THE CENTER ON SCHOOL TURNAROUND
WestEd

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANTS

Guidance and Tools for the 2015 Amended Regulations:

Maximizing the Optional Planning/Pre-Implementation Year

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Contents

Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to provide states, districts, and schools with information and support to prepare applications for 2015–2016 School Improvement Grants (SIGs). The guide includes tools, checklists, and questions for SEAs and LEAs aligned with the revised SIG requirements, primarily focused on how to leverage the "planning year" to build a foundation of success for SIG schools.

Background on School Improvement Grants

Purpose of SIGs

School Improvement Grants (SIGs) are authorized under section 1003(g) of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The grants are made to state education agencies (SEAs), and the SEAs award competitive subgrants to local education agencies (LEAs) that demonstrate (1) the greatest need for the funds, and (2) the strongest commitment to use the funds in ways that will substantially raise the achievement of students in the lowest-performing schools. The funds are to be used to improve student achievement in eligible schools.

The federal SIG requirements were originally re-regulated in 2010, and the amended requirements were finalized in February 2015. The amended requirements implement language from the 2014 Consolidated Appropriations Act thus allowing five-year SIG awards; adding State-determined school improvement intervention models; adding evidence-based, whole-school reform models; and provided some flexibility for rural schools. The amended requirements also add an Early Learning Model that focuses on improving outcomes in preschool and early grades. Further, the amended SIG requirements are modified to include

priority schools (lowest-performing Title I schools) and focus schools (schools with largest achievement gaps) eligible to receive SIG funds in states that are operating under approved ESEA flexibility plans without requesting a waiver to do so. Furthermore, the amended requirements make modifications to the teacher and principal evaluation and support system, clarify the renewal criteria, and call for more support and monitoring of implementation by the LEAs.

Duration of SIG Awards

An LEA may apply for, and the SEA award, a SIG grant for:

- Five years, with the first year being a planning year, followed by at least three implementation years and one optional year to sustain reforms or continue implementation, or

- Five years, with the first three years being implementation years, followed by (up to) two years to sustain reforms or continue implementation.

The grants are annually renewable during the five-year period, based on the state's determination that the LEA and school have

made adequate progress in implementing the intervention model.

2015–2016 SIG Timeline

The deadline for SEA submission of its application to the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) is April 15, 2015. The SEA includes a timeline in its application. Dates below are provided as an example and will vary according to each state's application.

> SEA notifies LEAs about the SIG competition: **February 2015**
>
> LEA applications due to the SEA: **June 2015**
>
> SEA conducts review of LEA applications: **June/July 2015**
>
> SEA notifies LEAs about their award status: **July 2015**
>
> SEA awards SIG funds to LEAs: **July 2015**
>
> Optional Planning Year Begins: **July/August 2015**
>
> OR
>
> Implementation Year Begins: **August/September 2015**

Eligible Schools

SEAs Not Approved for ESEA Flexibility

SEAs not approved for ESEA flexibility continue to identify SIG-eligible schools according to the Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III definitions used prior to the 2015 amendment to SIG requirements. In addition to these schools, the SEA may designate schools as "newly eligible" that meet criteria established in the 2010 amendment to SIG requirements. A school may be identified as a "newly eligible" school for Tier I or Tier II if it: (1) has not made adequate yearly progress for at least two consecutive years; (2) is in the state's

lowest quintile of performance based on proficiency rates on the state's assessments; and (3) is no higher achieving than the highest-achieving school identified by the SEA as a "persistently lowest-achieving school." A school may also be identified as a "newly eligible" school for Tier I or Tier II if it is a high school that has a graduation rate less than 60% over a number of years.

SEAs Approved for ESEA Flexibility

For SEAs approved for ESEA flexibility, all schools identified as priority schools or focus schools under the criteria in the ESEA flexibility plan are eligible to receive SIG funds.

Seven Intervention Models

The turnaround, restart, closure, and transformation models remain as defined in previous iterations of SIG. To these four models, three models have been added for 2015–2016. An LEA applying to the SEA for a SIG grant must select one of the following intervention models for each SIG-eligible school for which it is applying:

1. Turnaround—replacement of principal and 50% of staff and other requirements

2. Restart—close the school and reopen as a charter school or school administered by an Education Management Organization

3. Closure—close the school and assign students to other, better-performing schools

4. Transformation—replace the principal and implement turnaround principles; most significant change in federal requirements for 2015 is the requirement to align the leader and teacher evaluation system with the criteria in the ESEA flexibility guidance

5. NEW: State-Developed Alternative Model (if approved state model is available)

6. NEW: Evidence-Based, Whole-School Reform Strategy (created by LEA in partnership with a strategy developer)

7. NEW: Early Learning Model

Rural School Flexibility

Under the amended SIG requirements, an LEA eligible for services under subpart 1 or 2 of Title VI (Rural Education Assistance Program) of the ESEA may propose to modify one element of the turnaround or transformation model. In seeking this modification, the LEA's application must describe how the intent and purpose of the element will be met.

State-Developed Alternative Intervention Models

An SEA may seek approval from the U. S. Secretary of Education for one state-developed intervention model. The model must address the Department of Education's Turnaround Principles to[1]:

1. Ensure strong leadership by:

   a. Requiring a review of the performance of the current principal;

   b. Requiring replacement of the principal, if such change is necessary to ensure strong and effective leadership, or requiring the LEA to demonstrate to the SEA that the current principal has a track record in improving achievement and has the ability to lead the turnaround effort; and

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[1] The model description language used in this guide is taken and/or summarized from the Federal Register, Volume 79, Number 173, September 8, 2014 Proposed Rules by the U.S. Department of Education.

c. Requiring the LEA to provide the principal with operational flexibility in the areas of scheduling, staff, curriculum, and budget.

2. Ensure that teachers are effective and able to improve instruction by:

   a. Requiring a review of all staff and retaining only those who are determined to be effective and to have the ability to be successful in supporting the turnaround effort;

   b. Preventing ineffective teachers from transferring to a school implementing a SIG intervention; and

   c. Providing job-embedded, ongoing professional development informed by the teacher evaluation and support systems and tied to teacher and student needs.

