

Frequently Asked Questions about Michigan's Focus Schools

Revised: 6-23-14 -

Table of Contents (CTRL + Click to jump to category)

[General Questions](#)

[Identification of Focus Schools](#)

[Requirements and Supports for Title I Focus Schools](#)

[Financial Implications for Title I Focus Schools](#)

[Uses of Set-aside Fund for Title I Focus Schools](#)

[Other Issues](#)

General Questions

1. What is a Focus School?

Focus Schools are identified as the ten percent (10%) of Michigan schools having the widest gap in student achievement between their lowest and highest performing students. These schools have the greatest issues in supporting their lowest achieving students compared to their highest achieving students, whether their overall performance is high or low.

2. Are Focus Schools poor performing schools?

Not necessarily. Focus Schools are located all along the Top-to-Bottom ranking, ranging from the 5th to the 99th percentile (those in the bottom 5% are Priority Schools). Since the achievement gap only counts for 1/4 of the overall calculation, a Focus School might be performing above the state average in average achievement, and may even have robust gains in student achievement from year to year. What Focus Schools have in common is that students in the bottom 30% within the school are performing at a level significantly below the top 30% within the school.

3. If not for poor performance, then why have these schools been identified for improvement?

When the US Department of Education (USED) gave states the option of requesting flexibility from certain federally-defined accountability metrics of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) seized the opportunity. In exchange for this flexibility, USED required the state to adopt new metrics that would identify schools in need of special attention and support. In addition to Priority Schools (bottom 5% of Top to Bottom schools), MDE worked in collaboration with education stakeholders statewide to develop the Focus School metric because addressing the achievement gap and getting all students career- and college-ready is critical both nationally and here in Michigan. It is clear that we cannot raise Michigan's overall performance until we identify our lowest student achievers and change our practices in ways that enable them to succeed. The Focus School cohort represents the urgency of our commitment to make visible these students (even in relatively high-performing schools) whose needs are not being fully met, and to hold ourselves accountable for finding ways to help them succeed.

4. Can a school be both a Priority and a Focus School?

No. It's possible for a school to have a large gap between its top and bottom 30% student groups and also have an overall low Top-to-Bottom ranking; however, if a school has earned both designations, the Priority Schools designation takes priority in the accountability system and the school is then not designated as Focus.

5. Can a district have both Priority and Focus Schools?

Yes, if the district has at least one school that is very low performing (in the bottom 5%) and at least one school with a very large achievement gap regardless of overall ranking. See the **Requirements and Supports for Focus Schools** section below for specific information and plans to support each school according to its designation.

Identification of Focus Schools

6. How were Focus Schools identified?

The calculation methodology is explained in detail in documents on the Focus Schools website at www.michigan.gov/focusschools. A simplified overview is this:

- a. Each student is compared to other students statewide who took each grade level's subject area test, and is assigned a score that shows how far above or below the state average his/her individual performance is for that subject area and grade level.
- b. Students in a school are then ranked for each subject area from highest to lowest performance. The top 30% and the bottom 30% are clustered, and their scores are averaged. This results in subject area achievement gaps for the school.
- c. This is repeated for each of the last two years' test data, and these results are averaged.
- d. For each subject area, the achievement gaps of all Michigan schools are ranked from smallest to largest, and the school is assigned a score that shows how far above or below the state average the school's achievement gap is.
- e. All of a school's subject area scores are combined to yield an overall average achievement gap measure.
- f. All Michigan schools' achievement gap scores are ranked from smallest to largest, and the 10% with the widest achievement gaps are designated Focus Schools.

7. I want to see the data that took my Focus School through those steps.

A "2013/14 Top-to-Bottom Individual School Lookup Tool" will be available at www.michigan.gov/ttb. This downloadable Excel worksheet allows you to enter the name of a school or its school code and see the results of each of the calculations.

A "Top-to-Bottom Resources for School Use" document will also be available at www.michigan.gov/ttb and contains a worksheet that will lead you through the diagnostic steps that use these relative rankings to see where the school is doing better and worse than other schools in:

- achievement in each of the five tested areas (math, reading, writing, science and social studies)
- improvement in each of the tested areas, and
- achievement gap in each tested area. [This will be the area in which Focus Schools are well below the state average].

For questions that remain, please call the Bureau of Assessment and Accountability help desk for individual help in walking through calculations. You can reach this office via email at mde-accountability@michigan.gov, or via phone at 877-560-8378, option 6.

8. Could you please send the link to identify the bottom 30% students in our schools to us all?

The Report Card Student Data File Tool requires a secure login and will be posted under the “Data and Tools” section at: <http://www.michigan.gov/focusschools>. Once the protected file is opened, notice that the column labeled “bottom 30% (subject)” contains numbers. Students labeled with a “0” are not counted for accountability purposes (possibly not Full Academic Year (FAY) or not tested). Students labeled with “1” are in the top 30%. Students with a “2” are in the middle 40%. Students with a “3” are in the bottom 30%.

