

ALABAMA
Targeted Monitoring Review of
School Improvement Grants (SIG) under section 1003(g) of the
Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965
December 3-6, 2012

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANTS (SIG) MONITORING REPORT FOR ALABAMA STATE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (ALSDE)

BACKGROUND					
	Models	Number of SIG Schools Implementing the Model - Cohort I		Number of SIG Schools Implementing the Model - Cohort II	
	Turnaround	1		2	
	Transformation	11		9	
	Restart	0		0	
	Closure	0		0	
	Tier	Number of SIG-eligible Schools	Number of SIG-funded Schools	Number of SIG-eligible Schools	Number of SIG-funded Schools
	Tier I	41	10	5	5
	Tier II	6	2	11	3
	Tier III	217	0	57	3

MONITORING TRIP INFORMATION	
Monitoring Visits and Award Amounts	
LEA Visited	<i>Huntsville City Schools</i>
School Visited	<i>James I Dawson Elementary School-level funding: \$1,504,580</i>
Model Implemented	<i>Transformation</i>
Cohort I - No Funding Awarded (over three years)	<i>The LEA did not have schools in cohort I</i>
Cohort II - FY 10 and 11 Funding Awarded (for one year)	<i>LEA Award (for 2 SIG schools): \$3,161,458</i>
LEA Visited	<i>Lowndes County Public Schools</i>
School Visited	<i>Calhoun High School School-level funding: \$4,438,841.54</i>
Model Implemented	<i>Transformation</i>

Cohort I - FY 09 Funding Awarded (over three years)	<i>LEA Award (for 4 SIG schools): \$14,594,920</i>
Cohort II - No Funding Awarded (for one year)	<i>The LEA did not have schools in cohort II</i>
SEA Visited	<i>Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE)</i>
Total FY 2009 SEA SIG Allocation	<i>\$58,052,413 million</i>
Total- FY 2010 SEA SIG Allocation	<i>\$8,035,396</i>
Total FY 2011 SEA SIG Allocation	<i>\$8,267,769</i>
Total FY 2012 SEA SIG Allocation (estimate)	<i>\$8,128,359</i>

Staff Interviewed	
➤	<i>Alabama State Department of Education Staff</i>
➤	<i>Huntsville City Schools Staff</i>
➤	<i>James I Dawson Elementary School Staff: Principal, School Leadership Team, Teachers, Parents, Students, and 4 Classroom Visits</i>
➤	<i>Lowndes County Public Schools Staff</i>
➤	<i>Calhoun High School Staff: Principal, School Leadership Team, Teachers, Parents, Students, and 3 Classroom Visits</i>

U.S. Department of Education Staff	
Group Leader	<i>Carlas McCauley</i>
Staff Onsite	<i>Sara Waly, David Yi</i>

OVERVIEW OF MONITORING PROCESS

The following report is based on the U.S. Department of Education’s (ED) on-site monitoring visit to Alabama from December 3-6, 2012 and review of documentation provided by the State educational agency (SEA), local educational agencies (LEAs), and schools. The report consists of the sections described below.

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 **SIG Monitoring Report** provides feedback to the Alabama State Department of Education on its progress in implementing effectively, and in a manner that is consistent with the School Improvement Grant (SIG) final requirements of SIG 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 report consists of the following sections:

- *Background Information.* This section highlights significant achievements in the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) implementation of the SIG grant. This section also includes a brief overview of ALSDE's structure and vision for the SIG implementation.
- *Summary of the Alabama State Department of Education'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 December 3-6, 2012 or through written documentation provided to ED.
- *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 the Alabama State Department of Education's Implementation of SIG

- *The ALSDE encouraged its local education agencies (LEAs) to collaborate across departments. The ALSDE hired LEA district grant coaches during the first year of SIG implementation to work with LEAs in establishing a structure of roundtables to facilitate collaboration. Lowndes County Public Schools praised these structures for the positive impact they had on SIG implementation.*
- *The ALSDE emphasized the importance of data-based decision-making in driving implementation. This was reflected in the strong culture around data and using it to inform continuous improvement at the LEA and school levels.*
- *The ALSDE has instituted an online performance management system to monitor SIG implementation. Both LEAs praised the support provided by the ALSDE in establishing the system and the utility of the system in assisting the LEAs to stay on-track in supporting schools in SIG implementation.*

ALSDE Structure

The ALSDE has two full-time staff dedicated to working on SIG implementation. These positions include an education administrator and an education specialist both hired within the Office of Teaching and Learning. The ALSDE also hired additional part-time staff to support the implementation of SIG including three on-site monitors and two online desk coaches.

