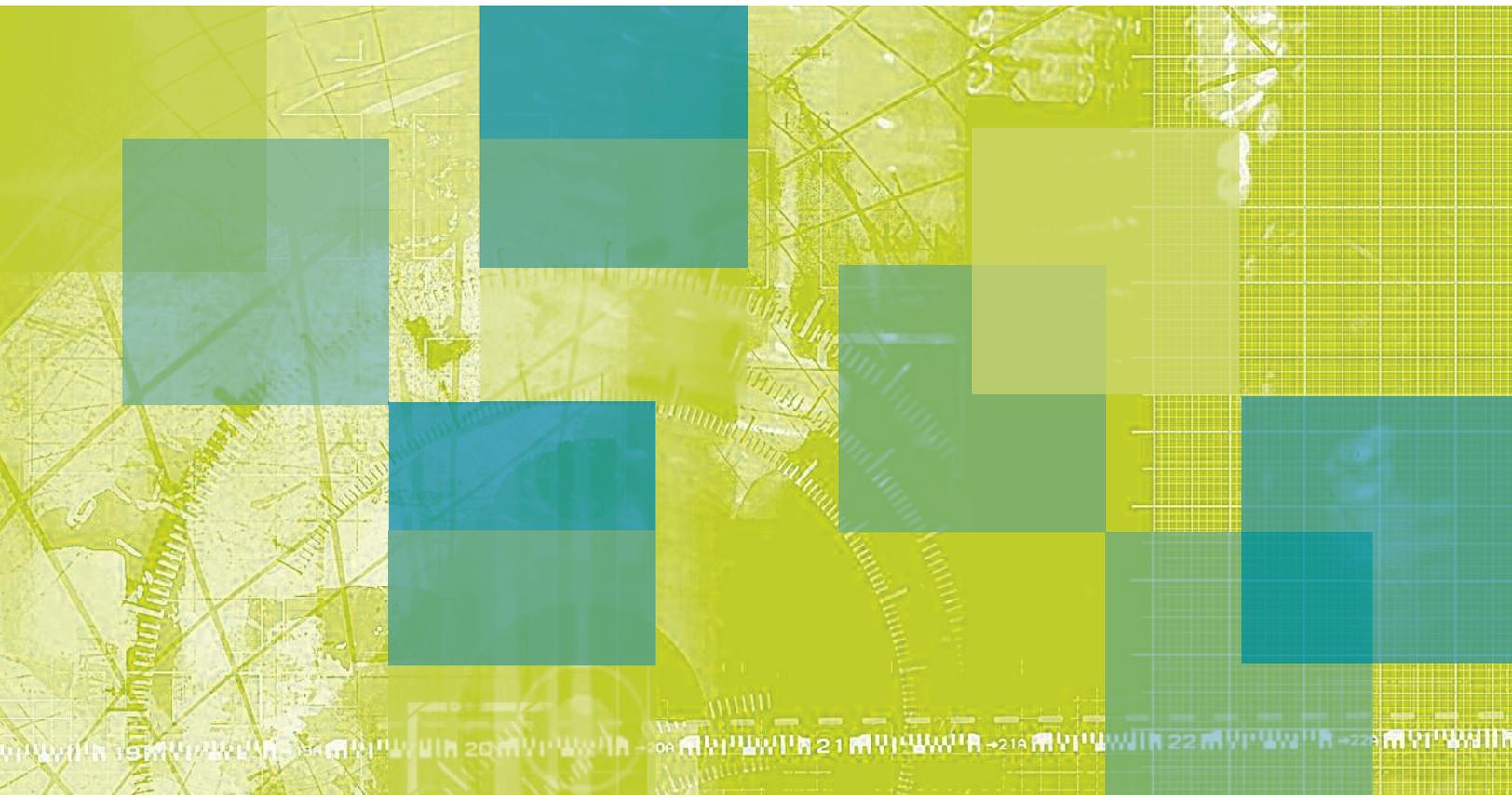


Changing Tires En Route: Michigan Rolls Out Millions in School Improvement Grants



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Introduction

A recent massive infusion of federal funding marked a dramatic shift in the federal approach to helping low-performing schools. As part of the broad array of economic stimulus efforts included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), the U.S. Congress appropriated an extra \$3 billion for school improvement grants (SIGs) to help reform persistently low-achieving schools. When added to the \$546 million that had already been appropriated for school improvement grants for fiscal year 2009, the ARRA appropriation brings the total funding for these grants to more than \$3.5 billion, available for use through September 30, 2013.

Not only did the new appropriation increase more than sixfold the federal dollars appropriated for school improvement grants, but it was also accompanied by new requirements from the U.S. Department of Education (ED) that governed use of the funds. These requirements target SIG funds on a smaller and somewhat different pool of schools than those identified for improvement under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and limit these schools to using one of four school improvement models, known as the transformation, turnaround, restart, and closure models.

Michigan received about \$115 million from the ARRA SIG appropriation. In the fall of 2010, just as the school year was starting, these dollars began pouring into school districts with low-achieving schools that met eligibility requirements and had won the competitive grants. While state and school officials no doubt appreciated the generous additional funds, some anticipated that using them well would be a challenge. “The school bus is rolling, and we’re changing the tires,” observed Linda Forward, director of Michigan’s Office of Education Improvement and Innovation. “ARRA SIG gives additional help in a concentrated way.”

This report by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) takes an early look at the roll-out of the ARRA SIG funding in Michigan, a state that has been the subject of CEP research on school improvement since 2004. Michigan is a useful site for tracking implementation of ARRA SIGs because the state legislature has passed new state laws incorporating some of the ARRA SIG provisions.

Data for this report were collected by interviewing state and local decision makers in Michigan and reviewing ARRA SIG applications and other state and school documents. CEP also conducted case studies of local implementation of ARRA SIGs by interviewing school staff and reviewing documents in three Michigan schools—Lincoln High School in the Van Dyke Public Schools, Phoenix Multi-Cultural Academy in the Detroit Public Schools, and Romulus Middle School in the Romulus Community Schools.

Summary of Key Findings

Several key findings emerged from this analysis:

- **For school years 2010-11 through 2012-13, a small number of schools will receive far more federal funding for school improvement than ever before.** Schools receiving ARRA SIGs in Michigan received average grants of about \$1 million, or roughly 20 times the state’s maximum award for school improvement prior to the ARRA. Consistent with federal guidance that requires states to award ARRA SIGs competitively and serve the lowest-achieving 5% of schools first, 108 Michigan schools were eligible for the first round of ARRA SIGs, and 28 schools

received them—a fraction of the 150-plus Michigan schools that had previously received school improvement funding. A smaller pot of federal funding continues to be available for other schools in NCLB improvement.

- Michigan’s “persistently lowest-achieving” schools are different from those in the later stages of NCLB school improvement.** ARRA SIG funds are intended to turn around the “persistently lowest-achieving schools” in a state, according to U.S. Department of Education guidance. The 108 Michigan schools that met federal and state criteria for being persistently lowest-achieving in the first round of grants included a greater share of high schools than did the group of schools identified for restructuring, the final stage of NCLB improvement. In addition, almost two-thirds of the persistently lowest-achieving schools eligible for ARRA SIGs were not identified for restructuring at all based on 2009-10 test results. This is largely because the ARRA SIG criteria include high schools that were eligible for but had not received federal Title I funds for low-achieving children in low-income areas and that consequently were not subject to the NCLB accountability system.
- Among Michigan’s ARRA SIG grantees, the transformation model of school improvement was by far the most popular of the four federally endorsed improvement models.** Two-thirds of the Michigan schools that received ARRA SIGs opted for the transformation model, which requires schools to undertake a variety of reforms, while one-third selected the turnaround model, which involves replacing school staff. The number using the transformation model might have been even higher except for a provision in federal guidance that prohibited districts with more than nine ARRA SIG schools, like Detroit, from using the same model for all schools. No rural school in Michigan chose the turnaround model, perhaps due to difficulties in replacing staff in rural areas. No ARRA SIG grantees chose the other two models—restart (becoming a charter school) or school closure.
- State technical assistance to ARRA SIG schools adds new elements and closer monitoring to the supports the state already provides to schools in NCLB improvement.** Like schools in NCLB improvement, ARRA SIG schools receive assistance with needs assessments and improvement plans from a state process monitoring team and regional technical assistance providers. In addition, newly hired state facilitator/monitors will provide at least monthly monitoring and support visits to each ARRA SIG school. Finally, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) will facilitate a new partnership network among state officials, district and school leaders, and potential providers of school services.
- Staff at the three case study schools appreciated the additional funding and focus on major improvements that accompanied ARRA SIGs but were challenged by the rapid application and implementation process.** All three schools were focusing on both academic interventions and student behavioral interventions, and all had created plans that relied heavily on coaching for classroom teachers and ongoing professional development. The three schools faced different challenges, however. Lincoln had difficulty attracting staff to fill the new coaching positions. Phoenix, which used the turnaround model, had problems replacing existing staff from a pool of applicants consisting mostly of teachers dismissed from other Detroit turnaround schools, and the school had yet to hire the specialized staff and tutors needed to carry out reforms. Romulus officials faced challenges in communicating reforms to teachers and getting buy-in for a new system of evaluating teachers using student achievement data.

