

MISSISSIPPI
Targeted Monitoring Review of
School Improvement Grants (SIG) under section 1003(g) of the
Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as Amended
May 2-6, 2011

BACKGROUND

Overview of SIG Schools in Mississippi

Tier	Number of FY 2009 Eligible SIG Schools	Number of FY 2009 Served SIG Schools
Tier I	7	2
Tier II	92	6
Tier III	126	0

**Implementation of
SIG School Intervention Models**

Models	Number of Schools implementing the Model
Turnaround	0
Transformation	8
Restart	0
Closure	0

MONITORING VISIT INFORMATION

Monitoring Visits

LEA Visited
School Visited
Model Implemented
FY 2009 Funding Awarded
(over three years)

Hazlehurst City School District
 Hazlehurst Middle School
 Transformation
LEA Award (for 2 SIG schools + LEA costs): \$7,877,067
Hazlehurst Middle School SIG funding: \$4,016,169
LEA Portion of Award: \$257,895

LEA Visited
School Visited
Model Implemented
FY 2009 Funding Awarded
(over three years)

Leflore County School District
 Leflore County High School
 Transformation
LEA Award (for 1 SIG school + LEA costs): \$5,250,000
Leflore County High School SIG funding: \$3,900,515
LEA Portion of Award: \$1,349,485

SEA Visited
FY 2009 SIG Award

Mississippi Department of Education
 \$47 million

Interviews Conducted

- *Mississippi Department of Education Staff*
- *Hazlehurst City School District Staff*
- *Hazlehurst Middle School: Principal, School Leadership Team, 5 Teachers, 8 Parents, Students, and 4 Classroom Visits*
- *Leflore County School District Staff*
- *Leflore County High School: Principal, School Leadership Team, 3 Teachers, 7 Parents, Students, and 5 Classroom Visits*

U.S. Department of Education Staff

Team Leaders	Susan Wilhelm
Staff Onsite	Ronn Friend and Grace Ross

OVERVIEW OF MONITORING REPORT

The following report is based on the U.S. Department of Education’s (ED) on-site monitoring visit to Mississippi from May 2 – May 6, 2011 and review of documentation provided by the State educational agency (SEA), local educational agencies (LEAs), and schools. The report consists of three sections: *Summary and Observations*, *Technical Assistance Recommendations*, and *Monitoring Findings*. The *Summary and Observations* section describes the implementation of the SIG program by the SEA, LEAs, and schools visited; initial indicators of success; and any outstanding challenges being faced in implementation. This section focuses on how the SEA, LEAs, and schools visited are implementing the SIG program with respect to the following five areas: school climate, staffing, teaching and learning, use of data, and technical assistance. The *Technical Assistance Recommendations* section identifies strategies and resources for addressing technical assistance needs. The *Monitoring Findings* section identifies areas where the SEA is not in compliance with the final requirements of the SIG program and indicates required actions that the SEA must take to resolve the findings.

Please note that the observations and descriptions included in this report reflect the specific context of the limited number of classrooms visited and interviews conducted at a small number of schools and LEAs within the State. Thus, this report provides a snapshot of SIG implementation at the school and LEA levels, and does not represent the entire SIG program within a school, LEA, or SEA. ED does not endorse or promote any particular practice or program cited in this report.

SUMMARY AND OBSERVATIONS

Climate

Hazlehurst City School District (HCSD)

HCSD has two schools: Hazlehurst Middle School that serves students in grades K-8 and Hazlehurst High School that serves students in grades 9-12. Both schools are implementing the SIG transformation model. The district is under conservatorship¹ by the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) and is considered one of the highest needs LEAs in the State. LEA staff reported that the median income of households in Hazlehurst was around \$25,000 based on latest census data and that 95 percent of the LEA’s students are eligible for free or reduced meals.

Hazlehurst Middle School is on a spread out campus with numerous buildings that were built in the 1950’s. At the time of ED’s visit, examples of student work were displayed along the

¹ Under Mississippi Code 37-17-6 the State Board is authorized to take over an LEA that has been declared in a state of emergency due to low student achievement and/or other factors such as severe deficits. The State Board may appoint a conservator to oversee school improvement efforts and/or regulate the day-by-day operations of the district.

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hallways and in classrooms. School staff noted that the focus this year has been on building a school climate that promotes a community of learners among teachers and students and that displaying student work and student progress data is one way to nurture the concept. Staff also indicated that the physical climate of the school is more appealing as a result of the district repainting many of the classrooms and hallways. SIG funds were used to update the school's library to supply it with new furniture, books, periodicals, reference materials, computers and other technology. The leadership team noted that the revamped "21st century" library fosters the school's community of learners focus since teachers and students are now enticed to use the library to access up-to-date resources and global information that enhances instruction and student research.

