

**IOWA**  
**Targeted Monitoring Review of**  
**School Improvement Grants (SIG) under section 1003(g) of the**  
**Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965**  
**October 31 – November 3, 2011**

**BACKGROUND**

**FY 2009 SIG Schools**

Tier	Number of SIG-eligible Schools	Number of SIG Schools Funded
Tier I	6	6
Tier II	29	0
Tier III	95	0

**FY 2009 SIG Intervention Models**

Models	Number of SIG Schools Implementing the Model
Turnaround	0
Transformation	6
Restart	0
Closure	0

**FY 2010 SIG Schools**

Tier	Number of SIG-eligible Schools	Number of SIG Schools Funded
Tier I	13	3
Tier II	28	0
Tier III	128	0

**FY 2010 SIG Intervention Models**

Models	Number of SIG Schools Implementing the Model
Turnaround	1
Transformation	2
Restart	0
Closure	0

**MONITORING TRIP INFORMATION**

**Monitoring Visits and Award Amounts**

<b>LEA Visited</b>	Waterloo Community School District
<b>School Visited</b>	George Washington Carver Academy
<b>Model Implemented</b>	Transformation
<b>FY 2009 Funding Awarded (over three years)</b>	LEA Award (for 2 SIG schools): \$4,391,540 School-level funding (for Carver): \$2,242,498
<b>FY 2010 Funding Awarded (for one year)</b>	LEA Award (for 1 SIG school): \$857,810
<b>LEA Visited</b>	Des Moines Public Schools
<b>School Visited</b>	North High School
<b>Model Implemented</b>	Transformation
<b>FY 2009 Funding Awarded (over three years)</b>	LEA Award (for 4 SIG schools): \$13,319,033 School-level funding (for North): \$3,738,000
<b>FY 2010 Funding Awarded (for one year)</b>	LEA Award (for 2 SIG schools): \$1,762,225
<b>SEA Visited</b>	Iowa Department of Education
<b>FY 2009 SEA SIG Award</b>	\$2,880,380 (plus \$15,829,842 in ARRA funding)
<b>FY 2009 LEA SIG Awards</b>	\$17,710,573 (for 6 SIG schools in 2 LEAs)
<b>FY 2010 SEA SIG Award</b>	\$2,939,883
<b>FY 2010 LEA SIG Awards</b>	\$2,620,035 (for 3 SIG schools in 2 LEAs)

Staff Interviewed	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Iowa Department of Education Staff</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Waterloo Community School District Staff</b></li> <li>➤ <b>George Washington Carver Academy Staff:</b> Principal, School Leadership Team, Teachers, Parents, Students, and 4 Classroom Visits</li> <li>➤ <b>Des Moines Public Schools Staff</b></li> <li>➤ <b>North High School Staff:</b> Principal, School Leadership Team, Teachers, Parents, Students, and 4 Classroom Visits</li> </ul>	
U.S. Department of Education Staff	
<b>Team Leader</b>	Carlas McCauley
<b>Staff Onsite</b>	Carlas McCauley, Kimberly Light, and Michael Lamb

OVERVIEW OF MONITORING REPORT

The following report is based on U.S. Department of Education’s (ED) on-site monitoring visit to Iowa from *October 31 – November 3, 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**

**School Climate**

### **Waterloo Community School District**

At the time the Waterloo Community School District (WCSD) applied for SIG funds, George Washington Carver Academy (Carver), which serves a diverse population of approximately 500 students in grades 6-8, had a school climate that interfered with effective teaching and learning. According to WCSD's application for SIG funds, for example, Iowa Youth Survey results indicated that 58% of Carver's 8<sup>th</sup> grade students reported having been bullied and that 72% reported that they felt teachers did not care about them or recognize when they are doing a good job and that students fail to treat each other with respect.

Despite early struggles, Carver's school climate improved through the early stages of SIG implementation. The principal and the school leadership team explained that the first year of the SIG program was challenging because of difficulty adjusting to higher expectations for both staff and students, a new dress code, and a school name change. However, the SIG interventions and a new school building have contributed to an improved climate and perception of the school, as explained by parents and students during interviews. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is being used to encourage behavior change; the school leadership team reported that student discipline referrals have decreased. But student referrals are still high as compared to those in the rest of WCSD.

