School Improvement Grants 2010-2011

The School Improvement Grant Rollout in America's Great City Schools

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Council of the Great City Schools

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Executive Summary

- The School Improvement Grant (SIG) program, initially enacted as part of the *No Child Left Behind* amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, underwent a substantial transformation under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Under the new program, states identified 2,172 persistently low-achieving schools nationally (Tier I and Tier II schools) and 12,947 low-achieving Tier III schools. The numbers of identified schools that were urban, poor, and enrolling high-minority populations were greater than national averages, and a high proportion of SIG-eligible schools were in districts that are members of the Council of the Great City Schools and were surveyed as part of this study.

- The "Round One" award process (grants that began in the 2010-11 school year) resulted in 831 Tier I and Tier II schools nationwide receiving awards for school improvement. The average grant award was $2.54 million across three years. Only 416 Tier III schools were awarded SIG funds, however, with an average award of $520,000. In Council districts, 298 Tier I and Tier II schools received an average award of $2.87 million (not including schools pursuing the closure model), and 91 Tier III schools received an average award of $366,000.

- Responses to the Council's survey also indicated that approximately one third of Tier I and II schools awarded SIG grants saw their three-year awards reduced by an average of $763,000 per school from the amounts for which they applied. Eighteen percent of Tier I and Tier II schools in responding districts that applied for SIG grants did not receive any funding.

- The most commonly used model nationwide among the four allowable options was the transformation model, which was used by 74 percent of SIG-awarded schools across the country. Some 20 percent of schools used the turnaround model. Survey responses from the Great City Schools indicated that only 54 percent of urban schools awarded SIG grants used the transformation model, while 36 percent of SIG-awarded schools used the turnaround model. Relatively few Great City Schools opted for the restart or closure models.

- The lack of timeliness in the first round of the SIG grants caused some problems for urban school districts pursuing reforms, according to survey responses. Some 26 percent of survey respondents indicated that award announcements were not made until after August, when the school year typically starts, and another 43 percent did not receive initial award announcements until July or August, after the regular Title I plans were due to the state and mere weeks before the beginning of the school year. For each of the six sample reform tasks listed in the survey, between 40 percent and 58 percent of respondents said they did not have "sufficient time to effectively plan and implement" each task.

- Information from the survey on previous school-turnaround efforts in urban schools suggest that most if not all of the components of the four turnaround models can be effective, although their configuration, timing, and implementation are key to successful reform work. The most common challenges to the school turnaround process involved removing ineffective teachers; facing community resistance to closing schools; recruiting high-quality, reform-oriented teachers for these challenging schools; and having adequate school-level and district-level resources in place to effectively bring about a school turnaround. The SIG program appears to be an important tool in helping districts address these issues, according to survey respondents.

Introduction

New results from the Trial Urban District Assessment of the National Assessment of Educational Progress indicate that America's large city schools made statistically significant progress in reading and mathematics achievement among their fourth and eighth graders between 2003, when cities first participated in the tests, and 2011. And a new report by the Council of the Great City Schools and the American Institutes for Research found that the urban school gains have been larger than those seen by the nation at large over the same period.[1] Still, the report indicates that the urban school system improvements leave pockets of schools that fail to respond to districtwide reforms and need special and targeted attention and intervention. This report looks at the efforts by the nation's Great City Schools to intervene in and turn around these schools and how the school districts have used federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) funding to do so.

The Council of the Great City Schools surveyed its member districts to gather information about school turnarounds generally and to learn specifically about early experiences in implementing the revamped SIG program under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). Forty-three of the Council's member districts (66.2 percent) responded to the survey.[2] Our analysis was supplemented with information from state and district websites, U.S. Department of Education reports, reports from news media and non-profit organizations, and previous Council surveys.

History of School Improvement Grants

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), provides for School Improvement activities under Section 1003(g) by which states may apply to the U.S. Department of Education to receive funds, or through Section 1003(a) with which states may take a percentage of their total Title I, Part A funds to provide local educational agency (LEA) subgrants. Both funding options support local school improvement and turnaround efforts as required by Sections 1116 and 1117 of ESEA.

Section 1003(a) of the law, which allows states to take a specified percentage from their Title I, Part A allocations, was included in the law prior to NCLB's enactment in 2002. This optional set-aside was initially limited to one-half percent, but under NCLB, the state allowance was increased to two percent in FY 2002 and FY 2003, and four percent in FY 2004 through 2007. The increase in the percentage was coupled with a rule stating that Title I, Part A, funds could only be set aside for school improvement if the grants did not lower the amount that each local educational agency (LEA) received under Title I, Part A the previous year. Consequently, it

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[1] Casserly, M. et. al. (2011). *Pieces of the Puzzle: Factors in the Improvement of Urban Schools on the National Assessment of Educational Progress*. Washington, DC: Council of the Great City Schools and the American Institutes for Research.

[2] Responding city school systems included Albuquerque, Anchorage, Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Broward County, Charleston, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Chicago, Cincinnati, Clark County, Cleveland, Columbus, Dallas, Dayton, Detroit, Duval County, East Baton Rouge, Fresno, Hillsborough County, Houston, Jefferson County, Kansas City, Long Beach, Memphis, Miami-Dade County, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Nashville, Norfolk, Oklahoma City, Omaha, Orange County (Orlando), Palm Beach County, Pittsburgh, Portland, Providence, Richmond, Sacramento, San Diego, Seattle, St. Louis, and St. Paul.

was difficult to determine precisely how much school improvement funding was set aside under 1003(a) for turnaround efforts during those early years.

A 2006 survey by the Council of the Great City Schools indicated that 66 percent of responding districts reported that Section 1003(a) funds were distributed by their states using a pre-set formula; 7 percent reported that funds were distributed competitively; 5 percent reported that some other process was used; and 20 percent said they did not know how the state distributed the 1003(a) funds. Otherwise, very little is known about how funds were set aside or distributed.

It was also difficult to determine how states and school districts used and implemented the 1003(a) funds during that period or whether the grants produced any measurable effect. The Council of the Great City Schools has not been able to locate any formal evaluation of the program or much other documentation that describes whether the funds did any good.

On the other hand, a specific line-item appropriation provides Section 1003(g) grant amounts to states using a defined federal formula. Appropriations were first made for the 1003(g) School Improvement Grants in 2007 when $125 million was appropriated by Congress for it. In 2009, the legislative branch substantially boosted the program at the request of the new Obama Administration by allotting $3 billion for the 1003(g) School Improvement Grants as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). This allocation was on top of $546 million in regular FY 2009 federal appropriations.

With this $3.5 billion infusion of funds in FY 2009, the U.S. Department of Education created a new set of rules and guidance for the School Improvement Grant program, as well as a requirement that one of four "intervention models" be implemented in order to receive funds. These intervention models first appeared in a Notice of Proposed Priorities published by the Department of Education in 2009 as part of the Race to the Top program, and were also included in later notices outlining requirements for School Improvement Grants.

New program rules also required that states create lists of their lowest-achieving schools to form the pool for determining eligibility for subgrants. (More on the school identification process is found in the chapter on SIG applications and round one awards.) The lists of SIG-eligible schools were divided into three tiers of the lowest-achieving schools, with Tier I and Tier II schools having priority over Tier III schools.

Tier I and Tier II: The "Persistently Lowest-achieving" Schools

In the first version of SIG's Final Requirements, definitions of "persistently lowest-achieving schools" and "Tier I and Tier II schools" were interchangeable. Subsequent revisions expanded the definitions of Tier I and Tier II, but this report will continue to use the term "persistently lowest-achieving" (PLA) to define schools that are identified as Tier I or Tier II on a state's list of SIG-eligible schools.

Districts were expected to apply for funding for all their Tier I and Tier II schools before they applied for funding for Tier III schools, unless they did not have the capacity to implement the mandatory intervention models in each of their Tier I and Tier II schools. Tier III schools

were not required to implement one of the four intervention models. While each state was required to create its own definition of how it identified SIG-eligible schools at each tier, the general criteria were the same for all states. The criteria for Tier I and Tier II schools included— Tier I schools can be any school that:

a) Is among the lowest five schools, or lowest five percent of schools (whichever is greater) that are Title I-participating, and is identified for school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring under NCLB; or
b) Is a high school that has a graduation rate lower than 60 percent.

States could also identify additional schools for Tier I status if the school:
- Is an elementary school that is at least as low-achieving as the highest-achieving of the above schools, and either has not made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for at least two consecutive years, or has a reading and math proficiency rate in the lowest quintile in the state (can be Title I-participating or Title I-eligible).

Tier II schools can be any secondary school that:

a) Is among the lowest five secondary schools that are Title I-eligible (but not participating), or are in the lowest five percent of schools, whichever is greater; or
b) Is a Title I-eligible (but not participating) high school that has a graduation rate lower that 60 percent over a number of years.

States could also identify additional schools for Tier II status if the school:
- Is a Title-I participating school if it (1) either is at least as low-achieving as the highest-achieving of the above schools, or has a graduation rate of less than 60 percent over a number of years; and the school (2) either did not make AYP in the last two consecutive years, or has a reading and math proficiency rate in the lowest quintile of the state.

Tier III Schools

Districts were not required to implement a specific intervention model in Tier III schools, so funding to these schools could be more flexible, and districts had more latitude over what strategies they used (or did not use). However, Tier III schools were a lower priority than Tier I and Tier II schools on both the district application and the manner in which the state awarded SIG funds.

Most schools that were identified as Tier III have not yet been awarded any funds. The criteria for Tier III schools included—

A Tier III school could be any school that does not meet the requirements for Tier I or Tier II, and is either:

a) a Title I-participating school identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring; or

b) a Title I-eligible (including Title I-participating) school that has not made AYP in the last two years, or has a reading and math proficiency rate in the lowest quintile of the state.

The Four Intervention Models for School Turnaround

School districts receiving SIG funds were required to select an intervention model for every school they included in their application that was a Tier I or Tier II school. The four intervention models were—

1. **Turnaround Model:** Schools replace the principal and at least half of their staff; implement teacher recruitment and retention strategies; provide embedded professional development aligned with the turnaround effort; adopt a new governance structure, perhaps by making the school accountable to a central turnaround office; increase use of student data to improve curricular program and student outcomes; increase learning time; and provide social-emotional and community-oriented services and supports for students. Additional strategies are also permitted.

2. **Transformation Model:** Schools replace the principal; reform principal and teacher evaluations and reward the most effective teachers and leaders; provide embedded professional development aligned with the turnaround effort; implement teacher recruitment and retention strategies; increase learning time; increase use of student data to improve curricular program and student outcomes; and provide operational flexibility and sustained support. Additional strategies are also permitted.

3. **Restart Model:** School closes and re-opens as a charter school or is managed by an education management organization.

4. **Closure Model:** LEA closes the low-performing school and moves students to a nearby school with higher performance.

The maximum length of a grant using the turnaround, restart or transformation models was three years, and the maximum per-school award was $2.0 million per year. For schools implementing the closure model, grant funds would cover only some costs associated with closing the school and placing students in another school.