The ALSDE has not changed its structure as a result of SIG implementation.

According to the ALSDE, its goal is to build capacity at the district and school level to engage in continual improvement practices that impact student achievement, close achievement gaps, promote student growth, and increase the number of graduates that are prepared for college and careers. The ALSDE stated that its goal is to customize support for each of the districts based on

their current data and capacity. The ALSDE also stated that it has common expectations for all districts and schools to plan for continuous improvement and believed that and one-size-fits-all approach does not work.

SUMMARY OF ALSDE'S IMPLEMENTATION OF SIG CRITICAL ELEMENTS

Application Process

The ALSDE's competition timelines included early notification for LEAs of the grant opportunity, webinar and training events, assistance on individual LEA grant applications, the application review, and the awarding of funds. Awards to LEAs were made according to the timelines in its FY 2009 application. As a part of the ALSDE's competitive process a total of 246 schools were eligible to apply for SIG during the FY 2009 competition and 12 applications were funded.

Awards to LEAs and from LEAs to schools were not made according to ALSDE's stated timelines for its FY 2011 competition. The ALSDE received a waiver to carryover the entire FY 2010 funds for a year and combine it with FY 2011 funds to run its FY 2011 competition. The ALSDE attributed the delayed implementation of their timeline as a result of interdepartmental communication difficulties. The second cohort was awarded funds on June 29, 2012.

The SEA changed its application review process between the first and second cohort. In the first cohort, reviewers were contractors without a background in turnaround work. In the second cohort, the Commissioner assigned individuals in the ALSDE who had experience in schools and background in improvement, curriculum, and leadership. ALSDE also stated that it increased its support around the development and approval of applications for cohort two. In the first cohort, technical assistance on SIG and the application process was provided during four regional meetings and was followed by informal technical assistance to LEAs. In cohort two, the ALSDE held a series of webinars on SIG, including the application process. The ALSDE also widely distributed Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on the process to LEAs and schools.

Implementation

School Climate

Huntsville City Schools; James I Dawson Elementary School

Huntsville City Schools identified the following challenges related to school climate based on its needs assessment of Dawson Elementary School:

Data on student discipline showed that there were a high number of student infractions reported for defying authority, fighting, and threatening others. The needs assessment noted that these behaviors were keeping instruction from being consistent and effective. Additionally, 88% of respondents to the school's parent involvement survey said they did not participate or volunteer in the classroom during the past school year, 67% did not participate in parent/teacher

conferences, and 100% of the parents surveyed did not participate in meetings for school improvement related to annual yearly progress.

In its SIG application, Huntsville City Schools indicated that it planned to address the needs of its students by implementing a new school-wide Comprehensive Behavior Management Plan. The school's application stated that Dawson Elementary School's staff would receive Comprehensive Behavior Management training by consultants that would also work with administration and staff to ensure fidelity of implementation. To increase parental involvement, Huntsville planned to partner with the Alabama Parent Education Resource Center to encourage a culture of collaboration between the school and home. The school's plan also stated that it would provide community based workshops for families and community members; parent and educator development through electronic media and printed material; and regular technical assistance sessions with the school parent involvement staff.

Since implementation of the transformation model at Dawson Elementary School, the school has begun implementing the Comprehensive Behavior Management system. Teachers stated finding the new plan helpful because rules are now enforced and all staff members are using the same consequences for students. Students and teachers also reported the school has implemented positive reinforcements, such as reward ceremonies, for good behavior. Finally, teachers reported the professional development received pertaining to culture building and the regular technical assistance about the behavior management system from consultants has led to an overall decrease in discipline rates.

As for parents, the school began implementing a number of new initiatives for including a parent breakfast program and creating a parent welcome table at the entrance of the school. The school is also beginning to implement a parent walkthrough program. Prior to the classroom walkthrough, parents learn about the different instructional techniques they should see in the classroom and then have a checklist to review if those techniques are being implemented in the classes they visit. Parents responded positively to these new initiatives and noted that the school seems like it has more of a cohesive vision this year.

Lowndes County Public Schools; Calhoun High School

During the interview process, the school's leadership team described the climate of Calhoun High School before implementation of SIG as one in which there was a lack of collaboration among teachers and students.

