State Implementation and Perceptions of Title I School Improvement Grants under the Recovery Act: One Year Later
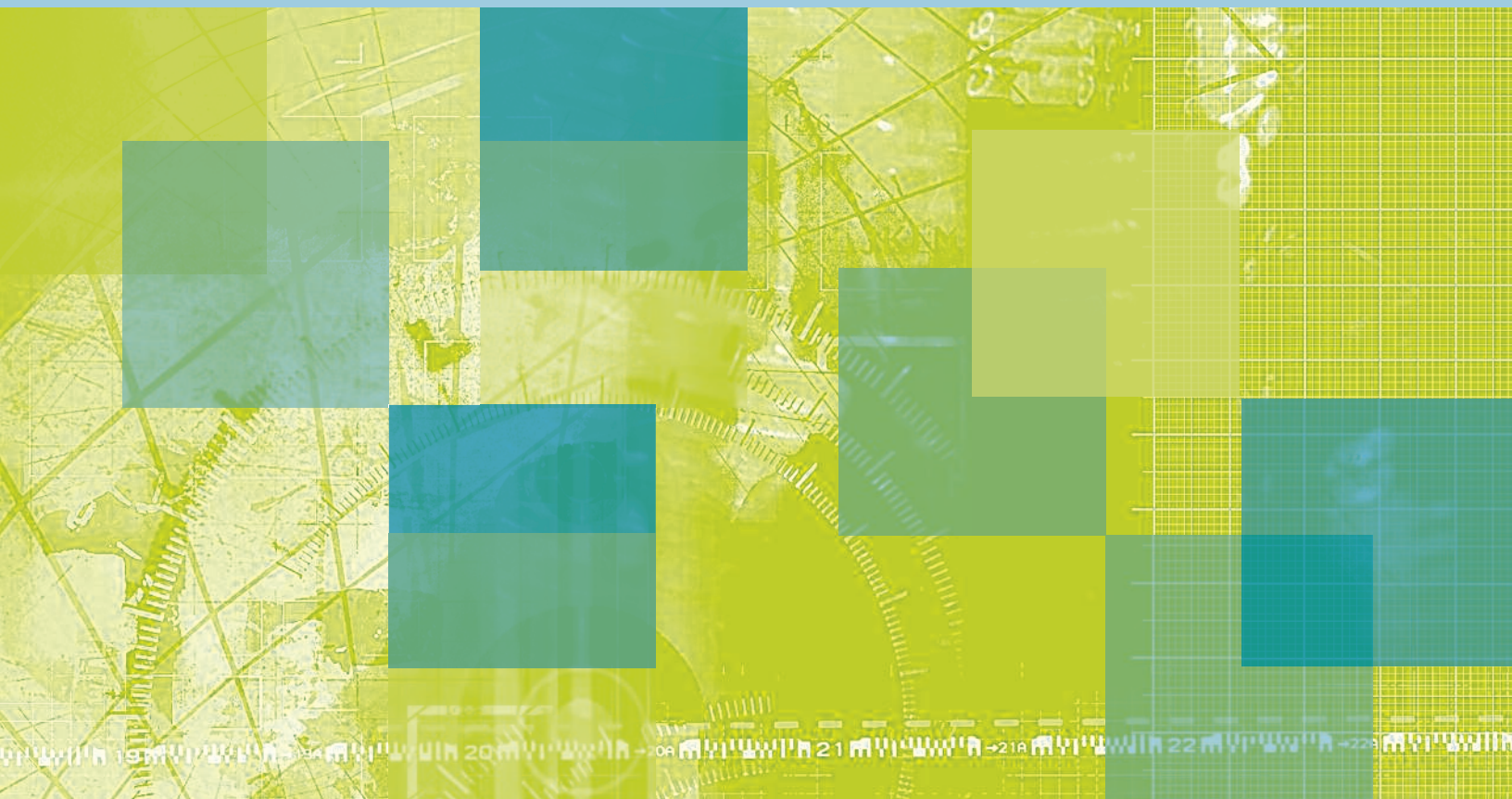
Credits and Acknowledgments

The George Washington University

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State Implementation and Perceptions of Title I School Improvement Grants under the Recovery Act: One Year Later

Introduction

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), also known as the stimulus package, appropriated $100 billion for education and included $3 billion for school improvement grants (SIGs) to help reform low-performing schools. This amount was in addition to the $546 million provided by the regular fiscal year 2009 appropriations bill for school improvement grants authorized by section 1003(g) of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. (Title I is the large federal program that provides assistance to low-income schools to improve achievement for students who struggle academically.) This fiscal year 2009 total of more than $3.5 billion for section 1003(g) SIGs represents a sevenfold increase over the previous year's appropriation.

Following passage of ARRA, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) changed the requirements for using school improvement grants under section 1003(g), including the ARRA SIG funds (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). These revised requirements target section 1003(g) funds on the "persistently lowest-achieving" schools within each state, typically the lowest 5%, and limit these schools to using one of four school improvement models. These models include (1) transformation, which entails replacing the school principal and undertaking three other specific reforms; (2) turnaround, which involves replacing the principal and many of the school staff; (3) restart, which means becoming a charter or privately managed school; and (4) school closure. According to a report published by the U.S. Department of Education, 1,228 of the nation's lowest-achieving schools were awarded ARRA SIGs as of March 21, 2011 (Hurlburt et al., 2011).