For schools that were implementing one of the intervention models (i.e., a Tier I or Tier II school), the U.S. Department of Education prohibited a single LEA from using the transformation model in more than half of its SIG schools if nine or more Tier I and Tier II schools were included in its application.

Numbers of SIG Schools and Students

Urban Share of SIG-eligible Schools

In June 2009, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan indicated in a speech that the $3.5 billion in FY 2009 SIG funds would be targeted on the nation's lowest-achieving schools—the "bottom five percent", or roughly 5,000 of the nation's 101,979 public schools. Actual lists of SIG-eligible schools generated by the states identified 2,172 schools in Tier I and Tier II (2 percent of the nation's schools), and the lower-priority Tier III category included 12,948 schools (13 percent of the nation's schools).[3]

A large proportion of these Tier I and Tier II schools are in large or mid-size cities, representing one-third and one-eighth of the total, respectively (Figure 1). Schools in member districts of the Council of the Great City Schools comprise 30 percent of the nation's Tier I and Tier II schools, and 42 percent of the total Tier I and Tier II school enrollment.

Figure 1. Percent of Tier I and Tier II Schools Nationwide by Locale

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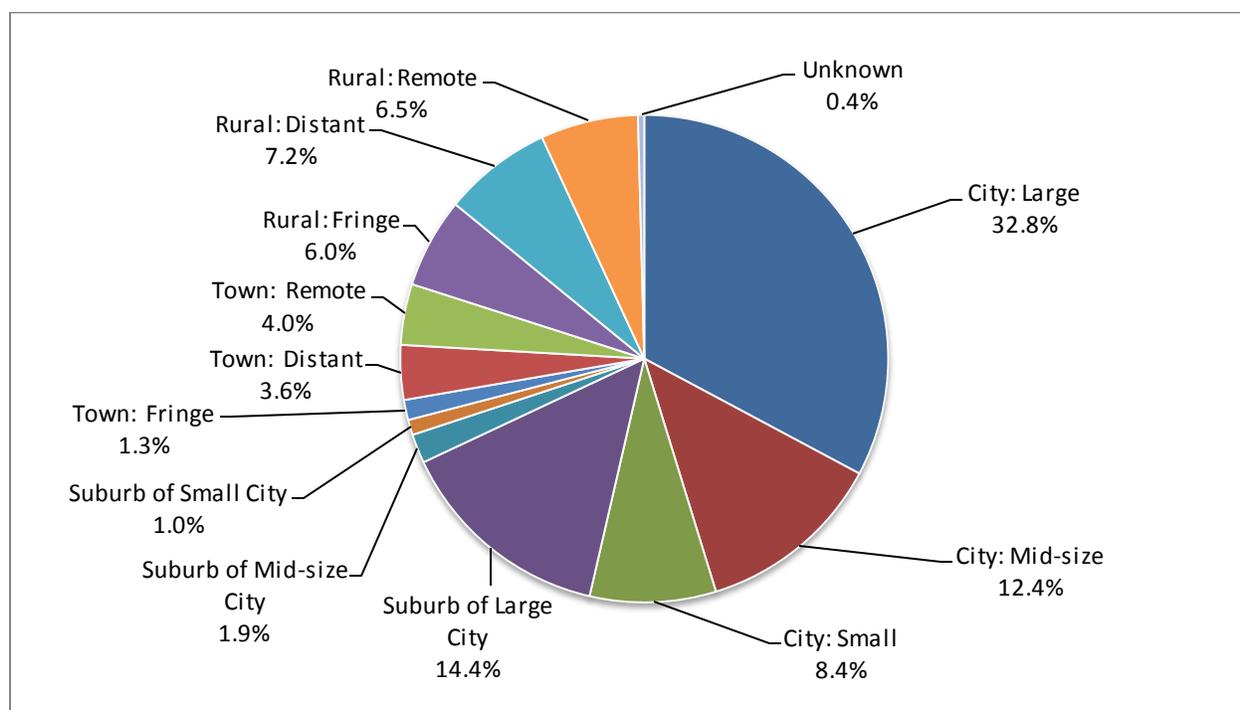
[3] The national information in this report on the total number of SIG schools resulted from compiling the lists of eligible schools posted on each state's department of education website in the Fall of 2010. Demographic data on SIG schools – both nationwide and in Great City School districts – was collected from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The U.S. Department of Education also compiled and released a list of SIG-eligible schools; minor discrepancies between the two are likely due to changes made to the state lists for a variety of reasons, such as changes to the definition of Tiers I, II or III; changes in methodology for identifying schools: or removal of schools from lists because they were special education schools or were schools that had closed.

Great City School Districts with High and Low Numbers of SIG Schools

Urban school districts responding to the Council's survey ranged considerably in the number and percent of their schools that were identified as either Tier I or Tier II schools under the SIG program. Great City School districts with the lowest numbers and percentages of SIG schools included Anchorage, Broward County, Hillsborough County, Long Beach, and Nashville. These five districts had three or fewer SIG schools or one percent or less of all schools districtwide. Both Broward County and Hillsborough County had all identified SIG Tier I and Tier II schools funded.

Conversely, the five districts responding to the survey with the largest numbers of Tier I and Tier II schools included Detroit, St. Louis, Boston, Pittsburgh, and Providence. Detroit had 47 schools or 23.6 percent of all its schools identified as Tier I and II. Only six of them received funding, however. Boston had 31 Tier I and II-identified schools or 22.5 percent of its schools— and nine were funded. St. Louis had 22 SIG schools (22.3 percent), 12 of which were funded. (Table A and Table B. See appendices for data on all districts.)

Table A. Districts with the Largest Numbers of SIG Schools

District	Total Schools	Tier I & II Schools	% of Total	Schools Awarded
Detroit	199	47	23.6%	6
Boston	138	31	22.5%	9
St. Louis	96	22	22.9%	12
Pittsburgh	69	13	18.8%	7
Providence	54	10	18.5%	4

Table B. Districts with the Smallest Numbers of SIG Schools

District	Total Schools	Tier I & II Schools	% of Total	Schools Awarded
Broward County	325	3	0.9%	3
Hillsborough County	313	2	0.6%	2
Anchorage	98	1	1.0%	0
Nashville	141	1	0.7%	0
Long Beach	94	0	0.0%	0

Characteristics of Students in SIG-eligible Schools

In general, the demographic characteristics of students enrolled in Tier I and Tier II schools do not match those of other schools across the country. A high proportion of students enrolled in Tier I and Tier II schools are African American or Hispanic, many of whom are enrolled in the Great City Schools. Of the 1.4 million students enrolled in Tier I and Tier II schools nationally, 44 percent are African American, 32 percent are Hispanic, and 19 percent are White.

By comparison, student enrollment nationwide is 17 percent African American, 22 percent Hispanic, and 55 percent White.

In the Great City Schools, the contrast in racial/ethnic makeup of Tier I and Tier II schools is even starker: 55 percent African American, 33 percent Hispanic, and eight percent White. (See Figure 2)

Figure 2. Percent of Students in Tier I and Tier II Schools Nationally and in the Great Cities by Race/Ethnicity
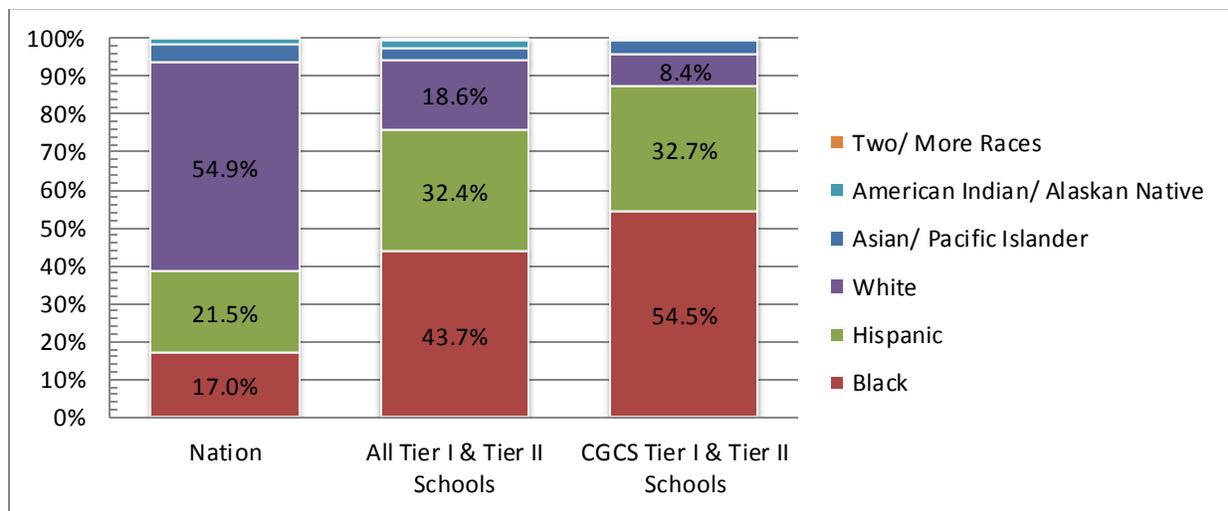
Similarly, a greater share of African American and Hispanic students is educated in Tier I and Tier II schools than are other groups. Some 7.4 percent of the nation's African American students are enrolled in a Tier I or Tier II school, compared with 4.3 percent of the nation's Hispanic students and only one percent of the nation's White students. Approximately 2.9 percent of all students nationwide are enrolled in a Tier I or Tier II school. (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3. Percent of Students Nationally in Tier I and Tier II Schools by Race/Ethnicity
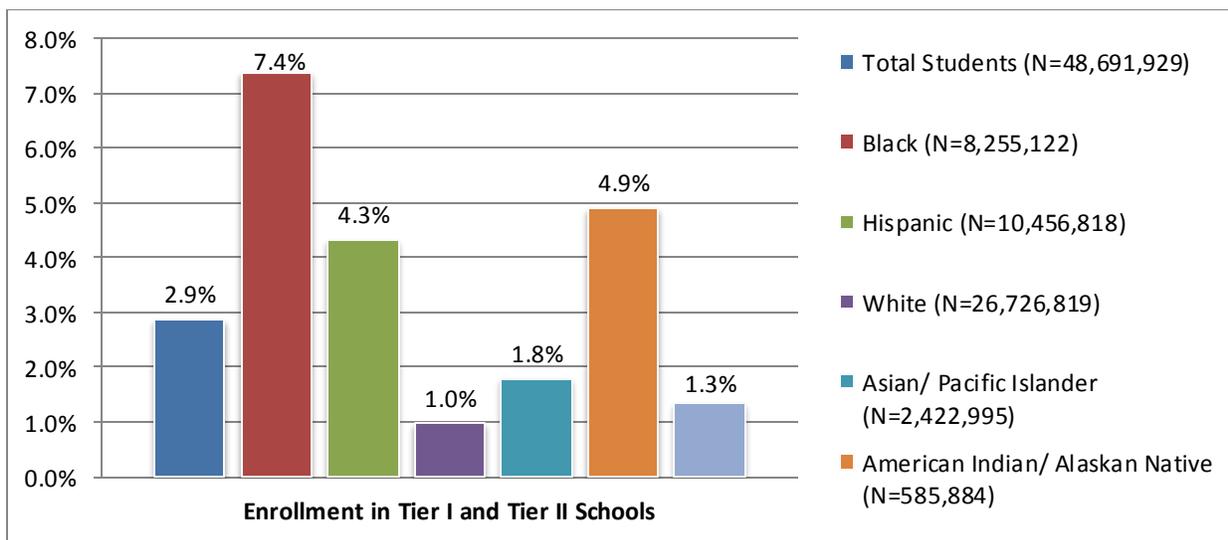
In addition, a large portion of students (69 percent) in Tier I and Tier II schools nationally were eligible for a Free and Reduced-Price Lunch (FRPL). This figure was slightly higher (72 percent) in Council-member districts and slightly lower (67 percent) in non-Council districts. (Figure 4.)

