

ISSUE BRIEF

LESSONS FROM SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANTS THAT WORKED

Greg Anrig | July 23, 2015

One of the Obama administration's most ambitious school reform initiatives was its dramatic increase in funding for so-called School Improvement Grants (SIGs) aimed at turning around the nation's worst performing schools. Under the 2009 economic stimulus act, the SIG program spent an additional \$3 billion above its previously allocated \$546 million, beginning in the 2010–11 school year, to support more than 1,200 struggling schools with high concentrations of students from low-income households. The grant awards to each school amounted to as much as \$2 million a year for three years.

A number of studies have attempted to evaluate the impact of the SIG program. Because that research has drawn mixed conclusions, [with more studies still in the pipeline](#), considerable debate has ensued about whether the initiative is succeeding.¹ That debate is ideologically complex.

On the left, progressives disagree with each other about the feasibility of revitalizing low-income schools. For example, a favorable Center for American Progress report on school turnaround efforts including SIG titled [“Dramatic Action, Dramatic Improvement.”](#)² prompted a [rebuttal from the liberal National Education Policy Center](#) at the University of Colorado, arguing that evidence shows programs like SIG do not work.³ The conflict on the left largely relates to the degree to which schools on their own can overcome the negative forces associated with poverty and racial isolation.

On the right, conservatives tend to believe that low-income schools can succeed, but only if they operate outside of the conventional governmental bureaucracy through charter or private schools, ideally without teachers unions, as in Louisiana. An article by public schools critic Andy Smarick, [“School Improvement Grants: The Disaster Continues.”](#) encapsulates that libertarian perspective.

This brief can be found online at: <http://www.tcf.org/blog/detail/lessons-from-school-improvement-grants-that-worked>

While the academic jury will continue to deliberate for years about the overall impact of the SIG program, amplified by ideologues with their entrenched positions, it is already clear that students in a meaningful, albeit small, subset of schools that received grants performed significantly better after major changes were implemented with the additional support. Moreover, the most successful stories share important commonalities that can help clarify for politicians, policymakers, school administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders how to emulate those effective transformations in other struggling, predominantly low-income schools.

A great deal of evidence has accumulated in the past few years about how to accomplish the successful transformation that many skeptics still consider to be impossible. Those details are consistent with other [research about the characteristics of effective schools](#), which often contradicts commonly repeated claims in political discourse about what needs to be done to reform American education.⁴ This Century Foundation report synthesizes that evidence about the SIG initiative and provides recommendations for enabling many more chronically struggling schools serving low-income populations to better educate their students. Some of the key findings are:

- Fundamentally transforming the culture of deeply troubled schools in impoverished environments is extremely difficult to accomplish over a fairly limited time frame of three years, even with a large surge in funding.
- While most SIG schools showed greater improvement in student outcomes than similar schools without grants, those relative gains were usually quite modest and may be difficult to sustain after the grants expire.
- The small number of schools that demonstrably transformed to the benefit of their students all

pursued very similar strategies, which the federal government and states should proactively communicate to low-income districts, especially including future grant recipients.

- Common strategies that proved successful include (1) an intensive focus on improving classroom instruction through ongoing, data-driven collaboration, led largely by teachers with oversight from the principal; (2) a concerted, systematic effort to create a safe and orderly school environment through implementation of research-supported practices that all staff members can learn to adopt; (3) expansion of time dedicated to instruction and tutoring in core academic subjects; (4) strengthening connections to parents, community groups, and local service providers to help support school staff efforts to build a culture that expects success of all students; (5) confining reliance on outside expert consultants to jump-starting changes that school leaders and teachers can sustain, rather than spending substantial resources on contractors who either micro-manage or provide inadequate assistance.

After summarizing the main features of the SIG program and the key findings of studies examining its impact that have been published to date, this report provides details about two SIG schools that fundamentally transformed, while generating significantly improved student outcomes. It also gives brief descriptions of other schools that have taken positive turns, while underscoring the commonalities in all of these encouraging stories.

To be clear, the particular schools highlighted in this report do not constitute a methodologically rigorous selection. Rather, they serve as proof that some SIG schools did significantly improve student outcomes over the term of their grant. Providing some detail

about the practices they pursued, the commonalities among them, and the extent to which their stories reinforce broader research about school improvement can provide useful lessons for other schools and for public policy.

The report concludes with recommendations for policy and practice that would improve the likelihood of revitalizing many more struggling low-income schools across the country. With Congress making progress toward reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the changes it considers to the SIG program and other elements of that bedrock federal school legislation should fully incorporate lessons available from actual success stories in extremely challenging environments. Even if reauthorization passes without continuing the grants, some kind of support for school turnarounds is likely to continue that would benefit from the SIG experience.

The SIG Program

In June 2009, secretary of education Arne Duncan proposed a national effort to rejuvenate the most consistently low-performing schools, arguing that “we want transformation, not tinkering.” In general, schools needed to be ranked among the lowest 5 percent in each state, with the least recent progress in raising student achievement, to be eligible for SIGs. Those receiving grants were required to choose from among three reform models—“transformation,” “turnaround,” or “restart”—or, to simply close.

The most popular option, chosen by 74 percent of the SIG recipients, was the least disruptive approach: transformation. Changes required under that framework include hiring a new principal, increasing learning time, implementing a new teacher evaluation system that weighs measurements of student progress as a significant factor, providing job-embedded professional development designed to build capacity and support staff, and identifying and rewarding

personnel who appear to be improving student outcomes, while supporting and then removing those who are not. Another 20 percent of SIG recipients opted for the turnaround model, which has similar requirements to the transformation approach, but also demands replacing at least 50 percent of the school’s staff. Only 4 percent of the schools receiving grants elected the restart model, which entails reopening the school under the management of a charter or an education management association. An even smaller share—2 percent—used a SIG award to close.

The main rationale for SIG’s ambitious, highly prescriptive approach is that, because low-performing, high-poverty schools are typically mired in a climate with a multitude of interlocking problems, only a fairly radical outside intervention can jolt a deeply flawed culture onto a more functional pathway. As [Thomas Dee, a professor at the Stanford Graduate School of Education, explains:](#)

One dimension of the theoretical perspective implied by these reforms concerns imperfect information: principals and teachers in underperforming schools may have limited information on what constitutes effective practices, as well as underpowered incentives to identify and implement them. Another implied theoretical assumption behind these reforms is that schools suffer from collective-action problems in aligning the efforts of principals and teachers to support a culture of school effectiveness. Whole-school reforms like those supported by SIGs can then be viewed as an external effort to coordinate and sustain a larger and more efficient individual and collective provision of effective classroom and school-level practices.⁵

Still, aside from anecdotes, essentially no evidence existed to undergird the expectation that interventions like those designed for the SIG program would work.

A [2008 “practice guide”](#) on school turnarounds commissioned by the Department of Education concluded that no valid studies demonstrated that chronically underperforming schools could be improved through any delineated set of changes.⁶ Educators Linda Darling-Hammond, a progressive, and Frederick M. Hess, a conservative, coauthored [a New York Times op-ed warning that highly prescriptive federal reforms such as SIGs would be counterproductive](#): “Dictates from Congress turn into gobbledygook as they travel from the Education Department to state education agencies and then to local school districts. Educators end up caught in a morass of prescriptions and prohibitions, bled of the initiative and energy that characterize effective schools,” they wrote.⁷

In a sense, the impetus behind the Obama administration’s substantial bet on the SIG program was a belief that given the enormous long-term human costs of high-poverty schools that inadequately educate their students, there was little to lose and much to gain from trying out an ambitious, but unproven, strategy. Even if only a fraction of the SIG schools benefited, that would still be a better outcome than standing pat, given the absence of progress in the targeted schools. The risk of doing harm under those circumstances seemed relatively modest, while the opportunity to learn from a bold new experiment in and of itself could be valuable.