This report by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) looks at states' experiences in using this infusion of ARRA SIG funding and implementing the new requirements. It is a follow-up to a 2011 CEP report that examined states' early experiences in implementing ARRA SIG grants (CEP, 2011). Both this report and the earlier one are based on surveys of state department of education personnel. For this 2012 report, we administered a survey to state Title I directors from November 2011 through early January 2012 that focused on state processes for renewing the ARRA SIG grants made for school year 2010-11, state assistance to schools, and general perceptions of the ARRA SIG program. A total of 46 states responded, including the District of Columbia, which is counted as a state in all tallies in the report. Survey responses were kept confidential in order to encourage frank answers. More information about the survey and research methods can be found in the Study Methods Appendix at the end of this report.

Key Findings

Several key findings are evident from our analysis of the survey data:

- **States are generally positive about the ARRA SIG requirements.** Overall, states expressed support for the ARRA SIG program, and some had already seen benefits from these grants in their schools. Most states had positive views of the program's major requirements, including the criteria for determining which schools are eligible for grants, the amount of funding provided to these schools to carry out their reforms, and the competitive grant process. States had mixed perceptions about other ARRA SIG requirements and strategies, however, as well as some frustrations with implementing the teacher and principal replacement requirements and meeting short timelines.

- **The transformation school improvement model remains the most popular model chosen by schools in responding states.** A majority of the states with schools implementing the transformation model said it is effective in improving student achievement. A majority of the survey states with schools implementing the turnaround model reported that this model is effective to some extent.

- **Most of the states responding to the survey (35 of 46) renewed all of the ARRA SIG awards made in school year 2010-11 for a second year of funding in 2011-12.** This was mainly done because all the receiving schools met the criteria for grant renewal, states reported. Further, though a slight majority (26) of the responding states did not fund all tier 1 and 2 applicants in the first round of grant competition, 17 of these 26 states awarded ARRA SIG funds in the second round (school year 2011-12) to at least some of the applicants that were not funded in the first round.

- **All of the responding states reported providing technical support to ARRA SIG-funded schools and their districts, and most are providing other types of assistance.** Despite being hampered by having too few state education agency staff and too little staff time, most states plan to maintain this level of assistance during the second year of implementation. Many states plan to offer additional types of assistance.

- **More than half of the responding states indicated that they have an adequate level of staff expertise in their state education agency (SEA) to assist ARRA SIG recipients.** But only slightly more than one-third of respondents said their state had adequate numbers of staff and sufficient time to assist with program implementation.

- **Most states (32) reported that external providers played a role in implementing the ARRA SIG program during the first year of funding.** Respondents had mixed views, however, about whether contracting with these external entities to assist low-achieving schools is an effective way to improve these schools.

State Perceptions about the ARRA SIG Program Requirements

U.S. Department of Education guidance for section 1003(g) school improvement grants includes criteria, shown in **box A**, for identifying three tiers of eligible schools. The first two tiers consist of schools that meet the definition of persistently lowest-achieving and therefore receive highest priority. Tier 3 schools may be considered for grants only after tiers 1 and 2 schools have been funded. Tier 3 consists of other schools that have been identified for improvement because they failed to meet the accountability requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

States made the first round of ARRA SIG grants ("round 1") starting in school year 2010-11, using funds that had been appropriated for fiscal year 2009. An additional appropriation for section 1003(g) SIGs for fiscal year 2010 made it possible for states to hold a new competition for a second round of grants ("round 2") for school year 2011-12. ARRA SIGs are for three years, so round 1 grants must be spent by September 30, 2013.

BOX A. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR ARRA SIG FUNDING

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. ("Title I schools" are those that receive federal funds for disadvantaged children through Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.)

Tier 1 consists of Title I schools that are in NCLB improvement, corrective action, or restructuring and have been identified by their state as "persistently lowest-achieving" because they are—

   (i)   among the lowest-achieving 5% of Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring in the state or the lowest-achieving five such schools, 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 have been identified by their state as "persistently lowest-achieving" because they are—

   (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) 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 1 or 2 schools if they meet certain criteria laid out in ED guidance.

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

Within these parameters for the first three tiers, states have discretion in making several key decisions:

- The number of years of achievement that count for SIG eligibility

- The number of years of graduation rates that count for SIG eligibility

- 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

- The number of years used to determine lack of progress

Source: U.S. Department of Education, 2011.

CRITERIA TO IDENTIFY SCHOOLS

As displayed in **figure 1**, 34 of the 46 states responding to our survey agreed that the ARRA SIG criteria properly identified those schools most in need of assistance in their states in round 1 of the grant competition. Six states disagreed with this statement, five were unsure, and one state respondent explained that although this was mostly true, the use of graduation rates in the criteria resulted in some schools being identified that were not among the "true lowest-performing."

Figure 1.   Number of survey states agreeing the ARRA SIG criteria for identifying low-achieving schools are appropriate
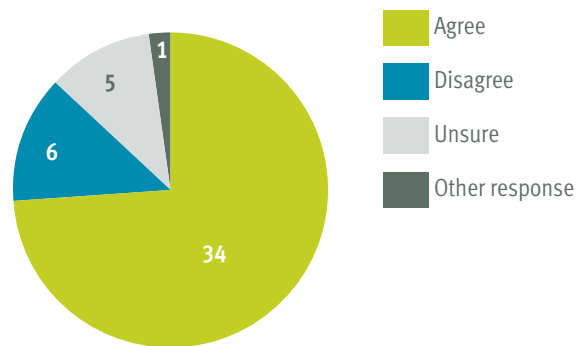
Figure reads: Thirty-four of the 46 states responding to CEP's survey agreed that the criteria used to identify low-achieving schools appropriately identified the schools most in need of assistance in their state.

