UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

JUN 18 2014

The Honorable Mike Hanley
Commissioner of Education
Alaska Department of Education and Early Development
801 W. 10th Street Suite 200
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1894

Dear Commissioner Hanley,

During the week of June 17, 2013, a team from the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) Office of School Turnaround (OST) reviewed the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development's (AEED) administration of Title I, section 1003(g) (School Improvement Grants (SIG)) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended. As part of its review, the ED team interviewed staff at the State educational agency (SEA) and two local educational agencies (LEAs). The ED team also conducted site visits to two schools implementing the SIG intervention models, where they visited classes and interviewed school leadership, teachers, parents, and students. Enclosed you will find ED's final monitoring report based upon this review.

The primary purpose of monitoring is to ensure that the SEA carries out the SIG program consistent with the final requirements. Additionally, ED is using its monitoring review to observe how LEAs and schools are implementing the selected intervention models and identify areas where technical assistance may be needed to support effective program implementation.

In line with these aims, the enclosed monitoring report is organized in three sections: (1) *Summary and Observation,* (2) *Technical Assistance Recommendations,* and (3) *Monitoring Findings.* The *Summary and Observations* section describes the SIG implementation occurring in the schools and districts visited, initial indicators of success, and any outstanding challenges relating to implementation. The *Technical Assistance Recommendations* section contains strategies and resources for addressing technical assistance needs identified during ED's visit. Finally, the *Monitoring Findings* section identifies any compliance issues within the six indicator areas reviewed and corrective actions that the SEA is required to take.

With regards to the *Technical Assistance Recommendations* provided, we encourage you to employ these strategies to further support the effective implementation of the SIG program. ED staff will follow up with your staff over the next few months to see how the AEED is working to address these issues and make use of this technical assistance.

Please be aware that the observations reported, issues identified, and findings made in the enclosed report are based on written documentation or information provided to ED by SEA, LEA, or school staff during interviews. They also reflect the status of compliance in Alaska at the time and locations of ED's onsite review. The AEED may receive further communication from ED that will require it to address noncompliance occurring prior or subsequent to the onsite visit.

The ED team would like to thank Margaret MacKinnon and her staff for their hard work and the assistance they provided prior to and during the review in gathering materials and providing access to information in a timely manner.

We look forward to working further with your staff to resolve the issues contained in this report and to improve the quality of the SIG program in Alaska.

Sincerely,

Scott Sargrad
Acting Director
Office of School Turnaround

Enclosure

cc: State Title I Director

Alaska Department of Education & Early Development
Targeted Monitoring Review of School Improvement Grants (SIG) under Section 1003(g) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965
June 17-19, 2013

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANTS (SIG) MONITORING REPORT FOR ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION & EARLY DEVELOPMENT (AEED)

BACKGROUND

Models	Number of SIG Schools Implementing the Model - Cohort I		Number of SIG Schools Implementing the Model - Cohort II	
Turnaround	0		0	
Transformation	6		3	
Restart	1		0	
Closure	0		0	
Tier	**SIG-eligible Schools**	**SIG-funded Schools**	**SIG-eligible Schools**	**SIG-funded Schools**
Tier I	24	7	22	2
Tier II	7	0	9	1
Tier III	108	0	125	0

MONITORING TRIP INFORMATION

Monitoring Visits and Award Amounts	
SEA Visited	Alaska Department of Education & Early Development (AEED)
Total FY 2009 SIG Allocation	1003(g) = $1,655,369 ARRA = $9,071,222 Total = $10,726,591
Total FY 2010 SIG Allocation	$1,636.914
Total FY 2011 SIG Allocation	$1,560,409
Total FY 2012 SIG Allocation	$1,584,006
LEA Visited	Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) District
LEA Information	Cohort 1: 2 schools awarded $1,091,978
School Visited	Burchell High School
School Information	Model: Transformation Cohort: 1 School-Level Award: $1,923,552
LEA Visited	Bering Strait School District
LEA Information	Cohort 1: 2 schools awarded $921,694 Cohort 2: 2 schools awarded $1,084,653.55
School Visited	Shishmaref School
School Information	Model: Transformation Cohort: 2