The following sections of this report examine a variety of issues in Michigan:

- Federal funding for ARRA SIGs and how requirements for these funds differ from previous federal funding for school improvement
- The process used to identify schools eligible for ARRA SIGs and select grantees, and how these schools compare with those identified for NCLB improvement
- School improvement models chosen by schools selected for ARRA SIG awards

- Types of state assistance and monitoring that Michigan is providing for ARRA SIG recipients and characteristics of external providers of school improvement support
- State school reform legislation encouraged by the ARRA SIG requirements
- Successes and challenges encountered by three Michigan schools in implementing ARRA SIGs

Funding for School Improvement in Michigan

Federal funding to improve low-performing schools has been available since No Child Left Behind was enacted in 2002, although amounts were relatively small for the first several years.

This funding is authorized by two different provisions of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by NCLB—section 1003(a) and 1003(g). This report focuses primarily on Michigan’s implementation of the section 1003(g) appropriation, which was the underlying authority for the ARRA SIG appropriation.

FEDERAL AUTHORIZATIONS FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

The authorizations under section 1003(a) and 1003(g) of Title I operate somewhat differently:

- **Section 1003(a)** requires each state to reserve for school improvement an amount that equals 4% of the total allocation for Title I, Part A grants to school districts in that state. Funding has been provided through this reservation since 2002, but not all states were able to reserve the full 4% in past years because of the interaction of a hold-harmless provision also contained in Title I law. For fiscal year 2009, the 4% reservation for school improvement amounted to about \$980 million.¹ Section 1003(a) funds continue to be available to assist schools that have been identified for improvement under NCLB.
- **Section 1003(g)** contains a separate authorization for school improvement grants. Funds were first appropriated under this authority in fiscal year 2007. For fiscal year 2009, Congress initially appropriated \$546 million for section 1003(g) grants. ARRA did not create any new authorization for school improvement grants, but rather appropriated an extra \$3 billion for SIGs for fiscal year 2009 under the existing 1003(g) authority.

MICHIGAN’S FEDERAL ALLOCATIONS FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Funds under both section 1003(a) and (g) are allocated to states on a formula basis. States must distribute at least 95% of their school improvement funds under both sections to school districts, which in turn use them to improve low-performing schools. States may use the other 5% of their funds under both sections to provide state-level technical assistance and support for school improvement.

Table 1 shows the approximate amounts of federal school improvement funds available for districts in Michigan under both authorities for school years 2008-09 through 2010-11. The \$129 million for section 1003(g) funding for 2010-11 includes \$109 million (the 95% district portion) from the state’s \$115 million ARRA SIG allocation, plus \$20 million previously allocated for 1003(g).

While the ARRA appropriation provided a much-needed boost for school improvement funding in Michigan, it has also complicated funding streams. “There are now two school improvement grants,” explained Linda Forward, whose office oversees both the 1003(g) and 1003(a) funds. “It gets very confusing.” She noted that the state is considering using a different name for the 1003(a) grants.

¹ The amount available through the 4% reservation was higher in fiscal year 2009 than in previous or subsequent years because ARRA provided a supplemental appropriation of \$10 billion for Title I, Part A for fiscal year 2009, on top of the regular \$14.5 billion appropriation for Title I for that year. The \$10 billion Title I ARRA supplemental is in addition to the \$3 billion appropriated for ARRA school improvement grants.

Table 1. Federal school improvement funds available for districts in Michigan

Title I funding authority	School year 2008-09	School year 2009-10	School year 2010-11
Section 1003(g)	\$4 million	\$18 million	\$129 million
Section 1003(a)	\$17 million	\$20 million	\$36 million
Total federal school improvement funds	\$21 million	\$38 million	\$164 million

Table reads: For school year 2008-09, Michigan received a \$4 million allocation for school improvement grants under section 1003(g) of Title I. This allocation increased to \$18 million in 2009, and to \$129 million in 2010 after the ARRA SIG funds became available.

*Includes ARRA SIG funds.

Source: Center on Education Policy based on data provided by the Michigan Department of Education.

Identifying Eligible Schools and Awarding School Improvement Grants

The requirements for allocating and using section 1003(g) school improvement funds, including ARRA SIG funds, changed as a result of guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Education in 2010 (ED, 2010a; 2010b). These changes do not affect school improvement funds provided through section 1003(a), which serve a broader group of schools and can be put to more flexible uses.

Under the previous requirements, states awarded 1003(g) funds to districts based on a formula. States had some leeway in determining which schools should be served with these funds and could require a grant application. All eligible schools, however, had to be Title I recipient schools that were in NCLB improvement (including corrective action or restructuring) or had recently exited NCLB improvement.

Under the new 2010 guidance, states award 1003(g) SIG funds to districts by competitive application. States must establish criteria for judging applications, and the expectation is that not all applicants will receive funding. States must also set up a system for identifying the persistently lowest-achieving schools in the state, including high schools that are eligible for but do not receive Title I funds. States must serve these lowest-achieving schools before serving any other schools in NCLB improvement. In addition, the maximum 1003(g) grant under the new guidance has increased to \$2 million. As explained later, schools that receive these grants are limited to using one of the four school improvement models prescribed by ED.

SCHOOLS ELIGIBLE FOR ARRA SIGS

Federal guidance contains criteria, shown in **box A**, for identifying three tiers of schools eligible for ARRA SIGs and other section 1003(g) funds. The first two tiers, which receive highest priority for funding, consist of schools that meet the definition of persistently lowest-achieving. The guidance, although quite detailed, allows states some leeway in determining eligibility and includes some optional measures. “Michigan really wrestled with a lot of different ideas” in developing its eligibility criteria, said Mary Alice Galloway, interim state school reform/redesign officer and the state’s former director of the Office of Education Improvement and Innovation.

Box A. Eligibility criteria for ARRA SIG funding

New U.S. Department of Education guidance contains criteria for identifying three tiers of schools in each state that are eligible for SIG funding under section 1003(g). The first two tiers are considered “persistently lowest-achieving schools” and receive top priority for funding.

Tier 1 consists of Title I schools in NCLB improvement, corrective action, or restructuring that are also—

- (i) among the lowest-achieving 5% of Title I schools in improvement status in the state or the lowest-achieving five Title I schools in this status in the state, whichever is greater; or
- (ii) high schools that have had a graduation rate of less than 60% over a number of years.

Tier 2 consists of secondary schools that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I funds and are also—

- (i) among the lowest-achieving 5% of such secondary schools or the lowest achieving five such secondary schools in the state, whichever is greater; or
- (ii) are high schools that have had a graduation rate of less than 60% over a number of years.

At its option, a state may identify additional schools as tier I or tier II schools.

Tier 3 consists of all other Title I schools in NCLB improvement, corrective action, or restructuring.

Within these parameters, states have discretion in making several key decisions:

- The number of years of achievement that count for SIG eligibility (two years in Michigan)
- The number of years of graduation rates that count for SIG eligibility (three years in Michigan)
- The weighting of the two required factors used to determine the persistently lowest-achieving schools—specifically, the performance all students in the school on the most recent administration of state reading and mathematics tests and the school’s lack of progress on these tests over a number of years (Michigan gives current performance twice as much weight as lack of progress over time)
- The number of years used to determine lack of progress (Michigan uses four years of test data for high schools and two years for elementary schools)

Michigan has also adopted one of the optional federal requirements—namely, that tier 2 may also include Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring in which student achievement is lower than or equal to the highest-ranked secondary school included on the tier 2 list due to its low achievement.