Figure 4. Percent of Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL) Students in Tier I and Tier II Schools Nationally and the Great City Schools
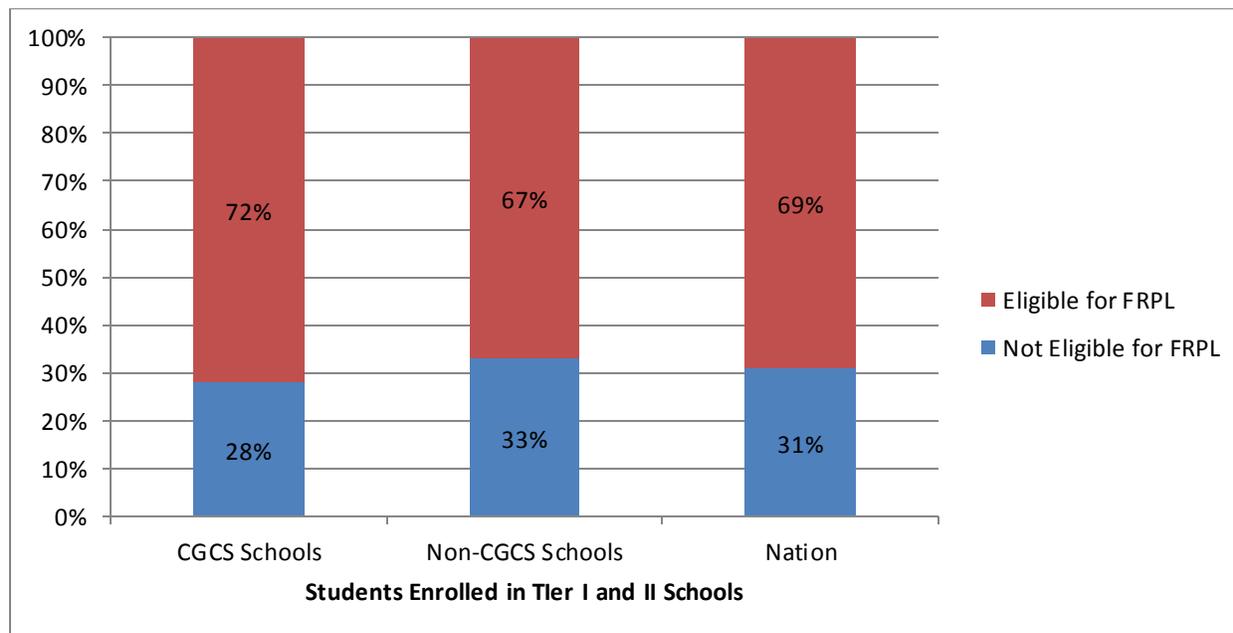
Types of Schools

A large portion (82 percent) of Tier I and Tier II schools nationally were Title I-eligible, and most of these (91 percent) ran Title I "schoolwide" programs. (See figure 5.) Interestingly, this means that there were a number of Title I targeted assistance schools pursuing whole-school SIG reforms.[4]

The schools that were not eligible for Title I but were identified as Tier I or Tier II were presumably deemed "newly eligible" for Title I through authorization language approved by Congress in the FY 2010 Consolidated Appropriations bill.

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[4] This pattern was likely the result of a waiver offered by the U.S. Department of Education for SIG recipients. In the final requirements for SIG, the Department invited applicants to waive the requirement in section 1114(a)(1) of ESEA that a school have a poverty percentage of 40 percent or greater in order to operate a schoolwide program. A waiver of this provision would allow a Tier I or Tier II Title I participating school with a poverty percentage of less than 40 percent to operate a schoolwide program. In approving an SEA's request for a waiver of this statutory provision, the Department would also grant a waiver of 34 C.F.R. § 200.25(b)(1)(ii), the regulatory provision implementing this statutory requirement.

Figure 5. Percent of Title I-Eligible Tier I and Tier II Schools Nationally by Schoolwide Status

Title I Eligibility Unknown, 23, 1%

Not Title I Eligible, 366, 17%

Title I Eligible, But Not Schoolwide, 159, 7%

Title I Eligible, Schoolwide, 1631, 75%
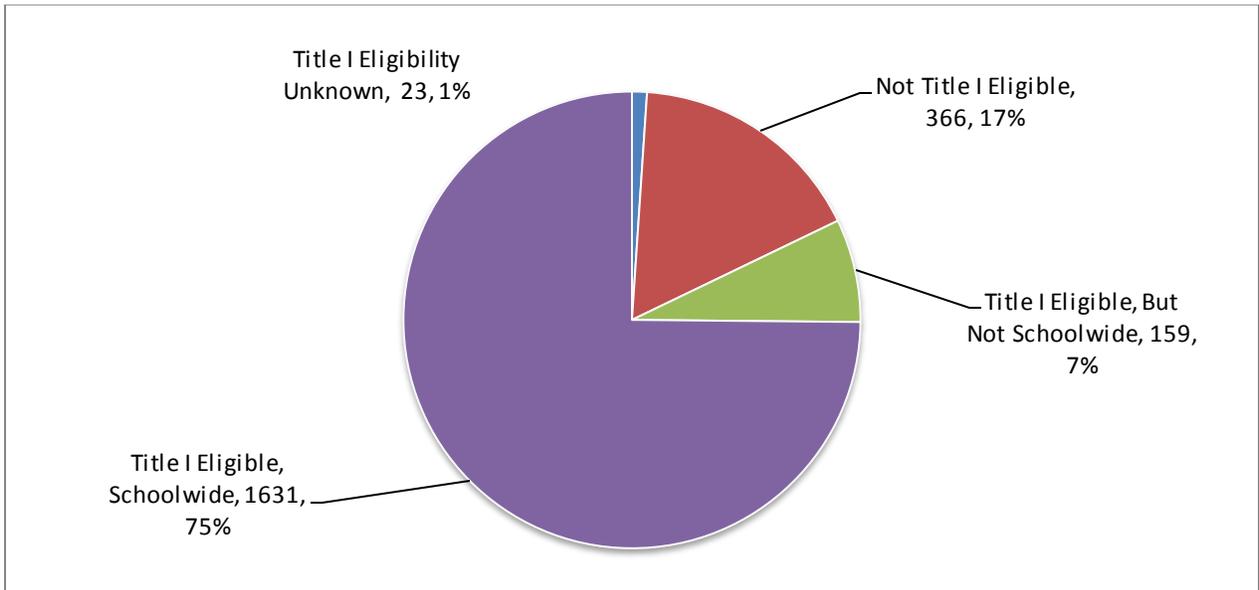
In addition, approximately half of the nation's Tier I and Tier II schools (51 percent) were high schools, enrolling some 66 percent of the entire Tier I and Tier II student enrollment. (Figure 6.)

Figure 6. Percent of Tier I and Tier II Schools by Grade Level

Elementary 22%

Other 11%

Middle 16%

High 51%
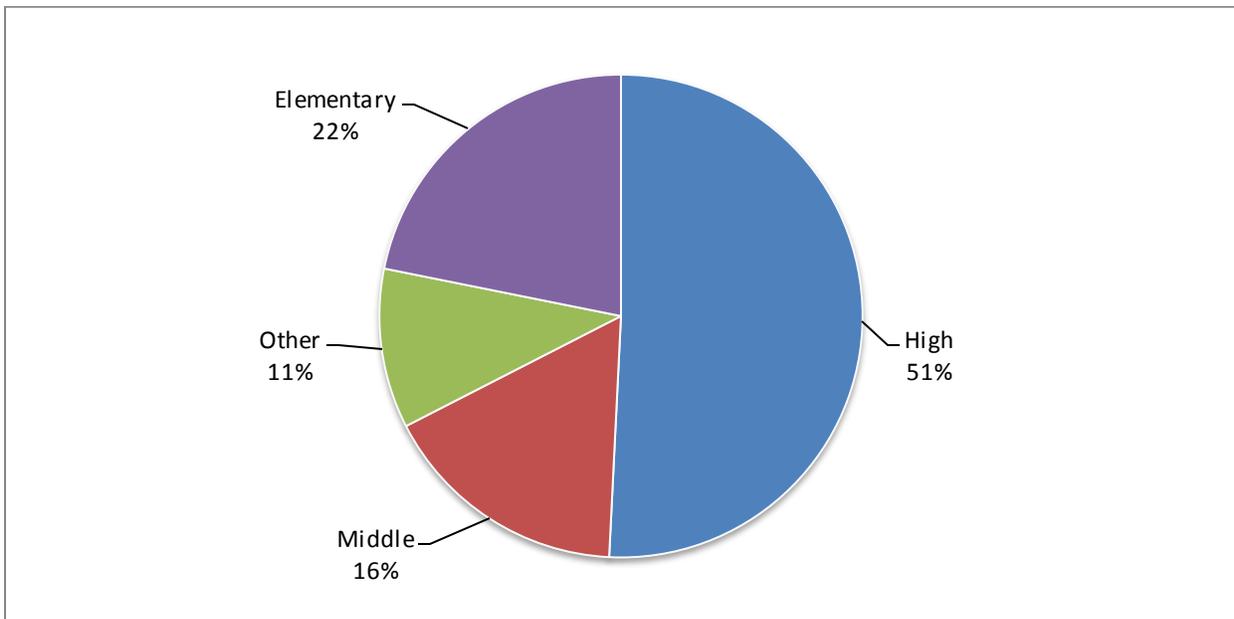
Finally, NCES data show that charter schools accounted for 11.3 percent of Tier I and Tier II schools nationwide. Only 18 of these schools (7.8 percent) were charters within the Great City School districts. (The charter status of 204 Tier I and Tier II schools was unknown.) (Figure 7.)

