



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Mr. Armando Vilaseca
Secretary of Education
Vermont Department of Education
120 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05620-2501

AUG 19 2013

Dear Commissioner Vilaseca:

During the week of March 25 2013, a team from the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) Office of School Turnaround (OST) reviewed the Vermont Department of Education 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). Enclosed you will find ED's final monitoring report based upon this review.

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

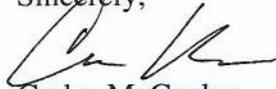
In line with these aims, the enclosed monitoring report is organized in three sections: (1) *Summary and Observation*, (2) *Technical Assistance Recommendations*, and (3) *Monitoring Findings*. The *Summary and Observations* section describes the SIG implementation occurring in the schools and districts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

Vermont Department of Education does not have any compliance issues. However, ED staff did make several technical assistance recommendations. We encourage you to employ these strategies to further support the effective implementation of the SIG program. Please be aware that the observations reported and issues identified made in the enclosed report are based on written documentation or information provided to ED by SEA, LEA, or school staff during interviews.

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

We look forward to working further with your staff to improve the quality of the SIG program in the Vermont.

Sincerely,



Carlos McCauley
Group Director
Office of School Turnaround

Enclosure

cc: State SIG Coordinator

VERMONT
Targeted Monitoring Review of
School Improvement Grants (SIG) under section 1003(g) of the
Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965
March 25-28, 2013

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANTS (SIG) MONITORING REPORT FOR VERMONT

BACKGROUND						
Models	Number of SIG Schools Implementing the Model - Cohort I		Number of SIG Schools Implementing the Model - Cohort II		Number of SIG Schools Implementing the Model - Cohort III	
Turnaround	0		NA		NA	
Transformation	10		NA		NA	
Restart	0		NA		NA	
Closure	0		NA		NA	
Tier	Number of SIG-eligible Schools	Number of SIG-funded Schools	Number of SIG-eligible Schools	Number of SIG-funded Schools	Number of SIG-eligible Schools	Number of SIG-funded Schools
Tier I	5	5	NA	NA	NA	NA
Tier II	5	5	NA	NA	NA	NA
Tier III	57	56	NA	NA	NA	NA

MONITORING TRIP INFORMATION	
Monitoring Visits and Award Amounts	
LEA Visited	Rutland City SD
School Visited	Rutland High School
Model Implemented	<i>Transformation</i>
Cohort I - FY 2009 Funding Awarded (over three years)	<i>LEA Award (for 1 SIG schools): \$850,364.00 School-level funding: \$850,364.00</i>
LEA Visited	Washington South
School Visited	Northfield Elementary School
Model Implemented	<i>Transformation</i>
Cohort I - FY 2009 Funding Awarded (over three years)	<i>LEA Award (for 1 SIG schools): \$497,200.00 School-level funding: \$497,200.00</i>
SEA Visited	Vermont Agency of Education
Total FY 2009 SEA SIG	\$1,320,614; ARRA: \$7,261,859

Allocation	
Staff Interviewed	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Vermont Agency of Education <i>Staff</i> ➤ Rutland City SD <i>Staff</i> ➤ Rutland High School <i>Staff: Principal, School Leadership Team,</i> ➤ Washington South <i>Staff</i> ➤ Northfield Elementary School <i>Staff: Principal, School Leadership Team</i> 	
U.S. Department of Education Staff	
Group Leader	<i>Carlas McCauley</i>
Staff Onsite	<i>Chuenée Boston, Kimberly Light, Sara Waly</i>

OVERVIEW OF MONITORING PROCESS

The following report is based on the U.S. Department of Education’s (ED) desk monitoring of the Vermont Department of Education from March 25-28, 2013 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 Vermont Department of Education (VDE) 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 SEA’s implementation of the SIG grant. This section also includes a brief overview of VDE’s structure and vision for the SIG implementation.
- *Summary of VDE’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 desk monitoring on March 25-28, 2013 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

Structure and Vision

The VDE has four staff dedicated to working on SIG implementation in the Division of Transformation and Innovation. Additional staff supporting the implementation of SIG includes Education Project Managers, Education Program Coordinators, and Education Consultants.

The VDE was restructured to create a multidisciplinary approach to school support and improvement statewide. A school improvement support team was formed to work with schools from the point of identification by the state accountability system through the points of application, action and remediation. A core team of individuals were identified based on experience and expertise in developing education support systems and implementing school-wide change models to improve instruction and school culture and climate.