Teachers and the LEA staff stated that prior to the reforms students were viewed as defiant toward staff. Students reported that the school environment felt chaotic and indicated many incidences of misbehavior and discord among students. In its SIG application, the LEA indicated that it planned to address the school needs by focusing on culture and behavior by implementing the Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS) program. In its second year, the school instituted an advisory period in place of PBS. The school also established common behavioral expectations and consequences for students and instituted a rewards program for positive behavior (Stripes and Platinum Pride), for which students were given awards such as free

attendance at athletic events, ice cream or pizza parties embedded within the school day. As a part of its plan, the school also wanted to recognize students for being Honor Roll recipients.

Since implementation of the transformation model, Calhoun High School's leadership and the LEA indicated that teachers felt more ownership over teaching, and students seemed to be more invested in learning.

Students also indicated feeling safer at school and felt a sense of community among students. The leadership team, teachers, students, and parents all agreed that there is a sense of pride in the changes occurring at Calhoun High School. Parents reported that students were expressing pride in themselves, which they believed was demonstrated through changes in their behavior, appearance, and school attendance. Students noted that school was steadily preparing them for next steps after graduation and that teachers actively challenged students with rigorous assignments. Students reported that teachers treated them with respect and made them feel welcomed in the school. The students described the environment as being warm and comfortable.

Parents indicated increased parent involvement as students were becoming more involved. Parents reported more opportunities to become involved at the school and district level, including the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), student mentoring programs, and volunteering. Parents also reported satisfaction with teacher and school communication with parents. Parents expressed receiving information about student progress and events frequently and reported satisfaction with intervention periods customized to individual student needs.

The hallways featured displays of student work and recognized the work of the "Teacher of the Month", who was rewarded for leading the classroom with the most growth between pre-and post assessments. Students were also recognized for their academic achievement.

Teachers reported that the reforms have changed the culture of learning. The teachers referenced the change in behavioral expectations and the inclusion of an advisory period focused on student social-emotional growth as being key drivers of a change in student culture, behavior, and more positive decision-making. Teachers and the leadership team reported that the advisory period has resulted in decreased discipline incidences. Teachers also reported a shift to a standards-based curriculum had an impact on culture and climate. Expectations were heightened and collaboration was promoted, which affected students and teachers. Additionally, teachers stated that data tracking assisted in focusing lessons and tailoring instruction to student needs.

Teachers and Leaders

Huntsville City Schools; James I Dawson Elementary School

In its SIG application, Huntsville City Schools indicated that it planned to address the needs of recruiting high-quality administration and staff by giving Dawson Elementary School priority and first choice in filling staffing needs. The LEA also planned to retain Dawson Elementary School's existing principal. As a part of the process Huntsville City Schools stated that all

administrator candidates must meet the standards of the LEA criteria assessment based on locally adopted competencies and must also show a history of producing high levels of student achievement; demonstrating team leadership; developing others; while, thinking analytically and conceptually. Huntsville City Schools also planned to hire an assistant principal at Dawson Elementary that would aid in the implementation of instructional and behavioral practices.

To hire high-quality staff, the LEA planned to work closely with the Alabama A&M University/UA Huntsville (UAH-AAMU) Regional In-service Center and local teacher education programs to identify exceptional candidates for recruitment through recommendations from principals and university personnel. The district also planned to utilize the state online application system to identify highly-qualified personnel nationally. According to the application, all existing staff would be briefed on the reforms outlined in the grant and asked to sign an agreement stating that they understood what was involved in the reform process and commit to the challenge. The LEA planned to actively assist the principal and school panel in reviewing applications, screening potential candidates, and participating in the interview process to fill all needed positions. The interview also included a list of LEA competencies to identify staff that would be successful in a transformation school. Furthermore, according to the application all applicants had to demonstrate a pattern of effectiveness based on student achievement data and previous teacher evaluations.

As a part of implementing the transformation model at Dawson Elementary School, a new principal and assistant principal were hired in the spring and summer prior to the first year of implementation, respectively. The principal served as a principal at another high-performing Huntsville school for seven years prior to coming to Dawson Elementary School. The assistant principal was hired through a leadership pipeline program developed by the LEA. During the summer before the first year of implementation, the principal evaluated teachers and as a result of the review, three teachers were transferred to other schools and seven new teachers were hired for the first year. The LEA also hired a technology coach, reading coach, school curriculum specialist, and transformation specialist and placed them on-site to support school staff and administration. Beginning this year, teachers will receive monetary incentives for reaching proficiency benchmark goals in reading and math. Monetary awards will be given out twice a year (January and May) and rewards will be given for both school-wide growth and individual classroom growth. A new teacher evaluation system that incorporates student growth is also being piloted at the school this year.