3. Establish schedules and implement strategies that provide increased learning time (as defined in the SIG requirements).

4. Strengthen the school's instructional program by ensuring that it:

   a. Is research-based, rigorous, and aligned with state academic content standards; and

   b. Meets student needs.

5. Use data to inform instruction and for continuous improvement, including providing time for collaboration on the use of data.

6. Establish a school environment that improves school safety and discipline and addresses other non-academic factors that impact student achievement, such as students' social, emotional, and health needs.

7. Provide ongoing mechanisms for family and community engagement.

Evidence-Based, Whole-School Reform Strategy Model

An LEA may propose to use SIG funds to implement an evidence-based, whole-school reform strategy developed in partnership with a strategy developer. The LEA must present evidence supporting the strategy, and the evidence must include a sample population or setting similar to the population or setting of the school. The evidence must include at least one study that meets the What Works Clearinghouse standards that found a statistically significant favorable impact on student academic achievement. The strategy developer must meet the definition of a strategy developer in the SIG requirements.

An evidence-based, whole-school reform strategy is defined as a strategy that (1) is designed to improve student academic achievement or attainment; (2) is implemented for all students in a school; and (3) addresses, at a minimum and in a comprehensive and coordinated manner, school leadership, teaching and learning in at least one full academic content area (including professional learning for educators), student non-academic support, and family and community engagement.

A "strategy developer" is defined as an entity or individual that maintains proprietary rights for the strategy or, if no entity or individual maintains proprietary rights for the strategy, an entity or individual that has a demonstrated record of success in implementing the strategy in one or more low-achieving schools or that, together with a partner LEA, has a high-quality plan for implementing the strategy in a school.

Early Learning Model

An elementary school eligible for a SIG award may apply to adopt an early learning model. The early learning model must include:

1. Implementing each of the following early learning strategies:

    a. Offer full-day kindergarten;

    b. Establish or expand a high-quality preschool program;

    c. Provide educators, including preschool teachers, with time for joint planning across grades to facilitate effective teaching and learning and positive teacher–student interactions.

2. Replacing the principal who led the school prior to commencement of the early learning model.

3. Implementing the same rigorous, transparent, and equitable evaluation and support systems for teachers and principals, designed and developed with teacher and principal involvement, that is required under the transformation model.

4. Using the teacher and principal evaluation and support system to identify and reward school leaders, teachers, and other staff who, in implementing this model, have increased student achievement and identifying and removing those who, after ample opportunities have been provided for them to improve their professional practice, have not done so.

5. Implementing such strategies as financial incentives, increased opportunities for promotion and career growth, and more flexible work conditions that are designed to recruit, place, and retain staff with the skills necessary to meet the needs of students in the school, taking into consideration the results from the teacher and principal evaluation and support system, if applicable.

6. Using data to identify and implement an instructional program that (a) is research-based, developmentally

appropriate, and vertically aligned from one grade to the next, as well as aligned with state early learning and development standards and state academic standards and (b) in the early grades, promotes the full range of academic content across domains of development, including math and science, language and literacy, socio-emotional skills, self-regulation, and executive functions.

7. Promoting the continuous use of student data (such as from formative, interim, and summative assessments) to inform and differentiate instruction in order to meet the educational and developmental needs of individual students.

8. Providing staff ongoing, high-quality, job-embedded professional development such as coaching and mentoring (e.g., regarding subject-specific pedagogy, instruction that reflects a deeper understanding of the community served by the school, or differentiated instruction) that is aligned with the school's comprehensive instructional program and designed with school staff to ensure they are equipped to facilitate effective teaching and learning and have the capacity to successfully implement school reform strategies.

The SIG Turnaround Application Process: SEA Roles and Responsibilities

The SIG program, through its requirements, conveys the distinctive roles of SEAs, LEAs, and schools in the process. Of the SIG funds received by a state, 95% must be allocated directly to LEAs, with up to 5% retained by the state for administration, evaluation, and technical assistance. However, the SEA is also responsible for the following:

- Identifying eligible Tier I, Tier II, priority, and focus schools;

- Developing SEA application, LEA guidance, and an LEA application template;

- Reviewing, approving, and awarding (including school/district grant renewals and annual goals);

- Managing and monitoring turnaround efforts; and

- Reporting data on leading indicators.

These responsibilities seek to engage SEAs in ways that may differ from past federal school improvement efforts; because of these responsibilities, states have many opportunities to impact turnaround efforts through its decisions and guidance.

SEA Levers

There are several key levers SEAs have at their disposal to guide SIG efforts. Two examples are whether to fund continuation versus new awards and what type of guidance will help drive systemic and sustainable turnaround efforts.

Continuation Versus New Awards

In this new round of funding, SEAs may consider whether to identify new schools or make continuation awards to current schools implementing SIG from previous cohorts. As states contemplate this question, there are obvious pros and cons to either option. Should an SEA decide to make continuation awards to currently implementing SIG schools, it will provide additional time for those schools to improve. However, these schools would also not have the luxury of having sufficient time to plan for the additional implementation year(s). Thus, these schools may not use the time as effectively as possible due to the lack of planning time. There are also pros and cons for identifying new schools to begin implementation. First, due to the timing of the release of the SIG grant, there is a shortened timeframe for schools seeking to implement this fall. Similarly, the lack of time may not lead to effective full implementation in the 2015–2016 school year. However, because of the extended life cycle of the SIG grant, newly funded schools may begin to plan with the end in mind by taking advantage of the new planning year option. Should an SEA decide to identify new schools for SIG implementation, one obvious drawback is the increased number of schools that have been identified as persistently low-achieving and/or priority and focus schools. As a result, the increased number may lead to public contention.

In choosing whether to offer continuation awards or new awards, states should analyze the current turnaround efforts to determine

the best course of action. One important question to remember is: Which course of action will allow any given school the opportunity to have success?

