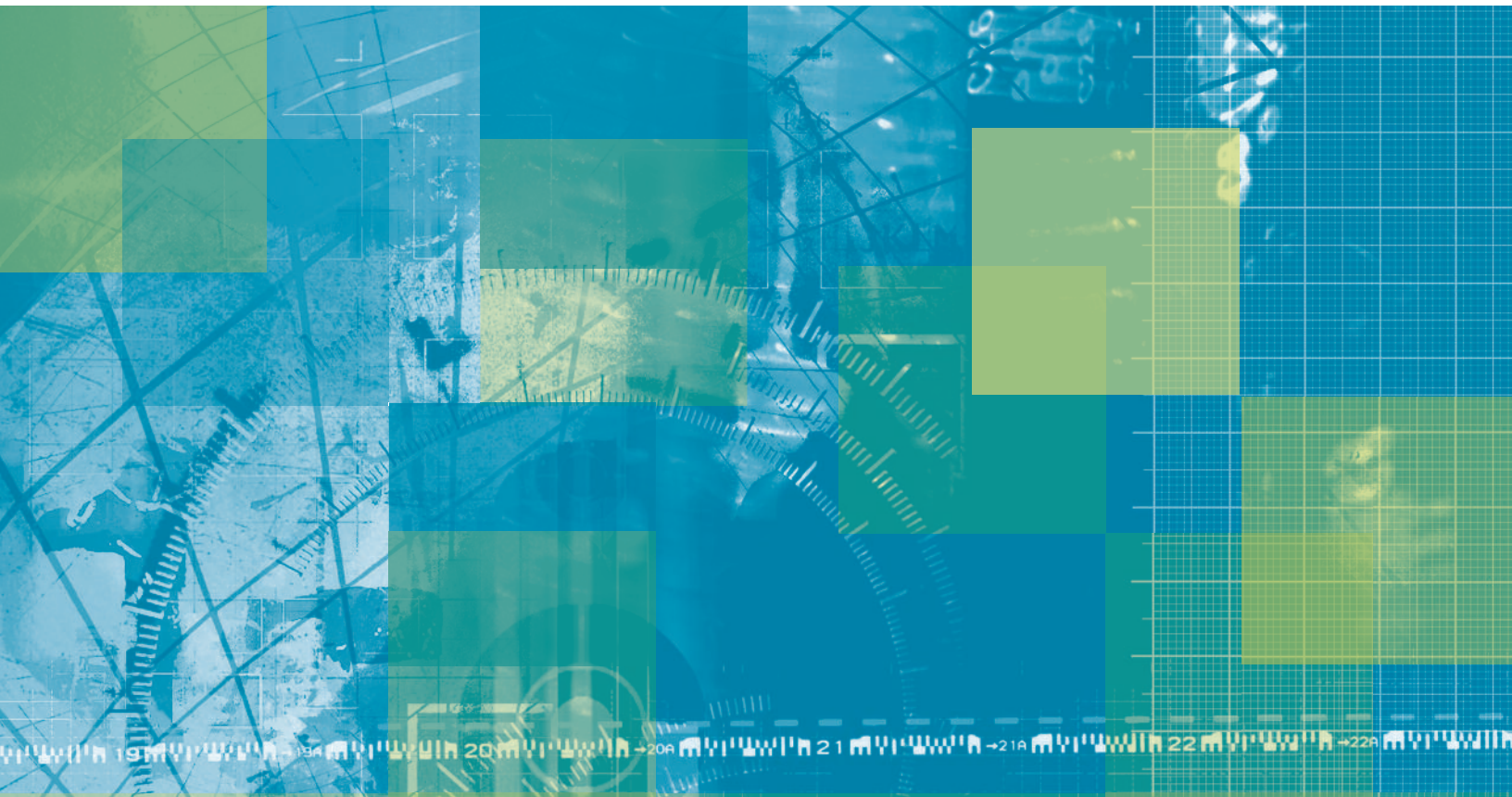


Opportunities and Obstacles: Implementing Stimulus-Funded School Improvement Grants in Maryland, Michigan, and Idaho



Opportunities and Obstacles: Implementing Stimulus-Funded School Improvement Grants in Maryland, Michigan, and Idaho

Introduction

State and local educators encountered both opportunities and obstacles in their first year of implementing the School Improvement Grants (SIGs) funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). These ARRA SIGs, as they are called, “are forcing more conversation about in-depth change,” noted Linda Forward, director of the Office of Education Improvement and Innovation at the Michigan Department of Education.

In 2009, the ARRA, better known as the economic stimulus package, provided \$3 billion for SIGs to help reform persistently low-achieving schools, on top of the \$546 million that had already been appropriated for fiscal year 2009 for school improvement grants authorized by section 1003(g) of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. With the extra ARRA appropriation, states received a total of more than \$3.5 billion for section 1003(g) SIGs; these are three-year grants that must be spent by September 30, 2013. This infusion of additional money was also accompanied by new requirements from the U.S. Department of Education (ED) that targeted ARRA SIG funds on the lowest-performing 5% of schools within each state and that limited these schools to using one of four school improvement models. These models include (1) transformation, which entails replacing the school principal and undertaking three other specific reforms; (2) turnaround, which involves replacing the principal and many of the school staff; (3) restart, which means becoming a charter or privately managed school; and (4) school closure. (More information about these models can be found later in this report in box B.) School year 2010-11 was the first year these grants were implemented.

This report by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) examines the first year of ARRA SIG implementation in Maryland, Michigan, and Idaho. We intentionally selected these states, as well as schools within these states, to represent different geographic locations and different types of schools and improvement models. We also brought to bear our knowledge about past school improvement efforts drawn from six years of prior CEP research in Maryland, eight years in Michigan, and studies in California, Georgia, New York, and Ohio. The results of this earlier research on school improvement are described in a series of studies listed at the end of this report and available at www.cep-dc.org.

Data for this study were collected from interviews conducted between September 2011 and February 2012 with 14 state and district officials and 21 principals, teachers, and other school staff in the three states. CEP staff conducted case studies of school-level implementation in four Maryland schools, four Michigan schools, and three Idaho schools; study schools included both those that received ARRA SIG funds and low-achieving schools that did not receive these grants. CEP staff also gathered information for this study by reviewing ARRA SIG applications and other state and school documents. More information about study methods can be found in the online appendix that accompanies this report, also available at www.cep-dc.org.

Key Findings

Our analysis led to several key findings that cut across multiple states:

The state and local officials we interviewed in Maryland and Michigan had more positive views about the appropriateness of the SIG requirements than did those in Idaho.

State and local officials in all three states reported that ARRA SIG funds have allowed them to provide more intensive services in targeted schools and to work with their lowest-performing schools to bring about major improvement. The states differed, though, in their level of enthusiasm about program requirements. Maryland interviewees were the most positive; they generally thought the ARRA SIG eligibility criteria identified the right schools and were satisfied with the improvement models. Michigan officials were supportive of many program requirements but would like to see the eligibility criteria expanded to include additional low-achieving schools. Interviewees in Idaho, however, noted that several key ARRA SIG provisions—such as the criteria for identifying the lowest-performing schools and the requirements to replace principals and staff in schools using certain improvement models—are less workable in a sparsely populated, rural setting.

Views differed among the three states about whether the amount of ARRA SIG funding was appropriate, but state and local officials in all three states expressed concern about whether reforms can be sustained after this funding ends.

State officials in Maryland and Michigan felt the amounts of ARRA SIG funds were sufficient, although Michigan officials would like to fund more schools for a longer period. An Idaho official, however, felt the amounts were too large. In all three states, state and local officials worried about sustaining reforms after the ARRA SIG money runs out.

All three states are providing some common types of monitoring and assistance to ARRA SIG schools, including assigning state-level coaches or assistants to work with leaders and teachers in these schools, requiring school progress reports, and coordinating a network of ARRA SIG grantees.

Although part of the job of the state-level coaches is to monitor schools' implementation of their reform efforts, most interviewees from ARRA SIG schools nevertheless appreciate having this assistance. Other types of state monitoring and technical assistance varied among the three states.

ARRA SIG requirements undervalue the critical role of districts in school improvement, according to state officials in Michigan and Idaho.

Officials in all three states emphasized the need for changes at the district level, particularly in dysfunctional districts, to strengthen districts' capacity to support school improvement. Michigan and Idaho state officials would like to see more explicit provisions for district capacity-building in the federal ARRA SIG program; in fact, an Idaho official interviewed for this study noted that the federal requirements run counter to the state's own strategy of focusing improvement efforts on districts more than schools. Maryland state officials, by contrast, felt the current

ARRA SIG framework gives them sufficient room to build on and expand prior school improvement efforts at the district level.

Many of the ARRA SIG schools in our study, as well as the non-recipient schools, are using similar improvement strategies that emphasize instructional coaching, extended learning time, and a focus on school climate.

Despite being located in different states and serving different types of communities and students, most of the schools that received ARRA SIG funding—as well as some of the non-funded comparison schools—are using instructional coaches to deliver professional development and are extending learning time. Most of the ARRA SIG schools are also taking steps to improve school climate—often as a first priority for reform—through such means as improving safety and discipline, building a sense of community among students and staff, and establishing a vision centered on student achievement. In addition, most of the ARRA SIG schools we studied are taking advantage of state assistance for improvement, such as consultations, site visits, and state-facilitated networks.

In Michigan and Idaho, the schools in our study that received ARRA SIG awards are undertaking more intensive and different improvement strategies than non-recipient schools.

The ARRA SIG schools studied in Michigan and Idaho had more specialized staff, such as instructional coaches, and more materials and technologies to support their improvement strategies than non-recipient schools, which had fewer or none of these extra resources. In Michigan, for example, ARRA SIG schools were able to hire multiple coaches to provide on-site observations, feedback, and professional development for their teachers, while non-recipient schools used classroom teachers who doubled as coaches and provided similar but less intensive services. In Idaho, the two ARRA SIG schools studied had sufficient resources to fully implement their improvement plans, while the non-recipient school had to scale back elements of its plan and rely on fewer special staff. In Maryland, non-recipient schools also had fewer instructional coaches than ARRA SIG schools. However, the principals of these non-recipient schools in Maryland said schools had less need for these specialized resources because they did not have the same school climate problems found in ARRA SIG schools and because they have invested in technology and additional teacher professional development in lieu of coaches.

Replacing teachers and principals was the challenge most often cited by both ARRA SIG schools and non-recipient schools in our study.

Finding and retaining teachers and principals has been a major challenge in the three states, particularly in ARRA SIG schools that chose reform models that require staff and principal replacement. Rural schools in Idaho were especially hard pressed to attract staff, but this was also cited a challenge by most ARRA SIG schools in Michigan and Maryland. Other challenges varied, depending on unique state and local circumstances; for example, schools in some urban districts noted challenges in dealing with central office bureaucracy.

Officials in both the ARRA SIG schools and non-recipient schools in our study seem optimistic that they are on the right track toward improvement.

Most ARRA SIG recipients, as well as the comparison schools, reported seeing an improvement in school climate, and several reported improvements in students' motivation to learn and staff collaboration. Some schools reported gains in student achievement, but several said it is too soon to tell.

State and local interviewees in all three states would like to see some changes in ARRA SIG requirements.

The greatest demands for additional flexibility in federal requirements came from Idaho, where interviewees felt the criteria for identifying and funding schools, the improvement models, the emphasis on schools rather than district capacity, the staff replacement requirements, and other aspects of the program were inappropriate for rural schools. State and local interviewees in Michigan suggested a few changes, including broadening the eligibility criteria to encompass more low-achieving schools and funding schools for a longer time period. Maryland state and local interviewees were generally satisfied, although some would like to see a greater emphasis on non-academic services that affect student achievement in poor schools.

The sections that follow elaborate on these key findings and describe additional findings from our study. The report is divided into two parts: the first part focuses on state-level implementation of the ARRA SIG program and the second part on school-level implementation.

Readers who are interested in more detail about specific states and schools can find brief case studies for each of the participating schools on CEP's Web site (www.cep-dc.org). Included in these case studies are recent student achievement data, descriptions of the school's improvement strategies, and other relevant information.

State Implementation of the ARRA SIG Program

The state officials we interviewed had varying perspectives about ARRA SIGs and federal assistance in general. Maryland state officials expressed very positive views of the use of ARRA SIG funds and seemed optimistic about the potential for these grants to improve student achievement in recipient schools in their state. Maryland officials acknowledged, however, that the success of these schools will depend on whether the reforms can be sustained once the ARRA SIG funds are depleted. Michigan state officials were optimistic about some aspects of ARRA SIGs but would like to see changes in the program to meet the specific needs of schools in their state. The Idaho state official we interviewed expressed frustration with the ARRA SIG program in general, noting that its requirements and reform models fail to address the unique challenges and needs of rural schools. These differences seem to be related in part to how well the ARRA SIG requirements fit with the state's prior practices for identifying and serving districts and schools in need of improvement.

Officials in the three states had different views about whether ARRA SIG requirements accurately identified the schools most in need of improvement.

The requirements for allocating and using section 1003(g) school improvement funds, including ARRA SIG money, changed as a result of guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Education. Under the previous requirements, states awarded 1003(g) funds to districts based on a formula, although they had some leeway in determining which schools should be served and could require districts to submit a grant application.

Under new federal guidance, states must identify three tiers of schools eligible for ARRA SIGs, shown in **box A**. Tiers 1 and 2 consist of the “persistently lowest-achieving” schools, which receive highest priority for funding. Tier 3, which consists of other schools identified for improvement after failing to meet the accountability requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), may be considered for funding only after schools in tiers 1 and 2 have been funded. Federal guidance, although quite detailed, allows states some latitude in determining eligibility and includes some optional measures.

Box A. Eligibility criteria for ARRA SIG funding

U.S. Department of Education guidance contains criteria for identifying three tiers of schools in each state that are eligible for SIG funding under section 1003(g). The first two tiers are considered “persistently lowest-achieving schools” and receive top priority for funding. (“Title I schools” are those that receive federal funds for disadvantaged children through Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.)

