

MONTANA
Targeted Monitoring Review of
School Improvement Grants (SIG) under section 1003(g) of the
Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965
September 13-15, 2011

BACKGROUND

Overview of SIG Schools in *Montana*

Tier	Number of FY 2009 Eligible SIG Schools	Number of FY 2009 Served SIG Schools
Tier I	7	6
Tier II	0	0
Tier III	123	0

**Implementation of
SIG School Intervention Models**

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

MONITORING TRIP INFORMATION

Monitoring Visits

LEA Visited	Pryor Public Schools
School(s) Visited	Pryor Elementary, Pryor 7-8, Plenty Coups High School
Model Implemented	Transformation
FY 2009 Funding Awarded (over three years)	LEA Award (for 3 SIG schools): \$2,287,786 School-level funding: Pryor Elementary School \$977,281; Pryor 7-8 \$333,224; Plenty Coups High School \$977,281
LEA Visited	Lame Deer Public Schools
School Visited	Lame Deer High School
Model Implemented	Transformation
FY 2009 Funding Awarded (over three years)	LEA Award (for 1 SIG school): \$3,431,381 School-level funding: \$3,431,381
SEA Visited	Montana Office of Public Instruction
FY 2009 SIG Award	\$4,361,961
FY 2009 SIG Awards to 5 LEAs	\$10,990,519
*Funds are managed directly by the SEA.	

Staff Interviewed

- **SEA Staff: 13**
- **LEA #1 Staff: 0 (The LEA and School are the same)**
- **Pryor Staff:** Elementary Principal, Superintendent/High School Principal, School Leadership Team, 3 Teachers, 6 Parents, Students, and 2 Classroom Visits
- **LEA #2 Staff: 0 (The LEA and School are the same)**

MONITORING TRIP INFORMATION

- **Lame Deer Staff:** High School Principal, Assistant High School Principal, School Leadership Team, 3 Teachers, 7 Parents, Students, and 3 Classroom Visits

U.S. Department of Education Staff

Team Leader	Carlas McCauley
Staff Onsite	<i>Vicki Robinson and Bill McGrady</i>

OVERVIEW OF MONITORING REPORT

The following report is based on U.S. Department of Education's (ED) on-site monitoring visit to Montana from September 13-15, 2011 and review of documentation provided by the State educational agency (SEA), local educational agencies (LEAs), and schools. The report consists of three sections: *Summary and Observations*, *Technical Assistance Recommendations*, and *Monitoring Findings*. The *Summary and Observations* section describes the implementation of the SIG program by the SEA, LEAs, and schools visited, initial indicators of success, and outstanding challenges being faced in implementation. This section focuses on how the SEA, LEAs, and schools visited are implementing the SIG program with respect to the following five areas: school climate, staffing, teaching and learning, use of data, and technical assistance. The *Technical Assistance Recommendations* section identifies strategies and resources for addressing technical assistance needs. The *Monitoring Findings* section identifies areas where the SEA is not in compliance with the final requirements of the SIG program and indicates required actions that the SEA must take to resolve the findings.

Please Note: The observations and descriptions included in this report reflect the specific context of the limited number of classrooms visited and interviews conducted at a small number of schools and LEAs within the State. As such, they are a snapshot of what was occurring at the LEA and school levels, and are not meant to represent a school's, LEA's, or State's entire SIG program. Nor are we approving or endorsing any particular practices or approaches by citing them.

SUMMARY AND OBSERVATIONS

Climate

Montana's Office of Public Instruction (OPI) used a needs assessment to help Pryor schools and Lame Deer High School improve their school climates through the Montana Behavioral Initiative (MBI) program. The OPI is also coordinating additional support through the community liaison's tribal partnerships, including contracting with the National Native Children's Trauma Center at the University of Montana to provide trauma awareness and intervention with students and staff. It is also contracting with the National Coalition Building Institute in Missoula to provide team-building supports for schools. The OPI has had discussions with providers of mental health services to explore increasing mental health services at the schools.

