

SOUTH DAKOTA
Targeted Monitoring Review of
School Improvement Grants (SIG) under section 1003(g) of the
Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965
May 16-20, 2011

BACKGROUND

Overview of SIG Schools in South Dakota

Tier	Number of FY 2009 Eligible SIG Schools	Number of FY 2009 Served SIG Schools
Tier I	5	1
Tier II	7	1
Tier III	49	16

Implementation of SIG School Intervention Models

Models	Number of Schools implementing the Model
Turnaround	1
Transformation	1
Restart	0
Closure	0

MONITORING TRIP INFORMATION

Monitoring Visits

LEA Visited	<i>New Underwood School District</i>
School Visited	<i>New Underwood High School</i>
Model Implemented	<i>Transformation</i>
FY 2009 Funding Awarded (over three years)	<i>LEA Award (for 1 SIG school): \$792,577 School-level funding: \$792,577</i>
SEA Visited	<i>South Dakota State Department of Education</i>
FY 2009 SIG Award	<i>\$11,302,905</i>
FY 2009 SIG Awards to 5 LEAs	<i>\$8,047,899</i>

Staff Interviewed

- **SEA Staff:** *Kristine Harms, Beth Schiltz, Shawna Poitra, Rob*
- **LEA #1 Staff:** *Mr. Jeff Marlette (Superintendent), Mrs. Irene Madsen (Business Manager)*
- **School #1 Staff:** *Principal, School Leadership Team, 13 Teachers, 5 Parents, 6 Students, and 5 Classroom Visits*

U.S. Department of Education Staff

Team Leader	<i>Susan Wilhelm</i>
Staff Onsite	<i>Nola Cromer, Gay Ojugbana, and David Yi</i>

OVERVIEW OF MONITORING REPORT

The following report is based on U.S. Department of Education's (ED) on-site monitoring visit to South Dakota from May 17-18, 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 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: 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. As such, they are a snapshot of what was occurring at the LEA and school levels, and are not meant to represent a school's, LEA's, or State's entire SIG program. Nor are we approving or endorsing any particular practices or approaches by citing them.

SUMMARY AND OBSERVATIONS

Climate

New Underwood Senior High School's (New Underwood) needs assessment identified two areas of weakness from the Dakota Character Survey: (1) the lack of autonomy that students felt they possessed in the decision making process, and (2) the students' sense of parent involvement at school and home. In addition, the student motivational survey noted two areas of weakness in the instructional program, specifically the lack of hands-on activities and a high level of boredom with classes.

New Underwood's SIG plan indicated that it would address the weaknesses identified in the needs assessment by using SIG funds to promote student autonomy in decision making, incorporate more project-based learning and hands-on activities, and increase the rigor and relevance within the curriculum to engage more students. New Underwood's plan did not specifically address how it would increase parent outreach, but parents reported that there has been more outreach from the school during the 2010-2011 school year compared to previous years.

In interviews with ED staff, teachers reported that, prior to the 2010-2011 school year, students were not held accountable for their actions and they did not feel supported by the administration. Students stated that the school felt gloomy and old. Parents indicated that the teachers were not held accountable. The New Underwood School District (NUSD) administrative staff reported that students had a large number of absences, and that there were no consequences. They also stated that parents would keep students home to help on the ranch during busy periods, such as branding time, and that students were okay about receiving failing grades.

At the beginning of school year (SY) 2010-11, the NUSD hired a new superintendent and a new principal for New Underwood. The superintendent is also the principal of the elementary school. The principal of New Underwood is also the principal of the junior high school. Since the NUSD only has one elementary, one junior high, and one high school, the superintendent and high school principal make up the administration of the NUSD. One of the first challenges the new school administration addressed was the school's policies related to absenteeism and tardiness. The school administration installed a new tardiness/absenteeism policy where after six absences parents receive a phone call, and after eight absences, parents are required to attend a mandatory conference. Parents reported that the administration let parents know that students are expected to be in school.