It is important to note that the SIG approach is an example of “attempting to make separate but equal” work, as Century Foundation senior fellow Richard Kahlenberg pointedly notes. A fundamentally different approach, described in a 2009 Century Foundation report by Kahlenberg, [“Turnaround Schools That Work”](#), highlights examples of promoting socioeconomic integration in student composition as a means of improving outcomes.⁸ While Secretary Duncan’s Department of Education has recently shown greater interest in integration, the main focus of their efforts

continues to be investing more in highly segregated schools.

Key Findings of Available Research

The studies examining the impact of the SIG program that have been published to date have drawn mixed conclusions. In the most general terms, SIG schools collectively appeared to improve modestly relative to peer schools that did not receive the grants. At the same time, a very small subset of SIG recipients showed concrete, quantifiable signs of genuinely “turning around.” A minority of others showed little improvement at all, or actually produced worse outcomes. Such ambiguous results are extremely common with social science studies, so it is important to dig deeper into the research to try to glean meaningful lessons that can guide future efforts to improve struggling low-income schools.

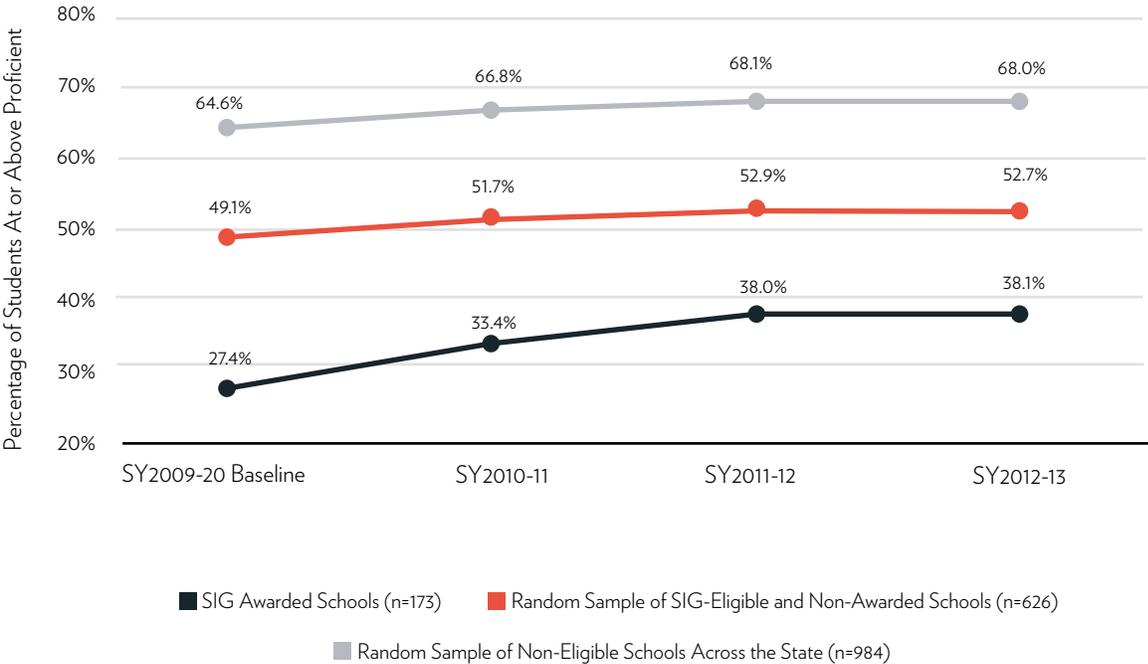
This section summarizes the primary conclusions of the most rigorous SIG investigations and then synthesizes their areas of agreement and disagreement. Those reports were produced by the Council for the Great City Schools, the U.S. Department of Education, and Professor Thomas S. Dee.

Council of the Great City Schools

In February 2015, the Council of the Great City Schools published a 110-page report, [“School Improvement Grants: Progress Report from America’s Great City Schools.”](#)⁹ The advocacy organization represents its membership of sixty-seven large urban school districts.

The overarching finding of the study was that the SIG schools succeeded in narrowing the gaps between them and the two control groups regarding the percentages of students scoring at or above the proficiency level over the first two years of the grants, but their success leveled off in the third year. In addition, the study found that the schools that were awarded SIGs succeeded in reducing the percentage of students in the lowest

FIGURE 1
MEAN PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS IN GRADES 3–8 PERFORMING AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENT IN MATHEMATICS BY SIG GROUP FROM SY2009–10 TO SY2012–13



Source: School Improvement Grants: Progress Report from America’s Great City Schools (Washington, D.C.: Council of the Great City Schools, February 2015), Figure 2.

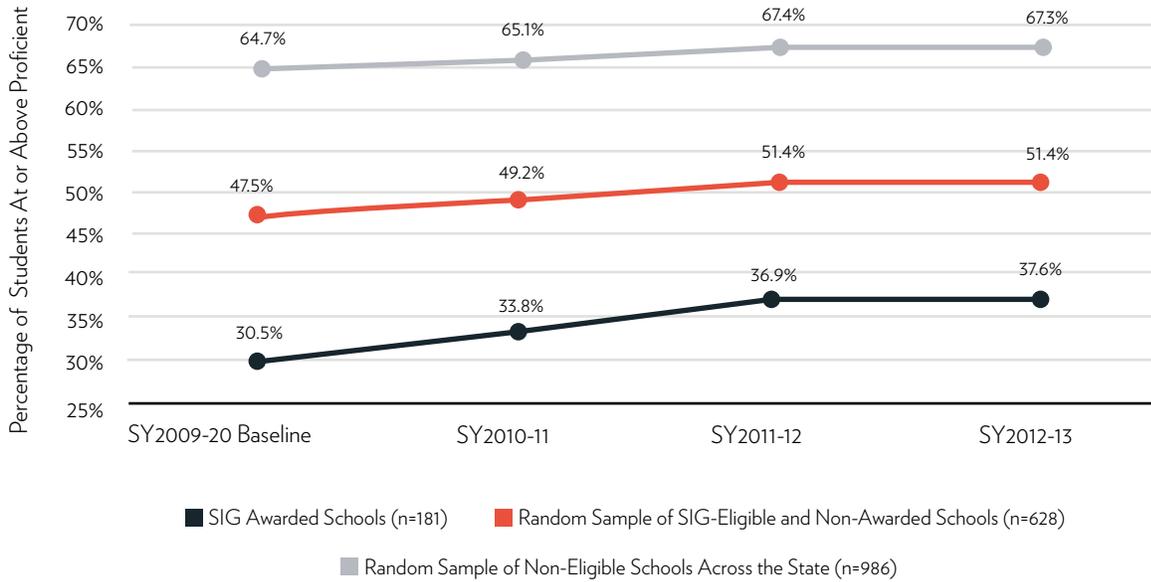
proficiency level on state assessments. There were no statistically significant differences between SIG schools that implemented the transformation model versus the more aggressive turnaround model that required replacing at least half of the school’s staff.

The study did not analyze high school test scores, in part because states vary in the grade levels when they conduct assessments. In addition, state tests administered in grades ten, eleven, and twelve often exclude students who fail to gain the necessary high school credits for promotion into the next grade. Consequently, any analysis of state performance in the upper grades sometimes excludes the lowest-performing students in high school. That can significantly undermine the value of using test score

results to gauge the progress of low-performing schools.