As reported in the data section of the school's SIG application, over 900 referrals for discipline had occurred in the previous school year. The school has addressed the discipline issue by creating a transitional classroom to work with students to modify behavior and also to keep them in school to address their achievement gaps.

On a needs assessment survey, 85% of the parents felt that security cameras were needed on the school site and most felt that the school did not have necessary resources to provide an adequate safe and drug free school program. Today cameras have been purchased to ensure the safety of the students and a safety officer has been hired. The safety officer helps address other discipline issues such as bullying on campus by giving students classes on behavior. Students reported that they felt safe at school and liked having a safety officer at the school.

Parents also reported on the needs survey that (1) the school did not have clear consistent policies and rules regarding student behavior, (2) staff was not responsive to student needs or dedicated to helping students achieve, and (3) staff was not open to parents' opinions and suggestions. Since the implementation of the transformation model, parents report that the school has a real vision and students are excited about learning. They also reported that the communication between the school and parents has greatly improved and an emphasis is now placed on talking directly to parents. Teachers send notes home or call parents to tell them what is happening, what is coming up in the near future, talking about and sharing children's work, and giving good news stories. Parents noted that this approach is making a real difference and school staff can see the impact on children's attendance, progress, and interest in learning.

Parents reported that there has been improvement in the physical nature of the school and this has improved the overall atmosphere of the school. Students reported that they liked all the new resources. Students in one classroom said they now had books and chairs and the new learning games made school more fun.

Leflore County School District (LCSD)

Leflore County High School enrolls 504 middle and high school students from grades 7-12. It is located in Itta Bena, which is a medium sized city in the Mississippi Delta with a median household income of \$20,968. Based on interviews with school staff, 99 percent of the students attending Leflore County High School are eligible for free lunch. According to the LEA's needs analysis, due to the overwhelming percentage of students from an impoverished background the

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LCSD has been designated as a Provision II school district, which allows each student attending any of the eight schools in the district to receive their school meals at no cost.²

According to school staff, Leflore County High School was built in the late 1930's though it has been extended since. The original structure shows its age both externally and internally. Hallways in some sections of the building were dimly lit and according to interviews with staff some classrooms only have one outlet to accommodate an overhead projector or other teaching technology. The display of student work and classroom climate varied in the classrooms the ED team visited. For example, in an advanced placement classroom there were many examples of student work and helpful resources displayed, students were engaged in the lesson, and the teacher checked for understanding. In another classroom the walls were bare with the exception of two commercial motivational posters, about half of the students appeared attentive to the lesson, and the classroom appeared to be unkempt and uninviting.

The LEA leadership team provided discipline data for 2009-2010 that showed 492 reported incidences of discipline and a truancy rate of 11%. The third ranked need on the LEA's training and recruiting needs assessment survey was school discipline. Since the implementation of the transformation model, parents reported student behavior has improved and students are much more engaged in their learning. Parents also reported that there were bullying issues in the school last year; but the new bullying policy has improved behavior. Parents believe that better equipment and technology has helped improve student behavior.

On the training and recruiting needs assessment survey, the second highest ranked need was parental involvement. Also, one of the stated goals on the SIG proposal is to increase parental and community engagement. In February 2011 the school formed a parent advisory council to guide the school in implementing the SIG plan. Interviews with parents revealed that the school had not consistently involved or engaged parents in organized meetings or school improvement activities over the last several years. Parents noted that one of the purposes of the advisory group is to help the school to find ways to better communicate and reach out to parents and the community. Parents commented that many parents in Leflore County and across the Mississippi Delta have very low levels of literacy and a number of parents are difficult and hard to reach. They complemented the school's new administration for investing time and resources – financial and human – to draw parents into their children's learning.

Staffing

Hazlehurst City School District (HCSD)

- ***Changes in Leadership***

HCSD has an unusual administrative structure. In June 2008 the Mississippi State Board of Education took over and placed in "conservatorship" HCSD due to a decline in student academic achievement and severe financial issues. As part of the takeover, the superintendent and local

² In 2009-2010 school year, Mississippi had 68% of eligible students for free or reduced price lunch programs. Eligibility for the National School Lunch Program is based on family income levels.

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board of education were dismissed. A conservator was appointed to operate the day-by-day functions of the LEA. In spring 2010, Barksdale Reading Institute (BRI) entered into a three-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Hazlehurst Middle School that entailed a financial commitment by BRI to place a BRI-employed principal and other staff at the school. Per the MOU, the principal has authority over key issues such as personnel, curriculum, discipline, scheduling, grades, etc.

A new principal was hired by the BRI in spring 2010 and was involved with crafting the school's SIG application. The principal's past experiences included the complete turnaround of a failing school. According to the MOU, the principal provides leadership in managing the school and has authority over such issues as personnel, curriculum, discipline, and scheduling. The school's leadership team is composed of the principal, three assistant principals, three intervention specialist, two literacy coaches, and two academic directors for the 7th and 8th grades. BRI pays for these positions through institution and SIG grant funds. More detail about these positions is provided in the "changes in staff" section on page 6 of this report.