9. How does the recent change in cut scores affect the Focus School calculation?

In general, the Top-to-Bottom rankings are not impacted by the change in “cut scores”, however, for the small number of calculations that cut scores impacted, student scale score data was retroactively calculated to apply the career- and college-ready cut scores. Please see the support documents regarding the Top-to-Bottom ranking at www.michigan.gov/ttb.

10. What years’ scores were used as the basis for this calculation?

For elementary and middle schools (who test in the fall) this year’s Top-to-Bottom list is based on averaging data from the last available school years: SY 2011-12 (tested fall 2012) and SY 2012-13 (tested fall 2013). For high schools (who test in the spring) this year’s list uses data from SY 2012-13 (tested spring 2014) and SY 2013-14 (tested spring 2013).

11. Are all schools included in the list?

Any school that has at least 30 Full Academic Year (FAY) students in each of the last 2 years in at least two tested content areas is ranked.

12. What if a school has been reconfigured?

If a school has changed four or more grade levels, it receives a new code and the Top-to-Bottom rating stays with the old school code; if three or ~~less~~ fewer grade levels have changed, the ranking belongs to the school even if it now has a different grade configuration.

13. If a district has a Priority School which was shut-down and students reassigned to a school that is a Focus School which has all new grades (from a 3-5 grade building to a K-6 building), couldn't the Focus School just be considered a whole new building and off "the list"?

Maybe. The reconfigured building might receive a new code, if requested by the district, because the minimum four grade levels were changed. However, these are decisions determined by the State School Reform Office, the Office of Evaluation, Strategic Research and Accountability (OESRA) and the Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI).

14. Are all students included in the school’s calculations?

A student’s scores are “pointed” toward the school where his/her learning took place during the year in question. For instance, sixth graders who tested in a middle school in fall 2013 but attended an elementary during 2012-2013 would have their fall 2013 scores attributed to the elementary school.

Students are included for accountability purposes in a school’s data only if they were Full Academic Year (FAY) students – present during three count days – during the year in question.

15. Is a school with a greater number of special education disadvantaged in these calculations?

No, the number of students who are identified as special education does not disadvantage a school in these metrics. The performance of students taking an alternate assessment are compared against other students taking the same alternate assessment, so that there is an “apples to apples” type of comparison for metrics in determining achievement gaps. Please see the presentation entitled “Dispelling the Myths about Focus Schools” at: www.michigan.gov/focusschools.

Individual schools’ analyses of their bottom 30% will take place as part of the diagnostic data dialogue and any student population that occurs in significant numbers in that cohort will need specific, responsive strategies for teaching and learning to meet their unique needs.

16. How does a school get off the Focus School list?

Although a school that has been identified as a Focus School will remain in its cohort for four years it does not necessarily appear on each year’s Focus School list. That will depend on each year’s 10% largest gap determination.

The waiver says on page 154: To exit Focus status, the school must, following the end of Year 4, meet its Accountability scorecard targets (attaining Green, Lime, Yellow or Orange designation) including meeting the safe harbor target for the bottom 30% subgroup.

To remove the Focus School identification at the end of the four year cohort a school must meet the AMO Proficiency targets as determined by the Accountability Scorecard.

Schools and districts can do powerful things that have been shown to minimize achievement gaps. One is to pay deep, diagnostic attention to their lowest-achieving students and commit both school-level and district-level resources to the adult-learning task of adapting teaching and learning methods to engage, guide and reinforce those students’ learning. Another important step is integrating the Career- and College-Ready (Common Core) Standards into the school’s curriculum and instruction, since state assessments will be tied to these standards by the 2014-2015 school year.

If all other schools in the state retained their same achievement gap next year, a school could be confident that its own efforts would suffice to remove it from the list. However, because the calculation is a relative one, and because many other schools are simultaneously working to reduce their own achievement gaps, in reality whether a school appears on next year’s list depends both on what the school itself does AND also on what all other schools do.

If the “widest achievement gaps” next year turn out to be smaller, Michigan will have made progress. But Michigan’s commitment to continuous improvement means that MDE will still identify and support the 10% of schools with the widest achievement gaps as they work to narrow the gap still further. Thus a school could remain a Focus School even if its gap narrowed (if other schools narrowed theirs even more).

17. Once identified as a Focus School, is that school locked into Focus status for a full four years?

When a school is identified as a Focus School it joins a cohort of Focus Schools for four years. Any of these schools may not be identified as a Focus School after the first year but will continue to be in their cohort. Any Focus School that is not identified in any of its subsequent cohort years will be conditionally suspended from its accountability requirements and supports. If a Title I Focus School is not identified in its second year of the cohort and is identified in the third or fourth year of its cohort, the accountability requirements and supports will resume according to that year’s requirements.

18. If a Title I school is not identified as a Focus School next summer (after being on the list this year) but then is identified during the following year, do they go on to the Year 2 requirements automatically?

