



## UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

March 29, 2016

Dear SIG Directors,

I am writing today to follow up on the letter that Senior Advisor Ann Whalen sent on January 28, 2016 regarding the use of fiscal year (FY) 2016 funds. Specifically, this letter provides information on the availability and use of FY 2015 and FY 2016 funds under the School Improvement Grants (SIG) program in light of the recent enactment of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA).

Although SIG is not one of the programs extended through ESSA, the FY 2015 and FY 2016 SIG funds that Congress appropriated remain available for obligation. Specifically, under the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015, Congress appropriated FY 2015 SIG funds that are available for obligation by States and local educational agencies (LEAs) through September 30, 2017, while, under the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016, Congress appropriated FY 2016 SIG funds that are available for obligation by States and LEAs through September 30, 2018. Furthermore, under section 421(b) of the General Education Provisions Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1225(b), the governing statutory provision on the period for obligation of the SIG funds, these funds must be administered throughout their period of availability consistent with section 1003(g) of the ESEA, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and the SIG final requirements as set forth in 80 FR 7223 (Feb. 9, 2015) (together, referred to herein as the SIG final requirements).

### State discretion to continue SIG beyond the 2017–2018 school year

Although a State and its LEAs must comply with current SIG final requirements only throughout the period of SIG fund availability (*i.e.*, through the 2016-2017 school year for FY 2015 funds and through the 2017–2018 school year for FY 2016 funds), we note that the SIG final requirements were designed, consistent with research as well as input from the field, to support implementation of rigorous interventions in identified schools for a period of three to five years. In fact, Congress provided the option of extending SIG implementation to a full five years beginning with the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014. This change was consistent with feedback the U.S. Department of Education (Department) received from States and LEAs, and was incorporated into the SIG final requirements. Consequently, the Department encourages States to take steps to ensure that LEAs can implement SIG interventions for the full period.

To that end, at a State's discretion, we have identified two options from which a State may choose in order to support up to five years of SIG implementation. First, and consistent with previous waivers granted under the SIG program, particularly for the use of SIG funds provided by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, a State may choose to request a waiver of the period of availability of SIG funds beyond September 30, 2017 or September 30, 2018 for FY 2015 and FY 2016 SIG funds, respectively. Such a waiver would allow a State to use FY 2015 and FY 2016 funds to “frontload” grants (*i.e.*, to use those funds to pay for multiyear SIG awards of up to five years in duration). A State may request a waiver of the period of availability of FY 2015 and FY 2016 SIG funds by completing “waiver

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<http://www.ed.gov/>

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1” and “waiver 2” of Section I, Part 1 of the State application, respectively. Please note that a State that receives a waiver of the period of availability of SIG funds must continue to comply with the SIG final requirements throughout the extended period of availability of those funds and must begin to implement activities required under section 1003(a) of the ESEA, as amended by ESSA, beginning with FY 2017 funds. Second, a State may choose, but is not required, to use funds that it reserves in FY 2017 and future years under section 1003(a) of the ESEA, as amended by ESSA, to support full implementation of SIG awards initially made with prior-year funds.<sup>1</sup>

### State application

The Department is implementing a streamlined application process for FY 2015 and FY 2016 SIG funds, and the State SIG application is available at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/index.html>. Each State must submit this single application to receive both its FY 2015 and FY 2016 SIG allocations. In order to further streamline the process and reduce burden on States, a State that intends to use FY 2015 and FY 2016 SIG funds exclusively for continuation awards, including for sustaining reforms in a school for a fourth and fifth year, must submit only a signed cover letter and the continuation awards application page.

A State that intends to use all or some portion of its FY 2015 and FY 2016 SIG funds for new awards, including new awards to unfunded applicants from its FY 2014 competition, must submit:

- (1) A signed cover letter;
- (2) A list of eligible schools (section A, part 1);
- (3) The completed assurances (section G, part 1);
- (4) Any applicable waiver requests (section I, part 1);
- (5) A description of the State’s timeline for implementing SIG with FY 15 and FY 16 SIG funds (section E, part 1);
- (6) A description of the use of State administrative funds (section H, part 1); and
- (7) Information about its State-determined intervention model, if appropriate (section B, part 1).

A State with an approved FY 2014 application for a new awards competition that chooses to use its FY 2015 and FY 2016 SIG funds consistent with that approved application, including by making new awards to unfunded applicants from its FY 2014 competition, need not submit any information other than the seven items listed above. If such a State chooses to make any amendments to its approved FY 2014 application, it should submit those amendments in addition to the items listed above.

A State without an approved FY 2014 application for a new awards competition must also complete the following sections of the application:

- (1) Application review process with respect to family and community engagement (sections C.1 and C.8);
- (2) Application review process with respect to LEA oversight and support for schools (section C.7);
- (3) Application review process with respect to LEA implementation of evidence-based strategies (section C.10) ;
- (4) Application review process with respect to, as applicable, LEA plans for meeting the intent and purpose of rural flexibility (section C.12);
- (5) Application review process with respect to LEAs’ selection of restart operators and external providers (section C.14);
- (6) SEA’s process for reviewing LEAs’ proposed budgets (section D.1); and

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<sup>1</sup> We note that the reauthorized ESEA increases the amount of Title I, Part A funds that States must reserve for school improvement. Specifically, under section 1003(a) of the ESEA as amended by ESSA, in FY 2017 a State must reserve the greater of: (1) seven percent of its combined Title I, Part A allocations to its LEAs; or (2) the sum of its FY 2016 section 1003(a) reservation (a maximum of four percent of its Title I, Part A allocations) and its FY 2016 allocation under the SIG program.

- (7) SEA’s process for renewing SIG funds after a school year of planning and other pre-implementation activities for a school (section F.2).

Applications are due to the Department by May 27, 2016. The Department will review applications on a rolling basis and make FY 2015 awards to each State once its application is approved. The Department will make FY 2016 awards in early October 2016 based on your approved application.

On Tuesday, April 5, 2016, at 3 pm EDT, the Department’s Office of State Support (OSS) will conduct a webinar to provide assistance to States in completing the application for FY 2015 and FY 2016 SIG funds. The webinar will, among other things, provide an update on the SIG program, outline application requirements, and describe specific program requirements. Additional information about the webinar will be provided in the coming days.

Call for evidence-based, whole-school reform models and request for feedback on socioeconomic diversity

Additionally, we are posting on our website two other important items today. First, the Department is inviting submissions of prospective evidence-based, whole-school reform models for review and identification for use under the SIG program. Please visit <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/npr-wholeschlreform.html> for additional information. Prospective models must be submitted no later than April 29, 2016.

Second, the Department is seeking feedback from States, LEAs, and other stakeholders about how SIG funds may be used to support socioeconomic diversity. Please visit <http://blog.ed.gov/> for additional information and submit comments to [SIG.StrongerTogether@ed.gov](mailto:SIG.StrongerTogether@ed.gov) no later than April 12, 2016.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to improving educational outcomes for all students and to turning around the lowest performing schools. I look forward to our continued partnership as we move ahead with this critical work.

Sincerely,

/s/

Patrick Rooney  
Acting Director  
Office of State Support

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