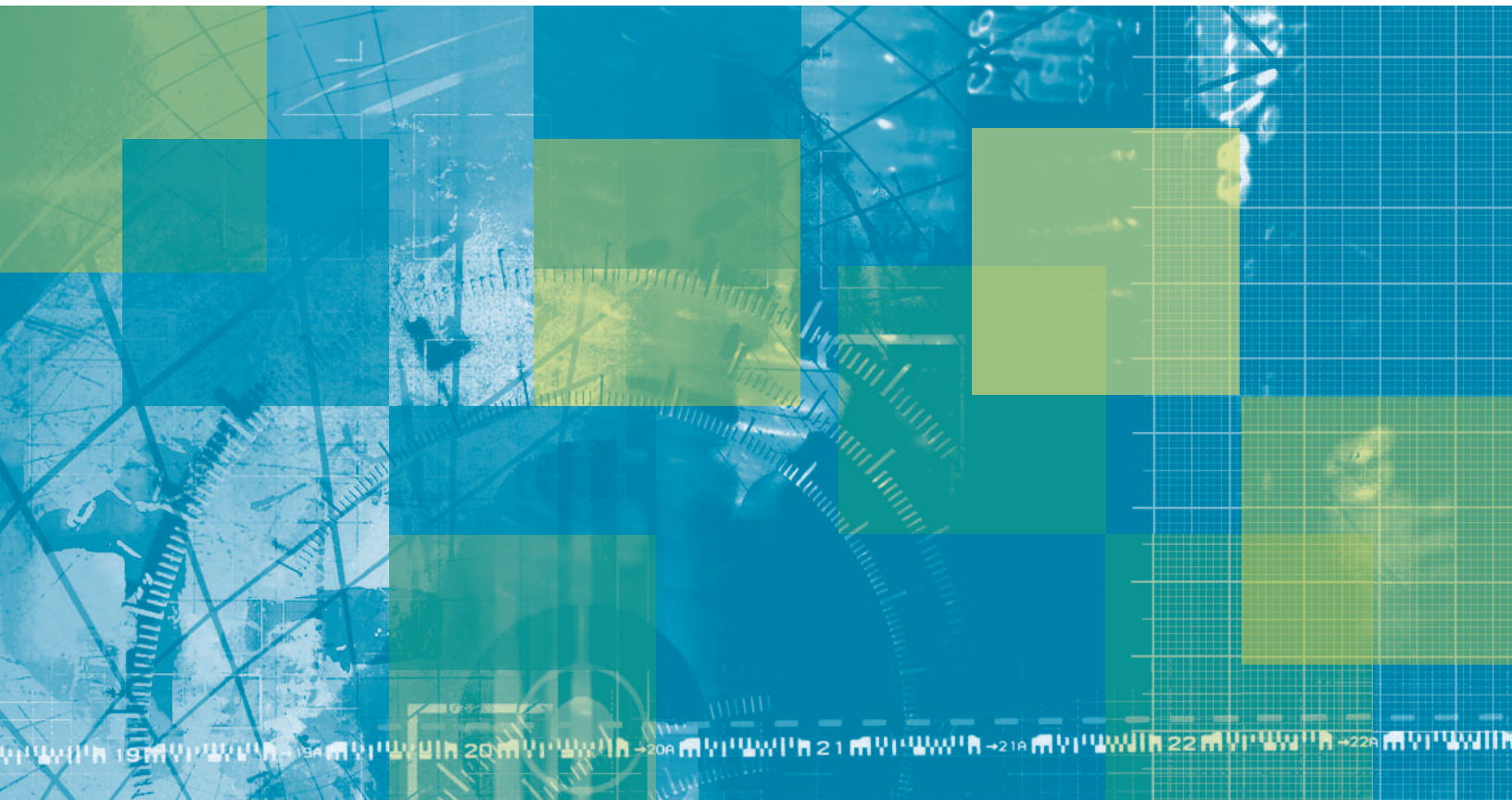


Early State Implementation of Title I School Improvement Grants Under the Recovery Act



Credits and Acknowledgments

This report was written by Jennifer McMurrer and Shelby Dietz, CEP research associates, and Diane Stark Rentner, CEP's director of national programs. Nancy Kober, a CEP consultant, edited the report. Jack Jennings, CEP's president and CEO, provided advice on the report. Bruce Haslam of Policy Studies Associates led a team of PSA staff that worked with CEP to develop and administer the survey of state deputy superintendents of education and analyze the resulting data. The survey of state title I directors was developed and administered by CEP with assistance and advice from Richard Long of the National Title I Association; Caitlin Scott, a CEP consultant; and Gary Galluzzo of George Mason University, along with GMU students in a graduate-level course in survey research methods.