During discussions with LEA and SEA staff, the ED team was informed that BRI has decided not to renew the principal's contract and will hire a new principal in time for the start of the 2011-2012 school year. As a result of BRI's decision to replace the principal, Hazlehurst Middle School will have experienced three different principals within the last three years.

Leflore County School District (LCSD)

A new principal was hired at Leflore County High School to replace the retiring principal. The LCSD superintendent noted that the LEA began the process of replacing the principal by examining extensive school and district level data and then determining which person was the best match for the school. The new principal came from a high performing school in another LEA and had a track record of success in raising student achievement and increasing graduation rates. Although the principal was hired after the LEA submitted its SIG application to the MDE, he noted that during the interview he was informed about the school's SIG plan and the need for a "transformation leader" to help carry out the plan should the LEA's application be approved. According to interviews with LEA and school staff, the principal has brought needed structure and organization to the school.

As stated in its SIG application, the LEA established a School Improvement Office to lead and monitor the SIG plan. A school improvement specialist³ was hired in October 2010 to help staff this office and to work full time with the school. In January 2011 the school improvement officer, in collaboration with the principal, established a school leadership team to assist in implementing the SIG plan. The team includes the principal, assistant principal, teachers representing grade and subject content areas, and a student counselor. At the time of ED's visit, the principal and the school leadership team were taking more ownership of the SIG program, but it was not clear that the principal and leadership team members had extensive knowledge about the purposes and intent of the SIG program. For example, the leadership team could not

³ LCSD's original SIG application referred to this position as the school improvement officer, but later amended the application to refer to this position as the school improvement specialist.

articulate the needs of the school in terms of the State assessment data and was unsure about the annual SIG goals and the purpose of the goals.

- *Changes in Staff*

Hazlehurst City School District (HCSD)

As previously noted, in spring 2010 BRI entered into a three-year MOU with Hazlehurst Middle School that entailed a financial commitment by BRI to place a BRI-employed principal and other staff at the school. As part of the MOU, BRI, at its sole expense, hired and assigned a full-time literacy coach and other support personnel to work with school staff on literacy-related matters.

The school leadership team noted that the LEA has had difficulty is “growing its own” and building career ladders for teachers. The LEA relies heavily on the Teach For America Organization⁴ for recruiting teachers who stay in their assigned schools for two years. Discussions with the leadership team revealed that the school is in the process of recruiting as many as 25 new Teach For America teachers to fill upcoming vacancies. LEA staff noted the difficulty of recruiting for science and math teachers and will offer hiring incentives to fill these and other hard-to-fill positions in time for the next school year.

Several new positions were added as a result of SIG funding. To address literacy concerns, two reading coaches, one paid by BRI and the other by grant funds, are responsible for planning, coordinating, and implementing a comprehensive reading program to targeted students across grade levels. Three interventionist specialists work with targeted students in the areas of reading, language arts, and mathematics. Because the 7th and 8th grade students were identified in the needs assessment as the lowest performing students in the school, two academic directors are tasked with following the progress of every student in his/her respective grade.

The SIG grant also supports three instructional coaches who work with teachers to implement best and promising practices and provide “on-the-spot” support to teachers when requested through one-to-one coaching and demonstration lessons. A social worker has been hired to work with families of students who are socially excluded or experiencing crisis in their personal life that gets in the way of attending or succeeding in school.

Leflore County School District (LCSD)

Leflore County is located in the Mississippi Delta, which is one of the highest areas of poverty in the country. Notably, this entire section of the state has also been a chronic teacher shortage area for at least ten years according to LCSD staff. Like Hazlehurst City, LCSD has had difficulty in “growing its own” and building career ladders for staff. The LEA’s SIG application noted that the Teach For America Organization is the district’s primary source for recruiting highly qualified teachers. In June 2010 Teach for America opened its Mississippi Delta teacher

⁴ Teach For America recruits recent college graduates and professionals to teach for two years in high poverty urban and rural communities throughout the United States.

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training institute at Delta State University, which is one of eight such centers nationwide, and the first in a rural area.

According to the SIG needs analysis, the LEA identified several new positions at the central office and school levels, many of which it was unsuccessful in filling. Page 71 of the school's SIG application described how the intervention model would have added additional staff to support the implementation of the model.

