



## UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

### **Summary of Responses to the “Socioeconomic Diversity as a School Turnaround Strategy” blog post on the ED website**

*The Department of Education (ED) released the combined FY 2015 and 2016 SIG application in conjunction with a [blog post](#) asking for input on how ED can support school districts or consortia of districts, to use SIG funds to implement socioeconomic diversity strategies. ED collected feedback from March 29 through April 26 and over 20 individuals and organizations submitted comments. Below please find a summary of the public input.*

The majority of contributors highlighted that socioeconomically diverse schools are beneficial for all students, and these contributors cited research to support this assertion. Some contributors expressed concern that focusing solely on socioeconomic diversity is not enough to improve outcomes for students, and that racial diversity should also be considered. Relatedly, a few contributors pointed to the joint ED and Department of Justice “Guidance on the Voluntary Use of Race to Achieve Diversity and Avoid Racial Isolation in Elementary and Secondary Schools” (published in Dec 2011). One contributor was concerned that socioeconomic diversity strategies are generally focused on supporting urban students and was interested in how strategies aimed at increasing socioeconomic diversity could be used in rural areas. One contributor expressed concern that focusing on socioeconomic diversity would merely result in busing students between districts—a strategy that the commenter believed would be ineffective.

Four specific areas were listed for reader feedback in the blog post. The first area for feedback was around the use of School Improvement Grant (SIG) funds to support district-wide socioeconomic diversity strategies aimed at increasing academic outcomes for students in the lowest performing schools. Some contributors highlighted magnet schools as a method for increasing parents’ interest in sending their students to schools other than their neighborhood schools, regardless of the families’ socioeconomic status. A few contributors recommended creating international baccalaureate schools as a way to attract students across district lines, and these contributors also noted that these schools benefit students of all socioeconomic statuses. One contributor highlighted dual language/immersion programs, STEM-focused schools, and college prep schools as strategies that have diversified student enrollment.

A number of contributors recommended considering inter-district strategies; one contributor suggested combining different funding streams to create an incentive for inter-district partnerships, such as a joint award of SIG funds and Magnet Schools Assistance Program funds. This contributor suggested using SIG funds to create an inter-district magnet school in a low-performing district, while using MSAP funds to create another inter-district magnet school located in a more affluent neighboring district. A few examples of inter-district strategies were highlighted by contributors, including the Urban-Suburban Inter-District Transfer Program in New York State. A few contributors recommended additional technical assistance to promote promising practices and innovative approaches to increasing socioeconomic diversity; one contributor suggested using the Center on School Turnaround and the School Turnaround Learning Community as a hub for sharing information with all districts interested in promoting socioeconomic diversity. The same contributor also suggested that ED create a competitive grant program using SIG national activities funds to provide additional resources to states that commit to using SIG funds to increase socioeconomic diversity (since FY 2012, Congress has permitted ED to

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*The Department of Education’s mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.*

reserve up to five percent of the SIG appropriation for national activities designed to help build the capacity of States and districts to implement the program effectively).

The second area ED asked for feedback around was current SIG requirements for states and districts that may restrict the use of SIG funds to increase the socioeconomic diversity of schools. To avoid penalizing a school that is seeking to advance socioeconomic diversity in an inter-district magnet context, one contributor recommended counting only the poverty rate among students from the high poverty district in calculating Title I eligibility. The same contributor also suggested that state educational agencies (SEAs) and local educational agencies (LEAs) should be permitted to retain a larger portion of Title I funds (i.e., SEA set-aside) in order to give those funds solely to schools and districts taking steps toward increasing socioeconomic diversity, rewarding districts that enroll more low-socioeconomic status students and holding harmless the schools that lose those low-socioeconomic students. One contributor recommended that ED allow SIG funds to be used to fund parent organizations and to fund high performing schools so there are more quality seats for low socioeconomic status students.

The third area ED asked for feedback was around other policies or conditions that need to be in place for districts to successfully implement a comprehensive socioeconomic diversity plan that increases academic outcomes for students in its lowest performing schools. The majority of contributors emphasized the importance of parent engagement, including the belief that parents supporting the content taught in school at home would improve student achievement. One contributor expressed the desire for employers and schools to work together to create opportunities for daily parent-child homework hours. In addition, many contributors believed that if a school is effective it will attract parents from all socioeconomic backgrounds, regardless of where it is located. A few contributors offered focus groups and surveys as methods for discerning what school elements were most important and attractive to parents. A few contributors listed specific student supports, including: mentors, online tutoring and in-person coaching for students taking advanced coursework, and opening centers for young children that can teach foundational academic and social skills.

Some of the feedback addressing policies and conditions necessary to successfully implement a comprehensive socioeconomic diversity plan centered on what states could do to encourage a focus on socioeconomic diversity in schools. One contributor suggested that states could place socioeconomic diversity at the center of their state-determined model, where schools could choose from a menu of academic reforms that increase student diversity. One contributor suggested modifying SIG applications to include an optional explanation of how socioeconomic diversity will be addressed, providing priority to districts that propose to use SIG funds to increase socioeconomic diversity. One contributor recommended an emphasis on local control and parent choice throughout all communication efforts. A few contributors believed high quality teacher professional development is important to the success of socioeconomic diversity strategies. One such contributor highlighted the importance of ongoing teacher training in cultural proficiency.

One contributor suggested that the presence of a strong community and the need for stakeholder engagement is necessary to make future efforts more successful than past socioeconomic diversity implementation efforts, including considering transportation burdens and within-school tracking practices that may lead to unintended inequitable student opportunities. A few commenters mentioned transportation more generally, stating that it is a critical element to the success of socioeconomically diverse schools.

The fourth area ED asked for feedback was around methods and measures states and districts could use to demonstrate progress in implementing a comprehensive socioeconomic diversity plan. One contributor recommended using New York City's first annual school diversity report (completed in compliance with the New York City School Diversity Accountability Act) as a model for diversity tracking because demographic data is broken down by grade level and programs within schools (in addition to school-wide demographics). One contributor suggested tracking annual progress by the number and by the percentage of low-income students who are attending economically and racially diverse schools.

A few contributors recommended calculating the percentage of students that qualify for free or reduced-price

lunch and those that do not as a measure of socioeconomic diversity. One contributor recommended measuring achievement gaps between subgroups and comparing those to the national average. A few contributors suggested that the student and faculty demographic makeup mirror the neighborhood/locality.

Lastly, one contributor highlighted various observable classroom practices that would demonstrate equitable access to academic opportunities, including distribution of higher order thinking questions, student progress toward mastery of standards, and use of cooperative teaching styles where students can learn from one another. The same contributor suggested that the curriculum reflect the life experiences of students in the classroom and that student portfolios demonstrate a high level of rigor in every class for every child.

ED greatly appreciates the time and effort all of the contributors took when providing input on SIG and socioeconomic diversity and we look forward to additional conversations with stakeholders in the future.