



School Turnaround

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Building Communities of Practice

As we head into spring, we are now more than halfway through the first school year of SIG implementation. For states, districts, and schools, this is a great time to reflect on the past six months, look at the data and information you've collected, and see what's working so far – and what you might need to change before the end of the school year. Many of you are already doing this, and I'm excited to hear about the progress happening across the country. I encourage you to communicate with us on a regular basis about the improvements you are seeing in your schools, so we can spread the word and celebrate your successes.

I believe the practice of sharing with colleagues and building communities of practice is critical to the success of SIG, and to the

success of teaching and learning in schools. This is why I'm looking forward to the upcoming SIG Regional Conferences, where we hope to facilitate this type of learning on a broader level with our conference participants. The conferences are also an opportunity for us at the federal level to hear from you on ways we can better support you to ensure the success of SIG. As I've mentioned before in this newsletter, improving our technical assistance efforts is a

key priority for OESE, and the regional

Dr. Thelma Meléndez de Santa Ana,
Assistant Secretary



conferences are a part of a more comprehensive technical assistance strategy specifically designed for SIG. More information on the conferences are included in this issue of the newsletter, and we will share new information on our technical assistance efforts as they become available.

I want to thank you all for this work you are doing to turnaround our lowest-performing schools. As you know, the Department of Education strongly believes that turning around these schools will be a win for our students, for families, and for entire communities. This is extremely difficult work. But it can be done, and we in OESE and the Department of Education are committed to supporting you, every step of the way.

Spring 2011 SIG Regional Conferences

In partnership with our Comprehensive Centers, OESE is hosting a series of regional capacity building conferences to help support state education agencies (SEAs), local education agencies (LEAs), and schools implementing SIG. Four conferences are planned to facilitate peer-to-peer sharing and learning. For more information on the conferences and how to register, please visit www.2.ed.gov/programs/sif/resources.html#conf.

DATE/LOCATION	REGION	CONFERENCE THEME
April 5-6, 2011 Los Angeles, CA	Western Contact: Meg Livingston Asensio, mliving@WestEd.org	The Role of State, District, and School Leadership in Turning Around Low Performing Schools
April 13-14, 2011 Washington, DC	Eastern Contacts: Robin Ahigian, rahigia@wested.org and Jan Phlegar, jphlega@wested.org	The Role of State, District, and School Leadership in Turning Around Low Performing Schools
May 18-19, 2011 Chicago, IL	Midwest Contact: Barbara Youngren, byoungren@air.org	High Schools
May 24-25, 2011 Denver, CO	Central Contact: Anne Tweed, atweed@mcrcel.org	Rural School Turnaround and Serving Native American Students

Promising Practices: State Turnaround Teams Share SIG Experiences

ED spoke with four state turnaround teams about their experiences in their first year implementing SIG, the lessons learned, and the advice they'd give to other state turnaround teams. All four interviews yielded common themes, but each team provided its own perspective on the unique challenges of their particular state.



“One challenge we are encountering is figuring out how we at the state level evaluate ourselves, and how we know if we’re effective.”

- Angela Denning, Arizona



ARIZONA

Angela Denning, Deputy Associate Superintendent of School Improvement and Intervention

Teri Regan, Director of LEA and School Improvement-North Region.

Arizona’s school turnaround team centers their SIG support system on four factors: 1) Technical Assistance (TA), 2) Professional Development, 3) Progress Monitoring, and 4) Compliance monitoring. While the state had focused on school improvement and intervention before the revamping of SIG, the new focus on turning around schools has provided an opportunity for Arizona to define a more structured, comprehensive system

of support. Angela Denning, the Deputy Associate Superintendent of School Improvement and Intervention oversees four regional directors who coordinate teams that provide direct support to districts.

Q: What are some of the challenges your team has faced in the first year of SIG implementation?