Figure 7. Numbers of Tier I and Tier II Charter Schools and Non-Charter Schools

Charter Schools (CGCS Members), 18

Charter Schools (Non-CGCS Members), 229

Charter Status Unknown, 204

Non-charter Schools(CGCS Members), 627

Non-charter Schools(Non-CGCS Members), 1101
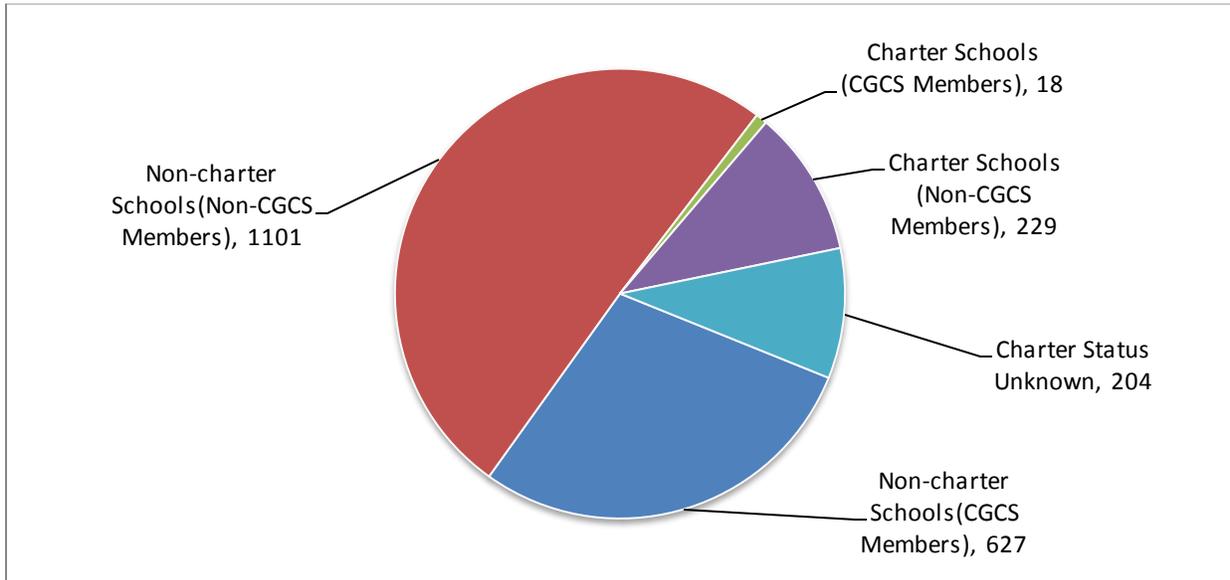
Pre-SIG School Turnaround Efforts

Effectiveness of Previous School Turnaround Strategies

Efforts among the Great City Schools to turn around low-achieving schools substantially pre-dated ARRA and provided some overarching lessons about what was likely to prove effective in SIG and what might not work. Since SIG under ARRA was only in its first year of implementation at the time the Council survey was conducted, the organization knew that limited, if any, data would be available to assess the program's effectiveness in raising student achievement. Consequently, the survey asked about school turnaround strategies that urban school districts have been using in the previous five years, and whether or not those strategies were perceived as effective.

Urban school districts were asked about their whole-school turnaround efforts, as well as about their schools closed for academic reasons. Whole-school turnarounds of various sorts have been pursued by a large majority of Council member districts for some years. Out of 43 respondents, 35 urban school districts reported that they had undergone whole-school turnaround efforts in a total of 284 schools between the 2005-06 and 2009-10 school years.

Table C. Numbers of Great City Schools Involved in Turnaround Efforts in the Five Years Before SIG

Grade Span	Total schools
Elementary	91
Middle	74
K-8	21
High	96
Other	5
Total	**284**

Urban school districts also pursued school closures over recent years, although less frequently than other strategies. Seventeen districts said they had closed a total of 93 schools solely for academic reasons. Nine of these districts subsequently reopened 41 of the schools.

Table D. Urban Schools Closed for Academic Reasons in the Five Years Before SIG

Grade Span	Total schools closed	Schools reopened
Elementary	24	8
Middle	21	9
K-8	15	1
High	33	22
Other	1	2
Total	**93**	**41**

Respondents were also asked to indicate how many schools a specified turnaround strategy was used in, and to indicate the strategy's effectiveness. A respondent would indicate "very effective" or "effective" if they perceived the strategy as helpful in improving student achievement. They would indicate "no change" to mean that the strategy made no difference in improving student achievement, and "ineffective" or "very ineffective" to mean that the strategy was disruptive or counter-productive to school turnaround.

Table E. Numbers of Districts Rating the Effectiveness of Specified Turnaround Strategies that were Similar to SIG Models and Numbers of Schools Involved

Turnaround strategy	Very Effective	Effective	No Change	Ineffective	Very Ineffective	Number of Schools
School underwent state takeover	0	0	2	1	0	29
Reopened as a public charter school	0	1	0	1	0	10
Reopened as a magnet or special-focus school	0	4	0	0	0	24
Contracted with private entity to operate school, such as education management company, university, etc	0	2	2	1	0	35
Replaced half or more of the staff, including the principal	2	12	3	2	0	106
Removed the principal only	0	11	5	1	0	81

All of the turnaround strategies that are part of the four SIG intervention models existed prior to the 2009 version of the program, so the Council's survey asked about interventions that most closely approximated the four SIG models. For example, one requirement of the SIG turnaround model is that the LEA replace the principal and at least 50 percent of staff. This strategy was used in past school turnarounds, and was included as a Corrective Action strategy under *No Child Left Behind*. Nineteen urban districts reported they had used this strategy over the past five years in a total of 106 schools. Fourteen of these 19 districts said this strategy was effective or very effective; three indicated they saw no change in student achievement; and two of the respondents reported the strategy was ineffective or very ineffective.

The transformation model required that the principal be replaced (but not necessarily the staff). This strategy was used in seventeen districts over the past five years in a total of 81 schools. Eleven respondents reported that replacing the principal was effective; five said they saw was no change in student achievement; and one of the respondents said the strategy was ineffective.

A number of respondents also used strategies that were similar to the restart model before the current version of SIG was put into place. Two districts reported reopening ten of their struggling schools as public charter schools. One district said it was effective, and one district said it was ineffective. Five respondents said that their districts had contracted with a private entity, such as an education management company, university, etc., to operate a total of 35 schools. Two districts indicated that the move was effective; two said it produced no change; and one district said it was ineffective.

One strategy that did not receive any positive ratings for its effectiveness involved state takeovers. Three respondents said this was done in their districts over the last five years in a total of 29 schools. Two of these districts reported that it produced no change, while a third district said it was ineffective.

Additional turnaround strategies were identified by responding urban school districts in an open-ended question. Table F and Table G summarize the major strategies used. Of course, even when the strategies were similar from district to district, their implementation could be vastly different, which could significantly impact the perceived effectiveness of the reforms.

Many of the reported strategies received differing effectiveness ratings from district to district. For example, several districts described grouping their lowest-performing schools into a single portfolio to be managed or overseen by a district administrator, such as the superintendent, assistant superintendent, or a turnaround office. Although this strategy was generally given a positive rating, it received responses ranging from "very effective" to "no change."

Another common strategy involved splitting schools into smaller learning communities, which seven districts reported trying. This strategy often received an "effective" or "very effective" rating, although two districts rated it as producing "no change"; one district rated it as "ineffective"; and another district rated it as "very ineffective". Survey responses seemed to suggest this strategy was more effective in primary schools than secondary schools.

Table F. Very Effective Strategies Used in Pre-SIG School Turnarounds

Strategies used in the last five years that were rated "very effective"	Number of schools affected
Provide additional 60-75 minutes of in-school tutoring for 6th and 9th graders	9
Offer professional development	7
Implement and support AP, AVID, IB or MYP programs	4
Offer incentives for principals and teachers at low performing campuses	3
Provide an extended school day	2
Implement incentive pay for teachers	2
Direct appointments of principals to low performing schools rather than traditional RFP hiring process	1
Split schools into single-gendered approach	1
Place low-performing schools in to single learning community to target resources and support	1
Make continuous use of student data (such as formative, interim, summative assessments) to differentiate instruction	1

Table G. Effective Strategies Used in Pre-SIG School Turnarounds

Strategies used in last five years that were rated "effective"	Number of schools affected
Alternate governance; formation of a superintendent-supervised PLC for the group of schools, with two principal coaches and a director	8
Place the lowest performing schools with a Turnaround associate superintendent to oversee their instructional strategies	8
Comprehensive high school redesign: small learning communities, trimester schedule, freshman advisory-advisee program	8
Splitting school into smaller learning community	5
Response to Intervention	4
Offer professional development	3
Strategically remove principal, other leadership and instructional personnel contributing to the performance of the school	2
Increasing industry certification opportunities	1
"Signing bonus" for teacher to agree to reform agenda (middle school level)	1
Implement new teaching standards rubric, weighted by grade level	1
Deploy or support intervention and enrichment programs	1
Develop literacy academies to serve the lowest performing 1st and 3rd graders in low and high performing schools	1
Uniform curriculum throughout the district	1

Generally, the Council has found that strategic coordination of multiple activities and fidelity of implementation was more important and effective than pursuing a single change.

Respondents were given specific indicators and asked if they were used to gauge the effectiveness of these turnaround strategies. Out of all respondents (N=43 districts), 72 percent used student gains on state assessments; 58 percent used Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) to gauge effectiveness; 58 percent used attendance or graduation rates; and 56 percent used measures of achievement gaps between student groups.

Thirty-four percent of respondents used all four indicators, 19 percent used a combination of three, and 19 percent used only one or two of them.

In addition, Table H lists the additional measures of effectiveness – beyond the four indicators provided in the survey – that one or more districts indicated they used.

Table H. Additional Indicators Used to Rate Effectiveness of Pre-SIG Turnaround Strategies

Effectiveness Indicator
Rate of disciplinary actions
Program evaluation
Conditions for learning (e.g. school climate and culture)
Relationships with community
Teacher recruitment and retention rates
Enrollment in choice programs
Advanced-course enrollment

Challenges to Reform

The implementation of turnaround efforts is as important as a good reform plan. There are dozens of obstacles that, if not adequately addressed, can hinder reform efforts and in turn reduce chances of a successful school turnaround.[5] From reforming curriculum and instruction, to recruiting teachers and school leaders, to involving critical stakeholders and the community, there are multiple issues that districts face when undergoing turnaround strategies, which vary widely in their difficulty. The survey asked districts to rate the degree of difficulty of sixteen specified challenges to school turnaround they may have faced over the past five years before the Round I SIG grants. Table I below summarizes the results in order of their greatest challenge.

Table I. Percent of Districts Rating of Turnaround Challenges by Degree of Difficulty

Challenges faced by district	Very Challenging	Challenging	Somewhat Challenging	Not Too Challenging	Not At All Challenging
Removing ineffective teachers	51%	27%	20%	2%	0%
Community resistance to school closures	41%	28%	23%	0%	8%
Recruiting teachers to challenging schools	34%	51%	10%	5%	0%
Securing turnaround funding	29%	41%	22%	5%	2%
Evaluating teacher performance	29%	37%	20%	15%	0%
Rewarding effective teachers	29%	46%	10%	15%	0%
Adequate districtwide resources for turnaround	28%	45%	18%	10%	0%
Working with unions	17%	34%	20%	20%	10%
Getting help from the state education agency	15%	15%	24%	39%	7%
Getting help from local government leaders	5%	20%	29%	32%	15%
Getting help from local business leaders	2%	17%	39%	27%	15%

The most consistently challenging issues from the survey results involved removing ineffective teachers; recruiting teachers to challenging schools; and community resistance to school closures. Issues that were consistently less challenging included getting help from local business leaders; getting help from local government leaders; and getting help from state departments of education.