	School-Level Award: $539,459.78
Staff Interviewed	
➢ **AEED Staff:** Margaret MacKinnon (SIG director), Angela Love (State System Support Specialist), Deborah Riddle (Title I/School Improvement Program Manager), Annette Green (AEED Internal Auditor), Melissa Bell (AEED lead grants administrator)	
➢ **Mat-Su District Staff:** Shawn Arnold (District SIG Coordinator), and Laurine Domke (District Federal Programs Coordinator)	
➢ **Burchell High School Staff:** Adam Mokelke (principal)	
➢ **Bering Strait Staff:** Sue Johnson (District SIG Coordinator)	
➢ **Shishmaref Staff:** Steve Sammons (principal)	

U.S. Department of Education Staff	
Team Leader	Carlas McCauley
Staff Onsite	Christina Weeter, David Yi

OVERVIEW OF MONITORING PROCESS

The following report is based on U.S. Department of Education's (Department) desk monitoring for Alaska from June 17-19, 2013 and review of documentation provided by the state educational agency (SEA), local educational agencies (LEAs), and schools.

The ***School Improvement Grant (SIG) Monitoring Report*** provides feedback to the AEED on its progress in implementing the program effectively, and in a manner that is consistent with the SIG final requirements, authorized by Section 1003(g) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended, and as explained further in *Guidance on Fiscal Year 2010 School Improvement Grants Under Section 1003(g) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (March 2012).* The observations and descriptions illustrate 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. The report consists of the following sections:

- ***Background Information:*** This section highlights significant achievements in the AEED's implementation of the SIG grant. This section also includes a brief overview of the AEED's structure and vision for SIG implementation.
- ***Summary of AEED's Implementation of SIG Critical Elements:*** This section provides a summary of the SEA's progress in implementing SIG and is based on evidence gathered during the monitoring visit on June 17-19, 2013 or through written documentation provided to the Department.
- ***Technical Assistance Recommendations:*** This section addresses areas where additional technical assistance may be needed to improve the quality of SIG program implementation.

- ***Monitoring Findings:*** This 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.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Highlights of AEED's Implementation of SIG

AEED Highlights

- There is regular and substantive communication between AEED and the LEAs and schools. State-contracted school improvement coaches are in three SIG schools one week per month. Other SIG schools have contracted directly for coaching/support using their SIG funds.
- AEED provides technical assistance to LEAs and schools, working with principals and teachers, through week-long monthly visits with monitoring and TA occurring simultaneously. Feedback is provided via email or phone, which can positively impact the SEA-LEA relationship by taking a coaching approach. AEED talks with the LEAs monthly about improvement planning.

Matanuska-Susitna District/Burchell High School Highlights

- Burchell High School has implemented a number of strategies to change the overall culture of the school to one that is more academically driven, has fewer behavior issues, and is responsive to social-emotional needs of the students attending this alternative school, which is often students' last chance to earn a diploma.
- When the former SIG principal retired, the district used the SIG toolkit, including staff surveys, student interviews, and student surveys, to inform its hiring process to ensure a good fit with the turnaround efforts in an alternative education context. Teachers now fight to get transferred to Burchell and to stay there. The principal now is able to have his or her pick of the best teachers. The biggest draw seems to be the principal and a change in perception of what the school is about towards one with an academic focus.

Bering Strait/Shishmaref School Highlights

- Staff at Shishmaref collect, analyze, and share data at least monthly to monitor student progress and drive instructional decisions. Data is used to place students in flexible, differentiated groups for reading and math and create intervention plans for students who are struggling.

AEED Structure

AEED staff positions that support SIG include a Title I/ESEA Administrator (SIG Director), State System of Support Specialist, Title I/School Improvement Program Manager, and a lead grants administrator. Staff supporting SIG are part of the Division of Teaching & Learning Support, the largest division at the SEA. The State System of Support is in also in the same division but under a different administrator. State System of Support staff will also be overseeing Priority and Focus schools identified through the SEA's approved ESEA flexibility request.