ADEQUATE FUNDING

Further, as displayed in **figure 2**, most state respondents (39) said they believe round 1 ARRA SIG funds are very adequate (26 states) or somewhat adequate (13) to allow districts to provide the types of interventions necessary to improve the schools that received grants. Six states felt it was too soon to know whether the funds were adequate in this respect, and one state respondent was unsure. None of the 46 states said the funds were "not at all adequate." This positive perspective about funding adequacy echoes the finding from our first survey of state Title I directors about ARRA SIG published in February 2011.

Figure 2. Number of states reporting that the amount of ARRA SIG funds is adequate to allow districts to improve schools

Legend:
- Very adequate
- Somewhat adequate
- Not at all adequate*
- Too soon to tell
- Not sure

Figure reads: Twenty-six of the 46 states responding to CEP's survey thought the round 1 ARRA SIG funds are very adequate to allow districts to provide the types of interventions necessary to improve recipient schools.

• None of the 46 states said the funds were "not at all adequate."
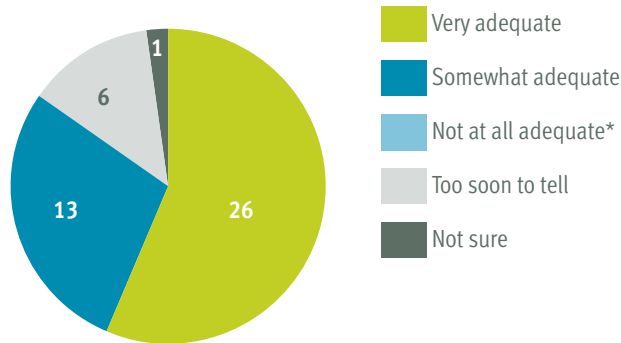
COMPETITIVE GRANT PROCESS

ED guidance requires states to award ARRA SIG funds to eligible schools on a competitive basis, in contrast to the former approach of distributing section 1003(g) grants mainly through a funding formula. Most (26) of the survey respondents agreed that a competitive grant process is an effective means for distributing these funds. Two states explained, however, that this competitive process sometimes means that funds are awarded to districts with the best grant writers rather than to districts with schools that have the greatest needs, which may be less able to write a competitive application; this is especially the case in rural areas, two respondents said. (See **figure 3**.) Most state respondents (29) felt that competitive grants are a more effective strategy for improving recipient schools than distributing funds to all schools identified for improvement under NCLB. However, one state said it was too soon to tell, and one felt that a mixture of both competitive and formula grants would ensure that other schools also get the help they need. One state said that competitive grants are effective only if there is a statewide coordinated effort to build capacity at the local level.

Figure 3. Number of states agreeing that competitive grants are an effective way to distribute ARRA SIG funds

Legend:
- Agree
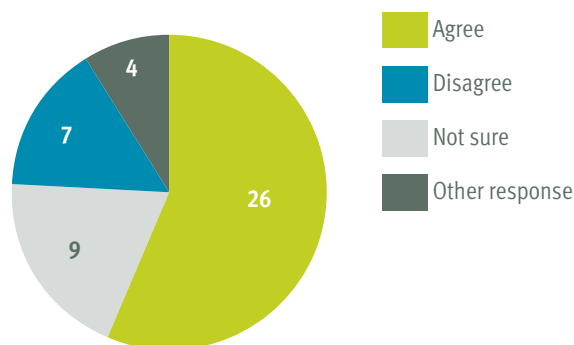- Disagree
- Not sure
- Other response

Figure reads: Twenty-six of the 46 responding states agreed that using a competitive grant process to distribute ARRA SIG funds is an effective way to support improvement of low-achieving schools in their state.

CONCENTRATION OF FUNDS

Although some state respondents (16) said that concentrating large amounts of federal funds on a small number of low-achieving schools is an effective means for improving these schools, many respondents (20) were unsure, as shown in **figure 4**. Two states said it was too soon to know for sure whether this is the case. One state noted that this is true to some extent, but only if schools can sustain the reforms funded by ARRA SIG once the money is gone. One state said the success of this strategy varies from school to school.

Figure 4.   Number of states agreeing that concentrating large amounts of federal funds on a small number of low-achieving schools is an effective means of improving these schools

Legend:
- Agree
- Disagree
- Unsure
- Other response

Pie chart values: Agree 16, Disagree 5, Unsure 20, Other response 5
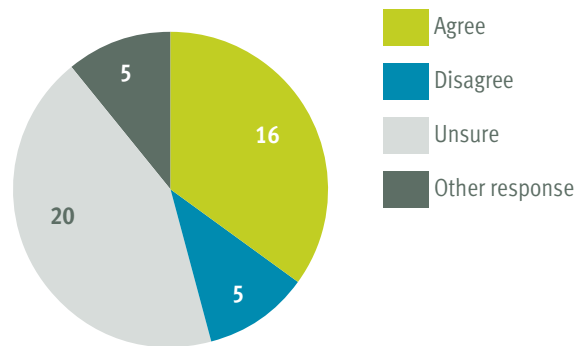
Figure reads: Sixteen of the 46 responding states agreed that concentrating large amounts of federal funds on a small number of low-achieving schools is an effective means of improving these schools.

EXTERNAL PROVIDERS

Federal guidance for the ARRA SIG program encourages states and districts to use external service providers, including institutions of higher education, regional technical assistance providers, and other nonprofit and for-profit organizations, to assist districts and recipient schools with implementing the school improvement models. Most state respondents (32) reported that these external providers played a role "to a great extent" or "to some extent" in assisting their ARRA SIG schools and districts during the first year of funding. Twelve other states responded that the role of external providers varied across districts and schools in their state. Two states reported that external providers did not play a role at all in assisting districts and schools with implementing the improvement models during the first year of funding.

Respondents had mixed views about whether contracting with external providers is an effective way to improve low-achieving schools. Sixteen states agreed with this statement, but 18 were unsure. Some states explained that the effectiveness of this strategy depends greatly on the quality of the external provider, and others said the success of external providers depends on several other factors at the school and/or district level.

We also asked states whether they felt that the three-year duration of ARRA SIGs is an appropriate amount of time to turn around their lowest-achieving schools. As shown in **figure 5**, states had mixed responses to this question. Eleven states agreed that three years was an appropriate amount of time, 18 disagreed, and 11 were unsure. Some states explained that it is too soon to tell or impossible to predict whether three years will be sufficient.

Figure 5.   Number of states agreeing that three years is an appropriate amount of time to improve the lowest-achieving schools

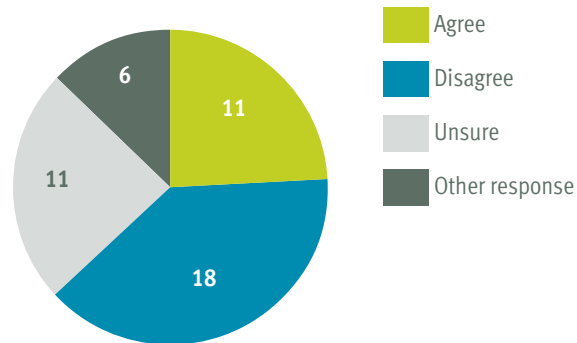Agree
Disagree
Unsure
Other response

Figure reads: Eighteen of the 46 responding states disagreed that three years is an appropriate amount of time to improve the lowest-achieving schools in their state.

State Perceptions of School Improvement Models and Their Effectiveness

ED guidance requires schools that receive ARRA SIG funds implement one of four school improvement models, explained in more detail in **box B**. In this year's survey, CEP asked states which improvement models their schools chose to implement and whether they thought specific requirements for each model were effective.

BOX B. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT MODELS

Federal guidance requires schools receiving ARRA SIG funds 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, 2011.

IMPROVEMENT MODELS SELECTED BY SCHOOLS

In 45 states (all but one of those responding to our survey), one or more ARRA SIG schools are implementing the transformation model, which makes it by far the most popular choice. This is in line with findings from prior research by CEP (2011) and others (Hurlburt et al., 2011). As shown in **table 1**, more than half (26) of these 45 states reported that the transformation model is effective in improving student achievement to a great extent or some extent. Nine state respondents said its effectiveness varies from school to school, and 10 believed it was too soon to tell whether it would be effective.

Twenty-nine states reported that one or more of their ARRA SIG schools had chosen to implement the turnaround model. As displayed in table 1, 18 of these 29 states said that, overall, this model is effective in improving student achievement to a great extent or some extent. Six states said that the effectiveness of the turnaround model varies from school to school, and five said it is too soon to tell about its effectiveness. Based on the total number of states in which the turnaround model is being used, the proportions of states giving these latter two responses are similar to the proportions for the transformation model.

Only 12 states had one or more schools that chose the restart model, and responses in these states were mixed about the effectiveness of this model. Similarly, only 14 states had schools that chose the closure model, and their responses about the effectiveness of this model were also mixed.

Table 1.	Number of states with various perceptions about the effectiveness of the ARRA SIG-required models in improving achievement in recipient schools					
Improvement model	Number of survey states with schools using model	Degree of effectiveness				Number of survey states with no schools using model
		To a great extent or some extent	Not at all	Varies from school to school	Too soon to tell	
Transformation	45	26	0	9	10	1
Turnaround	29	18	0	6	5	17
Restart	12	4	1	3	4	34
Closure	14	4	1	4	5	32

Table reads: Of the 45 survey states which reported that one or more of their schools were using the transformation model, 26 said this model was effective in improving achievement in these schools to a great extent or some extent. Nine states responded that the effectiveness of the transformation model varies from school to school, and 10 said it was too soon to tell about the model's effectiveness. In one state the question was not applicable because no schools were using the transformation model.

For the transformation and turnaround school improvement models, we asked states in which any ARRA SIG schools were implementing that model about the extent to which specific requirements of the model were key elements in improving student achievement in the majority of their schools using this model. Below we report their responses.

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE TRANSFORMATION MODEL

For the transformation model, 25 of the 45 survey states with schools using this model said that replacing the principal is, to a great extent or some extent, a key element to improving student achievement through this model. (See **table 2**.) Twenty-three states said that implementing a new teacher evaluation system is also a key element, while 18 states said it was too soon to tell. Twenty-eight respondents indicated that extended learning time opportunities were, to a great extent or some extent, a key element to improving achievement through the transformation model, but 12 respondents said that the extent to which this is key varies from school to school.

Table 2.	Number of states reporting that various requirements of the transformation model are key to improving achievement in ARRA SIG schools			
Transformation model requirement	To a great extent or some extent	Not at all	Varies from school to school	Too soon to tell
Replacing the principal	25	1	16	3
Implementing a new teacher evaluation system*	23	1	2	18
Increasing learning time for students	28	0	12	5

Table reads: Of the 45 survey states in which ARRA SIG schools are implementing the transformation model, 25 said that replacing the principal is, to a great extent or some extent, a key element in improving student achievement in a majority of their schools using this model.

*One state did not respond to this item because its teacher evaluation system was pending approval at the time of the survey.

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE TURNAROUND MODEL

As shown in **table 3**, most of the 29 survey states with schools using the turnaround model said that replacing the principal (21 states), replacing 50% of the staff (22), extending learning time opportunities (22), implementing a new school governance structure (17), and granting operating flexibility to a new school leader (20) are, to a great extent or some extent, key to improving student achievement through this model.

Table 3.	Number of states reporting that various requirements of the turnaround model are key to improving achievement in ARRA SIG schools			
Turnaround model requirement	To a great extent or some extent	Not at all	Varies from school to school	Too soon to tell
Replacing the principal	21	0	6	2
Replacing 50% of existing staff	22	0	6	1
Increased learning time for students	22	0	4	3
Implementing a new school governance structure	17	3	5	4
Granting operating flexibility to new school leader	20	0	6	3

Table reads: Of the 29 survey states in which ARRA SIG schools are implementing the turnaround model, 21 reported that replacing the principal is, to a great extent or some extent, a key element to improving student achievement in a majority of their schools using this model.

State SIG Awards and Renewal Funding

Now that the ARRA SIG program is in its second year of funding, we asked states how many of their eligible tier 1 and 2 schools that applied for ARRA SIG grants actually received funding in round 1 and how many of those not funded in round 1 were awarded these grants in round 2. Because ED guidance specifies that states cannot renew grants to schools that are not carrying out the promised reforms, CEP also asked states how many round 1 ARRA SIGs were renewed for a second year of funding and how they decided whether to renew these grants.

> **At least some of the applicants that were not awarded ARRA SIG funds during the first round of grant competition were successful in the second round.**

Based on responses to our survey, 20 states awarded ARRA SIG funding to all tier 1 and 2 schools that applied for the grants in round 1 (school year 2010-11). However, a slight majority (26) of the responding states did not fund all tier 1 and 2 applicants in round 1. Nevertheless, 17 of these 26 states awarded ARRA SIG funds in the round 2 competition (school year 2011-12) to at least some of the applicants that were not funded in round 1. The specific number of non-funded applicants in round 1 that were later funded in round 2 ranged from one or two schools in some states to 22 or 23 schools in a few others.

> **Most states renewed all of their round 1 ARRA SIG grants for a second year of funding in school year 2011-12. Ten states did not renew a few grants because schools had not met various criteria of progress.**

As already noted, ARRA SIG grants are for three years, but each year state officials must decide, based on established criteria, whether or not to renew these grants. As shown in **figure 6**, 35 of the 46 states responding to our survey indicated that their state renewed all of its round 1 ARRA SIGs for a second year of funding for 2011-12. Most (31) of these 35 states said they renewed these grants because all receiving schools met the renewal criteria, while the remaining 4 states said they had instituted an automatic renewal process for round 1 recipients. A few states provided additional rationale for their automatic renewal process, including delayed availability of state assessment results and delayed implementation of the program due to late federal approval of the state's SIG application. One state automatically renewed the ARRA SIG grants in anticipation that the state would make better technical

Figure 6. Number of states that renewed round 1 ARRA SIGs

Legend:
- Renewed all round 1 ARRA SIGs because all receiving schools met the criteria for grant renewal
- Automatically renewed all round 1 ARRA SIGs
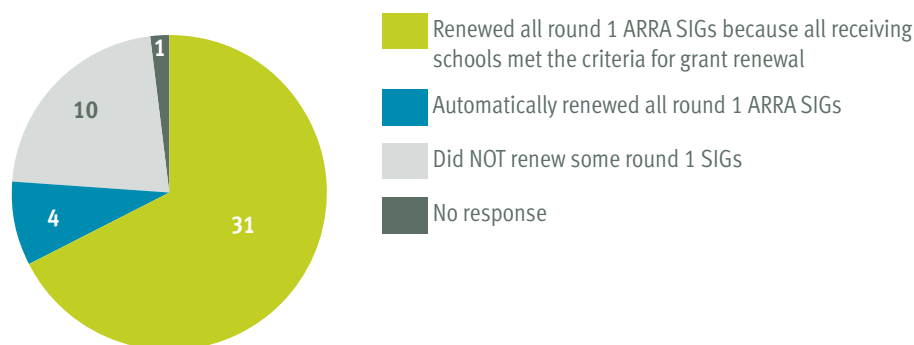- Did NOT renew some round 1 SIGs
- No response

Figure reads: Thirty-one of the 46 survey respondents indicated that their state renewed all round 1 ARRA SIGs because all receiving schools met the criteria for renewal.

assistance available to districts in school year 2011-12. Another state official reported that some districts had not yet completed the corrective action plan required for renewal, so the state did not yet know at the time of the survey whether all round 1 ARRA SIGs would be renewed for 2011-12.

Ten states reported that in one or two schools they did not renew the round 1 ARRA SIGs for a second year of funding. These states cited various criteria that these non-renewed schools had not met, including the following:

- Fidelity in implementing the chosen intervention model

- Fidelity in carrying out the activities proposed in the grant application

- Progress on leading indicators[1]

- Progress toward annual district student achievement goals in reading and/or math

Other explanations for why state officials did not renew some grants included school closure, school consolidation, an inadequate level of district oversight and support, and (for charter schools) a change in the chartering authority.

State Assistance and Monitoring of SIG Implementation

Federal guidance requires states to not only identify eligible schools and award grants, but also monitor school-level implementation of ARRA SIGs and provide technical assistance.

All responding states provided technical support to round 1 ARRA SIG districts and schools, and most provided other types of assistance.

As shown in **figure 7**, all 46 responding states reported providing technical support to districts that received round 1 ARRA SIGs. Additionally, more than half of survey respondents provided these other types of assistance to ARRA SIG schools:

- Increased monitoring and data review for participating schools

- Information on best practices for low-performing schools

- Guidance on selecting school intervention models

- Professional development for principals and/or other school administrators

- Guidance on finding and selecting external providers (for example, school intervention specialists)

Some states, though less than a majority, were providing one or more of the following types of assistance:

- Increased monitoring and data review across the district

- Professional development for teachers and other staff in ARRA SIG schools

- A list of state-approved external providers

- Technology-based materials and other instructional materials

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[1] For its grant to be renewed, a school must demonstrate progress on the following nine leading indicators: number of minutes in a school year; student participation rate on state assessments; dropout rate; student attendance rate; teacher attendance rate; number and percentage of students completing advanced coursework; discipline incidents; truancy rates; and distribution of teachers on district evaluations systems.

- Training for external providers

- Assistance to districts in identifying and recruiting highly effective principals and teachers

All of the responding states offered at least two of the types of assistance listed in figure 7—and the majority (33 states) offered six or more of the listed types of state assistance. The responses to this question are very similar to the types of state assistance reported in the February 2011 CEP study.[2]

Figure 7.   Number of states providing various types of assistance to ARRA SIG districts and schools

Type of assistance	Number of states
Technical support	46
Increased monitoring and data review for round 1 ARRA SIG participating schools	40
Information on best practices for low-performing schools	35
Guidance on selecting school intervention models	33
Professional development for principals and/or other administrators in participating schools	31
Guidance on finding and selecting external providers	24
Professional development for teachers in round 1 ARRA SIG participating schools	20
Increased monitoring and data review across the school district	17
Professional development for other school staff in round 1 ARRA SIG participating schools	17
List of state-approved external providers	14
Technology-based instructional materials (hardware, instructional software, etc.)	11
Training for external providers	11
Assistance to districts in identifying and recruiting highly effective principals	10
Instructional materials (curriculum, textbooks, etc.)	9
Assistance to districts in identiying and recruiting highly effective teachers	8
Other	5
None	0

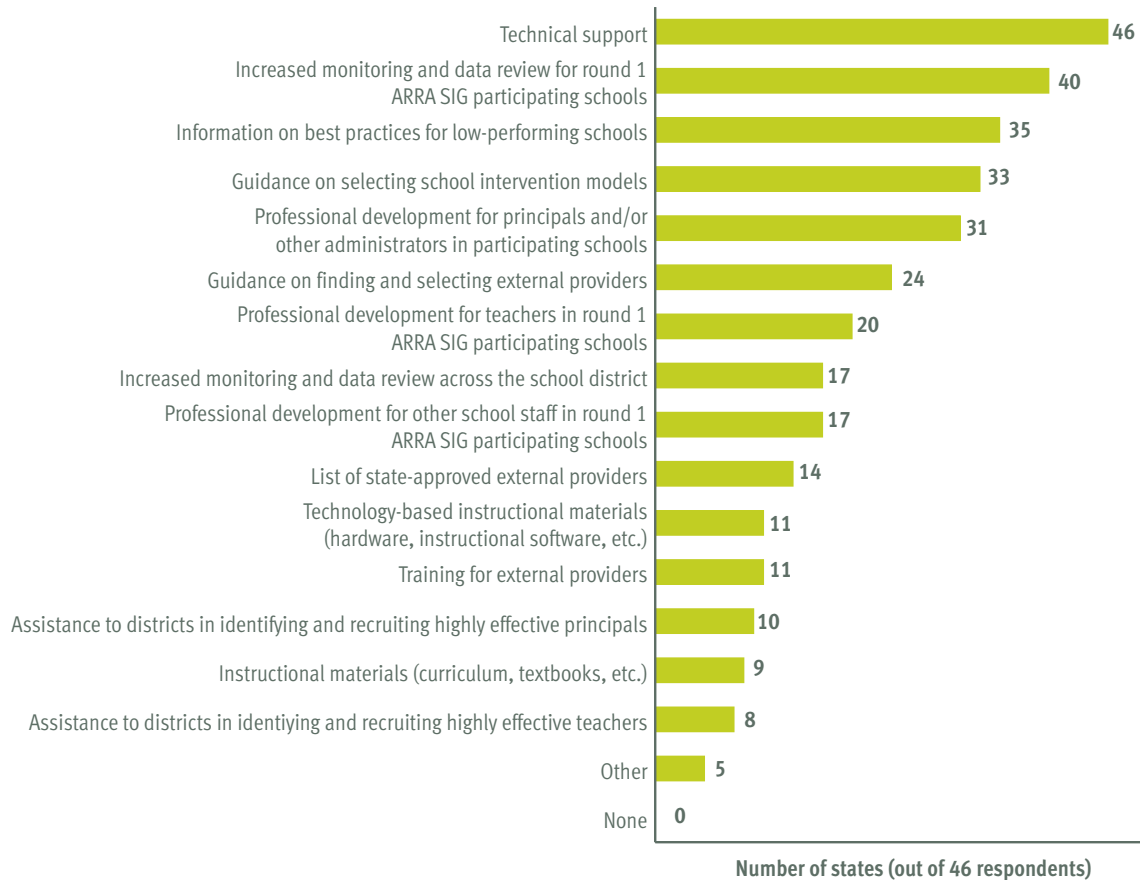Number of states (out of 46 respondents)

Figure reads: All 46 survey respondents indicated that their state education agency provided technical support to districts awarded round 1 ARRA SIG grants.

In an open-ended part of this survey question, a few respondents mentioned other types of assistance that their state was providing. These include additional support to ARRA SIG recipients in health services and student discipline, training of grantees on implementing programs with fidelity, more intensive site visits and data review that go beyond program implementation to provide comprehensive support, and external support for research and technical assistance related to teacher and principal evaluations. One state said it was developing a pipeline of turnaround leaders for ARRA SIG schools under its Race to the Top initiative.[3]

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[2] Although 46 states also responded to the survey described in the February 2011 report, a different set of states responded to this year's survey. The February 2011 report, *Early State Implementation of Title I School Improvement Grants Under the Recovery Act*, can be found online at www.cep-dc.org.

[3] Race to the Top is a federal competitive grant program initiated with ARRA funds. Its purpose is to encourage and reward states that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform, including turning around low-performing schools.

> **Most states plan to maintain their level of assistance and/or provide additional types of assistance for the second year of ARRA SIG implementation.**

The majority of state respondents reported that they plan to continue all forms of state assistance in the second year of ARRA SIG implementation that they provided in the first year. Only four states plan to discontinue one or more types of assistance in the second year. These states gave various reasons for discontinuing assistance. One state found that specific types of assistance were not effective, another cited reductions in state education funding, and a third respondent wrote that "with the increase in the number of SIG grantees to support, [the state] decreased the amount of on-site support for our first cohort." Two states were not sure about continued assistance in the second year of implementation.

More than half (26) of responding states said they will provide additional types of assistance in the second year of ARRA SIG program implementation beyond what was provided in the first year. States gave the following examples of additional assistance they plan to provide in the second year:

- Online tools to assist, coach, and support ARRA SIG schools

- Turnaround consultants and specialists to support and work in ARRA SIG schools

- Strategic planning guidance and planning sessions

- Expanded and additional on-site monitoring, including site-based implementation meetings and teacher-led data reviews

- Use of the results of monitoring visits and needs assessments to inform state support

- Additional professional development on school climate and culture and use of instructional time

- Technical assistance for alternative education programs

- Assistance working with school boards, where applicable

- Additional funding from the state for "schools that did not implement their approved plan to the level that the [state] would have preferred"

- State training for teachers and evaluators about teacher and principal evaluation initiatives

- "Wraparound" supports in mental health

Ten states said they would provide the same types of assistance in the second year of implementation as they did in the first year, while four states reported that they would provide different types of assistance in the second year, although the amount of overall assistance would be about the same. For example, one state official explained that the agency would focus on formative assessment, tiered instructional support, and sustainability during the second year. Another indicated the state agency would further customize and differentiate its assistance to schools and districts depending on their level of success in implementing ARRA SIG grants. A third state plans to provide enhanced benchmark assessments through a third-party provider. Three respondents were not sure whether their states would change the types of assistance available to schools in the second year of implementation.

ENTITIES PROVIDING OVERSIGHT AND MONITORING

As shown in **figure 8**, nearly all survey respondents (43 of 46) indicated that state education agency staff are the individuals who are overseeing and monitoring ARRA SIG-funded reforms in their state. Of the three states that were not using SEA staff for oversight and monitoring, one state had hired school improvement specialists to fulfill these responsibilities, the second had hired school improvement specialists and partnered with higher education institutions, and the third was using higher education institutions and current school employees.

In addition to using SEA staff for oversight and monitoring, almost half (22) of the state respondents were using improvement specialists hired by the state, and 19 said that district employees were fulfilling this responsibility. Other external providers involved in overseeing and monitoring ARRA SIG implementation included regional technical assistance providers (14 states), current school employees whose jobs now include monitoring and oversight of ARRA SIG plans (10 states), nonprofit or for-profit organizations (8 states), and institutions of higher education (5 states).

Thirty-four of the 46 state survey respondents indicated that their SEA relies on more than one organization or individual to provide oversight and monitoring of ARRA SIG implementation. The remaining 12 states are relying on only one of the seven entities listed in figure 8 to provide oversight and monitoring.

Figure 8. Number of states reporting that various types of staff or entities are providing oversight and monitoring of ARRA SIG implementation

Figure reads: Forty-three survey respondents reported state education agency (SEA) staff provided oversight and monitoring of school implementation of ARRA SIG reforms during the first year of round 1 ARRA SIG funding.

STATE EDUCATION AGENCY CAPACITY

More than half of the state respondents indicated that they had an adequate level of SEA staff expertise (32 states) and/or adequate fiscal resources (25 states) to assist round 1 ARRA SIG schools and districts during the first year of implementation. (See **box C** for additional information on state capacity and staffing.) Of the 25 states that reported having adequate resources, seven are winners of the first round of federal Race to the Top grants.

Fewer respondents—only 18 states—said they had an adequate *number* of SEA staff members to assist districts and schools with ARRA SIG implementation. Nineteen states said they had adequate SEA staff *time* for this purpose. Two states reported that their SEA did not have adequate capacity in any of these areas—expertise, numbers, or time—to provide assistance to ARRA SIG recipients.

BOX C. CEP'S REPORT ON GENERAL SEA FUNDING AND STAFFING IN THE REFORM ERA

The finding described above—that more states have adequate SEA staff *expertise* to assist ARRA SIG schools and districts than have adequate *numbers* of staff—echo our findings about SEA capacity in general from an earlier report and a different survey.

In the fall of 2011, CEP surveyed state education agency officials—usually deputy superintendents of education—in order to better understand the status of SEAs' operating budgets, staffing, and expertise in the wake of ARRA and whether SEAs have the capacity to support key education reforms. The survey found that states appear to be making an effort to maintain, and in some cases increase, SEA staff assigned to carry out key education reforms, including providing assistance to low-performing schools. In the 12-month period before the survey was administered, 35 of the 37 responding states maintained or increased the level of professional and technical staff assigned to assist low-performing schools. Looking ahead, 32 of the 37 of survey states reported that they expected to maintain or increase SEA staffing in these areas in the coming year, although fewer states anticipate staffing increases than in the previous year.

More states reported having adequate SEA expertise (22 states) to support efforts to improve low-performing schools than had adequate staffing levels (11 states) or fiscal resources (10 states) for these activities.

To access this broader CEP report, *State Education Agency Funding and Staffing in the Education Reform Era*, visit www.cep-dc.org.

Overall Views about the ARRA SIG Program

Finally, the survey asked respondents to share any additional thoughts about their state's experiences with the ARRA SIG program.

> **Overall, states expressed support for the ARRA SIG program but also aired some frustrations and made suggestions for the future of the program.**

Many states expressed satisfaction about the implementation of ARRA SIGs in their state, as well as optimism for the future of the schools in the program. Some said schools in their state are already experiencing a number of benefits from ARRA SIG funding, including gains in academic achievement. Other states noted that ARRA SIG funding enabled them to increase their technical assistance to recipient schools and devote additional SEA staff to helping these schools implement reforms.

At the same time, states aired frustrations about the difficulty of removing ineffective teachers and leaders and of finding and hiring effective teachers and principals to replace them. The short timeline and quick turnaround involved in the application process and program implementation was also a source of frustration for some survey respondents. To improve the ARRA SIG program, some states suggested changes. Though many suggestions were made, the most common theme involved extending ARRA SIGs beyond three years to allow more time for capacity-building for reform and making preparations to sustain these reforms over the long term, after ARRA SIG funding ends. Other types of suggestions included providing training and additional support for state staff in charge of administering the SIG funds, as well as increasing the focus on districtwide strategies rather than just school improvement strategies.

States made several other comments in response to this open-ended question. Their direct quotations appear in an online appendix to this report that is available at www.cep-dc.org.

The findings from our most recent state survey on the ARRA SIG program build on the findings from CEP's previous survey on this issue. As reported in *Early State Implementation of Title I School Improvement Grants Under the Recovery Act* (CEP, 2011), our first survey shed light on how the increased funding and new SIG requirements had impacted the number and types of schools served and how state education agencies were using these funds to assist schools targeted by the SIG program. As described in this current report, our second survey offers more information about states' overall perceptions of the program after the first year of funding, which appear to be relatively positive. It is important to note, however, that one year is not a sufficient amount of time to fully understand whether and how schools receiving ARRA SIGs will improve. Further research at the state, district, and school level is still needed to investigate whether SIGs are transforming school culture and raising student achievement as intended.

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Study Methods Appendix

The preliminary instrument for the survey of state Title I directors was developed after considering information from CEP consultants, prior CEP surveys and studies, and other reports about school improvement grants. The CEP survey team also sought advice on the preliminary survey from the executive director of the National Title I Association, who works with state officials in charge of administering and applying for SIGs.

In October 2011, the survey questions and response items underwent further review and systematic pretesting. The survey team obtained feedback from state-level officials in one state about whether the questions and response items were comprehensible. The survey was redrafted based on their input, and the revised instrument was administered to 51 state Title I directors or their affiliates (including the District of Columbia director).

In November 2011, CEP drafted a letter that outlined the purpose and goals of the survey—including the time involved and the anonymity of responses—and invited state Title I directors to participate. A paper copy of this letter, along with the survey, was mailed to all 51 state Title I directors or their affiliates. The same letter and an electronic version of the survey were also e-mailed to these individuals. State Title I directors were invited to respond to the survey via e-mail, fax, or hard copy sent by U.S. mail. CEP also provided a phone number to call if respondents had any questions. Nearly all respondents submitted the survey to CEP by e-mail, and one state's responses were collected by fax.

Most state respondents completed the survey electronically as a Microsoft Form. CEP converted these files as needed and imported them to a shared Microsoft Excel file. The imported data were also cleaned—checked for duplicate entries or missing response items—before analysis. Most of the items in the survey were closed questions and provided nominal and/or ordinal data. Response item frequencies were totaled and percentages calculated using the formula functions in Excel. A few questions allowed respondents to explain their responses, and the last question asked for additional comments or feedback about a state's experiences with SIGs. These written responses were simultaneously uploaded to the Excel file, and researchers analyzed these items individually, then together, to extract common themes.