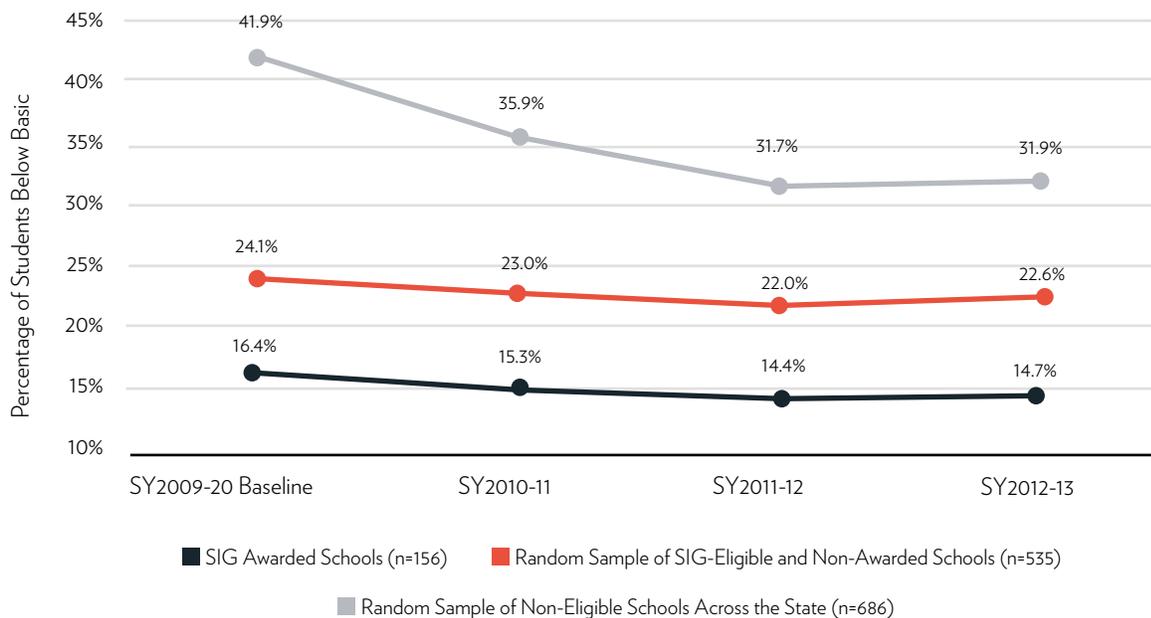
The Council acknowledged a number of limitations with its study, including the absence of information about student demographics, English language learners, and poverty levels. Nor was it able to track longitudinal data for individual students. In addition, states report data in different ways. For example, many states report the share of proficient students across grade levels without conveying the number of students tested at each grade level. That makes it impossible to calculate a weighted proficiency level for schools based on the number of test takers in each grade.

FIGURE 2
MEAN PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS IN GRADES 3-8 PERFORMING AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENT IN READING BY SIG GROUP FROM SY2009-10 TO SY2012-13



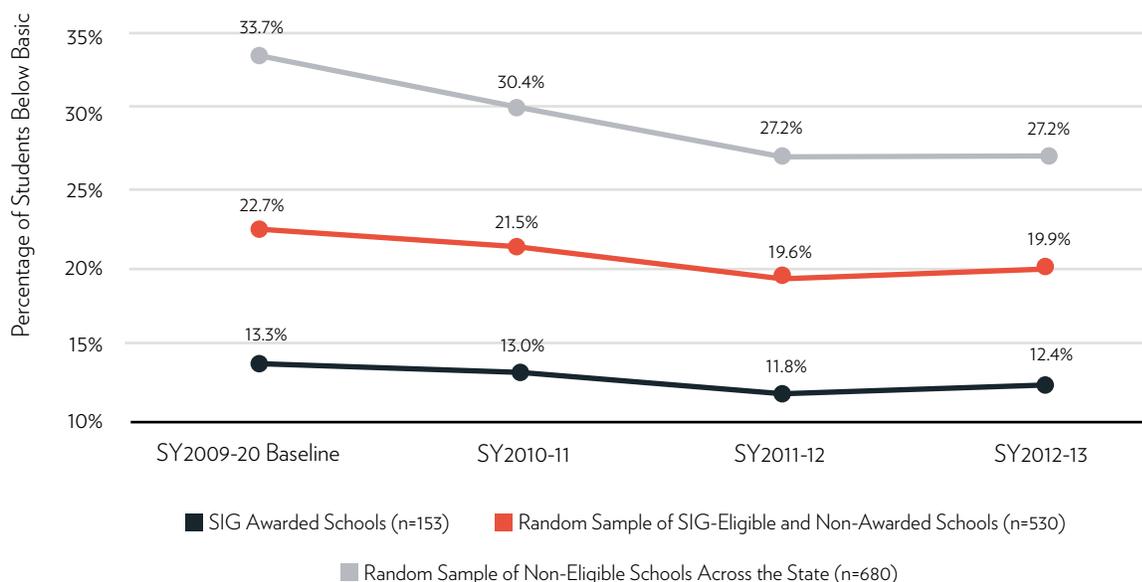
Source: School Improvement Grants: Progress Report from America's Great City Schools (Washington, D.C.: Council of the Great City Schools, February 2015), Figure 3.

FIGURE 3
MEAN PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS IN GRADES 3-8 PERFORMING BELOW BASIC IN MATHEMATICS BY SIG GROUP FROM SY2009-10 TO SY2012-13



Source: School Improvement Grants: Progress Report from America's Great City Schools (Washington, D.C.: Council of the Great City Schools, February 2015), Figure 4.

FIGURE 4
MEAN PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS IN GRADES 3–8 PERFORMING BELOW BASIC IN READING BY SIG GROUP FROM SY2009–10 TO SY2012–13



Source: School Improvement Grants: Progress Report from America's Great City Schools (Washington, D.C.: Council of the Great City Schools, February 2015), Figure 2.

In analyzing the testing data for grades three through eight, the Council found that, before the grants were awarded, the SIG schools had proficiency levels that were substantially below the random sample of schools that were eligible for SIGs but did not receive them. In the 2009–10 baseline year, that proficiency gap was 21.7 percentage points for math and 16.9 percentage points for reading. Unsurprisingly, the gaps were even wider for the SIG schools in comparison with a random sample of school not eligible for the grants: 37.2 points for math and 34.1 points in reading.

The study found that two years after the SIGs were awarded, all of those gaps declined by statistically meaningful levels. (See Figures 1 through 4.) By 2011–12, the proficiency level of the SIG schools in math was only 14.9 percentage points lower than for schools that

were eligible for the grants but did not receive them—a decline of 6.6 percentage points, or almost a third of the original deficit. For reading, the gap narrowed over those two years to 14.5 percentage points—a more modest decline of 2.4 percentage points. In relation to the random sample of schools not eligible for SIGs, the SIG schools also narrowed their proficiency gaps by comparable amounts over the first two years.

One other especially notable finding from the Council's study relates to the share of SIG schools that showed large versus modest versus negligible improvements in test scores. In the three years following 2009–10, 46 percent of the SIG schools made gains of greater than 10 percentage points in math, while another 12 percent improved between 5 and 10 percentage points; over the same period, 27 percent of SIG schools showed

no improvement at all. In reading, 30 percent showed gains in excess of 10 percentage points, 22 percent between 5 and 10 percentage points, and 23 percent showed negligible improvement.

