



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

October 2, 2007

The Honorable Joseph Morton
Superintendent of Education
Alabama Department of Education
Gordon Persons Office Building
50 North Ripley Street
Montgomery, AL 36104

Dear Superintendent Morton:

As you know, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has challenged States to close the achievement gaps between subgroups of students and ensure that all students are proficient in reading and math by 2014. The law also included comprehensive reforms that ensure all students have access to a high quality teacher, a greater focus on the use of research based instructional practices, and a new emphasis on school improvement.

After more than five years, I am pleased to report that States and local school districts have made great strides when it comes to putting these reforms in place. In fact, the most up-to-date information we have indicates that more than 70 percent of schools were able to meet State developed standards and make adequate yearly progress (AYP) last year. The 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress also reveals that math scores for 4th- and 8th-graders and the reading scores for 4th-graders are at historic highs and the biggest gains were made by African American and Hispanic students.

In addition to implementing these landmark reforms, NCLB also asked States to take a greater role in developing and delivering comprehensive leadership and technical assistance when it comes to school and districts that aren't making AYP. This is why President Bush's fiscal year 2008 budget requests \$500 million for the School Improvement Grants, which support States in their efforts to build capacity and support school improvement activities.

While we are still awaiting a final fiscal year 2008 appropriation from Congress, I am pleased to inform you that the fiscal year 2007 School Improvement Fund application is now available. For fiscal year (FY) 2007, \$125 million is available for awards under the section 1003(g) School Improvement Fund of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). State educational agencies (SEAs) must apply for these formula grant funds by submitting an application to the U.S. Department of Education (Department).

Section 1003(g) of the ESEA authorizes formula grants to SEAs to assist schools identified for improvement, corrective action, and restructuring. An SEA must subgrant at least 95 percent of its allocation to local educational agencies (LEAs) with schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring to support technical assistance to such schools and to make available additional resources to develop and implement school improvement plans. The SEA may retain five percent for State-level activities.

The FY 2007 preliminary allocation for your State can be found on the enclosed chart. Under the statute, each State, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and each outlying area is entitled to receive FY 2007 School Improvement Funds in proportion to the FY 2007 funds it receives under Parts A, C, and D, Subpart 1 of Title I of the ESEA. Your School Improvement allocation is preliminary because the Department does not yet have final FY 2007 allocation data for Part C (Migrant Education).

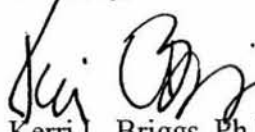
When final Part C allocation data become available, the Department will adjust the FY 2007 School Improvement allocations accordingly. The Department hopes to make those adjustments from FY 2008 School Improvement Funds, provided such funds are appropriated; otherwise, the Department will adjust the FY 2007 allocations.

Enclosed with this notice is the application process information, which outlines the content and submission requirements for these funds. Applications should be received by the Department by November 20, 2007. The Department will conduct a review to ensure that all applications comply with all program requirements. The application will be considered an amendment to your consolidated State plan.

The Department, in cooperation with the Council of Chief State School Officers, will schedule conference calls to walk through the application process and answer any questions that you may have. We will contact you with the dates and times for these calls should you or your staff wish to participate.

If you have any questions, please contact Sheila Sjolseth at 202-260-5619 or Gary Rutkin at 202-260-4412 or by email at school.improvement.fund@ed.gov.

Sincerely,



Kerri L. Briggs, Ph.D.

cc: State Title I Director

Enclosures:
School Improvement Fund Application
School Improvement Grant Allocation Chart