No. Once identified as a Focus School, the school will join a four year cohort of Focus Schools. The first year of identification there is no Title I set-aside required. The building Title I set-aside begins in Year 2 of identification and is conditionally suspended in any year the school is not identified. The District Title I obligation begins in Year 3 of a Title I Focus School's identification. The required district set-aside will be calculated as the sum of 10% of each Focus School's previous year school level Title I budget, up to an aggregate maximum not to exceed 10% of the current year LEA Title I allocation. The district level set-aside is required before any other reservations are made. During Year 4, the district set-aside will be calculated as the sum of 15% of each Focus School's previous year's school level Title I budget, up to an aggregate maximum not to exceed 15% of the current year LEA Title I allocation. The district level set-aside is required before any other reservations are made.

19. What if a district has deliberately chosen to place high performing and low performing students in the same building as a strategy for accelerating the growth of the low performing students? In other words, what if we CHOSE this gap, believe it's good pedagogically, and don't want to eliminate it?

MDE acknowledges that this is possible. For instance, we have worked with schools that serve both a district's gifted/talented population and a large number of English Language Learners (ELLs) because they find that the cross-socialization helps the ELL students assimilate rapidly. The gap will always remain as new ELLs arrive, but it helps erase the gap in a few years.

The Office of Evaluation, Strategic Research and Accountability (OESRA) is developing a - methodology for identifying a school that meets both of two criteria: -

Overall performance is strong (in the top 75% of the Top to Bottom list)

The bottom 30% is improving at least at the Safe Harbor rate.

Requirements and Supports for Focus Schools

20. What are the consequences of being identified as a Focus School?

The consequences of being identified are deliberately **formative and supportive** rather than punitive; this is because Michigan's alternate accountability system is built on this theory of action: careful diagnosis (consisting of data coupled with professional dialogue) will lead to customized interventions that support adult learning about (and use of) new ways of teaching and learning that will increase student achievement among our lowest performing students. By design, first year Title I Focus School interventions are **led by district personnel** and relatively lightly supported by a state-funded District Improvement Facilitator for districts with Title I Focus Schools.

During the first year in which one or more of its schools is identified as a Focus School, a district is required to ensure that the school:

- a. -Conducts a facilitated, diagnostic "data dialogue" to identify one or two major changes in teaching and learning practice capable of moving achievement levels among the lowest-performing students and post these conclusions in the AdvancED school improvement focus school diagnostic.

- b. -Revises its School Improvement Plan (and, if necessary, the district's consolidated application for federal funding) to incorporate scaffolding of adult-learning about and implementation of the selected new approaches to teaching/learning, and
- c. -Strengthens, focuses, or deepens the fidelity of its multi-tiered system of support to - differentiate learning processes for its lowest-performing students. -

Participate in the Superintendent's Dropout Challenge by identifying 10-15 at-risk students nearing a transition year, and track the effectiveness of research-based supports and interventions available to them.

At the same time, the district itself will:

- d. Monitor the implementation of the school's selected improvement strategies,
- e. -Self-assess its own readiness to support its struggling schools differentially (districts with Title I schools will use a Resource Allocation Check derived from the work of Education Resource Strategies, Inc. which is available to all districts at no charge at <http://www.erstrategies.org/info/tools>.) Districts with Title I Focus Schools will upload the results from this self-assessment in ASSIST.
- f. - Identify any changes in district-level infrastructure systems that are needed in order to allow and/or support the school in implementing its teaching/learning changes,
- g. -Revise its District Improvement Plan to specify one or two major changes in its school support system and report at monitoring intervals on its implementation of these changes.
- h. -Monitor and evaluate the School Improvement Plan of the Focus School and provide Quarterly Progress Reports to their school board on progress toward closing the achievement gap. The Quarterly Progress Reports to the school board are then uploaded each quarter into the MDE, Michigan Electronic Grants System Plus (MEGS+). This fall, the MDE will provide a Quarterly Progress Report template for district completion and upload by the district.

21. What help is available to Title I Focus Schools and their districts?

To help districts build capacity for supporting struggling Title I schools, MI-Excel (Michigan's - Statewide System of Support) will provide: -

- a. -A uniform set of disaggregated demographic and outcome data for each Focus School, in MI School Data: <https://www.mischooldata.org/>,
- b. A District Improvement Facilitator (DIF) trained and prepared to assist the district to:
 - 1. - lead the school-specific diagnostic "data dialogues"
 - 2. - identify district-level system changes needed if Focus Schools are to accomplish significant change in results
- c. -A District Toolkit, outlining practices, tools and strategies that have proven successful for districts seeking to differentially support their struggling schools to change.

22. What help is available to non-Title I Focus Schools and their districts?

MI-Excel, Michigan's Statewide System of Support, is funded from the state's portion of Title I funds, and so District Improvement Facilitators (DIFs) are made available to support districts with Title I Focus Schools. However, by focusing its efforts on strengthening district capacity to assist its Title I schools, we hope that the ideas, the lessons learned, and the experience gained with Title I schools will assist districts with both Title I and non-Title I Focus Schools in its efforts to leverage resources and support elsewhere to assist non-Title I schools.

