed at the RMC Research Corporation in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality

www.tqsource.org

Learning Point Associates

Dr. Sabrina Laine, *Director*

The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality is housed at Learning Point Associates (LPA) in Naperville, Illinois.

National High School Center

www.betterhighschools.org

American Institutes for Research

Dr. Joseph R. Harris, *Director*

The National High School Center is housed at the American Institutes for Research in Washington, DC.

Regional Comprehensive Centers

Alaska Comprehensive Center

www.alaskacc.org

Southeast Regional Resource Center

Mr. Jerry Schoenberger, *Director*

The Alaska Comprehensive Center serves the state of Alaska.

Appalachia Region Comprehensive Center

www.arcc.edvantia.org

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Dr. Sharon Harsh, *Director*

The Appalachia Region Comprehensive Center serves the states of Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

California Comprehensive Center

www.cacompcenter.org

WestEd

Dr. Fred Tempes, *Director*

The California Comprehensive Center serves the state of California.

Florida & Islands Comprehensive Center

www.ets.org/flicc/

Educational Testing Service

Dr. Alice Lindsay, *Director*

The Florida and Islands Comprehensive Center serves the state of Florida, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

Great Lakes East Comprehensive Center

www.learningpt.org/greatlakeeast/

Learning Point Associates

Ms. Barbara Youngren, *Director*

The Great Lakes East Comprehensive Center serves the states of Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio.

Great Lakes West Comprehensive Center

www.learningpt.org/greatlakeswest/

Learning Point Associates

Linda E. Miller, *Director*

The Great Lakes West Comprehensive Center serves the states of Illinois and Wisconsin.

The Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center

www.macc.ceee.gwu.edu

The George Washington University

Center for Equity & Excellence in Education

Dr. Charlene Rivera, *Director*

The Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center serves the states of Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, and the District of Columbia.

Mid-Continent Comprehensive Center

www.mc3edsupport.org

The Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma

Dr. Belinda Biscoe, *Director*

The Mid-Continent Comprehensive Center serves the states of Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma.

New England Comprehensive Center

www.necomprehensivecenter.org

RMC Research Corporation

Dr. Carol Keirstead, *Director*

The New England Comprehensive Center serves the states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

New York Comprehensive Center

www.nycomprehensivecenter.org

RMC Research Corporation

Mr. Larry Hirsch, *Director*

The New York Comprehensive Center serves the state of New York.

North Central Comprehensive Center

www.mcrel.org/nccc

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning

Dr. Anne Tweed, *Director*

The North Central Comprehensive Center serves the states of Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

Northwest Regional Comprehensive Center

<http://nwrcc.educationnorthwest.org/>

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Ms. Kathleen Peixotto, *Director*

The Northwest Regional Comprehensive Center serves the states of Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming.

Pacific Comprehensive Center

www.pacificcompcenter.org

Pacific Resources for Education and Learning

Dr. Hilda Heine, *Director*

The Pacific Comprehensive Center serves the state of Hawaii, and American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap), Guam, Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau.

Southeast Comprehensive Center

<http://secc.sedl.org>

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

Dr. Robin Jarvis, *Director*

The Southeast Comprehensive Center serves the states of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina.

Southwest Comprehensive Center

www.swcompcenter.org

WestEd

Dr. Paul Koehler, *Director*

The Southwest Comprehensive Center serves the states of Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah.

Texas Comprehensive Center

<http://txcc.sedl.org/>

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

Dr. K. Victoria Dimock, *Director*

The Texas Comprehensive Center serves the state of Texas.

Part I: Identifying Need, Selecting Interventions, and Differentiating Supports

The Purpose of the School Improvement Grants

Center on Innovation & Improvement

Section 1003(g) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provides for the U.S. Secretary of Education to allocate funds to SEAs for the purpose of school improvement. Within the regulations and guidelines established by the Secretary, each SEA administers grants to LEAs to “enable the lowest-achieving schools” to meet accountability requirements. In 2009 the U.S. Department of Education announced a dramatic increase in the funds that would be provided to SEAs under section 1003(g) while issuing program requirements that charged the SEAs with channeling the funds to LEAs for the “persistently lowest-achieving schools” to support rapid improvement through four intervention models:

- **Turnaround model:** The LEA replaces the principal and rehires no more than 50% of the staff; gives greater principal autonomy; implements other prescribed and recommended strategies.
- **Restart model:** The LEA converts or closes and reopens a school under a charter school operator, charter management organization, or education management organization.
- **School closure:** The LEA closes the school and enrolls the students in other schools in the LEA that are higher achieving.
- **Transformation model:** The LEA replaces the principal (except in specified situations); implements a rigorous staff evaluation and development system; institutes comprehensive instructional reform; increases learning time and applies community-oriented school strategies; and provides greater operational flexibility and support for the school.

Each SEA is directed to identify its “persistently lowest-achieving” schools (see Chapter 2). LEAs that include these schools then apply to the SEA to receive School Improvement Grants and determine which of the four models fits best in each of their lowest-achieving schools. While the LEAs must apply one of the four intervention models in schools defined as “persistently lowest-achieving,” once the SEA has allocated resources for its “persistently lowest-achieving schools,” according to the federal requirements, the SEA will use the remaining School Improvement Grant funds for LEAs to apply differentiated interventions and supports to improve other Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring.

In identifying the lowest-achieving schools, the SEA arranges the schools into three tiers, each tier representing a level of priority for the SIG funds. In determining which applicant LEAs receive grants, the SEA takes into account the number of low-performing schools in the LEA, the tiers these schools occupy, and the LEA’s capacity to

effectively implement the models and strategies outlined in the SIG application. The three tiers of schools identified as lowest achieving, in priority order for assistance through School Improvement Grants are:

Schools the LEA must identify:

Tier I: Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring that are identified by the SEA as “persistently lowest-achieving.”

Tier II: Secondary schools that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I-Part A funds and are identified by the SEA as “persistently lowest-achieving.”

Tier III: Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring that are not Tier I schools.

Schools the LEA may identify:

Tier I: Title I eligible elementary schools that are no higher achieving than the highest-achieving school that meets the criteria of “persistently lowest-achieving schools” in the “must identify” category above and that are:

- in the bottom 20% of all schools in the State based on proficiency rates; or
- have not made AYP for two consecutive years.

Tier II: Title I eligible secondary schools that are (1) no higher achieving than the highest-achieving school that meets the criteria of “persistently lowest-achieving schools” in the “must identify” category above or (2) high schools that have had a graduation rate of less than 60 percent over a number of years and that are:

- in the bottom 20% of all schools in the State based on proficiency rates; or
- have not made AYP for two consecutive years.

Tier III: Title I eligible schools that do not meet the requirements to be in Tier I or Tier II and that are:

- in the bottom 20% of all schools in the State based on proficiency rates; or
- have not made AYP for two years.