We would like to thank Wayne Riddle, Richard Long, and Caitlin Scott, who reviewed a draft of this report and provided insightful comments and suggestions about its content. Additionally, we are grateful to the state education agency staff who took time from their busy schedules to complete this survey.

Based in Washington, D.C., and founded in January 1995 by Jack Jennings, the Center on Education Policy is a national independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center works to help Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. We do not represent any special interests. Instead, we help citizens make sense of the conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create the conditions that will lead to better public schools.

The Center on Education Policy receives nearly all of its funding from charitable foundations. We are grateful to the Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for their support of this study. The George Gund Foundation and the Phi Delta Kappa International Foundation also provide the Center with general support funding that assisted us in this endeavor. The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the Center.

Early State Implementation of Title I School Improvement Grants under the Recovery Act

Introduction

Over the next three years, states will dedicate an unprecedented amount of federal funding to school improvement efforts at approximately 5,000 of the nation's lowest achieving schools. The \$100 billion for education appropriated by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), also known as the stimulus package, included an additional \$3 billion for school improvement grants (SIGs) to help reform low-performing schools. This amount was in addition to the \$546 million provided by the regular fiscal year 2009 appropriations bill for school improvement grants authorized by section 1003(g) of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.¹ This 2009 total of more than \$3.5 billion for section 1003(g) SIGs represents a massive increase compared with the \$491 million appropriated for fiscal year 2008 and the \$125 million appropriated for fiscal year 2007 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010c).

Following passage of ARRA, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) issued new guidance that changed the requirements for using school improvement grants under section 1003(g), including the ARRA SIG funds (ED, 2010a; 2010b). The guidance targets these grants on the most persistently low-achieving schools—a smaller and somewhat different pool of schools than those identified for improvement under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). It also requires grantees to use one of four school improvement models: (1) transformation, which entails replacing the school principal and undertaking three other specific reforms; (2) turnaround, which involves replacing many of the school staff; (3) restart, which means becoming a charter or privately managed school; and (4) school closure.

To learn more about states' early experiences in using this infusion of ARRA SIG funding and implementing the new SIG requirements, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) conducted two surveys. The first, which consisted of questions on a broad range of ARRA implementation issues including SIGs, was administered to state deputy superintendents of education in October and November of 2010.² Responses were received from 42 states and the District of Columbia, which is counted as a state in all tallies in this report. The second, which focused on how the ARRA has shaped state implementation of school improvement grants, was administered to state Title I directors from November 2010 through early January 2011. A total of 46 states (including D.C.) responded. Responses reported here are the aggregate responses of the states; data were not analyzed by region or by states' urbanicity. Responses from both surveys were kept confidential in order to encourage frank answers. More information about the two surveys can be found in the appendix.

Key Findings

Three key findings about ARRA SIGs emerged from the survey of state deputy superintendents of education:

- **Despite tight turnaround times, most states (28 of those responding) had awarded all of their ARRA SIG funding to districts by the time of our survey in fall 2010.** An additional nine states had awarded some, but not all, of their ARRA SIG funds to districts, while two states had not awarded any of these funds to districts.

¹ Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provides assistance to low-income schools to improve the achievement of academically struggling students.

² This report includes only the survey items related to SIGs. Responses from the survey items related to common core state standards are discussed in the 2010 CEP report, *States' Progress and Challenges in Implementing Common Core Standards*. Survey items related to general state implementation of ARRA are analyzed in CEP's February 2011 report, *More to Do But Less Capacity to Do It: States' Progress in Implementing the Recovery Act Education Reforms*.

- **Many states (20) reported that at least three-quarters of the eligible schools in their states applied for ARRA SIG funds.** In addition, 22 states reported that at least three-fourths of the schools that applied did receive or will receive SIG funds.
- **The transformation model is the most popular of the ED-endorsed intervention models.** Each state surveyed was asked to report the percentages of its ARRA SIG schools that are or will be implementing various intervention models. Across the responding states, the averages of these state-level percentages were 74% for the transformation model, 16% for the turnaround mode, and 6% for the restart model.

