



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

MAY 02 2013

Mitchell D. Chester
Commissioner of Education
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
75 Pleasant Street
Malden, MA 02148-4906

Dear Commissioner Chester:

During the week of December 3, 2012, a team from the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) Office of School Turnaround (OST) reviewed the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's 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 Observations*, (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.

The SEA has 30 business days from receipt of this report to respond to all of the compliance issues contained herein. ED staff will review your response for sufficiency and will determine which areas are acceptable and which require further documentation of implementation. ED will allow 30 business days for receipt of this further documentation, if required. ED recognizes that some corrective actions may require longer than the prescribed 30 days, and in these instances, will work with you to determine a reasonable timeline. In those instances where additional time is required to implement specific corrective actions, you must submit a request for such an extension in writing to ED, including a timeline for completion for all related actions. Each State that participates in an onsite monitoring review and that has significant compliance findings in one or more of the programs monitored will have a condition placed on that

program's grant award specifying that the State must submit (and receive approval of) documentation that all compliance issues identified in the monitoring report have been corrected. When documentation sufficient to address all compliance areas has been submitted and approved, ED will then remove the condition from your grant award.

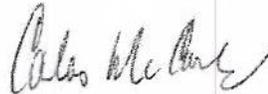
With regards to the *Technical Assistance Recommendations* provided, we encourage you to employ these strategies to further support the effective implementation of the SIG program. ED staff will follow up with your staff over the next few months to see how your agency is working to address these issues 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 Massachusetts at the time and locations of ED's onsite review. The SEA 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 Lise Zeig, Erica Champagne, Hope Hyuhn and Jesse Dixon for the assistance they provided prior to and during the review in gathering materials and providing access to information.

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 Massachusetts.

Sincerely,



Carlos McCauley
Acting Director
Office of School Turnaround

Enclosure

cc: Erica Champagne

MASSACHUSETTS
Targeted Monitoring Review of
School Improvement Grants (SIG) under section 1003(g) of the
Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965
December 3-5, 2012

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANTS (SIG) MONITORING REPORT FOR THE MASSACHUSETTS
DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

BACKGROUND

Models	Number of SIG Schools Implementing the Model (Cohort I)		Number of SIG Schools Implementing the Model (Cohort II)	
Turnaround	5		5	
Transformation	7		11	
Restart	0		2	
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	57	12	45	18
Tier II	43	0	43	1
Tier III	576	0	576	0

MONITORING TRIP INFORMATION

LEA Visited	<i>Boston Public Schools</i>
School Visited	<i>Orchard Gardens K-8 Pilot School</i>
Model Implemented	<i>Turnaround</i>
Cohort I (FY 2009) Funding Awarded (over three years)	<i>LEA Award (for 10 SIG schools): \$22,489,718 School-level funding: \$3,728,029</i>
Cohort II (FY 2010) Funding Awarded	<i>LEA Award (for 2 SIG schools): \$3,132,294</i>
LEA Visited	<i>Springfield Public Schools</i>
School Visited	<i>Elias Brookings Elementary School</i>
Model Implemented	<i>Turnaround</i>

Cohort I (FY 2009) Funding Awarded (over three years)	<i>LEA Award (for 1 SIG school): \$2,268,628</i>
Cohort II (FY 2010) Funding Awarded	<i>LEA Award (for 8 SIG schools): \$12,932,464 School-level funding: \$1,492,882</i>
SEA Visited	<i>Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education</i>
FY 2009 SIG Award	<i>\$9,017,161 (plus \$49,674,274 SIG ARRA)</i>
FY 2010 SIG Award	<i>\$8,023,626</i>
FY 2011 SIG Award	<i>\$7,893,880</i>
FY 2012 SIG Award	<i>\$7,231,947</i>