Tier 1 consists of Title I schools that are in NCLB improvement, corrective action, or restructuring and have been identified by their state as “persistently lowest-achieving” because they are—

- (i) among the lowest-achieving 5% of Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring in the state or the lowest-achieving five such schools, 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 have been identified by their state as “persistently lowest-achieving” because they are—

- (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) high schools that have had a graduation rate of less than 60% over a number of years.

At its option, a state may identify additional schools as tier 1 or 2 schools if they meet certain criteria laid out in ED guidance.

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

Within the parameters for all three tiers, states have discretion in making several key decisions:

- The number of years of achievement that count for SIG eligibility
- The number of years of graduation rates that count for SIG eligibility
- The weighting of the two required factors used to determine the persistently lowest-achieving schools—specifically, the performance all students in the school on the most recent administration of state reading and mathematics tests and the school’s lack of progress on these tests over a number of years
- The number of years used to determine lack of progress

Source: U.S. Department of Education, 2011.

MARYLAND: THE RIGHT SCHOOLS WERE IDENTIFIED.

State officials in Maryland believe that the ARRA SIG criteria resulted in “absolutely the right schools” being identified for funding in their state, according to Maria Lamb, director of the state Program Improvement and Family Support branch at the Maryland State Department of Education. As state officials explained, many of these schools had already been in the later stages of improvement for several years under the NCLB requirements, and ARRA SIG

provided them with an opportunity to make major changes. ARRA SIG funding, as well as the turnaround and restart improvement models selected by Maryland's SIG schools, gave these schools a fresh beginning by allowing them to "start over" under NCLB's school improvement timeline and waive the NCLB requirements to offer school choice and supplemental tutoring. According to Maryland officials, the ARRA SIG program also gave school districts an opportunity to develop an appropriate infrastructure to support their low-performing schools.

Two Maryland districts—the urban Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) and the suburban Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) outside of Washington, D.C.—had schools in tiers 1 and 2. Altogether, 16 schools were identified as tier 1 and 2 schools and were eligible for ARRA SIG awards. Perhaps because the right schools were identified, both of the participating districts were "very eager" to apply for ARRA SIG funding, according to Lamb. Working closely with the state, the two districts determined which schools to include in their ARRA SIG applications. The districts applied for funding on behalf of 11 of these 16 schools, and all 11 were awarded grants.

MICHIGAN: MOST TIER 1 AND 2 SCHOOLS APPLIED, BUT STATE OFFICIALS WISH THAT ARRA SIG CRITERIA WOULD ALLOW MORE LOW-ACHIEVING SCHOOLS TO BE ELIGIBLE.

Michigan officials said that overall the schools identified as eligible for ARRA SIGs were the right schools in their state, although they would like to see the criteria expanded to make more low-achieving schools eligible for funding. As Linda Forward of the state Office of Education Improvement and Innovation explained, under the current federal rules, some academically needy Michigan schools were not eligible for grants because they made adequate yearly progress (AYP) under NCLB based on "safe harbor." (The law's safe harbor provision allows schools to make AYP even if they fall short of state proficiency benchmarks, as long as they increase the percentage of proficient students by 10%.) Some of these schools, Forward said, had lower proficiency rates than other schools that were eligible for ARRA SIG funds. "We want to just do the straight, top-to-bottom lowest 5%" regardless of AYP status, she added. Michigan submitted a request for a waiver to ED that would permit the state to do this, but the waiver was not approved. Even with the current eligibility criteria, Michigan was not short on applications. Of the 108 tier 1 and 2 schools in Michigan, districts submitted applications on behalf of 84, and 28 were awarded grants in the first year.

IDAHO: THE RIGHT SCHOOLS WERE NOT IDENTIFIED, AND SCHOOLS WERE RELUCTANT TO APPLY.

On the other end of the spectrum, Steve Underwood, director of the statewide system of support for the Idaho State Department of Education, expressed frustration with how schools were identified to apply for ARRA SIGs in his state. In Idaho, 13 schools were identified as tier 1 or 2 schools, and 6 were awarded grants in the first year. According to Underwood, who helps coordinate the SIG program, the federal definition of "persistently lowest-achieving" schools presents complications for Idaho and was written to best serve large, urban school districts. The identification requirements for tiers 1 and 2 are statistically unreliable, he maintained, because they compare the performance of very small schools—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. In addition, he said, some school and district leaders were surprised that their schools had been identified as among the lowest performing in the state and would contend that "we have 70% of our kids' proficient, and yet you're telling us we need to fire our principal?" (The transformation and turnaround models require schools to replace their principals, and typically principals are replaced under the restart model as well.) Underwood estimated that about half of the schools that were ultimately awarded ARRA SIGs were among those most in need of assistance in Idaho; he was not as sure about the remaining half.

District and school officials in Idaho were reluctant to apply for ARRA SIGs, said Underwood, noting that state officials "had to twist people's arms" to get them to do so. Underwood attributed this reluctance to a combination of reasons, including apprehension that "federal policy would go straight from D.C. down into their classroom" and the potential changes that would be required in schools that received funding. In addition, he explained, some of the schools identified for ARRA SIG in Idaho were located in closely knit communities, where the citizens thought their schools were doing just fine, and were therefore reluctant to be labeled as among the lowest-achieving.

All states maintained a rigorous application process for local ARRA SIG funds.

Federal guidance requires states to not only identify schools eligible for ARRA SIG funds but also award grants to the most worthy applicants using a competitive application process. All three states developed criteria for judging applications, as required by federal guidance, and all also worked with local leaders to help them revise their grant applications.

MARYLAND: APPLICANTS WENT THROUGH MULTIPLE REVISIONS.

Although Maryland officials knew that both the Baltimore City and Prince George's County districts would ultimately receive ARRA SIG funding, the state still maintained a rigorous application process. In order to apply, the state required districts to review and analyze data in the following areas as part of a comprehensive needs assessment: student and staff profiles; student achievement; rigorous curriculum and instructional programs; assessments; school culture and climate; student, family, and community support; organizational structure and resources; professional development; comprehensive and effective planning; and effective leadership.

The state gave districts three target dates by which to submit their applications, and state department of education officials provided numerous reviews and time for questions and comments between each submission. Ultimately, the state also developed and applied a scoring tool to evaluate the quality of the needs assessments completed by the applicants. All 11 schools that ultimately received SIG money chose to use either the restart or turnaround model.

MICHIGAN: APPLICATIONS WERE TIED TO NEEDS ASSESSMENTS.

In Michigan, the 108 tier 1 and 2 schools that were eligible for the first round of ARRA SIG funding were spread throughout the state, mostly in urban and suburban districts. Michigan required districts applying for ARRA SIGs to conduct an analysis of each school's needs using the state's Comprehensive Needs Assessment, which was developed to implement NCLB, or a similar tool. Districts were required to base their grant applications on this assessment. Michigan determined which schools would receive ARRA SIG awards using a state-developed rubric that evaluated six key elements of the applications, including applicants' analyses of different types of data, their use of these analyses to select school improvement models, and the inclusion of external partners, among others.

The 28 schools that received first-round ARRA SIG awards are using either the turnaround or transformation model. While expressing regret that more schools could not be funded, Michigan state officials believe that their application process resulted in good funding decisions. "The winning proposals had coherent plans. They really took a look at their school and their data," said Mark Coscarella, assistant director of the Office of Education Improvement and Innovation, who helped oversee the awarding of the grants.

IDAHO: STATE OFFICIALS WORKED CLOSELY WITH APPLICANTS.

Similar to the application processes in Maryland and Michigan, Idaho state education officials worked closely with the tier 1 and 2 schools, most of them in rural areas, that applied for ARRA SIG funding. The state developed a scoring guide to judge the final applications. According to Steve Underwood, who was involved in reviewing the SIG applications, state officials wanted to help ensure that every applicant was successful—particularly because many districts were reluctant to apply for the grants. There were multiple rounds of discussion and feedback between state officials and district administrators about the proposal process, and not a single applicant was awarded a grant on the first try.

Six of the state's schools received ARRA SIG awards, and all elected to use the transformation model. In the end, said Underwood, the main difference between the winning and unfunded proposals was the district's capacity to

assist with school improvement. The winning districts had “put together a much better plan for what their vision was for that school and how it would fit within the larger district context,” he explained.

Officials in the three states had different views about the appropriateness of the amount of ARRA SIG funding, and some raised concerns about whether reforms can be sustained after this funding runs out.

Federal funding to improve low-performing schools has been available since NCLB was enacted in 2002, but amounts were relatively small for the first several years. With the ARRA appropriation, federal funding for section 1003(g) school improvement grants in fiscal year 2009 increased sevenfold compared with the previous year’s appropriation. As a result of this increase and the new requirements that targeted SIG funds on a smaller number of schools, the size of the individual school grants increased dramatically. Prior to ARRA SIG, school improvement grants amounted about \$50,000 per school in Michigan and up to \$20,000 or more in Maryland (CEP, 2010; CEP, 2009). **Table 1** shows the average total school-level ARRA SIG awards, as well as the average annual SIG amount per pupil, for Maryland, Michigan, and Idaho.

Table 1. School-level ARRA SIG awards for 2010-11

| State | Average total ARRA SIG award over 3 years | Average annual per pupil ARRA SIG award | Increase in annual per pupil funding due to ARRA SIG |
|-------------------------|---|---|--|
| Maryland | \$2,710,000 | \$1,560 | 13% |
| Michigan | \$2,960,000 | \$1,420 | 16% |
| Idaho | \$530,000 | \$650 | 11% |
| <i>National average</i> | <i>\$2,540,000</i> | <i>\$1,330</i> | <i>15%</i> |

Table reads: For school year 2010-11, the average school-level ARRA SIG award in Maryland was \$2,710,000 over three years, or an average amount of \$1,560 per pupil annually across all recipient schools. As a result of the ARRA SIG money, the annual per pupil funding in the recipient schools increased by an average of 13%.

Source: Hurlburt et al., 2011.

MARYLAND: ARRA SIG AMOUNTS WERE SUFFICIENT, AND PLANNING FOR SUSTAINABILITY LOOKS PROMISING.

In Maryland, the “significance of the money for the ARRA SIG is a very big deal,” said Ann Chafin, assistant state superintendent in the Division of Student, Family, and School Support; never before has the state had this level of funding for school improvement. Maryland received a total of \$47 million for section 1003(g) school improvement grants for school year 2010-11, far more than the \$7 million it would have received without the ARRA supplement. Prior to ARRA SIG, districts and schools had never had “enough money to truly turn around the school that has been low-performing for many years,” said Chafin. With ARRA SIG, however, state education officials believe the funding is more than enough in some cases.

Maryland state officials were cautiously optimistic about the prospect of sustaining state and school-level programs and services once ARRA SIG funding is gone. Lamb said that the state has begun working with central office staff in SIG recipient districts on a five-year sustainability plan, “but we don’t have the details worked out yet.” Maryland

was also the only one of the three states to receive a grant through the first round of the federal Race to the Top competition. Initiated with ARRA funding, Race to the Top is designed to encourage and reward states that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform, including turning around low-performing schools. Chafin explained that a major focus of ARRA SIGs, as well as federal Race to the Top grants, “is to make sure that we are having an impact at the central office level . . . that is in and of itself part of the sustainability piece.”

MICHIGAN: AMOUNTS PER SCHOOL WERE RIGHT, BUT STATE OFFICIALS WOULD LIKE TO FUND MORE SCHOOLS FOR A LONGER TIME.

In Michigan, the strings attached to the ARRA SIG funding have given the state an opportunity to be more focused and precise in what it requires of schools, state officials said. The program has also provided the state department of education with funding to do things that can help schools show progress. Michigan received a total of more than \$100 million for section 1003(g) school improvement grants in school year 2009-10, about five times what it would have gotten without ARRA. While individual local grant amounts appeared adequate, Michigan officials expressed concern that there was not enough money to reach a larger number of academically needy schools. Some of these unfunded schools have been in improvement for several years under the NCLB accountability requirements but are not eligible for ARRA SIGs under the new federal guidance. Others applied for grants but the state was not able to fund their applications. “Clearly, there’s not enough money, and I never thought I would say that,” reported Forward. She said Michigan feels caught between the need to really impact schools with ARRA SIG funds and the need to serve all schools that require improvement. “There are more schools genuinely in need of the funds, but we do not want to water down the amount given to a school just to be able to add more schools,” she said.

State officials in Michigan were also concerned about sustaining the school improvement efforts after SIG funding ends, particularly because it is unclear whether funding will ever again reach 2010-11 levels as state funds continue to decline. “We’re doing it in a state where our schools have lost substantial funding in the last two years,” said Forward. Michigan state officials do not anticipate increases in state funding in the near future. Forward said she has been asking grantees how they will be able to sustain progress after the three-year grants go away.

IDAHO: ARRA SIG AMOUNTS WERE TOO LARGE AND UNSUSTAINABLE.

Steve Underwood expressed concern about the sustainability of ARRA SIG reforms in Idaho schools and noted that the amount of funding is in some ways excessive and inappropriate for his state, given the small number of schools and small population. For school year 2010-11 Idaho received about \$12.5 million, an enormous increase over the \$2 million the state would have gotten without the ARRA supplement. In some schools, the ARRA SIG award of roughly \$500,000 increased their annual operating budgets by more than 50% when spread over three years, according to Underwood. This could set up schools for failure, he added, because once the money goes away some schools must readjust to operating with substantially decreased funding.

States are experiencing unique challenges with their selected ARRA SIG models.

Federal guidance requires districts applying for ARRA SIGs on behalf of eligible schools to choose one of four school improvement models prescribed by ED. These models are described briefly in **box B**.

BOX B. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT MODELS

Federal guidance requires schools receiving ARRA SIG funds 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. (This model allows schools to “start over” under NCLB’s school improvement timeline and waive the NCLB requirements to offer school choice and supplemental educational services.)
- **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. (This model allows schools to “start over” under NCLB’s school improvement timeline and waive the NCLB requirements to offer school choice and supplemental educational services.)
- **School closure:** Close a school and enroll its students in other schools in the district that are higher-achieving.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, 2011.

Table 2 shows the school improvement models being carried out by schools that received the first round of ARRA SIG funds in Maryland, Michigan, and Idaho, as well as across the nation. As in the nation as a whole, the transformation model was the most frequently chosen model in Michigan and the one used exclusively in Idaho. By contrast, no Maryland school used the transformation model; instead, 55% of that state’s schools chose the turnaround model, and 45% chose the restart model.