During interviews, the school leadership team and teachers responded favorably to the new system of rewards and evaluation systems. Teachers stated that they are regularly evaluated both formally and informally through regular administrator classroom visits and receive a lot of feedback from coaches and administration to improve their instruction. Additionally, with the increased use of data this school year, teachers expressed optimism about the results and hoped the progress translate to positive outcomes and incentives.

Lowndes County Public Schools; Calhoun High School

Lowndes County Public Schools indicated in its SIG application that it planned to address the needs outlined in its needs assessment by bringing in an outside team to conduct an audit of the

LEA, schools, staff, resources, and school community to evaluate the specific intervention and school improvement activities identified utilizing the “Blueprint for Excellence” assessment tool from the Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence. The LEA indicated that it would assist the school in developing a specific strategic plan for addressing all concerns highlighted by the Blue Ribbon Schools’ Assessment.

Lowndes County Public Schools stated that once the evaluations of the school by the Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence and the current staff was completed, a new principal would be assigned to the designated school and the principal would begin activities to recruit, replace, or retain staff. The LEA stated that other resources available in the transformation process provided flexibility for principals. Additionally, the LEA added additional support by allocating a full-time instructional assistant (Ed. Specialist) at each of the LEA’s SIG schools, a part-time academic coach at each school, a full-time technology coach at each school, a district transformation specialist, and a district grant coach. The LEA reported that principals were given flexibility to create their own teams. Principals were encouraged to review instructional data to determine if principals would like to retain teachers. The LEA stated that it believes the principal should have as much freedom as possible to make staffing decisions, and that it has never had to intervene.

As a part of implementing the transformation model in Calhoun High School, a new principal and assistant principal/instructional assistant were hired. The assistant principal was a Calhoun High School teacher who completed the Lowndes County Leadership Academy. Prior to leading Calhoun High School’s turnaround efforts, the principal taught for six years and served as principal at a school that made AYP in its second year under his leadership. Calhoun High School also hired a reading specialist in year two of SIG implementation in response to data reflecting a need to focus on that content area. The principal stated that a few staff members retired when he was appointed as principal. The county partnered with Teach for America for the hiring of six teachers.

Lowndes County Public Schools partnered with other school districts to develop a Leadership Academy to develop skills and confidence to support sustainable classrooms that utilize technology and standards-based instruction for effective teaching and learning. Calhoun High School’s Assistant Principal/Instructional Assistant had formerly been a member of the Calhoun High School staff and was a chosen for the leadership academy and received its training for her position.

The Instructional Assistant assisted the principal in developing a program to recognize high-performing teachers based on benchmark and post-test performance. One such teacher was recognized publicly in the high school on a display case depicting his students’ results. Teachers are able to receive “Teacher of the Month” awards, “Rising Teacher” awards, and “Teacher of the Quarter” awards, based on student achievement and growth on pre- and post-assessments. Lowndes County Public Schools was also the recipient of the Teacher Incentive Fund grant, which makes its teachers eligible to receive monetary awards for student achievement growth.

During interviews with the school leadership team and teachers at Calhoun High School, teachers stated that they were included in the needs assessment process and that their suggestions

were incorporated into SIG implementation. The teachers stressed the importance of student incentives and recognizing high-performing students and teachers each month.

Instructional Strategies and Time

Huntsville City Schools; James I Dawson Elementary School

Dawson Elementary School's needs analysis indicated that in order to increase students' overall math and reading proficiency, the school needed to place a greater emphasis on implementing standards-based instruction in all classrooms and tracking students' mastery of core standards through the use of formative assessments. Staff members at the LEA and the school's leadership team noted that historically, Dawson Elementary School has had some of the lowest achievement test scores in the district.

The needs analysis also stated that very few teachers were utilizing technology available in their classrooms. According to school surveys, only 14% of teachers assigned activities that used technology for inquiry-based learning and only 10% assigned activities that utilized technology to locate, evaluate, and collect information from a variety of sources. The school leadership team stated that they believed that integrating technology into the classroom was an essential component of increasing student engagement and narrowing the digital divide that many of their students faced compared to students from more affluent communities.

Dawson Elementary School's needs analysis indicated that extended learning time for all students could support the school's efforts to increase mastery of core instructional and grade level standards. Based on this analysis, the school determined that a designated daily intervention or acceleration time for academics and behavior support was needed to support student achievement. The school also planned to use extended learning time to add collaboration time for all teachers because teachers had expressed that there were limited opportunities for teacher collaboration, professional development, and analysis of student performance before the implementation of SIG.