“Through this school improvement model, our staff will be enhanced by the addition of several key faculty members. Never before has Leflore County High School been in the position to recruit and attract such high-level instructional staff by offering financial incentives. Through this school improvement plan, we will add three additional math teachers to focus our efforts on providing rigorous, well-planned instruction in mathematics. We will also hire an additional English/reading teacher who will work primarily with students who are experiencing significant difficulties in mastering the concepts in these courses. Our staff will also be enhanced by the addition of two teachers who will provide character education instruction. We feel with our significantly high dropout rate and the current condition of the family structure for many of our students, the school must take a more active role in the intentional development of individual student character. We feel this innovative strategy will produce rewards long term as we move to increase the number of high school graduates from our school. In that same regard, we will hire two graduation coaches who will identify at-risk students early and provide them with high levels of support, intervention, and assistance to see that they can obtain a high school diploma. Lastly, we will hire a school-based Curriculum Coordinator. Due to the diverse and varied instructional needs of our staff, we feel that this position can help provide alignment among our classes, ensure rigor is present in lesson plans and classroom instruction, and facilitate department meetings to ensure best practices are being utilized.”

Over the course of the year, most of these positions were eliminated or refined through amendments approved by the MDE. For example, the SIG plan initially included two character education teachers, but was adjusted in October 2010 to eliminate one of the positions and amended again in April 2011 to eliminate the second position. Although two graduation coaches were listed in the original application, the plan was amended to eliminate one of the positions and to reduce the other position to a half-yearly position. The LEA decided to contract a part-time curriculum specialist for the 2010-2011 school year rather than hire a full-time curriculum coordinator, as called for in the original SIG application. At the LEA level, the clerk-bookkeeper position was eliminated because there was sufficient staff to perform the responsibilities of that position. When asked about the need to eliminate or adjust these positions, LEA staff replied that because the State awarded the grant in September 2010 it was difficult to recruit and hire new staff after the beginning of school, especially since the county must compete with surrounding districts in the Delta region for highly qualified and hard-to-fill vacancies. Further, because of the Delta's history of a chronic shortage of teachers and difficulty

in filling positions, it is not clear if the State’s SIG review panel and the MDE staff took into consideration whether the LEA had the capacity to fully implement the model should the LEA experience difficulty in filling the positions listed in its application.

The LEA has contracted with the Bailey Education Group (BEG) as its “lead partner” to provide on-site, job-embedded professional development and coaching provided by experienced educational consultants. According to the SIG application, the lead partner is tasked with developing professional learning communities to build capacity to drive change throughout the school and community. Both new and returning staff reported that they felt that the teaching culture has changed for the better as a result of the change in leadership, the support of the school improvement specialist, and the support provided by BEG. Teachers felt that the work culture now promoted collaboration and professional growth and commented on the on-site and web-based support they receive from the BEG to further professional growth. Parents reported that they felt the staff was reaching out more to communicate with them about their children’s progress and to engage parents in school and student activities.

Teaching and Learning

Hazlehurst City School District (HCSD)

According to HCSD’s SIG application, to achieve the ultimate result of improved student achievement, (1) the leadership will establish, train, monitor, and support the teaching staff, (2) focus, train, monitor and coach grade level and or subject area study groups to use student data to adjust the instructional practices, classroom management and/or interventions, and (3) delineate and reward targets set by learning communities for leading, teaching, and learning and involving the community. The focus is on how to analyze and interpret all available data, plan and implement data driven decisions, and differentiated instruction based on performance data to customize learning for all students. As discussed in the use of data section of this report, teachers have used many different strategies to meet the needs of individual students. For example, changes in the structure of the school have helped provide extra resources. So too has the promotion of learning communities that assist teachers in planning and developing differentiated instruction strategies based on individual student needs. During interviews, teachers articulated how the use of data has improved teaching and learning in their classrooms. Staff was very positive regarding the assistance they receive from the interventionist teachers who work with each learning community to remediate at-risk students and help teachers develop instructional interventions. The interventionist teachers also are part of the job embedded professional development. They work in the classroom with teachers and model teaching strategies.

The needs assessment showed that many teachers reported needing additional support in the area of the “3 Tier Model” as a vehicle for differentiating instruction, assistance in the use of technology, and developing scientifically-based instructional strategies. To address these needs, the LEA has created a learning center for teachers that is fully equipped with current technological teaching tools. School staff reported that they were given the opportunity to

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observe other teachers to improve their instruction and that having common planning time with grade-level colleagues provided opportunities to improve their practices.

Teachers commented on the additional instruction time and indicated that the morning block of time for reading has translated into more learning. An additional 30 minutes per day has been added to the school schedule. Also, an extra hour of tutoring has been added each week for the following grade spans: K- grade 1 on Monday, grades 2-3 on Tuesday, grades 4-6 on Wednesday, and grades 7-8 on Thursday. Teachers reported that the tutoring has given the interventionist teacher more time to target students that need extra help.

Two new initiatives that will unfold concurrently during summer 2011 are a 7th and 8th grade summer academy for math and a kindergarten camp. School staff discussed these two efforts as reaching students at the two ends where the needs assessment indicated students needed extra help and support – students entering kindergarten without such prerequisite skills in numeracy, literacy, and color decoding and students transitioning into the upper grades where they tend to become the lowest-performing students in the school based on State and local assessment data.