Guidance to LEAs for Systemic, Sustainable Efforts

A key role of the state in SIG is the guidance that SEAs provide to LEAs as a part of the application process. Through this responsibility, states have an opportunity to influence turnaround efforts, as SEAs should develop guidance that requires an LEA to develop a comprehensive approach to turning around schools. This guidance should promote active district engagement and support. Promoting these actions will help transform the turnaround conversation from a school conversation to a *system* discussion. These types of conversations may support district efforts to bring to scale effective practices while producing sustainable efforts.

The planning year document highlights opportunities for SEAs to enhance the administration and management of the turnaround efforts by using the time to improve communications with LEAs to support the development and implementation of systemic and sustainable turnaround efforts. An SEA approving a planning year for LEAs may incorporate any aspect of the planning document to support the development of a comprehensive approach to school turnaround. The application process and the aligned support and the monitoring of those efforts may have a lasting impact on system-wide change at the local level. In an effort to administer and manage the SIG efforts, below are several items that SEAs should consider including in the LEA application process to expand district engagement and allow for the development of a systemic approach to school turnaround:

- Develop an application and grant renewal process that targets active district engagement. In some states, LEAs are required to present their turnaround plan in person. The presentation must include the Superintendent, Board President, and Principal of the school(s) to be served. This helps ensure engagement of senior district leaders in the turnaround effort.

- Develop guidance that expands LEAs' efforts to build better turnaround leaders. In some states, Principals and/or Superintendents must participate in statewide networks designed to build the capacity of these leaders. Some states are also including Principal Supervisors in these the LEA and school turnaround leadership programs.

- Develop guidance that promotes ongoing efforts to access progress. Many states have developed a performance management system that promotes continued review of progress by reviewing data weekly or monthly (e.g., achievement data, annual goals, monitoring reports). Other states have developed a monitoring process that moves beyond compliance and promotes a dialogue around achievement. This dialogue can help districts design better supports for SIG schools.

- Develop guidance that promotes scalable practices. In districts with previously funded SIG schools, some states have included language in the LEA application that requires the LEA to connect previous promising efforts to new schools that are applying to take on SIG efforts.

Lastly, in an effort to promote a more systemic approach to turnaround, states should review the planning tool document and consider incorporating any of the listed items into the appropriate areas of the state SIG application.

Planning and Pre-Implementation Year

Purpose and Timeline

LEAs that have been awarded a SIG may choose to take the first year of the five-year grant to develop an implementation plan. That year would be followed by at least three years of implementation and an optional additional year to sustain reforms or continue implementation. In its application, the LEA must include a description of the planning year activities, the timeline for implementing those activities, and a description of how those activities will lead to successful implementation of the selected intervention. The LEA must also select the intervention model it will implement. The amount of the award for planning and sustainability years is expected to be less than for the three mandatory implementation years.

An SEA, prior to renewing the SIG of an LEA that received funds for a full year of planning and other pre-implementation activities for a particular school, must review the performance of the LEA in that school during the planning year. The review will compare the actual planning and pre-implementation activities against the LEA's approved application and determine that the LEA has the capacity to fully implement its chosen intervention for the school on the first day of the following school year.

The planning year allows the LEA to prepare for full implementation and may include changes in personnel and personnel assignments; whereas due to the shortened timeframe to prepare for turnaround through the SIG process, an LEA that selects not to incorporate a planning year may experience difficulty in making the necessary staffing changes to ensure that schools are prepared for full implementation for the 2015–2016 school year. Further, the planning year provides the lead time that may be necessary to ensure implementation infrastructures are in place and, if not, make the fundamental structural and personnel changes required by SIG interventions to sufficiently engage school staff, families, and the broader community in the planning and pre-implementation work of turning around a low-performing school and sustaining improvements.

During the planning year, the LEA may progress through the following actions and decision points:

May/June

- **Planning Consultant**. Consider engaging a consultant to assist in the planning year, including assisting in the development of the LEA application. If determined that a consultant would be useful, select the consultant with best fit for the district and school.

- District Readiness. Administer the *District Readiness to Support School Turnaround* tool (Hambrick, Hitt, & Robinson, 2014) to determine and enact district improvements to strengthen the district's capacity to support the SIG school. This should be part of the process for developing an LEA's application, particularly in the SEA review to determine whether the LEA has the capacity to implement turnaround efforts.

- **Conduct School Needs Assessment**. Most LEAs conduct a school needs assessment as part of the SIG application process. Review the assessment

and determine areas of strength and weakness in both performance (student outcomes) and operations (professional practice). Identify key priority areas to focus on during SIG implementation.

- **Confirm Intervention Model.** Align school needs assessment results with SIG intervention models to confirm best fit of model with the school's operational and performance strengths and weaknesses.

July and August

- **Principal Recruitment and Selection (if applicable)**. Recruit an outstanding school leader who supports the vision and approach of the turnaround effort. It would be beneficial to engage the new principal in the development of the implementation plan as early as possible.

- **Draft Implementation Plan**. With the planning consultant (if one was chosen) and with community input, develop a draft plan for three years of implementation and an optional additional year to sustain reforms or continue implementation.

August and September

- **Design LEA Support and Monitoring Structure.** Identify leaders at the district who will provide support and supervision to schools. Outline district support, based on the school needs assessment and priorities, including more intensive site visits and professional development. Include clear goals and expectations for schools and district support.

- **Lead Partner**. Consider engaging a lead partner to assist with implementation. If a lead partner is to be engaged, select one that best fits the LEA, school, and intervention model.

- **Service Providers**. With lead partner (if one was chosen), select other service providers consistent with the results of the school needs assessment and the evolving implementation plan.

October and November

- **Share the Emerging Vision**. Communicate with existing school staff, parents, and the community the emerging vision for change and the role each stakeholder will play in its success.

- **Staff Recruitment**. Recruit outstanding teachers and support staff who support the vision and approach of the turnaround effort to apply for positions.

January through April

- **Additional Personnel Changes**. Make the additional personnel changes necessary for the chosen intervention model and to ensure success of the turnaround effort.

- **Review and Finalize Implementation Plan**. With the input of school leadership, finalize the implementation plan and identify key first steps and potential barriers. Work with school leadership to generate solutions to overcome these barriers.

May through July

- **Physical Plant Changes**. Repair, clean up, and freshen up the building and grounds to convey in concrete terms that change is on the way.

- **Communication About Change**. Convey to the school community and across the LEA the rationales for the necessary changes, that change will be dramatic, and that the LEA has adopted a model and strategies that will lead to success.

- **Establish LEA Policy and Guidance Documents to Support Practice in School**. Develop LEA policy and guidance documents that enable the funding and resources (e.g., training,

coaches, materials) for principals, teachers, and educational assistants required to effectively implement a new program with a high level of fidelity and success.

In the sections that follow, we go into further depth on the topics outlined in the planning year timeline. We offer questions to consider and some tools and checklists to incorporate into the application, planning, and implementation of SIG.

Selecting Planning Consultants and Lead Partners

The LEA may choose to engage a planning consultant (or consulting organization) to assist with the planning and pre-implementation year. The consultant may be engaged for only the planning year with the purpose of leading the planning year activities that culminate in a well-developed implementation and sustainability plan. To ensure independence and objectivity, the planning consultant typically does not represent an organization that may be vying to serve as a lead partner or service provider.

Depending upon the intervention model chosen, the LEA may choose to engage a lead partner organization to work alongside the LEA in implementing the intervention model in the SIG school. If the LEA selects the evidence-based, whole-school reform strategy model, the strategy developer will no doubt also serve as the lead partner and will, therefore, meet the requirements of a strategy developer.

When selecting a consultant or partner for SIG schools consider the following:

- Does the consultant or partner have a set model of support?

  » If yes, does that model fit with the school's SIG approach?

  » If no, how does the consultant or partner determine the support model?

- What are the consultant or partner expectations of the LEA and school?

- To what extent does the approach of the consultant or partner fit with the LEA and school culture?

- What other LEAs and schools have worked with the consultant or partner? What was their experience?

- What outcomes has the consultant or partner helped LEAs and schools attain? What evidence do they have of the effectiveness of their approach?

- How does the consultant or partner build in support for sustaining outcomes?

- How does the consultant or partner build the capacity of LEA and/or school staff to continue improvements after the engagement has ended?

- Will the LEA and/or school have a consistent point of contact with the consultant or partner?

- How long does the LEA and school intend to work with the consultant or partner? What happens if either party wants to terminate the relationship?

- How will the consultant or partner be held accountable?

Enhancing District Readiness

District Readiness to Support School Turnaround (Hambrick, Hitt, & Robinson, 2014) is the Center on School Turnaround's tool to guide an LEA in assessing its readiness to lead a school turnaround and shore up areas that need improvement. School turnaround—especially when facilitated by a SIG—is an LEA initiative, and the LEA must itself function at a level of proficiency that enables it to support the major overhaul of one or more of its schools. The LEA's role in a school turnaround goes well beyond hiring a turnaround principal and giving the principal flexibility and authority to lead change.

Conducting a School Needs Assessment

A needs assessment may be reviewed for the purpose of confirming the most appropriate intervention model and/or for preparing an implementation plan. The purpose of the needs assessment is to diagnose the school's strengths and weaknesses in performance (student outcomes) and in operations (professional practice). In a restart, diagnosis of current performance and operations is largely a moot point. An examination of performance has already shown that the school is persistently low-achieving, and a new school is created to better serve the students. Similarly, when the school is slated for closure, a diagnostic review will obviously not inform its progress. However, for both restarts and closures, prior diagnostic data are valuable to the LEA for gaining a better understanding of the links between practice (operations) and performance (student outcomes) that is useful in strengthening the LEA's continuing reform efforts. For this reason, ongoing diagnostic programs should be in place in advance of the decision points for interventions, and the LEA should analyze this data even after the decision has been made for a restart or closure.

For intervention models other than closure and restart, diagnostic data about the school's past performance and operations is useful to the new leaders in making the changes necessary to improve practice and performance. Also, continued and ongoing assessment of performance and operations using improvement cycles (e.g., Plan-Do-Study-Act, see Appendix A) provides a guide for changes in course to arrive at effective and efficient operations and rapid improvement in student learning. Similarly, the LEA can provide targeted supports for non-SIG schools by implementing routine diagnostic processes.

Diagnostic processes include the following types:

- Self-assessment to guide the school's leadership and teachers in making continuous improvement;

- Coached self-assessment—self-assessment with the consultation of an external consultant selected by the school or provided by the LEA or SEA; and

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

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

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

The U.S. Department of Education's Turnaround Principles[2] lend themselves to use in a diagnostic review. *The Handbook on Statewide Systems of Support* (Redding & Walberg, 2007) includes categories of LEA and school functions that are useful in a diagnostic review (see Appendix B for these Essential School Functions). Standards and indicators may be aligned with these topics.

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[2] See State-Developed Alternative Intervention Models section earlier in this document.

The type of diagnostic process varies according to the school's level of performance and trajectory of improvement. For all schools, the SEA and LEA should provide timely access to data and information on school improvement that will enable the school to make informed decisions in its continuous improvement. The SEA and LEA may also provide planning tools and standards and indicators of effective practice.

Diagnostic and improvement planning should be relevant to the school's level and trajectory of performance, as follows:

Performance	Tools & Infrastructure	Guidance
Consistently high performance	School will be able to apply SEA and LEA-provided tools, data, implementation infrastructure, and information to their own advantage	Self-directed; will access the resources and supports required for their continued growth
Moderate performance/ rapid improvement	School will typically be able to apply the SEA and LEA-provided tools, data, implementation infrastructure, and information to their own advantage	Self-directed; will access the resources and supports required for their continued growth
Moderate performance/ moderate improvement	School will benefit from coached self-assessment, applying the SEA and LEA-provided tools, data, implementation infrastructure, and information	Guidance of an external consultant would be helpful in diagnosis and planning
Moderate performance/ slow improvement	Coached self-assessment may be supplemented by external reviews to provide an objective view of their operations, implementation infrastructure, and recommend improvements	Needs coaching and external reviewers for diagnosis and planning
Consistently low performance	School is a candidate for intervention. External review is useful in determining the appropriate intervention and implementation infrastructure model to inform the SEA and LEA about conditions and practices prevalent in the school in order to strengthen their reform efforts	Needs interventionists and external reviewers for diagnosis, planning, and strategy selection

As the SIG intervention proceeds, year to year, the type of diagnostic review can be changed to grant greater autonomy to the school (its Leadership Team) in assessing and improving its own implementation infrastructure, practice, and performance.