SY 2007-08 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANTS

09/04/2007

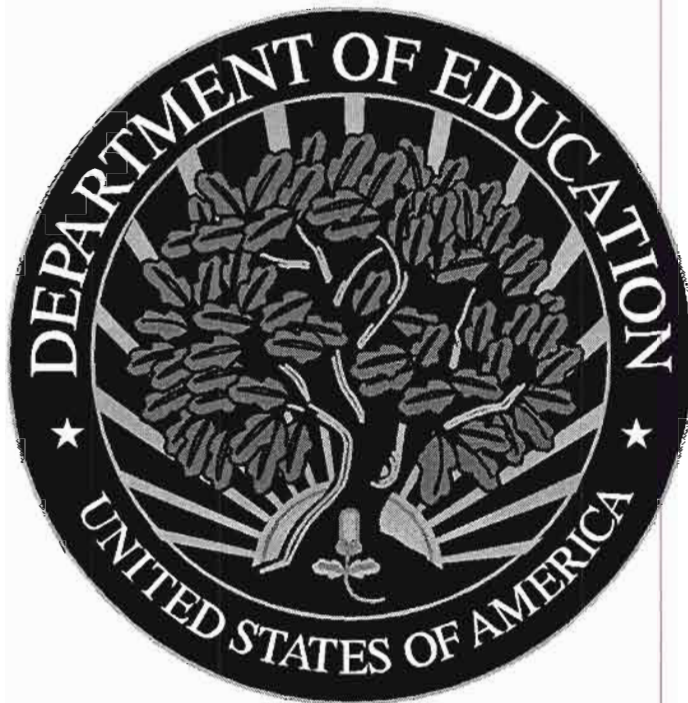
Preliminary
2007-08
Allocation *

TOTAL	125,000,000
ALABAMA	1,861,720
ALASKA	387,886
ARIZONA	2,559,460
ARKANSAS	1,190,751
CALIFORNIA	16,620,295
COLORADO	1,233,591
CONNECTICUT	1,072,455
DELAWARE	328,808
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	430,133
FLORIDA	5,729,854
GEORGIA	3,975,771
HAWAII	358,793
IDAHO	431,188
ILLINOIS	5,669,746
INDIANA	2,253,964
IOWA	675,321
KANSAS	947,069
KENTUCKY	1,828,604
LOUISIANA	2,646,711
MAINE	420,802
MARYLAND	1,804,240
MASSACHUSETTS	2,017,490
MICHIGAN	4,472,453
MINNESOTA	1,103,590
MISSISSIPPI	1,644,376
MISSOURI	1,939,187
MONTANA	361,711
NEBRASKA	527,388
NEVADA	771,291
NEW HAMPSHIRE	328,634
NEW JERSEY	2,397,833
NEW MEXICO	948,538
NEW YORK	11,640,707
NORTH CAROLINA	2,927,463
NORTH DAKOTA	284,321
OHIO	4,325,232
OKLAHOMA	1,194,184
OREGON	1,259,126
PENNSYLVANIA	5,021,980
RHODE ISLAND	487,186
SOUTH CAROLINA	1,814,877
SOUTH DAKOTA	361,862
TENNESSEE	1,961,679
TEXAS	11,556,803
UTAH	576,478
VERMONT	267,783
VIRGINIA	1,954,005
WASHINGTON	1,883,922
WEST VIRGINIA	796,450
WISCONSIN	1,936,898
WYOMING	272,871
PUERTO RICO	4,361,443
AMERICAN SAMOA	82,466
GUAM	73,538
NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS	31,130
VIRGIN ISLANDS	110,813
BIA	877,130

* School Improvement funds are allocated to the States, BIA, and the Outlying Areas based on the proportionate share each receives under the Title I, Parts A, C, and D (Subpart 1) formulas.

School Improvement Fund
State Application

Section 1003(g)
Fiscal Year 2007



According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless such collection displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 1810-0682 and will expire on 2/29/2008. The time required to complete these forms is estimated to average 30 hours per response, including the time to review instructions and complete the amendment. If you have any comments concerning the accuracy of the time estimate or suggestions for improving this form, please write to: U.S Department of Education, Washington, DC 20202-4651. If you have any comments or concerns regarding the status of your individual submission of this form, write directly to: Student Achievement and School Accountability Programs, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20202-6132 or email School.Improvement.Fund@ed.gov.

**School Improvement Fund
Section 1003(g)**

CFDA # 84.377A

Purpose of the School Improvement Fund

Improving schools is a joint responsibility for schools, local educational agencies (LEAs), and State educational agencies (SEAs). Section 1003(g) of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), also known as the School Improvement Fund, authorizes funds to help SEAs and LEAs address the needs of schools in improvement, corrective action, and restructuring in order to improve student achievement. In conjunction with funds reserved under section 1003(a), School Improvement Funds are to be used to leverage change and improve technical assistance under sections 1116 and 1117 of Title I, Part A through SEAs' and LEAs' targeting activities towards measurable outcomes as described in this document. Expected results from the use of these funds include improving student proficiency, increasing the number of schools that make adequate yearly progress, and using data to inform decisions and create a system of continuous feedback and improvement.