That wide variance in impact underscores the extent to which it would be useful to explore in greater detail how the schools that achieved large gains implemented their grants in contrast to those that experienced little improvement. To that end, the Council sent teams of researchers to some of the schools that performed unusually well, along with some that saw no gains, to discern contrasts that could illuminate what caused the differing results. Those investigations led the Council to highlight five themes that distinguished the most-successful from the least-successful SIG schools:

1. The successful schools had a more coherent overall district and state strategy for supporting and turning around their lowest-performing schools, and they executed those plans relatively effectively. More-successful SIG schools benefited from plans that clearly articulated how a school's instructional program was to be enhanced, how professional development on the instructional program was to be delivered, and how the school would be supported by outside contractors. In each case, the turnaround strategies were created and pursued in a *collaborative, coordinated* manner, with staff in schools, the district, and the state working together. Those efforts tended to be more cohesive and more easily implemented than strategies built on contradictory advice or that met with interference from multiple state or local authorities and external partners. A lack of coordination of instructional interventions among state, local, and school officials resulted in SIG schools having multiple intervention strategies of mixed quality or interventions that clashed instructionally with one another.

2. A heightened focus on *instructional* improvements was characteristic of the effective SIG schools, but not the ineffective ones. Less-effective SIG schools were more likely to report that the support they received from either state or local entities emphasized grant compliance, auditing requirements, or job protection. In contrast, the quality of the instructional programming—and the professional development and supports that came with it—was critical in the more-effective schools. The Council's research team saw two major dynamics. The first involved states, districts, and schools who used SIG funds to develop or purchase instructional materials or interventions that research clearly indicated could improve academic outcomes for students in struggling schools. Sometimes this also meant extending instructional time, implementing individualized tutorials, or rescheduling the school day in a way that allowed for more academic exposure for students while permitting time for teachers to review strategies and improve their practice. Where these tactics were done well, SIG schools had a better chance of improving. The second dynamic was that sometimes states, districts, or schools used SIG funds to retain organizations and supports that were not likely to improve academic outcomes on their own. For instance, there were examples of organizations such as City Year, Communities in Schools, the Urban League, and others being brought into schools as part of the overhaul process. Such groups are often capable of providing much-needed wraparound services and other community supports, but they are not well suited to boosting instructional capacity.

3. The quality of school staffing was also critical. Having an effective principal is a well-known

prerequisite for an effective school, and this longstanding finding is even more valid when turning around a chronically underperforming school. Schools and districts saw more positive results when principals were invested in a clearly defined vision for improvement and were able to communicate these priorities to teachers, staff, students, and the community. Leaders who were able to energize, inspire, and motivate teachers were a key ingredient of transformation efforts in the more-effective SIG schools. In addition, more-effective SIG schools invested part of their resources in boosting the capacity of the principals to lead and support the overhauls.

4. In schools where outcomes improved, administrators and teachers effectively leveraged *data* to identify the specific academic needs of struggling students, to determine areas where professional development required strengthening, and to point toward intervention strategies. This data could derive from a variety of formal and informal assessments, not just standardized tests. SIG schools that were less adept at using data did not appear to improve as fast. In addition, less-effective SIG schools appeared to make little effort to evaluate what they were doing or to assess why some interventions worked and others did not.

5. Finally, a major challenge facing all the SIG schools was the need to sustain any academic gains after the substantial federal resources expired. In some interviews conducted by the Council, staff members were optimistic about the path forward. For instance, one district indicated that the literacy coaches supported by the grants provided strong professional development to teachers that would be sustained long after the grant funds ran out.

Others voiced optimism that the new skills teachers developed around data could continue to be used to improve classroom practice. On the other hand, the interviews also revealed doubts about the future after SIG, which are valid, given the substantial leveling off of gains in reading and math scores in the third year of the program. Staff members in one school indicated that there were no discussions about transitioning or sustaining the work before the funds were actually gone. As a result, once funds expired, the school began struggling as a number of grant-funded coaches, teachers, and tutors moved on.

The Council study concluded that while it was clear that SIGs provided a temporary boost to some schools, they did not solve long-term and larger systemic issues. In order to continue SIG interventions, districts and schools are now forced to make difficult financial decisions, and many are unconvinced that there are sufficient funds that could be redeployed within the district to make up the difference. Other district administrators explained that as SIG funding dwindled, there were fewer opportunities for collaboration and support from one school to another, or with district and/or state leaders. The staff in one district indicated that preserving the improved school climate was going to be the hardest thing to sustain, as students continue to have social, emotional, and behavioral needs long after their SIG-supported social workers, counselors, and nurses disappear. One stated simply that, “You can’t go from \$1 million to \$70,000 and think that’s going to get the job done.” It was clear from the interviews that few policymakers at the federal, state, or local levels had given much thought to how to sustain program gains after the funds began to run out.

In sum, the case studies in the Council report revealed that there were multiple ways that chronically low-

performing schools could be improved, but there were an even greater number of ways in which their failure could be perpetuated.

The U.S. Department of Education

On February 14, 2014, the U.S. Department of Education published an analysis of the average proficiency rates of SIG schools in the 2011–12 school year compared to rates in the year prior to receiving the grants.¹⁰ For so-called Cohort 1 schools that began to receive their grant money in 2010, the study covered a two-year period; for Cohort 2 schools, it examined only one year of change. In addition to the limited time frame, the study's shortcomings included an absence of comparison schools with similar demographics that did not receive grants and negligible information about how the schools that achieved relatively larger gains differed from those that did not.

Those major limitations aside, these were the most notable findings in the Department of Education's report:

- When compared to all schools nationally, the SIG Cohort 1 schools demonstrated a larger increase in average proficiency rates in both math (7 percentage points, compared with 3 percentage points for all schools) and reading (3 percentage points, versus 1 percentage point for all schools); Cohort 2 schools showed a very small relative improvement in reading proficiency rates, but not in math.
- For Cohort 1, 39 percent showed a gain in average proficiency rates of at least 10 percentage points on math over the two years, and 30 percent had gains between 1 and 9 percentage points. On the other hand, 23 percent experienced declines between 1 and 9 percentage points, with 6 percent dropping 10 or more points. On reading for Cohort 1, 30

percent had gains of 10 or more percentage points; 35 percent improved between 1 and 9 points; 25 percent declined between 1 and 9 points; and 7 percent dropped 10 points or more. (For Cohort 2, the one year changes were more tightly clustered, unsurprisingly.)

- No meaningful differences were found between the SIG schools that adopted the transformation versus turnaround models.

While the findings of the Department of Education's SIG study are more limited than the Council of the Great City Schools' report, they are consistent with the same general conclusion that, at least in the short term, SIG schools on average saw meaningful test score improvements. But at the same time, there was wide variation in performance, including a substantial share of SIG schools that did not experience improved outcomes.

Stanford University Education Professor Thomas S. Dee

In April 2012, the National Bureau of Economic Research published a study by Professor Thomas S. Dee, who was then at the University of Virginia but has since moved to Stanford, [focusing on SIG schools in California](#).¹¹ Using a more sophisticated methodology¹² than the studies published by the Council of the Great City Schools and the Department of Education, but also concentrating on a much smaller group of schools in a single state, Dee's report found that one year after receiving grants, a subset of SIG schools showed significant improvements in test scores relative to their counterparts. In particular, Dee found that jumps in scores occurred largely among schools that adopted the more radical turnaround model.

Although Dee has not yet published an update of that study, he did share more recent findings with The Century Foundation that include a second year of

results covering the 2011–12 school year. In his more recent analysis, Dee found statistically significant second-year improvements in SIG schools that employed both the transformation and turnaround models. Those gains were somewhat larger in math than reading. Still, because only eighty-one SIG schools in California were examined in Dee’s study, over a brief time frame of just two years, it would be premature to describe those results as conclusive.