To address the instructional needs, Dawson Elementary School made a strong push to provide its teachers with more meaningful job-embedded professional development that focused on implementing standards-based instruction and tracking student data and mastery of core standards. In order to support teachers, school leadership and instructional coaches have regularly conducted classroom walkthroughs and provided feedback to teachers. Struggling teachers have had individualized professional development and coaching cycle plans developed for them. All classroom teachers have been required to utilize formative assessments and participate in regular data meetings to analyze data and plan for instructional adjustments. The Transformation Specialist, Literacy Coach, and Curriculum Specialist have provided coaching support for curriculum alignment, lesson planning, and implementation of instructional strategies based on student strengths and weaknesses identified during data meetings. The school has created a data room that displays the performance level of all students in reading and math. Each classroom has data charts tracking students' progress. Students are grouped into four levels of proficiency and instruction and interventions are individualized based on students' needs. School leadership and teachers also reported that new curriculum (Envision Math, Reading Street) and

assessments (STAR Enterprise, DIBELS) were introduced to provide more differentiation opportunities, especially for students who are behind. Additionally, the school has hired a gifted teacher to provide enrichment support for advanced students. Through these initiatives, the school leadership and staff noted that the school has transformed into a “results-oriented” school and improving instruction has become the school’s priority.

In order to provide support in technology integration, a Technology Specialist was hired to work with all classroom teachers to provide support in utilizing technology resources for planning and classroom instruction. All teachers now have a classroom set of laptops or iPads for students to access. The school is also taking steps to allow students to utilize the technology at home to further decrease the digital divide. Additionally, the district has digitalized the entire curriculum and allowing teachers to view results from assessments quicker. Teachers and students stated that the technology has made learning more engaging.

The school is implementing increased learning in accordance with SIG guidance. The school day was extended by thirty minutes which has allowed teachers to provide additional instruction and intervention support to students in reading and math. The school also plans to implement summer school, which has not occurred in the past few school years. The school also has extended specials period longer to allow teachers to have more time to collaborate and meet in grade-level instructional team meetings. These meetings have been used for lesson planning, shared planning with coaches, professional development support, and full staff collaboration.

Lowndes County Public Schools; Calhoun High School

According to Calhoun High School’s school leadership team, the school’s needs assessment indicated a need for a focus on instruction. As stated in its approved application, professional development was limited and was not a requirement for staff. The application also stated that limited accountability in terms of implementing practices learned in professional development in classroom instruction, and the school did not have discussion on sharing of best practices. Lowndes County Public Schools stated in interviews a deficiency in areas concerning classroom management, teaching strategies and the disaggregation of test scores. The LEA also stated that, prior to SIG, there was a lack of alignment between tests possessing rigor and content standards. There was no school-wide system to compare pre- and post-tests and, overall, the LEA felt there was not enough support for instruction.

In its SIG application, the LEA indicated that it would assist the school in developing a specific strategic plan for addressing all concerns highlighted by the Blue Ribbon Schools’ Assessment. To address those areas of need, the LEA stated it would implement a scientific research-based data disaggregation tool, “Thinkgate”. This tool includes the implementation of a system where real-time data is provided daily to the teachers, instructional assistants, academic coaches, assistant principals, and principals giving them the ability to make decisions based on individual student achievement data and specific needs. The LEA stated this would also allow for daily grade level data to systemically control the curricular sequence for all students in all grades.

To address instructional needs, Calhoun High School also implements a standards-based curriculum based on the Alabama course of study. According to the school's leadership team, the school's focus has been on teaching strategies for disseminating the content.

The year is divided into a series of nine-week instructional blocks. At the end of each new instructional block, teachers administer post-assessments. The Assistant Principal/Instructional Assistant designs each class's nine-week assessments to ensure that they are rigorous, aligned to standards, and uniform across other SIG schools (instructional specialists across the district's schools meet to develop the assessments).

Information Transport Solutions, Inc. (ITS), the school's chosen external provider, and the reading coach provide extensive support in collecting student achievement data. The reading coach was hired during the second year of SIG implementation in response to student performance in reading. All staff members participate in weekly data meetings. Data is used to inform interventions, as well as to drive instruction and inform lesson-planning. The school implements a weekly intervention block that alternates between a period of focused academic interventions and a period of advisory, during which students receive social-emotional support.