Additionally, New Underwood embarked on a more stringent policy regarding students' late or not completed school assignments. New Underwood has a four-day school week from Monday to Thursday. The administration reported that in the past the school did not offer supplemental academic activities for students on Fridays. However, the new administration has now utilized Fridays to provide supplemental academic activities, including requiring students to come to school on Fridays to complete any incomplete or missing assignments. Currently, New Underwood's principal receives a list each Monday morning of students who have incomplete homework assignments. Those students are given a ten percent deduction on the assignment and required to attend school on Friday if their assignment has not been completed by the end of the week. The administration said that they have tracked improvement in this area, and observed that there was a ten percent decline in late or absent homework assignments by the end of the school year. New Underwood's principal stated that he calls parents nightly for those students failing or struggling academically. The new administration reported that they wanted to create a culture where zeros (grades) were not permitted and to install "an attitude of excellence in students."

The superintendent and principal noted that the awarding of the school improvement grant initially dampened the culture of the school because of the negative perception of the award and stated that they "had to make sense out of it for South Dakota as a small, rural community." The administration stated they attend every school event so that their presence is known and that people see that they are approachable. The superintendent noted that "you can start to feel the culture (of the school) change. There are less students failing and parents are grateful."

The new administration said that they have attempted to reach out to teachers, students, and parents. Although students interviewed commented that they had seen only subtle differences in the school's culture from last year, they did remark that they were pleased that the high school council was opened to all students, where they felt they had more of a voice, and that the school's administration truly listened to their concerns. The superintendent indicated that six or seven students from each class attended a session away from the school where they were encouraged to share their thoughts about New Underwood. The superintendent indicated that he had taken many of the students' suggestions to the NUSD board, and that several were going to be implemented, including improving the school's entryway with new painting, lighting, and raising of the ceiling. The NUSD's school board has determined that local funding will be used for these activities. One interesting note was that students commented that they felt the school's principal was very approachable and welcoming, yet found the school's superintendent a bit intimidating whereas parents indicated that they have more involvement with the school's

superintendent. Parents noted in their interview with ED staff that the new administration has more of an “open-door policy,” “are more open-minded,” and “request more accountability” than the previous administration. One parent noted that discipline is now enforced and that the school is “making students feel that getting good grades is cool.” Parents also commented that the superintendent spoke to many of them about the importance of students being in school. Teachers’ sentiments were similar with teachers indicating that in prior years, “students ran the school” and now “consequences have been instituted.” Many of the teachers reported that they felt supported by the new principal. Parents, teachers, and students indicated that the principal and superintendent are very visible in the school, and are in and out of classrooms. Parents reported that their children had remarked that the administrators talked to them and really care about them.

Staffing

The NUSD’s new superintendent and New Underwood’s new principal began on July 1, 2010. Both administrators learned about these vacancies through the school district’s website. New Underwood has experienced a high turnover rate with teachers and principals, with five principals in eight years. The new principal is a former K-12 special education teacher and a former principal for a school that exited improvement during his tenure. The new superintendent said he was a finalist for 2 school districts, but was attracted to the NUSD for its challenges, stating that he’s “at heart, a reformer.”

The superintendent stated that he came from a school district that focused on data retreats and curriculum mapping, which both the needs assessment and staff reported as weaknesses. Teachers noted that parents think that the school’s principal is a good fit and indicated that the new superintendent has a vision which he is able to communicate to staff, students, and parents.

Teaching and Learning

The NUSD’s SIG application indicated that the School Improvement Grant committee reviewed the data from the 2008-2009 South Dakota State Test of Educational Progress (STEP) for the 11th grade and the academic trends from 2005-2009. Based upon the 2009 mathematics STEP data, New Underwood had 29 percent of the students at the proficient level, and 71 percent at the basic level. Two areas of weakness were identified in mathematics. The primary concern was student skills in the areas of using deductive and inductive reasoning to recognize and apply properties of geometric figures. The second area of concern in mathematics was improving student knowledge of procedures to transform algebraic expression in math.

In reading, the STEP data indicated that New Underwood had five percent of its students at the advanced level, 29 percent at the proficient level, 52 percent at the basic level, and 14 percent at the below basic level. The team indicated that they had noted one year of significant progress during that timeframe. Based on the 2008-2009 STEP reading data, New Underwood’s needs assessment identified two weak areas in reading. The first area in reading was students’ ability to apply knowledge of text structures, literacy devices, and literary elements to develop interpretations and form responses. The second area in reading was the students’ ability to access, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate informational texts.