Examples of SIG Schools That Showed Progress

A number of studies have examined efforts to turn around struggling schools through mechanisms other than SIGs, including various features of the Obama administration’s Race to the Top program. But because the SIG experiment was unusually ambitious and prescriptive, and because the preliminary research includes findings that are fairly promising, it is worthwhile to explore case studies of SIG schools that showed relatively strong results to get a deeper understanding of how the grants may have stimulated positive changes. Clichéd though it may be, it can never be said often enough with respect to education policy that there is no single magic bullet that will radically transform America’s schools. But these encouraging stories are likely to leave readers with the recognition that in deeply challenged, low-income schools that have demonstrably improved, the same collection of interrelated strategies drove the transformation.

This section provides details about two examples: McKay High School in Salem, Oregon, and Orchard Gardens K–8 School in Boston, Massachusetts, followed by thumbnail sketches of three other SIG schools that showed better results after pursuing a similar cluster of strategies.

McKay High School in Salem, Oregon

Situated in a neighborhood where the Crips, Bloods, Norteños, and Sureños gangs are active, many of

McKay High’s students have been both perpetrators and victims of crime outside of the school throughout the past decade. The percentage of students with one or more incarcerated parents was higher at McKay than at any other Oregon school. In the period leading up to McKay’s receipt of its \$1.9 million SIG beginning in 2010, total expulsions of its 1,800-plus students amounted to 53 in the 2007–08 school year and 49 in 2008–09. The graduation rate was only about 65 percent, and test scores were consistently poor. In a city with an unemployment rate close to 12 percent, about 85 percent of McKay’s predominantly Hispanic students qualified for subsidized lunch.

That was the environment that Ken Parshall confronted when he was hired in 2010 and joined administrators and teachers who had begun working together on their SIG proposal. They initially convened four meetings of the entire staff to discuss overarching goals and specific ideas for inclusion in the grant application. [The document they produced settled on four main strategies for improving McKay:](#) (1) To use a “medical rounds” type of classroom observation style to identify weak areas in instruction and provide support to develop stronger teaching; (2) to use job-embedded professional development and collaboration through “Professional Learning Community” teams that would focus on student performance data to identify and respond to problems; (3) to develop a comprehensive system of interventions and supports for students who struggle academically and behaviorally, and (4) to shift behavioral management of the students from administrative leaders to individuals with direct expertise in those techniques—campus monitors, behavioral specialists, counselors, and mentors—enabling the leadership team to focus on instructional improvement.

Once awarded with the SIG under minimally disruptive transformation model, Parshall focused initially on

recruiting the highest quality teachers he could find who expressed excitement about participating in the overhaul effort at McKay. Like most poorly performing schools, McKay had a high faculty turnover rate, which created many openings to fill. In addition to filling the vacant slots, Parshall used the SIG funds to hire ten teachers who would staff new academic workshops focused on reading, writing, and math. Those mandatory classes replaced what had previously been electives. The SIG also supported Saturday tutoring programs and summer school classes that provided credit-recovery opportunities and English language instruction.

Another core change that Parshall initiated was to create collaborative teacher teams that would meet for fifty minutes each day before school to focus on improving their instructional practices. In those meetings, teachers shared strategies and techniques, while paying close attention to student scores on the tests that they had developed to identify problems to be addressed. In contrast to conventional professional development, which is typically intermittent and minimally effective, Parshall believed that creating a day-in, day-out focus on teaching skills would be much more likely to strengthen the learning experience for students. Parshall explained:¹³

Usually professional development is like exercise—most schools do it just often enough to make it hurt, but you don't get any benefit from it. What I've learned over the years is that if you do it on a regular basis, that's when you start truly experiencing the benefit. The new teachers I recruited arrived recognizing the value of that kind of teamwork, and after relatively minor resistance from some who had been there for a while, a new kind of culture that embraced coaching began to take hold.

Given McKay's longstanding problems with student discipline, Parshall also prioritized creating a safe and orderly environment in the school. Previously, McKay was an "open" school, in which students often wandered out of classrooms and into town, and adults came in without permission—all of which created an undisciplined atmosphere. Parshall hired campus monitors to keep the school space much more contained, while also adding two behavioral specialists to advise staff on how to keep students focused on their work and how to minimize disruptions. While during the first year some consultants were brought in to provide training seminars in professional development and discipline practices, Parshall was much more reliant on hiring full-time staff who could lead and sustain those efforts. Parshall noted:

I'm really opposed to the approach of many schools in farming out leadership to consultants. It is okay to bring in experts to get you going, but you don't want to give a lot of resources to people who will only be at the school 10 days out of the year. It's much more effective to have on staff people with the capability to lead those kinds of efforts and work with their colleagues to build on improving what we are doing every day.

Among the more than 1,200 U.S. public schools that received SIGs, McKay High is among the top 1 percent in the extent to which its measurable outcomes improved. For example, the share of eleventh grade students whose scores met or exceeded standards on the Oregon Statewide Assessments increased from 50 percent in 2009–10 to 87 percent in 2013–14 in reading, from 48 percent to 85 percent in math, from 37 percent to 51 percent in writing, and from 37 percent to 58 percent in science. All of those most recent scores are well above the average for Oregon schools with similar demographics and exceed the statewide

average (which includes schools from wealthier districts) in math and reading. McKay's dropout rate fell to the lowest level of any large high school in Oregon.¹⁴ Salem's deputy superintendent Rob Sexton singled out McKay for its progress, saying: "I was blown away by the outstanding work they have done over the last several years to bring down their dropout rate, improve student achievement, and address the achievement gap." Parshall left McKay High in 2013 to become an assistant superintendent in the Salem district, but so far the strong performance has continued after the expiration of the grant under his successor, Sara LeRoy, who had served as assistant principal to Parshall.

Orchard Gardens K-8 School in Boston, Massachusetts

Located in the low-income, predominantly minority neighborhood of Roxbury, Orchard Gardens had been among the worst performing schools in Massachusetts in the seven years after it opened in 2003. With five different principals over the course of the school's first seven years, student achievement at Orchard Gardens regularly ranked near the bottom of all schools in Massachusetts. Scores for the school's 800 students—about evenly divided between African-American and Hispanic students, more than 80 percent of whom qualified for free and reduced-price lunch—placed Orchard Gardens consistently in the lowest tier, even when compared to other schools serving similarly large proportions of low-income students. From 2003 to 2010, the school's proficiency rates on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) stagnated below 20 percent in both English language arts and math. In a report on Orchard Gardens published by the [National Center on Time and Learning](#)—which provides all of the quotes in this section—Toby Romer, the school's director of professional development and data inquiry, said: "The best this school had ever done in the past was getting one-fifth of our students to proficiency."¹⁵

In 2010, Boston schools superintendent Carol Johnson designated Orchard Gardens as a school requiring a transformational intervention and named as its principal Andrew Bott, who had previously led the city's Rogers Middle School to significant improvements. After his appointment was announced, Bott spent a substantial amount of time observing Orchard Gardens' classrooms and decided to ultimately replace 80 percent of the school's staff as he began to implement a \$3.7 million, three-year SIG under the program's turnaround model. Because at least half of the faculty had been cycling out of the school from year to year, Bott believed he needed to recruit a new cohort of teachers with a particular focus on identifying individuals who had a desire to work collaboratively with their colleagues. Working with the nonprofit organizations Mass 2000, Teach Plus, and Teach for America, Bott recruited a team that collectively had a more positive attitude about working at Orchard Gardens. Kellie Njenga, the academy director for grades three through five who had been on the school's staff since its inception, said, "A big difference from past years is that our new teachers were not only good teachers, but they also wanted to be here and be part of this effort to really turn Orchard Gardens around."