Staff Interviewed	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Staff</i> ➤ <i>Boston Public Schools Staff</i> ➤ <i>Orchard Gardens K-8 Pilot School Staff: Principal, School Leadership Team, Teachers, Parents, Students, and Classroom Visits</i> ➤ <i>Springfield Public Schools Staff</i> ➤ <i>Elias Brookings Staff: Principal, School Leadership Team, Teachers, Parents, Students, and Classroom Visits</i> 	
U.S. Department of Education Staff	
Team Leader	<i>Carlas McCauley</i>
Staff Onsite	<i>Kimberly Light and Chuenee Boston</i>

OVERVIEW OF MONITORING PROCESS

The following report is based on the U.S. Department of Education’s (ED) on-site monitoring visit to Massachusetts from December 3-5, 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 Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MDESE) on its progress in implementing SIG effectively and in a manner that is consistent with the School Improvement Grant (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 report consists of the following sections:

- *Background Information.* This section highlights significant achievements in the SEA's implementation of the SIG grant. This section also includes a brief overview of the SEA's structure and vision for SIG implementation.
- *Summary of SEA 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 3-5, 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 Implementation of SIG

- The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MDESE) created a report entitled "Emerging Practices in Rapid Achievement Gain Schools" which is aligned to the SEA's Conditions for School Effectiveness and is being used to help support schools in SIG implementation.
- Prior to SIG, Orchard Gardens K-8 Pilot School in the Boston Public Schools was one of the lowest-achieving schools in the state and was rarely selected as a first choice school in the state's school enrollment lottery process. Since implementing SIG, Orchard Gardens has seen its proficiency rates dramatically increase, with growth exceeding most schools in the state. This year, according to the principal, they were a first choice school for 279 students.

SEA Structure and Vision

The SIG program has been integrated into the SEA's overall vision for education reform. According to SEA staff, Massachusetts has been able to leverage several different strategies related to school reform and turnaround to improve outcomes in the State's persistently lowest achieving schools. Massachusetts's 2010 Act Relative to the Achievement Gap provided support and flexibilities for the lowest-performing schools and focused on needs related to specific conditions for school effectiveness which set the stage for current turnaround efforts in Massachusetts. Although the law's requirements do not completely align with SIG requirements, staff reported that SIG fits well within their overall strategy of implementing robust innovations in these schools and, as a result, Massachusetts was able to use SIG funds as a lever for change. Staff also reported that Race to the Top also enabled the SEA to further support turnaround work by elevating the SEA work around curriculum, educator evaluation, external providers, and leadership development. Lastly, staff indicated the ESEA flexibility waiver process provided the

SEA with the opportunity to further articulate their vision and give districts greater flexibility around uses of funds.

SUMMARY OF SEA IMPLEMENTATION OF SIG CRITICAL ELEMENTS

Application Process

Since the SEA chose to focus on making awards to their lowest performing (Tier I) schools, the timing for applications and awards in Cohort I was a challenge. Massachusetts's Tier I schools were designated as Level 4 schools in the new state law. Level 4 schools are defined as schools that are low performing on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System and not showing signs of substantial improvement over a four year period. These schools are required to go through a detailed process involving the development of a redesign or turnaround plan after consultation with a local stakeholder group. Because of the time required to go through this process, only 11 of 34 Tier I schools decided to apply for SIG in Cohort I. The remaining schools began some implementation of their redesign plans (in some cases using state bridge grant funds) prior to applying for SIG in Cohort II.

Implementation

School Climate

Boston Public Schools; Orchard Gardens K-8 Pilot School

According to the Boston Public Schools (BPS) needs assessment, teacher scores on two climate indicators for Orchard Gardens K-8 Pilot School, relationships with students and parent and student engagement, were almost a full standard deviation below the district mean. In a climate survey, approximately 42 percent of teachers selected school and classroom discipline as the most important factor influencing how much students learn at school. Only 11 percent of parents responded to the survey. During the interview process, the school leadership team at Orchard Gardens described the climate of the school before implementation of SIG as valuing quiet as good, meaning that poor student growth was acceptable if student were well-behaved. Staff indicated that the environment was chaotic, with many discipline referrals and approximately \$200,000 per year spent on security measures. There was a lack of accountability and weak school-family relationships.