For a majority of respondents, it was a challenge before the revamped SIG grants to secure adequate funding for school turnaround, both at the school and district levels. Eighteen districts said that "Adequate districtwide resources to support school turnaround" was

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[5] Public Impact (2007), p. 8.

"challenging" for them, and eleven districts rated this issue as "very challenging." In "Securing funding to support school turnaround", 17 urban districts said the issue was "challenging," and 12 said it was "very challenging." That funding has been a challenge to successful urban school reform suggests that the new SIG program, and the funds appropriated to support it through ARRA, did indeed address a major barrier to school turnarounds faced by the Great City School districts.

Services and Supports from SEAs

Finally, survey responses indicated that states have provided resources and technical support to districts that were seen as helpful (see Table J). However, in a handful of cases, respondents reported that the state was absent from or even an impediment to reform efforts.

Table J. Number of Districts Indicating Receipt of Various Types of State Support for Reforms

Type of Support from State	Number of Districts	Number of States
School improvement/turnaround training (e.g. seminars, whitepapers, school leader training)	13	6
Grants and other supplementary funds	8	6
Embedded (school-level) content experts and mentors	8	7
Administrative (district-level) technical support teams	7	5
Assist in development of accountability tools, such as student assessments and teacher/principal evaluations	5	4
Guidance and technical assistance focused on compliance	4	4
Providing regulatory flexibility	3	3
Providing criteria and standards for improvement	1	1

SIG Applications and Round I Awards

The initial round of School Improvement Grants from the $3.5 billion ARRA and FY09 appropriations was made in 2010 in what was commonly called "Round I." And since SIG funds could be rolled over for up to two additional years, many states expected to hold a "Round Two" and possibly a "Round Three" before all funds from ARRA were awarded.

Funding began with states receiving allocations based on the Title I distribution formulas. The states, in turn, awarded sub-grants to districts that applied for funding. Sub-grants awards were based on both the quality of the LEA application and how the state prioritized funds to serve Tier I and Tier II schools throughout the state. Thus, for each LEA application, SEAs could make awards to all, some, or none of the Tier I and Tier II schools in the application, but typically awarded few or none of the Tier III schools. In addition, states could reduce the amount of money in each award below what schools applied for. The following sections describe how these steps in the process worked and what the intervention models looked like in practice.

Identifying "Persistently Lowest-achieving" Schools

The first step in the process of implementing the SIG program involved the identification of schools eligible for SIG awards. The Council of the Great City Schools asked its members about their involvement in the process of identifying schools for Round I grants.

Results showed that most respondents to the survey were not involved in the process of identifying their persistently lowest-achieving schools. Only five out of 43 respondents (11.6 percent) reported that their state sought the district's input in the process. However, one district praised its state for involving LEAs in defining and identifying SIG-eligible schools, stating that the district was, "heavily involved in the conversation, and influenced the development of the list significantly… we reviewed [various models for identifying persistently lowest-achieving schools]. Our influence certainly pushed the state…to ensure some balance in the list [between primary and secondary schools]."

Otherwise, most city school systems appeared not to have been substantially involved in the state selection process.

One outcome from this lack of input in identifying persistently low achieving schools was that several urban schools were wrongly identified as SIG-eligible schools, according to survey respondents. For example, alternative-education schools, schools that were already closed, or schools that subsequent data showed had actually met state targets were incorrectly identified.

Of 31 schools that were reported as being erroneously identified, just over half of them (58 percent) were eventually removed from state lists of SIG-eligible schools after districts were brought into the process. (See Table K.)

Table K. Numbers of Schools that were Incorrectly Identified as SIG-eligible

Reason for Misidentification	Number of schools affected	Number of schools subsequently removed from state list
Updated data – targets met	8	6
School closed	7	7
Alternative school	5	3
Special needs school	4	1
"Inflated" benchmark targets (state benchmark higher than federal benchmark)	4	0
Virtual school	1	0
Excluded from AYP Safe Harbor due to school size	1	0
Incorrect data	1	1

Requirements and Flexibilities in LEA Applications

LEAs wishing to apply for SIG funds had to meet a number of requirements and restrictions. For instance, LEAs were required to demonstrate that they had the institutional capacity to implement their proposed reforms, and they needed to provide a detailed plan and budget for each struggling school. Also, continued funding from year to year would be contingent on the reform's showing positive results; otherwise, the state educational agency (SEA) could discontinue the SIG award.

SEAs and LEAs were allowed some flexibility to ensure SIG efforts were not redundant and had some operational logic. In cases where an existing school reform effort matching one of the four intervention models "in whole or in part" had been initiated in the last two years, an LEA was allowed to continue that reform with SIG funds as long as it committed to expanding the effort to more fully implement one of the models. This flexibility around ongoing reform efforts also permitted LEAs to retain the existing principal in SIG schools if that principal had started within the last two years of the reform effort. Any principal who had been in place for longer than two years could not be retained. Council survey results showed a principal retention rate of 48.9 percent in SIG-awarded Tier I and Tier II urban schools as a result of this flexibility. (See Table L.)

Table L. Numbers of SIG Schools in the Great Cities Retaining Their Principals

Grade span	Number of principals retained
Elementary	17
Middle	12
K-8	6
High	52
Other	1
Total	**88**

Additional flexibility was granted through a waiver of NCLB accountability provisions by which an SEA or LEA could "restart" the NCLB timeline for school improvement. An LEA was permitted to apply if the SEA did not. According to a report by the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Services (NCEE), all states and the District of Columbia, with the exception of Montana, Vermont and Tennessee, applied for the waiver.[6] LEAs in Tennessee that are members of the Council—Memphis and Nashville—did not indicate they sought the waiver on their own, however.

Another waiver that was available to the SEAs, or subsequently the LEAs, allowed a Title I-participating school (in Tier I or Tier II) with a poverty percentage of less than 40 percent to operate a Title I schoolwide program, a situation currently not allowable under NCLB. The NCEE report found that 44 states applied for this waiver, including all but Hawaii, Montana, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Vermont, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia. Pennsylvania's application to the U.S. Department of Education indicated that it was an "Ed Flex State" and had the authority to issue the waiver on its own.

In addition, SEAs and LEAs could also seek a waiver to extend the availability of funds for up to three years. The NCEE report found that, with the exception of Montana, all states and the District of Columbia sought this waiver.

Delayed Timelines and Awards

For awards in the 2010-11 school year, SEAs needed to have their SIG sub-grant guidelines, definitions, and lists of schools approved by the U.S. Department of Education (ED). In addition, SEAs had to solicit and provide guidance to LEAs as they developed their applications, and LEAs had to determine which schools they wanted to include in their applications. The LEAs were required to develop comprehensive plans for implementing the intervention model(s) chosen. And SEAs were required to review applications and award funds based on need, capacity, and availability of dollars.

This process effectively began on December 10, 2009 when ED released the final SIG requirements (which have since been amended)—or about nine months before the beginning of the 2010-11 school year.

In its survey, the Council asked districts for the dates of three milestones in the application process: (1) when the SEA released its final list of SIG-eligible schools; (2) the deadline for the LEA application; and (3) the date the LEA was notified about which of its schools had received SIG awards.

The survey results indicated that most states released their lists of Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III-eligible schools by March 2010, but the majority of LEA applications were not due until after May. A third of the applications were due after June.

In addition, only a third of award announcements were made by July, and ten districts or 26 percent did not receive notification of their awards until after August—when the school year

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[6] Hurlburt, S., Le Floch, K.C., Therriault, S.B., and Cole, S. (2011). *Baseline Analyses of SIG Applications and SIG-Eligible and SIG-Awarded Schools* (NCEE 2011-4019). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

had already begun in many cases. Five districts did not receive notification of awards until after October. (See Table M.)

Table M. First Year SIG Application Milestones by Number of Great City School Districts

Milestones in SIG Application Process	
Dates the state released final list of SIG-eligible schools	
March or earlier	37 districts
April – May	6 districts
Date applications were due for funding for the 2010-11 school year	
May or earlier	17 districts
June	10 districts
July or later	15 districts
Date district was notified of schools awarded funds for 2010-11 school year	
June or earlier	12 districts
July – August	17 districts
September-October	5 districts
After October	5 districts

Urban districts were also asked whether they had enough time to effectively plan and implement various tasks required by the SIG reforms, given the award dates. For each required task, at least 39 percent of respondents indicated they did not have enough time, and more than half of respondents (24 districts) said they did not have enough time to conduct four specific tasks: recruiting and hiring qualified staff; providing professional development for teachers; providing leadership development for school leaders; and providing curriculum and/or classroom learning materials.

Figure 8. Percent of Great City School Districts With Insufficient Time for Turnaround Tasks
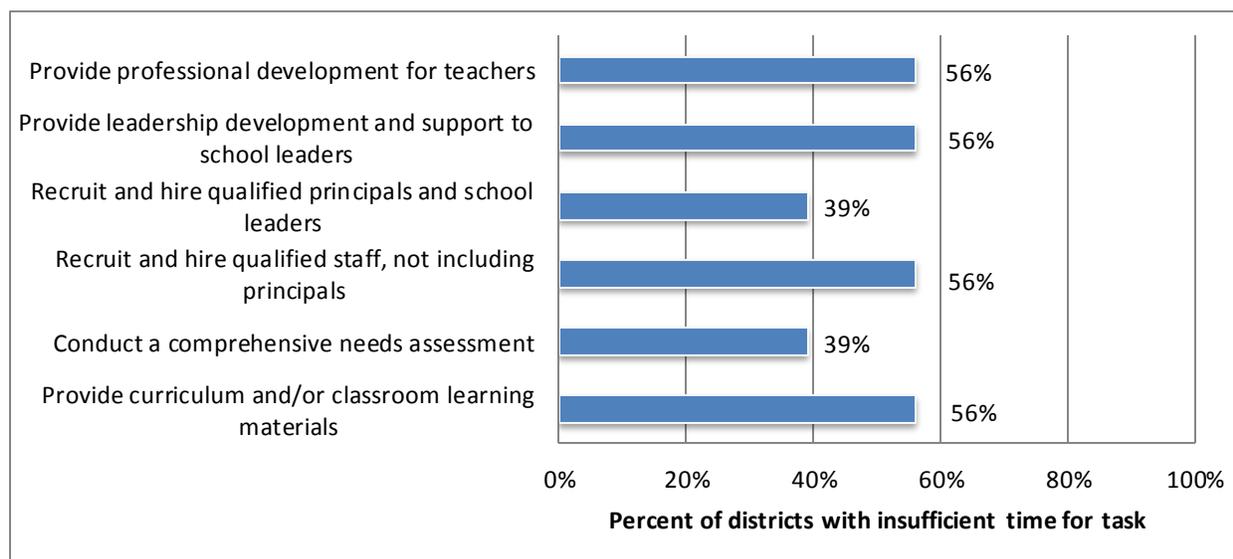
Research on school turnarounds suggests that ample preparation before the first school year of a turnaround effort is essential to ensuring a shift in school culture, whereas changes made abruptly in the months immediately before a school turnaround effort might be resisted by staff and students, and could result in instructional disruptions that can affect student achievement. A study on turnarounds released prior to the new SIG program found that a year of planning time is critical, and, "Schools that make major staff and leadership changes over a summer often struggle with chaos and poor results in the following year." While it often takes years of sustained effort to achieve a full and enduring "turnaround," an effort that has lackluster improvements in the first couple of years runs the risk of discouraging staff.[7]

For SIG-awarded schools that started their school year before receiving notification of their awards and found they had insufficient time to undertake major components of the required reform, the first year of SIG was likely challenging and frustrating. Therefore, it is important that federal officials, states, and local school districts—and the public—be realistic about what gains they should expect from schools in the first year of the program.

