

**Michigan Department of Education
Persistently Lowest Achieving Schools
Frequently Asked Questions**

1. *When does the model that schools adopt have to be implemented?*

A: Schools must submit within 90 days a detailed school improvement /redesign plan using one of four improvement models - transformation, turnaround, closure, or restart required by the U.S. Department of Education. Schools must implement plans no later than the start of the next school year.

2. *What are the four federally-required school improvement models from which the schools had to select?*

A: **Transformation Model** – Districts would address four specific areas: 1) developing teacher and school leader effectiveness, which includes replacing the principal who led the school prior to commencement of the transformational model; 2) implementing comprehensive instructional reform strategies; 3) extending learning and teacher planning time and creating community-oriented schools; and 4) providing operating flexibility and sustained support.

Turnaround Model – This would include among other actions, replacing the principal and at least 50 percent of the school's staff, adopting a new governance structure, and implementing a new or revised instructional program.

Restart Model – School districts would close the school and reopen it under the management of a charter school operator; a charter management organization; or an educational management organization selected through a rigorous review process. A restart school would be required to enroll, within the grades it serves, any former student who wishes to attend.

Close/Consolidate Model – The district would close the low-achieving school and enroll the students who attended that school in other high-achieving schools in the district.

3. *Does the selection of one of the models void the union contract?*

A: No. It is recognized that negotiations may be required to implement all or portions of a given model. Recent legislation passed in Michigan June 2011 has eliminated from collective bargaining the following topics: 1) policies governing teacher placement or impact of personnel decisions; 2) an employer's performance evaluation system; decision about a policy for discharging or disciplining employees subject to the tenure law, and the discharge or discipline of an employee; 3) classroom observation decisions; 4) a performance-based method of compensation; and 5)

decisions about parental notification of ineffective teachers. (For further discussion of this topic, please see question F-7 of the Federal SIG Grant Frequently Asked Questions document at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/faq.html>.)

4. What happens to PLA schools under an emergency manager?

A change to MCL 380.1280c indicates that “if a school is included on the list under subsection (1) is operated by a school district in which an emergency manager is in place under the local government and school district fiscal accountability act, then the superintendent of public instruction shall not issue an order placing the school under the supervision of the state school reform/redesign officer.” At this time, this only applies to all Detroit schools that are on the PLA list. The State Reform Officer will not be soliciting and approving plans for DPS schools. DPS schools come under the authority of the Educational Achievement Authority.

5. In the transformation and turnaround models, the principal has to be replaced. What role can he/she still play in the decision making process?

A: It is the intent of the federal reform models that new leadership be put in place at the school.

6. What is the criterion for replacing the principal?

A: The principal must be replaced in the Turnaround and Transformation models. There is a two-year rule that stipulates if a principal has been replaced within the last two full years (going back to the school year 2009/2010), and documentation is required for the Turnaround model.

7. What are the assessments schools must use?

A: For the purposes of state law and the federal models the school must use Michigan Merit Exam (MME) and Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) data (including the MI-Access assessments where appropriate). The School Improvement plan also requires schools to use the Plan and Explore tests for high schools. A well-rounded assessment system also should consider formative assessment and assessments that give information about instructional practices.

8. Are there exemplars of schools districts that have adopted the transformation or turnaround model and have shown dramatic improvement and/or success?

A: The following websites include videos or research articles about specific schools that have engaged in school restructuring using a variety of models including the turnaround model and demonstrating rapid and significant improvement:

- <http://www.ed.gov/blog/2010/03/whats-possible-turning-around-americas-lowest-achieving-schools/>
- <http://www.centerii.org/WhatAreDistrictsDoing/>
- <http://dww.ed.gov/> (Doing What Works)
- http://www.learningpt.org/pdfs/School_Restructuring_Guide.pdf

9. *Why do we have a PLA list? Is it required by state and federal legislation?*

A: It was a federal requirement to develop a ranking system to identify the persistently lowest achieving (PLA) schools according to certain specifications and it was a state requirement to publish the list and the formula.

10. *Are there schools that are not eligible to be placed on the PLA list?*

Yes. Schools that receive Federal Title I funds and that are making adequate yearly progress (AYP) are not placed in the pool of schools to be ranked. Small schools (testing fewer than 30 students) also are not placed in the pool of schools to be ranked.

11. *Who reviews the school reform/redesign plans?*

A: A team of reviewers, both internal and external, will assist in reviewing reform/redesign plans. Based on that review, the State School Reform Officer will determine if plans are approved, disapproved, or require changes.

12. *Can Title I, Part A funds be used to support professional learning communities (PLCs)?*

A: Professional development costs associated with PLCs may be funded with Title I, Part A funds in school-wide schools. This includes facilitator fees, supplies/materials and substitute teachers or stipends.

Title II, Part A funds may be used to pay for supplies/materials and substitutes or stipends for PLCs as long as the facilitator is paid with IIA funds, or IIA was used to train the facilitator on the PLC topic, or how to facilitate PLCs, in the past.

OFS has recently revised Title II guidance by issuing FAQs. These may be found at www.michigan.gov/ofs under Current Topics. Further clarification can be obtained by contacting your field service consultant or the office at 517-373-3921.

13. Do schools new to the PLA list this year have an opportunity to apply for a School Improvement Grant (SIG)?

A: No. All Federal school improvement funds received by Michigan have been granted to schools.

14. Do the Statewide School Reform/Redesign Plans supersede the plans that are submitted for Title I AYP status?

A: There should be one plan for each school that addresses all the plan requirements regardless of fund source or legislative requirements. The plan should meet all requirements (Title I schoolwide, School Reform/Redesign, and other planning requirements) appropriate and consistent with the school's status. The plan should be based on the comprehensive needs assessment, and be well-aligned and highly focused so that it can be implemented with fidelity quickly. Multiple or inconsistent plans lead to conflicts and distractions that inhibit implementation and progress on student achievement.

15. Small districts with only one high school cannot dismiss (or reassign) 50% of staff without terminating employment. Therefore, is the turnaround model an option they can consider?

A: Each district and school must select the model that works for its unique situation including needs of the students, staff, and the particulars of the collective bargaining agreements.

16. Why is it that a school that is no longer on "the list," still required to implement its school reform/redesign plans?

A: Schools that appear on the PLA list are required to develop a redesign plan and to implement it the following school year. If the school comes off the list due to ranking higher than other schools or improvements resulting from pre-implementation efforts, it is in the best interest of the school to follow-through with the implementation of its plans to ensure continued and sustainable improvements over time.

17. What are the web sites to get data about schools and rankings?

For information about the PLA schools, please go to:
http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,1607,7-140-6530_56811---.00.html with the PLA list, business rules, PowerPoint, and FAQ.

For information on the Statewide Top to Bottom ranking, please go to:
http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,1607,7-140-37818_56562---.00.html with the Top to Bottom list, business rules, data, brackets, FAQ and PowerPoint.

18. Does summer school count for the additional 200-300 hours?

A: As taken from federal SIG guidance, summer school may count if it meets the following:

A-31. What is the definition of “increased learning time”?

Increased learning time” means using a longer school day, week, or year schedule to significantly increase the total number of school hours to include additional time for (a) instruction in core academic subjects including English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography; (b) instruction in other subjects and enrichment activities that contribute to a well-rounded education, including, for example, physical education, service learning, and experiential and work-based learning opportunities that are provided by partnering, as appropriate, with other organizations; and (c) teachers to collaborate, plan, and engage in professional development within and across grades and subjects.

A-32. Does the definition of “increased learning time” include before- or after-school instructional programs?

Research supports the effectiveness of well-designed programs that expand learning time by a minimum of 300 hours per school year. (See Frazier, Julie A.; Morrison, Frederick J. “The Influence of Extended-year Schooling on Growth of Achievement and Perceived Competence in Early Elementary School.” *Child Development*. Vol. 69 (2), April 1998, pp.495-497 and research done by Mass2020.) Extending learning into before- and after-school hours can be difficult to implement effectively, but is permissible under this definition, although the Department (USED) encourages LEAs to closely integrate and coordinate academic work between in school and out of school. To satisfy the requirements in Section I.A.2(a)(1)(viii) of the turnaround model and Section I.A.2(d)(3)(i)(A) of the transformation model for providing increased learning time, a before- or after-school instructional program must be available to all students in the school. Addendum: Although research supports the effectiveness of increasing learning time by a minimum of 300 hours, the final requirements do not require that an LEA implementing either the turnaround model or the transformation model necessarily provide at least 300 hours of increased learning time. An LEA has the flexibility to determine precisely how to meet the requirement to establish schedules that provide increased learning time, and should do so with an eye toward the goal of increasing learning time enough to have a meaningful impact on the academic program in which the model is being implemented.

19. PLA schools are required to demonstrate growth and improvement? How will these things be determined and measured?

A: There is no consistent, statewide comparison that can be used in all schools except the statewide annual assessment. The statewide assessment always will be part of a school’s measure of academic

success. For PLA schools to demonstrate progress, other measures will be agreed upon and evaluated. Such measures could include local assessments and norm-referenced assessments, student discipline data, Advanced Placement tests, college credit earning courses, and other measures of student and school achievement.

