



# Wyoming Department of Education **PRESS RELEASE**

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**For Immediate Release:**  
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## **School Improvement Grant Conference Slated for Casper**

**CHEYENNE**—Understanding more about research, learning about new online tools, and the examination of goals and benchmarks for leading and lagging indicators are all part of the agenda for next week's School Improvement Grant (SIG) Conference, sponsored by the Wyoming Department of Education.

The SIG Conference will be held in Casper at the University of Wyoming Outreach Center (951 North Poplar Street, Casper, WY), April 10-11.

School Improvement Grants (SIG) are federal funds distributed by the state to schools which demonstrate the greatest need for the funds and the strongest commitment to substantially raise the achievement of students in their lowest-performing schools.

Currently, Wyoming has 11 SIG schools and it will add a new cohort this year. The grants are given out on a competitive basis and require four areas be addressed - family and community engagement, increased instructional time, teacher collaboration time, and teacher and leader effectiveness and operational flexibility. "The SIG Conference is a meeting of the SIG schools - their districts and their leadership teams," said Wyoming Department of Education SIG Consultant Beth Vandewege. "All the SIG schools will be there. We do some education, some collaboration, some support, sharing of resources. If you are a school who is interested, you are perfectly welcome to come."

Headlining the conference will be Dr. Sam Redding, who plans to speak about community engagement and turning around rural schools. Dr. Redding is the Executive Director of the Academic Development Institute and Director of the National Center on Innovation and Improvement.

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## **Related Information**

The Wyoming Department of Education is inviting public comment on the following waivers it is applying for in connection with its application for FY11 Title I 1003(g) School Improvement Grant Funds. The comment period will run from April 2-May 3, 2012.

If you would like to comment, please go to the Wyoming Department of Education website at [www.edu.wyoming.gov](http://www.edu.wyoming.gov) and select the link for public comment on these waiver requests. If you have questions please contact Beth VanDeWege at 307-777-8964 or [beth.vandewege@wyo.gov](mailto:beth.vandewege@wyo.gov) or David Holbrook at 307-777-6260 or [david.holbrook@wyo.gov](mailto:david.holbrook@wyo.gov)

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## School Improvement Grants (SIG) - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) & Glossary

### 1. What is a SIG Grant?

The School Improvement Grant (SIG) is a program funded through the US Department of Education. SIG is authorized under section 1003(g) of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Title I or ESEA). In 2009, states received a total of \$3.5 billion to turn around their persistently lowest achieving schools. In the 2011 budget, \$535 million was made available to nine states.

### 2. What is the ESEA?

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is a federal statute enacted in 1965. It is an extensive statute that funds primary and secondary education, emphasizes equal access to education, and establishes high standards and accountability. The goal of ESEA is to close the achievement gaps between students by providing each child with fair and equal opportunities to achieve an exceptional education. The funds are authorized for professional development, instructional materials, resources to support educational programs, and for parental involvement promotion. The government has typically reauthorized the act every seven years since its enactment, though 10 years have elapsed since the last reauthorization. The current reauthorization of ESEA is the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

### 3. What is an LEA?

Local Educational Agency (in Wyoming, local school districts).

### 4. What is an SEA?

State Educational Agency (WDE).

### 5. Who gets SIG Grants?

The Federal Government, through the US Department of Education, issues SIG funds to State Educational Agencies (SEAs) that award funds to LEAs and schools in a competitive grant process. In Wyoming, the Department of Education (WDE) has jurisdiction over competitive sub-grants to Local Educational Agencies (LEAs).



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## 6. Who pays for SIG Grants?

The SIG program is funded from federal tax dollars allocated to the US Department of Education.

## 7. What is Title I and how do LEAs and schools qualify for Title I funding?

**Title I** funding to SEAs is intended to help close the achievement gap between students in lower income neighborhoods and more affluent areas. Schools qualify for federal funding through Title I based on the number and percent of students enrolled in the Free or Reduced Lunch program. School districts must show Adequate Yearly Improvement (AYP) in their at-risk students to continue to receive funds.

## 8. How do SIG grants work?

WDE awards competitive sub-grants to LEAs (districts) who qualify for these funds based on their performance ranking and other factors such as whether they receive Title I funds already or not. The districts submit proposals on behalf of schools that demonstrate the greatest need for the funds and the strongest commitment to use the funds to provide adequate resources in order to raise substantially the achievement of students. LEAs can apply for SIG funding for schools in their district that qualify for the grant. Once grant applications are submitted, WDE hires grant reviewers who read the grants, score them and rank them based on the requirements of the grant. WDE then determines, based on a ranking system, if it can fund all the schools or if it needs to award funding to schools that are ranked as having the highest need.

Schools that have the highest need (Tier I and Tier II schools) are required to fully implement one of the four school reform models outlined in the grant requirements. These grants are designed to be implemented over a three year period, with the goal of turning around the performance of the schools in that time.

The WDE must comply with a number of terms, conditions and assurances to guarantee school implementation of interventions. The WDE must report and respond to requests



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for all school-level data, follow all fiscal reporting and auditing standards and ensure that funds are spent as indicated in the sub-grant proposal. The WDE has the right to intervene, renegotiate the sub-grant, and/or cancel the sub-grant if the recipient fails to comply with sub-grant requirements. The WDE must comply with the reporting requirements and submit any required report forms by the due dates specified

## 9. How is the sub-grant money disbursed?

The State holds the money received from the US Department of Education. The districts request reimbursements as they incur expenses. It is a reimbursement system of flow through.