Ultimately, the U.S. Department of Education must approve states’ plans for identifying schools eligible for ARRA SIGs before states are awarded these funds.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, 2010a; 2010b and Michigan Department of Education, 2010f.

Officials from the Michigan Department of Education praised several things about the new federal requirements governing schools’ eligibility and priority for ARRA SIGs. First, they appreciated the inclusion of secondary schools that were eligible for but not receiving Title I funds. In the past, Galloway said, districts that directed all their Title I funds to elementary schools were not held accountable under NCLB for the achievement of high school students, even though the poverty rates in these high schools might be similar to those in the elementary schools served. Second, officials were pleased that the federal requirements for ARRA SIG eligibility take into account growth in student achievement as well as current achievement status.

Galloway noted, however, that MDE was disappointed about a few of the federal eligibility restrictions. ED rejected MDE's proposal to rank *all* Michigan schools that were eligible for Title I funding on one list, regardless of whether they actually received Title I. Instead, ED required the state to use separate lists for tier 1 and tier 2, which complicated the process according to Galloway and did not put all schools on the same playing field. In addition, Galloway expressed disappointment that some schools with very low performance did not qualify for either tier 1 or 2 because they had recently exited NCLB improvement after making adequate yearly progress (AYP) for two consecutive years under Title I's "safe harbor" provision.²

Still, said Galloway, "when I look at the schools on the lists, I don't think we identified the wrong schools." While some local officials were at first surprised by the schools on the lists, "people now understand it," she added.

ELIGIBLE SCHOOLS IN MICHIGAN

In June 2010, Michigan identified 108 schools that were eligible for the first round of ARRA SIG funding, including 10 tier 1 schools and 98 tier 2 schools—a smaller group than the 150-plus Michigan schools that had previously received school improvement funding. These 108 schools were identified based on state test results and graduation data from school year 2008-09, since 2009-10 data were not yet available in June.

Most (72%) of the 108 schools were urban, 21% were suburban, and 7% were rural.³ These proportions were similar to the types of Michigan schools previously in NCLB restructuring but different from the types of schools receiving ARRA SIG funds for the nation as a whole. According to *Education Week*, 53% of schools receiving ARRA SIG funds nationally were in urban areas, while 23% were in rural areas, and 24% were suburban (Klein, 2010a). While Michigan has fewer rural schools than states like Alaska and Idaho, Michigan's rural schools tend to have few, if any, subgroups of students large enough to count for AYP purposes and therefore may find it easier to stay out of NCLB improvement.

The majority (60%) of these 108 eligible schools served at least some high school students, and 56% appeared to be traditional high schools, based on information from the National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data. The rest were elementary schools (18%), middle schools (17%), and elementary-middle combinations (8%). The larger proportion of high schools may be due not only to the tier 2 focus on secondary schools that are eligible for but not receiving Title I, but also due to the fact that the number of high schools in NCLB restructuring has increased in Michigan (CEP, 2008).

The Michigan schools eligible for round 1 ARRA SIG funding included a somewhat different set of schools than those identified for NCLB improvement. **Table 2** shows the NCLB improvement status of these eligible schools. Some of these schools were not in improvement, either because they had exited improvement based on 2009-10 test results or because they were tier 2 high schools.

Many schools in the later years of NCLB improvement did not make the list of persistently lowest-achieving schools. For example, 33 Michigan schools in restructuring implementation—those that have had the most difficulty over time meeting NCLB student achievement targets—were not in tiers 1 or 2 according to ARRA SIG criteria. These restructuring schools, which were in tier 3, were not eligible for round 1 funding, since all tier 1 and 2 schools had to be served before tier 3 could receive funding. Overall, 120 schools were in tier 3 and were ineligible for round 1 ARRA SIGs. These schools, however, remain eligible for section 1003(a) school improvement funding.

² Under the safe harbor provision, schools that fail to meet state targets for the percentage of students scoring proficient on state tests may still make adequate yearly progress if they reduce the number of students scoring below proficient by at least 10 percent from the previous year.

³ To calculate these percentages of schools from different types of districts, CEP used the locale codes for districts reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), except that the rural category includes one school in a district categorized by NCES as a distant town—i.e., between 10 and 25 miles from an urban center.

Table 2. NCLB improvement status of Michigan schools eligible for round 1 ARRA SIG funding

NCLB improvement status based on 2009-10 testing	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3*	Total
Not in improvement	0	20	22	42
Year 1 of improvement	1	7	11	19
Year 2 of improvement	3	22	19	44
Corrective action	0	8	15	23
Restructuring planning	2	13	20	35
Restructuring implementation	4	28	33	65
Total	10	98	120	228

Table reads. Of the 10 schools that met the tier 1 eligibility requirements for ARRA school improvement grants, 1 school was in year 1 of NCLB improvement, 3 schools were in year 2 of improvement, 2 were in restructuring planning, and 4 were in restructuring implementation.

*Tier 3 includes Title I schools in any stage of NCLB improvement that do not meet the criteria for tiers 1 or 2. Tier 3 schools do not become eligible for ARRA SIG funding until all tier 1 and 2 schools are served.

Source: Center on Education Policy analysis based on Michigan Department of Education, 2010a; 2010b.

AWARD OF ROUND 1 GRANTS

Federal guidance requires states to not only identify schools eligible for ARRA SIG funds but also award grants to the most worthy applicants. Michigan required districts applying for ARRA SIGs to conduct an analysis of each school's needs using the state's Comprehensive Needs Assessment or a similar tool and to base their grant applications on this assessment. (The Comprehensive Needs Assessment was developed by the state to implement NCLB.) Michigan determined which schools would receive ARRA SIG awards based on a four-point rubric developed by MDE that evaluates six key elements of the applications, including applicants' analysis of different types of data, their use of these analyses to select school improvement models, and inclusion of external partners, among other elements. The complete list of elements in the rubric is included in the appendix.

Galloway said that this rubric worked well to evaluate local ARRA SIG applications. The districts and schools that were awarded funding, she said, were "the ones that did the best job of looking at their data, created a plan that addressed the data, and wrote about it in a rational plan." Schools that got grants also tended to do a better job in reaching out to community partners and external providers, she noted.

A total of about \$83 million was awarded for round 1 ARRA SIGs. Districts applied in the summer of 2010, and funds were distributed in the fall of 2010. Of the 108 schools eligible for round 1, 84 applied, and 28 were awarded grants. The grants, which may be expended over three years, ranged in size from \$605,000 to \$5 million (or from \$202,000 to \$2 million per year on average). The average grant per school was \$3 million over three years, or about \$1 million per year—far more than the previous maximum school improvement grant of \$50,000.

ROUND 2 OF ARRA SIG FUNDING

Michigan is preparing to offer a second round of ARRA school improvement grants. Schools' eligibility status for round 2 was determined using an additional year of state testing and graduation data from school year 2009-10. This produced a quite different list of eligible schools, suggesting that the federal criteria and Michigan interpretations do not yield lists of schools that are *persistently* lowest-achieving schools in the strictest sense.

For round 2, Michigan has identified 92 eligible schools, including 8 in tier 1 and 84 in tier 2. Of these 92 schools, 21 schools (23%) had not been on the round 1 list. Conversely, 37 schools that were on the round 1 list did not make the round 2 list, including 12 schools that actually received ARRA SIG awards. Michigan plans to award round 2 grants soon after the federal guidance for round 2 is released.

SECTION 1003(A) GRANTS

Michigan also continues to make school improvement grants to school districts from funds reserved through section 1003(a), as it has done since school year 2003-04. These grants, which are distributed to districts by formula, range from \$5,000 to \$50,000 and are used by districts to assist schools that are in various stages of NCLB improvement or have recently exited improvement. Some of the 1003(a) funding in Michigan also goes to regional technical assistance providers for school improvement activities.

To receive 1003(a) funds, Michigan districts must submit applications specifically stating what will be done to improve schools, and the grant applications must be approved by MDE officials. Although the state lacks the power to withhold funds completely, MDE does require some schools to rewrite their applications before receiving funds. State requirements for 1003(a) grants involve school audits, process mentor teams to assist schools, coaching for school leaders, and extra professional development for principals and coaches (CEP, 2008).