According to the AEED, its goal for reform is to increase its support and staff positions to allow additional support for low-performing schools and to make changes based on sustainable practice by using systems that withstand staff changes over time. The AEED endeavors to encourage and

give districts the supports to make the changes necessary to sustain true improvement efforts rather than focus on compliance alone.

AEED has been working with external contractors to provide support to the schools and districts given the local-control dynamic. These school improvement coaches are physically present in SIG schools one week a month. They bring sleeping bags because there is no housing for visitors (which is also indicative of some of the challenges to recruiting new local staff). The AEED worked to ensure coaches assigned to SIG schools understood the "big picture" related to SIG implementation by providing them with a copy of the school's approved SIG application.

SUMMARY OF AEED'S IMPLEMENTATION OF SIG CRITICAL ELEMENTS

Application Process

During the AEED's most recent SIG competition to award FY 2010 SIG funds, the AEED made awards to LEAs on April 15, 2011 in accordance with the timeline in its approved SIG application. The AEED conducted its SIG competition in accordance with what was outlined in its approved application. The AEED notified all LEAs with SIG-eligible schools about the competition and asked interested LEAs to submit an "intent to apply" form. In interviews, LEA staff stated that the AEED supported LEAs through the application process by conducting conference calls to provide information about the SIG requirements and answer any questions. Additionally, the SEA provided feedback and additional technical assistance to LEAs to revise their applications so that they would be approvable.

Since awarding the grants, the AEED has received requests from LEAs to amend their SIG application. The AEED has a formal application amendment process that allows LEAs to submit amendment requests mid-year.

Implementation

Burchell High School/Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) District
Mat-Su identified math and writing proficiency, graduation and attendance rates, and student high risk behaviors as major areas of concern in Burchell High School's needs assessment.

In its application, Burchell indicated that it would improve math and writing proficiency by contracting with the Consortium on Reading Excellence (CORE) to provide intensive, ongoing, job-embedded professional development in math and English/Language Arts and increasing learning time by 1.5 hours per day in core content areas. In addition to contracting with CORE, Burchell has implemented Response to Intervention (RTI), Read 180 for language arts interventions based on state assessments, and Apex math program. Apex provides blended learning opportunities and is used during the regular school day and extended day to help differentiate instruction allowing students to take more advanced and AP courses as well as use for credit recovery. To address graduation rates and attendance rates, Burchell uses Apex and has partnered with two colleges for dual enrollment offerings. The increased learning time has

made it much easier for under-credited students to catch up without including credit recovery options.

To address attendance issues and student high risk behaviors, Burchell indicated in its application that would engage community partners to help create safe school environments and to meet students' social and emotional needs. Burchell also proposed the implementation of several programs to address school climate, student behavior, bullying, and harassment issues (e.g. Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS), and Safe and Civil Schools framework). In interviews, school staff noted high levels of student poverty, homelessness, and substance abuse as issues for their students. An academic behavioral assistant position was created to determine why students weren't at school by 1st or 2nd periods and make referrals to community partners as needed. A formal discipline referral process was implemented this year as well. Burchell partners with several community organizations very closely to provide support for homeless students and address mental health issues. They are also working to build relationships with local employers to support college and career readiness. For example, a partnership with Home Depot provided sponsorship for the school's first construction class.

In addition to addressing the major areas of concern in the needs assessment, Burchell High School hired a new principal with more than ten years of experience turning around schools to lead the implementation of SIG; implemented a principal evaluation system that incorporates data on student growth; provided on-going, job-embedded professional development for staff; implemented strategies to recruit, place, and retain staff; used data to inform and differentiate instruction; and increased learning time.

In interviews, the school leadership indicated that the Burchell implemented, but struggled with piloting a district teacher evaluation system that incorporates student growth; instituting a system of rewards for staff that have increased student achievement; and providing opportunities for family engagement (particularly given the number of homeless students who may not be living with family members).