Confirming an Intervention Model

At the time the planning year begins, the LEA must have already selected an intervention model and expressed this choice in its application for a SIG award. Even in this case, the following questions relative to each intervention model and the necessary implementation infrastructure will be useful in confirming the choice and setting the stage for the work to be done during the planning year.

Turnaround Model

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

- How will the LEA select a new leader for the school, and what experience, training, and skills will the new leader be expected to possess?

- How will the LEA assign effective teachers and leaders to the lowest achieving schools?

- How will the LEA begin to develop a pipeline of effective teachers and leaders to work in turnaround schools?

- How will staff replacement be executed—what is the process for determining which staff remains in the school and for selecting replacements?

- How will the language in collective bargaining agreements be negotiated

to ensure the most talented teachers and leaders remain in the school?

- What supports will be provided to staff being assigned to other schools?

- What are the budgetary implications of retaining surplus staff within the LEA if that is necessary?

- What is the LEA's own intervention and implementation capacity to execute and support a turnaround? What organizations are available to assist with the implementation of the turnaround model?

- What changes in decision-making policies and mechanisms (including greater school-level flexibility in budgeting, staffing, and scheduling) must accompany the infusion of human capital?

- What changes in operational practice must accompany the infusion of human capital, and how will these changes be brought about and sustained?[3]

Restart Model

- Are there qualified charter management organizations (CMOs) or education management organizations (EMOs) willing to partner with the LEA to start a new school (or convert an existing school) in this location?

- Will qualified community groups initiate a home-grown charter school? The LEA is best served by developing relationships with community groups to prepare them for operating charter schools.

- Based on supply and capacity, which option is most likely to result in acceptable student growth for the

[3] See Turnaround Principles in State-Developed Alternative Intervention Models section earlier in this document and Essential School Functions in Appendix B.

student population to be served—home-grown charter school, CMO, or EMO?

- How can statutory, policy, and collective bargaining language relevant to the school be negotiated to allow for closure of the school and restart?

- How will support be provided to staff that are reassigned to other schools as a result of the restart?

- What are the budgetary implications of retaining surplus staff within the LEA if that is necessary?

- What is the LEA's own capacity to support the charter school with access to contractually specified district services and access to available funding?

- How will the SEA assist with the restart?

- What performance expectations will be contractually specified for the charter school, CMO, or EMO?

- Is the LEA (or other authorizer) prepared to terminate the contract if performance expectations are not met?

Transformation Model

- How will the LEA select a new leader for the school, and what experience, training, and skills will the new leader be expected to possess?

- How will the LEA enable the new leader to make strategic staff replacements?

- What is the LEA's own capacity to support the transformation, including the implementation of required, recommended, and diagnostically determined strategies?

- What changes in decision-making policies and mechanisms (including greater school-level flexibility in budgeting, staffing, and scheduling) must accompany the transformation?

- What changes in operational practice must accompany the transformation, and how will these changes be brought about and sustained?[4]

School Closure Model

- What are the metrics to identify schools to be closed?

- What steps are in place to make certain closure decisions are based on tangible data and are readily transparent to the local community?

- How will the students and their families be supported by the LEA through the re-enrollment process?

- Which higher-achieving schools have the capacity to receive students from the schools being considered for closure?

- How will the receiving schools be staffed with quality staff to accommodate the increase in students?

- How will current staff be reassigned—what is the process for determining which staff members are dismissed and which staff members are reassigned?

- Does the statutory, policy, and collective bargaining context relevant to the school allow for removal of current staff?

- What supports will be provided to recipient schools if current staff members are reassigned?

- What safety and security considerations might be anticipated for students of the school to be closed and the receiving school(s)?

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[4] See Turnaround Principles in State-Developed Alternative Intervention Models section earlier in this document and Essential School Functions in Appendix B.

- What are the budgetary implications of retaining surplus staff within the LEA if that is necessary?

- How will the LEA track student progress in the recipient schools?

- What is the impact of school closure to the school's neighborhood, enrollment area, or community?

- How does school closure fit within the LEA's over all reform efforts?

State-Developed Alternative Model

If the state has provided a state-developed alternative model, it will have its own features but will also cover the seven Turnaround Principles.

- What are the special features and requirements of the state-developed alternative model?

- How will the LEA select a new leader for the school, and what experience, training, and skills will the new leader be expected to possess?

- How will the LEA enable the new leader to make strategic staff replacements?

- What is the LEA's own capacity to support the implementation of required, recommended, and diagnostically determined strategies?

- What changes in decision making policies and mechanisms (including greater school-level flexibility in budgeting, staffing, and scheduling) must accompany the implementation of this model?

- What changes in operational practice must accompany the transformation, and how will these changes be brought about and sustained?[5]

Evidence-Based, Whole-School Reform Model

The LEA has already worked with the strategy developer to prepare the LEA's application for a SIG. The requirements of this intervention model have been detailed by the strategy developer. The planning year enables the LEA and strategy developer to create a detailed implementation plan and prepare the school community for the change.

- What are the special features and requirements of the evidence-based whole-school reform model?

- What are the conditions of the contractual arrangement between the LEA and the strategy developer?

- Is the strategy developer also the Lead Partner, or does a third party serve in that capacity?

- How will the LEA select a new leader for the school, and what experience, training, and skills will the new leader be expected to possess?

- How will the LEA enable the new leader to make strategic staff replacements?

- What is the LEA's own capacity to support the implementation of required, recommended, and diagnostically determined strategies?

- What changes in decision making policies and mechanisms (including greater school-level flexibility in budgeting, staffing, and scheduling) must accompany the implementation of this model?