SUMMARY OF NCDPI'S IMPLEMENTATION OF SIG CRITICAL ELEMENTS

Application Process

Awards to LEAs and from LEAs to schools were made in a timely manner. LEAs received awards according to VDE stated timelines. LEAs with schools identified for Tier I and Tier II were notified of eligibility. Priority for funding was given to LEAs submitting applications to serve their Tier I and/or Tier II schools. Superintendents with Tier I and II schools were required to submit a letter of intent to participate no later than May 15, 2010 with a full application due no later than June 15, 2010. Applications were approved and funds were made available on a rolling basis for Tier I and II schools. Award notifications were sent as the LEA applications received final approval. The first award notifications were sent on July 13, 2010.

Upon approval of the SEA's application for SIG funds, all LEAs were provided with technical assistance on the completion of the local application. A pre-application technical assistance meeting was organized to provide support for applicants. The VDE School Improvement Support team provided more intensive technical assistance to Tier I and II applicants, as needed. This included an on-site visit with LEA administrators and the school principal.

Implementation School Climate

Northfield Elementary School (NES); Washington South

According to NES's survey results, item of note of which respondents indicated were not practiced to a great extent included training and support provided to parents to enhance academic supervision of children and improve communication with teachers. In addition, according to the behavior data student conduct needed improvement.

The school leadership team indicated that student behavior has improved due to the hiring of a behavior coach to support students and teachers in the classroom and to guide the building of a system to improve school and classroom climate. In addition, NES implemented Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and a response to intervention (RTI) model of tiered interventions. Specific supports included a tailored set of prevention, intervention, and enrichment services and are coordinated by staff. According to the data, office referrals and out-of-school suspension declined. In addition, family and community engagement has improved and more parents are attending school-sponsored events.

Rutland High School (RHS); Rutland City Supervisory District (RCSD)

The needs assessment developed by RCSD indicated that prior to SIG implementation, tardiness, attendance, and behavior issues were major challenges that were not addressed systemically at RHS. The assessment also explained that expectations for student learning and behavior were low as illustrated by the lack of investment in creating instructional and behavioral guidelines for staff and students. During the interviews, the principal and district leadership stated that prior to SIG there was a focus on discipline without a school-wide behavior management strategy. Expectations for staff performance and behavior were sporadic at best, resulting in a staff that was disconnected and uninspired. Furthermore, communication with parents was inconsistent and dependent upon the level at which individual teachers decided to engage them.

According to interviews with staff, since implementing of the transformation model RHS staff reported a marked improvement in student behavior, teacher attitudes and parent participation. The school's Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) system is now enforced consistently by all staff, which has reduced suspensions, thus increasing instructional time for students. In addition, school leadership conveyed that parents and students are now more involved in academic conversations. Teachers have begun to collaborate both in the reinforcement of high expectations for students as well as with regard to curriculum planning. The relationship between teachers and leadership has significantly improved and leadership emphasizes transparency and accountability to students, teachers and parents.

According to school staff, parents and the community were not part of the district-level planning process for SIG since the time frame for planning was very short. The community was initially angered over RHS being labeled as a low-performing school, but staff reported that this galvanized the community. This year, the school has instituted a Community Engagement Committee to facilitate increased community involvement. The Committee has recently done a community survey and is currently analyzing the data.

Teachers and Leaders

Northfield Elementary School (NES); Washington South

As a part of implementing the transformation model in NES, the principal was replaced before the 2010-2011 school year began. According to the school leadership team, approximately twenty-percent of staff retired in year two of implementation. The LEA provided flexibility to hire staff. The principal worked closely with the human resources (HR) department throughout the hiring process. Northfield Elementary School provided stipend to teachers leading various aspects of the school improvement efforts.

Washington South indicated that there is a teacher evaluation system in place that includes student growth as a portion of the evaluation. The evaluation system was redesigned. The new system requires teachers to set goals related to the use of student data and allow for student data to be part of the evidence used in evaluating teachers. In addition, the new system requires teachers to collect evidence of professional growth and share progress with an audience of their choice.

Rutland High School (RHS); Rutland City Supervisory District (RCSD)

As a part of implementing the transformation model in RHS, the principal was replaced prior to the 2010-2011 school year.

Rutland City Supervisory District indicated having a teacher evaluation system in place that includes student growth as a portion of the evaluation. The system comprises of a three-year cycle that involves a four step structure, the fourth being the assessment of data sources including examples of student work. The system also includes a comprehensive observation the first year and a collaborative evaluation with improvement goals in years two and three. Student performance data must be considered as part of the evaluation. The principal is also evaluated with a student growth component, along with a self-assessment and assessments from staff.