The school also implements the Alabama Reading Initiative; STAR Reading, a district wide reading comprehension assessment; and, Voyager, for students struggling with reading comprehension. The school also uses USA Test Prep. The school's E2020 computer lab functions as a credit recovery lab. Staff members throughout the school utilize technology such as smart boards and IPADs on a daily basis to complement and enhance instruction.

Teachers receive ongoing support through ITS. Professional development is focused on curriculum and instruction, data analysis, and technology. The professional development is embedded within the school day through side-by-side coaching. Teachers also receive professional development through the district's Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant. Professional development through TIF is provided on weekends. Teachers remarked that they find the professional development very relevant and practical.

Lowndes County Public Schools indicated in its approved SIG application that it would implement increasing learning time by providing additional professional development "Summer Academies" at the end of July. Teachers were given stipends paid out of Title II and Title I funds. The training concerned how to implement new strategies and included training embedded throughout the year.

Calhoun High School is not implementing increased learning in accordance with SIG guidance. Core subject blocks were shortened by 5-10 minutes to allow time for an intervention period once a week. Every other week, this period consists of academic intervention time in which students receive supports on graduation test preparation, ACT test preparation, and general support in standards not mastered during each nine-week instructional period. Teachers work with students experiencing difficulty in their specific subject area. On alternating weeks, this time is used for advisory, in which students receive social-emotional support. While this strategy appears to maximize learning time, the school has not added additional time to its day, week, or year.

Fiscal

The ALSDE reserves five percent of the State's SIG allocation and uses its reservation for the salaries of contract employees, the salaries of program staff, travel, supplies, phone, car rentals, and equipment. One program position is exclusively SIG-funded (the education administrator position). The education specialist position is funded fifty-percent by SIG, and SIG monitors (part-time contracted support) are also funded by SIG. The ALSDE also uses its reservation for evaluation. The reservation was used to commission two studies: (a) the first was a three-year contract to evaluate results from SIG, and (b) the second was an evaluation of vendor results.

After each LEA's application is entered on the Electronic Grant Application Process (EGAP), an online grant management tool, the ALSDE staff compare each LEA's budget with activities stated within the LEA's application. The education administrator and education specialist verify alignment between the activities and budget to ensure the ALSDE is only approving items that are eligible to be spent with SIG funds. After the applications receive approval from the federal programs coordinator, they are reviewed by the ALSDE's finance section. Pending programmatic approval, the LEAs are allowed to draw down funds.

Throughout the year, LEAs are allowed to send revisions to their budgets. The original budget is reviewed during this process, as well as any amendments to the budgets. The ALSDE staff members ensure the budget is aligned with the latest revision of the approved application. Expenditure reports are reviewed regularly and officially monitored three times a year.

To ensure that its LEAs adhere to the proper accounting of time and attendance for SIG paid staff, ALSDE conducts comprehensive monitoring of its grantees every three years as part of a rotational cycle for all federal programs.

Technical Assistance

In the ALSDE's FY 2009 SIG application, it stated that it would provide technical assistance to LEAs and schools by placing a District Grant Coach in each LEA that was committed to implementing a total school reform model. The District Grant Coach was responsible for building LEA capacity and assisting with school level implementation of the reform model. The LEA was required in conjunction with the District Grant Coach to monitor weekly in every school approved for a total school reform. Each review was followed by a debriefing with the District Grant Coach. The LEA identified areas of strength and areas in which additional assistance was needed. If a school demonstrated difficulty with implementation, the LEA consulted with the District Grant Coach about how to resolve the issue. The District Grant Coach reported on implementation monthly to the SEA at School Support Team PD sessions. Coaching advice was given to the District Grant Coach by School Improvement Leaders. If difficulties continued, one of the School Improvement leaders visited to assess the situation and develop a plan with the District Grant Coach.

In cohort two, the ALSDE no longer used District Grant Coaches. Instead, the state hired three on-site monitors to monitor SIG implementation and provide technical assistance through school

visits that occur every two weeks. The ALSDE also hired two online monitoring coaches who monitor ALASTAR and provide technical assistance to schools and LEAs.

During the site visit, the LEAs and schools indicated that the ALSDE has provided school-based and LEA-level support on SIG implementation. Huntsville City Schools noted the state's particular assistance on issues of parent involvement, and both LEAs mentioned that state's support on teacher and principal evaluation. The LEA and school expressed being supported by the on-site and online monitoring. Both LEAs mentioned reported being supported during the grant writing and application period through webinars, phone calls, and the ALSDE trainings.