- What changes in operational practice must accompany the transformation, and how will these changes be brought about and sustained?[6]

[5] See Turnaround Principles in State-Developed Alternative Intervention Models section earlier in this document and Essential School Functions in Appendix B.

[6] See Turnaround Principles in State-Developed Alternative Intervention Models section earlier in this document and Essential School Functions in Appendix B.

Early Learning Model

The early learning model requires the implementation of full-day kindergarten, creation or expansion of a high-quality preschool program, cross-grade instructional planning time that includes preschool teachers, replacement of the principal, and implementation of specified practices schoolwide. For examples of Cohort I SIG schools that used early learning strategies in their turnaround approach, see the Center on School Turnaround/Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes' publication *Incorporating Early Learning Strategies in the School Improvement Grants (SIG) Program* (Connors-Tadros et al, 2014).

- Is full-day kindergarten already in place, and if not will the LEA be able to sustain the cost of full-day kindergarten beyond the SIG funding?

- Is a preschool program in place or will it be newly created? If it will be newly created, what structure will fit the community needs?

- What is required to bring the preschool program to the status of a high-quality program?

- How will the cross-grade, joint planning time be organized and scheduled?

- Will the LEA be able to sustain the cost (if any) of the planning time beyond the SIG funding?

- What are the expectations, including work products, of teachers from their joint planning time?

- How will the LEA select a new leader for the school, and what experience, training, and skills will the new leader be expected to possess?

- How will the LEA enable the new leader to make strategic staff replacements?

- What is the LEA's own capacity to support the implementation of required, recommended, and diagnostically determined strategies?

- What changes in decision-making policies and mechanisms (including greater school-level flexibility in budgeting, staffing, and scheduling) must accompany the implementation of the model?

- What changes in operational practice must accompany the implementation of this model, and how will these changes be brought about and sustained?[7]

Developing an Implementation and Sustainability Plan

The intervention model chosen will dictate the skeleton of the implementation and sustainability plan. A good plan begins with the end in sight and allows for ongoing modification of the plan in response to analysis of progress data at periodic checkpoints. Major change efforts can fail because a plan is: (1) not focused on a few high-leverage priorities; (2) insufficiently rigorous in its expectations; (3) inadequately rooted in research-based practice; (4) not focused on implementation fidelity as well as program/intervention fidelity; (5) not monitored by a core team committed to its success; or (6) too rigid, inflexible, and absent performance management procedures for making necessary changes in course.

The first outline of the implementation and sustainability plan may track the requirements of the intervention model, as follows:

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[7] See specific requirements of the early learning model in the Early Learning Model section and Turnaround Principles in State-Developed Alternative Intervention Models section earlier in this document. See Essential School Functions in Appendix B.

Model Requirements	Objective	Evidence and Data Sources	Activities	Responsibility	Milestones (Dates)

Alongside this planning and tracking of model requirements (which include in most models changes in specific practices designed to improve student outcomes), the implementation and sustainability plan will include milestones and targets for the leading and lagging indicators. As a rule of thumb, the LEA should expect that in the first year of implementation, the school demonstrates high fidelity to the requirements of the intervention and implementation plan. In the second year, fidelity would be accompanied by significant improvement in leading indicators. In the third year, fidelity and leading indicators would continue to show progress, and lagging indicators would reveal significant improvement in student outcomes. Of course, improvement in student outcomes may come sooner, but an early focus on fidelity to implementation of the identified program/intervention (change in practice) establishes the foundation for the ultimate gains for students.

Implementation Plan Checklist

STEP 1: Identify Needs and Priorities

- What are the needs (identified by the diagnostic process)?

- What other data informs the needs?

- What are the identified priorities?

- What are existing initiatives? How well does SIG fit and align with these initiatives?

STEP 2: Assess Capacity

- Who will be responsible for the work?

- What skills are needed among the team and to what extent does the team possess these skills?

- What leadership support exists at the school?

- What buy-in exists at the school?

- What LEA supports are needed?

STEP 3: Develop Strategies

- Identify evidence-based practices or promising strategies aligned with school needs and priorities within the selected SIG model.

- Focus on a few key strategies to support SIG implementation.

- Analyze systems, policies, procedures, and practices to identify where strategies could be applied.

STEP 4: Identify Needed Structures and Supports

- To what extent are the strategy's core components clearly defined and operationalized?

- What training is needed for school staff to implement strategies effectively?

- Are there any competing priorities or initiatives at the school? If so, how can they be aligned with SIG?

- How will progress be monitored and tracked?

- Who will monitor progress?

- How will progress data be used to improve implementation? (See Plan-Do-Study-Act Template in Appendix A.)

- How will progress be communicated?

Need	Strategy	Person(s) Responsible	Key Outcomes	Timeline	Needed Supports

STEP 5: Draft Plan

- What strategies will address each priority need?

- Who will be responsible for leading implementation of the strategy?

- What are the key outcomes to be expected from the strategy?

- What is the timeline for implementation of the strategy?

- What support is needed to implement the strategy?

Considerations for how to sustain reforms and improvement should be planned from the start of SIG.

- What strategies will help the school in the long term?

- Will SIG funds be used to build school infrastructure? What would it take to maintain this infrastructure?

- Which SIG-funded positions will the LEA want to continue? How could those positions be funded in the future?

- Which initiatives or reforms would require ongoing costs? What other sources could be used to fund these costs?

- How will staff who have receive SIG-funded professional development be actively targeted for retention?

- How will LEA and school staff document initiatives, activities, and outcomes?

- How can the LEA support the sharing and dissemination of promising practices?

- What LEA systems need to be bolstered to support effective turnaround in the district?

Design LEA Support and Monitoring Structure

The district should build on its existing support structure to provide tailored support to SIG schools.

- What is the existing support structure for schools? How does it need to be intensified for SIG schools?

- Who will provide LEA support to schools? Does the LEA need more staff to directly support SIG schools?

- What are the expectations of LEA staff providing support? What training will the LEA provide to prepare staff to work directly with SIG schools?

- What is the LEA supervisory structure for SIG schools? How does this differ from other schools?