It is worth noting that many of the reasons that previously kept some Title I eligible buildings from participating in the federal supplemental program are no longer as powerful. If a district wishes to consider changing a building's Title I status, MDE's Office of Field Services will assist you through consideration and application.

Districts with non-Title I Focus Schools may choose to independently utilize some of the same tools that its Title I counterparts use with Facilitator support:

- a. Student achievement data from MI School Data - <https://www.mischooldata.org>
- b. District Systems Level Self-Assessment - <http://www.erstrategies.org/info/tools>
- c. District Toolkit to support identified challenges: <http://mitoolkit.org>
- d. District and school improvement resources - <http://advanc-ed.org/mde>

23. What is a diagnostic “data dialogue”?

A diagnostic “data dialogue” is an inquiry protocol that couples a school's “data” with the “professional dialogue” capable of interpreting it and mining it for locally appropriate, customized interventions powerful enough to change teaching/learning practice in needed ways. There are many formats for conducting such dialogues, and one or more may have been in place in your district for years. If so, you may use that format for the required data dialogues.

The District Improvement Facilitators, deployed to a district with Title I Focus Schools, will come equipped with a set of tools and protocols that can be used across the state unless another one is more useful in a particular district:

- They will bring a customized Data Wall provided in MI SchoolData.org.
- They will be prepared to model and coach a learning cycle based on the data dialogue methodology described by Laura Lipton and Bruce Wellman in their books **Data Driven Dialogue** and **Got Data? Now What?**

The Facilitators will begin by listening carefully at the district level to ascertain a district's own approach to data analysis and to plan what mix of the statewide protocols and locally-chosen analysis will best serve the goal of rapidly narrowing the Focus School's achievement gap.

24. Why would we assume any changes need to be made in “district infrastructure?”

Both national research and Michigan experience document that schools that succeed in changing practice and improving results quickly, demonstrably and sustainably do so because they exist within SYSTEMS that support iterative adult learning about how to customize a response to the needs of the hardest-to-reach students. Conversely, buildings that fail to change results (despite years of “interventions” and sometimes millions of dollars) cite numerous unintentional SYSTEM barriers that prevent change by failing to differentiate and serve schools differently that are working with the neediest students.

The District Resource Allocation Check (that the District Improvement Facilitators will bring to Title I schools) pinpoints areas of flexibility which are important to schools needing to reinvent themselves, but often invisible to central offices used to treating schools “equally.” MI-Excel is prepared to help districts instead work toward “equitably”.

NOTE: The Resource Check self-assessment is available free online (<http://www.erstrategies.org/info/tools>) from Education Resource Strategies (ERS) for non-Title 1 schools interested in its diagnostic power.

25. What does a District Improvement Facilitator (DIF) do?

District Improvement Facilitators will arrive prepared to assist district administrators with -three tasks:

- Preparing for and leading a building-level “data dialogue” that results in one or two agreed-upon major changes in teaching/learning practice needed to significantly narrow the improvement gap, and
- Using the ERS District Resource Check and building plans to identify the district-level - infrastructure changes needed to support them differentially. -
- Providing technical assistance, guidance and feedback to district-level staff regarding identified challenges

The Facilitator will work with a central office administrator designated by the district to plan for, implement, and monitor both school and district levels of change. The Facilitator will also gather implementation data for MI-Excel to monitor school and district progress; any reports will be transparent and available to the district and school.

26. Will we get 40 hours of DIF support per building or just 40 hours for the district?

The District Improvement Facilitator (DIF) will be available to the district for approximately 40 hours during any year of a Focus school’s identification and will work with the district administrator assigned to Focus Schools. The number of hours may be customized to more closely meet the district’s needs. If there are multiple Focus Schools in a district, the same DIF may be assigned more hours or there may be an additional DIF assigned, depending upon the district’s needs.

27. As a district with Title I Focus Schools, when will we receive our facilitator assignments?

District Improvement Facilitators will be matched with schools during September.

28. Can a district pick its own facilitator?

No, District Improvement Facilitator assignments will be made by MDE’s MI Excel partner. However, MDE is prepared to consult with districts to ensure that the match is a productive one.

29. Are District Improvement Facilitators different from the Specialists who will work with Priority Schools? What if both are assigned to a district?

Both Facilitators and Specialists are receiving the training and some individuals may perform both roles in a single district or in neighboring districts. The roles are different, however, because Facilitator engagements with districts are designed to be much more light-handed – they will be present for approximately 40 hours over a school year (rather than the 50 days that Specialists will be working with districts with Priority Schools.)

30. If the facilitator is assigned to our district, can we direct their work?

No, MDE’s partner is responsible for training, supervising, and evaluating the facilitators to ensure that equitable services are available to all districts across the state. However, the facilitator has discretion to customize as needed to complement and support district decisions and approaches, and MDE’s partner plans to consult regularly with districts to ensure satisfaction with the partnerships.