Governance, Human Capital, and Effective Practice

Since 1994, the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) has required states, as a condition of receiving federal dollars under this act, to maintain standards-based accountability systems and to provide statewide systems of support to assist LEAs and schools in meeting the accountability requirements. Under the 2001 reauthorization of ESEA (No Child Left Behind), sanctions were placed upon LEAs

and schools not making adequate progress toward student achievement targets. After not making adequate yearly progress for five years, a school is subject to restructuring.

The experience with restructuring since 2002 provides a backdrop for the current School Improvement Grant program’s sharp focus on persistently lowest-achieving schools and more substantial methods for positive change. For the 2007-08 school year, 3,500 schools—or 7% of all Title I schools—were in restructuring planning or implementation status (Center on Education Policy, 2008), and that number was escalating each year. A study by the Center on Education Policy (CEP, 2008) found that the “other” option for restructuring was chosen in 89% to 96% of the cases, state to state, in the five states studied.

An analysis of the CEP data and related studies and review of restructuring successes by the Center on Innovation & Improvement (Brinson & Rhim, 2009) concluded that:

- Few leaders of schools identified for restructuring were implementing significant changes to school governance and staffing as envisioned in NCLB (USDE, 2007);
- LEAs often choose the least prescriptive restructuring option; and
- All of the four most significant restructuring options are not available to schools.
 - In 10 states, charter conversion is not an option because charter schools are not allowed by state law. In many states that do have charter school laws, charter caps or other restrictions may limit conversion as a restructuring approach (Hassel, Hassel, Arkin, Kowal, & Steiner, 2006).
 - Some states have constitutions or laws forbidding state takeover. In other states, many top administrators believe that takeover would be a logistical quagmire (Steiner, 2006).
 - Contracting with an outside provider for many schools—especially small schools or geographically isolated schools—was difficult because contractors are simply not available or affordable.
 - Replacing some or all of the teachers and administrators met obstacles including the availability of leaders likely to obtain better results and high-quality teacher replacements (Kowal, 2009).

For these reasons, the U.S. Department of Education, through initiatives including those associated with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), has urged changes in state statute and policy to allow for the adoption of intervention models such as those prescribed in the School Improvement Grant program. The *Handbook on Restructuring and Substantial School Improvement* (Walberg, 2007) also provides specific practices that must accompany structural changes in order to achieve restructuring's intended results.

The 2009 and 2010 School Improvement Grant programs strongly amplify the restructuring provisions of NCLB and commits a massive surge of funding to rid the nation of its persistently lowest-achieving schools. The SIG provisions make it clear that change must be dramatic, improvement rapid, and results significant. Moving beyond the restructuring provisions of NCLB, the SIG program:

- Considers student growth in determining school progress;
- Sharply focuses on the “persistently lowest-achieving schools;”
- Limits strategies employed under the transformation model to a defined and muscular set of effective practices;
- Stresses the importance of talent, the human capital necessary for rapid school improvement; and
- Requires changes in governance and leadership to pave the way for rapid and sustained improvement.

Part II of this *Handbook* provides action principles, resources, and references pertaining to the models, strategies, and practices recommended in the federal regulations for the School Improvement Grants. These models, strategies, and practices are organized into the following categories:

- Organizational Structures
- Leadership and Decision Making
- Human Capital (Personnel and Professional Development)
- Curriculum and Instruction
- Scheduling and Learning Time
- Student Supports

The School Improvement Grant program emphasizes changes in governance, structure, human capital, and practice in order to effect rapid and substantial improvement of persistently low-achieving schools. The models, strategies, and practices recommended in the program's regulation and guidance also provide a sound menu for reform and improvement of schools not covered by the provisions of these grants, and the Comprehensive Technical Assistance Centers encourage SEAs and LEAs to use this *Handbook* in their systems of support for the improvement of all schools.

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Identifying Local Education Agencies and Schools for School Improvement Grants



Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center

Focusing School Improvement Grants on Persistently Lowest-Achieving Schools

The 2009 and 2010 final regulations for School Improvement Grants (SIGs) established a clear goal for the use of the grants: to help in achieving the rapid improvement of schools that are persistently the lowest-achieving. State Education Agencies (SEAs) have the primary responsibility for establishing clear and consistent statewide processes for identifying Local Education Agencies (LEAs) for School Improvement Grants (SIGs). Their challenge is to apply identification criteria that will focus the grants on schools with the greatest need—schools with extremely low levels of student achievement over extended periods of time. This chapter will assist SEAs and LEAs in the process of identifying the schools best served by these grants.

Historical Background: NCLB Accountability Requirements

Under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), large numbers of schools nationwide have been identified as “in need of improvement.” NCLB called for uniform statewide standards-based assessments and an accountability system that determined whether each Title I school made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). To measure the improvement of Title I schools, which serve large percentages of socio-economically disadvantaged students, SEAs were to establish targets requiring schools to increase annually the percentage of students reaching proficiency in English/language arts and mathematics.

Based on NCLB accountability provisions and prescribed sanctions, each state also established a Title I accountability system focusing on schools that were not making AYP and a set of requirements, increasing over time, for schools that did not increase student achievement sufficiently to meet the statewide targets.

A set of categories was established that identified both the length of time in years that a school had failed to meet the AYP targets, and the progressively intensive actions and interventions required of them to increase student achievement.

The categories of Title I schools failing to meet statewide accountability goals—“In School Improvement” are:

- 1. Schools in Improvement** have failed to make AYP for two or three consecutive years (one year for planning, one year for implementation of improvement strategies);
- 2. Schools in Corrective Action** have failed to make AYP for four consecutive years; and

3. Schools in Restructuring have failed to make AYP for five years, and have one year to plan and another year (year 7) to implement a major reform in school governance.

Starting in 2009, the School Improvement Grants focused funding and intensive improvement efforts on the least successful of Title I schools. It is not surprising to observe that achievement data typically identify the persistently lowest-achieving schools as among those currently in Corrective Action and in Restructuring—focusing specific attention on schools not making significant gains in student achievement over a number of years. The 2009 School Improvement Grants build on this historical categorization of schools with multiple years in “improvement” by carefully defining “persistently lowest-achieving schools” and by establishing categories (Tiers I, II, and III) of schools in need of the fundamental, intensive reform efforts described in this *Handbook*.

Requirements for Defining and Identifying “Persistently Lowest-Achieving Schools”

As defined in Federal statute and regulation, a “persistently lowest-achieving school” is:

1. A Title I school in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring that—
 - A. Is among the lowest-achieving five percent of Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring or among the lowest-achieving five Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring in the State, whichever number of schools is greater; or
 - B. Is a high school that has had a graduation rate as defined in 34 CFR 200.19(b) that is less than 60% over a number of years.
2. A secondary school that is eligible for, but does not receive, Title I funds that—
 - A. Is among the lowest-achieving five percent of secondary schools or among the lowest-achieving five secondary schools in the State that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I funds, whichever number of schools is greater; or
 - B. Is a high school that has had a graduation rate as defined in 34 CFR 200.19(b) that is less than 60% over a number of years.