- How many site visits will the LEA conduct at SIG schools? How will site visit data be used to improve teaching and learning?

- How will the LEA communicate goals and expectations to SIG schools?

- How will the LEA hold SIG schools accountable?

- How will the LEA help schools plan for sustainability after the SIG period?

District Support and Monitoring Structure Checklist

- Review school needs assessment/ diagnostic

» To what extent do the findings resonate with the district experience of the school?

» If there are discrepancies or issues, would the school benefit from an external review?

» What support mechanisms does the LEA have in place to address areas of need? What capacity does the LEA have to develop support in areas of unmet need?

- Review identified priorities

  » To what extent do the school's priorities reflect the district expectations of the school?

  » If there are discrepancies or issues, what support will the LEA provide to define priorities?

  » How will the priorities be used to develop school goals?

  » What are the LEA expectations for the school?

  » What existing support does the LEA have in place aligned with the identified priorities? What support will the LEA develop?

- Outline LEA site visit structure

  » How will site visits to SIG schools be more intense than the current site visit plan?

  » How many times will the LEA visit the school?

  » What will be the purpose of the visit? Technical assistance? Compliance monitoring? Both?

  » Who will conduct the site visits?

  » What reporting will be required after site visits?

  » How will the data be used to improve the school?

- Plan LEA professional development

  » What professional development needs surfaced from school assessments and LEA site visits?

  » What existing LEA professional development would meet these needs? What will need to be developed?

  » How will the LEA assess the extent to which professional development meets school needs?

  » How can schools learn from each other?

Selecting Service Providers

A great advantage of the planning year is the luxury of time in selecting service providers and preparing for their orderly provision of service and coordination with other activities in the school. When selecting providers, consider the extent to which they build the capacity of LEA and school staff to sustain reforms. Is the provider offering a service that will need to be continued for several years, or do they use a gradual release model where school staff take more responsibility over time?

Share the Emerging Vision

A benefit of the planning and pre-implementation year is the opportunity for the LEA to adequately prepare the school community and the LEA for the magnitude of change that is necessary for a successful SIG implementation. This process began in preparing the LEA's application for a SIG. Initially, the school community (personnel, families, community groups) must come to terms with what are often called the "brutal facts" of how persistently low school achievement affects the real lives of students. Dealing with the student data from the SIG school and understanding how the numbers reflect diminished opportunity for students brings a community to the realization that dramatic change is necessary.

Beyond confronting the school community with the facts of low achievement and the need for change, the LEA bears responsibility for engaging the school community in the process of reform, providing a clear picture of a vastly improved school in the near future, and paving a convincing pathway to the better school. Early in the planning year, all of the details may not yet be solidified; however, the LEA should share the emerging vision with school staff, families, the school board, and the community to begin to build trust and buy-in for the impending changes. Some messages may need to be tailored to different stakeholder groups. When crafting messages, consider:

- What is the purpose of the communication? To share information? Inspire to action? Seek feedback? Collaborate?

- What is the best medium to reach your desired stakeholder group and purpose? More passive forms such as websites or written materials? More engaging forms such as public forums or facilitated meetings?

- Who do you need to engage at different steps of the process? Unions, for example, are important to engage early on to discuss flexibility in SIG schools to implement reforms. Principals from other schools, on the other hand, may not need to be in conversations until later in the process.

Recruitment and Personnel Changes

All of the intervention models demand significant attention to personnel policies. In a closure or restart, the school's personnel are dismissed from service in that school and, depending upon LEA collective bargaining and personnel policies, must be reassigned or terminated. In the case of a restart, the new charter school or EMO-managed school may choose to employ some staff from the school that was closed.

In the turnaround model, the principal and at least 50% of other personnel are replaced, and in the transformation model, the principal is replaced. In all models in which the school continues to operate, a leader and teacher evaluation system that meets the criteria of the federal ESEA flexibility must be implemented.

As LEAs recruit and select school staff, they identify the instructional and leadership competencies needed to thrive in the turnaround environment. Look, both internally and externally, for staff who exhibit those competencies, using multiple points of data including past performance.

The planning year allows the LEA to process dismissals, transfers, and reassignments (with the building) in an orderly fashion. It also provides the time to put a leader and teacher evaluation system in place and prepare LEA and school personnel to execute the system.

The planning year is an excellent opportunity for the LEA to revamp its personnel policies, position descriptions, hiring practices, and implementation supports to assist personnel in improving their performance. The LEA should actively engage the union in discussions about personnel policies that support SIG implementation and draft a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or other policies and procedures that will support the necessary personnel conditions in SIG schools.

SEA staff can provide LEAs with support and guidance regarding staff recruitment. Specifically, SEA staff can outline and monitor the LEA role in staff recruitment, including:

- LEA support to assess skills and competencies of staff shown to influence improved levels of student achievement (e.g., see *http://publicimpact.com/teachers-leaders/competencies-of-high-performers/*) (Public Impact, 2009)

- LEA recruitment structures and support

- LEA communication and support of hiring efforts

- LEA engagement with union

- LEA policies to support hiring flexibility for SIG schools

In addition, SEA staff can encourage LEAs to engage in discussions with school leadership about the following topics:

- What skills will complement the vision for the school?

- Which competencies seem the most important to the school's context?

- Of the current staff, which skills and competencies are the strongest at each grade level and department? Which are lacking?

- What partnerships would assist with recruitment? University preparation programs? Specialized mentoring programs? Key community stakeholders?

- How involved will the LEA be in the recruitment process? Will there be dedicated HR resources for SIG schools?

- What are the key messages that will attract staff that fit the vision of the school?

- How can the LEA and school attract high quality talent in what will likely be an intensive, high-level change process?

- How can the LEA and school craft compelling job descriptions to reflect the unique opportunity of working in a SIG school?

- How can the LEA and school express the support and development they will provide to those willing and capable of doing this work?

- How will the LEA and school communicate the vision of the SIG school and its goals to potential staff?

- What kind of flexibility is needed from the LEA to aid in hiring? How can the LEA support hiring efforts? What LEA policies need to be modified or developed?