BPS indicated in its SIG application that it planned to address these needs by creating consistent and high school-wide expectations and a unified school culture. With the use of an RTI model of tiered interventions, a student support system was designed to meet the individual needs of each student and provide targeted outreach to families. Specific supports include a tailored set of prevention, intervention, and enrichment services coordinated by two full-time school site coordinators who serve as hubs for connecting students to customized services. Community partnerships also provide health and social services supports. Two family and community coordinators provide outreach, and a school parent resource center has been re-opened.

Since implementation of the turnaround model at Orchard Gardens, staff reported that climate has improved dramatically. Staff reported reductions in discipline referrals and an increase in high expectations for behavior, instruction, and performance.

Springfield Public Schools; Elias Brookings Elementary School

According to the Springfield Public Schools (SPS) needs assessment, 93 percent of teachers at Elias Brookings Elementary School perceived a problem with disorderly student behavior, and teachers reported the school rules were not effective in maintaining order or discipline. The assessment also indicated that parents were concerned with issues of school safety.

Approximately 50 percent of school staff contacted the office each day for support with student behavioral problems during the 2009-2010 school year. In addition, parents indicated having difficulty communicating with the school and reported that 80 percent of the school staff did not perceive that parents supported the school's policies. Student attendance in 2010 had decreased to 91.4 percent from 96.4 percent the previous year.

SPS indicated in its SIG application that it planned to address identified needs by establishing a positive climate for learning, increasing family and community engagement, and improving communication with parents. The school has partnered with an external provider to support families and make connections with health, social service, and workforce development services.

Since implementation of the turnaround model at Brookings, climate has improved dramatically. The school staff reported a decrease in discipline referrals and an increase in creating high expectations for behavior, instruction, and performance. Family and community engagement has improved and more parents are attending school-sponsored events. Parents reported that conversations between parents and teachers are now more about instruction compared to previous years when conversations were almost always about discipline or attendance issues. Parents at Brookings have organized a group called Parents Accountable for Student Success (PASS) and SPS has created a Parent Academy to provide professional development for parents.

Teachers and Leaders

Boston Public Schools

As part of implementing the SIG turnaround model, a new principal was hired at Orchard Gardens in the year before the SIG grant to begin a new reform effort. According to leadership team interviews, the principal previously served at the highest-performing middle school in the state in English Language Arts (ELA) and was the sixth principal in seven years at Orchard Gardens. Prior to SIG, the school had been experiencing a 50 percent annual turnover in staff. During the process of screening and selecting staff for the turnaround model, approximately 80 percent of teachers were replaced and 18 teacher leader positions were created that paid an additional \$6000 in annual salary. According to the leadership team, they wanted these positions to include at least 25 percent of staff in order to achieve a critical mass for school-wide impact as a Teacher Turnaround Team.

Orchard Gardens did not use a specific staff screening tool. However, the school utilized classroom data and observations and new staff were asked about how they use data to inform instruction. The leadership team reported that the new principal is exceptionally good at

interviewing and assessing the “fit” of teachers for the school and selecting the best people for the team. Because a chief operating officer position was created to focus on administrative tasks, the principal spends most of his time in the hallways and classrooms as an instructional leader,

Springfield Public Schools

As part of implementing the SIG turnaround model, a new principal was hired at Brookings in the year before the SIG grant to begin a new reform effort. The principal had been assigned to Brookings in 2009 because of success in her prior positions as a classroom teacher and coach. The principal was given decision making authority over school resources to create a learning culture to best meet student and family needs.

According to the school leadership team, prior to the 2010-11 school year, the entire staff was screened and 25 percent were replaced. In spring 2011, staff were screened again and an additional 25 percent of staff were replaced. In addition to widespread advertising, attending teacher recruitment fairs, and conducting district teacher recruitment events, the district also recruited new staff from the state’s Amazing Teacher website. New teachers stated that, along with participating in an oral interview, they had to model teaching a lesson and evaluate samples of student work.