Schools, for their part, should redouble their efforts in the second and third years of reform, building on structural changes that were put into place in the first year and improvements, if any, that were seen. Monitoring the progress using leading indicators—and adjusting accordingly—can make a significant difference in turnaround success rates.[8]

Finally, the survey indicated that some states rolled funds over into the second year to allow Round Two SIG awards that would begin in the 2011-12 school year. Unlike the 2010-11 competition, many of the policies and guidelines for the 2011-12 applications will already be in place, so there is more reason to think that the experience of second-round applicants who took the time to plan and prepare for their turnaround bids would be better.

Round-One SIG Awards

In all, Round One resulted in 831 Tier I and Tier II school awards nationwide (39 percent of all Tier I and Tier II schools). For Tier III schools, to which SEAs were required to give lower priority, 416 schools (3 percent) received awards to support school improvement strategies.[9] In Council districts, out of the 647 Tier I and Tier II schools identified, 298 schools received awards. This represented a significant increase in the number of school turnarounds that were being pursued in the Great City Schools before the new SIG program.

Out of 3,244 Tier III schools in Council districts, 91 schools (3 percent) received awards. (See Table N.)

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[7] Public Impact (2007). *School Turnarounds: A Review of the Cross-Sector Evidence on Dramatic Organizational Improvement*, pp. 8-9. Public Impact, Academic Development Institute. Prepared by Public Impact for the Center on Innovation and Improvement.

[8] Hassel, E.A., & Hassel, B.C. (2009). *Try, try again: How to triple the number of fixed failing schools without getting any better at fixing schools*. Public Impact. Retrieved from http://www.publicimpact.com/try-try-again/

[9] Nationwide data on grant awards comes from the U.S. Department of Education's database of SIG schools. Retrieved from: http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/

Table N. Number of SIG-Eligible Schools in the Nation and Great City Schools Receiving Awards by Tier

Nation			
TIER	**AWARDED**	**ELIGIBLE**	**% AWARDED**
Tier I	519	1,124	46%
Tier II	312	1,034	30%
Tier III	416	13,364	3%
Council of the Great City Schools – Member Districts			
TIER	**AWARDED**	**ELIGIBLE**	**% AWARDED**
Tier I	245	436	56%
Tier II	53	211	25%
Tier III	91	3,244	3%

Analyses of the data, using Common Core of Data (CCD) definitions of locality, did not show substantial differences in the rate of SIG awards according to type or locale. Most locales saw between 35 and 48 percent of their SIG-eligible schools receive awards. (See Table O.) Only suburbs of mid-size cities were awarded funds at a higher rate, 55 percent. The locales that had lower percentages of eligible schools awarded grants included small cities; "fringe" towns; "remote" towns; and "remote" rural areas.[10] Just under half of Tier I and Tier II schools in both large and mid-size cities were awarded SIG funds, 43 percent and 48 percent, respectively.

Table O. Number of Tier I and Tier II Schools Nationally that Received SIG Awards by Locale

Locale	Awarded Schools	Eligible Schools	% Awarded
City: Large	297	696	43%
City: Mid-size	133	278	48%
City: Small	46	178	26%
Suburb of Large city	105	305	35%
Suburb of Mid-size city	23	42	55%
Suburb of Small city	9	31	43%
Town: Fringe	8	28	29%
Town: Distant	35	79	44%
Town: Remote	17	89	19%
Rural: Fringe	47	130	36%
Rural: Distant	61	154	40%
Rural: Remote	37	140	26%

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[10] Common Core of Data locales are defined as follows. A "City" is a principal city in an urbanized area; large: population>250,000; mid-size: population>100,000 and <250,000; small: population<100,000. Suburbs are areas within an urbanized area, but outside the principal city. A "Town" is a territory inside an urban cluster; fringe: urbanized area <10 miles away; distant: urbanized area >10 miles and <25 miles away; fringe = urbanized area >25 miles away. "Rural" means a Census-defined rural territory; fringe: urbanized area is <5 miles away, or urban cluster is <2.5 miles away; distant: urbanized area is >5 miles and <25 miles away, or urban cluster is >2.5 miles and <10 miles away; remote: urbanized area is >25 miles away, or urban cluster is >10 miles away.

Intervention Models Used

The most commonly chosen intervention model by SIG recipients was the transformation model, which requires that the principal be removed (unless the principal started in the last two years as part of the reform effort). This model also necessitates evaluating and rewarding teacher and leader effectiveness, comprehensive instructional reforms, increased learning time, and "operational flexibility" and "sustained support." This model was used in 74 percent of SIG-awarded schools nationwide, and 54 percent of schools in Council districts.

Figure 9. Percent of SIG Turnaround Models Used Nationally
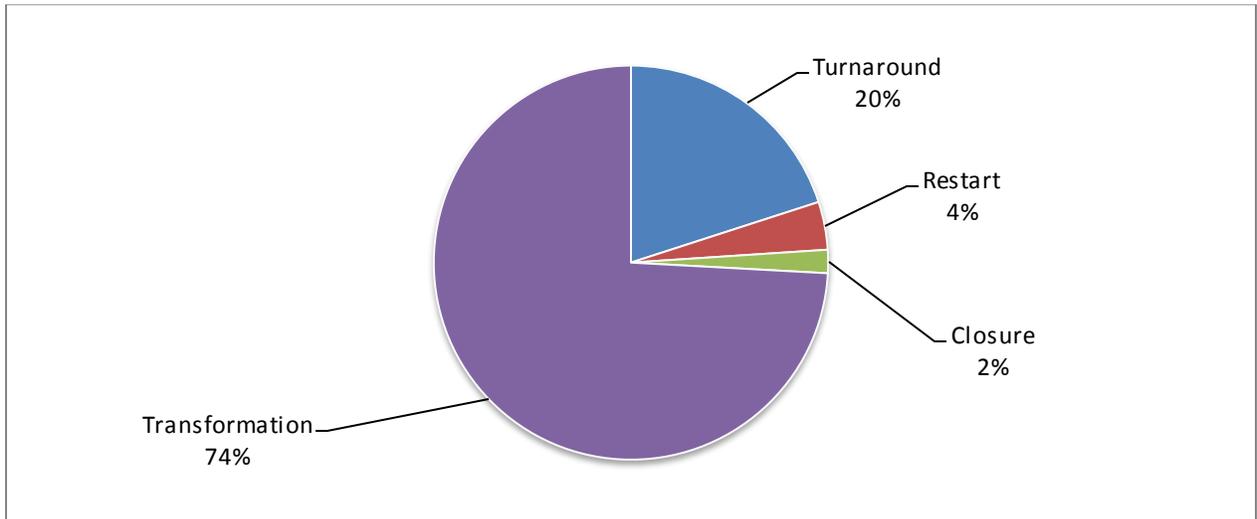
Source: U.S. Department of Education

The turnaround model was also widely used, with 20 percent of schools nationwide and 36 percent of SIG schools in Council-member districts opting to replace the principal and at least half of the staff, among other reforms.

The restart model, which calls for reopening the school as a public charter or having its operation taken over by an education management organization, was used in only 4 percent of the SIG-awarded schools nationwide, and in 5 percent of schools in Council districts.

Only 16 schools (2 percent) nationwide used the closure model, of which 10 were in Council-member districts.

Figure 10. Percent of SIG Turnaround Models Used in the Great City Schools
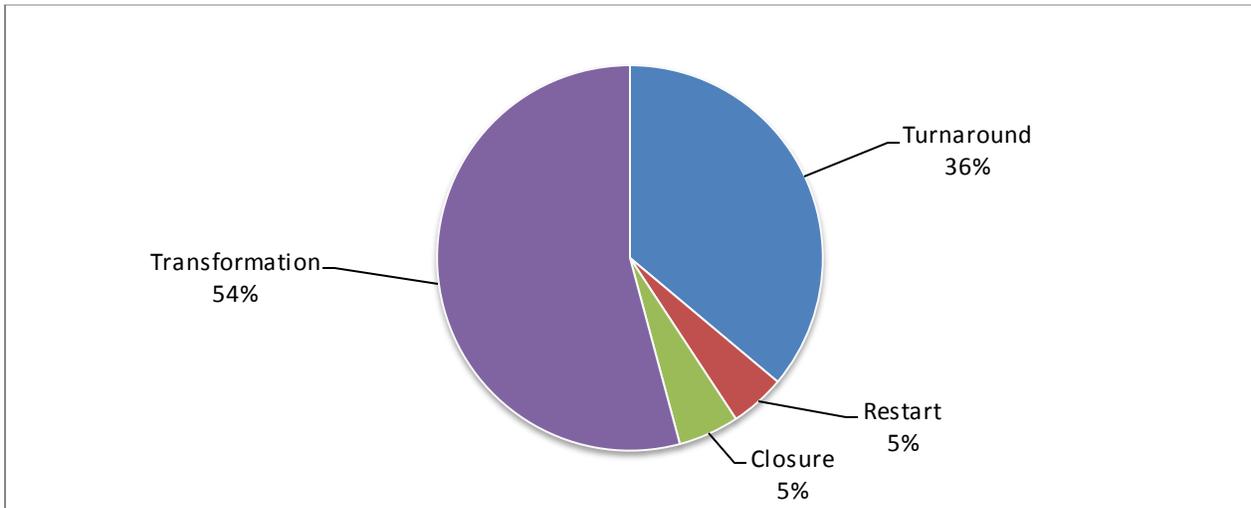
The average amount of SIG awards to schools in Council-member districts using the turnaround, restart or transformation models was roughly similar from model-to-model: $2,850,100 per school using the turnaround model; $2,820,900 per school using the restart model; and $2,966,700 per school using the transformation model. (The maximum was $6 million over a 3-year period.) The average award amount for schools in Council-member districts using the closure model, which pays for reasonable and necessary costs of closing a school and enrolling students in another school, was $38,000 per school. (See Table P.)

