

**Stimulus Funding Alert:  
New School Improvement Grant Guidance Will Likely Include the Use  
of a Comprehensive Intervention (as an Alternative to Charter  
Schools/EMO's and Closing Down Chronically Lowest-Performing  
Schools) Which Could Provide the Better Opportunities for Firms  
Whose Products Can Fit Into the Comprehensive Intervention**

*A Technology Monitoring and Information Service (TechMIS)*  
**SPECIAL STIMULUS FUNDING ALERT**

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A careful reading of recent USED/IES documents and RFPs strongly suggests that the soon-to-be published School Improvement Grants guidance will likely include an alternative to those options in the Law (i.e., converting to charter schools, contracting with EMOs, closing down schools, etc.). This alternative could provide the best opportunities for firms with products and services which can be part of an overall Comprehensive Intervention.

As noted in the last TechMIS issue, a recent Institute of Education Sciences application identified the need for and the eventual use of a “diagnostic framework” which can identify specific problems existing in the chronically lowest-performing schools and point to the types of interventions that are likely to address these problems and challenges effectively.

In its May 27<sup>th</sup> announcement, the Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) Grants program identified a number of high-priority professional development needs in terms of skills and competencies effective teachers should have including:

- employing effective strategies for reading instruction;
- skills to analyze student achievement data and other learning measures to improve classroom instruction; and
- skills to meet the specific learning needs of all students, including those with disabilities and limited English proficiency and use of screening, diagnostic, and formative assessments to determine students difficulties and individualize intensive literacy instruction and interventions.

As noted in Education Daily (May 29<sup>th</sup>), the TQP Grant application goes beyond statutory requirements, emphasizing the need to develop objectives and measures for increasing the achievement of students and being able to link such individual student performance measures to individual teachers. On several occasions, Secretary Duncan has emphasized the need for longitudinal data systems to be able to link student achievement data to teachers and principals, and the need to differentiate the effectiveness of teachers and principals and reward effective teachers. The Secretary has also stated that state longitudinal data systems which inhibit linking student performance to teachers would not be viewed in high regards during the review process for Race to the Top grants.

As we reported in the last TechMIS Washington Update, Secretary Duncan, in several recent speeches and articles, has identified other activities which should be required under his proposed “turnaround model” in order to transform chronically low-performing schools including:

- changing and strengthening curriculum and instructional programs;
- increasing learning time for students afterschool, weekends, and summer;
- providing more time for teachers to collaborate, plan, and strategize; and
- providing new principals and leadership teams in restructuring schools with greater flexibility for budgeting, staffing, and scheduling issues.

More recently, an additional flexibility has been emphasized -- namely the ability to award credits or provide student ratings based on performance measures such as the use of portfolios, project-based assessments, and online student performance history, rather than relying on credit hours earned or other measures of instructional seat time.

Building on the School Improvement Grant guidance provided to states in November 2007 when the SIG funding was \$125 million, the soon-to-be-published SIG guidance is likely to call for a refined system of continuous assessment data review to inform instruction. It will likely to call for more extensive use of “formative” assessments and “interim” assessments, especially formative assessments which will provide “rapid time” data analysis to inform instruction. It will also include the need for behavioral and other supports, which will be critical components of the so-called “instructional improvement systems” which states will have to ensure districts develop/adopt and use.

And, as we noted in the May TechMIS Washington Update, several groups, such as the Gates Foundation and the Eli Broad Foundation, in their publications have called for the use of performance contracts between states/districts and schools receiving School Improvement Grants and/or the entities operating such schools, such as charter schools and EMOs. At the least, states will be responsible for ensuring that LEAs are accountable for progress being made in schools receiving SIG funds.

While many of the above prescriptions, encouragements, and suggested activities have been mentioned under other Duncan priorities and grants/programs, most appear to be converging on the School Improvement Grants initiative. In turn, this initiative is increasingly being recognized

as the highest priority of this Administration. Moreover, if one takes into account the portion of Race to the Top funding also being allocated to turnaround school initiatives and the SEA 4% set-aside, as well as the funds under School Improvement Grants, the total amount of funding will far exceed \$5 billion for schools in corrective action and restructuring. This represents the largest targeted amount of Title I regular and stimulus funding; it also offers the most stable and promising opportunities for most TechMIS subscribers.