### **Des Moines Public Schools**

According to North High School's (North) principal, the school's atmosphere was chaotic prior to SIG implementation. Students at North – which serves an increasingly diverse, poor, and mobile population of 1,170 students – were often found wandering the halls. Staff and students focused on just “getting along” rather than setting and meeting high expectations.

Now the school is committed to creating an atmosphere of responsibility and respect that embraces diversity and fosters open communication and safety. Teachers reported that they are no longer isolated in their classrooms, that the school has decreased its discipline issues, and that instructional focus, teamwork, and resources and support have all increased. For example, all students now have laptops, which they reported make them feel like the school is committed to their success.

### **Staffing**

#### ***Changes in Leadership***

### **Waterloo Community School District**

WCSD did not replace Carver's principal because he began his service as part of a reform effort two years earlier. According to the leadership team, he has been at the school twice as long as any previous administrator.

### **Des Moines Public Schools**

DMPS replaced the principal and administrators at North and funded new School Improvement Leader positions through the SIG grant. In addition, the district added a new position – an Associate Superintendent of Teaching and Learning – that focuses on the SIG program and turnaround issues. The DMPS application indicates that the district also intends to create a “Turnaround Zone” to increase support at turnaround schools through providing technical assistance from external providers.

### ***Changes in Staff***

#### **Waterloo Community School District**

While the transformation model does not require staff replacement, Carver leadership worked with the teachers’ union and the district to allow one-third of the school’s staff to transfer to other buildings within the district without those transfers counting as the teachers’ one voluntary transfer. The Carver leadership team also described how “fireside chats” – through which the staff discussed the needed knowledge, skills, and dispositions to support the new turnaround work – were used to set new expectations for staff. WCSD staff reported that they had considered using signing bonuses for new teachers, but that the teachers’ union did not support the idea.

### **Des Moines Public Schools**

North retained almost all of their teachers and is using SIG funds for School Improvement Leaders (SILs) who act as coaches for staff around data, instruction, and technology. According to the DMPS application, more than 140 staff applied for the three SIL positions.

### **Teaching and Learning**

#### **Waterloo Community School District**

According to WCSD’s SIG application, Carver’s student achievement scores in both reading and math declined, and the building was in year four of School in Need of Assistance (SINA) status for both reading and math. This poor performance created an urgency to move forward with comprehensive reform efforts. The leadership team explained that they had not focused enough on ensuring rigorous instruction prior to SIG implementation, even noticing that students often passed Carver’s formative assessments but failed the end-of-the-year state tests.

The school adopted several strategies to address these issues. For example, the leadership team explained that the school hired two full-time instructional coaches to assist in SIG implementation, conducted peer observations and “walk throughs” in classrooms, linked curriculum to state standards, and increased reading time for students by creating 90-minute literacy blocks. Supplemental math instruction is now provided during former homeroom time. Carver also increased learning time by approximately 45 hours by adding ten additional days of which seven are student days. Teacher-driven professional development and individual development plans are also used. The WCSD application states

that staff will engage in a minimum of 75 hours of professional development that will include days prior to the start of the school year, extended hours throughout the school year, and district days that have been built into the school calendar.

Carver has not yet taken significant steps to recruit, retain, and evaluate staff. For example, while WCSD wanted to use an approach for rewards at the individual, team, and building level, it was unable to implement a performance-based system because of lack of support, especially from the teachers' union. Moreover, Iowa requested and received a waiver from ED on the implementation timeline for the evaluation system requirements of the SIG transformation model; the new timeline requires that cohort 1 schools develop an evaluation system during the 2011-12 school year, pilot the system no later than the 2012-13 school year, and use the system for decision making no later than the 2013-14 school year.

The WCSD application indicates that numerous attempts have been made at Carver to engage parents in academic support for their students, but this remains an area in need of improvement. Interviews with Carver staff confirmed that parent engagement is still difficult. They have monthly family nights, but report that parent participation is low. While teachers have increased phone and email contact with parents since SIG implementation, parents explained that communication with the school is not always timely or effective. In addition, WCSD staff noted that community partners often want to engage in ways that are not aligned closely with the district's strategic plan.