Table 2. Percentage of schools receiving ARRA SIG funds that chose various school improvement models, 2010-11

| State | Transformation | Turnaround | Restart | Closure | Total number of schools |
|---------------|----------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-------------------------|
| Maryland | 0% | 55% | 45% | 0% | 11 |
| Michigan | 68% | 32% | 0% | 0% | 28 |
| Idaho | 100% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 6 |
| <i>Nation</i> | <i>74%</i> | <i>20%</i> | <i>4%</i> | <i>2%</i> | <i>820</i> |

Table reads: In Maryland, 55% of the 11 schools awarded ARRA SIG funds in 2010-11 chose the turnaround model of improvement and 45% chose the restart model.

Sources: Analysis by the Center on Education Policy of data in Hurlburt et al., 2011 for Maryland, Michigan, and Idaho; and Hurlburt et al., 2011 for national percentages.

MARYLAND: STATE OFFICIALS LIKE THE TURNAROUND AND RESTART MODELS BUT WANT LONGER TIMELINES AND A GREATER FOCUS ON STUDENTS' WELL-BEING.

Although state officials in Maryland said they were generally satisfied with the turnaround and restart models, they would like to see more flexibility in the models, especially for implementation timelines. Longer timelines could allow districts to build the infrastructure essential to school reform, they noted. The timelines for implementing the models were also an issue in Maryland. All of the schools that chose the restart model opted to use a private management organization rather than becoming a charter school because the ARRA SIG timeline allowed just two months to open a charter school—a process that often takes about 18 months, according to Chafin. School-level officials in one turnaround school and another restart school echoed these timeline concerns. More details are provided in the local section of this report.

For the most part, state officials in Maryland felt the turnaround and restart models “are adequate and, for most of these schools, quite appropriate,” said Lamb. However, Maryland’s ARRA SIG schools are located in high-poverty areas, and the four models do not really address how poverty impacts student learning, said Mozelle Mickens, a Title I and school improvement specialist with the Maryland State Department of Education. State officials explained that schools must understand how poverty affects student achievement and what services they should put in place to improve students’ overall well-being. Maryland is approaching school reform by providing services, including school-level social workers, that go well beyond students’ academic needs. The state has hired a coordinator of student services to make sure that service providers for ARRA SIG schools are coordinating with each other and have the right training. The state has also hired a specialist to track absenteeism related to physical and mental health issues. Maryland has used part of its Race to the Top funds to hire behavior specialists to work in ARRA SIG schools. In other words, the end goal in Maryland is to improve student achievement, but the state is attempting to “be holistic in terms of how [they] work in helping the students” to achieve, said Mickens.

Maryland state officials also mentioned that hiring and retaining highly effective teachers and administrators has been a major challenge in implementing the ARRA SIG models in both Baltimore City and Prince George’s County.

MICHIGAN: MODELS ARE FLEXIBLE BUT NEED REVISION, ESPECIALLY THE REQUIREMENTS FOR REPLACING PRINCIPALS.

Michigan state officials interviewed for this study were mostly satisfied with the models but saw the need for some future revisions. “For where we are right now in the whole nationwide conversation about school improvement, the models are just fine,” Forward said, while emphasizing that the models would need revision as more evidence about best practices for improving schools emerges. For example, she said, educators around the country are still working on creating a system to effectively and equitably tie teacher evaluations to student achievement, which is required in the transformation model.

Michigan schools have also struggled with the extended learning time requirement in the transformation model. To comply with this requirement, “schools simply wanted to add a lot of kids to the tutoring thing after school or in some cases have a ‘zero hour’ [before school officially starts] that was optional for kids or a Saturday school that was optional for students, or [add] just a minimal amount of time, five minutes a day,” explained Mark Coscarella. He said that the state is encouraging schools to lengthen the school day by adding actual time—for example, by having staff work staggered hours but have students in classes all day and by cutting all transition times to the bare minimum. Extended learning time is an area Michigan will continue to work on in the coming years, Coscarella said.

One revision Michigan educators would like to see made sooner rather than later is in the criteria for replacing principals, a step that is required by the transformation and turnaround models and is typically taken with the restart model as well. The Michigan Department of Education applied for but did not receive a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education to address this issue. The state requested that under certain circumstances the principal of a newly funded school could remain in place—for example, if the principal was hired within the last two

years but not brought in specifically for reform purposes or if the principal was brought in more than two years ago but there is reason to believe that proficiency levels are climbing. “A few places might have been better off if they had not had to change and go through a stop-start motion,” said Forward.

Also, Michigan would like to have performance criteria that indicate when principals should be replaced in ARRA SIG schools. Forward noted that three ARRA SIG schools replaced the principal again after completing the first year of the grant, although she was unsure why this had happened and had not been aware of any problem with the principals. In any case, state officials would like a change in the criteria for replacing principals in ARRA SIG schools to give principals time to put reforms in place. “What [the state education department] would like to see is a situation where that building remains stable for those three years unless there is some overriding, overpowering reason to make a change in staff or in the leadership,” Forward said.

IDAHO: TRANSFORMATION WAS THE ONLY APPROPRIATE MODEL, BUT REPLACING THE PRINCIPAL WAS A BURDEN.

All of the ARRA SIG recipient schools in Idaho chose the transformation model. According to Underwood, this is the only model appropriate for the majority of the state because it “has more flexibility” and “gets at systemwide change.” He explained that the other three models pose significant challenges for rural districts, which face difficulties in finding sufficient teachers to replace staff as required under the turnaround model, have limited access to private management organizations that could implement the restart model, have difficulty meeting the timelines to become a charter school under the restart model, and have no other schools to which they could send students if they used the school closure model.

Still, he felt the principal replacement requirement under the transformation model is “not appropriate in our rural schools because there are huge issues of human capital that are very difficult to address . . . [and] put some severe strains on our ability to really work with those schools.” Although some schools might benefit from removing half of the current staff and replacing the principal, it is just not possible due to the schools’ remote locations and limited availability of teachers, he said.

There is also state-level resistance in Idaho to the federal ARRA SIG program due in part to the system used to identify persistently-low achieving schools and the perceived inappropriateness of the required reform models for the more rural context of the state. In addition, as outlined in the next section and the local implementation part of this report, Idaho’s own state reform efforts are targeted on building district-level capacity and encouraging systemwide changes affecting districts and schools, rather than focusing solely on school-level improvement.

States emphasized the importance of improving district capacity to support change.

Having learned from their past experiences with assisting schools identified for improvement under NCLB, officials in all three states discussed the importance of helping districts develop their capacity to support the reforms outlined by the ARRA SIG requirements. They contrasted this district approach with the federal approach, which they felt emphasized direct state assistance to schools.

MARYLAND: DISTRICTS NEED TO CHANGE TO SUPPORT ARRA SIG SCHOOLS.

An appropriate infrastructure at the state and district level is essential to be able to address the significant needs in ARRA SIG schools, according to Tina McKnight, a Title I and school improvement specialist with the Maryland State Department of Education. Districts could benefit from longer timelines in the application process to work on this infrastructure, Maryland state officials explained. A full year of planning would allow districts to “coordinate their internal structure to be able to support the magnitude of the kind of changes that needed to occur under these models.” said McKnight.

District officials in Maryland echoed this sentiment. Beth Nolan, who was the director of turnaround schools for the Baltimore City Public Schools at the time of our study but has since left that position, agreed with state officials and explained that “the first round of the application . . . was a very rushed process because the timelines did not allow for the full planning process.” Nolan said that in the second round the Baltimore City Public Schools were better able to manage the timeline and process.

MICHIGAN: LOCAL GRANTS SHOULD REQUIRE MORE SPECIFIC DISTRICT REFORMS.

State officials in Michigan would also like to see ARRA SIG requirements changed to acknowledge the importance of district capacity. “I wish there were a component in this system that required or forced work with the districts,” Forward noted. “In many, many cases the schools come from districts that have low capacity.” For example, she noted, some districts might play a stronger role in school improvement by designating district employees to deliver technical assistance and other services to their schools. While some districts did this, others did not, and in districts that did have these positions, their responsibilities varied. A stronger district role can leverage support for multiple schools, especially in districts with large numbers of tier 1 and 2 schools, Forward said.

IDAHO: ARRA SIG SHOULD BE REVISED TO SUPPORT EXISTING STATE ASSISTANCE AIMED AT DISTRICTS.

Idaho used to focus all of its improvement efforts directly on the schools, said Underwood, but state officials learned this was not the best way to influence and leverage change in their state, nor was it “the most sustainable way to impact school improvement for the long haul.” Idaho now tries to focus on improving the district and its partnership with the school, whereas the new ARRA SIG guidance focuses more on the schools, he asserted.

Much of the Idaho State Department of Education’s assistance to districts is centered on the Idaho Building Capacity Project. Under this state program, the district signs a performance agreement, and the state provides services directly to the superintendent and leadership team. The state provides a “capacity builder” that works on district leadership issues; a similar person at the school provides professional coaching to school-level leadership. All ARRA SIG schools and districts are participating in the program. Underwood explained that the Idaho Building Capacity Project has become an “internal linkage between the systems,” giving the state an “in” because most of the participants signed on voluntarily.

State assistance and monitoring show commonalities in the three states, but each state has built on its unique past initiatives.

In addition to identifying eligible schools and awarding grants, federal guidance requires states to monitor school-level implementation of the ARRA SIGs and provide technical assistance. All three states are providing some type of coach or assistant from the state who works with local leaders, all are requiring progress reports, and all are coordinating some type of network for local educators in ARRA SIG schools. Other state services funded by ARRA SIG differ. Many build on past state services to schools in need of improvement under NCLB.

MARYLAND: THE STATE IS CONTINUING ITS IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVES AND COORDINATING WITH RACE TO THE TOP.

As discussed previously, Maryland has added staff and services specifically to assist ARRA SIG schools. For example, Maryland has hired a coordinator of student services to synchronize services and training in ARRA SIG schools and a mental and behavioral health specialist to track absenteeism related to health issues. In addition, Maryland has used part of its Race to the Top funds to hire behavior specialists to work in ARRA SIG schools.

These services extend from the state to the local level in Maryland. For example, in Prince George's County, ARRA SIG funds paid for school-based social workers and their partnership with the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, an external service provider. This arrangement allows the district "to extend the work of the school to the community and really engage those wraparound services to help families as well as students," explained Ed Ryans, the district's turnaround director.

Other services provided to ARRA SIG schools have grown out of similar state services to schools with the greatest need for improvement according to state priorities. For example, state education department officials conduct on-site monitoring visits to all ARRA SIG schools in Baltimore City and Prince George's County. These visits include interviews with district and school leadership, teachers, parents, students, and school partner organizations, where applicable. Detailed reports from these visits are posted on the Maryland State Department of Education Web site and include an overview of the district and school improvement initiatives and their progress in meeting improvement goals.

The ARRA SIG program has also funded extensions of state services through two preexisting state initiatives, the Breakthrough Center and the Restructuring Implementation Technical Assistance (RITA) initiative. The Breakthrough Center, Maryland's consolidated statewide system of support, began around 2008. It brokers school improvement services from various providers and also delivers direct school improvement services to districts, aimed at measuring and developing districts' capacity to support their ARRA SIG schools. Maryland developed RITA in 2007 in response to NCLB's requirements to restructure schools; its original purpose was to audit schools that had been in improvement for more than five years. Under ARRA SIG, RITA audits identify programs and systems that are effective and those that need to be eliminated or improved to advance student achievement.

MICHIGAN: THE STATE GRANT RAMPS UP STATE SERVICES AND ADDS FUNDS FOR EXTERNAL PROVIDERS.

An increased ability to provide state services for school improvement efforts is one of the biggest changes brought about by ARRA SIG funding, according to Michigan state officials. For example, state monitoring of ARRA SIG schools is led by facilitator/monitors—state department of education employees hired especially for this purpose. These facilitator/monitors are expected to visit each school at least weekly at the beginning of the grant and at least monthly for the duration of the grant. While Michigan has done on-site monitoring of schools in improvement in the past, this monitoring of ARRA SIG schools is more frequent and more intense, according to Forward. She said that some schools have nicknamed the facilitator/monitor "the warden" but noted that the nickname "comes with a great deal of laughter and understanding that this person is really here to help."

Additional technical assistance includes process mentors and a partnership network. Both are available to schools receiving ARRA SIGs as well as to other schools in NCLB improvement. Process mentors were created to assist with school improvement under NCLB prior to the ARRA. For ARRA SIG schools, each team consists of a representative from the state education department and a person from the district's regional technical assistance provider. Process monitors began working with schools eligible for ARRA SIGs during the application phase by reviewing the Comprehensive Needs Assessment and school improvement plan to see how well they were aligned with the model selected by the school and by making recommendations for change as needed.

The partnership network was created in response to ARRA SIG. In the 2010-11 school year, the network included building-level teams from each ARRA SIG school; other schools in improvement were invited to participate as well. Michigan State Department of Education officials facilitated meetings of the network about once a month. The meetings, Forward said, not only gave teams time to work together, they provided information to the state education department about school needs and concerns. In the 2011-12 school year, the Michigan Department of Education is spearheading a new principal's network that will include both schools with grants and other schools in need of improvement.

As a final unique aspect of its state services, the Michigan Department of Education created a list of approved external providers and required all recipients of local ARRA SIG funding to contract with one of these providers to assist districts and schools with school reform. In hopes of improving the quality and coherence of the assistance delivered by external providers, the state offered them technical assistance. External providers, for example, were asked to use the templates, needs assessments, and language for school improvement developed by the state rather than provide unrelated services.

In the past under NCLB, government entities, such as regional technical assistance providers, offered most of the assistance for school improvement in Michigan that was not provided by the state department of education or by Michigan State University's Principal Fellowship (CEP, 2008). The state-approved list of external providers included a mix of for-profit, nonprofit, and government entities. However, most of the providers chosen by local districts were nonprofit or government entities; only about one-fourth were for-profit providers, a disproportionately small share compared with those on the approved state list. Similarly, about half the providers on the state's 2010-11 list were from outside of Michigan, but two-thirds of those chosen by schools were from Michigan, perhaps because these providers were better known to schools (CEP, 2010).

