



To: Superintendents of Districts with Priority Schools

cc: School Improvement Coordinators for Districts with Priority Schools

From: Margaret MacKinnon
Title I/ESEA Administrator

Date: December 19, 2013

**Subject: Notification of Alaska's intent to apply for a waiver to carryover
SIG 1003(g) federal FY2013 grant funds**

The Alaska Department of Education & Early Development is planning to request a waiver to carryover the federal FY2013 School Improvement Grants (SIG) program funds under Title I section 1003(g). These funds will be combined with the federal FY2014 SIG program funds to make SIG grant awards that would begin in the school year 2015-2016.

Background

Since the funding under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) in 2009, the School Improvement Grants (SIG) program funds under 1003(g) have been awarded to states to make competitive grants available to persistently lowest achieving schools to implement one of four intervention models: Transformation, Turnaround, Restart, or Closure. At that time, Alaska was able to issue 3-year SIG grants to 7 schools in Cohort 1 to begin in school year 2010-2011. These schools ended their third year of the grant in 2012-2013. Alaska was able to award SIG 3-year continuation grants to 3 more schools in Cohort 2 to begin in school year 2011-2012. The third year of funding for these Cohort 2 schools ends this year in 2012-2013.

Alaska must submit a new application to the US Department of Education for the federal FY2013 SIG funds which would be available to award to schools to begin in the 2014-2015 school year. Under Alaska's approved ESEA Flexibility Waiver, Title I schools designated as Priority Schools would be eligible to apply for these funds. Alaska has approximately \$1.4 million to award for a three-year grant to one or more priority schools. The schools selected would be required to implement one of the four SIG intervention models.

All but one SIG school in Alaska has implemented the Transformation Model. While schools applying for SIG grants could choose one of the other intervention models, it appears that the Transformation Model would be the most likely to be chosen by Alaska's eligible priority schools. This model requires a school to implement a teacher and principal evaluation system that includes student learning data as a significant component of the evaluation system. While the US Department of Education allowed timeline waivers for the Cohort 1 and 2 schools with SIG grant to extend the time needed to put an evaluation system into place, any new schools applying for SIG grants in the spring of 2014 for the 2014-2015 school year would be expected to fully implement such teacher and principal evaluation systems in that school year. This would require implementation of a teacher

and principal evaluation system that includes measures of student learning data one year earlier than the Alaska regulations will require of all schools and districts. The Cohort 1 schools with SIG grants worked to create and pilot these systems, and all found that developing such a system with valid and reliable data on which to measure teacher effectiveness was more difficult than originally expected. The advantage of applying for the waiver is to align the timeline for teacher and principal evaluation requirements for new SIG recipients with the current state regulations for all schools and districts.

Impact of Request to Carryover FY2013 Funds

There are several impacts of the request to carryover federal FY2013 funds and combine them with federal FY2014 funds. If the funds are carried over, it is anticipated that there will be a larger pool of SIG funds (dependent on Congressional appropriation) and more schools will be able to receive funds. All currently designated Priority Schools will be eligible to apply for these new funds in the spring of 2015 for implementation to begin in the 2015-2016 school year. The schools will be able to continue the SIG funds for the three-year grant period even if they meet the criteria to exit priority school status. This waiver, if approved, will allow priority schools to have the 2014-2015 school year to develop and pilot teacher and principal evaluation systems that include student learning data, and to be prepared to submit a SIG application in the spring of 2015. Full implementation of these evaluation systems by schools that receive the SIG grants in the 2015-2016 school year will then align with efforts of all Alaska schools. There is a possibility that some of the requirements of the SIG program may be modified before the grant award cycle for 2015-2016. If that is the case, schools would be required to apply and meet the new requirements.

Required Notice and Invitation for Comments

This notice is to meet the notification requirements under Section 9401(b)(3)(A)(i) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. **Districts are invited to submit comments to the department regarding this waiver request no later than January 9, 2014. After that date, the department will submit the district comments to the US Department of Education (USED) along with its waiver request. Comments may be submitted to Margaret MacKinnon by email at margaret.mackinnon@alaska.gov or by fax at 907-465-2989.**

Complete information about the School Improvement Grants under 1003(g), including the state's earlier applications, LEA application forms, federal requirements and guidance documents and the required models, is posted on the department website at: <http://education.alaska.gov/nclb/title11003grant.html>.