



Comparing Race to the Top and the School Improvement Grant Program

The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) is evaluating Phase 2 state applications for Race to the Top (RTTT) funding at the same time that states are applying for School Improvement Grant (SIG) funds for Title I and Title I-eligible schools. Both the RTTT and SIG programs are intended to improve student achievement in low-achieving schools, and both programs utilize funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to direct unprecedented funding toward education reform (RTTT is distributing \$4.3 billion and SIG \$3.4 billion this year). Pennsylvania will receive \$140 million in SIG funds when its application is approved by USDOE. The Commonwealth hopes to receive an additional \$400 million in a competitive RTTT grant.

PSEA locals that signed Memoranda of Understandings (MOUs) for RTTT that include “turnaround school” reforms will find that many of the requirements for participation in the SIG program look familiar. For example, a major component of SIG is the requirement that all schools receiving funds (with one exception, discussed later in this document) implement one of four intervention models that are identical to the four “turnaround” models defined by RTTT: transformation, turnaround, restart (charterize), and closure. Neither SIG nor RTTT can be utilized by districts to implement changes that contradict state statutes, regulations, or collective bargaining agreements.

Although the two programs appear similar, there are substantial differences. In general, SIG requires less union involvement in the planning stages and more rapid reform implementation than RTTT.

Key Differences between RTTT and SIG

PSEA locals that are familiar with the requirements of RTTT should be aware of four key differences between RTTT and SIG.

1. SIG does not require the submission of a Memorandum of Understanding in order to qualify for funds; RTTT does. In order to receive any funds under RTTT, each participating district must have submitted to the state a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by the school board president, superintendent, and local union president. The MOU signifies that all parties have agreed to bargain in good faith over the components of RTTT implementation that involve mandatory subjects of bargaining or are contrary to existing collective bargaining agreements. These components may include an extended school day and/or year, financial incentives for specific teaching assignments, and changes to teacher compensation that may include tying evaluation results to compensation. In addition to these reforms, a district seeking RTTT funds for turnaround schools must implement one of four intervention models.

The SIG program does not require union agreement prior to a district submitting an application for funds. USDOE recognizes that implementation of the intervention models may require negotiation and encourages districts to involve teachers’ unions early in the process. However, a district can apply for SIG funds prior to engaging in any substantial discussions with the union.

Locals that chose not to sign the RTTT MOU may still face efforts under SIG to implement an intervention model in one or more schools. In all cases, state laws, regulations, policies, and collective bargaining agreements remain in effect, and districts must bargain with the union over those portions of proposed interventions that are subject to bargaining or are inconsistent with the existing collective bargaining agreement.

2. The implementation timeline for SIG is substantially faster than for RTTT.

In September 2010, Pennsylvanians will know if the state has been awarded a RTTT grant. At that point, each local that signed an MOU will need to work with the district to create a Scope of Work and submit it to PDE within 90 days. The scope of work will identify those elements of the RTTT implementation plan that require bargaining. The local and district do not need to complete bargaining within the 90-day window, but the Scope of Work that is submitted to PDE should establish dates by which the local and district expect to complete bargaining and begin RTTT implementation.

Districts that apply for SIG funds are expected to begin to implement one of four intervention models in each designated school at the beginning of the 2010-11 school year.

Locals in districts that submit a SIG application will need to be active through the summer to ensure that collective bargaining agreements and bargaining obligations are honored as the district plans for rapid implementation of one or more intervention models.

3. The schools that are eligible for SIG and RTTT funds differ.

RTTT provides funds to support district-wide reforms in every district that submitted a signed MOU to the state. If Pennsylvania receives a RTTT grant all participating districts will receive RTTT funds. Exact funding levels will be based upon poverty levels within the district. In addition to the money districts receive for participation in the program, RTTT directs additional funds to "turnaround" (low achieving) schools as defined by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Initially, SIG funds may only be applied to implement one of four intervention models in specific Title I and Title I-eligible schools that have been designated as either a "Tier I" or "Tier II" school for the purposes of the SIG grant process.

- A Tier I school is a Title I school in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring that is identified by PDE as a "persistently lowest-achieving school."
- A Tier II school is a secondary school that is eligible for, but does not receive, Title I funds and is identified by PDE as a "persistently lowest-achieving school."

Districts with Tier I and Tier II schools may apply to the state for SIG funds for those schools. After all applying Tier I and Tier II schools have obtained funds, districts may apply for funds for Tier III schools, if funds are available. A Tier III school is a Title I school in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring that has not been designated by PDE as a Tier I or Tier II school. Tier III schools must use funds to implement research-based interventions that align with the needs of the school, but they need not implement one of the four intervention models.

Slightly different criteria define the two sets of schools, and consequently RTTT "turnaround" schools and SIG Tier I, II, and III schools are not the same. A complete list of Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III schools is available on the PDE website or from PSEA.

Districts without a RTTT "turnaround" school may still have a SIG Tier I or II school. All locals should check the PDE website or call PSEA to learn if their district has a school that is eligible for SIG funds.

4. SIG funds are sure to arrive in Pennsylvania within the next couple of months; RTTT funds have not yet been awarded to Pennsylvania.

RTTT is a competitive grant program. This means that Pennsylvania must compete against other states to secure a grant. Pennsylvania currently has filed a phase 2 grant application with USDOE; the state will know in September, 2010, if its application for \$400 million is successful. Implementation of the RTTT program components depends upon a successful grant application.

SIG funds are distributed to all states via a formula, not a competitive grant process. In other words, Pennsylvania is certain to receive \$140 million in SIG funds, and these funds will be distributed to districts with Tier I, Tier II or Tier III schools that apply for funds.

SIG application decisions will be made this summer, and where districts apply for SIG funds, locals will face efforts to implement of one of the four intervention models beginning in Fall 2010.

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