### **Des Moines Public Schools**

Through SIG implementation, North has taken several initial steps to provide job-embedded professional development and increase learning time. For example, the School Improvement Leaders conduct classroom observations; teachers reported that they had not been observed previously and welcome the feedback. According to the leadership team at North, the school day has been extended by ten minutes to add a short period in the middle of the day when students can get extra assistance from teachers if needed. Interviews with DMPS staff indicated that they would like to negotiate additional contract options with the teachers' union to allow for extra days, but this has not yet happened.

In interviews, North staff reported that professional development is primarily teacher-led. According to the DMPS application, the district has also contracted with the Leading Learning Center to provide job-embedded professional development, coaching, and technical assistance. Additionally, a technology team provides training for teachers on how to use new laptop computers in the classroom.

North is planning to build reward systems and to improve its evaluation system, but both efforts are still in the initial stages of development. The LEA application indicates that North will collaborate with DMPS Human Resources and the teachers' union to explore opportunities for incentives, career pathways, and flexible working conditions for staff. DMPS staff reported that they intend to launch a rewards system in

the 2012-13 school year that will encourage collaboration and use improvement targets in addition to the Iowa state tests. According to DMPS staff, schools are not yet using student achievement as part of their staff evaluation systems, but DMPS staff are serving on a state-level committee that is working on development of a new model evaluation system. As stated earlier in this report, Iowa has received a waiver from ED on the implementation timeline for the evaluation system requirements of the SIG transformation model.

North has undertaken efforts to improve ongoing family and community engagement, but it's not clear that new relationships with community partners are in fact developing. Staff at North reported that they have an active alumni group and that they have held "lunch and learns" for the local community. The approved SIG application also indicates that North will use a Family Liaison to build relationships with parents through home visits, regular phone calls, and connections with community services, but some interviewed parents indicated that were not aware of this new position.

### **Use of Data**

#### **Waterloo Community School District**

The WCSD application states that Carver is using processes that enable teachers to use data from formative assessments to respond to student learning needs, including a Data Driven Decision Making Model (DDDM) process and an Instructional Decision Making (IDM) process. Instructional coaches are responsible for the collection and analysis of implementation data which are provided monthly to the leadership team. WCSD staff meet monthly with principals to discuss and make decisions based on the data. At Carver, teachers meet frequently in teams to discuss student data and use benchmark results instead of only teacher-developed assessments in order to promote rigor. Carver staff indicated that having benchmarks helps motivate them and that they would like more recognition of incremental improvements.

According to WCSD staff, every SIG cohort 1school showed improvement, but the schools did not meet their annual goals, which the LEA views as "stretch" goals.

**Des Moines Public Schools**

As outlined in the DMPS application, North’s data teams meet to set achievement goals, select and implement instructional strategies, monitor student performance, and conduct assessments. DMPS staff explained that each school is using a school improvement plan template with six-week benchmark assessments to collect data. At North, teachers meet in data teams weekly, in part, to use data to differentiate instruction in the classroom. Interviews with staff indicated that there is a clear push from school leadership to use data.

According to data on the SEA web site, North exceeded its annual goals for student achievement between 2010 and 2011: it achieved an 18 percentage point change in 11<sup>th</sup> grade students proficient in reading and a 9.4 percentage point change in 11<sup>th</sup> grade students proficient in math (their goal is to increase each by 4 percent per year).

**Technical Assistance**

**Waterloo Community School District**

WCSD staff indicated that each SIG school has been assigned a primary district contact to support the overall SIG initiative, including monitoring of implementation. According to interviews with WCSD, instructional professional development is provided by external providers and consultants.

**Des Moines Public Schools**

According to the DMPS application, the district has contracted with Solution Tree to support Professional Learning Communities. All SIG principals in the district meet once a month.