Section 1003(g) of the ESEA authorizes formula grants to SEAs to assist schools identified for improvement, corrective action, and restructuring. SEAs are required to subgrant at least 95 percent of their allocations to LEAs with schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring to support technical assistance to such schools and to make available additional resources to implement school improvement activities.

For fiscal year (FY) 2007, \$125 million is available for awards under the section 1003(g) School Improvement Fund. States, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the outlying areas are eligible to apply. The U.S. Department of Education (Department) will allocate School Improvement Funds among eligible entities in proportion to the FY 2007 funds those entities receive under Parts A, C, and D of Title I of the ESEA. Each entity's preliminary allocation is listed in Attachment A. The Department will adjust those allocations, as necessary, to account for changes in the entities' FY 2007 Part C allocations when those allocations become final. SEAs must apply for these formula grant funds by submitting an application to the U.S. Department of Education (Department).

Overview of Application

To receive School Improvement Funds, an SEA must submit an application to the Department that complies with the provisions herein. These funds, along with funds reserved under section 1003(a), are intended to support high-quality, sustainable school improvement activities that increase the likelihood that students learn challenging academic content and achieve proficiency. Each SEA and LEA that receives funds must implement one or more of the *school improvement strategies* from the list below that are

designed to build LEA and school capacity to improve student achievement and positively impact the following *measurable outcomes*.

MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

1. The number and percentage of students who score proficient in reading/language arts and mathematics, as measured by the SEA's assessments given annually in grades 3-8 and once in high schools, increase in LEAs and schools receiving School Improvement Funds.
2. LEAs and schools receiving School Improvement Funds that make adequate yearly progress and move out of improvement status.
3. LEAs and schools receiving School Improvement Funds that make decisions regarding the use of these funds based on data and create systems of continuous feedback and improvement.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

Each SEA and LEA that receives School Improvement Funds must implement one or more of the following strategies. Each SEA and LEA should select the strategy or strategies it determines will be the most effective, based on data that reflect their individual circumstances, in building LEA and school capacity to improve student achievement and move schools out of improvement.

1. Provide customized technical assistance and/or professional development that is designed to build the capacity of LEA and school staff to improve schools and is informed by student achievement and other outcome-related measures.
2. Utilize research-based strategies or practices to change instructional practice to address the academic achievement problems that caused the school to be identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring.
3. Create partnerships among the SEA, LEAs and other entities for the purpose of delivering technical assistance, professional development, and management advice.
4. Provide professional development to enhance the capacity of school support team members and other technical assistance providers who are part of the statewide system of support and that is informed by student achievement and other outcome-related measures.
5. Implement other strategies determined by the SEA or LEA, as appropriate, for which data indicate the strategy is likely to result in improved teaching and learning in schools identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring.

Reporting

To demonstrate progress on the measurable outcomes listed above, each SEA must report the following information annually¹ to the Department.

1. The total number and percentage of students who are proficient in reading/language arts and mathematics in schools that received technical assistance through the statewide system of support and whether that number and percentage increased from the prior year as measured by State assessments required under section 1111(b)(3) of the ESEA as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.
2. The total number and percentage of students who are proficient in reading/language arts and mathematics in schools that received School Improvement Funds as a result of subgrants to LEAs and whether that number and percentage increased from the prior year as measured by State assessments required under section 1111(b)(3) of the ESEA as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.
3. The number of schools that received technical assistance through the statewide system of support that—
 - a. Make adequate yearly progress;
 - b. Exit improvement status.
4. The number of schools that received School Improvement Funds that—
 - a. Make adequate yearly progress;
 - b. Exit improvement status.
5. Evidence that SEAs, LEAs, and schools used data to make decisions about the use of School Improvement Funds and created a system of continuous feedback and improvement.
6. Evidence indicating those school improvement strategies that were effective in contributing to increased student achievement and schools' making adequate yearly progress and exiting improvement status.
7. The amount of funds allocated under section 1003(g) and 1003(a) to each LEA and school.