Identifying Persistently Lowest-Achieving Schools

To identify the lowest-achieving schools, a 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 under section 1111(b)(3) of the ESEA in reading/language arts and mathematics combined; and
- The school’s lack of progress on those assessments over a number of years in the “all students” group.

The SIG regulations direct each SEA to identify the State’s “persistently lowest-achieving” schools. LEAs then apply to the SEA to receive School Improvement Grants, committing to employ one of the four intervention models identified in the SIG regulations in Tier I and II schools. (See below for definitions of Tier I, II, and III schools—differentiated categories of schools eligible for School Improvement Grants). (See <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/sigguidance11012010.pdf> for Federal Guidance or the Appendix at the end of this book to see Federal Guidance A-15: “How can an SEA determine academic achievement in terms of proficiency of the ‘all students’ group on the State’s reading/language arts and mathematics assessments combined to develop one list of schools that will enable it to identify the persistently lowest-achieving schools in the State?”)

Key Considerations in Identifying Persistently Lowest-Achieving Schools: SEA Responsibilities

1. SEA Responsibility: Establish and apply criteria and calculation formulas for identifying the lowest-achieving 5% of Title I schools not currently making AYP.

Initial Criterion—

- A. The Title I schools to be identified are not currently making AYP.
- B. And, Applying the Calculation Formula, either—
 - B.1. Identify the lowest-achieving (5%) of all such Title I schools, ranking schools from highest to lowest using the current year ESEA standards-based assessment results, and establishing a cut score of percent proficient, below which a school is in the bottom 5%. (See Table 1: Steps to Identify “Persistently Lowest-Achieving” Schools at end of this chapter.)
 - OR
 - B.2. Identify the Title I high schools that have had a graduation rate as defined in 34 CFR 200.19(b) that is less than 60% over a number of years. All such Title I high schools are eligible for School Improvement Grants.

2. SEA Responsibility: Establish and apply criteria and calculation formulas for identifying secondary schools eligible for, but not receiving, Title I funds, but that will be eligible for School Improvement Grants.

A. Identify secondary schools that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I funds. From this group of schools, identify secondary schools that are among the lowest-achieving five percent of secondary schools.

OR

B. Identify secondary schools that are among the lowest-achieving five secondary schools in the state.

OR

C. Identify secondary schools that have had a graduation rate as defined in 34 CFR 200.19(b) that is less than 60% over a number of years.

All secondary schools meeting the criteria described in 2A, 2B, or 2C are eligible for School Improvement Grants.

3. SEA Responsibility: Identify low-achieving schools that are not making significant student achievement gains and are among the persistently lowest-achieving.

To determine persistently lowest-achievement levels in schools, compare the results of the above calculation for each Title I school over the years since it initially failed to meet the statewide AYP requirements and fell into “school improvement” status.

An SEA has discretion in how it determines whether a school has demonstrated a “lack of progress” on the State’s assessments. See at the end of this chapter three examples of how an SEA can determine “lack of progress.” An SEA may use other reasonable approaches.

4. SEA Responsibility: Avoiding false category errors in identifying “persistently lowest-achieving schools.”

To avoid falsely categorizing any schools as persistently lowest-achieving, schools that have begun to make substantial progress in student achievement in the last year or two years and whose current improvement plans appear to be showing substantial positive results, the foregoing analysis (in #3 above) may point to a small number of low-achieving schools that may not be appropriately placed in the category of “persistently lowest-achieving schools.”

Defining and Prioritizing Three Tiers of Schools Eligible for School Improvement Funds

In identifying the persistently lowest-achieving schools, the SEA categorizes the schools into three tiers, each tier defining a group of schools eligible for SIG funds. LEAs apply to the SEA for School Improvement Grants, giving first priority to their persistently lowest-achieving Tier I and II schools, followed by requests for additional funding for eligible Tier III schools. An LEA must demonstrate in its application its commitment and capacity to effectively implement in its Tier I and Tier II schools one of the rigorous interventions described in the regulations governing the School Improvement Grants.

The three tiers of schools identified as eligible for assistance through School Improvement Grants are:

- **Tier I:** Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring that are identified by the SEA as “persistently lowest-achieving.”
- **Tier II:** Secondary schools that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I-Part A funds and are identified by the SEA as “persistently lowest-achieving.”
- **Tier III:** Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring that are not Tier I schools (not identified as persistently lowest-achieving schools). An SEA may establish additional criteria to encourage LEAs to differentiate among these schools in their use of school improvement funds and to use in setting priorities among LEA applications for funding.

Key Considerations in Defining and Prioritizing the Three Tiers of Schools in LEAs Eligible for School Improvement Grants

1. Identifying LEAs Eligible for School Improvement Grants: Criteria

- A. Greatest Need: An LEA with the greatest need for a School Improvement Grant must have one or more schools in one of the three tiers.
- B. Strongest Commitment: An LEA with the strongest commitment agrees to implement and demonstrates the capacity to implement fully and effectively one of the rigorous interventions identified in the SIG requirements in each Tier I and Tier II school that the LEA commits to serve.

Note: Criterion B (above) establishes that all Tier I and Tier II schools have been identified by the SEA as persistently lowest-achieving schools. Tier I and Tier II schools have first priority for School Improvement Grant funds.

2. Identifying Tier III Schools for SIG Funding

Additional School Improvement Grant funds may be available to LEAs for Tier III schools. The SEA should establish criteria that encourage LEAs in their SIG applications to establish funding priorities for their Tier III schools and to differentiate among those schools in their appropriate use of school improvement funds.

Conclusion

Although this chapter of the *Handbook* focuses primarily on the identification of LEAs and schools for School Improvement Grant funding, these categories and criteria are of great importance as these requirements are built into each SEA's application criteria and fully incorporated into the grant applications submitted by each LEA. The success of this process will only become a reality as the appropriate intervention strategies for specific schools are identified and fully implemented, schools are turned around, and all students in all schools attain high levels of academic achievement.

The process described in this chapter contributes to the success of this grant program in essential ways:

- Initially, an intense focus on identifying and planning to improve the “persistently lowest-achieving schools” builds on the historical categories drawn from past efforts at reform: Schools in Improvement, in Corrective Action, and in Restructuring. Those categories are indicative of and combine both inadequate growth in student achievement over time with inadequate attempts to intervene effectively at the school level. Lessons learned from this history suggest the importance of intense efforts to employ a set of powerful reform strategies in every low-achieving school.
- Second, the focus of the School Improvement Grant program is not on all “improvement schools,” but rather on a finite number of priority schools, 5% of the schools in improvement, that are to receive substantial funding and support in exchange for a commitment to use designated reform strategies to turn schools around and to make major student achievement gains in a very short span of time. The schools receiving SIGs are those with the greatest need and are expected to become models of successful intervention for the future.
- Third, the identification of three tiers of schools for the prioritization of funding and focused services allows a broad spectrum of low-achieving schools to receive the differentiated support they need—

with the four key turnaround strategies available to all Tier I and II schools and with additional differentiated strategies available for schools (Tier III) not in the bottom 5%, but who have substantial needs for support if they are to increase the pace of student growth.

