



# School Turnaround

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## Introducing the School Turnaround Learning Community

We have a big announcement from our school turnaround team this month: the launch of the **School Turnaround Learning Community (STLC)**, an online community of practice for state, district, and school leaders implementing school turnarounds.

The STLC provides one-stop access to resources on school turnaround, and it promotes and facilitates sharing across states and districts to deepen learning on the issue over time. Available resources on the STLC include research-based practices and practical examples from states, districts, and schools inventing on-the-ground solutions. The STLC

also facilitates regular activities such as training, discussions, and Q&A sessions with experts on school turnaround implementation.

We know from our visits to different SIG schools and talking with superintendents and principals across the country that

there's a great need for this kind of platform to share information and to continue to grow as professionals together. We encourage those of you who haven't signed up for the community to do so and ask that you share your feedback and suggestions on how to make the STLC even more useful to your work. We at the Department are truly excited to make this resource available to you. Most of all, we look forward to joining this community with you and learning about all the wonderful, innovative work you are doing in your schools every day.



*Thelma Meléndez de Santa Ana,  
Assistant Secretary*

To join the STLC, visit [www.schoolturnaroundsupport.org](http://www.schoolturnaroundsupport.org).

## Spotlight on Nevada: Monitoring the Implementation of SIG

The "dynamic duo" – that's what Sue Moulden-Horton, who oversees School Improvement Grants (SIG) for Nevada, calls the team that has created a successful monitoring system to help oversee SIG implementation across the state. The partnership consists of staff from the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) and the Southwest Comprehensive Center at WestEd, who worked together to create a handbook and a framework for evaluating the progress districts and schools were making in their turnaround efforts.

For Moulden-Horton, the decision to partner with WestEd was easy.

"Due to the fact that the NDE does not have the capacity to work with all of our schools, we

needed to reach out to our comprehensive center to assist us in this process," she said.

Nevada is home to 17 school districts. Three districts – Washoe County, Clark County, and Carson City – applied for SIG grants, and Nevada awarded grants to 10 schools, creating its first SIG cohort.

To help monitor the implementation of SIG at these schools, Moulden-Horton turned to an online monitoring tool originally created by WestEd in 2004 to help Utah improve its Title I monitoring efforts. Since then, WestEd has made the tool available for all states served by the Southwest Comprehensive Center.

"Each state uses the tool differently, because it has a

monitoring side and a planning side. Nevada had only used the monitoring side ... but after lots of talking about monitoring SIG and how we were going to do this work, we said to ourselves, 'why don't we have our SIG schools use the planning side?'" said Moulden-Horton.

In addition to the online tool, WestEd and the state produced an evaluation handbook that was developed for SIG based on the work by Dean Fixsen and Karen Blase. Moulden-Horton says the handbook helped provide the framework and a starting point for the overall monitoring plan. NDE used the handbook throughout the first year of the SIG program; a revised, lessons-learned version will be released in July.

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*“But now, after the first year of working with schools and districts, I really believe that SIG is one of the best programs that has ever come out.”*

*- Dr. Moulden-Horton,  
Nevada Department of  
Education*



#### About Charlotte Danielson

Charlotte Danielson is an educational consultant based in Princeton, N.J., who has worked on teacher evaluation systems for the past 10 years. She has taught at all levels, from kindergarten through college, and has worked as an administrator, a curriculum director, and a staff developer. In her consulting work, Danielson has specialized in aspects of teacher quality and evaluation, curriculum planning, performance assessment, and professional development. She was a featured speaker on teacher evaluation systems at the Regional Capacity Building Conferences this Spring.

## Spotlight on Nevada

*Continued from page 1*

### Monitoring SIG Schools

The first step in monitoring the progress of Nevada’s SIG schools began with bringing all 10 schools into NDE.

“We put them in front of the computer, trained them on how to use the planning system, and had them enter their SIG plans, budgets, and all other information into the tool,” said Moulden-Horton.

Once the information was in place, Moulden-Horton was able to go into the system at any time and keep in touch with the districts and schools without having to physically travel to the sites. She tracked the progress of each SIG school and left comments for each site to address. The districts and schools, in turn, used the system

to respond to any inquiries from Moulden-Horton, update their status on a particular goal, and upload evidence and other documents to show the work that was happening on the ground.

In addition to online monitoring of schools, Moulden-Horton and a WestEd staff member visit each of the SIG schools four times over the course of the year. The team spends half a day at each school, interviewing principals, coaches, and other trainers hired with SIG funds to work with the teachers. The team holds teacher focus groups with a different group of teachers each visit.

The team also spends half a day interviewing district leaders and staff. In such instances, the team offers advice and resources from WestEd and other organizations like the Center for Innovation and Improvement, and suggestions for improvement. After the visit, the team creates a report that details accomplishments, observations, next steps, and a ranking score

based on the indicator rubric in the evaluation handbook. The scores are based on how well the district or school is implementing its SIG plan.

Moulden-Horton admits that it can be a struggle for districts to see their scores based on the rubric, but she says that districts have not been reluctant to make changes based on the feedback provided through the visits.