Pryor Public Schools

Pryor Public schools analyzed various data to determine its needs, such as Criterion Referenced Test (CRT) data, graduation rate, attendance rate, and board minutes. According to the needs assessment, before implementing reform efforts as part of the school intervention model, Plenty Coups High School's climate did not foster high academic expectations. The Montana Behavioral Initiative (MBI) School Climate remediation survey of students, staff, and parents, identified a need to create a more rigorous curriculum and set higher academic expectations within the school.

The school leadership team reported that in previous years student attendance and discipline were challenges for the schools. For example, some students and staff often arrived to school late every day. Likewise, Plenty Coups's parents were concerned that their students were not graduating from school. To address these issues during the first year of SIG implementation, the school instituted a new discipline plan designed to keep students in school and to improve behavior. Moreover several programs are in place to improve student attendance and behavior, such as a mentorship program and a parent-teacher home visitation program.

Lame Deer Public Schools

Lame Deer High School also analyzed various data to determine its needs, including its Criterion Referenced Test (CRT) data, graduation rate, attendance rate, and board minutes. In the needs assessment, staff at Lame Deer Public Schools identified student and teacher absenteeism as an ongoing problem and a contributing reason for low student achievement. Data from the 2009-2010 school year showed a high percentage of missed days by all staff. The needs assessment also highlighted the need to hire qualified substitute teachers so that para-professionals are not left to instruct the classrooms when teachers are absent.

To address the student attendance issues, the OPI has placed a numerous supports in the school and community. For example, community liaisons have been hired to improve the relationships with the community and are working with teachers to conduct home visits. Parents expressed that these visits are helpful. The school also has focused on building relationships between the school, community, and parents by including parent and community liaisons on the school's SIG leadership team and by creating a monthly SIG newsletter.

Staffing

Pryor Public Schools

The Pryor Public Schools's needs analysis found that schools needed to strengthen their leadership, to hire a leadership team committed to creating positive relationships and improving student academic success, and to improve the overall quality of staff.

To address these concerns, Pryor Public Schools hired new principals in 2008 and 2010. The district also proposed to the School Board a recruitment strategy for all three schools that included new incentives to attract qualified staff. The district plans to help existing staff identify areas for improvement by examining the staff's certification status and experience level.

Lame Deer Public Schools

Lame Deer High School replaced its principal. This change was not received well by the many of the staff and created some transition challenges.

Teaching and Learning

Pryor Public Schools

The Pryor Public Schools's needs assessment found that low student achievement scores were due, in part, to lack of instructional time, a transient student population, ineffective instructional strategies, and low levels of parent engagement. Scholastic Review also recommended that the district extend opportunities for learning beyond the regular school day (e.g., after-school programs or Saturday School) and develop more family involvement activities.

Lame Deer Public Schools

Recognizing through its needs assessment that it lacked sufficient collaboration time for teachers, Lame Deer High School modified the school schedule to add two hours of staff development per week to provide opportunities for teachers to work together. Staff now have the opportunity to share ideas, analyze data, and improve instructional strategies during these staff development sessions. Training has also been scheduled during faculty meetings, early release days, and after school that focuses on topics such as the following: instructional techniques, data analysis, goal development, differentiated instruction, and response to intervention.

Use of Data

Pryor Public Schools

Educators at the Pryor schools, according to the needs assessment, had little or no experience in using data systemically to inform decisions. As part of its turnaround efforts, Pryor has committed to data use and is now using data to help it make decisions about programs and instructional strategies. For example, after examining trends from state tests, district tests, and staff surveys the district implemented research-based instructional programs recommended by the Office of Public Instruction, including Algebraic Thinking and the Carnegie Learning Blended Curriculum.