A: One challenge we are encountering is figuring out how we at the state level evaluate ourselves, and how we know if we’re effective with this SIG work. Right now, we’re asking districts to think about what’s been most effective for them in implementation. This way, they can reflect, learn, and get

better. But we have to do this at our level, too – we truly believe we have to walk the walk. So, we have an internal evaluator that we’re working with to define indicators and measurements to evaluate our effectiveness.

Q: What are lessons learned from your experience with SIG?

A: We changed a few things going into the second round. We’ve instituted an onsite visit from a cadre of education experts – who we call “solution teams” – for districts with low-performing schools.

To read the full interview, visit www.ed.gov/oese-news/state-turnaround-teams-arizona.

ILLINOIS

Monique Chism, Division Administrator, Innovation & Improvement, Illinois State Board of Education

In Illinois, the SIG team is currently housed under the Office for Innovation and Improvement. In addition to Dr. Chism, there are four staff members that are dedicated to SIG work. Illinois has plans to create a Center for School Improvement that will house the school support and school turnaround teams. The Center will hire additional staff to help support SIG work and provide more direct technical assistance (TA) for districts. The state anticipates the Center to be open by January 2012.

Q: What are some of the challenges your team has faced in the first year of SIG implementation?

A: In the first year, we had a lot of questions from the field about the different SIG requirements and expectations for the grant. Many people just didn’t have good examples of implementation. Things like extended learning time, operational flexibility, embedded professional development – people wanted concrete examples of those practices.

Based on this experience, we put together a four-course series for round two of SIG on what good school improvement looks like. These are actual 90 minute courses which an external provider – Turnaround Learning – helped put together that provides

more support for districts and schools on SIG.

Q: What are lessons learned from your experience with SIG so far?

A: We really learned from the first round the importance of community and parent engagement in SIG. The challenge with round one was the turnaround time – the timeline was so tight that there wasn’t a lot of opportunity for districts to do much. Whenever you’re going through this radical reform – there’s going to be a level of pushback. The best thing to do is to make sure that people feel they have voice in the process.

To read the full interview, visit www.ed.gov/oese-news/state-turnaround-teams-illinois.

MINNESOTA

Pat King, Director of the Office of Turnaround Schools

The Office of Turnaround Schools works solely with SIG schools in Minnesota to offer support and assistance in implementing the grant. The Office has in-house staff who work on program management, budget, and monitoring, as well as field-based staff who support schools in different regions of the state. Field staff members are carefully matched with the needs of the schools; for example, the staff member who works with northern Minnesota schools – which have a high Native American student population – has expertise in serving Native American students. Support provided to districts and schools are based on need and existing capacity, so a rural district may receive more specialized support than large, metropolitan districts.

Q: How are you helping your districts and schools build capacity?

A: An example is providing districts

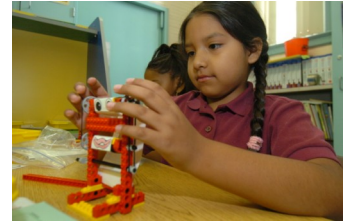
and schools more guidance on how to lead Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). There is not one right model, but we're providing more training on best practices. Our goal is to go in and work with a school, and train the trainer. We know that in three years, we [state staff members] are going to be gone. We want districts and schools to take ownership right from the beginning. We're implementing our capacity building from the perspective that if any leader of the school or district leaves, this program or school reform model will continue. It's extremely important for reforms to not depend on one entity.

We have tried to help districts make the connection with their community to help them understand what the community has to offer in terms of helping with school turnarounds. We provided states with a webinar on practices to engage the community. But a lot of them are doing that already.

Q: What are lessons learned

from your experience with SIG so far?

A: First of all, we now know what we are talking about when it comes to SIG. Since we've done it before, the application process also will go a lot smoother. We've learned that we need to be more proactive in communicating the message.



We also learned how hard the principal replacement message was – we had a lot of tough conversations the first time around. Based on past experiences, some people thought principal replacement wouldn't end up being a real requirement, but the Department held fast to that. It was really good to know that the Department had our back, so that when we say something, the field knows we mean it. We've built our reputation on trust, honesty, and integrity.