New Underwood’s application indicated that, before the SIG grant, New Underwood staff focused on Marzano’s instructional strategies, which were incorporated into daily lesson plans. Professional

development had been provided using Bloom's Taxonomy in analyzing test questions to look at the rigor in the classroom.

In its SIG application, New Underwood identified several prioritized needs for the SIG funds:

- Technology development and collaborative training for curriculum integration;
- Curriculum development to meet state standards with an emphasis on technology;
- Development of formative and summative assessment protocols to measure student learning;
- Increase in project based learning, hands on activities, and differentiated instruction within the instructional presentation;
- Job embedded professional development regarding subject specific pedagogy; and
- Increase rigor and relevance within the curriculum.

To address these prioritized needs, New Underwood proposed in its SIG application to:

- Expand the use of technology instruction which would include the purchase of equipment, software, and training;
- Provide students with opportunities to engage in work related activities through local businesses;
- Use outside consultants to support the development of curriculum, the alignment of curriculum to state standards;
- Provide an after school tutorial program for all students for thirty minutes daily four days per week as well as a Friday school two Fridays a month for students seeking additional time;
- Provide opportunities for teachers to get master's degrees as part of professional development activities;
- Hire a technology staff member to assist in the wireless labs;
- Increase staff training and planning time throughout the school year and summer; and
- Hire a core curriculum specialist to assist in providing instruction

Both the NUSD superintendent and the New Underwood principal who were instrumental in developing the original SIG application are no longer there. The new superintendent and new principal, both of whom were hired after the SIG application was drafted, reported that they would have written the SIG application differently. They indicated that they believe that strengthening instructional practices, providing solid professional development, and focusing on the fundamentals is most important as opposed to focusing on technology for technology's sake. Consequently, the administration reported that the laptop computers mentioned in the SIG application had not been purchased because they did not think that teachers were ready to further infuse technology into the curriculum to improve instruction. The administration reported that they anticipate purchasing 75 laptop computers and 35 desktop computers in year two to begin more fully utilizing the school's technological capacity to enhance instruction and learning. The new administration has requested two amendments thus far, one to move funding from the category to have teachers get masters degrees, and the second to increase funding for contracting coaching services.

The current administration reported that New Underwood has implemented an after school tutorial program from 3:45 pm to 4:15 pm four days per week. Although the original SIG application proposed that the program would be mandatory for all students, only students who have received a failing grade must attend while other students may attend if they wish. In addition, students who have incomplete assignments are required to attend school on Fridays. The Friday school operates two Fridays per month for three and a half hours. The Friday school, which is supported by SIG funds, typically includes reading, science, and math and operates from 8:00 am – 12:00 pm. Teachers reported that the students like the idea of a time when they can come to school for additional help. They also reported that, on many

Fridays, one-third of the high school students were in attendance even though only half of that number were required to attend. The superintendent reported that, because of the after school, Friday school and intervention programs, there are fewer students who are receiving failing grades.

The superintendent indicated that this year, New Underwood has 144 student-teacher contact days and operates on a 7:45am-3:30pm schedule with the after school tutorial being provided from 3:45pm to 4:15 pm. For the 2011-2012 school year, the superintendent stated that he expects to have 155 student-teacher contact days and increase the school day to 8:00am – 4:00pm, with the after school tutoring program provided from 4:00 pm to 4:30 pm. The superintendent also stated that next year, New Underwood will have changed schedules so that study hall is the last period of the day. This will allow students who are on teams, in chorus, etc. not to miss core subject instruction.

The superintendent reported that New Underwood was unable to hire a curriculum specialist. However, SIG funds are being used to pay for the services of a reading interventionist who provides assistance to students who have been identified for additional assistance in reading. The administration stated that next year they hope to expand the interventionist strategies to math. Administrators also reported that each high school student has been assigned a teacher as an advisor to help that student with any academic challenge or difficulty. Additionally, the administration reported that, prior to the 2010-2011 school year, some students had the option of taking credit recovery courses in lieu of actually attending classes. Parents indicated that, in some instances, students were not prepared for college once they graduated from New Underwood, and the new administration believed that students were abusing the credit recovery program in order to take less rigorous courses and complete the courses in a shorter amount of time. Because of these factors, the administration indicated that New Underwood has discontinued using the credit recovery program with the exception of three students who are continuing from last year.