Four key findings about the impact of ARRA on SIG implementation emerged from the survey of state Title I directors:

- **The majority of the states surveyed are serving increased proportions of high schools with ARRA SIG funds compared to the proportions served previously with Title I school improvement grants.** This reflects the fact that the new ARRA SIG funding criteria include a priority for grants to low-performing secondary schools that are eligible for but have not previously received regular Title I funds—a group of schools that was not eligible for school improvement grants under the prior criteria.
- **States plan to provide various types of assistance to districts receiving ARRA SIG funds.** A majority of responding states plan to provide ARRA SIG districts with technical support, increased monitoring and data review, information on best practices for low-performing schools, and other types of assistance. Just over half of these states said the types of state assistance being given to ARRA SIG recipients were “different” or “very different” from what states provided prior to ARRA. A majority of responding states also plan to provide school improvement funding, technical support, and professional development to low-performing schools that have been identified for improvement under NCLB but are *not* receiving ARRA SIG funds. Grants for this latter group of schools, however, come from a different pot of school improvement money in section 1003(a) of Title I.³
- **The majority of Title I directors surveyed viewed federal ARRA SIG guidance as helpful and federal SIG funding as adequate.** In 44 states, nearly all of those responding, officials rated the new federal SIG guidance as “helpful” or “somewhat helpful.” And in 29 of the responding states, officials said ARRA SIG funds are adequate to allow districts to provide the types of interventions necessary to improve schools.
- **Title I directors had mixed responses about the extent to which the new SIG requirements are targeting the schools most in need of assistance in their state.** Twenty-three states reported that the schools most in need of assistance are being identified “to the right extent” by the ARRA SIG requirements, while 22 states said this is happening “to some extent.” Only one state reported that the schools most in need of assistance are not being identified at all by the ARRA SIG requirements.

The sections of the report that follow describe in more detail these and other findings from the two surveys.

Most ARRA SIG Funds Have Been Awarded

Most states received federal ARRA SIG funding between spring and early fall of 2011. The majority of this funding was to be passed on to districts through a competitive grant process. Schools could begin using the funds as early as the start of the 2010-11 school year and must expend the funds by September 2013. Given these timelines, states were under considerable pressure to develop an adequate grant application and get funds to schools as quickly as possible.

³ A more complete discussion of the differences between Title I sections 1003(a) and 1003(g) funds can be found on page 8.

According to the CEP survey of state deputy superintendents, officials in 28 states reported that all of their ARRA SIG funds had been awarded by fall of 2010, when this survey was administered. Nine more states had awarded some but not all of the funds. One state indicated that no ARRA SIG funds had yet been awarded.

As for the timing of the awards, many, though not all, districts participating in the ARRA SIG program had received grant awards by the beginning of the 2010-11 school year, giving them time to get their improvement strategies up and running early in the school year. Most of the states reported awarding ARRA SIG funds to districts prior to October 2010. This group includes 26 states that made awards between July and September 2010 and 9 states that did so between February and June 2010. Two more states made awards over a longer or different period of time.

Of the states that had not awarded any ARRA SIG funds or still had funds to disperse at the time of the survey, five expected to make these grants to districts in October or November 2010, one anticipated doing so in December 2010 or January 2011, and four states expected to make grants after January 2011.

Large Proportions of Eligible Schools in Each State Applied for SIG Funds, and Many Received Grants

In 20 of the states responding to the survey of deputy superintendents, 75% or more of the schools eligible for ARRA school improvement grants were in districts that applied for these funds. (Although individual schools are eligible for SIGs, it is technically the school district that applies for the funds on behalf of the schools.) In 11 states, between 25% and 75% of the eligible schools were in districts that applied for SIGs, while in 4 states, 25% or fewer were in districts that applied. Two states reported that they did not have information about school applications at the time of our survey.

In addition, many states reported that most of the schools in districts that applied for ARRA SIG funds have received or will receive grants. In 22 of the responding states, at least 75% of applicants have received or will receive these funds. **Table 1** shows the proportions of applicants receiving SIG grants.

Table 1. Percentage of applicants that have received or will receive ARRA SIG funds

Percentage of schools in districts applying for ARRA SIGs that have received or will receive grants	Number of states
75% of applicants or more	22
Between 50% and 75%	5
Between 25% and 50%	5
25% of applicants or less	3
Information not currently available	2

Table reads: In 22 of the 43 states responding to CEP's survey, 75% or more of the schools in districts that applied for ARRA school improvement grants actually received or will receive these grants.

Source: CEP survey of state deputy superintendents of education, fall 2010.

Large Proportions of ARRA SIG Grantees in Each State Are Using the Transformation Model

Under the new U.S. Department of Education guidance, schools that receive ARRA SIG funds must use one of four ED-endorsed improvement models—transformation, turnaround, restart, or school closure—described in more detail in **box A**. This is a more prescriptive approach to school improvement than in the past.