## **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Issue:** Although responsive to LEA and school requests for assistance, the SEA does not appear to have a broader technical assistance strategy to address LEA and school needs related to SIG program requirements and school turnaround efforts. In particular, the LEAs and schools visited would benefit from targeted assistance from the SEA around strategies for family and community engagement, increased learning time, and systems of rewards. It is recommended that the SEA broaden existing TA efforts to address these issues as well as other issues related to school turnaround efforts.

### **Technical Assistance Strategies:**

- Providing technical assistance to LEAs on strategies and methods to improve parent and community engagement, such as how to plan and hold meetings for parents and community members about the grant and include parents in the evaluation of the strategies that are implemented as part of the grant.
- Providing guidance to LEAs on the appropriate and meaningful use of increased learning time. It appears that the LEAs and schools could benefit from additional guidance on what qualifies as extended learning time and how schools can maximize the benefits of extended learning time, including by following ED guidance that effective programs expand learning time by a minimum of 300 hours per school year.
- Providing assistance to LEAs on the development of systems that identify and reward school leaders, teachers, and other staff who have increased student achievement.
- Creating one or more SEA staff positions that focus on oversight and leadership of statewide school turnaround efforts.

## MONITORING FINDINGS

### Summary of Monitoring Indicators

Critical Element	Requirement	Status	Page
<b>1. Application Process</b>	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	9
<b>2. Implementation</b>	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	9
<b>3. Fiscal</b>	The SEA ensures LEAs and schools are using funds consistent with the final requirements of the SIG program. [Section II of the final requirements for the School Improvement Grants authorized under section 1003(g) of Title I of Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (75 FR 66363 (October 28, 2010)) ; §1114 of the ESEA; and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-87]	Finding	10
<b>4. Technical Assistance</b>	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	N/A
<b>5. Monitoring</b>	The SEA ensures that monitoring of LEAs and schools is being conducted consistent with the final	Finding	11

	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))]		
<b>6. Data Collection</b>	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	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 SEA does not have all of the required documentation posted on its website. NCES identification numbers for LEAs and schools are not posted for either FY 2009 or FY 2010 awards, and no summary could be found for FY 2009 awards.

Citation: Section II.B.3 of the SIG final requirements states that an SEA must post on its website, within 30 days of awarding school improvement grants to LEAs, all final LEA applications as well as a summary of those grants that includes the following information: (a) Name and National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) identification number of each LEA awarded a grant. (b) Amount of each LEA's grant. (c) Name and NCES identification number of each school to be served. (d) Type of intervention to be implemented in each Tier I and Tier II school.

Further action required: The SEA must post on its website, within 30 days of receipt of this report, NCES identification numbers for FY 2010 LEAs and schools, and a complete summary of FY 2009 awards.

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

**Finding 1:** The SEA has not ensured that all LEAs implementing the transformation and turnaround models are establishing schedules and implementing strategies that increase learning time consistent with the definition provided in the final requirements. For example, at North High School, the school day has been extended by 10 minutes to accommodate the addition of a short period in the middle of the

day when students can get extra assistance from teachers if needed; this does not significantly increase the total number of school hours for learning time.

Citation: Section I.A.2.(d)(3)(i)(A) of the SIG final requirements requires an LEA implementing the Transformation model to establish schedules and 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.”

Further action required: The SEA must submit evidence to ED that it has reviewed each LEA that has a school implementing the transformation and turnaround model to determine if increased learning time is being provided consistent with the SIG final requirements. For each school implementing the turnaround or transformation model that is not implementing increased learning time consistent with the SIG final requirements, the SEA must submit to ED a timeline for implementation of increased learning in each school and evidence that each school has been notified that it must implement increased learning time consistent with the SIG final requirements before the start of the 2012-13 school year.

**Finding 2:** The SEA has not ensured that the system of rewards for school leaders, teachers, and other staff implementing the transformation model is based in part on student achievement. The current staff evaluation process is not clearly linked to student performance.

Citation: Section I.A.2. (d)(1)(i)(c) of the SIG final requirements states that an LEA implementing a transformation model must identify and reward school leaders, teachers, and other staff who, in implementing this model, have increased student achievement and high school graduation rates and identify and remove those who, after ample opportunities have been provided for them to improve their professional practice, have not done so.