For example, said Moulden-Horton, “[in our first visit to one district], we asked the staff, ‘how do you know if your coaches and your principal are doing a good job? Where’s the data?’ Well, they didn’t have any. So I said that we needed to come up with a plan, and asked district staff if they’ve ever thought of doing 360 degree evaluations.”

To read the full article, visit: <http://www.ed.gov/Spotlight-on-Nevada-SIG>.

## Developing Effective Teacher Evaluation Systems

### A Conversation with Charlotte Danielson

*Note: This article does not constitute an endorsement by the Department of Education (ED). The interview is the first of several resources that ED plans to share in the future on teacher evaluation systems. More resources will be available at [www.schoolturnaroundsupport.org](http://www.schoolturnaroundsupport.org).*

**ED: What makes a teacher evaluation system effective, and why is it so difficult for schools and districts to put effective systems into place?**

**Charlotte Danielson (CD):** The bottom line, I’ve discovered, is that when you do this work [of teacher evaluations] well, it produces growth for teachers. I’ve worked across the country and around the world trying to help people do this work well by developing training and

helping them design systems. Specifically, the procedures that you use [to evaluate teachers] must be ones that do what we know can produce teacher learning. Now, this is not easy to do. Just because we know how to do it doesn’t mean it’s easy.

One problem people point to is that there’s no time to do it well. To some degree, that’s true. In your typical teacher evaluation system, it’s mostly the principals and some assistant principals who do evaluations. But these leaders have to do other things – they have to manage day-to-day operations and handle other issues which have the advantage of being of more immediate concern. Some schools choose to get around this by delegating work out – either the management piece

or the evaluations piece.

But what I’ve found is that it doesn’t take any longer to implement a teacher evaluation system well than to do it poorly. Most schools, however, just don’t know how to do it well.

**ED: What are the first steps that SIG schools and districts should take when re-thinking their teacher evaluation systems?**

**CD:** First, there needs to be an intense dialogue with faculty members about what constitutes good teaching. They need to develop a shared understanding of what is good practice.

To read the full interview, visit: <http://www.ed.gov/Teacher-Evaluation-Systems>.

## NEA Partners with SIG Schools in Priority Schools Campaign

In 2009, more than 9,000 educators attending NEA’s representative assembly responded to President Obama’s policy on turning around low-performing schools by voting to direct NEA’s resources toward transforming struggling schools. As a result, the Priority Schools Campaign was born.

“NEA seized on the public policy window afforded by the [Obama] Administration’s School Improvement Grant program to leverage our resources as a complement,” said Sheila Simmons, the director of the NEA Priority Schools Campaign.

Today, the NEA is working directly with 35 schools implementing School Improvement Grants (SIG) in 25 districts across the country, providing intensive technical assistance to schools and districts as well as providing other resources to support the success of school turnarounds. Each of NEA’s priority schools has a two-year plan for improvement that was co-created with local and state union affiliates, the district, and the NEA. The union also provides strategic and on-the-ground support at no cost on matters such as educator practice and professional development, family and community engagement, communications support, and collective bargaining.



“It may be a shock to those stuck on so-called conventional wisdom, but unions aren’t obstructionists; in fact, we are helping to lead the way!” said Simmons. “Partnerships between schools, districts, and

educators may be surprising, but make no mistake – the Priority Schools Campaign is changing the game and moving the reform conversation.”

### The Making of the Priority Schools Campaign

With the support of the NEA Foundation, NEA created a school-based, operationalized framework for the Priority Schools Campaign that focuses the organization’s support in three areas:

1. Support and advocacy for priority

schools as they implement SIG, including professional development, school visits, and local advocacy on behalf of the schools.

2. Organizational capacity building to improve leadership skills of teachers and school leaders, and to increase collaboration among the superintendent, the district, and the leadership of the local union.
3. Engagement and outreach to better involve the community and to successfully communicate the successes of each school as it undergoes turnaround.

While NEA started with 15 target states and 300 schools, it narrowed its focus to a smaller group of schools and states to distill best practices. In each of the 31 Priority Schools, the NEA has a team member working directly with the local union president and staff. Working with all local stakeholders, the team creates a two-year plan for the school built around the three components of NEA’s framework for support.

To read the full article, visit: [www.ed.gov/NEA-Partners-with-SIG-Schools](http://www.ed.gov/NEA-Partners-with-SIG-Schools).

## SIG Grant Invested in Teachers, Technology at Rural Turnaround

By John White, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Rural Outreach at the U.S. Department of Education

This article originally appeared as a blog post on the [Department’s blog](#).

Teachers and administrators in the rural village of DePue, Ill. – more than 100 miles southwest of Chicago – are connecting with their colleagues and students in new and exciting ways as they lead the difficult work of turning around academic achievement in their local high school.

Like many who traveled to this month’s federal 2011 Midwest Regional School Improvement Grant Capacity-Building Conference in Chicago, the DePue School District team is investing heavily in teacher and administrator training to improve instruction. With help from the Department of Education’s School Improvement Grants, it is also deploying the latest technologies to provide students and adults with a new world of learning opportunities.