Michigan also gave a small amount of 1003(a) funding to some schools that did not win competitive ARRA SIGs in the first round. If these schools win ARRA SIGs in the second round, then their round 2 ARRA funding will be reduced by the amount of the 1003(a) funds provided, Forward explained.

Models Chosen by ARRA SIG Schools

Districts applying for ARRA SIGs must choose one of four school improvement models prescribed by ED. These models are described briefly in **box B**. States and districts can apply for waivers that allow schools using the restart and turnaround models to automatically exit school improvement under NCLB. Michigan has applied for and received this waiver.

Box B. School improvement models

New federal guidance requires schools receiving ARRA SIG funds, or other section 1003(g) funds for fiscal years 2009 and 2010, to use one of the following school improvement models:

- Transformation: Implement all of the following strategies: (1) replace the principal and take steps to increase teacher and school leader effectiveness; (2) institute comprehensive instructional reforms; (3) increase learning time and create community-oriented schools; and (4) provide operational flexibility and sustained support.
- Turnaround: Replace the principal, rehire no more than 50% of the school staff, and grant the principal sufficient operational flexibility to implement fully a comprehensive approach to substantially improve student outcomes.
- Restart: Convert a school into one operated by a charter school operator, a charter management organization, or an education management organization that has been selected through a rigorous review process.
- School closure: Close a school and enroll its students in other schools in the district that are higher-achieving.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, 2010a; 2010b.

Skeptics, including political leaders, civil rights groups, and state and local educational leaders, have questioned whether these four models are reasonable and effective strategies for reform, especially for schools in rural and urban areas that may have difficulty attracting staff and turnaround partners (Klein, 2010b; Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights under Law et al., 2010; CEP, 2010).

MDE officials interviewed for this study expressed concerns about the feasibility of replacing staff in some schools. Some also said they would like more guidance on how to carry out the staff replacement required by the turnaround and transformation models. “We don’t have a tool to help schools evaluate principals,” said Galloway, who noted that some schools—particularly those in difficult-to-staff rural or urban areas—do not know how to attract and choose the best candidates.

Table 3 shows the school improvement models chosen by Michigan schools that received round 1 ARRA SIG funds. As the table makes clear, the transformation model, which includes a variety of reforms, was by far the most popular. More than two-thirds of the grantees chose the transformation model. The turnaround model was the next most popular, chosen by nearly one-third of the grantees, although this group did not include any of the five grantees in rural districts, which typically have more difficulty attracting staff. No schools chose the restart or closure models, although some Detroit schools that were eligible for ARRA SIGs did close, according to MDE officials, but because they had lost enrollment.

Type of district	Transformation	Turnaround	Restart	Closure	Total*
Rural	5	0	0	0	5 (18%)
Suburban	4	2	0	0	6 (21%)
Urban	10	7	0	0	17 (61%)
Total	19 (68%)	9 (32%)	0	0	28

Table reads: Five rural schools receiving ARRA SIG funds for school year 2010-11 chose the transformation model for their school improvement strategy, while no rural schools chose the turnaround, restart, or closure models.

*Percentages in the last column do not total 100% due to rounding.

Sources: Center on Education Policy, based on Michigan Department of Education, 2010c, and on data on school type from the National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data, 2009-2010.

The percentages of ARRA grantees choosing various models were much the same as the percentages of ARRA SIG *applicants* choosing these models, with the transformation model predominating.

That no schools chose the restart model, which involves becoming a charter school, is not surprising, given that no Michigan schools previously in NCLB restructuring chose to become charters, even though this was an option under the law (CEP, 2008). It is also not surprising that the closure model is unpopular; closing a school is not likely to require grant funding or to inspire school officials to write grants. It is somewhat unexpected, however, that one-third of the ARRA SIG schools chose the turnaround model. Michigan schools previously in NCLB restructuring faced a similar choice among the restructuring options of replacing staff, becoming a charter, closing the school, or undertaking “any other” major restructuring of school governance that produced fundamental reform. But less than 10% of these restructuring schools chose to replace staff (CEP, 2008).

The number of schools choosing the turnaround model would have been lower were it not for an ED requirement that districts with more than nine eligible schools may not use the same model for all schools. Detroit was the only Michigan district that fell into this category, and consequently some Detroit schools had to implement a model other than the transformation model. If the Detroit schools were removed from the analysis, only 15% of schools chose the turnaround model.

Other factors may have also influenced individual schools' decisions to use the turnaround model. Replacing staff may have been a more appealing option to schools than undertaking the more extensive reforms involved in the transformation model. The national economic downturn has resulted in teacher and principal layoffs, which has increased the number of candidates available to replace staff. In addition, choosing the turnaround model may have been more appealing because it allowed schools to automatically exit NCLB improvement.

State Assistance for ARRA SIG Schools

Federal guidance requires states to monitor the implementation of the ARRA school improvement grants and provide technical assistance. These state responsibilities, as well as the responsibilities of identifying eligible schools and awarding ARRA SIG funds, have increased MDE's contact with schools and districts that need assistance with school improvement.

MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION

ED requires states to review annual goals for student achievement in each school participating in ARRA SIGs. In addition to administering annual state tests, ARRA SIG schools in Michigan are expected to use interim assessments to provide progress reports. Michigan high schools awarded ARRA SIG funds must also use "Explore" and "Plan," two student assessments developed by ACT, the college placement test company. Michigan's plans call for quarterly reviews of this student achievement data.

In addition, Michigan's ARRA SIG application states that schools awarded grants must participate in state technical assistance and demonstrate progress toward specific goals, such as increasing student and teacher attendance and increasing the number of students completing advanced coursework (Michigan Department of Education, 2010f). The appendix shows these goals in more detail.

All of this monitoring is led by facilitator/monitors, MDE employees hired especially to monitor ARRA SIG schools. These facilitator/monitors are expected to visit each school at least weekly at the beginning of the grant and at least monthly for the duration of the grant. While Michigan has done on-site monitoring of schools in improvement in the past, this monitoring of ARRA SIG schools will be more intense, according to Galloway. "We literally want someone in the school underfoot, making sure that the money pouring into the school is used quickly and efficiently," she said.

PROVIDING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

MDE provides technical assistance aimed at improving ARRA SIG schools. According to Michigan's ARRA SIG application, this technical assistance includes process mentors, the aforementioned facilitator/monitors, and a partnership network.

Process mentors were created to assist with school improvement under NCLB prior to the ARRA. For ARRA SIG schools, each team consists of a representative from MDE and a person from the district's regional technical assistance provider. Process monitors began working with schools eligible for ARRA SIGs during the application phase

by reviewing the Comprehensive Needs Assessment and school improvement plan to see how well they were aligned with the model selected by the school and making recommendations for change as needed.

Not only do facilitator/monitors make monitoring visits throughout the grant, as noted above, but they also support schools. “The facilitator/monitors will personalize that attention to schools,” said Linda Forward, whose Office of Education Improvement and Innovation employs the facilitator/monitors. “While their focus is on monitoring the grant, the flip side is providing assistance.” For example, she said, a school might want to hold a professional development event, but the paperwork is held up at central office. The facilitator/monitor might expedite the process. The facilitator/monitor might also put the school in contact with the district’s regional technical assistance provider for assistance on similar topics.

Finally, MDE will facilitate a partnership network among state officials, district and school leaders, and potential providers of school services—“a networking opportunity for leaders to come together,” as Forward called it. The group is expected to meet four to six times a year. Forward explained that the group will help MDE tailor its work to school needs: “I think it can lead to good insights for us to provide technical assistance. It will help us to fine tune our approach.”

External Providers

MDE expects all recipients of local ARRA SIG funding to contract with external providers to assist districts and schools with school reform. Although Michigan does not absolutely require the use of external providers, having an external provider was one of the criteria the state used to judge ARRA SIG applications. Districts that worked with schools to select external partners to assist with reforms received the highest number of points on the state’s rubric. In the past, some schools have contracted with outside providers to help with school improvement. This MDE expectation that all ARRA SIG schools should use part of their grant funding to hire external providers could dramatically increase the federal dollars for school improvement that flow to non-governmental entities.