Parents were very supportive of the expanded school day, although several remarked that they and their children had to adjust to the earlier beginning time. Parents expressed enthusiasm about the Saturday classes available to their children as well as the opportunity to observe teachers teaching these classes. The parents interviewed stated that school staff is doing a better job keeping them informed about the new programs and instructional practices at the school.

Leflore County School District (LCSD)

According to the Leflore County High School SIG grant, the school will meet the challenge of school improvement using the transformation intervention and will focus on five essential areas: instructional leadership, data, assessment, instructional effectiveness and literacy. After interviewing the leadership team, the teachers and the LEA staff, much of the SIG plan has not been implemented yet. The leadership team reported that they had not been chosen until February. The leadership team could not articulate the components of the SIG grant or articulate the changes in the school as a result of the SIG grant. In a conversation with a few members of the leadership team, they reported that they would review the SIG grant and be ready for full implementation in the fall. However, the LEA leadership team could readily articulate the needs of the school and how the SIG grant was developed to address those needs. As such, there appears to be a disconnect in knowing the purpose and scope of the SIG intervention model between the school's leadership team and LEA staff. This disconnect may be a result of the LEA crafting the SIG plan without the direct input and involvement of school staff.

Even though the State data showed that Leflore High School made AYP in literacy in 2009-2010, it failed AYP in mathematics. However, mathematics was not a focus of the school's SIG plan. The ED Team observed that the 2009-2010 data showed that only 24% of the males in the 7th and 8th scored proficient and above on the MCT2 and only 9% of the males in grade 11 scored proficient and above on the English II test. The school staff indicated that it is addressing the literacy focus by extending the learning time by 20 minutes a day to do sustained reading during

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the homeroom period. Teachers commented that this extended learning time was helping students with reading comprehension. Teachers also noted that because each homeroom teacher is responsible for planning a daily sustained reading activity, the activities and strategies each teacher uses can look different across homerooms. For example, math teachers may place greater emphasis on reading materials that help students solve word problems while social studies teachers may emphasize newspaper and magazine articles that focus on current events. As such, there appears to be little continuity in how the sustained reading program is being implemented across classrooms. However, parents commented that they liked the sustained reading initiative and have noticed that it was helping their children to read more. The Read 180 program is also being implemented in the school. This program has computers in the classroom. A Read 180 teacher commented that this program was helping students to be engaged and improving their reading. Parents also had positive comments for the Read 180 program.

According to the SIG proposal, Saturday and after school tutoring will be coordinated with other programs to ensure all students will have an opportunity to receive additional educational support as needed. The leadership team reported that Saturday classes provided one-on-one assistance to approximately 20-25 students that are at risk.

The SIG grant has provided the school with new technology such as smart boards and additional computers. A new computer lab also was installed in the school. Except for the Read 180 classroom, it is unclear how this technology is integrated into teaching and learning. Some students reported that they did not have access to the computers. In observing a classroom, one teacher seemed to be successfully using the smart board as a tool to engage students.

Staff reported that professional development is now more job-embedded. Teachers were positive about getting help this year. One Teach For America teacher reported that she was having difficulties with discipline and teaching strategies and now has an instructional coach from the BEG, the school's lead partner, in her classroom assisting her each day. Teachers also reported that the instructional coaches assisted teachers in analyzing their teaching strategies.

Use of Data

Hazlehurst City School District (HCSD)

In examining the needs of Hazlehurst Middle School, multiple measures were used to look at school needs in the area of student achievement, curriculum and instruction, professional development, and family, community engagement. Teachers interviewed reported that prior to the SIG grant teachers did not use data to guide instructional decisions for individual students or groups of students. Now teachers meet biweekly in grade-level team meetings to discuss all the assessment outcomes and look at the needs of the students. As part of their data driven professional development teachers examined achievement data from the MCT2 by grade, subgroup, and subject over a three year period. Teachers reported that this professional development helped them to understand the data and also helped them develop strategies to address student needs. These data showed that in language arts approximately 70% or more

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students were scored basic and below in grades 3 through 8. From 61%-91% of the students in mathematics in grades 3-8 scored basic and below. Grades 7 and 8 performance was the lowest in the school. As a result of the analysis of these data, academic coaches were added to the 7th and 8th grades as a part of the SIG grant to monitor and remediate those students scoring basic and below.