31. Will our MDE Consultant be able to explain Z scores to our Board?

The District Improvement Facilitator (DIF) will assist the district administrator to understand and work with the data pertaining to your school. In the course of this diagnostic “data dialogue” the district administrator will learn what he/she needs to know to explain Z scores to the school board.

32. Is there a list of approvable interventions?

No. Each school must use their own data to determine their strengths and challenges and then match the intervention to their needs. However, an integrated, multi-tiered system of instruction, assessment, and interventions designed to meet the achievement and behavioral needs of all learners is a research-based structure that allows all students to achieve at their optimal levels.

Financial Implications for Title I Focus Schools

33. What are the financial implications of being identified as a Title I Focus School?

Focus Schools are required to set-aside 10% of the building-level Title I allocation beginning in Year Two, and in each subsequent year that the building is identified as Focus, for at least one of the options below:

- Professional learning on:
 - multi-tiered system of support
 - scaffolded instruction for lowest performers or
 - essential elements for teachers of MI-ACCESS students
 - other strategies based on the needs identified by the analysis of the school’s data
- Weekly/daily teacher collaboration time
- Surveys of Enacted Curriculum
- Contract with the local ISD/ESA for a School Improvement Review of with AdvancED Michigan for a School Diagnostic Review
- Culture/climate interventions

Additionally, the district-level Title I set-aside obligation begins in Year 3 of a Title I Focus School’s identification. The required district set-aside will be calculated as the sum of 10% of each Focus School’s previous year school level Title I budget, up to an aggregate maximum not to exceed 10% of the current year LEA Title I allocation. The district level set-aside is required before any other reservations are made. During Year 4, the district set-aside will be calculated as the sum of 15% of each Focus School’s previous year’s school level Title I budget, up to an aggregate maximum not to exceed 15% of the current year LEA Title I allocation. The district level set-aside is required before any other reservations are made.

At least one of the options below must be used by the district in support of its Title I Focus School:

- Provide or enhance the fidelity of implementation of a multi-tiered system of supports
- Professional learning aligned with building data.

34. If the Focus School is a Title 1 school is the 10% school set- aside in addition to their portion of the Title 1 funding in the School Selection Process?

The 10% comes out of Title I funding after the School Selection Process.

35. Our district has multiple Title 1 schools identified as both Priority and Focus. How is the maximum district set-aside determined?

The district Title 1 set-aside for the 2014-15 school year is determined by the number of Priority and Focus schools in the district and their cohort of identification. The district set-aside is required for Focus schools in their third and fourth year of identification.

- The required district Title I set-aside will begin in Year 3 of a Title I Focus School's identification and will be calculated as the sum of 10% of each Focus School's previous year school level Title I budget, up to an aggregate maximum not to exceed 10% of the current year LEA Title I allocation. The district level set-aside is required before any other reservations are made.
- During Year 4, the district set-aside increases to 15% of each Focus School's previous year school level Title I budget up to an aggregate maximum not to exceed 15% of the current year LEA Title I allocation. The district level set-aside is required before any other reservations are made.

In a District with both Title I Focus and Priority schools, the minimum required Title 1 aggregate district set-aside is determined by the oldest cohort of identification of the Priority school(s) in the district. If all of the district's priority schools are in year one, then set asides must be determined as if the district only has focus schools. Refer to the focus school set aside guidance for more information with one exception:

- . If in addition to one or more Title 1 Focus schools in Year 3, a district has one of or more - Priority schools identified by cohort as Year 1, the aggregate district set-aside shall be - determined as that required by the oldest cohort of the Focus school(s) of the district, not to - exceed 10% of the current year LEA Title I allocation. The district level set-aside is required - before any other reservations are made. -

A District with both Title I Priority and Focus schools required to do the set asides will determine the aggregate maximum district set-aside of the LEA Title I allocation as follows:

- The required district Title I set-aside will begin in Year 2 of a Title I Priority School's identification and will be calculated as the sum of 10% of each Priority School's previous year school level Title I budget, up to an aggregate maximum not to exceed 10% of the current year LEA Title I allocation. If, in addition to the Year 2 Priority school the district has one or more Focus schools identified as Years 3, then the district set-aside increases to 10% of each Priority School's previous year school level Title I budget, plus 10% of each Focus School's previous year school level Title I budget up to an aggregate maximum not to exceed 10% of the current year LEA Title I allocation. The district level set-aside is required before any other reservations are made.
- During Year 3 of Priority school identification, the district set-aside increases to 15% of each - Priority School's previous year school level Title I budget up to an aggregate maximum not to - exceed 15% of the current year LEA Title I allocation. The district level set-aside is required - before any other reservations are made. -
- During Year 4 of Priority school identification, the district set-aside is increased to 20% of each Priority School's previous year school Title I budget up to an aggregate maximum not to exceed 20% of the current year LEA Title I allocation. The district level set-aside is required before any other reservations are made.
- Districts with one or more Title I Priority Schools **may** choose to continue to implement Title I district set-asides as in the original waiver language, setting aside a straight 20% reservation of the current year LEA Title I allocation in Years 1, 2, 3 or 4 of the Priority School's cohort identification.