The schools identified for the School Improvement Grants will benefit greatly from the combined efforts of SEAs and LEAs to identify them with great care and to choose from a variety of improvement strategies to provide local communities, parents, and students with schools of the highest quality meeting the needs of all of their students.

School Improvement Grant Resources

Online from the U. S. Department of Education

1. Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended, Title I, Part A, Section 1003(g) <http://www.ed.gov/programs/sif/legislation.html>
2. Guidance—School Improvement Grants—11/01/10 <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/legislation.html>
3. School Improvement Fund: Applicant Information, including Final Requirements and SEA Application for School Improvement Grants <http://www.ed.gov/programs/sif/applicant.html>
4. Final Requirements, Federal Register, October 28, 2010. This document contains the final requirements governing the process that a State educational agency (SEA) uses to award school improvement funds authorized under section 1003 (g) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to local educational agencies (LEAs) in order to transform school culture and substantially raise the achievement of students attending the State's persistently lowest-achieving schools, including secondary schools. The official version will be posted in the U.S. Federal Register. <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/legislation.html>

Table 1: Steps to Identify “Persistently Lowest-Achieving” Schools

The following steps provide an example of the process that an SEA might employ to identify Title I schools as “persistently lowest-achieving,” as described above in 1.B.1.

- Step 1: Determine all relevant definitions—*i.e.*, the definition of “secondary school,” the definition of a “number of years” for purposes of determining whether a high school has a graduation rate less than 60%, and the definition of a “number of years” for purposes of determining “lack of progress” on the State’s assessments.
- Step 2: Determine the number of schools that make up five percent of schools in each of the relevant sets of schools (*i.e.*, five percent of Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring and five percent of the secondary schools that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I funds); determine whether that number or the number five should be used to determine the lowest-achieving schools in each relevant set of schools, depending on which number is larger.
- Step 3: Determine the method for calculating combined English/language arts and mathematics proficiency rates for each school.
- Step 4: Determine the method for determining “lack of progress” by the “all students” group on the State’s assessments.
- Step 5: Determine the weights to be assigned to academic achievement of the “all students” group and lack of progress on the State’s assessments.
- Step 6: Determine the weights to be assigned to elementary schools and secondary schools.
- Step 7: Using the process identified in Step 3, rank the Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring from highest to lowest based on the academic achievement of the “all students” group.
- Step 8: Using the process identified in Step 4, as well as the relevant weights identified in Steps 5 and 6, apply the second factor—lack of progress—to the list identified in Step 7.
- Step 9: After applying lack of progress, start with the school at the bottom of the list and count up to the relevant number determined in Step 2 to obtain the list of the lowest-achieving five percent (or five) Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring.
- Step 10: Identify the Title I high schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring that have had a graduation rate of less than 60% over a number of years (as defined in Step 1) that were not captured in the list of schools identified in Step 9.
- Step 11: Add the high schools identified in Step 10 to the list of schools identified in Step 9.
- Step 12: Using the process identified in Step 3, rank the secondary schools that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I funds from highest to lowest based on the academic achievement of the “all students” group.
- Step 13: Using the process identified in Step 4, as well as the relevant weights identified in Steps 5 and 6, apply the second factor—lack of progress—to the list identified in Step 12.
- Step 14: After applying lack of progress, start with the school at the bottom of the list and count up to the relevant number determined in Step 2 to obtain the list of the lowest-achieving five percent (or five) secondary schools that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I funds.
- Step 15: Identify the high schools that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I funds and that have had a graduation rate of less than 60% over a number of years (as defined in Step 1) that were not captured in the list of schools identified in Step 14.
- Step 16: Add the high schools identified in Step 15 to the list of schools identified in Step 14.

As exemplified in the table below, together, the two lists of schools resulting from Steps 11 and 16 make up the State’s persistently lowest-achieving schools. The list of schools resulting from Step 11 will constitute the Tier I schools and the list of schools resulting from Step 16 will constitute the Tier II schools for purposes of using SIG funds under section 1003(g) of the ESEA. Except for newly eligible schools the SEA may identify under the Consolidated Appropriations Act (2010), all Title I participating schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring that are not on the list resulting from Step 11 will constitute Tier III schools for purposes of using SIG funds under section 1003(g) of the ESEA.

List A: Resulting from Step 11 (Tier I)	List B: Resulting from Step 16 (Tier II)
<p>Lowest-achieving five percent (or five) of Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring, obtained by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ranking the Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring from highest to lowest based on the academic achievement of the “all students” group; ■ Applying lack of progress to the rank order list; and ■ Counting up from the bottom of the list. <p>Plus</p> <p>Title I high schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring that have had a graduation rate less than 60% over a number of years (to the extent not already included).</p>	<p>Lowest-achieving five percent (or five) of secondary schools that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I funds, obtained by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ranking the secondary schools that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I funds from highest to lowest based on the academic achievement of the “all students” group; ■ Applying lack of progress to the rank order list; and ■ Counting up from the bottom of the list. <p>Plus</p> <p>High schools that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I funds and that have had a graduation rate less than 60% over a number of years (to the extent not already included).</p>

Examples of how an SEA can determine “lack of progress.”

EXAMPLE 1

Lowest Achieving Over Multiple Years

An SEA repeats the steps in List A or List B for two previous years for each school. Then, it selects the five percent of schools with the lowest combined percent proficient or highest numerical rank based on three years of data to define the persistently lowest-achieving schools in the State.

This same methodology could also be applied using other numbers of years (e.g., two out of the last three years; three out of the last four years, etc.).

EXAMPLE 2

Lack of Specific Progress

An SEA establishes an amount of progress below which a school would be deemed to be demonstrating a “lack of progress.” For example, an SEA might determine that a school has demonstrated a lack of progress on the State’s assessments if its number of non-proficient students in the “all students” group in reading/language arts and mathematics combined has not decreased by at least 10% over the previous two (or three) years. The SEA would apply this standard to each school in its ranking until the SEA had identified the lowest-achieving five percent or lowest-achieving five schools in the State in each relevant set of schools. Under this example, there are only two options: a school makes progress, as defined by the SEA, or the school does not.

EXAMPLE 3

Lack of Relative Progress

An SEA repeats the steps in List A for the previous year (or other number of previous years, as the SEA determines appropriate) for each school in each set of schools and compares the results to the ranking obtained for the most recent year to obtain the difference, which determines the school’s progress, or lack thereof. The SEA ranks those differences from highest to lowest. It then determines the lowest-achieving five percent or lowest-achieving five schools based on the combination of their percent proficient as well as their relative lack of progress. Under this example, two schools with similar proficiency percentages in the most recent year could rank differently depending on their relative amount of progress.