Overall, state officials said most schools were satisfied with their external providers. A small number were changing providers, including Phoenix Elementary-Middle School in Detroit, an ARRA SIG school that participated in this study. "We have had a couple of places where the schools were not satisfied with the external providers and have since changed external providers to better meet their needs," Coscarella explained. "For example in some cases, the external provider may have been too prescriptive in the district's mind as far as what they were asking the school to do. [In] a couple of other cases, in the district's opinion, the external provider did not provide all of the intended deliverables in a way that met with the district's satisfaction."

IDAHO: THE STATE IS CONTINUING SOME PAST PROGRAMS BUT FINDS THE GRANT RESTRICTIVE.

Idaho's approach to the ARRA SIG program has built upon the state's past strategies for school improvement from about ten years ago, said Underwood. For example, Idaho State Department of Education officials conduct "focus visits" in five to seven districts over the course of a year, during which they complete a districtwide analysis and provide feedback to the district about its system. As part of the analysis, state officials interview administrators and teachers, conduct focus groups with parents and students, and do classroom observations. These focus visits are loosely modeled on a guide developed by the Center on Innovation and Improvement, a national center supported by ED that is focused on school improvement.

In addition to these focus visits, Idaho offers assistance to districts through its Superintendents' Network of Support, a volunteer learning community of district officials who discuss instructional leadership from a superintendent's perspective. Superintendents in persistently low-achieving districts are strongly encouraged to participate in this network. In this same vein, the state organizes the Principals' Academy of Leadership, which is a resource for school-level leaders on instructional leadership, evaluation processes, and other aspects of the principalship. All of the persistently low-achieving schools in Idaho are participants in this project, Underwood reported.

As discussed previously, the Idaho State Department of Education also provides assistance to districts through its Idaho Building Capacity Project. All districts with ARRA SIG schools must sign a performance agreement. A state capacity builder provides leadership services directly to the superintendent and district leadership team, along with the school principal and improvement team. The capacity builder's work is shaped by the state's Ways to Improve School Effectiveness (WISE) tool. This tool, developed with the Center on Innovation and Improvement, allows districts and schools to set particular goals and track their progress toward reaching those goals in collaboration with their capacity builders. WISE was used prior to ARRA SIG but has a specially developed section for ARRA SIG schools to track their improvement efforts.

Finally, said Underwood, although extended learning time is a requirement for the transformation model, Idaho has not made this a major priority in the state’s technical assistance or expectations. “[O]ur premise at the state level has been that . . . extended learning time is only good if the extended learning time is good—if it’s done well,” he said. When reviewing SIG applications, the state ensured that there were more minutes allotted to instruction for all students.

Still, the Idaho Department of Education is limited in the services it can provide directly to schools because of the disconnect between Idaho’s focus on districts and the federal ARRA SIG emphasis on schools, Underwood said. He elaborated on the philosophy behind this approach:

[A] lot of the problems aren’t because of the school but because of district superintendents or problems with the way the school board functions or . . . problems with the way the business manager tracks and spends money. You’ve got all these other things, and [the state doesn’t] necessarily have an in with those people to leverage change there, and so that bogs things down.

Underwood said he would like to see a multilayered, differentiated approach to school improvement and assistance. Under this model, the school would have certain responsibilities, the district would have even stronger and larger responsibilities, and the state would have responsibilities for what they do for the district.

A Closer Look at School Improvement in ARRA SIG Schools and Their Counterparts

At the local level, CEP compared improvement efforts in schools that received ARRA SIGs with efforts in schools that were eligible for but did not receive these grants. Both the ARRA SIG schools and the comparison schools were low-performing and had relatively high enrollments of low-income students. In Idaho and Michigan, the comparison schools were among the lowest-achieving 5% in the state, and all initially applied for ARRA SIGs. In Maryland, although the comparison schools were not among the lowest-achieving 5%, they had sufficiently low achievement to be identified for improvement under NCLB. To the extent possible, we also tried to compare schools with similar proportions of low-income and racial/ethnic minority students, although good matches could not be found for all schools in Idaho and Maryland. To conduct these comparative case studies, we interviewed district-level staff in two school districts in Maryland, two districts in Michigan, and three districts in Idaho. Within these districts, we interviewed school-level staff in a total of four schools in Maryland, four in Michigan, and three in Idaho. The names of the districts and schools, along with other school demographic information, are listed in tables at the beginning of the sections on each state found after the Cross-Cutting Findings. We also gathered information by reviewing state and local documents relating to school improvement.

Our analysis of local implementation of ARRA SIGs begins with a review of findings that cut across schools in two or three states. This is followed by more detailed discussions of improvement efforts within specific schools and districts in each of the three states.

CROSS-CUTTING FINDINGS

ARRA SIG-funded schools, as well as some non-funded schools, are implementing similar improvement strategies, including a focus on school climate, the use of instructional or behavior coaches, and an extended learning time. Most of these schools are also making use of state technical assistance.

Despite being in different states, serving different types of low-income students, and having different levels of funding, many of the schools in our study shared commonalities in their general approach to school improvement. All of the study schools that received ARRA SIG funds said they were focusing on improving school climate among

students, staff, or both. Additionally, all of these schools reported using instructional or behavioral coaches to deliver ongoing, classroom-based professional development. Most of the schools in our study have extended learning time by adding to the overall length of the day or eliminating non-instructional time or both, although some schools reported doing so only for students with the greatest needs. Finally, most study schools, especially those that received ARRA SIG funds, said they were taking advantage of one or more forms of state assistance with school improvement, including consultations, site visits, and state-facilitated networks.

We also found differences in approaches to school improvement among schools with different needs and resources. For example, three of the five schools in our study that were eligible for but did not receive ARRA SIGs did not devote the attention to school climate found in the ARRA SIG-funded schools.

Because of resource differences, schools in Idaho and Michigan that received ARRA SIG funds are offering more intensive and different improvement strategies than non-recipient schools.

In the ARRA SIG schools we studied in Idaho and Michigan, the improvement strategies were more intensive than in the non-recipient schools, in terms of both additional staff time devoted to the strategies and availability of new materials and technology to support the strategies. For example, Arthur Hill School in Saginaw, Michigan, an ARRA SIG recipient, was able to hire multiple coaches to provide on-site observations, feedback, and professional development, but unfunded Saginaw High School used classroom teachers who doubled as coaches to provide similar but less intensive services. A lack of instructional coaching was cited as a challenge in two of the four non-recipient schools in Michigan. Similarly, ARRA SIG schools in Idaho were able to implement all aspects of their grants, while the non-recipient school had to delay some of its plans, such as purchasing hands-on math lab materials.

The situation was different in Maryland, where districts applied for ARRA SIG funding for schools that had particular difficulties with school climate, as well as being among the lowest-achieving 5% in the state. The principals of the Maryland schools we studied that did not receive ARRA SIG funding agreed that the recipient schools had greater needs. These principals reported that despite a lack of ARRA SIG funds, their schools are maintaining improvement efforts, and school climate is not a major problem.

Schools are optimistic about school improvement, particularly in the area of school climate.

All 11 schools in our study shared a general optimism that they were on the right track for school improvement. For ARRA SIG-funded schools, the success most frequently cited in interviews was an improvement in school climate. A majority of the funded schools also mentioned early success in increasing students' motivation to learn and staff collaboration. Some schools reported improvements in student achievement, but others said it was too early to know the impact of their reforms on students' academic outcomes.

Schools face challenges in implementing ARRA SIG reforms, especially in maintaining and replacing staff and sustaining their improvement efforts after ARRA SIG funding ends.

Other challenges were not as clearly divided between the ARRA SIG-funded and non-funded schools in our study. In fact, replacing and retaining teachers and principals was the challenge most frequently mentioned by both types of schools. More than three-fourths of ARRA SIG schools cited this as a challenge. All of the ARRA SIG schools

in our study faced the challenge of replacing principals, as required by their chosen improvement models, and those that were using the turnaround model also had to replace half their teachers. Two of the five schools we studied that did not receive ARRA SIG funds also described staffing as a challenge. In both types of schools, participants often discussed their fear of losing staff due to competition from schools that were perceived to have better working conditions or were in more convenient locations. For all of the rural schools participating in this study, staffing was a major concern, since the majority of teachers and principals were commuting long distances to reach these remote schools. The staffing challenges faced by most of the study schools suggest a need for greater state and federal support and strategies to improve the recruitment and retention of principals and teachers and to attract personnel to struggling schools.

Other frequently mentioned challenges differed based on school characteristics. Interviewees in all of the ARRA SIG schools cited challenges related to sustaining efforts after the funding ends. Participants from all of the urban schools discussed difficulties in accessing funding for school improvement efforts due to their central office bureaucracies.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN MARYLAND

In Maryland, district-level staff called “turnaround directors” help coordinate school improvement efforts and support schools that are awarded ARRA SIG funds. CEP researchers interviewed the turnaround directors in both of the Maryland districts with ARRA SIG-recipient schools—the urban Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) and the Prince George’s County Public Schools (PGCPS), located in a suburb of Washington, D.C. We also spoke with the principals at the four case study schools.

As shown in **table 3**, two ARRA SIG schools and two non-recipient schools participated in CEP’s study of school improvement in Maryland.

Table 3. Case study schools in Maryland

| School | District | Type of school | Percentage low-income* | Largest racial/ethnic groups | ARRA SIG status |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------|------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|
| Commodore John Rodgers Elementary | Baltimore City Public Schools | Urban | 89% | 76% black, 17% Latino | Recipient |
| G. James Gholson Middle | Prince George’s County Public Schools | Suburban | 68% | 87% black, 11% Latino | Recipient |
| Buck Lodge Middle | Prince George’s County Public Schools | Suburban | 86% | 60% Latino, 32% black | Non-recipient |
| Nicholas Orem Middle | Prince George’s County Public Schools | Suburban | 84% | 65% Latino, 31% black | Non-recipient |

*Percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

All of the case study schools had been in improvement for three or more years when they became eligible for ARRA SIG grants in 2009, and all had been designated as “Comprehensive Priority Schools,” the highest category of need under the state’s criteria for identifying schools for improvement. As shown in table 3, all of the schools have relatively high poverty and all have student bodies that are majority African American or Latino. Commodore John Rodgers Elementary, Buck Lodge Middle, and Nicholas Orem Middle Schools receive federal Title I funds for disadvantaged students, while Gholson Middle does not. While student achievement in these schools has increased for some grades and subjects in recent years, achievement has declined in other subjects and grades, and none of the schools has improved enough to make AYP under the No Child Left Behind Act.

Maryland districts and schools have used ARRA SIG funding for special staff and extra staff, extended learning opportunities, and science and math education, among other areas.

In Maryland, ARRA SIG funds were used at the district level to hire a turnaround director in each district to help coordinate reforms at SIG-funded schools across the district and collaborate with state-level officials.

In the Baltimore City Public Schools, ARRA SIG funds helped to pay for additional school staff in recipient schools who provide targeted interventions for at-risk students, according to Beth Nolan, the former turnaround director. In addition, Nolan said, BCPS schools have used ARRA SIG funds for enrichment activities to “engage [students] in the learning process, because what we know is that in many of these schools, students aren’t engaged in school, and it’s partially because they don’t have a connection to their school, so we’re trying to build those connections.” In BCPS, these interventions and enrichment activities vary, depending on an individual school’s needs. “You don’t buy one program and say ‘everyone implement this one program,’ because that doesn’t change the school,” said Nolan.

ARRA SIG-recipient schools in Prince George’s County have used these funds to extend learning opportunities for students; support science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education; and hire additional support personnel for schools that need them most. Ed Ryans, the turnaround director for PGCPSS, said the district has hired “math, data, [and] reading coaches, social workers, parent engagement specialists, [and] behavioral engagement specialists.” PGCPSS has also been able to expand the staff in its Turnaround Office, which consisted of just Ryans and his secretary during the first year of SIG funding. This school year, Ryans is also supported by a reading specialist, a mathematics specialist, a support specialist, and a compliance specialist, all of whom work together to coordinate services for ARRA SIG-recipient schools in Prince George’s County.

To maximize its capacity to implement the turnaround model, Gholson Middle School in PGCPSS used a portion of its ARRA SIG funds to hire an additional principal. (See **box C** for more information about the school’s co-principalship.) Lacy Robinson, one of the two Gholson principals, said the most valuable resources funded by ARRA SIG have been additional support personnel, extended-day learning opportunities, and instructional supplies and equipment, including updated technology.

BOX C. CO-PRINCIPALSHIP AT GHOLSON MIDDLE SCHOOL IN PGCPSS

In an attempt to maximize Gholson Middle School’s capacity to implement the turnaround model, the Prince George’s County Public Schools and the Maryland State Department of Education approved a proposal by Lacy Robinson and Ebony Cross to serve as co-principals of the school. The two women met in a principal training program known as New Leaders for New Schools. Under dual leadership, “you can essentially make change, effect change a little faster,” said Robinson in an interview for this study.

Robinson and Cross split the leadership responsibilities and support each other at Gholson. Robinson is responsible for the 8th grade students and for issues such as attendance, grading, and reporting. Cross is responsible for the 7th grade students and for budgeting. They work together on personnel issues. The two principals try to ‘stay in [their] lanes’ but that it is not always easy to do,” said Robinson. When a student, teacher, or community member comes to one of the principals with a problem, they expect a solution regardless of whose “lane” the problem falls in. “At the end of the day,” explained Robinson, “if there’s an issue . . . whoever’s on deck has to [resolve] the issue.” The key to successful dual leadership, she added, is good communication and “trying to keep each other abreast on what’s going on in the building.”

Robinson believes the co-principalship has proved successful at Gholson and that neither she nor Cross would have been nearly as successful in implementing the ARRA SIG turnaround efforts alone.

Maryland focuses on school climate as the first improvement priority and instructional programs as the second.

During the first year of the ARRA SIG program, the Prince George's County school district “really had to focus heavily on climate and culture in each of the [ARRA SIG] schools because we had new principals and new staff,” said Turnaround Director Ryans. In school year 2011-12, the second year of ARRA SIG, “there's climate and culture in each [ARRA SIG] school. That's a success,” he added. In addition, the ARRA SIG schools made small gains in student achievement, even with their primary focus on school climate.