Bering Strait/Shishmaref School

Bering Strait identified staff development, use of data, and parent involvement as major areas of concern in Shishmaref School's needs assessment.

In its application, Shishmaref indicated that it would improve staff capacity by providing professional development and implementing a new evaluation system for teachers. In interviews, school administration stated that it now uses Marzano's iObservation system to support and evaluate teachers. School administrators collect, manage, and report longitudinal data from classroom walkthroughs and provide teachers feedback, observations, and evaluations. The school administration said there is a weekly feedback cycle to improve instructional practice and that the observations inform the topics covered in professional development. The professional development is differentiated to the individual learning needs of the teachers to improve classroom effectiveness. School administration expressed that the system has helped improve the instructional practice of teachers, which is reflected in gains in reading and math scores, and that many teachers find the feedback and observations meaningful and helpful.

To increase the use of data in instruction, Shishmaref planned to designate more time for professional development and collaboration on how to analyze data to make adjustments to lessons and instruction to students. School administration expressed that teachers regularly collect and analyze data now through its AIMSWeb program. Additionally, the administration stated that the data is used to determine next steps for students who are struggling, create differentiated groupings for reading and math, and determine on which RTI tier to place students. Teachers share data at team meetings and use progress monitoring regularly in the classroom.

Finally, to address low rates of parental involvement the school proposed to contract with experts to help the principal and staff design an effective parental involvement plan. School administration stated that increasing parental and community involvement has been a challenge and the school has not contracted with consultants. However, the school does have a parent liaison and the administration has worked to create opportunities for elders in the community to visit the school to provide cultural activities and demonstrations to students. Additionally, the school administration meets with the Advisory Education Committee, which consists of community members, to present school data, set school goals, and problem-solve. The school administration said that it plans to try to engage more community partnerships in the next school year.

In addition to addressing the major areas of concern in the needs assessment, Shishmaref hired a new principal for the first year of SIG implementation and increased learning time by 40 minutes per day.

In interviews, the school leadership and LEA staff indicated that Shishmaref implemented, but struggled with instituting a system of rewards for staff that have increased student achievement as rewards were provided school-wide based on overall growth. School leadership also indicated difficulties in implementing strategies to recruit, place, and retain staff.

Fiscal

The AEED reserves five percent of the State's SIG allocation and uses its reservation for technical assistance support activities such as statewide professional development meetings for SIG schools and districts, contracts for coaches to work in SIG schools, and regional conferences. Part of the AEED's SIG staff positions are also paid by the SEA reservation.

The AEED ensures that SIG funds are spent on allowable activities by conducting regular budget reviews. LEAs submit reimbursement forms to the AEED on a quarterly basis for review to ensure that all budget items are allowable and align with the schools' SIG plans.

To ensure that its LEAs adhere to proper accounting of time and attendance for SIG paid staff and maintain equipment and materials purchased with SIG funds, the AEED conducts annual audits for all federal grant programs.

Technical Assistance

AEED

In interviews, the AEED stated that it is providing technical assistance to support LEAs with implementing SIG by sending coaches to the schools for one week per month to work with principals and teachers providing supports for strategies and practices that will be sustainable beyond the SIG grant. The coaches are rigorously reviewed prior to being contracted to ensure they have the appropriate disposition to deal with Alaska's unique challenges as well as experience and expertise in this kind of turnaround work.

LEA leadership stated that the AEED support for SIG implementation has been very responsive to their needs, particularly with questions related to regulation, accountability, and fiscal matters. This enables the LEAs to focus on the details of SIG regulations and frees the schools to focus on school improvement. The relationship between the SEA, LEA, and schools is very transparent and supportive "top-to-bottom and back up to the top."

Matanuska-Susitna

In its application Mat-Su described engaging CORE to provide training staff in peer coaching, reading theory, and instructional best practices as having been effective in increasing student growth. In addition, the district committed to providing a Teacher on Special Assignment to assist with the coordination between CORE services and Burchell. The district stated it would continue to provide professional development in a number of areas including data analysis, using district curriculum materials, and integrating technology into lessons.

