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School Improvement Grants: Implementation and Effectiveness

School Improvement Grants of up to $6 million over three years were awarded to schools that agreed to implement one of four school intervention models and the practices that model prescribed.

The School Improvement Grants (SIG) program, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education (ED), aimed to improve student achievement in the nation's lowest-performing schools. ED awarded $3.5 billion in School Improvement Grants in 2010, using $3 billion from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. School Improvement Grants of up to $6 million over three years were awarded to schools that agreed to implement one of four school intervention models and the practices that model prescribed (see the figure for examples of these practices).

SIG schools agreed to implement one of four school intervention models and the practices that model prescribed

Transformation	Turnaround	Restart	Closure
• Replace principal • Use student achievement growth to evaluate teachers • Use data to inform instruction • Lengthen the school day or year	• Replace principal • Replace at least 50 percent of school staff • Use data to inform instruction • Lengthen the school day or year	• Convert to charter school	• Close the school and send students to higher-achieving schools

Given the sizeable investment in SIG, it is of policy interest to know (1) if schools that implemented a SIG-funded model were more likely than other schools to use the practices promoted by SIG, (2) if receiving SIG funding to implement a model had an impact on student achievement, and (3) if student achievement improved more with some models than others. To date, there has been little comprehensive evidence to answer these questions.

The final report from Mathematica's multiyear evaluation of SIG for ED's Institute of Education Sciences answers these questions by examining the program's implementation and its impact on student achievement over three years (2010–2011 to 2012–2013).

SIG-funded models had no impact on math or reading test scores, high school graduation, or college enrollment

Secondary schools implementing the turnaround model had larger improvements in math test scores than those implementing the transformation model.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Schools implementing a SIG-funded model used more SIG-promoted practices than other schools, but there was no evidence that SIG caused schools to use more practices.** A descriptive analysis found that overall, schools implementing a SIG-funded model reported using more SIG-promoted practices than other low-performing schools (23 versus 20, out of the 35 practices examined). However, a more rigorous analysis that compared more similar groups of low-performing schools (those that barely qualified for the grant and those that just missed qualification) concluded that SIG did not cause schools to use more practices; there was no significant difference between these groups in the number of practices used.
- **Implementing a SIG-funded model had no significant impacts on student achievement.** A rigorous analysis comparing schools that barely qualified for the grant with those that just missed qualification found that implementing a SIG-funded model had no significant impacts on math or reading test scores, high school graduation, or college enrollment.
- **Elementary schools had similar improvements in math and reading test scores regardless of which model they implemented.**
- **Secondary schools implementing the turnaround model had larger improvements in math test scores than those implementing the transformation model.** In contrast, reading improvements were similar for all models. The differences in math improvements across models might be due to factors other than the model implemented, such as differences between schools that existed before they received grants.

SAMPLE AND METHODS

Data for this report came from surveys of school administrators conducted in spring 2013 and student-level administrative data collected from states and districts for the 2009–2010 through 2012–2013 school years. The sample included 480 schools located in 60 districts from 22 states. Each state and district included a mix of low-performing schools that either were or were not implementing a SIG-funded model. The sample was purposively selected to support estimation of the impact of SIG on student achievement. The report used several different methods to answer the research questions: a descriptive analysis of implementation, a rigorous regression discontinuity design analysis of impacts, and a correlational analysis of the relationship between the type of model implemented and improvements in student achievement.

ABOUT THE REPORT

This report was written by Lisa Dragoset, Jaime Thomas, Mariesa Herrmann, John Deke, and Susanne James-Burdumy of Mathematica Policy Research and Cheryl Graczewski, Andrea Boyle, Rachel Upton, Courtney Tanenbaum, and Jessica Giffin of American Institutes for Research. It describes the SIG program's implementation and its impact on student achievement. The full report is available at https://www.mathematica-mpr.com/our-publications-and-findings/publications/SIG-Implementation-and-Effectiveness.

Scan this QR code to visit our website.