APPROVED EXTERNAL PROVIDERS AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

In hopes of improving the quality and coherence of the assistance offered by external providers, MDE offers technical assistance to these providers. “We’re taking rolling applications for external providers,” Forward explained. “Once external providers apply and are accepted, we provide initial training and follow-up that asks that they be respectful of state norms and initiatives.” External providers, for example, are asked to use the templates, needs assessments, and language around school improvement developed by the state rather than provide unrelated services.

As of fall 2010, 48 different external providers were approved by MDE. From among these, 20 were chosen to provide services, according to district and school ARRA SIG applications. These chosen providers were slated to provide services in 43 schools, with some providers serving multiple schools and some schools contracting with multiple providers.

CEP analyzed and researched the area codes of the external providers listed on MDE’s Web site to determine each provider’s location and also looked at providers’ Web sites to determine whether they were a for-profit, nonprofit, or government entity. (Because applications from external providers come in on a rolling basis, more approved providers may be added to the list at a later date.) CEP also analyzed the applications of all successful round 1 ARRA SIG applicants on the MDE Web site to determine which districts were using which external providers.⁴ School ARRA SIG applications listed 67 external providers (or external partners), and 43 of those listed were on the state’s fall 2010 approved external provider list.

⁴ One SIG application was incomplete on the Web site and therefore was not included in the analysis.

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION OF EXTERNAL PROVIDERS

As shown in **figure 1**, about half of the external providers on the fall 2010 state-approved list had an area code that placed them in Michigan for either the main contact or a secondary contact listed. The rest were from other states, including Arizona, California, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. No providers were from outside the United States. Schools and districts receiving ARRA SIG funds disproportionately chose in-state providers from those on the state-approved list: two-thirds of the providers chosen by schools and districts were from Michigan, while just one-third were from outside the state.

Figure 1. Geographic location of Michigan’s approved external providers, fall 2010

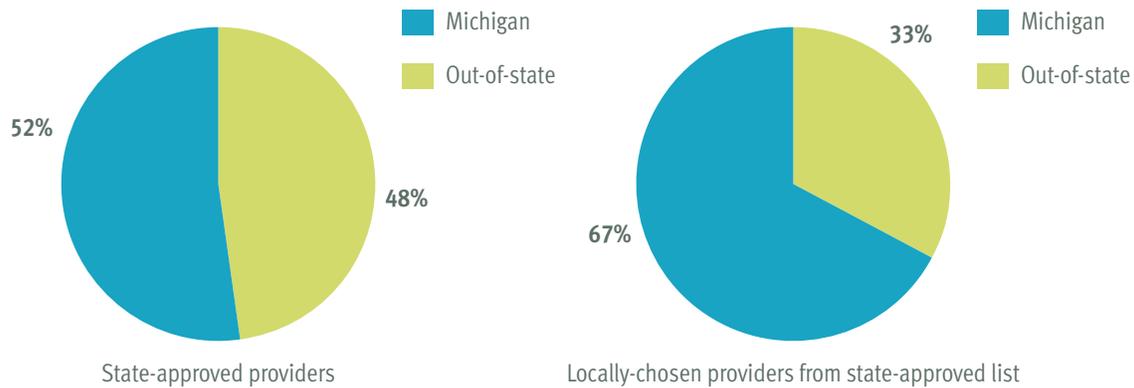


Figure reads: In the fall of 2010, 52% of state-approved external providers had area codes indicating they were located in Michigan or had a contact person in Michigan, while 48% were located out of state. Of the providers chosen from the state list by local ARRA SIG grantees, 67% were located or had a contact person in Michigan, while 33% were from out of state.

Source: CEP analysis of Michigan Department of Education, 2010c; 2010d.

Among the 48 locally-chosen external providers, two states other than Michigan figured prominently. The University of Pittsburgh’s Institute for Learning was chosen by five schools, all in Grand Rapids. Pearson K-12 Solutions, a for-profit based in Texas, was chosen by four schools, all in Detroit. No more than one school chose a provider in any of the other states (except Michigan).

TYPES OF EXTERNAL PROVIDERS

In the past under NCLB, government entities, such as regional technical assistance providers, offered most of the assistance for school improvement in Michigan that was not provided by MDE or by Michigan State University’s Principal Fellowship (CEP, 2008). Federal ARRA SIG requirements opened the door to additional nonprofit and for-profit service providers. As shown in **figure 2**, both state-approved external providers and those chosen by local districts and schools include a mix of for-profit, nonprofit, and government entities. However, relatively fewer for-profit providers were chosen locally, compared with the share approved by the state, while relatively more nonprofit and government entities were chosen locally.

Figure 2. Michigan’s approved external providers by organization type, fall 2010

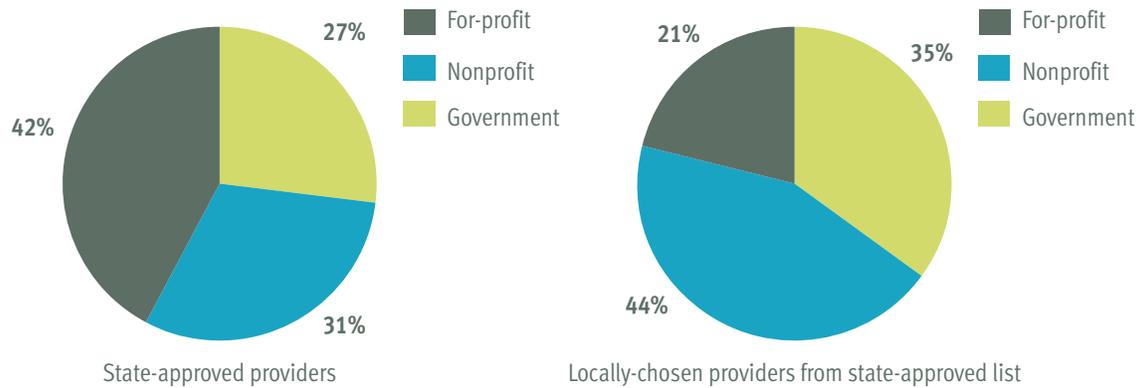


Figure reads: In the fall of 2010, 42% of the state-approved external providers were for-profit entities, 31% were nonprofits, and 27% were government entities. In the same time period, 21% of locally-chosen providers from the state-approved list were for-profits, while 44% were nonprofits, and 35% were government entities.

Source: CEP analysis of Michigan Department of Education, 2010c; 2010d.

There was a great deal of variety among the external providers chosen by grantees, perhaps because schools and districts had formed previous relationships with the providers nearest to them geographically. The most frequently chosen nonprofit provider was Michigan State University’s Principal Fellowship. This was perhaps because schools and districts had participated in the Principal Fellowship in the past or had heard that many local educators appreciated this professional development (CEP, 2008). Pearson K-12 Solutions was the most frequently chosen for-profit provider. Four of the eight schools that chose a for-profit provider (all in Detroit) chose Pearson K-12 Solutions.

EXPERIENCE LEVELS OF EXTERNAL PROVIDERS

A recent national news article raised concerns about inexperienced companies being chosen by schools as external providers of ARRA SIG services (Dillon, 2010). On one hand, these new organizations might not have the expertise needed to assist schools. On the other hand, some might argue that experienced providers have not been very successful in improving schools and that new providers are needed. Time will tell how successful providers are in Michigan.

All the external providers in Michigan that are government entities have been assisting Michigan schools in improvement at least since the onset of NCLB accountability. To determine the experience levels of the rest of the providers, CEP searched the organizations’ Web sites for a founding date. As shown in **table 4**, almost all nonprofits and most for-profits were founded before NCLB. None of the approved nonprofits were founded in 2009 or later. While founding dates indicate that the majority of state-approved external providers in Michigan have experience working to improve schools, these dates are not an indication of effectiveness. CEP plans to continue to follow schools and providers that participate in the ARRA SIG process in Michigan to track improvement.

Table 4. Number of Michigan state-approved external providers by founding dates, fall 2010

Type of Organizations	Founded before 2001	Founded between 2001 and 2008	Founded in 2009 or later
For-profit	14	3	3
Nonprofit	12	3	0

Table reads: In the fall of 2010, 14 state-approved, for-profit external providers of school improvement services in Michigan were founded before 2001, 3 were founded between 2001 and 2008, and 3 were founded in 2009 or later.

Source: CEP analysis of Michigan Department of Education, 2010d.