Prior to ARRA SIG, school climate was one of the biggest obstacles at Gholson Middle, according to Principal Robinson. The school had 1,000 suspensions in a single year, and many students were suspended repeatedly. School enrollment was on the decline. When she took over as a co-principal, the school had “graffiti, rat feces, mice infestations, bug infestations . . . you couldn't tell it was a new building,” Robinson said. Many students experienced not just behavior problems in school, but also conflicts with the law both in and out of school. The previous principals “could not [get] their hands around the climate and the culture,” she said, adding that the school “became a thorn to the community; became a thorn, I would say, to the district.”

When Principals Robinson and Cross took charge and began implementing the ARRA SIG reforms, they started with school climate and the “remarketing and rebranding of Gholson,” said Robinson. All students are referred to as “scholars.” They wear uniforms, which the principals refer to as “paycheck attire,” that include ties and black shoes to emphasize unity and the feeling of community. Students are told to abide by the saying, “Everyone works harder to get smarter.” Robinson described her first day of school and the weeks that followed at Gholson:

I lined every single child up, and we looked at every single child walking into this building, and they had to be in full uniform compliance. And we literally—every single child—we spoke to right before they entered the building. And we did that for a week straight. I shut instruction down and did all climate and culture for a week and a half. [We would ask], ‘What does a Gholson scholar do? How do they walk? How do they talk? What do they say? How do we look out for each other? What is the creed?’ . . . [I]t was literally . . . trying to change the mindset [of the school].

Robinson said the change in school climate has been the “biggest success” of the reforms at her school, one that would “absolutely not” have been possible without ARRA SIG funding. At the beginning of the second year of this funding, she was “blown away” because the school climate was “completely different.” Students at Gholson are beginning to understand that “somebody believes in them, somebody will not give up on them, and that they have a future,” she said.

Building on those successes, principals in ARRA SIG schools in PGCPs are now able to “push that instructional program that [they] weren't able to push 100%” in the first year of ARRA SIG, according to Ryans. For the second year of funding, principals have set goals to monitor the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment; improve instructional practices through observation and evaluation of teachers; and regularly integrate appropriate assessments into daily classroom instruction.

Beth Nolan, Baltimore City's former turnaround director, also cited changes in school climate as one of the “quick wins” experienced by ARRA SIG-recipient schools in her district in the first year of funding. Principals made real gains “in terms of getting a true vision and mission established at [their] schools,” Nolan said. In these ARRA SIG schools, the mission and vision are evident not only from “artifacts on the walls and the things you hear in the classrooms, but . . . a student or teacher or . . . any other staff member [would] be able to tell you what they were trying to do there”—something Nolan believes is essential to the improvement process.

Marc Martin, principal of Commodore John Rodgers in BCPS, gave examples of how the climate has changed at his school. In addition to replacing most of its staff, the school began holding student-led conferences three times

a year, during which students would present their learning to their families, rather than holding teacher-led report card nights. Students are grouped into grade-level communities and teams that meet once a week. The entire school is focused on one mission, Martin explained: “Commodore to College: 100% for 100%.”

Schools in Maryland that did not receive ARRA SIG funds are not struggling with the same school climate issues.

The two schools CEP visited that were eligible for but did not receive ARRA SIG funds reported fewer problems with school climate than recipient schools did. For example, James Richardson, principal of Buck Lodge Middle School in PGCPs, described the climate at his school in these positive terms:

We have great kids. We’ve decreased the number of suspensions even in the last year. There are no major issues with discipline, so it’s really about developing teacher capacity so that they can continue to teach and reach students. When you walk around, it’s a great place to be.

Richard Jackson, principal of Nicholas Orem Middle School in PGCPs, also said that school climate is not an issue at his school, adding that “if you walk around, we don’t have discipline issues that are excessive.” Instead, he said, his school’s improvement plan focuses on cultural inclusion and competence, which meets the needs of the teachers and students. Nicholas Orem has a diverse student body, including many students who are newcomers to the United States and many who do not speak English as their native language. Jackson explained that he received some “pushback” from the state about the school’s plans to improve cultural inclusion and competence “because that’s not quantifiable. But it impacts our student achievement. I had to really defend that portion of my [school improvement] plan when I went to the state.”

Maryland SIG districts chose to focus on improving the overall well-being of their students in addition to improving academics.

As described in the state section of this report, the Maryland State Department of Education, as well as its districts and schools, are approaching school reform by providing services extending from the state to the school level that go well beyond students’ academic needs. These include mental health services, behavioral specialists, and other social services to improve students’ well-being. In PGCPs, the ARRA SIG funds pay for school-based social workers and their partnership with the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, which “allows [PGCPs] to extend the work of the school to the community and really engage those wraparound services to help families as well as students,” said Ryans. Gholson Middle School in the same district has used ARRA SIG funds to support a full-time social worker, a “phenomenal” community outreach program, bilingual personnel, and two full-time student advocates, Principal Robinson explained.

Both ARRA SIG schools and non-recipient schools in Maryland are targeting extended learning opportunities on students with the greatest needs.

Extended learning opportunities at the SIG-recipient schools in BCPS focus primarily on students most in need of additional assistance, although they are open to all students who want to take advantage of them. These programs typically occur after school. As Beth Nolan explained, “every student does not need to stay until 5:00. There might

be some students that need to . . . so let's get the students who really need the additional intervention or enrichment and extended learning to be [at school] until 5:00.”

Gholson Middle School in PGCPs has taken a similar approach to extended learning time. In the first year of ARRA SIG funding, the school targeted extended learning opportunities on students who had been retained for one or more years “to give them extra support,” said Principal Robinson. In the second year of funding, the school waited to see what state assessment data revealed. Students who scored at the basic level on the assessment (about one-third of the school's students) or at the proficient level (another one-third) were given an application to attend an extended learning opportunity, or ELO.

ELOs were designed to “help draw kids in [while emphasizing] reading, math, social studies, and science,” explained Robinson. Gholson teachers designed courses like cooking with mathematics, science inquiry, reading book clubs, and technology clubs. An algebra teacher and a consumer science teacher are designing an ELO in which students will “make fabric, they'll make costume designs, and they'll talk about area, perimeter, and charting,” she said. There will also be an after-school STEM course in which students will be able to compete with other STEM students across the country. The point, Robinson said, is to “look at the [test] scores and figure out what the school needs [are], and then figure out what classes will [meet] them.”

Robinson believes extended learning opportunities funded by ARRA SIG are paying off in her school. Children in the surrounding community “just need something to do—parents are working, or they're not at home, or there's no one checking in on them,” she said. ELOs have been an inspirational source of change for several Gholson students because “they know that somebody's always here [for them].” The ELOs are offered on a six-week rotation, with an assessment at the beginning and end of this period. Some students do well enough on the assessments that they no longer have a need for extended learning, while others are asked to continue with the program.

Nicholas Orem Middle School in PGCPs, which did not receive ARRA SIG funds, is also providing targeted extended learning services to some students as part of its improvement strategies, according to Principal Jackson. The school offers after-school tutoring programs for students most in need, as well as student-focused assistance through Response to Intervention, a national approach to identify learning difficulties early and provide remediation. In the past, Nicholas Orem had used a federal section 1003(g) improvement grant to pay for after-school tutoring for all students, provided by about 20 teachers who agreed to stay late. After this source of funding ended, the school “pared down” its after-school tutoring program, Jackson said. The school uses Title I money to fund the program, and approximately four to six teachers stay after school. The program is targeted on the students with the greatest academic needs according to assessment data, and the teachers' instruction is supplemented with computer software programs.

When asked whether he wished his school had additional funds to restore these programs to their former scope, Jackson said, “The easy answer is yes.” But considering the amount of time and money it would cost his school to comply with other ARRA SIG requirements, Jackson believes his schools are making more efficient use of its funds by paring down their programs to focus on the students most in need.

Maryland districts and schools are partnering with external management organizations and service providers to implement reform models in ARRA SIG schools.

The Baltimore City district chose the restart model for five of its seven ARRA SIG schools, and external management organizations (EMOs) are being used to implement the model in these schools. Nolan, the former turnaround director, explained that BCPS did not tell schools which EMO they had to use for the restart model but instead gave schools a list of approved EMOs. The EMOS “would go out to the school communities to make presentations, and the school communities chose restart providers,” she said.

Living Classrooms, a nonprofit organization, was chosen as the EMO to implement the turnaround model at Commodore John Rodgers in BCPS. Prior to taking over Commodore Rodgers, Living Classrooms operated a charter school called the Crossroads School, provided curriculum enrichment and after-school programs to schools in BCPS, and helped youth who were adjudicated through the legal system in Baltimore to obtain work skills and a GED. Living Classrooms participated in writing the ARRA SIG grant for this school and brought in a new principal, who previously worked at the Crossroads School, to restart the school.

ARRA SIG-recipient schools in Prince George’s County did not use the restart model in the first year of funding but did use some of their ARRA SIG money to pay for support services from external providers, such as Research for Better Teaching and the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium. District turnaround director Ryans explained that partnerships with these organizations “put [PGCPS] in a great position to extend support to challenging schools” by building school- and district-level capacity.

With its ARRA SIG funding, the Prince George’s district pays Research for Better Teaching to provide direct coaching to teachers in reading, English, and mathematics because, as Ryans explained, “having a very effective teaching staff is the most essential thing [for ARRA SIG schools].” The teachers not only are coached in general pedagogy, but also are taught practical teaching strategies. This partnership provides “the direct coaching and feedback necessary to effect change,” said Ryans. The district’s collaboration with the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, also funded through ARRA SIG money, focuses on community involvement. Mid-Atlantic works “to engage parents across turnaround schools, so that [PGCPS has] an informed community that is able to support its children,” said Ryans. This community outreach assistance has been crucial to the turnaround efforts at Gholson Middle School, said Robinson. Principals “cannot turn a school around without a community outreach program. There’s no way.”

Restaffing ARRA SIG schools has posed a challenge in Maryland. The ARRA SIG timelines and documentation and compliance requirements have also presented challenges.

As Beth Nolan explained, “One of the bigger pieces to [school improvement] is finding the right people for these schools, and it’s been our biggest challenge. I think it’s a challenge nationwide to find the really highly capable people.” BCPS used ARRA SIG funds to hire a consultant to help the district find highly qualified staff for ARRA SIG schools. Nolan said BCPS did open its schools fully staffed in the 2010-11 school year, but “fully staffing is one indicator; fully staffing with highly qualified people is another indicator.”

At Commodore John Rodgers in BCPS, the short time frame was “one thing that really limited the amount of success [the school] could have in the first or second year,” particularly when it came to staffing, said Principal Martin. All teachers were asked to reapply for their positions after the school entered the restart model—a step that Martin felt was essential to changing the school culture—and only three people were rehired. Martin said he would “never recommend going into a turnaround situation with 11 first-year teachers,” but that this was his best option when faced with hiring 50 new staff members in a matter of months. As he explained, “those 11 first-year teachers were remarkably better than the staff that was in place.”

Similarly, schools in Prince George’s County that chose the turnaround model had “an awfully difficult time staffing schools,” said Ryans, especially with the short implementation timelines. In many cases, turnaround schools struggled to fill their open positions with highly qualified staff. For the turnaround model to be successful, “we have to have the best people in front of children every day,” Ryans stressed, adding that ARRA SIG schools should “be a priority when it comes to staffing.” In the second round of ARRA SIG, the district chose the restart model for more of its schools due to the staffing challenges associated with the turnaround model.

Restaffing Gholson Middle School in PGCPs was “mind-boggling,” according to Principal Robinson. After she and Ebony Cross were hired as co-principals in the first year of ARRA SIG funding, they had only one month to fill half of the teaching positions and hire new administrators prior to the first day of school. At that point in the summer, Robinson said, “anybody that’s trying to get a job or trying to get a good position [had] already been placed.” Robinson said that she and Cross complained to the state that they had been given the staff who were left over and had been asked to turn around a school without the personnel that could help them do that.

Robinson and Cross tried some innovative approaches to staffing their school, with mixed results. At the last minute, they reached out to a local university with a summer program for people pursuing science and math education as a second career. They thought they would “rather take [their] chances with new teachers than [with] someone that is kind of stuck in a rut,” Robinson said. In hindsight, she said that she would “never recommend that to anybody” and that turnaround schools need a “balance of both [new and experienced teachers].” She described the whole process as a “very kamikaze way of trying to staff a building.” The principals have had success, however, with educators from Teach for America. They also approached their experienced teachers to ask for referrals and recommendations for potential additional staff members.

In addition to finding the right teachers for the job, removing the wrong teachers was also challenging, said Robinson, adding that “it would have been really nice to have a union person who could come and talk to us [about removing staff].” For example, in the first year of ARRA SIG funding, she had a teacher who incessantly called in sick, one who was removed for inappropriate behavior, and one who just did not show up to teach class. It would have also helped to “have a union person . . . saying to me, ‘This is how we get rid of this person.’”

Gholson Middle School had to eliminate nine positions due to state and district budget cuts, and the co-principals used this situation to remove their less effective teachers. The teachers who were let go were told, “If this [isn’t] the place for you . . . we will assist you in going somewhere else,” Robinson said. In other ways, however, the budget cuts made it more difficult for the principals to hire the right teachers for Gholson. For example, the principals organized a “turnaround fair” where they spent “a Saturday and three days [at the school] until 11 p.m. going through applications and resumes . . . [but] couldn’t hire a single person” due to issues related to the budget and unions.

Principal Martin noted that the documentation and compliance activities related to the ARRA SIG program have posed an additional challenge in leading the turnaround efforts at Commodore Rodgers. While he understands the need for these requirements, he said that “it takes so much time to turn around a school, let alone having to document that.” Additional support is needed just to manage the documentation of the grant, he said. Although district monitoring visits are intended to help ease this burden, he “doesn’t find them helpful,” he said, and characterized the visits as “district teams . . . telling us what we need to do.”

Maryland is optimistic about the future of ARRA SIG reform efforts.