Table P. Average SIG Award Amounts by Intervention Model in the Great City Schools

Turnaround Model	Average Award Amount
Turnaround	$2,850,100
Restart	$2,820,900
Transformation	$2,966,700
Closure	$38,000

Reductions in SIG Award Funds

School districts applying for SIG funds did not always receive the amounts they requested. The 43 urban school districts that responded to the Council's survey requested funding for 226 Tier I and Tier II schools. Forty of these schools (18 percent) did not receive an award, and 66 out of 186 funded schools (29 percent) received an average amount that was – over the three year grant period – $763,000 per school lower than what they applied for, including reductions in SIG funds for schools using the closure model. (See Table Q.)

Table Q. Funds Requested and Awarded in the Great City Schools by Tier and Grade Span

Grade span	Tier I Applications	Tier I Awards	Tier II Applications	Tier II Awards	Total Amount Requested	Total Amount Awarded
Elementary	40	38	0	0	$ 80,500,000	$ 69,849,000
K-8	2	2	17	5	45,232,000	18,163,000
Middle	28	28	5	4	74,865,000	69,387,000
High	83	72	42	28	374,819,000	264,408,000
Other	9	9	0	0	25,622,000	21,442,000
Total	**162**	**149**	**64**	**37**	**$601,039,000**	**$443,248,000**

In addition, most responding urban LEAs did not receive any SIG funds for Tier III schools for which they applied. Sixteen urban districts included Tier III schools in their applications, but only four of the 16 districts received funding. Eleven districts reported that their SEA required them to seek funds for Tier III schools, but seven of these districts did not receive awards for any Tier III schools. Twenty-six districts indicated they did not include any Tier III schools in their applications.

Examples of How the SIG Models Were Implemented[11]

Restart Model

At the end of the 2009-10 school year, the Baltimore City Public Schools elected to implement the Restart Model at Chinquapin Middle School, a Tier I school that struggled with low achievement and declining enrollment, as well as having significant student discipline and behavior problems. In the fall of 2010, the school reopened as Baltimore IT Academy, operated by the non-profit Chesapeake Lighthouse Foundation in grades 6-8, and offered a technology-infused curriculum that will prepare students for careers in information technology. Instructional techniques at Baltimore IT Academy utilize multimedia and multisensory education tools, relevant software, and other technologies to improve learning in all subject areas.

The Baltimore IT Academy provides cutting-edge technology such as computers, SMART Boards, and data projectors in every classroom, and uses online resources related to the coursework to provide a rich, scientific, and technological environment. Despite initial negativity from students and parents about the changes made in the school, teachers have reported that student engagement and motivation have increased with the introduction of technology across the curriculum. The new principal has also worked to embed positive behavioral supports and interventions into the school program, which has improved the school's climate and created a culture focused on teaching and learning.

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[11] The Council of the Great City Schools maintains a databank of all SIG schools in its member school districts.

Transformation Model

The Seattle Public Schools used the Transformation Model to divide Cleveland High School into two academies, the School of Engineering and Design and the School of Life Sciences—both of which are focused on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields. Each academy created a unique school culture where learning is personalized and students feel a shared sense of community and personal responsibility. The school used a project-based approach to build 21st century learning skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, oral presentation, and how to work effectively in teams.

The new Cleveland High School provides a longer school day to accelerate learning for students that enter ninth-grade behind their peers. The extended learning time is also used to increase math instruction, ensuring that every student completes Calculus by the time they graduate. The district is also offering enriched professional development for its faculty, providing on-site coaching and access to a national network of experienced educators

Turnaround Model

Lee High School implemented the Turnaround Model as one of Houston Independent School District's Apollo 20 schools, a portfolio of both traditional and charter schools managed in partnership with Harvard's EdLabs. Like its Apollo 20 counterparts, the turnaround at Lee High was guided by five broad strategies: (1) effective teachers and principals at every school; (2) more instructional time; (3) data-driven instruction; (4) high-dosage tutoring; and (5) a culture of high expectations and no excuses.

The Apollo 20 schools saw dramatic improvements in school culture, with higher attendance rates and a safer learning environment. In addition, every sixth and ninth grade student received 60-80 minutes of intensive math tutoring. The program's annual review by Harvard researchers determined that Apollo 20 schools improved their achievement in mathematics by 0.276 standard deviations. In 2011, 82% of students at Lee High School passed the state standardized test in mathematics, up from 67% just one year earlier.

Closure Model

In 2010, the Board of Education of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools voted to close Waddell High School, which was the lowest-rated full-sized high school in the district based on a metric that measured per-pupil spending and academic achievement. Waddell High School, first opened to students in the 2001-2002 year, never reached the enrollment number the facility was designed for, operating at just two-thirds capacity in 2009-10.

With the decision to close, students attending Waddell High School, which had a 71 percent proficiency level, were given the option of transferring to two higher-performing high schools: Harding High School or South Mecklenburg High School, both of which scored 87 percent proficiency in 2009-10. A popular K-8 magnet school offering a World Languages and Language Immersion program moved into the facility that housed Waddell High School, and the building was renamed the Waddell Language Academy.

Funding for Districtwide Activities

In addition to these school-level activities, approximately 68 percent of responding districts receiving SIG grants used part of their awards to fund districtwide activities (25 of 37 respondents). These activities included such things as funding turnaround staff and materials, transportation services, classroom materials, data systems, professional development, tutoring services, and community outreach. The average grant amount for these districtwide activities was $913,000 over the three-year period.

Partners in School Turnarounds

The primary responsibility for turning around struggling schools lies with district and school leaders, although there can be additional partners and agents that support the process. The survey asked urban districts about two kinds of partners they worked with in turning around low-achieving schools: for-profit companies or turnaround firms, and not-for-profit "external partners" or turnaround organizations.

The for-profit companies/turnaround firms and not-for-profit partners/turnaround organizations that districts contracted with were reported largely to be reliable partners. Survey respondents indicated that they would consider using them again with additional schools that were deemed in need of turnaround. In a few cases, however, respondents indicated that they would not consider using the external partners again, which suggests that the firm or organization did not add sufficient value to the district's school turnaround efforts (at least in its initial year). Tables listing companies and organizations that were used, and how many SIG schools they were involved with, can be found in the appendices of this report.

Impressions of the SIG Program and Application

Survey respondents reported being generally satisfied with the services and supports they received from their states regarding the SIG program and the application process. In a question that asked survey takers to rate how much they agreed or disagreed with statements about their state departments of education, most districts said they strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that:

- The state department of education was helpful in providing resources and guidance for the SIG application;

- The state department of education took into consideration the needs of our district, in terms of size, demographic makeup and past school performance, in its administration of the SIG program; and

- The state department of education granted sufficient SIG funding for our district to implement lasting reform of our persistently lowest-achieving schools.

Districts also reported being generally satisfied with the SIG program. Most respondents strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that:

- The SIG program gives our district the autonomy and flexibility to effectively implement and oversee school turnarounds; and

- The SIG program has a strong chance of significantly improving our district's persistently lowest-achieving schools.

For each of these five statements, only 12 percent to 23 percent of respondents indicated that they "somewhat disagreed" with the statement, and only 3 percent to 5 percent indicated that they "strongly disagreed" with the statement.

Table R. Percent of Great City School Districts with Varying Impressions of the SIG Program

Great City School districts agreeing or disagreeing with the following statement?	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The state department of education was helpful in providing resources and guidance for the SIG application	28%	55%	15%	3%
The state department of education took into consideration the needs of our district, in terms of size, demographic makeup and past school performance, in its administration of the SIG program	33%	45%	20%	5%
The state department of education granted sufficient SIG funding for our district to implement lasting reform of our persistently lowest-achieving schools	40%	30%	23%	8%
The SIG program gives our district the autonomy and flexibility to effectively implement and oversee school turnarounds	25%	53%	18%	5%
The SIG program has a strong chance of significantly improving our district's persistently lowest-achieving schools	45%	43%	13%	0%

Synopsis and Discussion

The nation's Great City Schools have made substantial academic progress over the last several years, and new evidence from the National Assessment of Educational Progress indicates that that progress is both significant and greater than gains seen nationally. This result is as it should be, for urban schools continue to perform at lower levels—on average—than the nation at large.

The NAEP results suggesting that urban schools may be catching up with the nation are encouraging to be sure. Yet evidence also indicates that large numbers of individual schools continue to under-perform despite the broad strategic reforms that are producing the systemic gains. The results of this study, for example, show that in the process of identifying the nation's most persistently failing public schools (Tier I and II), some 646 or 30 percent were schools that were part of the Great City Schools coalition.

The data were also clear that the burden of low-performing schools falls most heavily on African American and Hispanic students since some 7.4 percent of all African American students in the nation are enrolled in a SIG school and 4.3 percent of Hispanic students are, compared with 2.9 percent of all students.

To better understand what the nation's large city school districts were doing to turn around these low-achieving schools and how the federal government's School Improvement Grants (SIG) program was aiding or failing to aid that process, the Council of the Great City Schools surveyed its membership on the strategies they were using before the grants and since.

Survey results indicated that many large city school districts were pursuing school turnaround strategies of one kind or another well before the SIG program received its large infusion of funding under ARRA. Some of these strategies were connected to the sanctions required under No Child Left Behind; some were independent of the federal law, but many were similar to reforms that the new SIG program eventually called for.

Before the ARRA version of SIG, the Great City Schools reported pursuing turnaround efforts over a five-year period in some 284 schools that were similar to what SIG eventually required, including closing 41 schools for academic reasons. Replacing staff from these poorly performing schools was the most frequently used strategy, followed by removing only the principal. These two strategies were also the ones that urban educators perceived as being the most effective in their efforts to improve student achievement. Reopening schools as either charters or magnet theme schools were the least often used strategies, and state takeover of schools received no positive ratings from urban educators.

The Council also asked its urban school district members what other turnaround strategies they used. Responding districts indicated that their most effective other reforms included such strategies as using extended-learning time, establishing portfolios of schools under the aegis of district leadership, professional development, and redesigning schools.

Conversely, the districts indicated they faced a number of consistent challenges in putting these reforms into place. The most substantial included removing ineffective teachers, community resistance to school closures, recruiting teachers for schools being turned around, and securing funding for the reforms—something that the expanded SIG program has helped address.

Since SIG was revamped and expanded in 2009 and put into place in the fall of 2010, the number of urban schools being turned around has increased significantly. Survey responses indicated that some 298 Tier I and II schools in the Great City Schools coalition had received SIG awards and were undergoing one kind of turnaround or another. An additional 91 Tier III urban schools were also pursuing reforms. Districts with the fewest numbers of SIG schools included Anchorage, Broward County, Nashville, Hillsborough County, and Long Beach. Responding districts with the largest number of SIG schools included Detroit, St. Louis, Boston, Pittsburgh, and Providence. Not all schools applying for SIG awards received them and not all schools receiving awards got all the money they requested.

The reforms being followed by the urban districts under the expanded SIG program vary from site-to-site but generally follow what is outlined in the law. The Great City Schools reported using the transformation model in 54 percent of their SIG schools, the turnaround model in 36 percent of their SIG schools, the restart model in five percent of their SIG schools, and closures in five percent. City school systems were far more likely to use the turnaround model than other SIG schools nationwide and less likely to use the transformation model.