State-Enacted Reforms Encouraged by ARRA

In Michigan, ARRA SIG has had an impact that goes beyond the federal requirements. As the foundation for Michigan's application for federal Race to the Top funds—an ARRA initiative to reward states that create the conditions for educational innovation and reform—the state legislature passed HB 4787-4789, which included many of the same elements as the ARRA SIG requirements. Although Michigan did not receive a Race to the Top grant, the state is obligated to implement the reforms set out in HB 4787-4789. MDE officials said they believe these reforms are essential to school improvement (Michigan Department of Education, 2010e).

Under the new law, MDE's superintendent appoints a "state school reform/redesign officer," a deputy superintendent who oversees a newly identified group of schools that are among those eligible for but not receiving ARRA SIGs. Mary Alice Galloway was serving as the interim state school reform/redesign officer in the fall of 2010.

Galloway explained that as of round 2, the applications submitted for ARRA SIG funding in Michigan will determine much more than whether schools receive federal funding. The most highly rated applications in round 2 will be funded. Other applications that meet all the federal requirements but are not funded must be implemented under the new state laws, with monitoring from MDE. Schools with plans that do not meet the minimum federal requirements or are not well implemented are placed under the supervision of the state school reform/redesign officer in a newly created school district called the State Reform District.

Principals of schools in the State Reform District report directly to the state school reform/redesign officer, who helps them rewrite their improvement plans and guides them toward the following goals:

- Significant gains in student achievement within two years
- Improvement three times greater than the state average
- Transformation into a high-performing organization
- Clear reporting of progress
- Focus
- Return to stability

- Sufficient progress to move off the persistently lowest-achieving schools list
- Feedback to parents, students, community

In addition to requiring these schools to implement one of the four ARRA SIG models, state law stipulates that schools implementing the transformation or turnaround models must have an addendum to their union contract. For the transformation model, the addendum must address extended learning time and teacher evaluations tied to performance. For the turnaround model, the addendum must address replacing staff.

Michigan’s teachers unions have been supportive of this new legislation. To facilitate these addenda, Galloway said, “the state’s unions have done outreach to the schools and have said, ‘We want to be with you in the planning.’” She anticipated, however, that “individual schools will have individual challenges, especially with replacing staff.”

Another major challenge these schools and the state face is financial. “Our legislature did not provide any funding,” Galloway said. She noted that schools would get some support through the Statewide System of Support, which serves schools in improvement under NCLB, but added that MDE is currently exploring additional sources, such as foundation funding.

A Closer Look at ARRA SIG in Three Michigan Schools

CEP chose Lincoln High School and Romulus Middle School for case studies from a list of five schools recommended by MDE because the schools were faithfully implementing ARRA SIGs. CEP chose Phoenix Multi-Cultural Academy in Detroit because it was implementing the turnaround model and because the school responded promptly to CEP’s request for information. The schools are representative of the many Michigan schools awarded ARRA SIGs. The two suburban schools, Lincoln High and Romulus, are near Detroit, and both are implementing the transformation model. The schools are different in that one is a high school already receiving large amounts of private grant funding for school improvement activities and the other is a middle school that is not in school improvement. Phoenix Multi-Cultural Academy is an elementary school in Detroit.

The three schools have some similarities. All three are focusing not only on academic interventions, but also on student behavioral interventions required as part of the “social-emotional” component of the SIG application. All also created plans that rely heavily on embedded professional development initiatives in the form of coaching for classroom teachers and ongoing professional development for teachers. Finally, leaders in all schools believe that ARRA SIGs have brought a new focus and energy to their school improvement efforts.

The three schools face different challenges, although all scrambled to get their ARRA SIG applications in on time. Lincoln school officials noted that they had a difficult time attracting staff to fill the new coaching positions at the school. Phoenix Elementary has yet to hire the additional staff and tutors needed to carry out reforms as promised in the school’s grant application. In addition, applicants to replace existing Phoenix staff were predominately teachers dismissed from other turnaround schools in the district, which limited the school’s options. Romulus officials faced challenges in communicating the reforms to teachers and getting buy-in for the required new system for evaluating teachers using student achievement data. Despite these challenges, leaders in both schools saw ARRA SIGs as an opportunity to make major improvements at their school.

LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL: TRANSFORMATION OF A SCHOOL IN THE MIDST OF OTHER MAJOR REFORMS

Lincoln High School is part of Van Dyke Public Schools, a suburban district just over 10 miles from downtown Detroit. Serving fewer than 1,000 students, Lincoln caters to a diverse population: about 49% of its students are white, 33% are African American, 6% are Asian, and 11% are multiracial. In the past, Lincoln was eligible for Title I

funding based on student poverty levels but did not receive Title I until 2009-10, when changing district priorities brought more focus to the high school's reform efforts. Although MDE reports AYP status for non-Title I schools like Lincoln, these schools are not held to NCLB rules and were previously not eligible to apply for federal school improvement funds. Therefore, Lincoln never received school improvement grants prior to the ARRA.

Lincoln fell short of its AYP targets in the 2009-10 school year. The school is currently "on hold" in the restructuring phase of NCLB and will need to make AYP again to exit restructuring.

In December 2008, well before the ARRA, Lincoln competed for and won a \$1.5 million Venture Fund grant through the United Way, funded in part through the Skillman Foundation and America's Promise. Receiving that grant cemented Lincoln's partnership with the Institute for Research and Reform in Education (IRRE) and allowed Lincoln an opportunity to take steps toward implementing transformation model requirements.

In June 2010, Lincoln was identified on Michigan's tier 2 list of persistently lowest-achieving schools, and within one month, administrators completed their school improvement grant application. Regardless of the SIG application, the district was committed to finding a new principal for Lincoln, although this was a requirement of its ARRA SIG improvement model as well. Principal Charles Lesser was hired in July 2010. Shortly thereafter, Lincoln was notified that it had received an ARRA SIG grant of \$1,037,843 over three years.

Because of the school's relationship with IRRE, Lincoln had begun implementing the First Things First high school reform model in 2009. Therefore, many of the steps required by the transformation model were already in place at the beginning of the 2010-11 school year, including the implementation of a new data measurement system to help guide instructional reform and a refocusing of professional development on high-quality, embedded programming.

Crafting the ARRA SIG application gave Lincoln's administrators an opportunity to reflect on ways to coordinate the school's strategies for improvement. As the ARRA SIG application was being prepared, the school faced a "grave" situation of declining student enrollments, said Donn Tiganelli, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction for the Van Dyke district. "We needed to have an excellent program. We needed to have a very good focus to help teachers increase their capacity to increase student achievement in order to keep people in this district."

With guidance from the First Things First model and motivation to sustain enrollment, Tiganelli and Carol Anthony, the school improvement facilitator and assistant principal at Lincoln, drafted the ARRA SIG application through an iterative process with the Macomb County Intermediate School District, the school's official external provider. Using Michigan's Comprehensive Needs Assessment to collect data that could drive the development of a school improvement plan—a process Lincoln teacher Susan Ludlum called "mind-numbingly comprehensive"—Lincoln was able to coalesce previously unaligned strategies around a series of coordinated school improvement initiatives. "The whole process has really given us focus to what we're doing," observed Ludlum.

Lincoln's ARRA SIG application was designed to fully embed its school improvement plan into the school day, with research-based strategies for addressing student achievement. ARRA SIG funding has allowed the school to implement four main strategic initiatives so far:

- A new testing system through Northwest Education Assessment Systems that tests students two weeks into the academic year in order to evaluate student achievement. Students achieving at lower levels are moved into intervention programs and then mainstreamed once their skills are better developed.
- Positive Behavior Interventions Support, a version of the Positive Behavior Support program modified with input from Lincoln High School students and faculty to incentivize strong academic performance, promote school attendance, and reduce disciplinary problems.

- The hiring of a number of new support faculty, including a data specialist to help teachers use data to inform instructional practice, a graduation coach to focus on students at risk of not graduating, a math coach, a reading coach, and four math and reading professionals to provide support for teachers in the classroom.
- A data-based student achievement component for teacher evaluations, as required by the transformation model. Teachers select two forms of student assessment scores to be included in their evaluation. Lincoln’s teachers union president worked on this compromise alongside district officials to prepare for implementation in 2010.