## 10. What do SIG schools have to do?

Implement a multi-year approved intervention and improvement plan, according to the criteria of the model selected.

## 11. What are the SIG Intervention Models?

**Restart** - The LEA converts or closes and reopens a school under a charter/performance contract with a charter school governing board, charter management organization (CMO), or education management organization (EMO). A restart model must enroll, within the grades it serves, any former student who wishes to attend the school.

**School Closure** - The LEA closes a school and enrolls the students who attended that school in other schools in the LEA that are higher achieving. These other schools should be within reasonable proximity to the closed school and may include, but are not limited to, charter schools or new schools for which achievement data are not yet available.

**Transformation** - The LEA replaces the principal with a highly capable principal with either a track record of transformation or clear potential to successfully lead a transformation (although the LEA may retain a recently hired principal where a turnaround, restart, or transformation was instituted in past two years and there is tangible evidence that the principal has the skills necessary to initiate dramatic change). The



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LEA also implements a rigorous principal and staff evaluation and development system; rewards staff who increase student achievement and/or graduation rates and removes staff who have not improved after ample opportunity; institutes comprehensive instructional reform; increases learning time and applies community-oriented school strategies; and provides greater operational flexibility and support for the school.

**Turnaround** - The LEA replaces the principal with a highly capable principal with either a track record of turnaround or clear potential to successfully lead a turnaround (although the LEA may retain a recently hired principal where a turnaround, restart, or transformation was instituted in past two years and there is tangible evidence that the principal has the skills necessary to initiative dramatic change). The LEA screens and rehires no more than 50% of the staff and uses locally adopted competencies to measure staff effectiveness. The LEA must implement the prescribed strategies included in the Final Requirements for School Improvement Grants.

12. Which model(s) are Wyoming SIG schools using?

Transformation.

13. What are these waivers the WDE is considering?

WDE is asking for three waivers in connection with its application for FY2011 SIG funding (funding that will be awarded to schools for the 2012-2013 school year implementation). All these waivers and more are included in the application for funds. Wyoming only needed these three.

The **first waiver** is a request to use the same list of schools eligible for this grant that was developed for the previous year's grant award. Wyoming developed the list of schools eligible for these funds last year when we were awarded the FY2010 funds. Because of the quick turnaround for the application for FY2011 funding, WDE chose to apply for this waiver.

The **second waiver** is related to two of the four reform models that a Tier I or Tier II school is required to fully implement. The reform models are outlined in the Federal Register posting for the requirements of this grant. WDE is requesting the waiver to allow schools that choose to implement Restart or Turnaround models to start over in the school improvement timeline. Many schools that are eligible for these funds are in Title I



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improvement status due to not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). This waiver allows schools start over in improvement status.

The **third waiver** relates to the fact that every school that receives a SIG award is required to operate as a school wide school. A school wide school means that the school provides services to all students using Title I funds regardless of whether they technically qualify for Title I funds. One of the requirements to become a school wide school is that the school has to have a poverty percentage of 40% or greater. This waiver allows schools that have a poverty percentage that is less than 40%, that receive a SIG grant, to operate as a school wide school.

#### 14. How does the waiver process work?

In applications for federal grants where there are requirements of the grant that may disallow an otherwise eligible state, district or school from applying, the US Department of Education will include the option for states, districts or schools to apply for waivers in order to take advantage of the grant funding. This is the case with the waivers that WDE is applying for in connection with the SIG funds.

#### 15. Why is WDE seeking public comment on the SIG waivers?

It is a federal requirement that we post waivers for public comment. We also present the waivers to the superintendents and committee of practitioners.

#### 16. What is the Center on Innovation and Improvement?

The Center on Innovation & Improvement supports regional centers in their work with states to provide districts, schools, and families with the opportunity, information, and skills to make wise decisions on behalf of students. The Center serves as a clearing house and is federally funded through the Department of Education.

#### 17. Which regional center does Wyoming belong to?

The Northwest Regional Comprehensive Center. The Center provides expertise and web based tracking mechanisms.



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18. Who is Dr. Sam Redding?

Dr. Redding is the Director of the Center on Innovation and Improvement. He is a nationally recognized expert at turning around low performing schools.

19. What is the purpose of the SIG conference on April 10 & 11 and what will the participants learn?

The Conference will provide SIG schools with the latest information and features of the SIG program and tools; increase their understanding of best practices to engage local families and communities; hear about available WDE resources; be informed and share strategies for extending meaningful learning time; examine goals and benchmarks.

20. Who should attend the SIG Conference?

Anyone who teaches or works or has a child in a SIG school.

## **Acronyms:**

AYP - Adequate Yearly Progress

SIG - School Improvement Grant

SEA - State Education Agency

LEA - Local Education Agency

## **Terms:**

Indistar - The SIG Implementation tool, used by many states to guide districts and schools in implementing their SIGs. It includes year-end reporting of progress on the Implementation Indicators, the Plan Interventions, and Leading and Lagging Indicators, as well as providing evidence of what has been done.