Specific Application Contents

Part A – Funds Retained by the SEA

Each SEA must:

1. Identify the amount of funds the SEA will retain from section 1003(g) and 1003(a) for State-level activities.
2. Describe the SEA's current statewide system of support required under section 1117 and how the SEA will use funds available to the SEA under section 1003(g)

¹ The Department expects to collect this data through the Consolidated State Performance Report.

and 1003(a) to build capacity at the LEA and school levels to improve student achievement.

3. From the on page 3, describe the school improvement strategy or strategies the SEA will implement with section 1003(g) and 1003(a) funds, including a brief explanation of why each strategy was selected.

Part B – Funds Awarded to LEAs

Each SEA must describe:

1. How the SEA will allocate at least 95 percent of its section 1003(g) and 1003(a) funds, either separately or combined, to LEAs². In its description, the SEA must address the following statutory provisions:
 - The criteria the SEA will use to give priority to LEAs with the lowest-achieving schools that demonstrate--
 - The greatest need for these funds, and
 - The strongest commitment to ensuring that the funds are used to provide adequate resources for the lowest-achieving schools to meet the goals for improvement under section 1116.
 - How the SEA will define “greatest need” and “strongest commitment.”
 - With respect to section 1003(g) funds (if allocated separately from 1003(a) funds), the criteria the SEA will use to determine grant award amounts to LEAs to ensure that each grant—
 - Is of sufficient size and scope to support the activities required under sections 1116 and 1117, and
 - Is not less than \$50,000 or more than \$500,000 for each participating school.
 - How funds will be integrated with other funds awarded by the SEA under the ESEA.
 - Whether, assuming section 1003(g) funds are appropriated in subsequent years, the SEA will renew an LEA’s grant for up to two additional one-year periods if schools in the LEA are meeting the goals for improvement under section 1116.
2. The local application provisions the SEA will require its LEAs to address to ensure that—
 - a. LEAs will use funds under section 1003(g) and 1003(a) to implement one or more of the school improvement strategies previously listed and that decisions about the strategy or strategies selected are based on data; and

² An SEA may, with the approval of the LEA, directly provide for one or more of the school improvement strategies listed above or to arrange for their provision through other entities such as school support teams or educational service agencies.

- b. The school improvement strategies supported with these funds contribute to achieving the annual measurable objectives in school improvement plans [§1116(b)(3)(v)], or to achieving the goals necessary for schools to exit corrective action and restructuring status, as appropriate.
3. How the SEA will assess the effectiveness of school improvement activities and disseminate information on what works to other LEAs in the State.

Part C – Monitoring

Each SEA must describe how it will monitor the effectiveness of the strategies selected and implemented with funds from section 1003(g) and 1003(a) and the steps the SEA will take if the school improvement strategies supported with these funds are not contributing to increased student achievement.

The Application Process

Applications are due November 20, 2007.

Applications may be submitted electronically or by paper submission. The application does not have a required application format but should be 10 pages or less.

Electronic submissions must be sent to: school.improvement.fund@ed.gov
Please send a follow-up paper copy of the cover page signed by the authorized representative.

If applying by paper submission, the original and 2 copies must be sent to the following address:

Zollie Stevenson, Jr., Ph.D.
Acting Director
Student Achievement and School Accountability Programs
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202-6132

Due to potential delays due to required processing of mail sent through the U.S. Postal Service, applicants are encouraged to employ alternate carriers for paper submissions.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the total appropriation for the School Improvement Fund?

The total appropriation for Fiscal Year 2007 is \$125 million.

Who can apply for School Improvement Funds?

The SEA of each State, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and each outlying area may apply.

How did the Department determine each SEA's allocation?

The Department determined the amount of School Improvement Funds each SEA is eligible to receive in proportion to the FY 2007 funds each SEA received under Parts A, C, and D of Title I of the ESEA. Each entity's preliminary allocation is listed in Attachment A. The Department will adjust those allocations, as necessary, to account for changes in the entities' FY 2007 Part C (Migrant Education) allocations when those allocations become final.

What is each SEA's allocation?

See the attached list for the preliminary allocation for each SEA.