Huntsville City Schools

During the site visit, Huntsville City Schools stated that it has assigned two staff members (directors of instruction) to serve as the main points of contact at each of the LEA's two SIG schools. The directors of instruction support the schools on an ongoing basis and are on-site at least twice a week. Four specialists also support the schools on-site. The directors of instruction conduct regular walkthroughs with SIG principals to discuss the fidelity of implementation of the SIG plan and provide feedback on areas of weakness. The LEA also conducts monthly professional development meetings with instructional coaches at SIG schools to support their work and share best practices of supporting teachers. Additionally, the LEA holds monthly feedback meetings with external providers to make sure that they are providing services that best address the needs of the school.

Lowndes County Public Schools

Lowndes County Public Schools stated that it provided its SIG schools technical assistance around the use of the Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM), an evaluation tool that measures, describes, and explains the change that teachers and school leaders experience while implementing or leading transformational changes in schools. The LEA also stated that it provided its schools training around ALASTAR and assistance with maintaining documented evidence of indicators. The LEA representative assigned to oversee the SIG work at each school in the district (the transformation specialist) visited each of the four schools every week to follow-up on grant deliverables, to schedule time with Instructional Assistants to create benchmark assessments, and to identify any professional development needs for which ITS, the LEA's external provider, could be brought in to provide additional support.

Over the course of the site visit, Calhoun High School and Lowndes County Public Schools requested additional technical assistance on increasing family and community engagement. While the LEA and school praised the state for their initial efforts, they expressed a need for additional support. The LEA also mentioned its struggle to sustain the reforms undertaken in SIG. Huntsville City Schools expressed that more assistance in acclimating to ALASTAR, the state's SIG indicator performance monitoring tool would be helpful.

Monitoring

The ALSDE's plan for monitoring the implementation of the SIG program includes the utilization of three on-site monitors to monitor SIG implementation and provide technical assistance through school visits that occur every two weeks. The ALSDE also hired two online monitoring coaches who monitor ALASTAR and provide technical assistance to schools and LEAs around ALSDE's forty-three indicators.

The ALSDE uses a checklist in its current on-site monitoring process and SIG indicators are represented on the checklist. The on-site monitor focuses on different indicators on each visit. In its online monitoring tool, ALASTAR, LEAs and schools are asked to submit evidence on the forty-three indicators related to SIG implementation.

The ALSDE has trained its schools and LEAs on ALASTAR, the state's online performance management system for SIG. Schools and LEAs have been uploading evidence and writing entries into the online plan that the state has used to inform monitoring and technical assistance. On-site monitors visit the schools every two weeks with specific checklists that correspond to the SIG requirements. Those monitors also take note of the things that are going well and the areas in which additional help is needed. The ALSDE is ensuring that LEAs are adequately monitoring school implementation by holding the LEAs accountable to collecting school level evidence and observations to upload into ALASTAR.

To inform its decisions concerning continuation funding, the ALSDE evaluates each school's SIG implementation using a SIG school evaluation checklist which evaluates the following: the management of school efforts to implement a school improvement model, the district's commitment and capacity to implement a SIG intervention model, documentation of adherence to final requirements, analysis of program budget and program budget amendments, analysis of leading and lagging indicators, analysis of annual goals, analysis of assessment scores, and analysis of each school's Concerns-Based Adoption Model (C-BAM) evaluation. Much of this checklist is completed on the ALSDE's last monitoring visit of the school year. The rest of the checklist is completed when LEAs receive their achievement scores, and then the entire contents of the evaluation is considered in constructing funding recommendations to present to the Executive Committee for final approval on continuation funding.

Data Collection /Use of Data

The ALSDE is collecting data for all leading indicators and is ensuring that LEAs and schools are collecting leading indicator data to support implementation. Its academic data on districts, schools, subgroups is available on its website. The ALSDE conducts checks on the accuracy of the data, particularly with regard to behavior-related data such as discipline incidents. The state also utilizes Positive Behavior Intervention System data and student incident reports (SIR) data to inform its work on SIG.

Both LEAs and schools are using data to identify and implement an instructional program that is research-based and vertically aligned.