Teachers interviewed reported that, in previous years, professional development consisted of, “the flavor of the month.” The administration reported that the NUSD wanted a systematic approach to professional development. The administration indicated that the high school is now providing professional development to teachers on the first Friday of each month as a regular part of the school’s professional development activities. The NUSD has contracted with a consultant who provides specific professional development based on the goals of the administration, including project-based learning. The NUSD has also contracted with Technology in Education (TIE), which provides a coach for math, reading, and integration of technology. The NUSD’s SIG application indicated that this contractor would support aligning lessons and curriculum to State standards. Teachers reported that the coaches provide one-to-one individual assistance. The coaches visited teachers seven times during this school year for technology and reading, and four times for math. The coaches met with teachers for activities ranging from in-class modeling or shadowing to pre- and post-classroom consulting on instructional techniques and strategies. In interviews with ED staff, the math coach stated that the goal of the coaches is “instruction by design...where technology is a tool and not the end-all,” with the superintendent adding that he desires technology as a part of a grab bag of instructional tools. The math and reading coaches meet with teachers in a pre-conference to establish standards and daily instructional goals as well as a post-conference to see if goals were met. One of the ways that the coaches have assisted the school’s math teachers is by helping the teachers in infusing inquiry-based math into their instruction. TIE uses a variety of technology, such as internet and video, to assist instructional and learning styles for teachers and students. Currently, electronic logs are used for geography and social studies classes. Teachers have also been able to utilize a technology program that allows them to observe how students are using technology in their classrooms. In addition, the administration wanted school staff and leadership to attend national conferences with experts in the field as part of their professional development. Several teachers reported that they were able to attend national conferences, such as National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. The principal also indicated that he had attended a leadership camp.

Teachers reported that they are implementing strategies, such as inquiry-based learning in math, project-based learning in math, prime-time teaching, and check and guess math. Teachers indicated that they feel like they are doing a good job in reading, and, that because of the assistance they have received from TIE and the consultant, students love to read and are reading more. Teachers also commented that they have learned about many new strategies and can collaborate better. They particularly feel that the coaching is very beneficial, particularly when they travel to other schools to observe other teachers. Teachers and school administrators reported that they are pleased with the success TIE has had in their school during the first year of implementation. A survey was conducted of teachers regarding TIE's impact and many teachers said they found TIE to be beneficial because of the one-on-one coaching. However, teachers also reported feeling overwhelmed with all of the new ideas and strategies. In interviews with ED staff, one teacher recommended that coaching from TIE be more focused and teacher-driven and differentiated based on teacher needs and abilities.

The principal indicated that he has seen more group work, more inquiry-based lessons, less lecture, more children using the smart boards, and students teaching students since the professional development and coaching began. He stated that he feels that teachers are collaborating more, and that conversations have an academic focus, but would like to make curriculum mapping more a part of the ongoing teaching process for teachers. However, he states that the difficulty is that there are not multiple teachers teaching the same subjects. The administration reported that establishing Professional Learning Communities will occur during the next school year.

Use of Data

The NUSD, as part of its needs assessment, reviewed data from the STEP and Dakota Character Surveys in identifying the needs of New Underwood.

The NUSD indicated in its SIG application that it would continue to measure student performance based on the STEP test. Pre- and post-summative assessments would be administered through AIMSWEB and the Achievement Series program in grades 9-12. Students in grades 9 and 10 would be given the SAT 10 achievement test. Effectiveness of professional development practices targeting specific instructional strategies would be evaluated to determine the impact on student achievement in the areas of reading and math through a monitoring system developed by an outside resource, as well as the current evaluation system. During the monitoring visit, the administration indicated that it would be reviewing the results of the STEP test once those results were available.

The NUSD's SIG application established a math goal that New Underwood would move at least ten percent of students from below basis/basic to proficient/advanced, as measured by safe harbor, on the STEP Math test as defined by the annual measurable objectives set by the State of South Dakota.

In reading, the NUSD's SIG application set a goal that New Underwood would move at least ten percent of students from below basis/basic to proficient/advanced, as measured by safe harbor, on the STEP Reading test as defined by the annual measurable objectives set by the State of South Dakota.