To address the individual needs of all the students, the school has implemented a progress monitoring system that shows individual student data. As a result of this system, teachers reported that students are learning to use data and set goals. With the individual student data, teachers reported that they were able to differentiate instruction to address student needs. Hazlehurst's Middle School is using AimsWeb and Mock MCT2 as their benchmark assessments. The AimsWeb is administered 3 times a year and the Mock MCT2 is administered every nine weeks. Since most students perform at basic or below, which gives the school a status of academic watch, the school has set goals on the Mock MCT2 to move a certain number of students out of basic to proficient, so the school will earn the status "successful performance" on the Mississippi accountability system. The AimsWeb is a benchmark assessment that includes kindergarten to 8th grade in reading and mathematics computation. In kindergarten and first grade, students are showing improvement from the fall test to the midyear test. In general students in grades 2 through 8 are showing improvement between fall and the midyear assessment in reading. The AimsWeb data for mathematics computation shows that student scores are showing little improvement. With the help of the literacy and math coaches, teachers review the individual student data biweekly and make instructional decisions based on their students' performance.

The MDE has a data system that collects most of the leading indicators and may be accessed by teachers and administrators. According to this data system, Hazlehurst had over 900 incidents of discipline issues in 2009-2010. To address this issue the school created a transitional classroom to work with students to modify behavior and also keep them in school to address their achievement gaps. Parents indicated that they like this in-house suspension and the help students are getting.

Leflore County School District (LCSD)

The data displayed in the LCSD SIG application from the State standards' based test (the MCT2) and the Subject Area Testing Program (SATP) in Algebra and English II shows that Leflore County High School did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in both reading and mathematics in 2008-2009. The 2009-2010 data on these assessments show that the school is making AYP in reading in the all student, economically disadvantaged, and black student groups and that all these groups were failing AYP in mathematics. An essential area identified in the school's SIG plan is literacy. However, math is not identified as an essential area. While the school leadership team knew the school had been identified as a failing school through the State and NCLS accountability systems, the team could not articulate the needs of the school in terms of the State assessment data, lead indicators, or the survey conducted to identify training and recruiting needs for the high school. The LEA staff could articulate the needs of the school and

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had data readily at hand. During the LEA interviews, most of the data including the data on the lead indicators, State test, and benchmark test were reviewed with the ED Team.

In the SIG application for the transformation model, the school was to focus on five essential areas, two of which were data and assessment. When teachers were asked about the use of data to inform instruction, they said they used the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test competencies. The MAP test is an adaptive benchmark assessment given in the fall and spring. However, teachers didn't talk about the results of this assessment or how it was used for instruction. Additionally, neither the leadership team nor teachers mentioned collaborating with the assessment team. Further, while the leadership team reported that the data coach was to help teachers, the teachers didn't mention the data coach in the interviews.

The needs assessment for Leflore County High School showed that the graduation rate was 73.7% and the dropout rate was 20.7%. As noted in the SIG application a graduation coach was hired to work with students to increase the graduation rate. Survey data collected from teachers and parents rated the need for addressing character education and school discipline as the first and third rated need. The character education teacher was taken out of the grant due to the inability of the LEA to fill the position. The leadership team members could only talk about the leading indicators in qualitative terms, such as "the discipline referrals were less frequent."

Technical Assistance

SEA Support to LEAs and schools

The MDE began providing support to all LEAs eligible to apply for SIG funding by sending information and resources about the application requirements early in the process while developing the State's SIG application and while ED was reviewing the State's SIG application. The MDE held webinars and workshops to review the SIG application requirements, the review rubric, and grant requirements. MDE staff conducted numerous calls with individual LEAs to address questions and concerns. Staff in HCSD and LCSD commented on the support the MDE provided regarding the SIG application process.

In September the MDE created a new Office of School Recovery (OSR) within the Office of Improvement, Oversight and Recovery to oversee the SIG program. The MDE recruited and hired a manager to oversee this office and who reports to the deputy superintendent for Improvement, Oversight, and Recovery. Because the staff placed in this office was new to SIG and different than the staff the involved in developing the State's SIG application and carrying out the initial review of the LEA SIG applications, one of the first duties of the OSR was to review the SIG applications recommended for approval. The manager met with LEA staff to refine budgets, review goals, and adjust the SIG applications before funds were allocated to the LEAs.

In February 2011 the OSR hired three specialists to monitor and provide customized technical assistance and support to LEAs and schools receiving SIG funds. After each visit, these

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specialists provide a written report to the school’s principal; reports are very detailed and cite areas in the SIG plan that have not been achieved, areas needing improvement, and areas of success. LEA and school staffs were complementary of the support and “hands-on” assistance that these specialist provide through site visits, phone conferences, and email responses.

Based on lessons learned from first year SIG implementation, the MDE has initiated a more rigorous process for reviewing and approving SIG applications for the 2011-2012 competition. As a result, SIG applications are now reviewed using a two tier process. First, all SIG applications are reviewed by a panel that recommends successful applicants based on a scoring rubric and panel discussion. Applicants recommended by the review panel are then interviewed by a panel of SEA staff. This interview focuses on the alignment of the needs assessment with goals and strategies to implement the SIG intervention model(s) and the capacity of the LEA to fully implement the interventions.