What is the deadline for an SEA to apply?

Applications must be submitted by November 20, 2007.

Is a standard application form required?

An SEA need not use a specific form but must address all required components as listed in this document. Applications should be 10 pages or less. A title page and table of contents may be submitted as part of the application and will not count against the page limit.

How does an SEA distribute School Improvement Funds to LEAs?

An SEA must subgrant at least 95 percent of the funds it receives under section 1003(g) to LEAs with schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring. In making awards to LEAs, the SEA must give priority to LEAs with the lowest-achieving schools that demonstrate (1) the greatest need for funds, and (2) the strongest commitment to ensuring that the funds are used to provide support for the lowest-achieving schools to meet the goals for improvement under section 1116. LEA subgrants must be of sufficient size and scope to support activities under sections 1116 and 1117 and may not be less than \$50,000 or more than \$500,000 for each participating school.

How might an SEA define "greatest need for funds" as required by the statute?

An SEA must include its definition of "greatest need" in its application. As an initial matter, an LEA is eligible only if it has schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring. An SEA may further narrow the pool of eligible LEAs or determine allocations by considering such factors as the percentage of students from low-income families enrolled in each eligible LEA; the number or percentage of each eligible LEA's schools that are identified for improvement, corrective action, and restructuring; those

eligible LEAs with the largest number of schools in restructuring; or those eligible LEAs with the largest number or percentage of non-proficient students.

How might an SEA define “strongest commitment” as required by the statute?

An SEA has a great deal of flexibility in determining how to carry out this statutory requirement. In considering an LEA’s plan for using section 1003(g) funds, the SEA might consider such factors as the LEA’s commitment to making structural changes designed to improve student achievement, such as modifying teacher assignment practices to help ensure that a fair share of the LEA’s most effective teachers are assigned to the lowest-achieving schools or the LEA’s use of data to drive its decisions regarding school improvement strategies.

Must an SEA distribute School Improvement Funds to its LEAs on a competitive basis?

No. An SEA has flexibility to create its own subgrant process. However, it may be that implementing the priorities in section 1003(g)(6) are best met through a competitive process. In particular, at the current funding level, a formula-based process in which School Improvement Funds are awarded to every LEA with schools in improvement, corrective action, and restructuring would likely spread those funds too thinly to meet the requirements for LEA awards in section 1003(g)(5).

Must an SEA allocate funds to every LEA with schools identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring?

No. Indeed, the amount of funds likely will not be sufficient for an SEA to make awards to every eligible LEA. However, the new funding available under section 1003(g), combined with the school improvement funds currently available under section 1003(a), should permit the SEA to provide meaningful levels of improvement support to an increased number of LEAs with schools in improvement, corrective action, and restructuring. This is one reason the application requires an SEA to describe how it will integrate activities funded under sections 1003(g) and 1003(a).

Note that each identified school and LEA is responsible for carrying out its school improvement responsibilities under section 1116(b) and (c), respectively, whether it receives additional school improvement funds under either section 1003(g) or 1003(a).

Are School Improvement Fund grants to LEAs renewable?

Yes. Subject to future appropriations by Congress, an SEA may renew an LEA’s grant of section 1003(g) funds for two additional one-year periods if schools in the LEA are meeting the goals in their school improvement plans developed under section 1116.

May an SEA provide school improvement services directly to its LEAs with section 1003(g) funds?

Yes. With the approval of LEAs, an SEA may provide school improvement services under section 1116(b) directly to LEAs or arrange for their provision through other entities such as school support teams or educational service agencies. If an SEA will provide services directly to LEAs, its application must include a description of such services and evidence that it has approval from its LEAs.

May an SEA retain any School Improvement Funds to carry out activities?

Yes. An SEA may reserve up to 5% of its allocation under section 1003(g) for administrative, evaluation, and technical assistance costs.

How may an SEA use School Improvement Funds?

An SEA has broad flexibility in using section 1003(g) funds it retains for administrative, evaluation, and technical assistance costs. SEA activities funded by section 1003(g) must support one or more of the school improvement strategies listed in the application that are designed to build LEA and school capacity to improve student achievement and positively impact the measurable outcomes. The SEA should consider how best to integrate section 1003(g) funds with school improvement funds the SEA reserves under section 1003(a) of the ESEA, which by statute must be used to carry out SEA responsibilities under sections 1116 and 1117 of the SEA, including implementation of the required statewide system of technical assistance and support for LEAs.