Box A. School improvement models

New federal guidance requires districts and schools receiving ARRA SIG funds, or other section 1003(g) funds for fiscal years 2009 and 2010, to use one of the following school improvement models:

- **Transformation:** Implement all of the following strategies: (1) replace the principal and take steps to increase teacher and school leader effectiveness; (2) institute comprehensive instructional reforms; (3) increase learning time and create community-oriented schools; and (4) provide operational flexibility and sustained support.
- **Turnaround:** Replace the principal, rehire no more than 50% of the school staff, and grant the principal sufficient operational flexibility to implement fully a comprehensive approach to substantially improve student outcomes.
- **Restart:** Convert a school into one operated by a charter school operator, a charter management organization, or an education management organization that has been selected through a rigorous review process.
- **School closure:** Close a school and enroll its students in other schools in the district that are higher-achieving.

U.S. Department of Education guidance for the ARRA SIG program includes a requirement that districts providing SIG grants to nine or more schools in tiers 1 and 2 cannot use the transformation model in more than 50% of the schools.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, 2010a; 2010b.

The survey of deputy superintendents asked each state to report the approximate percentage of its SIG-funded schools that are or will be using the turnaround, restart, and transformation models. (The survey did not ask about the school closure model because ARRA SIG funds can only be used for limited activities related to closing a school, such as parental outreach.) Across the responding states, the averages (means) of these state-level percentages were 74% for the transformation model, 16% for the turnaround mode, and 6% for the restart model, as shown in **figure 1**.

Comments to the open-ended portions of CEP's second survey, which targeted state Title I directors, revealed some dissatisfaction among states, particularly rural states, about restricting schools to four improvement models. The following survey comments illustrate the concerns raised:

- *I understand the desire to foster true turnaround as opposed to random acts of improvement, but mandating these models seems like a solution of questionable value.*
- *The 4 prescribed models are somewhat restrictive in a small, mostly rural state where options to replace staff and leadership are minimal.*
- *The four prescribed models are too restrictive—especially for rural areas.*
- *The tight timeline for implementing significant reforms and the restrictions on the models, particularly the requirement to replace the principal, have and will be challenging for our schools.*

Figure 1. Average state-level percentages of ARRA SIG grantees using various improvement models

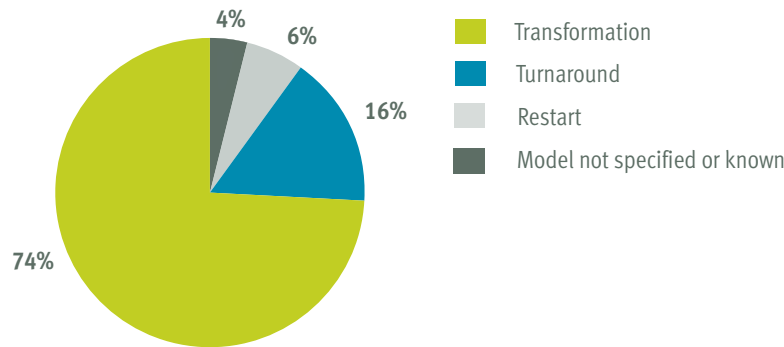


Figure reads: Across the 43 states that responded to CEP’s survey and had awarded ARRA SIGs to districts, the average of the state-level percentages of ARRA SIG schools that are implementing the transformation model was 74%.

Note: U.S. Department of Education guidance for the ARRA SIG program includes a requirement that districts providing SIG grants to nine or more schools in tiers 1 and 2 cannot use the transformation model in more than 50% of the schools. This requirement may impact the proportion of schools selecting models other than the transformation model.

Source: CEP survey of state deputy superintendents of education, fall 2010.

States Are Serving Increased Proportions of High Schools with SIGs

The new ED guidance on school improvement grants changed which schools are eligible to receive school improvement grants under section 1003(g), including ARRA SIGs. Previously, the schools eligible for section 1003(g) funds were those that received Title I, Part A funds and had been identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring under NCLB. The new guidance, which is intended to focus 1003(g) funds on the “persistently lowest-achieving” schools in a state, created three tiers of eligible schools, described in **box B**. One of the most significant changes

Box B. Eligibility criteria for ARRA SIG funding

New U.S. Department of Education guidance contains criteria for identifying three tiers of schools in each state that are eligible for SIGs under Title I, section 1003(g), including grants funded through ARRA.

Tier 1 consists of Title I schools in NCLB improvement, corrective action, or restructuring that are also—

- (i) among the lowest-achieving 5% of Title I schools in improvement status in the state or the lowest-achieving five Title I schools in this status in the state, whichever is greater; or
- (ii) high schools that have had a graduation rate of less than 60% over a number of years.