SPS established a redesign team for Brookings that was responsible for coordinating the redesign process, including the school’s redesign plan. The membership of the team was designed to include district representation, the principal, key instructional leadership specialists, and a cross-section of the core academic disciplines and grade levels, as well as parent and community members. Each selected teacher has assumed key leadership roles in the school.

Instructional Strategies and Time

Boston Public Schools

The needs analysis conducted by BPS indicated that Orchard Gardens had been designated as one of MA’s lowest performing schools in the state, with only 6 percent of students proficient in Math, and 13 percent proficient in ELA. To address instructional needs, a large portion of the school’s SIG budget is allocated to extended learning time—including contracts for extended learning services and stipends for extra time for teachers and support staff. Increased learning time (including after school tutoring, an apprenticeship program, and acceleration academies) is a key component of the school’s focus on differentiated and tiered instruction, which also includes small group instruction, one-on-one tutoring, and in-class support. The new school schedule includes one extra hour per day for all students, four extra hours four days per week for middle school students, plus other after school options until 5:30 p.m.

According to the leadership team, 95 percent of professional development is created and delivered internally with input from teacher leaders and the instructional leadership team. According to the leadership team, teachers spend approximately two hours biweekly on in-service professional development and three to four hours per week in grade-level and subject-area team meetings. Teachers reported that the voice of the teacher has become much more important under SIG, with increased autonomy tied to higher expectations.

Orchard Gardens has made data-driven decision making a strong part of their vision for turnaround, conducting inquiry cycles (using data analysis and student assessments) every six to eight weeks to make adjustments to instruction, student groupings, and tiered interventions. Based on interim assessments, the school leadership team decided not to use some of the district's instructional programs in Math and ELA, instead selecting programs and curricula that were more relevant to their needs.

BPS provides technical assistance to SIG schools through instructional coaching contracts (focusing on ELA, Math, Writing, and implementation of the common core). BPS also provides assistance around effective use of data, working with external partners and providing technical assistance to its schools as a part of the rollout of the statewide teacher and principal evaluation system.

Springfield Public Schools

According to SPS's needs assessment, student achievement at Brookings was well below the standards that define success. According to the assessment, the school did not meet the ELA or Math performance or improvement targets, and had not made adequate yearly progress (AYP) over the past eight years. The plan to address instructional needs included providing additional instructional coaching support, professional development for teachers, and expanding the school day and school year in order to provide more time for targeted interventions and enrichment activities.

As part of the school's effort to increase academic achievement and reduce learning gaps, beginning in September 2011 the school year was extended by 135 hours to provide additional instructional time for targeted interventions and enrichment. Overall, the work year was extended by 165 additional hours, 135 of which is used for instructional time, and 30 of which is used for professional development and collaboration.

Grade level teams meet for common planning time twice each week. The entire staff meets for a 2 ½ hour extended day period every other Monday. The staff also meet for six days prior to the opening of school (school based professional development for four days and teacher selected district professional development courses for two days) and for two days at the end of the school year. In addition, instructional coaches work directly with teachers to provide embedded professional development and plan targeted whole staff professional development. Teachers regularly collect benchmark assessment data on students in both reading and math. Data are discussed during professional development sessions and are used to inform behavioral and academic interventions to differentiate instruction for students.

SPS provides technical assistance and support to schools through key external partners. The partners assist the schools in identifying key flexibilities that may be essential to each school's turnaround effort. The technical assistance provided includes assisting with planning and assessing progress, providing periodic formative assessments with on-time data analysis to assist in instructional improvement, developing instructional leadership teams and a school-wide focus on improving instruction, and building strong wraparound services for students and their families.

The district and the local teachers union arrived at a contract agreement to provide each SIG school with additional instructional time and professional collaboration hours, financial incentives for accelerating achievement, and a commitment to build a new teacher evaluation system with student growth as one factor in evaluating teacher performance.