Rutland High School has implemented incentives and opportunities for career growth and more flexible work conditions. Teachers have the opportunity to get directly involved in the process of transformation with work and study opportunities on multiple initiatives. Teacher leaders have been chosen to help lead these initiatives. Rutland High School have staff members who were given the opportunity through the financial support of the grant to lead projects in six different SIG initiatives, as well as individuals to do research on smaller research projects. Teachers who have demonstrated success implementing best practices have been rewarded with opportunities to attend remote conferences and trainings. Professional learning communities integrate both special education teachers and parent educators.

Instructional Strategies and Time

Northfield Elementary School (NES); Washington South

Northfield Elementary School's audit indicated that results for testing in the 2006 through 2009 school years, reading performance level of students on the New England Common Assessment Program were approximately fifty-five percent proficient or better compared to a statewide average for the same period. In math, NES students have averaged a proficiency level of fifty-four percent as compared to a statewide average of sixty-six percent. In grade five, for testing years 2006 through 2008, NES students demonstrated in writing a proficiency or better level averaging twenty-seven percent compared to a statewide average of fifty-one percent.

To address instructional needs, NES implemented an extended school day and year, embedded professional development, a focus use of data and formative assessments to drive instruction for mastery learning, and additional coaching and mentoring of teachers. In addition, NES hired a data team lead to guide the continuous use of data usage within grade level teams. Data acquired allows staff to assess the progress being made, address any areas of need, and change strategies within the school improvement plan to target student and teacher needs. Additionally, NES has

made data-driven decisions, adjustments to instruction, student groupings, and tiered interventions a strong part of its efforts to turn around schools.

Moreover, NES is implementing increased learning in accordance with SIG guidance. The school has increased the academic time by thirty minutes a day. The additional time allowed for the school to implement a four block reading model. In addition, NES implemented summer school, after school and vacation support time. According to the leadership team, the additional increase in time has led to an increased focus on professional development for whole group learning as well as the desire to meet the needs of individuals. Over the last two years, staff received training on the math strategies, response to intervention, and common core. Teachers also noted having common planning blocks. Furthermore, the leadership team indicated that the school has established a core group (teachers, staff, and district and state representatives) to deliver continuous training for staff

Rutland High School (RHS); Rutland City Supervisory District (RCSD)

Rutland High School audit for the 2010 NECAPs indicated that eighty-three percent of RHS juniors met the standard in reading; forty-three percent of RHS juniors met the standard in math; and sixty-one percent of RHS juniors met the standard in writing, compared to forty-nine percent for the state.

According to LEA staff, SIG allowed the district to build on pre-SIG reform initiatives. In an effort to improve achievement, RHS implemented content-area focused reading instruction throughout the school and a freshman academy. The freshman academy was designed to facilitate team collaboration and student support by enabling teachers to be available to collaborate or provide support for students during the last two blocks of the day. Structurally, the schedule facilitated curricular integration, as it allowed teachers to collaborate and to execute instruction as individuals or in teams. All freshman classes were offered during the first three blocks of the day, which could reportedly be reconfigured based on need. For example, during the first quarter, science, social studies, math, and English contributed to a water conservation project that crossed disciplines and involved the community.

Professional development for teachers was also revamped. The focus was on strategic grouping and team building. The majority of school's faculty had been trained in the area of common assessments and differentiated instruction. In addition, according to interviews, the administrative team had initiated topical book study groups and professional learning communities. Moreover, RHS also planned to expand the reach of professional development to include more training and opportunities to study and plan for a focus on global studies and STEM-type configurations.

Lastly, RHS increased the learning time by adding one hour each day after school to serve students who needed additional support. The time was open to all students. Tutoring was also provided one hour before the official start of the school day and a credit recovery program for students failing one or more courses. In addition, students could get help in four different subject areas within the regular school day, which potentially would double learning time in those subjects (up to seventy five extra minutes per day).

New Governance Structure

Northfield Elementary School (NES); Washington South

Washington South did not develop any new structures to increase support and oversight of turnaround schools. The district hired a curriculum director to assist with the development and implementation of curricula.

Rutland High School (RHS); Rutland City Supervisory District (RCSD)

Rutland City Supervisory District did not develop any new structures to increase support and oversight of turnaround schools. The district created a SIG Coach position to coordinate SIG-related activities.