State, district, and school officials interviewed for this study are hopeful about the progress and future of ARRA SIG reform efforts in Maryland. For example, Ryans said he feels optimistic about the impact of ARRA SIG on PGCPs schools. The district is in a “better place” in the second year of ARRA SIG funding, he said, because “the district took the time to engage directly with the turnaround principals to really gain some insight on what was needed to move these schools in the right direction.” Ryans has been encouraged by these conversations in PGCPs because they have allowed district-level administrators to understand the needs of a turnaround school and then respond to those needs appropriately.

At Gholson Middle School in PGCPs, Robinson said the turnaround model was the appropriate choice for her school. “[W]hen a school gets so far off track, you have to start over again,” she explained, and labeling her school

as a “turnaround school” sent a message to the students, teachers, and community that “we’re moving along this change continuum . . . and let’s talk about what your role plays in it.”

The Baltimore City district expects that the training it is providing to teachers in ARRA SIG schools will result in more highly qualified staff, said Turnaround Director Nolan—“not only highly qualified in terms of [having] the right certification, but that they’re using our instructional framework in a way that [they are] seeing student gains and students really producing high-level work in their classrooms.” Nolan pointed out BCPS hopes to see sufficient improvements in the climate and culture of its school that enrollments will increase, as families start saying, “We want our students to go to these schools.”

Commodore John Rodgers is showing early signs of this success. The school was the only turnaround school in the district to meet its performance targets, which resulted in salary bonuses for the staff (excluding the principal.) Although the school had not experienced any schoolwide victories in the past, students made double-digit gains in reading and math in the first year of ARRA SIG funding, Martin said. Additionally, enrollment at the school has increased by more than 100%, and the school has made progress, he said.

Another reason Maryland appears to be so optimistic about ARRA SIG reforms is that all of people we interviewed in the state—including state department personnel, district turnaround directors, and principals at all four schools—agreed that the right schools and the right number of schools were selected for funding. Maryland State Department of Education officials and the district turnaround directors emphasized that, although they could always use additional money to fund more schools, the schools with the greatest need for assistance in Maryland were identified for and received ARRA SIG funds. Even the two principals of the non-recipient Maryland schools in our study, Buck Lodge Middle and Nicholas Orem Middle, agreed the right schools had been awarded SIGs. These principals reported that even without ARRA SIG funding, their schools have been able to maintain their improvement efforts.

Maryland districts are making plans to sustain reform efforts after ARRA SIG funding ends, but sustainability remains a concern for schools.

As noted in the state-level section of this report, Maryland State Department of Education officials are beginning work on sustainability. From a district perspective, Ryans believes that building school- and district-level capacity through PGCPs’s partnerships with external providers will contribute to his district’s ability to sustain these reforms once ARRA SIG funding ends. Research for Better Teaching is coaching master teachers in turnaround schools so they can later train other teachers once the services from this provider are no longer available. Similarly, Ryans explained that “when the contract with Mid-Atlantic expires, [PGCPS] will still know how to do the work [in the community], and that the training provided through this partnership will help the district build its capacity as well.”

BCPS is also tackling the issue of sustainability through teacher and principal training. The district is “working very diligently with [its] teachers to ensure that they are prepared to move forward [with] the work” once ARRA SIG funding ends, said Nolan. The goal, she added, is to train staff and principals “so that they don’t need additional training after the dollars leave.” BCPS is hoping that even after ARRA SIG ends, “the principal leadership pipeline is strong enough to be able to continue to maintain the work that happens over the three years of the grant,” said Nolan.

Even with the availability of training, however, Robinson and Cross at Gholson Middle remain concerned that without the funding they will not be able to sustain the good work that’s been done. Robinson wonders what will happen when her funding for the full-time social worker goes away or her community outreach assistance ends. She fears losing her STEM and creative arts classes. “Without the [ARRA SIG] funding, there are just quite frankly facets of this program that are just going to go away,” she said.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN MICHIGAN

CEP studied four schools in two Michigan districts to shed light on the role of ARRA SIG funding on the ground in schools. Both districts, Detroit Public Schools and Saginaw Public Schools, are located in urban centers and serve mostly African American students, with a substantial Latino student population in one school. In each district, we studied one school that received ARRA SIG funding and a similar school that applied for but did not receive a grant. **Table 4** lists the participating Michigan schools and districts, along with demographic data.

Table 4. Case study schools in Michigan

| School | District | Type of school | Percentage low-income* | Largest racial/ethnic groups | ARRA SIG status |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|----------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| Phoenix Elementary-Middle | Detroit Public Schools | Urban | 99% | 58% Latino, 26% white, 14% black | Recipient |
| Marion Law Academy (elementary) | Detroit Public Schools | Urban | 87% | 99% black | Non-recipient |
| Arthur Hill High | Saginaw Public Schools | Urban | 77% | 67% black, 17% Latino, 15% white | Recipient |
| Saginaw High | Saginaw Public Schools | Urban | 80% | 96% black | Non-recipient |

*Percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

In Detroit, Phoenix Elementary-Middle School received ARRA SIG funds, while Marion Law Academy's application was not funded. In Saginaw, Arthur Hill High School won an ARRA SIG award, while Saginaw did not. Interviews with key administrators in both districts—as well as our examinations of local ARRA SIG grant applications, state test results, and other documents—revealed a number of salient similarities and differences throughout the case study locations.

All staff are optimistic about improvement, but schools without ARRA SIGs have fewer resources.

All Michigan school and district interviewees shared a general optimism that they were on the right track for school improvement. The success most frequently cited in interviews was improvement in school climate, including greater student motivation to learn and greater staff collaboration. The money, however, mattered a great deal. Schools that did not receive ARRA SIG funding did not have the same intensity of strategies, in terms of both additional staff time devoted to the strategies and new materials and technology to support their strategies.

For example, Arthur Hill High in Saginaw, an ARRA SIG school, was able to hire multiple coaches to provide on-site observations, feedback, and professional development, but unfunded Saginaw High School used classroom teachers to double as coaches that provided similar but less intense services. Insufficient instructional coaching time was cited as a challenge in both schools without ARRA SIG funding.

Similarly, Principal Jeffery Nelson at Law made clear that the school's improvement goals would have been easier to achieve had the school received a grant. If more funding were available, he said, he would be able to use it for

professional development and possibly use it to pay for teachers' salaries, bring on extra staff to enhance the core curricular areas of language arts and math, support instruction for coaches, and hire instructional specialists.

Despite the challenge, unfunded schools were not giving up. "You'd be surprised at how they're glowing and how hard they're teaching and working," said Don Durrett, educational director of the Saginaw Public Schools, in reference to the Saginaw High School staff. "It's like you're trying to convince the world. You against the world, and we are going to show them."

External providers have a strong presence in Michigan school improvement efforts.

Michigan has long used regional government-funded agencies to assist in school improvement efforts. As described previously, Michigan's ARRA SIG schools are expected to hire external providers and can choose from a state-approved list that includes regional agencies and other nonprofit and for-profit providers. Our interviews showed that all four schools were assisted by external providers, although the ARRA SIG schools had more time with these providers. Three of the four schools described consistently positive relationships with their external providers.

At Arthur Hill High School, external provider EdWorks delivers regular professional development related specifically to the literacy strategies instructors are using across the curriculum. Additionally, Nathaniel McClain, the school's principal, noted that EdWorks has helped instructors learn how to use available data to drive instructional decisions in their own classrooms and coordinate efforts across instructors. Mainly, however, EdWorks has helped administrators at Arthur Hill develop a framework to envision and achieve improvement milestones throughout the duration of the SIG funding. "I think the structure they provide in coordination with the coaching is real critical because it gives us the parameters that we need to operate within," said McClain.

Detroit's Phoenix Elementary-Middle had a troubled relationship with Pearson Learning Teams, the first external provider with which they contracted. The next year, they switched to Teachscape. This made for a somewhat slow start for the grant, noted Markita Hall, interim director for school improvement for the Detroit Public Schools. She said Teachscape is doing a full needs assessment while also assisting with professional development. Teachscape's peer and individual reflection model requires teachers to videotape and then review classroom lessons and offers teachers an opportunity to discuss what practices and strategies were displayed, as well as what might improve the quality of teaching. Hall said this model was a better fit for growing the new culture of collaboration at Phoenix.

Michigan schools are using data to improve instruction.

In all of the Michigan schools studied, teachers were increasing their use of data to adjust their instructional strategies. Schools with ARRA SIGs hired coaches to help with this process, while non-recipient schools did not have the resources for additional coaching. Staff in every school remarked how important data is becoming in driving decisions at both the administrative and classroom levels. ARRA SIG schools noted that Michigan required this type of data use in their grant applications and focused state technical assistance in this area.

"The biggest challenge was getting the teacher to use data to drive instruction," said Shalonda Byas, who was principal of Phoenix Elementary-Middle at the time of the study. ARRA SIG funds allowed the school to hire an academic engagement officer, whose job it is to help teachers improve instruction by coordinating curricula across the school and by organizing and assisting in professional development activities. Byas noted that the academic engagement officer is helping her staff make progress. Law Academy, which did not receive ARRA SIG funds, added technology this year but would have liked more opportunities for coaching in data use.

Extended learning time has sometimes been hard to implement in ARRA SIG schools.

Michigan state officials noted that schools have struggled with extending learning time as required by the transformation model chosen by many ARRA SIG schools. Both of the ARRA SIG schools studied in Michigan extended the school day, as did Saginaw High School, a non-recipient school.

Arthur Hill High School extended learning time by 30 minutes each day (5 minutes per class) and offered extra academic support to students through a Saturday School program and similar strategies. Phoenix Elementary-Middle was unable to extend learning time in 2010-11, and instead shifted its schedule to devote more instructional time to English language arts and math. This year, Phoenix has extended learning time by one full hour every day. Because the SIG funds are completely supporting this increase in time, however, Hall notes that “this will be a loss once SIG funds are gone if Title [I] funding cannot support that.”

Coaching is seen as essential by all of the Michigan schools studied.

In Michigan, the state’s support for schools in improvement includes on-site coaching and monitoring of instruction. All of the schools interviewed mentioned using some form of instructional and content-oriented coaches, and all indicated that having support available to help monitor improvement at both the school and classroom levels allowed staff to stay focused and on track. Schools that did not receive ARRA SIGs, however, reported that coaching was limited by a lack of funding.

The most intensive coaching model was at Arthur Hill High School, which used ARRA SIG funds to hire a “SIG team” to coordinate its improvement strategies. The team includes, among others, a “SIG coach” to lead the charge, a math coach, literacy coach, professional development coach, technology coach, positive behavior coach, and a data coach position that was not yet filled at the time of our study. The SIG team at Arthur Hill has been essential in creating what Principal McClain calls a “more responsive culture.” With the support offered to instructors by ARRA SIG-funded coaches and the ARRA SIG-required practice of regular assessments, staff work as a team to stay organized and focused on school improvement, McClain said.

Schools report challenges in expending funds efficiently.

Despite their general optimism about improving student achievement, all of the Michigan study schools discussed challenges to implementing their school improvement strategies. One of the most frequently mentioned challenges was spending available improvement funds quickly and efficiently, in light of administrative barriers. These barriers have generally taken the form of complicated bidding and purchasing schemes that delay receipt of goods and services, which in turn prevents administrators and teachers from implementing their planned school improvement strategies. Interviewees expressed growing frustration and impatience about this problem, which further affects staff morale and capacity.

In Detroit, schools must request competitive bids for services and products over \$1,000. This delays the process of getting schools the materials they need, explained Markita Hall. “We’re struggling to get products and services in a timely fashion, whereas in some districts they can send out for services and they would get the services . . . or products within the next week or two,” Hall noted. These delays can slow down implementation and cause frustration for administrators trying to use SIG funds, she added.

Detroit's Law Academy also faced difficulties expending funds. Principal Nelson noted that the process the school has to go through to order the "minutest" of items severely delays the receipt of goods and slows down implementation of reforms. Furthermore, he said, late payments by the central office mean that vendors are frequently wary of working with Detroit schools, and schools "end up having to pay more than [they] would have had [they] been given the approval two months ago." Nelson finds this kind of bureaucracy "very, very discouraging" and called it one of the largest barriers to getting school improvement efforts underway.

While purchasing was not cited as an extreme challenge by schools in Saginaw, interviewees in that district did say they had trouble spending funds quickly. Arthur Hill's Principal McClain said he was concerned about not being able to expend all of the ARRA SIG funding in a timely fashion: "Once you get the money, you just want to be able to use it as efficiently [so that] people aren't under the impression that you don't know what to do with it. The state has given you all this money, and they're like, 'Why do you have something for carryover, or a significant amount for carryover? It shouldn't be if their need is that great. All of that money should be spent.'"

Staffing schools is a challenge in Michigan.

Hiring and retaining high-quality teachers and principals also presented a challenge to all of the Michigan study schools, according to interviewees. All ARRA SIG schools in Michigan had to replace their principals, and many had to replace staff as a requirement of their chosen improvement model. Implementing this aspect of the grant was difficult, but the problem was not limited to ARRA SIG schools. Non-recipient schools in our study also had difficulty replacing staff. This was perhaps because both types of schools had already spent many years in improvement under NCLB, which gave them a reputation as less desirable places to work among potential new staff and which created some churn in staffing among schools that had already replaced staff as part of NCLB restructuring.

Detroit's Phoenix Elementary-Middle, in particular, has had a revolving door for principals. Norma Hernandez was appointed principal of this ARRA SIG school. After Hernandez took unexpected medical leave during the early months of 2011, administrator Shalonda Byas stepped in as acting principal for the duration of the 2010-11 school year. Because of her work in that capacity, Byas was promoted to the position of principal at nearby Farwell Middle School, also a SIG school, and Christopher Sandoval took over as principal of Phoenix. However, Sandoval has since resigned, and Alexander Cintron has now taken on the role of principal at Phoenix. Phoenix also has had difficulty hiring coaches funded through its ARRA SIG grant.

Detroit's Law Academy, a non-recipient school, faced two substantial challenges, according to Principal Nelson: recruiting and retaining strong staff members and using available funds. "We simply do not have enough teachers to do what we need to do to move forward and be successful with our school improvement plan," Nelson said. Additional funding would be necessary to improve staffing deficiencies.