SIG Final Requirements

In its January 15, 2010 announcement, the Department of Education amended the SIG requirements to increase the amount of funding that may be allocated to a school and expanded the categories of schools that are eligible. A waiver is no longer required to serve secondary schools that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I, Part A funds. In addition SIG eligibility is extended 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, as per the definitions below.

	Schools an SEA MUST identify in each tier	Newly eligible schools an SEA MAY identify in each tier
Tier I	Schools that meet the criteria in paragraph (a)(1) in the definition of “persistently lowest-achieving schools.” See 1 below.	Title I eligible (see 2 below) elementary schools that are no higher achieving than the highest-achieving school that meets the criteria in paragraph (a)(1)(i) in the definition of “persistently lowest-achieving schools” and that are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ in the bottom 20% of all schools in the State based on proficiency rates; or ■ have not made AYP for two consecutive years.
Tier II	Schools that meet the criteria in paragraph (a)(2) in the definition of “persistently lowest-achieving schools.” See 1 below.	Title I eligible secondary schools that are (1) no higher achieving than the highest-achieving school that meets the criteria in paragraph (a)(2)(i) in the definition of “persistently lowest-achieving schools” or (2) high schools that have had a graduation rate of less than 60 percent over a number of years and that are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ in the bottom 20% of all schools in the State based on proficiency rates; or ■ have not made AYP for two consecutive years.
Tier III	Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring that are not in Tier I. See 3 below.	Title I eligible schools that do not meet the requirements to be in Tier I or Tier II and that are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ in the bottom 20% of all schools in the State based on proficiency rates; or ■ have not made AYP for two years.

1. “Persistently lowest-achieving schools” means, as determined by the State--
 - (a)(1) Any Title I school in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring that--
 - (i) Is among the lowest-achieving five percent of Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring or the lowest-achieving five Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring in the State, whichever number of schools is greater; or
 - (ii) Is a high school that has had a graduation rate as defined in 34 CFR 200.19(b) that is less than 60 percent over a number of years; and
 - (a)(2) Any secondary school that is eligible for, but does not receive, Title I funds that--
 - (i) Is among the lowest-achieving five percent of secondary schools or the lowest-achieving five secondary schools in the State that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I funds, whichever number of schools is greater; or
 - (ii) Is a high school that has had a graduation rate as defined in 34 CFR 200.19(b) that is less than 60 percent over a number of years.
2. With respect to schools that may be added to Tier I, Tier II, or Tier III, “Title I eligible” schools may be schools that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I, Part A funds or schools that are Title I participating (i.e., schools that are eligible for and do receive Title I, Part A funds).
3. Certain Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring that are not in Tier I may be in Tier II rather than Tier III. In particular, Title I secondary schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring that are not in Tier I may be in Tier II if they meet the criteria in section I.A.1(b)(ii)(A)(2) and (B) of the interim final requirements and an SEA chooses to include them in Tier II.

Selecting Interventions, Differentiating Supports, and Monitoring Progress

3

Center on Innovation & Improvement

Once the SEA has identified the schools eligible for assistance from School Improvement Grants and has classified these schools according to the three tiers, the LEA must make critical decisions to determine which intervention model is most likely to result in success for each school. Also, and especially for Tier III schools, plans must be drawn for implementing the required strategies and for introducing additional practices suggested in the SIG regulations and guidance in order to address each school's specific needs. This chapter offers decision-making approaches for determining the best model fit for a school and for diagnosing needs to offer the most effective supports. Both the SEA and LEA bear responsibility for sound diagnosis and efficient delivery of supports and resources to ensure successful implementation. These diagnostic, intervention, and support mechanisms will have wider applicability in SEAs and LEAs as they provide systems of support for the improvement of all of their schools.

A system of support, whether provided by the SEA or LEA, functions to change the behaviors of practitioners and stakeholders in ways that produce better learning results for students. The *Handbook on Statewide Systems of Support* (Redding & Walberg, 2008) proffers a theory of change that is applicable to both LEA and SEA systems. This theory of change includes three levers by which a support system may effect change and encourage stronger educational practices: Incentives, Opportunity, and Capacity (Rhim, Hassel, & Redding, 2008). The *Handbook* emphasizes that the system (SEA or LEA) must apply the levers in the right balance, with consideration for each school's context and conditions. One lever alone, however, is likely to have limited impact, whereas the combination of the three produces a more robust foundation for improvement.

Building capacity for change is the lever with which educators are most familiar—providing resources and developing knowledge and skills, typically through training, professional development coaching, and consultation. While this approach is necessary, it is often not sufficient. Incentives add a catalyst and a motivational dimension, giving people a reason to change. Incentives include public disclosure of a school's performance, sanctions for inadequate performance, and rewards for adopting effective practices and demonstrating significant improvement. Incentives are offered for individuals (e.g., leaders, teachers, improvement coaches), groups (such as school teams), and organizations (school, LEA, external partner, for example). Even with attractive incentives, access to resources, and available training, progress may be less than hoped because people also need the opportunity to innovate, to break away from the system's own barriers and constraints. SEAs and LEAs enhance the opportunity for constructive change by vetting their own regulations to remove those that inhibit innovation,

granting waivers and exemptions, and allowing for fresh starts through charter schools and new school models. The School Improvement Grant program gives SEAs and LEAs a framework and resources to incentivize rapid improvement, build local capacity, and open new space for innovation.

Chapter 1 introduced the School Improvement Grant program's components, and Chapter 2 offered guidance for states on sorting schools into categories of performance. Within each category, the SEA and LEA differentiates its interventions and supports. In every state and in most districts, some schools are performing at high levels, and their accomplishments are to be rewarded, their practices studied, and their approaches disseminated as useful information for other LEAs and schools. Also in all states and most districts, some schools are making acceptable progress and continuing to improve. SEAs and LEAs can help these schools sustain and build upon their successes by providing them with strong data systems, diagnostic and planning tools, greater flexibility, access to a large pool of talent, and differentiated supports. Among those schools making inadequate progress and demonstrating unacceptable performance, some will qualify for School Improvement Grants. Others will benefit from the SEA's and LEA's expansion of SIG models, strategies, and practices to include them.

Selecting an Intervention Model

The School Improvement Grant directs LEAs to select for their Tier I and Tier II schools one of four intervention models:

- **Turnaround model:** The LEA replaces the principal (although the LEA may retain a recently hired principal where a turnaround, restart, or transformation was instituted in past two years) and rehiring no more than 50% of the staff; gives greater principal autonomy; implements other prescribed and recommended strategies;
- **Restart model:** The LEA converts or closes and reopens a school under a charter school operator, charter management organization, or education management organization;
- **School closure:** The LEA closes the school and enrolls the students in other schools in the LEA that are higher achieving; or
- **Transformation model:** The LEA replaces the principal (although the LEA may retain a recently hired principal where a turnaround, restart, or transformation was instituted in past two years); implements a rigorous staff evaluation and

development system; rewards staff who increase student achievement and/or graduation rates and removes staff who have not improved after ample opportunity; institutes comprehensive instructional reform; increases learning time and applies community-oriented school strategies; and provides greater operational flexibility and support for the school.

For most schools eligible for School Improvement Grants, the persistence of their low achievement calls for dramatically new governance structures, human capital, decision-making mechanisms, and operational practices. Change of this magnitude and immediacy is most likely through:

- Turnaround (infusion of talent and change in decision making and operational practices); or
- Restart (change in governance and decision making, an infusion of talent, and change in operational practices).

When the school's context and conditions do not suggest that a turnaround or restart is possible, the transformation model pertains and brings with it change in decision making, strategic staff replacement, and substantial improvement of operational practices. When the LEA (in consultation with the SEA) determines that the students attending a persistently low-achieving school may be better served by attending other schools, and when turnaround, restart, and transformation do not offer the certain promise of rapid improvement, the school is a candidate for closure.

The Turnaround Model

Because the turnaround model relies principally upon an infusion of human capital, along with changes in decision making and operational practice, the following considerations must be taken into account in determining if turnaround is the best fit for a persistently low-achieving school:

1. How will the LEA select a new leader for the school, and what experience, training, and skills will the new leader be expected to possess?
2. How will the LEA assign effective teachers and leaders to the lowest achieving schools?
3. How will the LEA begin to develop a pipeline of effective teachers and leaders to work in turnaround schools?
4. How will staff replacement be executed—what is the process for determining which staff remains in the school and for selecting replacements?

5. How will the language in collective bargaining agreements be negotiated to ensure the most talented teachers and leaders remain in the school?
6. What supports will be provided to staff being assigned to other schools?
7. What are the budgetary implications of retaining surplus staff within the LEA if that is necessary?
8. What is the LEA's own capacity to execute and support a turnaround? What organizations are available to assist with the implementation of the turnaround model?
9. What changes in decision-making policies and mechanisms (including greater school-level flexibility in budgeting, staffing, and scheduling) must accompany the infusion of human capital?
10. What changes in operational practice must accompany the infusion of human capital, and how will these changes be brought about and sustained?

The Restart Model

1. Are there qualified charter management organizations (CMOs) or education management organizations (EMOs) willing to partner with the LEA to start a new school (or convert an existing school) in this location?
2. Will qualified community groups initiate a home-grown charter school? The LEA is best served by developing relationships with community groups to prepare them for operating charter schools.
3. Based on supply and capacity, which option is most likely to result in acceptable student growth for the student population to be served—home-grown charter school, CMO, or EMO?
4. How can statutory, policy, and collective bargaining language relevant to the school be negotiated to allow for closure of the school and restart?
5. How will support be provided to staff that are reassigned to other schools as a result of the restart?
6. What are the budgetary implications of retaining surplus staff within the LEA if that is necessary?
7. What is the LEA's own capacity to support the charter school with access to contractually specified district services and access to available funding?
8. How will the SEA assist with the restart?

9. What performance expectations will be contractually specified for the charter school, CMO, or EMO?
10. Is the LEA (or other authorizer) prepared to terminate the contract if performance expectations are not met?

The Transformation Model

1. How will the LEA select a new leader for the school, and what experience, training, and skills will the new leader be expected to possess?
2. How will the LEA enable the new leader to make strategic staff replacements?
3. What is the LEA's own capacity to support the transformation, including the implementation of required, recommended, and diagnostically determined strategies?
4. What changes in decision making policies and mechanisms (including greater school-level flexibility in budgeting, staffing, and scheduling) must accompany the transformation?
5. What changes in operational practice must accompany the transformation, and how will these changes be brought about and sustained?

School Closure Model

1. What are the metrics to identify schools to be closed?
2. What steps are in place to make certain closure decisions are based on tangible data and readily transparent to the local community?
3. How will the students and their families be supported by the LEA through the re-enrollment process?
4. Which higher-achieving schools have the capacity to receive students from the schools being considered for closure?
5. How will the receiving schools be staffed with quality staff to accommodate the increase in students?
6. How will current staff be reassigned—what is the process for determining which staff members are dismissed and which staff members are reassigned?
7. Does the statutory, policy, and collective bargaining context relevant to the school allow for removal of current staff?

8. What supports will be provided to recipient schools if current staff members are reassigned?
9. What safety and security considerations might be anticipated for students of the school to be closed and the receiving school(s)?
10. What are the budgetary implications of retaining surplus staff within the LEA if that is necessary?
11. How will the LEA track student progress in the recipient schools?
12. What is the impact of school closure to the school's neighborhood, enrollment area, or community?
13. How does school closure fit within the LEA's overall reform efforts?

Diagnosing Performance and Operations

In a restart, diagnosis of current performance and operations is largely a moot point. An examination of performance has already shown that the school is persistently low-achieving, and a new school is created to better serve the students. Similarly, when the school is slated for closure, a diagnostic review will obviously not inform its progress. However, for both restarts and closures, prior diagnostic data are valuable to the SEA and LEA for gaining a better understanding of the links between practice (operations) and performance that is useful in strengthening the SEA's and LEA's continuing reform efforts. For this reason, ongoing diagnostic programs should be in place in advance of the decision points for interventions, and the SEA and LEA should analyze this data even after the decision has been made for a restart or closure.

For turnarounds and transformations, diagnostic data about the school's past performance and operations is useful to the new leaders in making the changes necessary to improve performance. Also, continued and ongoing assessment of performance and operations provides a guide for changes in course to arrive at effective and efficient operations and rapid improvement in student learning. Similarly, the SEA and LEA can provide targeted supports for schools in Tier III and for other schools by implementing routine diagnostic processes.

Diagnostic processes include the following types:

1. Self-assessment to guide the school's leadership and teachers in making continuous improvement;
2. Coached self-assessment—self-assessment with the consultation of an external consultant selected by the school or provided by the LEA or SEA; and

3. External review by a trained team of on-site observers.

With all three types of diagnosis, student learning data and operational data about the prevailing practices in the school inform the conclusions drawn and the recommendations made for improvement. Student learning data includes both formative data (classroom assessments, benchmark assessments, periodic assessments) and summative data (annual state standards assessments and achievement tests). Operational data is tied to indicators of effective practice and is gleaned from classroom observations, document review, interviews with leaders and teachers, focus groups, and surveys.

Some states and LEAs have adopted standards and indicators for effective school operations or for school improvement. Useful indicators are clearly tied to an evidence base; written in clear, jargon-free language; stated in behavioral terms; and particular to the person, persons, or teams responsible. The indicators may be so specific as to be determined with a simple Yes/No response or may be accompanied by rubrics and examples of evidence.