Tier 2 consists of secondary schools that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I funds and are also—

- (i) among the lowest-achieving 5% of such secondary schools or the lowest achieving five such secondary schools in the state, whichever is greater; or
- (ii) are high schools that have had a graduation rate of less than 60% over a number of years.

The first two tiers are considered “persistently lowest-achieving schools” and receive top priority for funding. At its option, a state may identify additional schools as tier 1 or tier 2 schools.

Tier 3 consists of all other Title I schools in NCLB improvement, corrective action, or restructuring.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, 2010a; 2010b.

gives tier 2 priority for SIGs to secondary schools that are eligible for, but have not previously received, regular Title I, Part A funds, as long as these schools are among the lowest-achieving in the state or have low graduation rates.

The CEP survey of state Title I directors asked respondents to compare the types of schools served through the new ARRA SIGs with the types of schools served by section 1003(g) school improvement grants in past years. **Table 2** shows their responses. It appears that the ARRA SIG requirements are fulfilling ED's intention to channel more funds to secondary schools. Under the new requirements, the proportion of high schools served with SIGs has increased in 31 states, while the proportion of elementary schools served has stayed the same or decreased in 38 states. The proportion of charter schools served through the new SIGs has stayed the same in 23 of the responding states and decreased in 6 states.

Table 2. Changes in types of schools receiving section 1003(g) school improvement grants after new ARRA SIG guidance

Type of school	Proportion increased	Proportion same	Proportion decreased	Not sure	Other/not applicable
High schools	31 states	8 states	4 states	2 states	1 state
Middle schools	16 states	15 states	11 states	2 states	2 states
Elementary schools	6 states	18 states	20 states	1 state	1 state
Charter schools	4 states	23 states	6 states	2 states	11 states*

Table reads: Of the 46 states that responded to CEP's survey and had awarded ARRA SIGs to districts, 31 states reported the proportion of high schools served with ARRA SIG funds increased in comparison with the proportion previously served through section 1003(g) school improvement grants.

*Several states do not have or permit charter schools, which accounts for a sizeable share of the "other/not applicable" responses.

Source: CEP survey of state Title I directors, fall 2010/winter 2011.

Responses were less clear cut about changes in the proportion of middle schools served as a result of the new ARRA SIGs requirements. This is most likely due to varying definitions of what constitutes a middle school. One state official, for example, said that the state categorizes schools as either elementary or secondary, and secondary schools can include any school with grade 7 or higher.

States Are Providing Different Types of Assistance to ARRA-Funded Schools

The survey of state Title I directors asked what, if any, types of technical and other assistance states plan to provide to school districts that receive ARRA SIG grants. The survey also asked how this assistance differs from that provided to section 1003(g) SIG grantees *prior* to ARRA. In addition, the survey asked about the types of assistance states plan to offer schools that have been identified for improvement under NCLB but are *not* receiving ARRA SIG funds.

As displayed in **table 3**, all or nearly all of the responding states plan to provide districts receiving ARRA SIG funds with technical support (46 states) and increased monitoring and data review (44 states). The vast majority of responding states also plan to offer these ARRA SIG districts information on best practices for low-performing schools (39 states), guidance on selecting school intervention models (34 states), and professional development for school leadership (32 states). Half of the respondents (23 states) reported that their state would provide ARRA SIG districts with teacher professional development.

Table 3. Types of assistance states plan to provide to school districts with low-performing schools that received and did not receive ARRA SIG funds

Type of state assistance	Assistance for school districts receiving ARRA SIGs	Assistance for school districts NOT receiving ARRA SIGs
	Number of states	Number of states
Technical support	46	40
Increased monitoring & data review	44	13
Information on best practices for low-performing schools	39	24
Guidance for selecting school intervention models	34	12
Professional development for school leadership	32	27
Guidance in finding & selecting external providers (i.e., school intervention experts)	28	8
Professional development for teachers	23	24
Professional development for other school staff	19	12
Assistance to districts in identifying & recruiting highly effective principals	15	6
List of SEA-approved external providers	15	10
Assistance to districts in identifying & recruiting highly effective teachers	9	4
Training for external providers (i.e., school intervention experts)	8	4
Instructional materials	7	3
Support for turnaround principals	*	4
Grants under Title I section 1003(a)	*	30
Other	6	5
None	0	20

Table reads: All 46 states responding to CEP's survey of Title I directors plan to provide technical support to districts receiving ARRA SIG funds. Forty states plan to offer technical support to schools in the various stages of NCLB improvement that are not receiving ARRA SIG funds.