Lincoln High School administrators mentioned several challenges they faced in planning for and implementing ARRA SIG requirements. First was the relatively short window between the time schools were notified of their eligibility for ARRA SIG funding and the application’s due date. Another challenge is the difficulty of hiring qualified professionals to fill new support positions. “We want to do it right; we don’t want to just hire someone just to hire someone,” said Susan Ludlum. “It’s a challenge being able to implement properly, and we don’t want to drop the ball.” Moreover, said Principal Lesser, “the quality and depth of the [candidates’] pool is not there sometimes.” Additionally, more communication and guidance from the state would be useful throughout the implementation process, according to interviewees.

Administrators were also quick to point out several positive outcomes associated with ARRA SIG funding and to underscore the opportunity it has created to streamline and coordinate school improvement efforts. “What we had tried in the past was a loose framework; there wasn’t a tight alignment,” said Tiganelli. “Now we use evidence-based interventions, progress monitoring, [and a] communication link that goes back to family advocacy systems—strategies that are defined, aligned, articulated in an evidence-based framework.”

By building time into the school day for teachers to stay in contact with one another, Lincoln has been able to develop a positive culture centered on education, according to school officials. Teachers are no longer “the captain of their own ship,” said teacher Carlie McClenathan, coordinator for Lincoln’s Positive Behavior Interventions Support program, because everyone is now working with a “common language” for reform.

Administrators also had overwhelmingly positive things to say about the ARRA SIG monitor assigned to their school by the MDE. Although there was some initial trepidation about an outside figure coming into the school to observe progress, all administrators interviewed reported productive experiences with Lincoln’s monitor and felt she had done an excellent job integrating herself into the school community. Her feedback to date has been timely and forthcoming, and all interviewees expressed appreciation for her investment in their school improvement efforts.

Lincoln High School administrators believe ARRA SIG funding will improve academic performance through comprehensive and coordinated efforts by administrators, teachers, and students. By requiring a carefully articulated plan to be implemented from the beginning of school year 2010-11, the ARRA SIG application process “gave us a framework to connect the dots focusing on student achievement,” explained Principal Lesser.

PHOENIX ELEMENTARY ACADEMY: TURNAROUND AT A SCHOOL IN A LARGE URBAN DISTRICT

Located in the southwestern part of Detroit, Phoenix Academy is an elementary school in Detroit Public Schools (DPS), Michigan’s largest public school district. Currently enrolling 484 students from pre-kindergarten through 8th grade, Phoenix had served the middle school grades only until 2007, when it merged with now-closed Higgins Elementary. Phoenix’s student population is approximately 55% Hispanic, 29% white, 15% African American, and less than 2% Native American. Seventy-three percent of Phoenix students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Phoenix briefly exited NCLB school improvement in 2006-07, but by 2009-10 the school was again in year 2 of school improvement.

Unlike most Michigan ARRA SIG recipients, DPS decided Phoenix would use the turnaround model for its 2010 school improvement grant application and, therefore, would implement the requirements specific to this model,

including replacing at least 50% of its staff. Part of the reason the district and school chose the turnaround model was a provision in federal guidance that prohibited districts like Detroit with more than nine schools eligible for ARRA SIGs from using the same model for all schools, and several Detroit schools were planning to use the transformation model.

Phoenix Academy's principal, Norma Hernandez, was hired in 2008—one academic year after Phoenix merged with Higgins—which means that she did not have to be replaced to fulfill ARRA SIG requirements.⁵ Before that, Principal Hernandez reported, Phoenix was “just doing” school improvement without coordinated improvement initiatives. Hernandez's early school improvement strategies included beginning a parent-teacher organization, focusing attention on school safety, improving school building facilities, and lowering the student suspension rate.

In August 2010, just before the state deadline for ARRA SIG applications, Hernandez was notified by DPS district officials that Phoenix was eligible to apply and that Pearson K-12 Solutions, a for-profit professional services group, would serve as the school's external provider. Armed with their school improvement plan, Hernandez and two other staff members met with a representative from Pearson K-12 Solutions, who took their suggestions and drafted Phoenix's ARRA SIG application. “We had less than a week,” said Hernandez of the application process; “we only had the two days to meet with Pearson, and then they left and the rest was done via email.”

While Hernandez said she is satisfied with much of what was included in the grant, which totals \$1,824,980 over three years, she reported that several issues were left out of the application due to the fast timeline and that if given the chance she would rewrite some of it. “For the amount of money that we're getting, you really need to sit down with a good group numerous times and be able to come back to the table,” she said, “not 10 hours later and spew out stuff. We knew what we wanted, but we left stuff out.”

Phoenix has implemented some of its ARRA SIG strategies and has focused on the following three main initiatives:

- Changing the school's culture by implementing a new discipline system and a new positive behavior support system, which rewards students with “scholar dollars” that can be spent in a school store stocked with items donated from parents, teachers, and community business partners.
- Implementing a series of new professional development initiatives, including semiannual visits from Chelonnda Seroyer, a classroom management expert and national speaker known for presenting Harry and Rosemary Wong's strategies from their book *The First Days of School*. Seroyer works with teachers directly to review curriculum so that teachers can embed her suggestions in their classrooms.
- Implementing new schoolwide strategies for instructional learning and allowing teachers time to observe one another in the classroom and collaborate by looking at data in weekly after-school meetings.

Phoenix's ARRA SIG application contains several other planned activities that have not yet been realized. Among them are plans to outfit Phoenix's classrooms with smartboards and hire several new professionals, including a student advocate officer, an academic engagement administrator, and 10 tutors. When asked about a timeline for implementing these plans, Phoenix administrators reported that they have experienced continued communication problems with DPS, which has made it difficult to spend ARRA SIG funds and has delayed the hiring of new staff and the implementation of certain turnaround model requirements, including increased instructional time and a data-based teacher compensation plan. School administrators were unsure when these problems would be resolved. While these issues remain on hold, Hernandez said she is laying the groundwork to add two more external providers to improve professional development for Phoenix's teachers: Wayne RESA, the school's regional technical assistance provider, and Project Seed, a local nonprofit focusing on mathematics instruction.

⁵ Although principal replacement is technically a requirement for turnaround models, Principal Hernandez's recent hire date (July 2008) exempted her from replacement. Had she been hired one month earlier, she said, she would have been replaced with another principal.

In addition to the communication issues with the district, Phoenix administrators reported problems implementing the turnaround model requirement to replace at least 50% of the instructional staff. Due to teachers union regulations, new hires were selected from the pool of teachers that were in the process of being removed from *other* turnaround schools in the district. Though Principal Hernandez has had several positive experiences with her new teachers, she noted that the candidate pool for new hires was limited. In addition, she said, the process was “very hurried at the end of summer” and the time constraints added another layer of difficulty.

When asked about successes related to the ARRA SIG funding, Phoenix administrators were most enthusiastic about the facilitator/monitor provided by the state. “She’s very assertive and very knowledgeable—she caught some things that I didn’t even catch. She’s very approachable,” said Hernandez. “I don’t feel it’s punitive. Many people come to you saying that they’re monitoring, but it’s punishment. But I trust that she has our best interest at heart, and that she’s really invested in student achievement.”

In general, Phoenix administrators were cautiously optimistic about the impact of ARRA SIG funding in their school. Administrators overwhelmingly reported that the ARRA SIG had the potential for success if the issues regarding access to funds could be resolved and if the planned initiatives would be fully implemented. Jeannine Lesch, the school improvement chair, noted that ARRA SIG will give teachers “the opportunity to use more technology, engage more students; teachers will have stronger knowledge of different types of activities to use for the different learners due to ARRA SIG-funded professional development.” Added Lesch: “If we can fully implement it, I think it will have an amazing impact.”

Hernandez pointed out that even with the constraints attached to the ARRA SIG, the grants allow some flexibility. “People say ‘think outside of the box’ but that really means ‘think outside of the box within these parameters.’ These funds give me the opportunity to be more creative,” she said.

ROMULUS MIDDLE SCHOOL: TRANSFORMATION AT A SCHOOL NOT IN NCLB IMPROVEMENT

Romulus Middle School is located in the Romulus Community School District, in the heart of Michigan’s Wayne County, a Detroit suburb. The school’s student population is 62% African American, 35% white, less than 2% Latino, and less than 1% other ethnicities. In the 2010-11 school year, the school added grade 6 to its previous configuration of grades 7 and 8, increasing enrollment from approximately 550 students to around 850.