Fiscal

The VDE reserved five-percent of the State's SIG allocation and used its reservation for administration, evaluation, and monitoring of its SIG-funded implementation. A limited portion of funds were used to support school improvement support coordinator positions. The funds were used to do the following: 1) provide training to state school improvement support coordinators and school improvement coaches at a regional and local level; 2) develop capacity through use of regional ESA's (Education Service Agencies) to support LEAs in this work on an ongoing basis. 3) engage stakeholders and supporting partners in developing a statewide system to improve instruction and learning; 4) provide comprehensive evaluations to inform planning and implementation for Tier I & II schools and Tier III schools who have been in Corrective Action in the state system for 4 years or more; 5) develop resource materials, electronic and otherwise, to support instructional improvement, systems evaluation, and related school improvement networks; and 6) engage the Center on Improvement and the New England Comprehensive Center in working with the state of Vermont to develop a statewide system of support for improving instruction and learning outcomes.

The VDE funded each cohort of SIG schools in accordance with the guidance of SIG. The SIG funds were allotted to districts committing to serve its Tier I and Tier II schools. After funding all Tier I and Tier II schools, the VDE determined that sufficient funds remained to approve additional LEA applications and funds were made available to LEAs for Tier III schools.

According to interviews, the VDE ensured that SIG funds were spent on allowable activities through the use of established systems and reports. On a monthly basis, each LEA was required to submit all financial data. This includes all expenditures from state, federal and local accounts, details of all checks written, and all Social Security payroll records. To ensure that all personnel expenditures are appropriate, the VDE audits expenditures coded to certified personnel. In addition, School Improvement Coordinators met with LEAs on a quarterly basis for review of progress on required activities, as well as updates on SIG funds. Budget amendments were accepted at any time throughout the year.

To ensure that its LEAs adhered to the proper accounting of time and attendance for SIG paid staff, the VDE conducted on-site monitoring of its grantees.

Technical Assistance

In the VDE approved SIG application, the SEA states that it will provide intensive technical assistance through the school support coach on, at minimum, a monthly basis for Tier I and II schools and a quarterly basis for Tier III schools. This intensive technical assistance may include site visits, systems change guidance, support and training, implementation coaching, and fidelity checks that may include self-assessments as well as external reviews including interviews with students, faculty and administrative leaders, parents and community members.

During the desk monitoring, the LEAs and schools indicated that the SEA provides ongoing district and school level support through school support coaches and educational consultants that conduct on site coaching and assistance at SIG schools. The LEA and schools receive support from the Division of Transformation and Innovation within VDE. Each SIG school is assigned a School Improvement Coordinator or Program Manager who is available to offer a monthly technical assistance, quarterly technical assistance, and monitoring meetings with leadership teams.

During the desk monitoring, the LEAs and schools requested additional technical assistance in identifying how states are using student growth in the decision making process.

Monitoring

The VDE plan for monitoring the implementation of the SIG program includes on-site and desk reviews for all schools in the LEA receiving SIG funds or participating in LEA-level activities provided with SIG funds. According to the SEA application, progress toward SIG implementation plan goals will be assessed and reported quarterly by the LEA implementation team and biannually by the SEA School Support team working with that LEA. Fidelity measures and evaluations including self-evaluations will be used in determining progress toward implementation. In addition, on-going fiscal monitoring through review of expenditure reports and fund requests will be conducted in tandem by the SEA School Support Coach and financial office.

During the desk monitoring, both districts indicated that they either received or is scheduled to receive fiscal monitoring by the state. Program monitoring takes place with the school improvement coordinators and managers. Coordinators and managers have ongoing conversations with schools concerning progress on activities in grant, effectiveness of activities, what local data is showing, and amendments needed to budget. Conversation specifically concerning progress on required activities occurs quarterly with reports from schools submitted mid-year and at the end-of-year. The VDE has implemented its monitoring plan as specified.

Data Collection /Use of Data

The VDE indicated in its approved SIG application that it would collect SIG leading and lagging indicator data. The VDE is collecting data on all SIG leading and lagging indicators. The SEA 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. Vermont also is in the process of implementing Indistar, a tool that will assist with the collection of data and progress monitoring.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE RECOMMENDATIONS

Issue: During the desk monitoring, the LEAs and schools requested additional technical assistance in identifying how states are using student growth in the decision making process.

Technical Assistance Recommendations:

- Consult with national content centers on Great Teachers and Leaders to provide research on best practices on the role of student growth data in the decision making process. (VTDOE)

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