One of the top priorities for Bott (as with the principal of McKay High School) was to create a substantial amount of time each week for teachers to meet, plan, and learn from one another. Part of the SIG money went toward extending the teachers' work week by five hours, with four of those dedicated to working with students and one added to planning and teacher collaboration. Prior to the start of expanded learning time at Orchard Gardens, teachers received just one fifty-seven-minute planning period each day, totaling about five hours each week; in the expanded time schedule, teachers now have seven fifty-five-minute planning periods, in addition to two content team and two grade-level meetings weekly, totaling about

ten hours each week. Content team meetings last one hundred minutes and follow a highly structured protocol intended to focus teachers' attention solely on data analysis and instructional strategies. Each of those is led by one of the school's fifteen teacher leaders, who are part of a program called T3 (Turnaround Teacher Teams) that is managed by Teach Plus. For taking on additional leadership responsibilities in the school, T3 teachers receive a \$6,000 stipend. Kellie Njenga explained: "In each meeting, the teacher leader always has an agenda and clear objectives. For example, in one meeting, the objective may be 'identify and place students into small group instruction during guided reading.' Just like we have objectives for our students to reach in each of our lessons, we want teachers to be able to come away from each meeting with something they'd accomplished."

The new professional development model at Orchard Gardens has been effective in strengthening teacher development and collaboration among staff. Teachers who are selected to lead professional development sessions have the opportunity to practice their presentations in front of the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) before presenting to the whole staff, gaining feedback from administrators and other teachers during the ILT sessions. "Having our own teachers lead sessions did a few things," said Njenga. "First, we're recognizing our teachers for their strengths. Second, presenters are getting valuable feedback from the ILT. Third, as an audience, teachers are much more likely to listen to one of their peers than an outside coach or someone brought in by the district."

Also consistent with the practices initiated in McKay High School under its SIG, Orchard Gardens launched an intensive effort to focus on data and respond to it. "Data is like a guide," said Toby Romer. "It tells us where we are and also where we need to go as educators." In the years before the school's turnaround, Orchard

Gardens' teachers had looked at student data only sparingly and mostly in isolation. The school's new administration prioritized data-driven instruction, hiring Romer to oversee data analysis and dedicating time before and during the school year for teachers to analyze and plan using data. As Principal Bott was recruiting new teachers during the spring and summer of 2010, he looked specifically for teachers who were comfortable using data in collaboration with teams. "When we scheduled interviews, I asked teachers to bring in their data from previous classes. You can really tell a lot about how a person teaches based on the data they bring," Bott said. "What I want to know is, 'Are you good at using the data to drive instructional outcomes for kids?' And then I ask specific questions to get an understanding of how someone works on a team."

Before each school year, the Orchard Gardens teaching staff reviews prior years' MCAS data to identify areas of academic improvement and develop consensus around the specific academic skills on which to focus. Throughout the summer, Romer leads trainings on data inquiry cycles—standardizing and improving the protocol and vocabulary by which all teachers discuss student achievement data during their weekly content meetings. "Collecting, analyzing, and actually planning around data requires a lot of time," Romer maintained. "Setting aside 100 minutes each week to do that vital work is really important for our teachers to teach at a high level."

Despite hiring data-driven teachers and implementing structured protocols around data analysis, administrators at Orchard Gardens experienced some early pushback from staff members. Teachers questioned whether too much emphasis was being placed on data—particularly data from standardized assessments. "Because we had stressed the role of data so much," Bott recounted, "we inadvertently sent the message that it was the most important piece, when we wanted teachers to

just recognize it as one important piece of knowing the student fully.” To resolve the issue, administrators have since allowed staff to suggest other measures of data and to incorporate them into ways to motivate students and monitor their progress. “Today, we have teachers using more of their data to complement the information taken from the ANET standardized data,” Romer explained. “For instance, in third grade, teachers plan weekly quizzes together and track progress publicly. The fourth-grade and middle-school math teams use data from their own assessments and ANET to identify students for after-school tutoring.”

Also consistent with other successful SIG schools, Orchard Gardens took proactive steps to create a much more positive and safer culture in the school, working closely with outside service providers. Before 2010, student expectations—both behavioral and academic—were inconsistent from year to year, as well as from classroom to classroom. “Students got into fights and misbehaved in class a lot,” said one eighth grade student. “Nothing would happen to them, so they would keep doing it.” Sarah White, the school’s guidance counselor, who had been at Orchard Gardens since 2004, recalled, “By October, many teachers had lost control of their classrooms, and the chaos spilled out into the hallways, into the restrooms, cafeterias, and other spaces.” According to Njenga, “The change in our school culture has been huge. Now, we devote a lot of time at the beginning of the year to teach procedures and establish a consistent set of expectations for everyone.”

To reinforce common expectations for student conduct, the school developed an incentive system for students called “Paws PRIDE.” Today, any adult in the building can award students tickets, named “paws” after the school’s lion mascot, for exhibiting behavior aligned with the school’s values. These school-wide values are captured in the acronym PRIDE: Perseverance,

Respect, Integrity, Daring, and Excellence. Students who earn the requisite number of paws are invited to monthly celebrations and field trips, and they receive rewards and prizes as well. “It was so important for all our teachers to be on the same page before the school year started, even use the same language, to communicate and enforce our expectations,” Njenga recalled. “In the past, we had a lot of students saying, ‘Well, we don’t do it this way in my other teacher’s classroom,’ which was demoralizing for our staff and sent an inconsistent message to our students.”

As with many other aspects of the school’s transformation, the staff experienced some initial resistance to these cultural changes. “Students really tested the adults at the beginning of my first year,” acknowledged Bott. “They didn’t know how strongly their teachers were committed to the expectations that had been set, and they weren’t used to those expectations being consistent in every classroom.” Now, students are testing teachers less frequently and the school culture has changed dramatically. District staff who visit the school regularly remark that Orchard Gardens feels like a completely new place. “Once students realized that everyone was going to keep them to a common set of expectations, they actually started to like it,” said Njenga. “We found that our kids wanted to be at a school where everyone is on board and they know what is expected of them.” As another eighth grader attested, “Everyone follows the rules because the teachers are stricter now, but they also really care about you.”

From 2009 to 2013, the [proficiency levels of Orchard Gardens’ students on the state’s standardized tests improved](#) from 6 percent to 34 percent in math and from 13 percent to 43 percent in English. By the end of that period, the school had moved from the state’s lowest classification of Level 4 to its highest of Level 1.¹⁶ The story does not end there, though, because Bott

moved on to another school in 2014, the grant expired, and [the school's test scores have sagged somewhat](#)—though they are still much stronger than before the SIG was awarded.¹⁷ Still, the gains achieved were real—an outgrowth of the same kinds of practices that contributed to comparably impressive improvement in other SIG schools.

Other Successful SIG Schools

While the degree of improvements in McKay High School in Salem, Oregon and Orchard Gardens K–8 School in Boston could be perceived as rare outliers in the SIG program, it is important to recognize that they are by no means the only encouraging stories. For brevity's sake, here are thumbnail summaries of three other SIG schools that experienced major gains in student outcomes, largely by following a similar set of strategies to those highlighted in McKay and Orchard Gardens.