The district may determine how the district set-aside is allocated to each identified Title I Focus and Priority school; however, the set-aside may only be used for the MDE-identified activity options and must serve all of the identified Focus and Priority schools.

36. Must the use of the district set-aside be proportional to the identified Focus and/or Priority schools' Title I budgets?

No. The district may determine how the district set-aside is allocated to each identified Focus and/or Priority school; however, the set-aside may only be used for the MDE-identified activity options and must serve all of the identified Focus and Priority schools.

37. Is the required building level set-aside of 10% of the building's Title I budget for Focus schools, identified as Year 2 or greater in addition to any required district set-side?

The required building level set-aside of 10% of the Title I building budget is in addition to the - required district set-aside. -

38. Last year our district and schools initiated some strategies and interventions from the required options for use of set-aside funds which the district would like to continue; however one Title I school is not identified as a Focus School in the 2014/15 school year. May the district and building continue to allocate funds for those activities?

Yes, so long as the continued strategies and interventions are allowable Title I expenditures, those activities may be continued using Title I funds; however, the Title I funds used may no longer be from the set-aside required be used to support identified Focus schools. Districts must obtain the approval their MDE Consultant in the Office of Field Services to assure that the proposed interventions are allowable expenditures under Title I regulations.

39. Do our Title I schools that are not identified as Focus Schools also need to adjust their school improvement plans, as the required set-aside funds will tremendously impact services provided in those schools?

Yes. If the non-Focus schools in your district must change their school improvement plan then changes to the SIP can be made in the Goals and Plans section of the MDE website, ASSIST, as needed.

40. If a school is not identified as a Focus School next year (after being on the list this year) but then is identified during the following year, do they go on to the Year 2 requirements automatically?

No. Once identified as a Focus School the school will join a four year cohort of Focus Schools. Any of these schools may not be identified as a Focus School after the first year but will continue to be in their cohort. Any Focus School that is not identified in any of its subsequent cohort years will be conditionally suspended from its accountability requirements and supports.

If a Title I Focus School is not identified in its second year of the cohort and is again identified in the third or fourth year of its cohort, the accountability requirements and supports will resume according to that year's requirements. So, if a Title I Focus School is identified in 2012/13, not identified in 2013/14 and is identified again in 2014/15, the building's Title I 10% set-aside resumes and the district set-aside for the third year of identification begins.

41. When do we have to set aside funds for reform-related efforts? How can a school change Title I funding plans if identified as a Focus School?

The second year a school is identified as a Focus School the school must set aside funds at the local level to accommodate the set-aside requirements for the upcoming school year (and each

subsequent year). A district is encouraged to address this set-aside within their consolidated application before it is submitted. Because of the set-aside nature, schools could then use the funds elsewhere as needed if they are not identified as a Focus School when announced in August. This same process must be repeated for school's identified as Focus in their third and/or fourth years.

Required Identification and Notification Letters to be Sent to Parents of Students in Title I Schools identified as Focus and Optional Choice/Transfer Program

42. What correspondence is required to be sent to parents of students attending schools identified as Title I Focus Schools for the 2014/15 school year?

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA,) as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and the Michigan Department of Education's (MDE) approved ESEA Flexibility Waiver, requires Title I schools that are identified as Focus schools to disseminate the following specific information to the parents of students attending Focus Schools:

- Letter of Identification and Notification – A letter sent to parents of students enrolled in a school identified as a Focus School. The letter must be sent to parents of those students enrolled in the school in the 2013/14 school year and those anticipated by the district to enroll in the Focus School for the 2014/15 school year. Also to be included in the letter are the reasons for its identification and the school's and district's plans to improve student achievement.
- Our work to ensure absolute accuracy in the public release of the Top-to-Bottom list may result in unavoidable delays, if that happens, the deadline is hereby adjusted as follows: **the required letters should be sent so that parents will receive them no later than 10 days following public release of the Top-to-Bottom list, or by August 26, whichever is later.**
- Generally, the requirement to send the parent letter applies to students that were enrolled in a K-12 program in the 2013/14 academic year and are eligible to return. However, where students are reasonably expected to attend the identified Focus School in the normal course of events, parents must be sent the identification letter as well. This includes students that are entering kindergarten, students transitioning from elementary to middle school and from middle to high school. Districts should clearly identify in their written policy and procedures how the identification letters will be sent out and to whom. The MDE recommends that districts be inclusive in the implementation of these notification requirements.
- This letter must describe that the Focus School identification of elementary, middle, alternative and /or high schools is because they are among the ten percent (10%) of Michigan schools that have the widest gap in student achievement between their lowest and highest performing students.
- Note that once identified, a Focus School is part of a cohort for a period of four years. As a result of the school improvement efforts made by the school and the district, if a school is no longer identified as a Focus School for the 2014/15 school year, it will be followed by the MDE through Spring 2017; however, all required accountability and supports related to the school's identification as a Focus School are conditionally suspended by the MDE and a letter does not need to be sent in any year a Focus School is not identified during its four year cohort.