As a district, Saginaw also had difficulty hiring, especially finding qualified staff to work with high-needs students. "Most of the time, if a teacher could get, or an educator could get, a BMW versus a Pinto, even if the Pinto's free, a lot of people still are going to go with the BMW . . . and if there's an opening in a suburban district, even if it's a substitute offer, they may go for the BMW," observed Carlton Jenkins, superintendent of the Saginaw School District. Saginaw's location as an urban school surrounded by a rural area has further compounded its problems attracting qualified teachers and instructional support personnel.

Struggles with sustaining ARRA SIG initiatives loom in Michigan.

All of the Michigan schools in our study are likely to struggle with sustaining school improvement efforts due to the state and national economic situation. ARRA SIG schools, however, must anticipate a return to pre-grant budgets. In Michigan, the ARRA SIG funding averaged about \$1 million annually per school.

Many of the resources paid for with ARRA SIG funds consist of new technology or curricular materials that will last beyond the grant. Much of the ARRA SIG-funded professional development and coaching aims to improve staff and change school culture permanently. At Arthur Hill High, for example, administrators are working with staff from EdWorks to reinforce the message to coaches that “you know you’ve done your job when you’ve coached yourself out of a job,” explained Priscilla Arocha-Roby, assistant principal for curriculum and instruction.

Still, interviewees in Michigan’s ARRA SIG schools said they were already worried about sustaining reforms beyond the end of the grant. Principal McClain at Arthur Hill noted that the challenge would go beyond coaching:

The biggest challenge for me . . . would be the sustainability. I just don’t like getting started, and having the support and having the funding and the momentum, only to have that taper off because the grant cycle has run its course. If we’re truly interested in changing the lives of our kids, and I’ve seen what ARRA SIG can do with additional resource and people who are competent in positions . . . then we have to fund it accordingly or we’re just blowing smoke.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN IDAHO

Of the three Idaho schools participating in this study, two received ARRA SIG grants: Lakeside Elementary, a rural, majority-Native-American school in the Plummer-Worley School District, and Jefferson Middle, a suburban school with a majority-Latino enrollment in the Caldwell School District. The third school, Wilder Elementary (a rural, majority-Latino school in the Wilder district) initially applied for but ultimately did not participate in ARRA SIG. (See **table 5**.)

Table 5. Case study schools in Idaho

| School | District | Type of school | Percentage low-income* | Largest racial/ethnic groups | ARRA SIG status |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| Lakeside Elementary | Plummer-Worley School District | Rural | 60% | 66% Native American, 31% white | Recipient |
| Wilder Elementary | Wilder School District | Rural | 88% | 85% Latino, 14% white | Non-recipient |
| Jefferson Middle | Caldwell School District | Suburban | 75% | 52% Latino, 45% white | Recipient |

*Percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

CEP’s interviews with local educators and examinations of ARRA SIG applications, local results on state tests, and other documents showed a number of similarities, as well as some differences, among the schools.

The transformation model was the only workable choice for Idaho's rural schools.

All three Idaho schools in our study initially chose the transformation model. Interviewees at these schools noted that the requirements of the other models to replace large percentages of staff, contract with outside charter or management organizations, and/or close schools were not workable given Idaho's rural setting. Attracting new staff and organizations is difficult in rural communities, and closing a school leaves the community with inadequate schooling opportunities. This rationale is consistent with the context described by Steve Underwood, the Idaho state official interviewed for this study.

At Lakeside, for example, there would have been no time to replace staff as required by the turnaround model or to contract with a charter company as required by the restart model, particularly because of the remote location of the school and the difficulty recruiting staff and other providers to the district, explained Judi Sharrett, superintendent of the Plummer-Worley District. Closure was also not an option, she said, because the district has only one elementary school and few buildings large enough to house new schools.

In Jefferson Middle the transformation model allowed the district to build on past initiatives rather than start over, said Sherawn Reberry, the Caldwell district's director of federal programs. The past initiatives included twice yearly district observations of teachers and district training in the Caldwell Academy of Leadership, which provides professional development based on the findings of the observations.

While all three Idaho schools initially believed the transformation model would work for the school, Wilder Principal Jeff Dillon said the school abandoned its application in part because the school and district staff found the state's interpretation of this model would require changes in addition to restaffing that they did not want to make.

All of the Idaho schools studied had to scramble to complete their grant applications.

All of the study schools in Idaho noted that the grant application required extensive planning in a short time period. Steve Underwood of the Idaho Department of Education echoed this sentiment. The two rural schools had more difficulty with the short timeline, perhaps due to very small district offices. Even officials in Caldwell, a larger suburban school district, said the timeline was difficult to meet. As a district, Caldwell had developed several initiatives that administrators said helped other district schools to improve student achievement and exit NCLB improvement. The district's three-and-a-half-month grant writing effort built on these prior initiatives, local officials said. Still, meeting the application deadline was a challenge for the district.

Superintendent Sharrett of the Plummer-Worley district explained that replacing the principal at rural Lakeside Elementary, as required in the transformation model, was a challenge under the short time frame: "The grant gave us no time and had no respect for timelines or legal obligations and notifications. We were lucky the way it worked out. It could have put us in court for a long time." Similar to the application experience in Caldwell, Principal Dillon and others interviewed for this study agreed the application process was time consuming for rural Wilder. Dillon estimated staff spent about 250 hours on the application, and parents were included in the process.

Instructional coaches played an important role in improvement efforts.

Similarities among the three Idaho schools' initial plans for ARRA SIG were striking. In particular, all three schools planned to create administrative support positions in the form of instructional coaches and/or school improvement

directors. These non-teaching positions would work closely with teachers in their own schools to improve instruction. All schools were able to engage coaches regardless of grant funding.

Lakeside's grant has brought several new support positions to the district. "I call it building a bigger boat," said Superintendent Sharrett. These positions and other grant activities were designed to focus mostly on the elementary school but also to help the secondary school, which served grades 7-12. "You can't tear things apart, you know, in a district like ours. You have to look at the whole," Sharrett noted.

The ARRA SIG award originally supported three new positions in the Plummer-Worley district in school year 2010-11: a full-time school improvement director, a part-time instructional coach, and a part-time community coordinator. In school year 2011-12, these positions were combined; ARRA SIG supported two full-time instructional coaches, and existing staff were redeployed. Interviewees said this change helped focus the reform efforts in each building. "It was muddy as a staff last year," said Leisa Anderson, a former teacher who is now the instructional coach at Lakeside. "What did that person do? What were this person's responsibilities? What was each job like? So, it felt like we didn't get as much benefit out of the positions as we might have if we were to separate each position into one building."

Caldwell has had instructional coaches in place in its schools for the past five to six years, said Reberry, the federal programs director. These coaches work with teachers on instructional strategies. ARRA SIG has continued and intensified this coaching at Jefferson. "Our coach is really visible and knowledgeable," said Mary Rita Yamamoto, a veteran social studies teacher at Jefferson. "She observed my classroom last week and came right back in the next day with some really good feedback."

Interviewees from Wilder said they work with two experts in English language arts from Boise State University, Mary Ann Cahill and Anne Gregory, as well as with an independent math and science consultant, Tom Farley. These coaches have been working with the schools to adopt new curricula and related instructional practices. Cahill calls the new research-based English language arts curriculum "a blended approach" that teachers and Cahill developed together. "I came on board with the same issues that literacy was having, the absence of curriculum," said Farley, adding that four years ago, math instruction consisted of a walk through the textbook, and science instruction was often nonexistent. He worked with teachers to create common expectations and practices. "Our math curriculum is now, and has been for this year, tied tightly to the common core standards, so that we can do a better job of tracking what we expect kids to know and be able to do here in Wilder," Farley said. In both English language arts and math, local assessments are given several times a semester to help teachers track students' progress and adapt and develop instruction.

Much of the curricular work at Wilder took place during two-hour weekly professional development meetings for all staff. These meetings are continuing to hone teachers' skills in the new curriculum and help teachers identify and provide remediation to students with learning difficulties through the Response to Intervention approach. "We're learning how we can take strategies from that professional development and use it in our classrooms with kids of all different levels," said Lynette Rivera, a 14-year veteran of the school and new intervention specialist. "I mean, we have kids in 2nd grade that are kindergarten level, so we have to learn to adapt and work with all of those kids." Rivera praised the professional development for raising both teachers' expectations of students and staff morale.

Idaho schools are providing extended learning time and tutoring to improve student achievement.

All three Idaho schools in our study planned to rearrange their schedules, not only to extend the school day but also to provide more instruction for students who are having difficulty academically and/or behaviorally. The ARRA SIG schools, however, had more financial resources to do this. At Lakeside, the ARRA SIG funds supported "master

scheduling.” In contrast to past practice which allowed more flexible scheduling, the school now has a master schedule with the following features:

- Classes take place at predictable times for students, as well as parents and administrators visiting classrooms
- Reading occurs earlier in the day for younger students when they are more rested.
- Reading is consistently taught for 90 minutes a day.
- Time is set aside for differentiated instruction in small-groups based on students’ skill levels.
- Less time is wasted and the transformation model requirement of extending learning time is met.

In 2011-12, Jefferson Middle School introduced a “flex time” period to make time for more remediation and enrichment based on assessments. The school made room for this period by cutting down on transition time, a step that also extended learning time. During flex time, students can make up work, get extra tutoring in areas of need, or choose an enrichment activity. All interviewees in the school believed this flex time would improve student achievement in the coming year.

The initial ARRA SIG application from Wilder Elementary outlined plans for a year-round school to correspond with many of the students’ winter celebrations in Mexico, which are longer than the current vacation time, and to reduce the loss of learning time during the three-month summer vacation. Ultimately, Wilder decided not to pursue ARRA SIG funding and had not implemented this plan for a year-round schedule at the time of our study.

All Idaho study schools point to success in improving climate and culture.

All three Idaho schools, regardless of whether they received ARRA SIG funding, have taken steps to change their climate and culture as part of their school improvement efforts. At Lakeside, interviewees agreed that ARRA SIG brought big changes to the school. Although there had been ongoing effort to improve the curriculum and climate prior to ARRA SIG, this effort lacked resources and focus. Leisa Anderson, the instructional coach, described how ARRA SIG changed things:

Before the grant, our school improvement efforts seemed very disorganized. When we had turnover of principals or administration, they would come in with their own ideas and try to implement them, but it didn’t always feel like we were headed in the right direction. Now we know where we’re headed. We’re clear on that picture. It’s just provided us that foundation and the framework that we needed. We were lacking that before.

While Lakeside students made some achievement gains on state tests last year, the primary success mentioned by all of the school interviewees was improved school climate, as evidenced by more engaged students and better staff collaboration. “Kids are more engaged,” Anderson said. “And I think changing our curriculum has helped that process. We’re very intentional, and I think that’s the biggest key.” Lakeside Principal Monique English called ARRA SIG “the backbone of our school improvement” and said it provided the resources staff needed to be more successful and work as a team. “I just think we made huge gains last year. The building feels like it made a 180 degree turn, compared to how it felt last year. That’s exciting.”

At Jefferson Middle School, the first success mentioned by interviewees was increased student achievement, and a contributor to these increases, in their view, was the improved school culture. “If a kid loves school, that student’s achievement is going to go up,” Principal Moss Strong explained. Student incentives, a focus on learning, less transition time between classes, and more adult supervision have all contributed to the improved culture, interviewees said.

Teacher Mary Rita Yamamoto described the change in Jefferson's school climate in this way:

Our discipline has gone from horrible to great. Principal Strong is just a natural at it. The kids turned on a dime. They were tired of the old school climate. Our kids weren't happy. They weren't smiling. As soon as this stronger leader came in, the kids' shoulders went down. They were smiling, happy, and relaxed. It was a huge change, and the kids were ready for it, and they wanted it.

Staff morale is also up at Jefferson, interviewees said. "I think they hit it hard last year," said Reberry, referring to the Jefferson staff. "They understood how they had been defined as a school, and they really wanted to work hard to change. I just think the teachers did an excellent job of stepping up to the plate, asking questions, doing what they needed to do, and focusing on students' learning. I really see the staff has come together."

Interviewees at Wilder Elementary, which did not receive an ARRA SIG award, also said staff morale had improved at their school, in part due to teacher turnover that took place when the school was identified for improvement under NCLB. Once the English language arts and math consultants were on board at the school, they and the principal began observing teachers weekly. Many teachers were being observed and given feedback for improvement up to three times a week. Some were put on official one-year improvement plans. In response to continued poor student performance, Superintendent Daniel Arriola said the district worked in multiple ways to change the staff. The district took advantage of teacher attrition through retirements, resignations, or non-renewal of contracts to bring in new staff, focused on effective classroom teaching for all students, and sought "to counter the excuse that our kids cannot achieve, our parents don't care because they're poor," he said. Administrators estimated that about half of the staff left due to unwillingness to participate in the new initiatives.

"I think at first it was kind of shocking," Intervention Specialist Rivera said of the staff changes, but she noted that those who left the school were "the ones that weren't willing to change and adapt." Ultimately, she agreed with the administration that the change was for the best. "We've got these new teachers in, and they're willing to work hard and do the best for our kids. So, now we have a much better staff morale than we've ever had."

ARRA SIG grant funding meant more resources for school improvement strategies.

Lakeside and Jefferson, the two Idaho schools that received ARRA SIG funding, had more resources to fully implement their plans than Wilder Elementary, which initially applied for but did not receive a grant. At Wilder, administrators said they simply had to do the best they could with their current funding. The school did at least partially implement the plan outlined in its initial ARRA SIG application, except for a switch to year-round schools and the addition of hands-on math lab materials. The school also got to keep elements, including the current principal and current curriculum, that interviewees felt were essential to the school's success but that would have had to be eliminated due to ARRA SIG requirements. **Table 6** shows the key elements of school improvement in Wilder's ARRA SIG application and their current level of implementation.

At Lakeside Elementary, the ARRA SIG funds supported or enhanced several school improvement efforts. These included five all-staff professional development days in which staff met to align their curriculum with common core standards; a new reading curriculum; an enhanced full-day "solutions" class consisting of four-week instructional units for students with intensive, ongoing behavior problems and shorter-term instruction for students who need to be temporarily removed from their regular classroom; a lunch reflection time for students who exhibit behavior problems during regular classes; and the master scheduling approach described above.