[*Leslie County High School in Hyden, Kentucky.*](#)¹⁸

Located in a rural part of the state with about 500 students, 77 percent of whom are eligible for subsidized lunch, Leslie County High School's students scored poorly on the state's standardized tests in the year before receiving its SIG under the least disruptive transformation model. By 2014, it had soared to the ninety-fourth percentile in Kentucky and was designated as a distinguished school two years in a row. Central to that improvement was the initiation of data tracking tools that teachers and administrators, as well as students, use to monitor their progress and discuss in regular meetings. [School principal Robert Roark said](#), “Data-based decision-making allows us to create a greater sense of ownership for improving individual student performance among both students and teachers.”¹⁹

Charlotte M. Murkland Elementary School in Lowell, Massachusetts. The success story at Charlotte M. Murkland Elementary School began with leaders of

the teachers union working closely with administrators in the process of developing the application for the \$1.5 million SIG, also under the transformation model. That intensive collaboration has continued since, with impressive results in a low-income community that has a large immigrant population in which more than fifty languages are spoken. Just a year into the implementation process, the percentage of students scoring at the proficient level or higher soared 20 points in math and 13 points in English language arts. That progress has continued, with another jump from 2013 to 2014 of 8 points in math and 13 points in English language arts. Principal Jason DiCarlo even makes a habit of co-teaching with his staff members as a way of promoting collaboration and determining the best way to reach students. He says: “We have a vision and we know what we want to do, but putting it into action is the hardest part. It's important that administrators admit that they don't know everything.”²⁰

[*Horace Mann Elementary School in St. Louis, Missouri.*](#)

Serving about 250 K–6 students, predominantly from low-income African-American families, Horace Mann Elementary School in 2009 was one of the lowest-performing schools in Missouri and was not even accredited by the state. Under the turnaround model, it used its SIG funding to hire specialists in reading, math, and social-emotional support, as well as to build outreach to parents and community organizations. Under the leadership of the school's principal, Nicole Conaway, those specialists worked closely with teams of teachers who met regularly four days a week in “Power Hour” sessions to focus on student data and discuss how to adjust their instructional approaches. New mentoring relationships were a critical part of the transformation. From 2009 to 2014, Horace Mann's scores on the state's English language arts test climbed from just below 250 to above 290, and it came close to ranking in the top 25 percent of schools in the district.²¹

It is important to note that the challenges confronting low-income, racially isolated schools are so formidable that even a principal and teachers who energetically pursue many of the practices that succeeded elsewhere still may not see equally impressive results in test scores. One example of that disappointment is Peoria High School in Illinois, which was the subject of a compelling forty-minute documentary produced by the [Consortium for Educational Change \(CEC\)](#).²² Faced with a low-performing school with predominantly low-income African-American students, Peoria High principal Brett Elliott worked closely with the head of the teachers union for the school, Jeff Adkins-Dutro, to participate with other teachers in crafting the details of the school's SIG application.

After attaining \$2 million a year for three years, Elliott and Adkins-Dutro focused on providing support to teachers to enable them to become more effective in the classroom. Working with the consulting firm CEC, which emphasizes the importance of teachers and their union in leading efforts to improve their skills, teachers agreed to be videotaped during class time. In regular, daily meetings with other teachers in their subject areas, they reviewed and critiqued their performances while sharing suggestions for connecting and communicating with students. They even became comfortable with using videotape of their lessons to share constructive criticism. In addition, the teachers union voted to adopt a new, much tougher evaluation system that would incorporate student test scores in teacher ratings.

The SIG also supported Peoria High's "Why Try" program, which focused on conveying to teachers strategies for responding more effectively to discipline problems. Rather than simply sending disruptive students to the assistant principal, teachers learned how to build trusting relationships with challenging students through one-on-one conversations outside

of class. A related SIG-funded innovation was the launch of "Pride Time"—a daily twenty-five-minute session in which students talk about their lives outside the classroom and receive mentoring from teachers. In addition, the SIG enabled Peoria High to create a separate "school within a school", with unusually small class sizes in a building across the street (labeled Peoria North) for sixty to seventy students who had been repeatedly held back. That extra attention helped them to make progress toward a degree while incoming ninth graders could learn together without having their classes bogged down in addressing the needs of older, struggling students who were often disruptive. Those initiatives appear to have been effective, with a 56 percent decline in discipline referrals by the third year of grant and 312 fewer suspensions.

Notwithstanding all of that hard work and of following practices consistent with those in effective schools, the test scores of Peoria High's students rose somewhat, only to drop back down in the third year of the grant to their earlier levels. The school may yet experience better results if it can build on the improvements in order and safety combined with the culture of instructional collaboration. But the experience there is a reminder that the obstacles to quantifiable success are formidable, even when school leaders and teachers follow a path that aligns with the best research available about how to improve schools.

Building from SIG Successes

Much remains to be learned about the impact of the 2010 changes and resource infusion to the SIG program. But what we already know is sufficient to guide the next wave of reforms to the program and other efforts to fundamentally transform low-performing schools. We know that SIGs helped to modestly improve student outcomes in many low-income schools while "turning around" a relatively small number, at least so far. We also know that some SIG schools showed no progress

at all. In that context, experimentation should continue in ways that particularly draw from the experience of the most successful models to date, while minimizing problems evident in the schools that did poorly.

To that end, the U.S. Department of Education should develop and aggressively disseminate video-recorded case studies conveying in the words of principals, teachers, and students details about the steps taken to transform their schools. Just as modeling can help students learn how to, say, conduct a complex science experiment, exposing school personnel to counterparts in successful SIG grantees can help them better comprehend how to pursue and embrace changes that paid off in a similar setting. Those videos should particularly focus on the common features among the schools that turned around. Specifically: (1) what it looks like when teachers work together to improve their practice by focusing on data, (2) concrete actions that helped to transform unruly classrooms and hallways into orderly ones, and (3) how principals went about creating a culture of shared responsibility for promoting the success of every student in the school.

All levels of government and countless educational organizations inundate school leaders and teachers with publications, online resources, and sundry technologically advanced products intended to improve U.S. education. Those materials can become overwhelming, and they by and large have failed to make much of a dent in the problems confronting troubled schools, notwithstanding the enormous amount of resources spent on those products. But now that a small number of real-life examples show that turnarounds can actually happen, a logical innovation would be to zoom in on those cases so that others can learn and be inspired by them. Bringing those stories to light in a way that others can learn from would be an extremely cost-effective way for the federal government to help reproduce such success in more schools.

Earlier this year, as Congress continued to deliberate over additional SIG reforms in connection with the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (most recently labelled No Child Left Behind), the U.S. Department of Education went ahead and finalized [new requirements for the SIG program](#).²³ The changes, which mostly seem sensible in light of what has been learned over the past few years, include:

- Allowing for five-year awards rather than the current maximum of three. In that context, one option would be to have the first year be a planning year, followed by at least three implementation years, and then an optional year to sustain reforms or continue implementation. Another option would be to have three years of implementation, followed by up to two years to sustain reforms or continue implementation.
- Adding three new intervention models to the four existing options: (1) a state-developed alternative that meets federal principles; (2) an evidence-based, whole-school reform strategy developed in collaboration with an approved outside strategy developer; and (3) an early learning model that offers full-day kindergarten, a high-quality preschool program, and provides educators—including preschool teachers—with time for joint planning across grades to facilitate effective teaching and learning as well as positive teacher-student interactions.
- Other modifications related to the teacher evaluation and support system, criteria for renewing grants, and increasing support and monitoring of grant implementation by local education agencies.

With some exceptions, three years has generally proved to be an inadequate length of time to fundamentally

transform a troubled school's culture in ways that can be sustained. On the front end, many school administrators at both the state and local level said that they had inadequate time to plan how to implement SIGs when the surge of new funding became available beginning in 2010, [leading to a multitude of problems](#).²⁴ On the back end, when the extra resources essential to extending learning time and deepening the team of talented educators disappears, the framework bolstering whatever progress has been made suddenly weakens. Particularly for schools that have made progress, it would be wise to allow for grant renewals even beyond five years to continue supporting changes that seems to be working.