To reiterate, the above requirements apply only to Title I schools that are identified as Focus schools for the 2014/15 school year.

If you have questions about this or need more information about the required documentation to parents, please contact Greg Olszta at 517-241-4715 or olsztag@michigan.gov.

- 43. With regard to the required letter to be sent to the parents of students in the identified Focus School, does it make a difference whether the school's Title I participating status is Schoolwide or Targeted Assistance?**

No, Schoolwide or Targeted Assistance status does not matter in this instance. Schools that are identified as Title I Focus Schools must send notification to parents of all students enrolled in the school in the previous school year and expected to return. **The required letters should be sent so that parents will receive them no later than 10 days following public release of the Top-to-Bottom list, or by August 26, whichever date is later.**

- 44. What happens if a building identified as a Focus School that was NOT a Title I participating school changes status and becomes a Title I participating school?**

If the Focus School elects to become a Title I participating building, then it must meet all of the requirements for that identification. The parent notification must be sent as soon as possible after the school has elected to receive Title I funds.

- 45. Does the letter to parents have to follow the MDE template language or may the district tailor it to meet district specifics?**

The district must add language describing what the district and school are doing to improve academic achievement and describe local context but the template is intended to model the simplest way to meet the requirements as completely as possible.

- 46. May the district/school send the letter out via email message, or does it have to go out via us mail?**

The district may use email as well as the postal service but must document delivery of both the emails and letters to demonstrate that they were sent and, if the district is relying upon emails, those parents without email addresses must be sent the letters in regular mail.

- 47. What is the obligation to send the parent letters for a school that has already started school for the school year, e.g. year-round schools?**

The district must still send the notification because it is required, even if the school year is already under way.

- 48. Do the parent notification letters have to be sent to new incoming students (i.e. incoming kindergarten, students matriculating from elementary to middle school, or middle school to high school for the 2014/15 school year)?**

Yes, letters must be sent to all students anticipated to attend a Focus school in the 2014/15 school year. Generally, the requirement to send the parent letter applies to students that were enrolled in a K-12 program in the 2013/14 academic year and are eligible to return. However, where students are reasonably expected to attend the Focus school in the normal course of events, parents must be sent the identification letter as well. This includes students that are entering kindergarten, students transitioning from elementary to middle schools and from middle to high school. Districts should clearly identify in their written policy and procedures how this will be implemented. The MDE recommends that districts be inclusive in the implementation of these requirements.

- 49. If a State School of Choice (under Section 105 or 105c) non-resident student is in our Title I Focus School from a neighboring district must we still send those parents the identification letters?**

Yes, letters must be sent to all students anticipated to attend the Focus School in the 2014/15 school year. Generally, the requirement to send the parent letter applies to students that were enrolled in a K-12 program in the 2013/14 academic year and are eligible to return. However, where students are reasonably expected to attend the Focus School in the normal course of events, parents must be sent the identification letter as well. This includes students that are entering kindergarten, students transitioning from elementary to middle schools and from middle to high school. Districts should clearly identify in their written policy and procedures how this will be implemented. The MDE recommends that districts be inclusive in the implementation of these requirements.

50. If a student enrolls in a Title I Focus School in the middle of the year is the district still required to send the parents the identification letter after the start of the school year?

Yes, the parents of the student enrolling in the identified Focus School after the normal start of the school year must still be sent a copy of the identification letter to parents.

51. What are “Choice/Transfer” Requirements for Title I Focus Schools for the 2014-2015 school year?

The Michigan Department of Education’s (MDE) amended ESEA Flexibility Waiver, effective with the 2013-2014 school year, no longer requires that Title I schools identified as Focus schools to offer Choice/Transfer and transportation for students. Effective with the 2013-2014 school year, the school, district, or PSA are no longer required to continue transportation for students whose parents had in past years chosen to transfer students under the Choice/Transfer option. However, districts and schools are encouraged to be sensitive to the burdens that this will place upon families and students affected by this change.

If a district chooses to provide transportation from an identified Title I Focus school to another school not identified as Focus or Priority, the district should consult its Office of Field Services (OFS) consultant or proper budget coding in the Consolidated Application. Transportation services in this case are not an allowable use of any required Title I set-aside funds but may be provided using the regular Title I allocation with the approval of the OFS consultant.

Uses of Set aside Funds

52. Will you clarify the types of expenditures that the district set-asides can be used for? For example, to support implementation of a multi-tiered system of support, could districts hire a reading intervention teacher to provide additional supplemental services for students? Or, can they purchase leveled readers? Or hire a math specialist to coach teachers in the Focus Schools? Can the district allocate back to the Consolidated Application what we originally budgeted to our buildings?