- How will the union be involved in the hiring process? Are there flexibilities with union rules that need to be exercised for this school?

- How will potential staff be assessed during the interview process?

- What are the multiple indicators that will be referenced in selection process?

- Who will participate in the interview process?

- How will the LEA and school restructure existing job descriptions or time commitments of those who will participate in an intensive, comprehensive selection process?

- What are the indicators the LEA and school will use for selection, and what is the rationale for using those indicators to choose a high-quality turnaround teacher/leader/etc.?

- Who will make final hiring decisions?

- How can the process and timeline be streamlined to keep top candidates from waiting too long for selection decisions?

- Are there specific, SIG-funded positions that will need to be filled? How will the LEA and school thoughtfully create new positions to best support improved student learning?

- What are the LEA and school expectations of these positions?

- Is there a plan to sustain those positions after SIG? What would the

LEA and school agree upon to be an indication of their effectiveness and legitimate need to sustain beyond SIG funding?

Making Physical Plant Improvements

The planning year is also a pre-implementation year. Without the pre-implementation year, the work of improving the physical plant is seen as part of the intervention and can require time and attention for personnel that takes the focus off the necessary instructional change.

Communicating About Change

The planning year is a time to engage various groups in preparing for implementation and understanding their roles. It is also a time to put in place the ongoing structures of teams and committees to provide input and feedback throughout implementation of the intervention model and to share information with school staff, families, the school board, and the community, including:

- SIG goals, major activities, and timeline

- Expectations and desired outcomes

- The decision-making process and authority

- Ways of raising questions/concerns

- Ways of measuring progress

Establish LEA Policy and Guidance Documents to Support School Practices

As SIG schools engage in new practices, LEAs must change their policies and guidance.

- What policies may inhibit the implementation of SIG reforms?

- What policies need to be revised or developed?

- How will the LEA ensure policies enable the funding and resources (e.g., training, coaches, materials) needed to implement reforms successfully?

- What guidance will schools need? What is the process to identify needed guidance?

Conclusion

The amended SIG regulations present an opportunity for SEAs and LEAs to revisit how SIG is implemented across all levels of the system. As SEAs prepare and release applications to LEAs, they may want to consider including some elements and questions posed in this guide. SIG, and in particular the planning year, offers LEAs and schools an opportunity to build on existing successes and assess the capacity at all levels to support rapid, systemic, and sustainable change.

References and Resources

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Appendices

Appendix A: Plan-Do-Study-Act
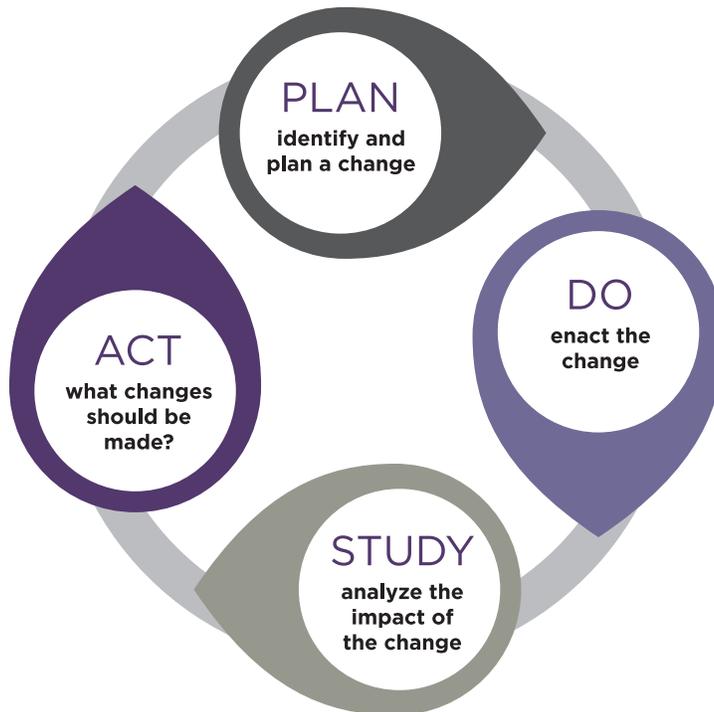
Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) is a cyclical process that school and district leadership teams can engage in as part of a continuous improvement approach. PDSA can be done concurrently with different aspects of the SIG plan.

Plan:
- What are the objectives of the change?
- What are we trying to accomplish?
- How will we know when we have achieved our objectives?
- What do we need to do to enact the change?
- Who needs to be involved in different components of the change?

Do:
- Is everyone enacting the change?
- What support do they need to enact the change?

Study:
- What outcomes did we achieve?
- Were there any unintended consequences?

Act:
- What could be improved?
- What adjustments should we make?

Appendix B: Essential School Functions

The *Handbook on Statewide Systems of Support* (Redding & Walberg, 2007) includes the following categories of LEA and school functions (revised here) that are useful in a diagnostic review. Standards and indicators may be aligned with these topics.

Essential School Functions

A. Leadership and Decision Making

1. Vision development

2. Allocation of resources to address learning goals

3. Decision-making structures and processes (including teams that are linked)

4. Information and data systems

5. Information on implementation infrastructure

B. Curriculum and Instruction

1. Alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment with standards

2. Curriculum—description, scope, focus, articulation, organization

3. Formative and periodic assessment of student learning

4. Instructional delivery (teaching and classroom management)

5. Instructional fidelity

6. Instructional planning by teachers

7. Instructional time (within school day, length of day, days in school year)

A. Human Capital (Personnel)

1. Teacher engagement and commitment to change

2. Performance incentives for personnel

3. Personnel policies and procedures (hiring, placing, evaluating, promoting, retaining, replacing)

4. Professional development processes and procedures

5. Staff owned performance assessment (fidelity) system for instructional programs/practices

B. Student Support

1. Programs and services for English language learners

2. Expanded learning time (equitable access to supplemental educational services, after-school programs, summer school, for example)

3. Parental involvement, communication, and options

4. Special education programs and procedures.

5. Student support services (tutoring, counseling, placement, for example)

About the Authors

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Guidance and Tools for the 2015 Amended Regulations:

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