The Center on Innovation & Improvement's *Handbook on Statewide Systems of Support* (Redding & Walberg, 2008) includes the following categories of LEA and school functions that lend themselves to a diagnostic review. Standards and indicators may be aligned with these topics.

Leadership and Decision Making

- Allocation of resources to address learning goals
- Decision-making structures and processes
- Information and data systems

Curriculum and Instruction

- Alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment with standards
- Curriculum—description, scope, focus, articulation, organization
- Formative and periodic assessment of student learning
- Instructional delivery (teaching and classroom management)
- Instructional planning by teachers
- Instructional time and scheduling

Human Capital (Personnel)

- Performance incentives for personnel
- Personnel policies and procedures (hiring, placing, evaluating, promoting, retaining, replacing)
- Professional development processes and procedures

Student Support

- Programs and services for English language learners
- Extended learning time (supplemental educational services, after-school programs, summer school, for example)
- Parental involvement, communication, and options
- Special education programs and procedures
- Student support services (tutoring, counseling, placement, for example)

The type of diagnostic process varies according to the school’s level of performance and trajectory of improvement. Figure 1—Classifying Schools by Performance (Student Growth) and Trajectory of Improvement—provides a graphic illustration of categories within which different diagnostic processes may be applied.

For all schools, the SEA and LEA should provide access to timely data and information on school improvement that will enable the school to make informed decisions in its continuous improvement. The SEA and LEA may also provide planning tools and standards and indicators of effective practice. Diagnostic and improvement planning should be relevant to the school’s level and trajectory of performance, as follows:

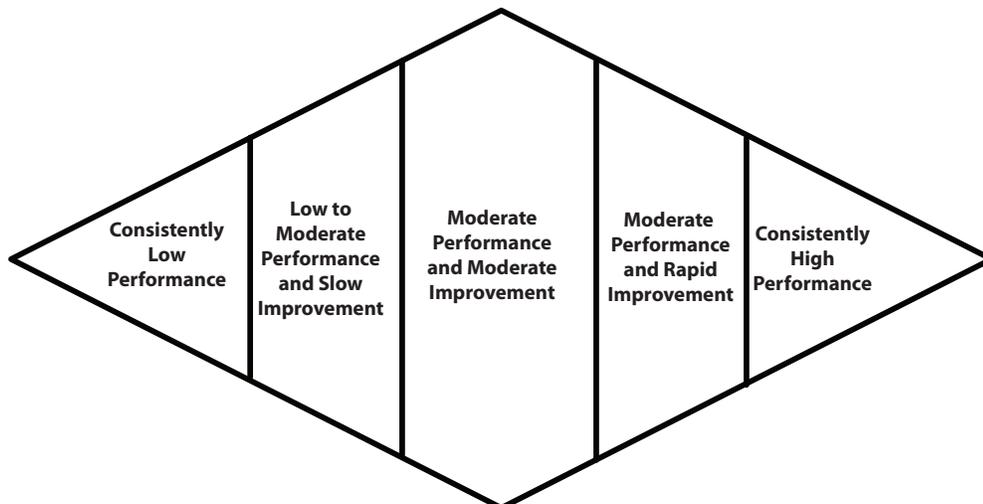
- Schools demonstrating moderate performance/rapid improvement and schools showing consistently high performance will typically be able to apply the SEA and LEA-provided tools, data, and information to their own advantage and will access the resources and supports required for their continued growth.
- Schools demonstrating moderate performance/moderate improvement will benefit from coached self-assessment, applying the SEA and LEA-provided tools, data, and information with the guidance of an external consultant.
- For schools demonstrating low to moderate performance/slow improvement, coached self-assessment may be supplemented by external reviews to provide an objective view of their operations and recommend improvements.
- Schools showing consistently low performance are candidates for intervention, and external review is useful in determining the appropriate intervention model and for informing the SEA and LEA about conditions and practices prevalent in these schools in order to strengthen their reform efforts.

Please see the Appendix for indicators of effective practice developed by the Center on Innovation & Improvement and high school indicators developed by the National High School Center.

Differentiating Supports

For persistently low-achieving schools, selection of the appropriate intervention model is itself a form of differentiation. For all schools, diagnostic processes should be linked with targeted resources and supports to address diagnosed areas in need of improvement.

Figure 1: Classifying Schools by Performance (Student Growth) and Trajectory of Improvement



The intentional alignment of diagnosis, improvement plan, and service plan is critical, with the service plan including the resources and supports provided by the SEA, LEA, and external providers. The Center on Innovation & Improvement’s *Framework for an Effective Statewide System of Support* (Redding, 2009) offers the following cycle for improvement (Figure 2: Improvement Cycle) that illustrates the relationships among identification, diagnosis, planning, support, and progress monitoring. This cycle is applicable to both SEA and LEA supports for schools.

Support services may include consultation, training, professional development, coaching, and contracting for the provision of particular components of the school’s operation. Efficient and effective provision of support services is ensured with intentional alignment to diagnosed operational need. The SEA and LEA may provide schools with lists of approved service providers, with the services aligned with standards and indicators included in the diagnostic and planning tools.

Monitoring Progress and Evaluating Results

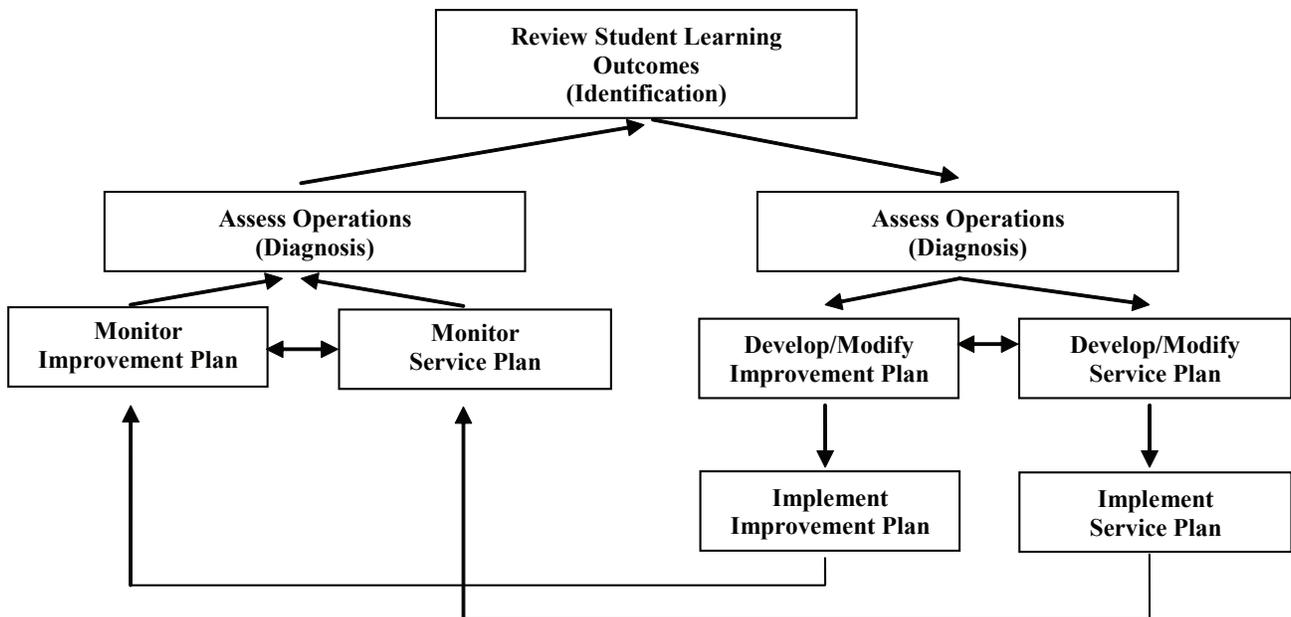
The SEA and LEA will monitor progress of the schools receiving School Improvement Grants, and if the monitoring is thoughtfully designed, the data collected and the analysis applied will also yield important information about the effectiveness of models, providers, and particular strategies. The schools receiving School Improvement Grants and employing one of