20. How do we get our school off the PLA list?

Michigan will use several indicators to determine progress and significant achievement. The indicators will include the following:

- State Assessments, such as the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP), Michigan Merit Exam, and MI-Access
- Achievement data in reading, mathematics, science, social studies, and writing
- Growth data
- Achievement gap data
- Graduation rate data (for high schools)
- Teacher attendance
- Student attendance
- Student dropout rate
- Student participation rate on state assessments
- Discipline incidents
- Truancy rates
- Distribution of teachers by performance level on an LEA's teacher evaluation system

21. Are there resources to help us choose the right people for the intervention team?

A: The Center for Innovation and Improvement webinars can be accessed for technical assistance with work on intervention planning and staff selection.

School Improvement Grants - LEA Webinars on the Intervention Models

Selecting the Intervention Model	Webinar (46.07)	Power Point Slides (ppt)
Transformation Model	Webinar (31.04)	Power Point Slides (ppt)
Turnaround Model	Webinar (35.17)	Power Point Slides (ppt)
Restart Model	Webinar (35.34)	Power Point Slides (ppt)
Closure Model	Webinar (22.04)	Power Point Slides (ppt)
Communicating about School Reform	Webinar (37.45)	Power Point Slides with Notes (ppt)
The Right People for the Job	Webinar (43.20)	Power Point Slides with Notes (ppt)

Questions Regarding the Metric, Data or Calculations

22. How were PLA schools identified?

The PLA schools were identified using a set of business rules that were approved by the federal government for the publication of the 2009-2010 PLA list. In August, 2011, the Michigan Department of Education submitted a request for a waiver of certain requirements for the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) Section 1003(g) School Improvement Grants to the U.S. Department of Education (USED). This waiver would have permitted MDE to use rules different from those required by Section 1003g for identifying schools as persistently low achieving (PLA). Because the waiver was denied by USED, Michigan's 2011 PLA list has been determined by current federal guidelines and business rules, which require the use of the tier system and do not include graduation rate data, achievement gap data, and assessment data for content areas other than reading and mathematics.

MDE's preferred rules use a straight classification of the lowest performing five percent of schools as determined by Michigan standard assessments, growth data, achievement gap data in all five tested content areas, and graduation rate data (for high schools) without using the USED "tier" system.

23. A Top to Bottom ranking was published as well as the PLA list. How are these two lists different?

The PLA list is generated following a set of federal approved business rules and applies only to certain schools who meet the federal requirements. The statewide Top to Bottom Ranking was generated for all schools in the state (who had a sufficient number of full academic year students).

The Top to Bottom ranking includes all five tested content areas, and graduation rate data (for high schools), and uses MDE's preferred rules, developed in conjunction with a diverse set of education stakeholders throughout the 2010-2011 school year. This list is being published to provide information to all schools and to provide "light of day" reporting on the achievement, improvement, and achievement gaps of all schools in the state.

A comparison of the two lists is included below:

	Top to Bottom	PLA
Subjects included	Math Reading Writing Science Social Studies	Math Reading
Graduation rate?	Yes	No
Components	Achievement (1/2) Improvement (1/4) Achievement gap (1/4)	Proficiency (2/3) Improvement (1/3)
Proficiency?	Uses standardized measure of student performance (z-score)	Uses proficiency levels
High achieving schools?	Calculation adjustments to avoid "ceiling effects"	No adjustment
Tiers?	No tiers; all schools included	Tiers; Title I, AYP and school level considered

24. What are the components of the PLA ranking?

The first step of the PLA identification process is to place schools into two pools. These pools are based on their Title I status (receiving or eligible), their AYP status, and their grade level. Please see the PowerPoint "Persistently Lowest Achieving Schools 2011 Overview" for more information on the pools and tiers.

The second step is to rank schools based on their proficiency and improvement in reading and mathematics.

25. I want to see the data for my school and how my PLA status was calculated. How can I do this?

Data files are available for PLA schools on request from the Bureau of Assessment and Accountability. Please send an email to mde-accountability@michigan.gov and we will make this file available to you.

26. Can a school have a higher ranking on the statewide Top to Bottom ranking and still be a PLA school?

Yes. This is for two reasons:

1. The pools and tiers required by the federal government mean that certain schools qualify as PLA schools, even if their ranking is higher than the lowest 5%.
2. The rules by which the Top to Bottom list was generated are different than the rules for the PLA schools. This is due to the fact that the rules for identifying PLA schools are linked in state statute to the federally approved rules for School Improvement Grant funding. See Sally Vaughn's memo from August 22, 2011: (http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/PLA_Pub_List_361314_7.pdf) for further information on this situation.