Further action required: The SEA must provide a plan to ED for how it will assist LEAs in developing and implementing a system that identifies and reward school leaders, teachers, and other staff who, in implementing the transformation model, have increased student achievement and high school graduation rates. The plan must include a timeline for implementation in the 2012-2013 school year, to identify and reward school leaders, teachers, and other staff who, in implementing the transformation model, have increased student achievement.

**Finding 3:** The SEA has not ensured that LEAs with schools implementing the transformation and turnaround models are providing ongoing mechanisms for family and community engagement as part of the requirement for increased learning time and creating community-oriented schools. Both the schools and school districts visited lacked an ongoing mechanism for establishing family and community

engagement. While the schools and districts each reported conducting activities related to parent and community engagement, they did not provide evidence that an ongoing strategy to engage families and community at either the school or LEA level was in place.

Citation: Section I.A.2.(d)(3)(i)(B) of the SIG final requirements states that LEAs implementing the transformation model must provide ongoing mechanisms for family and community engagement.

Further action required: The SEA must provide a plan to ED for how it will assist LEAs in developing and implementing by the 2012-13 school year an ongoing mechanism for engaging families and community. As evidence, the SEA must submit to ED the guidance it will provide to LEAs and the expected timeline for LEAs to submit their strategy to develop an ongoing mechanism for family and community engagement.

**Finding 4:** SEA staff could not specifically identify how the five percent reservation for SEA activities for FY 2009, FY 2010, or ARRA funds was being used.

Citation: Title I, Part A, Section 1003(g)(8) of the legislation and Section II. D. of the SIG final requirements states that an SEA may reserve from the SIG funds it receives under section 1003(g) of the ESEA in any given year no more than five percent for administration, evaluation, and technical assistance expenses.

Further action recommended: The SEA must provide information to ED on how the five percent reservation is being used and how this relates to the plan set out for the use of these funds as described in the SEA approved application.

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

Finding: The SIG funds at Harding Middle School in Des Moines Public Schools are being used to pay for transportation costs to enable the school to start and end the school day one hour later so it can move its after school program to before school.

Citation: Section C.1. of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-87 stipulates that to be allowable under Federal awards, a cost must be necessary and reasonable for proper and efficient performance and administration and allowable under the relevant program. Section A-32c of ED's Guidance on Section 1003(g) School Improvement Grants updated on February 23, 2011 states that generally, providing transportation to students in order for them to attend school is a regular responsibility an LEA carries out for all students and, thus, may not be paid for with Federal funds unless specifically authorized. However, an LEA may use SIG funds to cover transportation costs if the costs are directly attributable to implementation of a school turnaround model, are reasonable and necessary, and exceed the costs the LEA would have incurred in the absence of its implementation of the model.

Further action required: The SEA must determine whether or not the transportation costs funded by SIG at Harding Middle School were directly attributable to implementation of a school turnaround model, were reasonable and necessary, and exceeded the costs the LEA would have incurred in the absence of its implementation of the model.

**Critical Element 5: The SEA ensures that monitoring of LEAs and schools is being conducted consistent with the final requirements of the SIG program.**

Finding: The SEA does not appear to be consistently carrying out their monitoring plan as written in their approved application. The monitoring plan in the SEA application indicates that post-monitoring Technical Assistance Reports and annual reports from LEAs will be reviewed by a team of SEA personnel to determine whether any specific follow up actions need to be taken with an LEA and its schools, but reports have not been submitted and follow-up actions have not taken place.

Citation: Section 80.40 of the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) states that grantees must monitor grant and sub-grant activities to ensure compliance with applicable Federal requirements. Section 9304(a) of the ESEA requires that the SEA must ensure that (1) programs authorized under the ESEA are administered in accordance with all applicable statutes, regulations, program plans, and applications; and (2) the State will use fiscal control and funds accounting procedures that will ensure the proper disbursement of and accounting for Federal funds.

Further action required: The SEA must submit to ED a description of how they are carrying out their monitoring plan as described in the approved SEA application, including follow up actions to be conducted after review of Technical Assistance Reports and annual reports and how the SEA will ensure compliance with SIG requirements and proper uses of SIG funds.