It also is reassuring that the new guidelines add even more emphasis on the importance of promoting data-driven collaboration among teachers and administrators focused on continuous improvement in instructional practice. Research conducted not only on SIG schools, but also for much more extensive studies—both domestic and international—consistently shows that schools that improve the most are usually built on intensive teamwork. When teachers are left to fend for themselves, isolated in their classrooms—consistent with organizational models that originated in the nineteenth century—they have little opportunity to become better at their work. Shifting from that deeply entrenched “egg-crate” system to the proven collaborative approach is the kind of fundamental transformation that can be much more readily catalyzed through a SIG award than without one. In the most successful turnarounds, that shift toward greater collaboration was an essential, if not always sufficient, ingredient leading to improved student outcomes.

Another positive step in the new guidelines is a shift in emphasis away from evaluating and compensating teachers based on how their students perform on standardized tests given at the beginning and end of

the year. The reliance on standardized tests had many methodological pitfalls, which discouraged teachers from supporting any similar evaluation schemes. Instead, the Department of Education endorses a performance-management system that promotes continued review of progress by analyzing data weekly or monthly, coupled with promoting a dialogue around achievement. By dovetailing evaluation with ongoing team efforts to support improvement, teachers are much more likely to learn from and accept assessments of their work.

One especially thorny issue related to SIGs concerns the role of outside consultants who collect a share of the money to provide help and expertise in assisting schools with their transformations. Almost all struggling schools need some kind of outside support from contractors that have had experience, and ideally success, in guiding other schools as they carry out major organizational and cultural changes. But the quality of consultants providing such help varies enormously, and some firms have become spread too thin while working with SIG grantees. Moreover, as former McKay High principal Ken Parshall points out, overreliance on consultants risks diminishing the roles of the full-time school personnel who are ultimately responsible for leading, carrying out, and sustaining changes.

In 2012, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report that raised a number of concerns about the role of contractors retained by schools that received SIGs.²⁵ It pointed out that outside entities are often integral to implementation; under the restart model, which was not widely adopted, districts are actually required to hire a contractor to take over school operations. But with the exception of restart schools, states and localities are not mandated to review the performance of contractors after they are retained. The GAO argued, with justification, that inadequate oversight of the contractors' work leaves

school systems highly vulnerable to poor performance. The Department of Education responded that states and localities should be largely responsible for monitoring contractors. Given that SIGs are federal grants, however, a stronger federal oversight role would seem to be justified, especially in light of the GAO's finding that some states and localities were not monitoring outside consultants at all.

The Future of SIGs

The Republican leadership in [the House of Representatives has proposed completely eliminating the SIG program](#), while Senate Republicans would significantly reduce its funding.²⁶ With the best existing research on the SIG initiative ambiguous enough to be perceived as either half-full or half-empty, the strongest argument for pouring more resources into it is the reality that some schools really did turn around after receiving their grants. Those success stories suggest that the basic concept can work, which is important given the dismal record of previous efforts to revitalize the most challenged schools.

Now, the central task should be to apply what has been learned from those effective examples to other SIG schools to demonstrate that the successes can be replicated more consistently elsewhere. Just as scientists learn from the successful experiments of their colleagues and adapt to them, school leaders today have a rare opportunity to emulate strategies that made a big difference for some low-income children who once had little reason to be hopeful.

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Notes

- 1 The National Center on Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, which is conducting the federal government's evaluation of the SIG program as well as Race to the Top, is expected to publish its first report on early implementation in fall 2015, followed by a final report on implementation and impacts in the summer of 2016.
- 2 Tiffany D. Miller and Catherine Brown, "Dramatic Action, Dramatic Improvement," The Center for American Progress, March 31, 2015.
- 3 Tina Trujillo, "Review of *Dramatic Action, Dramatic Improvement*," National Education Policy Center, May 2015.
- 4 Greg Anrig, "How We Know Collaboration Works," *Educational Leadership* 72, no. 5 (February 2015), <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/feb15/vol72/num05/How-We-Know-Collaboration-Works.aspx>.
- 5 Thomas S. Dee, "School Turnarounds: Evidence from the 2009 Stimulus," NBER Working Paper No. 17990, April 2012.
- 6 Rebecca Herman et al., *Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools: A Practice Guide* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, May 2008).
- 7 Frederick M. Hess and Linda Darling-Hammond, "How to Rescue Education Reform," *New York Times*, December 5, 2011.
- 8 Richard D. Kahlenberg, "Turnaround Schools that Work: Moving Beyond Separate but Equal," The Century Foundation, 2009.
- 9 "School Improvement Grants: Progress Report from America's Great City Schools," Council of the Great City Schools, February 2015.
- 10 "School Improvement Grant National Assessment Results Summary: Cohorts 1 and 2," U.S. Department of Education, February 14, 2014.
- 11 Thomas S. Dee, "School Turnarounds: Evidence from the 2009 Stimulus," National Bureau of Economic Research, April 2012.
- 12 Dee employed a so-called regression discontinuity design, which helps to distinguish causal connections between an intervention such as school improvement grants and its outcomes.
- 13 Interview with author, June 24, 2015.
- 14 Oregon Report card, 2013-14; http://mckay.salkeiz.k12.or.us/sites/mckay.salkeiz.k12.or.us/files/mckay-state-report-card-13-14_0.pdf.
- 15 Much of this section draws from "Transforming Schools through Expanded Learning Time: Orchard Gardens K-8 Pilot School," National Center on Time and Learning/Mass 2020, updated 2013, <http://www.timeandlearning.org/sites/default/files/resources/orchardgardencasestudy.pdf>.
- 16 "Incorporating Early Learning Strategies in the School Improvement Grants Program," Center on Enhanced Early Learning Outcomes and Center on School Turnaround, 2015, <http://ceelo.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/TurnaroundCaseStudies01-22-15.pdf>.
- 17 "Report on Teaching and Learning: School Report Card School Year 2014-2015/Orchard Gardens K-8 School," http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=1479&dataid=2768&FileName=OrchardGardens_ReportOnTeachingandLearning1415.pdf.
- 18 "School Improvement Grant Practices: Making Data-Based Decisions/ Leslie County High School," American Institutes for Research, November 2014, <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/sigprofiles/kyleslieddd110714.pdf>.
- 19 Tiffany D. Miller and Catherine Brown, "Dramatic Action, Dramatic Improvement," The Center For American Progress, March 31, 2015.
- 20 "The 'Murkland Miracle,'" AFT Massachusetts, September 28, 2011, <http://aftma.net/2011/09/the-murkland-miracle/>.
- 21 "Incorporating Early Learning Strategies in the School Improvement Grants Program," Center on Enhanced Early Learning Outcomes and Center on School Turnaround, 2015, <http://ceelo.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/TurnaroundCaseStudies01-22-15.pdf>.
- 22 This draws from a short documentary video produced by the Consortium for Educational Change, titled "Peoria High School: A Case Study," and is accessible here: <http://cecillinois.org/peoria-high-school-case-study/>.
- 23 Sam Redding, Lenay Dunn, and Carlas McCauley, "School Improvement Grants: Guidance and Tools for the 2015 Regulations,"

WestEd/The Center on School Turnaround, 2015, http://centeronschoolturnaround.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/CenteronSchoolTurnaround_SIGPlanning_20150310.pdf.

²⁴ “School Improvement Grants: Education Should Take Additional Steps to Enhance Accountability for School and Contractors,” U.S. Government Accountability Office, April 2012, <http://www.gao.gov/assets/600/590054.pdf>.

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Catherine E. Brown, “The GOP’s Education Plan Gets an F,” *U.S. News and World Report*, June 25, 2015, <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/knowledge-bank/2015/06/25/why-the-gops-education-funding-bill-gets-an-f>.