In general, it’s not expected that funds from the set-aside would be later reallocated. The district set-aside can be used for:

- Providing or enhancing the fidelity of implementation of a multi-tiered system of support, or
- Professional learning aligned with building data

Work with your consultant from Office of Field Services to be sure that your proposed uses meet usual Title I conditions: "supplement, not supplant" still applies, and there are limits to purchasing student materials with the money.

53. One of the requirements for Focus schools are Title I set-asides which are to be used to address root causes. However, problems arise if a school's root causes for their overall achievement gap is in Science, Social Studies, or Writing. Aren't Title I dollars are only supposed to be spent

supporting Math and Reading and not to be used to address root causes in Science, Social Studies, or Writing? In these cases how does, the Title I set-aside help in addressing root causes?

The new metric for Focus Schools does contain all five tested subjects. Title I has always required that supplemental services be provided in all five core areas so there is no inconsistency in the use of Title I funds.

The Building Title I set-aside is allocated for one or a combination of the following:

- Professional learning on multi-tiered system of support or scaffolded instruction for lowest performers or essential elements for MI-ACCESS
- Weekly, daily teacher collaboration time
- Surveys of enacted curriculum, or
- Culture/climate interventions

54. Does incrementally increasing Focus School district set-asides apply ONLY to schools who continue to be re-identified as Focus Schools each year, or does this increase apply to ALL schools in the four year cohort regardless of whether or not they are "re-identified" in subsequent years?

The incremental increase applies only to districts that have Title I schools that continue to be identified Focus Schools. Title I Focus Schools that are not identified in any years of its four year cohort have the accountability and supports conditionally suspended, which includes not having to use Title I set-asides at the school or district level.

55. For Title I Priority schools, how does the four-year cohort interpretation apply to the set-asides and other options, if the school comes off the list in 2014/15? Is it the same as for Focus Schools?

No. Title I Priority Schools are in a four year cohort and all accountability and supports apply during each of the four years. The building Title I set-aside continues in each of the four years and the district Title I set-aside is calculated in years 2, 3 and 4 of the four year cohort. All other accountability applies during all years of the cohort.

56. May the district set-aside be used for BOTH multi-tiered system of support and professional learning aligned with building data?

Yes.

57. If we have a tiered system in place paid for out of Title I funds, can we use district set-aside funds for that?

Yes. The district set-aside funds may be used to:

- Enhance the fidelity of implementation of a multi-tiered system of support, or
- Professional learning aligned with building data

58. Do single building districts or stand-alone charter schools need to set-aside both the building and district set-asides when identified as a Title I Focus School?

Yes, the set-aside schedule for single building districts would be:

- Year One – no set-aside
- Year Two – 10% building set-aside
- The required district Title I set-aside will begin in Year 3 of a Title I ~~Priority~~ Focus School's identification and will be calculated as the sum of 10% of each ~~Priority~~ Focus School's previous year school level Title I budget, up to an aggregate maximum not to exceed 10% of the current

year LEA Title I allocation. The district level set-aside is required before any other reservations are made.

- During Year 4, the district set-aside will be calculated as 15% of each -Focus School's previous year school level Title I budget up to an aggregate maximum not to exceed 15% of the current year LEA Title I allocation. The district level set-aside is required before any other reservations are made.

59. Can the set-aside fund be used to pay the salary of an employee who is implementing the tiered support system?

Yes, as long as it meets the regular Title I criteria of supplementing, not supplanting and can demonstrate that students being served are Title I students. This is easier in school wide situations, but could be managed in targeted assistance situations. Contact your OFS consultant for the approval needed in your particular situation.

Other Issues

60. Is it anticipated that the designation of Focus or Priority schools will have any impact on educator evaluations in the designated Focus or Priority building?

Piloting and implementation of student-achievement-influenced teacher evaluations should proceed as planned. To the extent that low performance or large gaps are included as factors, the achievement may influence results, but the designation as such is not intended as a factor in educator evaluations.

61. Many of our bottom 30% will be students with IEP's. Will our Title 1 set-aside activities include these special education students?

Yes. Use the data to analyze the needs of the school and implement interventions and strategies to address those needs. If the need is with students with IEPs then the set-aside activities will include them.

62. If you are looking for alignment between the consolidated application and the district improvement plan (DIP) then what about single buildings that only completed a school improvement plan (SIP)?

For single building districts the SIP is considered a DIP and it aligns with the consolidated application.

63. Are revisions to the SIP for this year's plan or next?

The revisions to the SIP are for this year. The SIP must be transmitted to the MDE by 9/1/14 but afterward changes to the SIP can be made in the goals and plans section of the MDE website at any time. Any strategies and activities that a school implements during the year should be documented in the goals and plans as the year progresses. The school's consolidated application for federal funds may be amended to reflect the plans identified during the data-dialogues during the end-of-year amendment period.