*These responses appeared only for the survey question about assistance for schools not receiving ARRA SIG funds.

Source: CEP survey of state Title I directors, fall 2010/winter 2011.

A minority of the responding states plan to offer ARRA SIG districts professional development for other school staff (19 states) and assistance in identifying and recruiting highly effective principals (15 states). Less popular forms of state assistance for these districts include help in identifying and recruiting teachers (9 states), instructional materials (7 states), or other types of assistance (6 states). (States mentioned school improvement planning support, SIG coaches, and capacity-building support for district and school leaders as examples of "other" assistance.)

The new section 1003(g) guidance permits school districts to contract with universities, school intervention experts, and other outside groups to help reform the low-performing schools receiving ARRA SIGs. A majority (34) of the responding states plan to provide guidance to districts in finding and selecting these external providers. Smaller shares of these states intend to make available a list of state-approved external providers (15 states) or offer training to external providers (8 states).

States had mixed views about whether the types of state assistance being given to ARRA SIG districts represent a change from the past. More than half (26) of the responding states reported that the assistance being provided under the new ARRA SIGs is “different” or “very different” from that provided to school improvement grant recipients prior to ARRA. The remaining 20 states said that the types of state assistance provided through ARRA SIG is “similar” or “very similar” to the types provided prior to ARRA. The survey did not delve into how this new assistance is different.

Table 3 also shows the number of states that intend to provide various types of assistance to schools which are not receiving ARRA SIGs but have nevertheless been identified for improvement (including corrective action and restructuring) under NCLB. These schools are eligible for school improvement grants funded from a different pot of money authorized by section 1003(a) of Title I. Section 1003(a) directs each state to set aside for school improvement activities an amount equal to 4% of the total allocation for Title I, Part A grants to school districts in that state. (Due to a “hold harmless” provision in Title I, however, some states may not be able reserve the full 4% if it would result in any district receiving less Title I funding than it did the previous year.)⁴ The amount available for this set-aside grew tremendously under ARRA, which provided a supplemental appropriation of \$10 billion for the Title I program for fiscal year 2009. When this ARRA supplemental was combined with the previous fiscal year 2009 appropriation for Title I, states had approximately \$1 billion for school improvement grants under section 1003(a). States generally have more flexibility in allocating the 1003(a) funds than they do for the 1003(g) funds, although eligibility for 1003(a) funds is limited to schools that participate in Title I and have been identified for any stage of NCLB improvement.

As table 3 makes clear, most states plan to provide at least some form of assistance to schools in NCLB improvement that are *not* receiving ARRA SIGs. Only two states said they do not plan to offer any assistance to these schools. The types of assistance mentioned most often include technical support (40 states), financial assistance through section 1003(a) (30 states), professional development for school leadership (27 states), professional development for teachers (24 states), and information on best practices for improving low-performing schools (24 states).

Just over a fourth of responding states plan to provide low-performing schools that do not receive ARRA SIGs with increased monitoring and data review (13 states), professional development for other school staff (12 states), and guidance for selecting school intervention models (12 states).

Fewer than one-fourth of the responding states plan to provide assistance related to external providers to these schools, including a list of state-approved external providers (10 states), guidance for use in finding and selecting external providers (8 states), and training for external providers (4 states). These numbers are substantially lower than the numbers of states that plan to offer these services to ARRA SIG recipients.

State Perceptions Vary about New SIG Requirements and Funding

As noted above, the new ED guidance is intended to focus ARRA SIGs on the persistently lowest-achieving schools in the state. Survey respondents had mixed perceptions about the extent to which these requirements are targeting the schools most in need of assistance. Twenty-three states said their schools most in need of assistance are being targeted by ARRA SIGs “to the right extent,” while 22 states reported this was occurring “to some extent.” Only one state reported that the schools eligible under ARRA SIG criteria are “not at all” the schools most in need of assistance.

This divergence of views about whether ARRA SIGs are reaching the schools with the greatest needs may be attributable to different state contexts—for example, in rural versus urban states. Open-ended survey comments from rural states, in particular, evidenced some frustration with school eligibility criteria and other SIG requirements. **Box C** highlights some of the concerns voiced by an official from a rural state.

⁴ A more detailed discussion of the interaction of the Title I 4% set-aside and the hold harmless provision can be found in the CEP report *Title I Funds—Who’s Gaining and Who’s Losing: School Year 2008-09 Update*, available on CEP’s Web site at <http://www.cep-dc.org/index.cfm?DocumentSubSubTopicID=30>.