To assist LEAs and schools in developing teacher evaluation systems, the MDE established a workgroup composed of representatives from the SIG LEAs and schools. According to discussions with LEA and SEA staff, the workgroup will recommend minimum statewide standards that will include student growth and consistent with the transformation model’s requirements. The workgroup will also recommend minimum statewide standards that LEAs can use to reward effective teachers who improve student achievement.

The OSR has created a SIG “School Improvement Grants Information Center” Website that includes up-to-date information about SIG awards, LEA and school applications, and tools and best practices to assist LEAs and schools in implanting their SIG plans. LEA and school staffs were aware of the website and commented on how they use the website to stay informed about SIG training opportunities and technical assistance meetings.

LEA Support to Schools

Both HCSD and LCSD play an important role in supporting effective implementation in their SIG schools. Both LEAs provide ongoing support through customized professional development. LCSD staff provides support to Leflore County High School in such areas as parent involvement and student placement. In HCSD, a part-time SIG manager oversees implementation in the two SIG schools. Additionally, HCSD staff work closely with Barksdale Reading Institute (BRI) and the principal at Hazlehurst Middle School to plan LEA sponsored professional development.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE RECOMMENDATIONS

This section addresses areas where additional technical assistance may be needed to improve the quality of implementation of the SIG program.

Issue 1: Use of Data

The leadership team at Leflore County High School could not articulate the needs of the school in terms of the State assessment data, lead indicators, or the survey conducted to identify training and recruiting needs for the high school. The leadership team knew that the school had been identified as a failing school through the State and NCLB accountability systems; however, the team members could only talk about the leading indicators in qualitative terms, such as the discipline referrals were less frequent. Also the 2010 AYP designation showed that the school was identified as needing improvement in math; however, math was not identified as an essential area.

Technical Assistance Strategies:

- Provide technical assistance, both via statewide meetings with participating LEAs and one-on-one with participating LEAs, to build on staff understanding of use of multiple sources of data to inform instructional decision making. (MDE)
- Convene lead partners and other external providers responsible for providing job-embedded professional development instructional coaches, and data specialist in the SIG schools to develop common language and strategies lead partners and other external providers can use to communicate with and build knowledge of school staff about the use of multiple data sources to inform instructional decision making. (MDE)

Issue 2: Aligning Teacher Evaluation Systems

In spring 2010, Barksdale Reading Institute (BRI) entered into a three-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Hazlehurst Middle School that entailed a financial commitment by BRI to place a BRI-employed principal and other staff at the school. Per the MOU, the principal has authority over key issues such as personnel and teacher evaluations. During interviews with LEA staff, the area coordinator for BRI indicated that the Institute had developed its own teacher evaluation system that it uses in schools it serves. The teacher evaluation that BRI uses must be consistent with the transformation model's requirements.

Technical Assistance Strategy:

- Invite a representative from the BRI to serve on the State's Teacher Evaluation Work Group. (MDE)

MONITORING FINDINGS

Summary of Monitoring Indicators

Critical Element	Requirement	Status	Page
1. Application Process	The SEA ensures that its application process was carried out consistent with the final requirements of the SIG program. [Sections I and II of the final requirements for the School Improvement Grants authorized under section 1003(g) of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (75 FR 66363 (October 28, 2010))]	NA	--
2. Implementation	The SEA ensures that the SIG intervention models are being implemented consistent with the final requirements of the SIG program. [Sections I and II of the final requirements for the School Improvement Grants authorized under section 1003(g) of Title I of Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (75 FR 66363 (October 28, 2010))]	Finding	16
3. Fiscal	The SEA ensures LEAs and schools are using funds consistent with the final requirements of the SIG program. [Section II of the final requirements for the School Improvement Grants authorized under section 1003(g) of Title I of Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (75 FR 66363 (October 28, 2010)) ; §1114 of the ESEA; and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-87]	Finding	17
4. Technical Assistance	The SEA ensures that technical assistance is provided to its LEAs consistent with the final requirements of the SIG program. [Section II of the final requirements for the School Improvement Grants authorized under section 1003(g) of Title I of Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (75 FR 66363 (October 28, 2010))]	NA	--
5. Monitoring	The SEA ensures that monitoring of LEAs and schools is being conducted consistent with the final requirements of the SIG program. [Section II of the final requirements for the School Improvement Grants authorized under section 1003(g) of Title I of Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (75 FR 66363 (October 28, 2010))]	NA	--
6. Data Collection	The SEA ensures that data are being collected consistent with the final requirements of the SIG program. [Sections II and III of the final requirements for the School Improvement Grants authorized under section 1003(g) of Title I of Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (75 FR 66363 (October 28, 2010))]	NA	--

Monitoring Area: School Improvement Grant

Critical Element 2: The SEA ensures that the SIG intervention models are being implemented consistent with the final requirements of the SIG program.