What entities are potential partners with States for delivering technical assistance, professional development and management advice to help schools in improvement improve teaching and learning?

One strategy for expanding the capacity of SEAs and LEAs to meet the needs of schools in improvement, corrective action, and restructuring is to partner with other entities knowledgeable about improving teaching and learning. Such entities might include colleges and universities and federally funded technical assistance providers such as the comprehensive assistance centers and the regional educational laboratories.

How long does an SEA and its LEAs have to spend School Improvement Funds?

The project period for FY 2007 funds ends on September 30, 2009. This means that all work described in the grant application for the first year of funding must be completed by that date.

Must an SEA seek advice from its Committee of Practitioners regarding the criteria it will use to allocate School Improvement Funds?

Yes. By statute, a State's Committee of Practitioners, the majority of whose members must represent LEAs, is designed to provide the SEA with a wide range of viewpoints on rules, regulations, or binding policies that will affect LEAs' implementation of Title I programs. The Committee is well suited to provide input on the SEA's criteria for allocating School Improvement Funds.

May an SEA require its LEAs to amend their local plans to explain how they will use school improvement funds?

Yes. The Department encourages an SEA to require LEAs that seek funding to describe, for example:

- The technical assistance they will provide to schools identified for improvement, corrective action, and restructuring;

- How School Improvement Funds will implement and support the improvement, corrective action, and restructuring plans developed for each identified school.

May School Improvement Funds be used to provide Supplemental Educational Services?

Yes. An LEA may use School Improvement Funds to provide Supplemental Educational Services.

May an LEA use a portion of its School Improvement Funds for administrative costs?

Yes, although, as a practical matter, the Title I, Part A funds an LEA already has available for administrative costs should be sufficient to cover costs associated with administering section 1003(g) funds. Any use of Title I, Part A funds for administrative costs must be reasonable and necessary to carry out Title I, Part A activities.

May School Improvement funds be used to support a school that does not participate in Title I but whose lack of progress would qualify it for school improvement under section 1116(b)?

No. Only Title I schools identified for school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring under section 1116(b) may receive School Improvement Funds.

Must an SEA report on the use of School Improvement Funds??

Yes. Each SEA must report to the Department the data in the reporting section of the application. The Department anticipates collecting this data as part of the existing Consolidated State Performance Report starting with the 2007-2008 report.

How can an SEA or LEA demonstrate that it is making decisions regarding the use of school improvement funds based on data and that it has systems for continuous feedback and improvement?

An SEA or LEA can demonstrate that it is making decisions regarding the use of school improvement funds based on data by clearly articulating the data it analyzed, the conclusions drawn, and how the proposed uses of School Improvement Funds address areas where the data indicate that changes are needed to improve teaching and learning. At the LEA or school level, the analysis should include a review of the relevant data about student achievement and related factors, as well as a review of the evidence that the strategies to be implemented with the School Improvement Funds have the greatest likelihood of ensuring that all students reach proficiency. For example, LEA or school staff might consider data indicating that a particular strategy or combination of strategies contributed to improved student achievement in similarly situated schools. At the SEA level, the data review might include student achievement and other data that can be used to help ensure that the technical assistance being provided is aligned with local needs.

Data analysis is a continuous activity. Once a strategy or strategies have been identified, LEA and school level staff should monitor to ensure that those strategies are actually being implemented and to determine if they are contributing to the desired outcomes either in terms of improvement in student achievement or increases in other activities that lead to increased student achievement such as greater parental involvement or more high-

quality professional development. At the SEA level, the SEA should monitor the effectiveness of the technical assistance provided through its statewide system of support to ensure that LEAs and schools are receiving technical assistance in the areas where they most need it and it is having the intended results. In both cases, changes should be made when the data indicate that technical assistance or a strategy or combination of strategies are not having the intended result. Additionally, there should be a mechanism to report back to the LEA and the SEA about practices that are proving to be effective so this information can be shared with other LEAs and schools.