A considerable number of city school systems also reported receiving late notice of their Round I grants and having insufficient time for planning, recruiting, or providing professional development to the teachers in the affected schools. Some 27 of 43 districts responding to the survey indicated they were informed about their awards after July 2010. The research suggests that such hasty implementation is likely to cause initial problems, but that subsequent years should see a smoother process and better results than what the first year alone is likely to produce.

While first year impact on student achievement is not yet available on a broad basis, responses to the Council's survey indicate that most city school districts were satisfied with the SIG program. In addition, responding cities reported that the program gave them ample flexibility to implement turnarounds and that the SIG program had a strong chance of significantly improving student achievement in these persistently low-achieving schools.

Any new program put into place by the federal government or any other entity for that matter is likely to have initial implementation problems. One might have actually expected a program of the size and complexity of SIG to have more first-year challenges than it actually did. What is clear, however, is that the scale and funding of the program provide an important and substantial new tool in the arsenal of many big city school districts as they work to implement both their broad systemic reforms and their more targeted school-by-school turnaround efforts. Together, the strategies promise to make a significant difference in the academic attainment of the nation's urban school students.

Appendices

Tier I and Tier II Schools by District*

Great City School District	District Tier I & Tier II Schools	Total Schools in District	Tier I & Tier II as Percentage of District Schools	Percentage of State's Tier I & Tier II Schools	Schools Awarded	Percent of District Schools Awarded
Philadelphia	98	275	35.6%	22.7%	27	27.6%
Detroit	47	199	23.6%	20.6%	6	12.8%
St. Louis	22	96	22.9%	4.8%	12	54.5%
Boston	31	138	22.5%	31.0%	10	32.3%
Pittsburgh	13	69	18.8%	3.0%	7	53.8%
Providence	10	54	18.5%	23.3%	4	40.0%
Indianapolis	12	80	15.0%	4.1%	2	16.7%
Cleveland	16	108	14.8%	2.0%	12	75.0%
Rochester	9	61	14.8%	2.1%	5	55.6%
Des Moines	9	62	14.5%	7.0%	4	44.4%
Newark	10	74	13.5%	4.9%	5	50.0%
Buffalo	7	62	11.3%	1.6%	4	57.1%
Charleston	8	81	9.9%	28.6%	2	28.6%
Cincinnati	6	64	9.4%	0.8%	6	100.0%
San Francisco	10	114	8.8%	0.4%	10	100.0%
Chicago	56	643	8.7%	7.6%	4	7.7%
Dayton	3	36	8.3%	0.4%	3	100.0%
Jackson	5	61	8.2%	2.2%	1	20.0%
Kansas City	6	74	8.1%	1.3%	3	50.0%
Denver	12	153	7.8%	3.8%	9	81.8%
Richmond	4	54	7.4%	6.2%	3	75.0%
Birmingham	6	83	7.2%	2.3%	0	0.0%
Caddo Parish	5	78	6.4%	1.7%	0	0.0%
Wichita	6	94	6.4%	12.2%	1	16.7%
Minneapolis	7	111	6.3%	2.4%	6	85.7%
Little Rock	3	49	6.1%	1.1%	3	100.0%
Baltimore	12	204	5.9%	16.7%	7	58.3%
Duval County	11	188	5.9%	1.3%	11	100.0%
Milwaukee	12	220	5.5%	19.7%	11	91.7%
District of Columbia	9	172	5.2%	6.9%	9	100.0%

Great City School District	District Tier I & Tier II Schools	Total Schools in District	Tier I & Tier II as Percentage of District Schools	Percentage of State's Tier I & Tier II Schools	Schools Awarded	Percent of District Schools Awarded
Columbus	7	136	5.15%	0.9%	7	100.0%
Portland	4	93	4.30%	5.3%	3	75.0%
Dallas	11	260	4.23%	0.7%	2	18.2%
Omaha	4	98	4.08%	7.7%	0	0.0%
Memphis	8	200	4.00%	6.8%	8	100.0%
Norfolk	2	54	3.70%	3.1%	2	100.0%
Los Angeles	31	868	3.57%	1.1%	9	29.0%
Jefferson County (KY)	6	174	3.45%	5.6%	6	100.0%
Oakland	5	145	3.45%	0.2%	3	60.0%
Miami-Dade County	19	557	3.41%	2.3%	19	100.0%
Fort Worth	5	150	3.33%	0.3%	0	0.0%
Oklahoma City	3	95	3.16%	6.8%	3	100.0%
Albuquerque	5	175	2.86%	15.6%	2	40.0%
Clark County	10	351	2.85%	7.1%	2	20.0%
Seattle	3	106	2.83%	1.5%	3	100.0%
Fresno	3	107	2.80%	0.1%	3	100.0%
Houston	8	305	2.62%	0.5%	6	75.0%
Greensboro (NC)	3	120	2.50%	0.4%	1	33.3%
New York City	34	1,452	2.34%	7.8%	11	32.4%
San Diego	5	223	2.24%	0.2%	2	40.0%
East Baton Rouge	2	91	2.20%	0.7%	0	0.0%
Atlanta	2	114	1.75%	0.9%	2	100.0%
St. Paul	2	125	1.60%	0.7%	2	100.0%
Austin	2	128	1.56%	0.1%	2	100.0%
Toledo	1	67	1.49%	0.1%	0	0.0%
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	2	168	1.19%	0.3%	2	100.0%
Orange County (FL)	3	264	1.14%	0.4%	3	100.0%
Palm Beach County (FL)	3	266	1.13%	0.4%	3	100.0%
Sacramento	1	91	1.10%	0.0%	0	0.0%
Anchorage	1	98	1.02%	0.7%	0	0.0%
Broward County	3	325	0.92%	0.4%	3	100.0%
Nashville	1	141	0.71%	0.8%	0	0.0%
Hillsborough County (FL)	2	313	0.64%	0.2%	2	100.0%
Long Beach	0	94	0.00%	0.0%		
New Orleans	0	21	0.00%	0.0%		

* Shaded districts responded to the Council survey

Partners in School Turnaround

For-Profit Companies/Turnaround Firms

For-profit companies/turnaround firms that district(s) WOULD consider using in additional schools	Number of SIG-schools involved
NCS Pearson, Inc	4
A&J Education and Professional Consulting, LLC	3
American Alliance for Innovative Schools	3
EdisonLearning, Inc.	3
Education is Freedom	3
International Center for Leadership in Education	3
TAP Training	3
iStation	2
NAEP Cambium Learning	2
Study Island	2
ACT Inc.	1
America's Choice	1
Battelle for Kids	1
Center for Educational Improvement	1
Global Partnership	1
Model Secondary Schools Project, LLC	1
Northwest Evaluation Association	1
Pearson	1
Public Impact	1
Teachscape	1
For-profit companies/turnaround firms that district(s) would NOT consider using in additional schools	**Number of SIG-schools involved**
Synesgi, Inc.	11
NY School Turnaround	3

Non-Profit External Partners and Turnaround Organizations

Not-for-profit external partners/turnaround organizations that district(s) WOULD consider using in additional schools	Number of SIG-schools involved
Johns Hopkins Talent Development	6
City Year	6
ASCD	4
EdLabs (Harvard University)	4
Mass Insight	4
Teach Plus	3
Community In Schools	3
Achievement Network	3
National Equity Project	3
Paragon Education Network	3
Barry University	2
BRAIVE Foundation	2
Florida Atlantic University	2
Florida International University	2
High Schools That Work	2
National Education Association (NEA)	2
University of Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program	2
Academy of Urban School Leadership	1
American Psychiatric Association	1
Chesapeake Science Point	1
Friendship Schools	1
Living Classrooms Found	1
New Tech Network	1
Powerful Schools	1
United Way	1
Not-for-profit external partners/turnaround organizations that district(s) would NOT consider using in additional schools	Number of SIG-schools involved
City Connects	6
Talent Development Middle Grades Program (Johns Hopkins University)	4
Project GRAD	3

Useful Tools and Resources on School Turnarounds

While each school district has a unique set of goals and requirements to satisfy when developing a school turnaround program, it is nevertheless helpful to look at the best tools and resources for school turnaround that are available. We asked respondents to share what was most helpful for them in their efforts, including any research reports, case studies, technical assistance, or other tools they used.

Articles, books and reports

- The School Turnaround Field Guide by FSG Social Impact Advisors, Link: www.wallacefoundation.org/Pages/about-fsg-school-turnaround-field-guide.aspx
- Driven to Succeed: High-Performing, High-Poverty, Turnaround Middle Schools, by the Charles A Dana Center (University of Texas at Austin). Published in 2002. Link: http://www.utdanacenter.org/research/driven.php.
- School Improvement – Aligned!, by ASCD. Published in 2005. Link: http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/summer05/vol62/num09/School-Improvement%E2%80%94Aligned!.aspx
- Structuring Out of School Time to Improve Academic Achievement, by the National Center on Education Statistics. Published in 2009. Link: http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=WWC2009012
- Turning Around Chronically Low Performing Schools, by What Works Clearing House. Link: http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/practiceguide.aspx?sid=7
- Successful School Turnarounds: Seven Steps for District Leaders (webcast and slides), by the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. Link: http://www.centerforcsri.org/webcasts/school-turnarounds/
- Turnaround Schools: District Strategies for Success and Sustainability, by Education Week. Link: http://www.edweek.org/ew/collections/ers/turnaround.html
- The Turnaround Challenge: Why America's best opportunity to dramatically improve student achievement lies in our worst performing schools, by Mass Insight Education. Link: http://www.massinsight.org/stg/research/challenge/

Internet resources and web portals

- Center on Innovation and Improvement, www.centerii.org
- Public Impact, www.publicimpact.com/school-turnarounds
- Darden-Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education, University of Virginia, www.darden.virginia.edu/web/darden-curry-ple
- Consortium on Chicago Schools Research, University of Chicago, ccsr.uchicago.edu
- Teacher Advancement Program, www.tapsystem.org
- Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL), www.mcrel.org/topics/SchoolImprovement
- International Center for Leadership in Education, www.leadered.com

About the Council of the Great City Schools

The **Council of the Great City Schools** is a coalition of 65 of the nation's largest urban public school systems. The organization's Board of Directors is composed of the Superintendent, CEO or Chancellor of Schools, and one School Board member from each member city. An Executive Committee of 24 individuals, equally divided in number between Superintendents and School Board members, provides regular oversight of the 501(c)(3) organization. The composition of the organization makes it the only independent national group representing both the governing and administrative arms of urban education and the only education association whose sole purpose is urban.

The mission of the Council is to advocate for urban public education and assist its members in their improvement and reform. The Council provides services to its members in the areas of legislation, research, communications, curriculum and instruction, and management. The group convenes two major conferences each year; conducts studies of urban school conditions and trends; and operates ongoing networks of senior school district managers with responsibilities for such areas as federal programs, operations, finance, personnel, communications, research, and technology. Finally, the organization informs the nation's policymakers, the media, and the public of the successes and challenges of schools in the nation's Great Cities. Urban school leaders from across the country use the organization as a source of information and an umbrella for their joint activities and concerns.

The Council was founded in 1956 and incorporated in 1961, and has its headquarters in Washington, D.C.

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