Finding: The MDE has not ensured that LEAs implementing the transformation model are establishing schedules and implementing strategies that increase learning time. Although Leflore County High School added an additional 20 minutes at the beginning of the day for sustained reading time during the homeroom period, interviews with staff demonstrated that the sustained reading initiative was not consistently implemented across homerooms and that the additional time was not consistently used for instruction or other activities consistent with the SIG final requirements.

Citation: Section I.A.2(d)(3)(i)(A) of the final requirements stipulate as part of the transformation model an LEA must “establish schedules and implement strategies that provide increased learning time.” Section I.A.2(a)(1)(viii) of the final requirements stipulate as part of the turnaround model an LEA must “establish schedules and implement strategies that provide increased learning time.” Section I.A.3 of the final requirements defines *increased learning time* as “using a longer school day, week, or year schedule to significantly increase the total number of school hours to include additional time for (a) instruction in core academic subjects including English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography; (b) instruction in other subjects and enrichment activities that contribute to a well-rounded education, including, for example, physical education, service learning, and experiential and work-based learning opportunities that are provided by partnering, as appropriate, with other organizations; and (c) teachers to collaborate, plan, and engage in professional development within and across grades and subjects.” (75 FR 66363 (October 28, 2010))

Further action required: The MDE must work with its LEAs to ensure that all schools implementing the turnaround or transformation models have significantly increased the number of school hours and that the additional time is being consistently used for instructional purposes or for teachers to collaborate, plan, and engage in professional development. The MDE must submit the following evidence to ED:

- **2010-2011 School Year:** For each of the eight schools that implemented the transformation model in the 2010-2011 school year, the MDE must submit documentation demonstrating that these schools have significantly increased the number of school hours and that the additional time is being consistently used in accordance with the definition of “increased learning time” in the final requirements. Prior to submitting this documentation to ED, in instances where the MDE discovers that the increased learning time is not being applied consistently with the final requirements, the MDE must work with these LEAs and schools to amend this component in their SIG applications accordingly. For any LEA and school that amends the extended learning component of their SIG plan, the MDE must include the amended component as part of its documentation.

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- 2011-2012 School Year: For each new school the MDE approves to implement the turnaround or transformation model as part of the 2011-2012 competition, the MDE must submit (1) documentation demonstrating the increase in learning time under the school intervention model and (2) evidence that the time will be consistently used in accordance with the definition of “increased learning time” in the final requirements. This documentation must be submitted once the MDE has issued all final award letters for the 2011-2012 SIG competition.

Critical Element 3: The SEA ensures LEAs and schools are using funds consistent with the final requirements of the SIG program.

Finding: Although the MDE has a process in place to review and approve programmatic and budget amendments for SIG grants, it has not consistently ensured that it has communicated clear guidance for LEAs to submit substantive programmatic and fiscal amendments to the SEA and the process the SEA will use to review and approve such amendments. On April 28, 2011 the MDE approved an amendment to realign the SIG budgets for LCSD and for Leflore High School. Because the LEA was unable to fill several positions listed in the original budget, the amendment permitted the LEA to reallocate \$248,301 among other categories. As a result, at the school level the amount budgeted for equipment was increased by \$61,000 for additional LCD projectors and Smart Board technology; the budget for supplies increased by \$39,114; the budget for contractual services increased by \$99,800. The SIG budget for the LEA (central office) was adjusted to increase supplies by \$38,750. LCSD’s amendment request did not include a clear justification or rationale for how these budget changes support the overall goal of implementing the transformation intervention model at Leflore County High School. Further, it is not clear if the changes to the school’s budget were reasonable and necessary and whether the elimination of key staff identified in the original application would have a bearing on the school’s capacity to fully implement the intervention model. Although the amendment did not include a clear justification for these significant changes, the MDE bureau manager responsible for SIG oversight indicated she had spoken with the LEA to verify the need for the amendment and kept handwritten notes to support her decision to approve the amendment.

Citation: Section 80.30 of the Education Department General Administrative Requirements (EDGAR) requires that the subgrantee obtain prior written approval from the awarding agency before changes are implemented. Section 80.40(a) of EDGAR requires that grantees are responsible for managing the day-to-day operations of grant and subgrant supported activities. Section C.1 of Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-87 stipulates that to be allowable under Federal awards, costs must be necessary and reasonable for proper and efficient performance and administration and allowable under the relevant program.

Further action required: The MDE must take and inform ED of the following actions:

- Develop and post on the MDE website written guidance and a standard format that LEAs must use to propose substantive programmatic and fiscal changes to their SIG applications.

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- Develop and post on the MDE website a checklist the MDE staff will use to review and make determinations on substantive programmatic and fiscal amendments to approved SIG plans.
- Develop a plan and timeline to train LEA and MDE staff responsible for SIG implementation about the standard format and checklist the MDE will use to review and approve SIG amendments.