To read the full interview, visit www.ed.gov/oese-news/state-turnaround-teams-minnesota.

WASHINGTON

Tonya Middling, Director of Secondary Education and School Improvement

Janell Newman and Bill Rossman, SIG Coordinators

The Washington State Department of Education's state turnaround office, established last year, focuses solely on SIG – from the state application, to reviewing and selecting district grantees, to overseeing implementation in schools. In addition to state employees who are working on SIG, the turnaround team is also staffed by four contractors who provide direct support to districts and monitor implementation of the grant.

Q: How are you helping your districts and schools build capacity?

A: With the first cohort of SIG grantees, we started a network of schools where we started initial

training in the first 90 days. That network met for four days throughout the summer and three days during the year, where we provided support in building competency in things like human capital. We customize the support we provide based on what schools are struggling with the most and what they need, based on feedback and on the needs assessment we conducted.

Another example of capacity building is the way we're dealing with monitoring. Initially, we did high level monitoring during our implementation visits. One of the ways we're building capacity now, using the tools provided by the Department of Education, is helping districts take on the role of monitoring.

Q: What other support would you like to see from the federal government?

A: An issue we've had is with

competing legislation. For example, some of our schools are receiving 21st century grants, so we're coordinating with another division in the state office so that our schools are meeting requirements for both 21st century grants and SIG. Any additional TA or guidance when we come up against those conflicts would be helpful.

The Department has done well [in its support] but should remain mindful of questions that come from states when there are challenges to interpretation of rules and guidance. We have a strong union presence in most of our districts, and at times, the state leadership of unions interpret guidance a little differently than we might. So instead of battling with them directly, we ask for the Department's interpretation so we get clarity.

To read the full interview, visit www.ed.gov/oese-news/state-turnaround-teams-washington.

School Turnaround Resources

DOING WHAT WORKS: TURNING AROUND CHRONICALLY LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, Doing What Works (DWW) is an online library of resources that may help teachers, schools, districts, states and technical assistance providers implement research-based instructional practice. DWW offers a Practice Guide on School Turnarounds that was developed by an Expert Panel convened by the Institute of Education Sciences. The Guide highlights four recommended practices: 1) Improved Leadership, 2) Focus on Instruction, 3) Quick Wins, and 4) Committed Staff. To learn more, please visit http://dww.ed.gov/topic/?T_ID=21.

STATE IMPLEMENTATION AND SCALING UP OF EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES CENTER (SISEP)

ED's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has funded a center designed to assist States in building the organizational and procedural supports necessary to take existing effective practices to scale. The SISEP Center currently works with selected States (Illinois, Minnesota, and Oregon) to develop capacity, while other States are receiving less intensive support. SISEP focuses on building an infrastructure for implementation so that interventions applied have a better chance for success.

SISEP leaders write, "For decades the emphasis has been on finding and evaluating effective education approaches. That is a necessary but insufficient resource for achieving excellent student outcomes. To achieve excellent student outcomes, it is time to invest in the second part of the formula for success: effective implementation."

For more information on SISEP's work and how it may be used to help turnaround low-performing schools, please visit its website at www.scalingup.org.



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.



CENTER FOR INNOVATION AND IMPROVEMENT – PROMISING PRACTICES

The Center for Innovation and Improvement (CII) has a new publication available for download entitled, "The Oklahoma Story: Situating School Improvement Grants within a Coherent System of Support." The piece details Oklahoma's efforts at the state

level to escalate its support for districts and schools implementing SIG, using a set of research-proven strategies.

For more information and to download the publication, visit www.centerii.org/survey.



Other Resources

- Sign up to be a part of the online professional learning community for school turnarounds by emailing us at school.improvement.grants@ed.gov. We will be sharing more information on how you can get involved in the near future.
- Missed the last issue of the newsletter? All issues of the newsletter can be found on our website at www.ed.gov/oese-news/school-turnaround-newsletters.
- E-mail any questions or concerns concerning SIG or school turnarounds to askdrt@ed.gov.