Robert Libka, who leads a transformation team of 10 educators at DePue High School, used Skype to connect with a teacher in

Indonesia during a recent professional development workshop. “It was 1 a.m. her time and she was interested enough in our work to log-in,” said Libka, adding that he wants DePue teachers to know their work is important and can have global impact. Technologies such as Skype can improve collaboration for rural educators and reduce their sense of isolation.

English teacher Mary Flor uses an interactive white board to guide her class of seniors to research on poetry classics. Her students use their laptops to dive deeper into the material than would be possible with only a text book. These new tools are being used to enrich classroom discussions through wireless Internet at school, which is the only online access available to some DePue students. DePue is also using technology to give its students a head start for college. Many of

them are the first in their families to attend college. It offers college-level coursework to its students online through a partnership with nearby Illinois Valley Community College.



Teacher Tim Stevens uses

computer software to help students prepare for the ACT college entrance exam, which is mandatory for all 11th-graders in Illinois as a part of its state assessment. The individually paced instruction has helped some students boost both their scores and their confidence in going on to college.

A transformation is under way at DePue High School – one that is designed to prepare every student for success in college and the career of their choice.

# Extending Learning Time for Student Success

An Interview with Ron Karsen, Principal of Dayton Street School in Newark, N.J.

**The Department of Education (ED): Explain your model for extended learning time. How did you come to this model, and why do you think it has been successful?**

**Principal Ron Karsen (RK):** I've been an educator for quite a few years. I've worked in a high school, elementary school, and at the central office. Throughout my work, it's always been assumed that students will achieve more if they have more time in class. We tried things like afterschool and Saturday and morning programs. But when I looked at the outcomes-based data, I saw that we didn't get the biggest bang with that kind of approach. There was just a whole litany of variables that worked against what these programs were trying to achieve through more learning time.

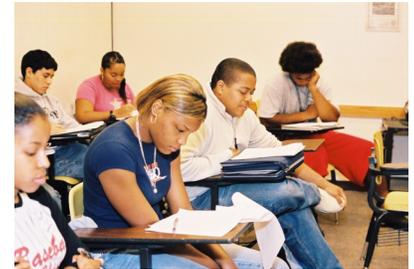
When we received the SIG funds, we were awarded a nice chunk of money. So we sat down as a school community with all the stakeholders and set some goals for ourselves. The first and most important goal is student achievement. To get there, I needed to put highly effective teachers in front of my kids every day who could teach written curriculum and align it to spoken curriculum. We wanted to make sure we had sound instructional practices. Of course, this was easier to say than do, especially when the teachers were leaving at 3 p.m.

We decided that we needed to build in more time for content areas during the day and also support teachers and help build their content capacity. To build in more time, we changed the whole school day: now, it's from 8:35 a.m. to 4:35 p.m. every day. We doubled the time for math, doubled the time for language arts, and ensured that students had the opportunity to take an hour of science and social studies every day.

Now that I had more time for my kids in the classroom, I thought, how do I support teachers? With extended time and the addition of support staff, we were able to provide more time for teachers away from the classroom. The extended learning schedule gives teachers an additional three hours a week for collaborative planning, both horizontally and vertically. Teachers have more time to meet, and we built in content-based, job-embedded professional development. We have coaches, master teachers from Seton Hall University, and two content practitioners who spend time with every teacher, planning with them, doing demo lessons, and reflection sessions – it's built so that teachers become practitioners.

In summary, throughout the year, we give kids extra time, support for teachers, and time for planning for teachers. We build professional learning

communities, engage in content-based dialogue, and monitor teachers more frequently with spot observations from the administration. It's only been one year, so we are in the early stages of transformation.



**ED: What is the buy-in currently among teachers for these changes? How did you encourage buy-in?**

**RK:** Last year, when we applied for the grant, we talked through the components of the grant and asked each teacher about extending learning time. Out of the entire staff, only two people couldn't do it – and that was because of personal reasons or obligations.

My first year at the school, we spent a lot of time on building the climate and the culture. It made buy-in of the changes for SIG easier.

To read the full interview, visit: [www.ed.gov/Extending-Learning-Time](http://www.ed.gov/Extending-Learning-Time).



**The Department of Education is focused on promoting student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by**

**fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access. The Office of Elementary and Secondary Education strives to enhance educational opportunities and equity for all America's children and families as well as improve the quality of teaching and learning by providing leadership, technical assistance, and financial support.**

## Call for Submissions: Share your SIG Success Stories

Across the country, there are close to 1,000 schools implementing one of the four intervention models under SIG. In just under a year, many of these schools have seen encouraging growth in leading indicators as well as transformations in school culture and climate. The Department of Education believes these stories must be shared widely – to highlight successes, to inspire colleagues, and to validate the work being done in your communities.

We are calling on all educators who are undertaking school turnarounds to make your story known by sharing with us the positive changes you are seeing in your schools and districts. Specifically, we are asking states and districts to submit names and contact information of schools that are making improvements under the SIG grant. Your school may then be featured in an upcoming School Turnaround Newsletter.

Please submit the name of the school, contact information, and a brief summary of school highlights to [school.improvement.grants@ed.gov](mailto:school.improvement.grants@ed.gov). We look forward to hearing back from you!