In interviews Burchell's leadership confirmed that the support they receive from the state and district is very timely and they work closely with the principal to resolve difficult issues including fiscal, program accountability issues, etc. As a new principal he felt supported and given full autonomy from the day the former principal retired, including being sent to Denver for a SIG meeting before his contract had even started.

Bering Strait

Bering Strait proposed to support schools in implementing SIG by having the Coordinator of Educational Support make regular visits to SIG schools to ensure that the reforms are being implemented with fidelity. The LEA also planned to attend trainings and professional development to provide feedback to the schools and meet with the principal to discuss the school's progress and determine next steps.

In interviews Shishmaref's administration described the technical assistance it receives from Bering Strait as incredibly helpful. School administration stated that they work very closely with LEA staff and that the Coordinator of Educational Support is on-site at the school three to four times a year. Additionally, the school administration stated that the LEA communicates regularly with the school to answer questions and address issues. According to Shishmaref's administration, the LEA has hosted leadership meetings for SIG principals, provided professional development, including training school staff on using AIMSWeb, and held conferences for SIG schools and their providers.

Monitoring

In its approved application AEED proposed to monitor SIG implementation by requiring the LEAs to submit mid-year and year-end reports, reviewing reimbursement requests, and conducting phone or onsite interviews. In interviews, LEA staff reported that they use mid-year and annual reports for both monitoring and technical assistance. There is no official SIG monitoring report as SIG monitoring is rolled into the monitoring for the combined NCLB Title programs including Title I-A, Title I-C, Title II-A and Title III-A. Because SIG is a competitive grant, a monitoring report was not generated. The AEED worked with the districts and schools to make any changes needed in the next school year of the continuation of the SIG grant award

Data Collection

The AEED uses its OASIS Data Collection System to collect data on SIG achievement and leading indicators from LEAs and schools. LEAs submit data to the SEA on an annual basis.

According to EDFacts records, the AEED has submitted all required achievement and leading indicator data to the Department to date.

The AEED uses the data it collects to review the progress of SIG schools and determine which districts and schools may need additional support or interventions.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Issue: APPLICATION PROCESS. While Alaska did make relatively small supplemental awards consistent with the LEAs applications, it did not use additional criteria based on the needs and approved implementation activities to make allocations for supplemental awards. For Cohort 2 there were $53,000 in unallocated funds that were split proportionally among the three awarded schools.

Technical Assistance Strategies:

- *For the next SIG competition Alaska should develop clear criteria for making supplemental awards that take into account specific needs and approved implementation activities, particularly if the supplemental award is a more significant amount. (Responsibility: AEED)*

2. Issue: IMPLEMENTATION. Based on interviews with the LEAs school administrators expressed difficulty with implementing adequate parent & community engagement activities.

Technical Assistance Strategies:

- *Connect AEED to a comprehensive center and other SEAs facing similar demographic and geographic challenges that are implementing promising practices or have examples related to family and community engagement. (Responsibility: ED)*

3. Issue: IMPLEMENTATION. Teacher & principal recruitment has been challenging.

Technical Assistance Strategies:

- *Connect AEED with another state or comprehensive center that can be a resource for educator recruitment. (Responsibility ED)*

4. Issue: IMPLEMENTATION. Sustaining increased learning time has been a challenge.

Technical Assistance Strategies:

- *Connect AEED with another state or comprehensive center that can be a resource. (Responsibility ED)*
- *Connect AEED with the National Center on Time and Learning (Responsibility ED)*

5. Issue: IMPLEMENTATION. Social emotional supports have proven difficult to address as fully as needed.

Technical Assistance Strategies:

- *Connect AEED with another state or comprehensive center that can be a resource. (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)]*	No findings	
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))]*	No findings	
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]*	No findings	
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))]*	No findings	
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))]*	No findings	

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))]*	No findings	