At Jefferson, ARRA SIG funding dramatically increased technology and accompanying professional development, according to interviewees. The school changed some curricular areas when it brought in supplemental materials

Table 6. Key elements of Wilder’s ARRA SIG application and current implementation status

| Element in original ARRA SIG application | Current implementation status |
|---|---|
| Year-round school (to correspond with many students’ winter celebrations in Mexico, which are longer than the current vacation time, and to reduce the lost learning time during the three-month summer vacation) | Not implemented |
| Two intervention specialists | Fully implemented in 2010-11 (two intervention specialists); partially implemented in 2011-12 (one specialist) |
| Continue two English language arts consultants and one math/science consultant | Implemented |
| Full-time elementary principal with no other administrative duties | Partially implemented (half-time principal, half-time federal programs director for 2010-11; three-quarters time principal for 2011-12) |
| Full-time coach for English language learner (ELL) instruction | Partially implemented (English language arts consultants help with ELL instruction) |
| Hand-on math lab materials | Not implemented |
| Class size reduction | Fully implemented |

Note: Wilder Elementary initially applied for but did not receive an ARRA SIG award. The elements in the left column were included in the improvement plan in the school’s application. The right column shows the implementation status of these elements at the time of CEP’s study.

through a program called Compass Learning, said Principal Strong. The program includes smart-board technology, software and Web support for creating group and individual lessons and assessments, and professional development for teachers.

Teachers at Jefferson also receive incentives through the ARRA SIG. Some incentives are tied to developing proficiency in using the new technology. For example, teachers might earn document cameras and mimeo pads (similar to iPads) if they complete the training and meet the criteria set out in their professional development plan. Teachers also got bonuses last year for increasing student achievement. Yamamoto appreciated the bonuses and emphasized that teachers should be paid at the level appropriate for highly educated professionals. But, she added, student success is a reward in itself. For example, she said, seeing student successes like high school graduation is the real incentive for teachers: “That’s what feeds us.”

Interviewees believe that ARRA SIG has made positive changes at Jefferson. “I don’t know that money is always the answer to everything, but you know it helped in this case being able to put in some new tools,” said Reberry.

Staffing was challenging for all Idaho schools in the study.

Regardless of whether they received ARRA SIG grants, all of the Idaho study schools mentioned challenges in hiring and retaining qualified teachers, instructional coaches, or other administrators. While interviewees at all three schools expressed concern that they might lose staff that had participated in important professional development, this was a particular concern in the two rural schools, especially if the economy picks up and suburban and urban

schools begin hiring. For example, Wilder's rural setting means that many teachers do not live in the community, and administrators expressed some worries about losing good teachers to other districts in the future. "I think what's helped Wilder a lot in the last couple years is the economic downturn," noted Cahill, "because new teachers can't get jobs in Boise and Meridian, which are the big places." Although an economic upturn would be good for Wilder's families, it would increase the employment options for teachers.

The two Idaho study schools with ARRA SIG awards also will have the special concern of sustaining or phasing out the additional administrators, such as instructional coaches, brought on through this additional funding. District and school staff at Lakeside did not know whether the instructional coach positions would continue to be funded after ARRA SIG funding ends. Superintendent Sharrett of the Plummer-Worley district plans to use state and/or tribal funds to keep the instructional coaches, although she admitted that these funding sources are unpredictable "and you can't really count on it."

Idaho's state-level supports are stronger for ARRA SIG schools.

Schools differed in their views of state support for the school improvement process, particularly the state capacity builders, who work with school teams to plan for improvement and keep the process on track, and the state's Ways to Improve School Effectiveness (WISE) software, which enables online school improvement planning and tracking. Although WISE was somewhat of a time burden in the two rural schools, perhaps due to small central offices, the ARRA SIG schools were more positive about these state supports than the non-recipient school. "I think that it's useful," said Monique English, Lakeside's principal. "But I think in the reality of paperwork, it's a time cruncher. It's definitely one of those things that once you get used to using it and you're doing it, the paperwork part is less of a burden."

At Lakeside Elementary, interviewees particularly appreciated the state's capacity builders. "Our capacity builder has been a great resource," teacher Liesa Anderson said. "She's always helpful and shares—'Have you thought about this? What else might you try?'—trying to get us to be more reflective in our practice."

Jefferson administrators said the district and school had participated in state assistance to schools in NCLB improvement and that this assistance intensified with the ARRA SIG grant. In particular, the state's capacity builder, who assists both ARRA SIG schools and other schools in NCLB improvement, was working more intensely with Jefferson, according to Reberry. "The previous administration I don't believe took advantage of the capacity builder in the same way," she said.

The ARRA SIG also brought the Caldwell School District more technical assistance on how to use the WISE tool effectively, Reberry noted. The tool has a special section on school improvement and transformation that the ARRA SIG schools are using. "That enhanced my knowledge of the WISE tool, and then I could in turn share this professional development with other buildings," she said.

Conversely, Wilder administrators and consultants said state supports had not been and were not likely to be a central part of their improvement efforts. For example, Wilder, like many districts in NCLB improvement, worked with a state capacity builder to create a school improvement plan using the WISE tool. Delays in processing this plan in the fall of 2011 and differences in beliefs about school improvement left little room for meaningful state input. Farley referred to the rewriting the district did as "sentence engineering," implying that the school's plans would not change in important ways to meet the state requirements.

Conclusion

CEP's investigation of the first year of ARRA SIG implementation in three states revealed both opportunities and obstacles. All of the state and local officials participating in the study appreciated the focus on improving schools and were hopeful that their school improvement efforts would have a positive impact. All three states were providing state-level coaches or assistants to work with leaders in ARRA SIG schools, requiring school progress reports, and coordinating a network of ARRA SIG grantees. State officials believed these efforts would be worthwhile, and most of local interviewees that received these services agreed.

Interviewees differed, however, in their views of the overall federal approaches to school improvement in the ARRA SIG program and were not always positive. Both state and local officials in Idaho questioned, for example, the appropriateness of ARRA SIG requirements for their rural and remote schools, which sometimes have difficulty replacing staff and attracting service providers. The Idaho state official also questioned the appropriateness of the federal methods of identifying schools in the lowest achieving 5%, since the small numbers of students in rural schools result in yearly percentages of proficient students that fluctuate widely.

State-level officials also differed in their view of the adequacy of the funding available for ARRA SIGs. Maryland officials felt the award amounts were sufficient. While Michigan officials also said the school amounts were sufficient, they wished that the program criteria would allow them to serve more low-achieving schools. By contrast, the Idaho state official interviewed said the amounts were too large for some of Idaho's small schools.

All state officials agreed that districts should play a key role in school improvement. Those in Idaho and Michigan would have liked to have seen more emphasis on building district capacity in the federal ARRA SIG requirements.

At the local level, the types of reforms discussed in both ARRA SIG schools and non-recipient schools were similar on the surface. These improvement initiatives included using instructional coaches to deliver professional development, extending learning time, and focusing on improving school climate. However, initiatives were less intensive in non-recipient schools. In Idaho and Michigan, in particular, the contrast between resources in recipient and non-recipient schools was striking.

Even with the ARRA SIG awards, interviewees in recipient schools uniformly cited attracting and retaining staff as a challenge to their school improvement efforts. Having the grant with all of its enhanced resources did not allay worries that staff would leave for jobs in more convenient locations and in schools perceived to be better places to work. Staff stability was also identified as a challenge in schools that did not get grants.

In all three states, but particularly in Idaho, officials would like to see some changes in ARRA SIG requirements. Idaho interviewees felt the criteria for identifying and funding schools, the improvement models, the emphasis on schools rather than district capacity, the staff replacement requirements, and other aspects of the program were inappropriate for rural schools. State and local interviewees in the other two states suggested less extensive changes, such as the suggestion from Maryland that the program acknowledge the importance of non-academic services that affect student achievement.

In the future, it will, of course, be important to track school improvement trends in schools with and without ARRA SIG. CEP anticipates, however, that it will be difficult to make conclusive statements about whether or not these grants "worked" without looking closely at implementation. Officials in our study identified factors outside of those influenced by the grant that had a major impact on school improvement efforts, in particular, district capacity and staffing. In addition, state contexts shaped participants' views of the appropriateness of federal policy surrounding ARRA SIGs. Therefore, CEP hopes to continue to follow these schools and states in order to provide important fine-grained information about implementation and state context that impacts the success of the ARRA SIG program and of school improvement efforts in general.

References

References Cited in This Report

- Center on Education Policy. (2010). *Changing tires en route: Michigan rolls out millions in school improvement grants*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Center on Education Policy. (2009). *Looking for new ways to make progress: School restructuring in Maryland, 2008-09 follow up report*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Center on Education Policy. (2008). *The sit-down dinner: Formalizing restructuring under the No Child Left Behind Act in Michigan*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Hurlburt, S., Le Floch, K. C., Therriault, S. B., & Cole, S. (2011b). *SIG baseline database*. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/oese-news/sig-baseline-report-database-and-map-now-available>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2011, February 23). *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/sigguidance02232011.pdf>

CEP Reports on School Improvement

ALL OF THE FOLLOWING REPORTS ARE AVAILABLE AT WWW.CEP-DC.ORG.

2012:

State implementation and perceptions of Title I school improvement grants under the Recovery Act: One year later

2011:

Early state implementation of Title I school improvement grants under the Recovery Act

Changing tires en route: Michigan rolls out millions in school improvement grants

2010:

Improving low-performing schools: Summary of a forum

School districts' perspectives on the economic stimulus package: School improvement grants present uncertainty and opportunity

2009:

Top down, bottom up: California districts in corrective action and schools in restructuring under NCLB

Intensified support: Changes in school restructuring in Georgia under the No Child Left Behind Act

Beyond restructuring: Ohio retools state support for high-need districts through its differentiated accountability plan

Differentiating and simplifying: Transforming school restructuring under No Child Left Behind in New York

Looking for new ways to make progress: School restructuring in Maryland, 2008-09 follow up report

Expanding restructuring and taking on high schools: An NCLB follow-up report in Michigan

Restructuring roads diverge: Lessons from schools in the last stages of school improvement in six states

Mining the opportunities in “differentiated accountability”: Lessons from the No Child Left Behind pilots in four states

2008:

Managing more than a thousand remodeling projects: School restructuring in California

Uncharted territory: An examination of restructuring under NCLB in Georgia

It takes more than a hero: School restructuring in Ohio under the No Child Left Behind Act

A call to restructure restructuring: Lessons from the No Child Left Behind Act

The sit-down dinner: Formalizing restructuring under the No Child Left Behind Act in Michigan

Restructuring under the No Child Left Behind Act in Maryland: 2007-08 follow-up report

2007:

What now? Lessons from Michigan about restructuring schools and next steps under NCLB

Making mid-course corrections: School restructuring in Maryland

Moving beyond identification: Assisting schools in improvement

NCLB year 5: Beyond the mountains: An early look at restructuring results in California

2006:

Building on state reform: Maryland school restructuring

Wrestling the devil in the details: An early look at restructuring in California

2005:

Hope but no miracle cures: Michigan’s early restructuring lessons

2004:

Makeovers, facelifts, or reconstructive surgery: An early look at NCLB school restructuring in Michigan

Credits and Acknowledgments

This report was written by Caitlin Scott, a CEP consultant; Jennifer McMurrer and Shelby McIntosh, CEP research associates; and Kenne Dibner, a CEP consultant. Nancy Kober, a CEP consultant, edited the report. Diane Stark Rentner, CEP's deputy director, and Jack Jennings, CEP's founder, provided advice and assistance.

We are deeply grateful to the state, district, and school officials in Maryland, Michigan, and Idaho who took time from their busy schedules to be interviewed for this report. Specifically, we would like to thank the following individuals:

MARYLAND

Maria Lamb, Ann E. Chafin, Mozelle Mickens, and Tina McKnight with the Program Improvement and Family Support Branch, Maryland State Department of Education

Beth Nolan, Former Turnaround Director, Baltimore City Public Schools

Ed Ryans, Turnaround Director, Prince George's County Public Schools

Marc Martin, Principal, Commodore John Rogers in BCPS

Lacey Robinson, Principal, Gholson Middle School in PGCPs

James Richardson, Principal, Buck Rodgers Middle School in PGCPs

Richard Jackson, Principal, Nicholas Orem Middle School in PGCPs

MICHIGAN

Linda Forward and Mark Coscarella with the Office of Education, Improvement, and Innovation at the Michigan Department of Education

Markita Hall, Interim Director of School Turnaround, Detroit Public Schools

Jeffrey Nelson, Principal, Marion Law Academy

Shalonda Byas, Principal, Farwell Elementary-Middle School and Former Principal, Phoenix Elementary-Middle School

Carlton Jenkins, Superintendent, Saginaw Public Schools

Don Durrett, Director, Saginaw High School

Ramont Roberts, Assistant Principal, Saginaw High School

Teri Lieber, Teacher, Saginaw High School

Shannon Rammler, Teacher, Saginaw High School

Sharon Richardson, Professional Development Coordinator, Arthur Hill High School

Priscilla Arocha-Roby, Assistant Principal for Curriculum and Instruction, Arthur Hill High School

Nathaniel McClain, Principal, Arthur Hill High School

IDAHO

Steve Underwood, Director, Statewide System of Support, Division of Student Achievement & School Improvement, Idaho State Department of Education

Sherawn Reberry, Director of Federal Programs, Caldwell School District

Moss Strong, Principal, Jefferson Middle School

Mary Rita Yamamoto, Teacher, Jefferson Middle School

Judi Sharrett, Superintendent, Plummer-Worley Joint District

Liesa Anderson, Teacher, Lakeside Elementary

Monique English, Principal, Lakeside Elementary

Daniel Arriola, Superintendent, Wilder School District

Jeff Dillon, Principal, Wilder Elementary

Mary Ann Cahill, Assistant Professor, Boise State University

Tom Farley, Independent Math and Science Consultant

Lynette Rivera, Teacher, Wilder Elementary

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.

We are grateful to the William and Flora Hewlett 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.

© Center on Education Policy

The George Washington University

March 2012



Center on Education Policy

The George Washington University
2140 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Suite 103
Washington, D.C. 20037

Tel: 202-822-8065
Email: cep-dc@cep-dc.org
Web: www.cep-dc.org

www.cep-dc.org