New Governance Structure

Boston Public Schools

BPS has realigned staff to increase support and oversight of turnaround schools. They have created an Academic Superintendent position for turnaround schools, as well as a cross-functional rapid support team (C-FRST) to assist school leadership with SIG implementation.

Springfield Public Schools

SPS has created an Office of Redesign with a Chief School Redesign Officer to support and monitor SIG schools. An Internal Lead Group provides day-to-day oversight and management, including selection and implementation of SIG models.

Fiscal

The SEA reserves five percent of the State's SIG allocation and uses its reservation for SEA personnel costs (monitoring, oversight and renewal), technical assistance and support to LEAs and schools, and an evaluation of the implementation, impact and outcomes of SIG interventions. SEA staff reported that they provide guidance to SIG schools on developing budgets to support sustainability of SIG reforms.

In addition to SIG funds, other resources being used to support school turnaround efforts are Race to the Top funds. Activities supported by these funds include a network of external providers as well as training on educator evaluation and turnaround leadership.

Technical Assistance

The MDESE's approved SIG application states that the SEA will help districts analyze the needs of individual schools, support qualitative school review processes, provide tool kits and research packets, and screen and recruit providers for SIG schools. During the site visit, the SEA staff indicated that they provide ongoing district and school level support through liaisons that conduct walk-throughs and post-monitoring assistance at SIG schools. The SEA's Priority Partners initiative provides a network of pre-qualified external providers for districts and schools, and the SEA is in the process of finalizing a Sustainability Tool Kit to assist in sustaining SIG and other turnaround efforts.

Monitoring

The MDESE's application indicates that it will conduct quarterly grants monitoring and fiscal review, and annual district and school site visits for progress monitoring. SEA staff reported using an outside vendor for these site visits to look at program effectiveness, including tailored feedback to districts and schools. SEA staff reported this review as a key piece of SEA technical

assistance to districts, along with the SEA's renewal application process which focuses more specifically on compliance and budget review.

Data Collection /Use of Data

The SEA is collecting data on SIG leading and lagging indicators and is using this data to identify LEAs and schools in need of assistance. The SEA also compiles and analyzes both quantitative and qualitative data for use by SIG schools. As part of an evaluation of the impact of SIG implementation in Massachusetts, a Report of Preliminary Statewide Findings has been developed and was released in September 2012. The purpose of the evaluation is to provide the SEA with formative feedback for continuous improvement, as well as capture evidence of the progress and success of Massachusetts' turnaround efforts.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE RECOMMENDATIONS

Issue: During interviews, LEA staff reported wanting more exposure to examples of other district turnaround practices. The LEA staff also stated an interest in being part of a network of other districts that focus on turnaround.

Technical Assistance Recommendations:

- In conjunction with LEAs, develop a strategy for ongoing information sharing around effective SIG practices. (ESE)
- Explore ways that ED's School Turnaround Learning Community (STLC) could support communication and sharing between districts in MA, such as with the use of a dedicated discussion group. (ED, ESE)
- Look for opportunities for LEAs in MA to share information and strategies with districts in other states, through ED's STLC and Comprehensive Centers. (ED, ESE)

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))]	N/A	N/A
2. Implementation	The SEA ensures that the SIG intervention models are being implemented consistent with the final requirements of the SIG program. [Sections I and II of the final requirements for the School Improvement Grants authorized under section 1003(g) of Title I of Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (75 FR 66363 (October 28, 2010))]	N/A	N/A
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	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	N/A
5. Monitoring	The SEA ensures that monitoring of LEAs and schools is being conducted consistent with the final requirements of the SIG program. [Section II of the final requirements for the School Improvement Grants authorized under section 1003(g) of Title I of Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (75 FR 66363 (October 28, 2010))]	N/A	N/A
6. Data Collection	The SEA ensures that data are being collected consistent with the final requirements of the SIG program. [Sections II and III of the final requirements for the School Improvement Grants authorized under section 1003(g) of Title I of Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (75 FR 66363 (October 28, 2010))]	N/A	N/A

Monitoring Area: School Improvement Grant

No findings reported