About 75% of the students are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, but Romulus Middle School does not receive Title I because the district has focused these funds on elementary schools. Therefore, Romulus Middle has never received a school improvement grant in the past. In addition, Romulus Middle achieved its AYP targets in 2009-10 and is not in improvement under NCLB.

Before receiving an ARRA SIG grant worth \$5,328,664 over three years, Romulus Middle School had focused its school improvement strategies on increasing achievement in English language arts and math. The school competed for and won a \$62,000 grant from the Southeastern Michigan Community Alliance to finance a tutoring program and community involvement initiative in 2009. Prior to the ARRA, officials had also begun implementing a school-designed behavior/discipline plan aimed at creating a college-going culture. Called The Romulus Way, this plan was based on values of respect, responsibility and resourcefulness. School officials interviewed noted that the ARRA SIG helped to focus school improvement efforts on streamlined behavioral and academic objectives.

Romulus administrators expressed surprise at the school being identified as one of Michigan’s persistently lowest-achieving when its percentages of students scoring proficient on state tests exceeded 60% in both math and reading. District officials applied for ARRA SIG funding over a two-and-a-half week period in June 2010, using that time to research strategies in literacy and math that could best meet the needs highlighted by student achievement data. “We wanted to responsibly and creatively and diagnostically look at what our needs were and how we were going to meet those needs, how we were going to move our staff through staff development,” said Phyllis Adkins,

dean of student services and former principal of Romulus Middle. “Having the money is one thing, but if you don’t have a staff that is willing to make some mistakes and walk by faith . . . you can’t make an impact.”

Attempting to harness staff buy-in, district officials consulted key teacher leaders throughout the application process, keeping interested parties informed in order to ensure that new strategies would be feasible. Additionally, Romulus administrators performed an abbreviated version of a Comprehensive Needs Assessment to identify arenas requiring the most immediate attention. In response to that feedback, administrators crafted an application that highlighted areas where Romulus showed a convincing capacity to enact reform strategies. Principal Jason Salhaney was hired in the summer of 2010 as part of the school’s commitment to meeting the requirements of the transformation model.

Romulus used its ARRA SIG application as an opportunity to organize and strengthen its prior efforts in math and literacy, as well as to introduce new initiatives aimed at helping teachers across content areas. Romulus’s ARRA SIG funding is focused on four main school improvement projects:

- Implementing Reading Apprenticeship, a literacy instructional reform focused on metacognition. Administrators continually emphasized that this program was selected because of its applicability across disciplines.
- Implementing a Pearson Learning Teams framework for teacher collaboration. Pearson Learning Teams is the school’s official external provider.
- Upgrading all Romulus Middle School classrooms to “21st century classrooms,” complete with smart boards, document cameras, clicker systems, sound amplification systems, and LCD projectors.
- Hiring Learning Point Associates, an affiliate of American Institutes for Research, to coordinate and organize the activities of the many external providers contracted to supply services to the Romulus Middle School community.

Principal Salhaney observed a thread running through all of these discrete strategies: a distinct, clear focus on coaching and embedded professional development. He saw this as critical to ensuring the success of these new reforms. “The real difference [between ARRA SIG-funded reforms and prior attempts] is that they’re all-school strategies that include extensive coaching and a three-year [professional development] plan,” he said. “Now we have coaching from West Ed for 50 days a year, so teachers must implement the prescribed strategies because there are professionals overseeing implementation.”

A number of new professionals have been hired to help Romulus teachers and administrators adjust to the new reforms through coaching and long-term professional development. This concerted oversight is new to Romulus Middle School teachers. Salhaney noted that while teachers were skeptical about evaluation at first, most have warmed to the idea of embedded professional development. Teachers are beginning to see that coaches, in identifying gaps in instruction, can help direct instructional services and improve student learning, he said.

Romulus administrators confronted several challenges in meeting the requirements for the transformation model. First, Romulus has not yet been able to identify a new teacher evaluation mechanism that ties teacher performance to student achievement data. Though Romulus administrators have been working with Learning Point Associates to identify a plan that both uses data and incorporates financial incentives, Romulus’s teachers remain skeptical. Second, it has been a challenge, Salhaney said, to keep teachers informed of all of the changes occurring as Romulus officials implement a panoply of new school improvement strategies. It remains a struggle, he observed, to “make sure that everyone is communicating about what the goals are, where we are, and lowering the tension and anxiety” around changing efforts.

Despite these challenges, school officials pointed to several successes associated with ARRA SIG funding. Both Salhaney and Adkins were quick to point out the benefit of hiring Learning Point to coordinate the various external providers working at Romulus and appreciated Learning Point's efforts in helping teachers identify specific measures of success for each new initiative. Additionally, ARRA SIG funding had helped bring about a culture shift for teachers, Salhaney noted. ARRA SIG-funded strategies have been "changing the culture between staff—the collaboration model, focusing on lessons and lesson study," he said. The culture is also changing between staff and students, he said, "cutting down on kids in the hallway and not using passes, getting everyone to see the value of instructional time."

Administrators were very pleased with the work of the state-identified facilitator/monitor responsible for helping schools with ARRA SIG implementation. Romulus Middle's facilitator/monitor, who comes once a week, is "wonderful," according to Salhaney. "She's part of the staff, she has a central location, she talks with us . . . She gets into the classroom, and then provides us with guidance," he said. "She's worked to build the relationship so that we're happy to have her . . . she's very supportive. She's provided us with good feedback." As a result of that connection to the staff, Romulus's facilitator/monitor has worked with teachers with relatively few setbacks, allowing for more immediate impact on teachers' instructional practices and administrators' work, Salhaney noted.

Romulus officials felt that the success of its ARRA SIG reforms would be contingent on teachers' willingness to embrace new ideas and new professionals in the school community. Adkins summed up the predominant attitude toward the ARRA SIG in this way: "I think it'll be very effective . . . You cannot in this century do high-quality programs and meet the needs of students along with the training that's required for teachers without funds. ARRA SIG allows us for three years to develop a plan for success, and for three years it allows us the time and space to work on that plan without interruption. Who wouldn't want that opportunity?"

Conclusion

In Michigan, federal ARRA SIG funding has increased the resources to improve schools by more than \$100 million in 2010-11. These funds, however, come with new requirements. MDE has responded by building on the supports provided to schools in NCLB improvement and adding new supports.

State officials and staff in our three case study schools pointed to several ways in which ARRA SIGs have resulted in a more focused approach than previous efforts to improve schools. First, ARRA SIGs impact fewer schools than those identified for NCLB improvement, and not necessarily those schools that have been in improvement for the longest time. Second, schools were required to choose from among four federally prescribed improvement models, with two-thirds choosing the transformation model and one-third choosing the turnaround model. Third, state monitoring and assistance has increased for ARRA SIG schools, including elements developed under NCLB, such as process mentor teams, and new elements, such as facilitator/monitors and the partnership network. Finally, MDE has approved a wide variety of organizations that can serve as external providers. Many schools have chosen familiar regional governmental agencies and Michigan universities.

Overall, state officials appreciated many aspects of ARRA SIGs, particularly the more focused approach and better funding, but some expressed concerns about the prescriptive nature of the requirements, especially compared with previous NCLB regulations. It remains to be seen how effective this more prescriptive, more focused, and better funded approach to school improvement will be.

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Appendix: Michigan's Evaluation of Local ARRA SIG Applications and Ongoing Implementation Goals

Michigan determined which schools would be funded for ARRA SIGs based on a four-point rubric evaluating six key elements. These six key elements were:

1. Analysis of student achievement data
2. Analysis of teacher and principal data
3. Inclusion of perception data
4. Assessment of system processes
5. Use of analyses to select turnaround models
6. Inclusion of external partner(s) for turnaround model

In addition, Michigan's ARRA SIG application states that schools awarded grants must demonstrate progress toward the following goals:

- An increase in the number of minutes in the school year
- An increase in student participation rates on state assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics, by student subgroup
- A decrease in the dropout rate
- An increase in the student attendance rate
- An increase in the number and percentage of students completing advanced coursework, early-college high schools, or dual enrollment classes
- A decrease in discipline incidents
- A decrease in truancy
- A distribution of teachers by performance level on the district's teacher evaluation system
- A steady or increasing rate of teacher attendance

Source: Michigan Department of Education, 2010f.



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