Huntsville City Schools; James I Dawson Elementary School

Since the implementation of the SIG model, data meetings at James I Dawson Elementary School occur bi-weekly. The school uses the STAR Enterprise program to collect benchmark assessment results on students. Teachers reported that analyzing data to inform instructional practices has now become a regular part of their practice. The school has a data room that displays the performance level of all students in reading and math. Each classroom also has data charts tracking students' progress. Students are grouped into four levels of proficiency and instruction and interventions are individualized based on students' needs. Students also track their own progress on assessments. In classroom observations, students were graphing their progress in reading fluency based on assessment results. School leadership stated that professional development and targeted support for teachers are driven by the results of the data.

Huntsville City Schools conduct quarterly site data review meetings to look at leading and lagging indicators. School leadership share additional data points during these meetings. As a part of the process principals are required to keep data notebooks. The LEA reviews these notebooks during on-site walkthroughs. The LEA stated that data is used to determine the types of supports the LEA should provide to its schools. Beyond the leading and lagging indicators, the LEA stated that it reviews other data such as how professional development is used in the classroom and benchmark data from the digital curriculum.

Lowndes County Public Schools; Calhoun High School

Calhoun High School uses frequent reviews of data and practice across its SIG-implementing schools to inform instruction. Each teacher administers pre- assessments serve as a baseline before teacher led benchmark assessments take place every three weeks to measure student progress toward mastery of the standards taught during that period. At the end of each new instructional block, teachers administer post-assessments. The Assistant Principal/Instructional Assistant designs each class's nine-week assessments to ensure that they are rigorous, aligned to standards, and uniform across other SIG schools (instructional specialists across the district's schools meet to develop the assessments).

Data Action Planning meetings at Lowndes County Public Schools are held every forty-five days. These action plans are school improvement documents updated quarterly to keep the school leadership team focused on subgroup achievement performance and accountability to meeting performance expectations. Discussions around school data occur at monthly roundtable meetings between district leadership and external providers.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE RECOMMENDATIONS

Sustainability: Lowndes County Public Schools asked for support in identifying strategies for sustaining reform efforts in SIG schools.

Technical Assistance Recommendations:

- Provide resources to the ALSDE that support sustainability planning and continued implementation of SIG-funded interventions. (Responsibility: ED)
- Develop strategies to assist LEAs in identifying strategies for sustaining reform efforts in SIG schools. (Responsibility: ALSDE)

Family and Community Engagement: Although the SEA has met the requirement of ensuring that LEAs with schools implementing the transformation and turnaround models are providing ongoing mechanisms for family and community engagement, Lowndes County Public Schools expressed that they would benefit from additional resources on creating opportunities for family and community engagement that are meaningful and well-attended by parents and members of the community.

Technical Assistance Recommendations:

- Provide technical assistance to LEAs on strategies and methods to improve meaningful and strategic family and community engagement, such as how to more effectively include families and community members in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of SIG programs and strategies (Responsibility: ALSDE)
- Create an opportunity for Huntsville City Schools and Lowndes County Public Schools to share practices on improving meaningful and strategic family and community engagement. (Responsibility: ALSDE)

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))]	Finding	Page 19
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	Page 19
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]	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))]	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	N/A	

	(75 FR 66363 (October 28, 2010))]		
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))]	N/A	

Monitoring Area: School Improvement Grant

Critical Element 1: The SEA ensures that its application process was carried out consistent with the final requirements of the SIG program.

Finding: The ALSDE does not have all of the required documentation posted on its website. Although the ALSDE posted each original LEA and school SIG application on its website (both recipients and non-recipients), during the review, it was revealed that two LEAs made revisions to their applications that had not been posted on the web site at the time of the onsite review and need to be posted online to replace the previous versions.

Citation: Section II.B.3 requires an SEA to post on its website, within 30 days of awarding school improvement grants to LEAs, all final LEA applications (75 C.F.R. [October 28, 2010]).

Further action required: The ALSDE must post on its website within 30 days of receipt of this report all final LEA applications, including amended budgets and/attachments.

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 ALSDE has not ensured that Lowndes County Public Schools has established schedules and implemented strategies that increase learning time for all students. Although Lowndes County Public Schools has implemented increased learning time this year in two of its schools by adding before/after school remedial programs at its two SIG-implementing middle schools, the increased learning is not mandatory and does not extend to all of its SIG schools.

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 ALSDE must submit evidence to ED that it has reviewed each LEA that received SIG funds to implement the transformation and turnaround model to determine if increased learning time is being provided consistent with the SIG final requirements. The ALSDE must submit the results of the review to ED within 35 days of receiving a copy of this report. For any school that ALSDE has determined is not currently implementing increased

learning, as outlined in the SIG final requirements, the ALSDE must submit to ED a timeline for implementation.