Box C. School identification and district reform efforts in one rural state

Survey comments from one rural state, also echoed by other states, indicated that the ARRA SIG requirements may be doing more harm than good in that state. "Our state used one of the 'example' ranking methods in the SIG guidance (after trying to advocate for a more statistically reliable method and failing)," the respondent wrote, "and we cannot confidently say that the tier I and tier II schools are truly the persistently lowest of all schools in the state. That is troublesome." In a follow-up phone call, an official from this state further explained the state's experiences with the new SIG eligibility requirements and what this respondent believes is a lack of flexibility in the way districts must identify and assist their lowest-performing schools.

According to this respondent, the ED definition of "persistently lowest-achieving" schools presents complications for the state and was written to best serve large, urban school districts. To determine which schools in the state are lowest-achieving, states had to rank schools based on their percentages of students scoring proficient on state tests. The official felt that the identification requirements for tier I and tier II schools are statistically unreliable because they compare the performance of schools with smaller student populations—in which the performance of one or a few students may greatly impact the aggregate performance of the school—to that of schools with many more students. For example, if 65% of the students scored proficient in a school of 40 students, and 66% scored proficient in a school of 1,000 students, the latter would be the better-performing school according to the ARRA SIG requirements. The state respondent felt these criteria did not accurately identify the persistently low-achieving schools in this state.

The official also contended that the four invention models required under the SIGs do not consider the magnitude of school needs or variations in state demographics. For example, this state official reported that the state already had several promising systemic approaches underway to turn around entire school districts, and the school-level focus of the new SIGs may be a backward step for these reform efforts. Based on findings from commissioned case studies, the state had transformed its assistance to target both school and district leadership capacity. This official felt the SIG requirements are a "mismatch with all that we know about the work to be done . . . it doesn't account for the complexities of the system at large."

In response to a different survey question, the vast majority of state respondents (44 states) considered the new federal guidance governing ARRA SIGs to be "helpful" (28 states) or "somewhat helpful" (16 states).

Moreover, the majority of Title I directors surveyed had positive views about whether ARRA SIG funds are adequate to provide the interventions necessary to improve struggling schools. As displayed in **figure 2**, 29 states rated the adequacy of these funds as 4 or 5 on a scale of 1 (not at all adequate) to 5 (very adequate). A minority of respondents (9 states) rated the adequacy of the ARRA SIG funding as 2 or 1.

Figure 2. State perceptions of the adequacy of ARRA SIG funds to provide the needed interventions

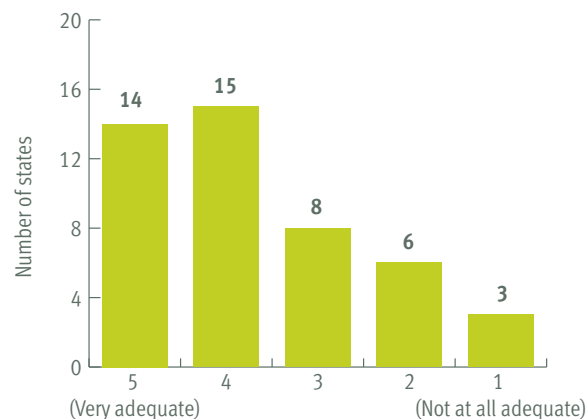


Figure reads: Fourteen state Title I directors responding to CEP's survey said that ARRA SIG funds were "very adequate" to allow districts to provide the necessary interventions to improve struggling schools, and 15 said these funds were "adequate."

Source: CEP survey of state Title I directors, fall 2010/winter 2011.

The level of satisfaction with SIG funding may be due to the large increase in section 1003(g) funds represented by the \$3.5 billion available for school year 2010-11. This satisfaction is likely to be temporary, however, if future funding reverts to its previous levels.

Twenty-two of the 46 responding Title I directors took advantage of a final survey item that asked them to share any additional thoughts about their state's experience with ARRA SIGs. Their feedback ranged from comments about the restrictive nature of the four ED-endorsed improvement models, already discussed above, to concerns about the timeline for turning around low-performing schools. Below are examples of these additional comments:

- *Federal models require a rapid turnaround.*
- *Targeted assistance schools who receive 1003(g) funds as a tier III school need more flexibility on using the funds. The whole school is in improvement. It doesn't make sense to require them to target their funds to only identified students.*
- *New SIGs require a tight timeline for implementing significant reforms, and the reform models are restrictive—particularly the requirement to replace the principal.*
- *The state would like more technical assistance from [the] federal government for implementation.*
- *Some states would prefer more flexibility on funding caps—especially small states.*
- *SEA [state educational agency] funding [is] not adequate to build capacity in LEAs [local educational agencies] to improve schools.*
- *The competitive grant process is more labor intensive for both SEA & LEA.*
- *The program is confusing and complicated—even for veteran Title I SIG personnel.*
- *[The] identification of [the] lowest-performing schools formula is problematic, with too much focus on schools when district leadership is the problem.*
- *The model does not fit [the] realities of rural states, and the four intervention models do not fit needs of low-performing schools in rural states.*

Conclusions

The findings from these two surveys offer a baseline understanding of how the increased funding and new SIG requirements have impacted the number and types of schools served. Additionally, the findings illustrate how state education agencies are using these funds to assist schools targeted by the SIG program. Once ARRA SIG-funded activities have had time to take hold, research at the state, district, and school level will be needed to investigate whether SIGs are transforming school culture and raising student achievement as intended.

References

- U.S. Department of Education. (2010a, June 29). *Guidance on school improvement grants under section 1003(g) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*. Washington, DC: Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/legislation.html>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2010b, November 1). *Guidance on fiscal year 2010 school improvement grants under section 1003(g) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/sigguidance11012010.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Education (2010c, November 1). *Funding status of the School Improvement Fund*. Washington, DC: Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/funding.html>

Appendix—Survey Development and Data Collection

GENERAL SURVEY OF STATE OFFICIALS

The Center on Education Policy, with support from its contractor, Policy Studies Associates, Inc. (PSA), administered a general survey about ARRA implementation to the deputy state superintendents of education between early October 2010 and late November 2010. Deputies in the 50 states and the District of Columbia (counted as a state for purposes of this report) were invited to complete the survey.

After CEP and PSA consulted with state leaders on the development of survey items, the PSA survey team sent initial letters to the deputies that explained the purposes of the survey and invited them to participate. The team also sent the survey via email. The survey team followed up with non-responders at weekly intervals, with a goal of achieving at least an 80% response rate. Forty-three states returned completed surveys.

The survey included 32 questions, divided into three sections. The sections focused on (1) adoption and implementation of the common core state standards; (2) state use of ARRA education funds, including the distribution and use of federal SIG funds; and (3) state education agency capacity. All of the questions asked respondents to select a response, or multiple responses in some cases, from a set of options. Thirteen questions provided respondents with space to insert comments or explanations regarding their responses. The survey team used statistical analysis software to store, clean, and analyze the survey data. This report analyzes responses only to the SIG-related questions in section 2.

SURVEY OF STATE TITLE I DIRECTORS

The preliminary instrument for the survey of state Title I directors was developed after considering information from CEP consultants, prior CEP studies, and other reports about school improvement grants. The CEP survey team also sought advice on the preliminary survey from an executive director at the National Title I Association, who works with state officials in charge of administering and applying for SIGs, and from a George Mason University professor and a graduate-level class in survey research methods.

In October 2010, the survey questions and response items underwent further review and systematic pretesting. The survey team obtained feedback from three state-level officials in the same state about whether the questions and response items were comprehensible. The survey was redrafted based on their input, and the revised instrument was sent to the three officials for any additional suggestions.

In November 2010, CEP drafted a letter that outlined the purpose and goals of the survey—including the time involved and the anonymity of responses—and invited state Title I directors to participate. A paper copy of this letter, along with the survey, was mailed to all 51 state Title I directors or their affiliates. The same letter and an electronic version of the survey were also e-mailed to these individuals. State Title I directors were invited to respond to the survey via e-mail, fax, or hard copy sent by US mail. CEP also provided a phone number to call if respondents had any questions. Nearly all respondents submitted the survey to CEP by e-mail, and one state's responses were collected by telephone.

Most of the surveys were completed electronically by state respondents as a Microsoft Form. CEP converted these files as needed and imported them to a shared Microsoft Excel file. The imported data were also cleaned—checked for duplicate entries or missing response items—before analysis. Most of the items in the survey were closed-ended questions and provided nominal and/or ordinal data. Response item frequencies were totaled and percentages calculated using the formula functions in Excel. A few questions allowed respondents to explain their responses, and the last question asked for additional comments or feedback about a state's experiences with SIGs. These written responses were simultaneously uploaded to the Excel file, and researchers analyzed these items individually, then together, to extract common themes.



Center on Education Policy

1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 522

Washington, D.C. 20036

tel: 202.822.8065

fax: 202.822.6008

e: cep-dc@cep-dc.org

w: www.cep-dc.org

www.cep-dc.org