Teachers indicated that reading rubrics are being used to chart student progress and inform instruction. Teachers reported that, in other subject areas, they are experiencing difficulty in tracking or benchmarking student progress. There are no tools available at the high school level. The administration indicated that they expect to do a survey of graduates from the past five years. The survey will ask whether students felt that New Underwood had prepared them for college, job, or other activities they pursued, and how they felt the school met their needs.

The administration reported that student attendance has gotten better over the year, and there are fewer students with failing grades.

Technical Assistance

The South Dakota Department of Education (SDDOE) used part of its SEA SIG reservation to create a new staff position that is dedicated to working on the SIG program. The SEA has five total staff members working on the SIG program, including the State Title I director, two program officers, and two fiscal staff members. The SDDOE conducted webinars and conference calls with LEAs to prepare them for the SIG application process. The SEA used peer reviewers to assist in the application review, and provided feedback to LEAs to ensure applications addressed the needs of their SIG schools.

The SEA has provided technical assistance during implementation of the SIG program through on-site visits, phone calls, and emails. The State Title I director reported that she is in communication with LEAs with SIG schools on a daily basis. The SEA has hired and placed a consultant (usually a retired administrator or teacher) in each LEA with a SIG school to provide support and technical assistance and serve as a point of contact to the State. The SEA has also conducted multiple site visits to its Tier I and Tier II schools and completed a formal monitoring visit to the schools in January. The SEA also conducts an annual meeting of business managers to provide technical assistance regarding any fiscal issues.

The SDDOE staff stated that they were aware that NUSD's new administration wanted to make revisions to its original SIG application and provided technical assistance to the LEA and school about the application amendment process. The SDDOE worked with the NUSD staff to develop and approve two amendments to the SIG application. The amendments included adjustments to the SIG budget to provide new funding for the school to continue its systemic approach to professional development and provide training for the principal on instructional leadership.

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: The NUSD has asked for assistance in developing a process to benchmark student progress at the high school level. Currently, school administration and staff report that they are unable to track students' academic progress in core subjects because they do not have benchmark assessments.

Technical Assistance Strategies:

- Provide district and school leadership with possible resources or external providers that may be able to provide technical assistance on creating benchmark assessments that align with South Dakota's State standards and how those assessments can be used to collect, track, and analyze student performance. (Responsibility: SDDOE)
- Provide professional development to school staff on how to create and utilize benchmark assessments to inform instruction in the classroom. (Responsibility: SDDOE)

Issue 2: Although the SDDOE has indicated that it will review the LEA's annual goals and performance of its SIG schools to determine whether to renew SIG funds for the second year of implementation, the SEA has asked for further guidance regarding a review process it could use for making its renewal decisions.

Technical Assistance Strategies:

- Connect SDDOE with other SEAs that have an effective review process to make decisions on renewing SIG funds for the second year of implementation in order to share ideas and best practices. (Responsibility: ED)

Issue 3: SDDOE and the NUSD have asked for assistance regarding developing a teacher evaluation system that incorporates student growth.

Technical Assistance Strategies:

- Contact the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality to provide technical assistance to SDDOE on developing teacher evaluation systems that incorporates student growth. (Responsibility: ED)

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))]	Met Requirements	N/A
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	11
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]	Met Requirements	N/A
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))]	Met Requirements	N/A
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))]	Met Requirements	N/A
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))]	Met Requirements	N/A

Monitoring Area: School Improvement Grant

Finding 1: The SDDOE has not ensured that NUSD has established schedules and implemented strategies that increase learning time for all students. Although New Underwood has implemented increased learning time this year by adding an after school tutoring program on Monday through Thursday for half an hour, and also adding remedial instruction in reading, math, and science on two Friday mornings every month for three hours, the increased learning is only mandatory for a subset of the student population. The after school tutoring and Friday classes are only mandatory for students who are failing a class or who have outstanding assignments. The increased learning time is optional for all other students in the high school.

Citation: Section I.A.2(d)(3)(A) of the final requirements stipulates, as part of the transformation model, that 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 SDDOE must work with NUSD and other grantees as appropriate 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 for all students. For each school implementing the turnaround or transformation model, the SDDOE must submit to ED documentation demonstrating the increase in learning time under the school intervention model and evidence that the time is being consistently used in accordance with the definition of “increased learning time” in the final requirements.