the four intervention models for rapid improvement create a natural laboratory within which a variety of hypotheses can be tested, and from which lessons will be learned that may be applied for the improvement of all schools, and especially for turning around low-achieving schools. For this reason, it is necessary for SEAs and LEAs to put in place systems for collecting data from the beginning of the grants’ implementation, a design for analyzing the data, and a plan to disseminate the lessons learned. The SEA and LEA may require resources to engage consultants in both the design phase and in the implementation of the studies and their dissemination.

The School Improvement Grant program is premised upon three primary assumptions:

1. Low-achieving schools can be categorized into three tiers based on available data, and interventions and supports (including funding) can vary according to the tier;
2. A low-achieving school can be rapidly improved (within three years) through one of three intervention models: Turnaround, Restart, or Transformation; and
3. Some schools will not demonstrate a reasonable expectation of adequately responding to one of the three aforementioned intervention models, and their students will benefit from a fourth

Figure 2: Improvement Cycle



intervention model—the school’s closure and the students’ placement in higher-achieving schools.

Within each of the four intervention models (Turnaround, Restart, Transformation, and Closure), great variety will be displayed in the mix of external partners employed, the leadership applied, and the strategies implemented. This variety lends itself to systematic analysis of the relationship between the actions taken and the results achieved. For this analysis:

1. Cost-benefit ratios of various approaches should be taken into account;
2. Quantitative data must be accompanied by in-depth, on-site case studies of a sample of schools;
3. Reports generated from the studies should:
 - a. include practical and procedural guidance,
 - b. be presented in plain language for practitioners and policy makers, and
 - c. be accompanied by trainings and forums to enhance their adoption.
4. Schools not receiving School Improvement Grants that demonstrate a turnaround, by the same definition applied to the SIG recipients, should also be studied and included in the reports.
5. Studies should continue beyond the time of the turnaround attempt (typically three years) to determine the relative sustainability of the interventions and strategies employed.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection and analysis should include, but not be limited to, an examination of the following questions:

A. School Context and Selection/Implementation of an Intervention

1. What were the school’s prior context, student demographics, and performance?
2. What changed in terms of student demographics and enrollment with the onset of the intervention?
3. Which intervention model was employed?
4. What factors were considered in selecting the intervention model and who was involved in making the decision?
5. Which external partners were engaged, and what was the role and extent of involvement of each?

6. What level of funding was available, both in terms of the school’s standard operational budget and the additional funds provided for purposes of the intervention, and how was the funding allocated?
7. What is the theory of action (or theory of change) for the intervention, as expressed by the district itself (turnarounds and transformations) or the lead agency (restarts)?
8. What new flexibility in staffing, scheduling, and budgeting was granted the school leaders?
9. How did the district support the intervention, the school leaders, and the school staff?
10. How did the state support the intervention, the school leaders, and the school staff?
11. How did the community support the intervention, the school leaders, and the school staff?

B. School Closures and Staff Dismissals and Reassignments

In School Closures:

1. In which higher-achieving schools were the students enrolled, and how did the influx of students affect these schools?
2. How were the receiving schools staffed to accommodate the influx of students?
3. What support did the district and state provide the receiving schools?
4. How did the students enrolled in the closed school fare in the receiving schools?
5. What were the consequences of school closure to the school’s neighborhood, enrollment area, or community?
6. How were the students and their families supported by the LEA through the re-enrollment process?

In School Closures and in Other Interventions that Required Staff Dismissal or Reassignment:

1. How many and which staff were dismissed, reassigned?
2. What was the process for determining which staff was dismissed and which staff was reassigned?
3. How did the statutory, policy, and collective bargaining context relevant to the school affect removal or reassignment of current staff?

4. What were the consequences to recipient schools where staff was reassigned?
5. What were the budgetary burdens of retaining surplus staff within the LEA if that was necessary?

C. Leadership and Decision Making (Interventions other than closure)

1. What leadership changes were made, what factors were considered in selecting new leaders, and what background did the new leaders possess?
2. How were the school's governance and decision-making structures changed?
3. How were teams organized, purposed, scheduled, and supervised?
4. How were resources allocated to address learning goals?
5. What decision-making structures, including team responsibilities, were established?
6. What data, management, and information systems were employed?

D. Curriculum and Instruction (Interventions other than closure)

1. How were students enrolled or placed in program areas, curricula, or small schools?
2. How were curriculum, instruction, and assessment aligned with standards?
3. What was the curriculum—description, scope, focus, articulation, organization?
4. What formative and periodic assessments of student learning were utilized?
5. What was the nature and quality of instructional delivery (teaching and classroom management)?
6. How was instruction differentiated for students?
7. How was instructional planning by teachers (individual and team) conducted—structures, time, expectations, work products?
8. How much instructional time was provided and how was it organized—school year, school day, and periods within the day?

E. Human Capital (Interventions other than closure)

1. What, if any, performance incentives were provided for personnel?

2. What were the personnel policies and procedures (hiring, placing, evaluating, promoting, retaining, replacing)?
3. What were the professional development processes and procedures?
4. What professional development was provided?

F. Student Support (Interventions other than closure)

1. What programs and services were provided for English language learners?
2. How was extended learning time provided (supplemental educational services, after-school programs, summer school, for example)?
3. What was the nature and quality of parental involvement, school-home communication, and parent options?
4. What programs, services, and procedures were provided for students with disabilities?
5. What student support services were provided (tutoring, counseling, placement, for example)?
6. How were social and emotional learning, school climate, and discipline addressed—what were the policies, practices, and procedures?
7. What community-oriented school programs and practices were utilized?

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