This approach to data is now part of the schools' decision making process. The district has combined various data sources into one monthly student report, which includes MAPS testing in math and reading, AIMS Web, attendance, discipline, student grades, and quarterly classroom achievement reports, among other data sources. In addition, the district purchased and trained staff with Power School, a student data recording system that tracks student behavior, attendance, and academic records. This system, combined with the RTI, is expected to make it easier for the staff to identify at-risk students and place them into more intensive, strategic interventions. With these new data systems, the district is nearing its data storage capacity and is exploring ways to increase that capacity.

Lame Deer Public Schools

The needs assessment revealed that educators at Lame Deer High Schools had little or no experience in using data systemically to inform decisions. The needs assessment indicated that the district was supporting data collection and dissemination and that staff at Lame Deer High School were analyzing attendance, graduation rates, and other data.

Lame Deer High School is focused now on building in additional time to analyze data and make decisions based on the data. In interviews, the building leadership team highlighted that staff meet regularly (at least once per month) to discuss formative, interim, and summative assessments. The school's SIG team also explained that a new schedule allows for data analysis during staff development time. In these sessions, staff often focus discussion around successes and how the formative data can improve and differentiate instruction. One of the key responsibilities of the Administrative Leadership Team is to monitor data on a monthly basis.

Technical Assistance

The OPI is providing direct services to the districts, including by embedding coaches in each SIG school. Since the OPI staff is located in schools, the technical assistance has been planned and implemented jointly with the school staff. The technical assistance provided is based on the needs analysis of each school. The first year of implementation technical assistance focused primarily on professional development, core program needs, and infrastructure. OPI contracted a technology firm to complete comprehensive technology audits in each school to gain better understanding of infrastructure and staff technology needs. Additional assistance was supported for staff training in the use of student data systems, including School Master and Power School for Public Schools

The Pryor Public School District entered a memorandum of agreement with the OPI to provide intensive technical assistance to all stakeholders. The OPI provides support personnel including the Transformational Leader, the instructional coordinator, the board coach, and the community liaison.

Lame Deer School District

As in Pryor Public Schools, the Lame Deer School District entered into a memorandum of agreement with OPI to provide intensive technical assistance to all stakeholders. The SEA provides support personnel including the Transformational Leader, the instructional coach, the board coach, and the community liaison.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE RECOMMENDATIONS

This section addresses areas where additional technical assistance may be needed to improve the quality of implementation of the SIG program.

Issue: The districts and the OPI could use additional technical assistance from the Department in identifying permissible uses of the SIG funds to support the various activities of the Montana Behavioral Institute (MBI) process, i.e. education time, student incentives for appropriate behaviors, providing appropriate substitute teachers so staff can attend training, and classroom materials for teaching students expected behaviors). The OPI has requested technical assistance from ED to assist with uses of funds for support of parent engagement and student incentives. The OPI would also like information on rural-based research to improve student achievement and school performance.

Technical Assistance Strategies:

- Connect OPI with the Department’s Indian and Rural Education programs to serve as a resource for OPI and the districts. (Responsibility: ED)
- Provide information on best practices for working with American Indian students in rural areas to support the implementation of the SIG model. (Responsibility: ED)
- **To address both identified needs the OPI and individual districts may access resources and webinars offered through the School Turnaround Learning Community on parent engagement and school climate resources at <http://www.schoolturnaroundsupport.org> (Responsibility :OPI).**

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))]	NA	
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))]	NA	
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]	NA	
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))]	NA	
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))]	NA	
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))]	NA	

Monitoring Area: School Improvement Grant

There were no findings therefore this section is blank.

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

Finding

Citation:

Further action required:

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

Finding

Citation:

Further action required:

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

Finding:

Citation:

Further action required:

Critical Element 4: The SEA ensures that technical assistance is provided to its LEAs consistent with the final requirements of the SIG program.

Finding

Citation:

Further action required:

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

Citation:

Further action required:

Critical Element 6: The SEA ensures that data are being collected consistent with the final requirements of the SIG program.

Finding

Citation:

Further action required: