

# Michigan School Improvement Grant Case Studies

## Findings from School Improvement Grant Cohorts I and II

- Research Brief -  
Juan Carlos Bojorquez and John Rice

WestEd

November 2015

### Summary of Main Findings

The evaluation examined practices related to key school turnaround domains at high- and low-improvement SIG schools in an effort to identify whether there were trends in practices that differentiated high- and low-improvement schools, and if yes, which practices were more common in high-improvement schools. Specific domains of interest were: SIG plan priorities, school leadership, school culture and climate, instruction and data use, school staffing, performance evaluation, and district's role and support. Trends that were consistent across both high- and low-improvement schools included:

- Academic improvement was a stated priority under SIG.
- SIG reform efforts included multiple instructional programs and/or strategies.
- The amount of data schools collected, analyzed, and used increased as a part of SIG efforts.
- Principals reported being able to exert the greatest influence on school culture and climate under SIG; a focus on improving school culture permeated SIG.

- There were efforts aimed at improving teacher involvement on culture-related issues.
- Principals conducted reflective and thoughtful searches for staff and teachers.
- Adult performance was monitored, examined, or evaluated under SIG.
- SIG funding had a positive self-reported impact on principals' leadership capacity.
- During SIG both schools and districts experienced continuous flux and change.
- There was minimal significant district-level reorganization or restructuring to support SIG, including district-level turnaround activities specifically designed to support SIG.

Additionally, although principals conducted thoughtful searches for staff and teachers, there were no specific traits or characteristics principals reported looking for that differentiated high- from low-improvement schools. Principals at both types of schools generally reported looking for characteristics such as ability to build relationships and communicate with students, and commitment to students and the school's efforts. Further, principals at both high- and low-improvement schools generally indicated they felt they selected the right staff to turnaround their school and that they were able to retain these staff. Trends related to performance evaluation also appeared similar in high- and low-improvement schools.

Trends that differentiated high- from low-improvement schools included:

- High-improvement schools leveraged what they acquired through SIG funding for secondary purposes.
- High-improvement schools were more likely to indicate that some SIG objectives that initially were a primary focus of SIG changed over time and became a means toward advancing secondary purposes.
- High-improvement schools were more likely to adapt their SIG program and strategies in order to remain responsive to changing conditions.
- High-improvement school principals identified adaptability, willingness to change, and ability to be a change agent as important teachers and staff qualities.
- At high-improvement schools, the collection, analyses, and use of data increased in priority and became a larger part of the school's culture. These high-improvement schools appear to have begun SIG with lower levels of data integration and use.

- All staff at high-improvement schools shared a concern for improving student achievement. High-improvement schools were more likely to report coherence between school and district priorities related to their school’s turnaround efforts.
- Although both high- and low-improvement schools reported continuous changes and flux during SIG, the nature of the flux was different across types of schools.

## Background

This research brief provides a summary and analysis of interviews conducted with a subset of schools that received School Improvements Grants (SIGs) in Michigan from 2010 to 2012, and 2011 to 2013 (i.e., SIG I and SIG II cohorts, respectively). Administrators at these schools were interviewed as part of the annual data collection activities associated with WestEd’s ongoing evaluation of MDE’s SIG program. This case study component of the evaluation sought to identify effective practices that brought about improvements in schools, as well as examine the degree to which those practices were also implemented at SIG schools where student academic achievement improved less or even declined. In order to understand practices implemented across schools, the evaluation team interviewed administrators about effective and ineffective turnaround practices associated with key domains of interest under SIG.

This brief opens with a description of case study site selection, then provides an overview of the topics addressed during interviews. The brief concludes with findings from the analyses of interviews, disaggregated by schools that made the greatest and smallest gains (or losses) in academic improvements over the course of SIG.

## Evaluation Method

### Site Selection: Greatest and Lowest Gains

The pool of potential case study schools consisted of 25 SIG I and 16 SIG II schools, representing all SIG schools in these cohorts that were still open at the time of the follow-up achievement test administration. Sites were selected for inclusion in the case study based on change in academic performance from each school’s baseline year of the SIG (2009–10 for SIG I and 2010–11 for SIG II) to its final year of SIG with available achievement test data (2012–13 for SIG I and 2013–14 for SIG II grade 11, 2012–13 for SIG II grades 3–8<sup>1</sup>). In order to calculate a composite change score in student academic achievement for each school, we first standardized each school’s average scale scores in reading, math, and science and across grades from the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) and the Michigan Merit Examination (MME), and computed standardized difference scores for each

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<sup>1</sup> MEAP scores were not available for 2013–14 school year.

subject and grade level.<sup>2</sup> We then computed a single average change score for each school weighted by tested subjects and grades.<sup>3</sup> The table below reflects the weighted change in student academic achievement for all SIG I and SIG II schools. Negative numbers reflect decreases in standardized weighted average scores from baseline to follow-up; bolded schools participated in case study interviews.

**Exhibit 1. SIG I and SIG II Weighted Average Student Academic Achievement Scores**

SIG I Cohort		SIG II Cohort	
School	Weighted Average Change	School	Weighted Average Change
<b>Mount Clemens High School</b>	<b>0.49</b>	Schulze Elementary School	0.39
<b>Adrian High School</b>	<b>0.45</b>	<b>Eastland Middle School</b>	0.39
Fitzgerald Sr. High School	0.19	<b>Maple Street Magnet School for the Arts</b>	0.30
Grant High School	0.18	<b>A.L. Holmes Elementary School</b>	0.12
Lincoln High School	0.14	River Rouge Middle College High School Academy	0.06
Lee High School	0.13	Waverly Middle School	0.05
Romulus Middle School	0.12	King High School	0.03
Lessenger Elementary Middle School	0.05	Highland Park Community High School	0.03
Oak Park High School	0.04	Western International High School	-0.04
White Elementary School	0.03	Brenda Scott Middle School	-0.13
Westwood Middle School	-0.01	Lincoln Park Middle School	-0.14
Buchanan High School	-0.01	Harper Woods High School	-0.18
Arthur Hill High School	-0.02	Northwestern High School	-0.25
Inkster High School <sup>4</sup>	-0.03	<b>Roseville Middle School</b>	<b>-0.31</b>
Farwell Middle School	-0.03	<b>Milwood Middle School</b>	<b>-0.32</b>
Buena Vista High School <sup>5</sup>	-0.04	Ruben Daniels Middle School	-0.83
Weston Preparatory Academy	-0.09		
Gerald R. Ford Middle School	-0.10		
Union High School	-0.12		
Alger Middle School	-0.13		
E.A. Johnson Memorial High School	-0.14		
Waldron Middle School	-0.14		

<sup>2</sup> For MME, scores were weighted across subjects only because testing occurred in a single grade.

<sup>3</sup> High school scores were weighted across subjects; only one grade was tested.

<sup>4</sup> This school had closed by the time schools were sampled for the case studies.

<sup>5</sup> This school had closed by the time schools were sampled for the case studies.

**Exhibit 1. SIG I and SIG II Weighted Average Student Academic Achievement Scores  
(cont.)**

SIG I Cohort		SIG II Cohort	
School	Weighted Average Change	School	Weighted Average Change
<b>Thompson Middle School</b>	<b>-0.22</b>		
Ottawa Hills High School	-0.24		
<b>Springport High School</b>	<b>-0.26</b>		

From the list above, WestEd researchers attempted to recruit the three lowest-performing and highest-performing schools. Researchers telephoned principals at these schools between March and June 2015. In cases where we were unable to reach principals, we expanded the list of schools using the same list of weighted average scores. Two additional schools were added to the list of low-performing SIG I schools; one school was added to the list of high-performing SIG II schools; and one school was added to the list of low-performing SIG II schools. Principals were interviewed from nine schools: five high-improvement schools<sup>6</sup> and four low-improvement schools, which included four SIG I schools and five SIG II schools.

### Interview Protocol

All principals were interviewed by telephone. The interview protocol included the following domains of interest: instruction and data use; staffing; district’s role and support; culture; school context, environment, and support; leadership; and SIG plan focus. Several questions were structured as survey questions in order to gather fixed responses across all interviews in a consistent manner. (See Appendix for copy of the interview protocol.) Additionally, we asked principals several background questions, including why the school was initially placed on Michigan’s Persistently Lowest Achieving (PLA) or Priority schools list. From these domains and questions, we analyzed and summarized data along the following themes:

- SIG plan priorities
- School leadership
- School culture and climate
- Instruction and data use
- Staffing at the school
- Performance evaluation
- District’s role and support

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<sup>6</sup>At one high-improvement school, the current principal was hired after the end of the SIG. From this school, we spoke with the principal and a teacher who was at the school during the SIG.

Through the interviews we sought to understand schools' efforts and activities related to these key school reform themes. Secondly, interview data allowed us to tease apart trends in these areas between schools that made the largest gains in performance from those that made the smallest gains (or had decreases) in performance.

## Findings

In this section, we present findings from the interviews. Where appropriate and meaningful, findings are disaggregated by whether the school was identified as a high-improvement school or a school that made low-level or no improvements over the course of SIG funding.

### SIG Plan Priorities, Focus, and Coherence

High-improvement schools appear to have leveraged what they acquired through SIG funding for secondary purposes. A series of interview questions asked whether and the extent to which some key school reform areas were priorities of their SIG. These questions also asked whether associated efforts were a SIG objective or if they were a means toward a different end, that is, leveraged to accomplish a secondary purpose. The specific areas we asked about were: increased accountability, intensive professional development, coaching, distributed leadership, and professional learning communities. Interviewees at high-improvement schools often identified efforts in many of these key reform areas as a means to a different end. In contrast, low-improvement schools indicated that efforts in these areas were a primary objective of their SIG. In other words, they did not identify that efforts in these areas were leveraged to accomplish broader school improvement goals.

High-improvement schools also were more likely to indicate that some efforts initially identified as SIG objectives changed over time and were used to accomplish broader goals. This shift underscored a trend in high-improvement schools—they were more flexible and adaptable in their implementation of SIG. Efforts related to increased accountability and distributed leadership were consistently identified as being a means to an end (i.e., associated efforts were leveraged). High-improvement schools were mixed in indicating whether professional learning communities were leveraged to accomplish broader goals. Among low-improvement schools, principals indicated they only leveraged distributed leadership to accomplish broader goals.

Data collection, analysis, and use increased among high-improvement schools and became a larger part of school culture. More high-improvement than low-improvement schools indicated they experienced significant changes related to data as a result of SIG, and that these changes were sustained. It should be pointed out, however, that one of the potential reasons for high-improvement schools identifying significant change in their use of data may be related to low-improvement schools reporting that before SIG, the presence and use of data were already a part of school culture. High-improvement schools were more likely to

report that before SIG there were no common assessments, no sharing of data among teachers, or no data use at all.

All principals at high-improvement schools identified improving student achievement as a shared concern and responsibility for all staff at their schools. At low-improvement schools, two principals indicated they struggled with the entire staff taking ownership and/or fully accepting shared concern and responsibility for improved student achievement.

Both high- and low-improvement schools consistently reported that academics were a primary priority under SIG. High-improvement schools, however, also included non-academic priorities such as attendance, discipline, culture, and climate. The only non-academic priority identified by low-improvement schools was school culture.

High-improvement schools were also more likely to report coherence between school and district priorities related to their schools' turnaround efforts. Specifically, three high-improvement schools indicated a high degree of coherence, and one indicated that coherence grew as SIG progressed. Only one high-improvement school indicated there was not much coherence; although the principal noted the district was supportive. Among low-improvement schools, one principal noted school and district priorities were very much aligned, while the others indicated coherence varied over time or that there was some coherence.

## School Leadership

In exploring school leadership, we looked at the reported impact SIG funding had on principals' leadership capacity, as well as the areas of school turnaround where principals were able to exert influence. Overall, principals reported SIG funding had a positive impact on their leadership capacity. In some cases, the positive impact was related to instructional leadership. For example, SIG allowed one principal to learn more about how to use data and how to guide teachers in using data. Another principal now spends more time in classrooms helping teachers with instruction. Another principal used SIG to become a better facilitator for teachers, using distributed leadership practices to share decision-making responsibilities with teachers. One leadership-related area that differentiated high- from low-improvement school principals was that SIG funding helped the principal provide focus and specific objectives. The high-improvement school principals indicated SIG helped them provide focus and clear objectives to the school. It is unclear, however, whether this focus and clear objectives was maintained after SIG funding ended.

Principals from both high- and low-improvement schools said they were able to exert the greatest influence on school culture and climate. Principals from high-improvement schools also identified instruction or instructional leadership as an area of great influence, which differed from those at low-improvement schools. Two low-improvement school principals indicated curriculum was an area of great influence, whereas none of the high-improvement

school principals noted curriculum as such. Interestingly, principals at high-improvement schools generally had more to say regarding areas where they had a great influence, and the nature of their descriptions was qualitatively different. Responses included phrases such as:

- Administration gets their hands dirty too; administration makes things happen
- Teachers believe in the principal, trust the principal, know administration knows what they are doing so are willing to follow
- Administration gets into the classroom

In terms of areas where principals had the least influence, every principal from a low-improvement school identified something different: school climate, staff selection, students' environment and background, and whatever the principal chose not to focus on. Among principals from high-improvement schools, two principals identified parent involvement as an area of least influence, one indicated staff feeling overwhelmed, and the two remaining principals did not identify areas of least influence.

### School Culture and Climate

Principals from all schools indicated that improving school culture was a focus of SIG-funded activities. In some cases it was the focus from the beginning of SIG; in others it grew over time as school leadership realized the need to address school culture. Administrators from most schools—three high-improvement and three low-improvement—described systemic, school-wide interventions focused on improving school culture. These interventions included revising the school's social promotion policy, implementing restorative justice strategies, and implementing positive behavior interventions and support. Schools reviewed and revisited student discipline practices, improved/increased the use of an accountability officer, and made concerted efforts at capturing, listening to, and validating student voice and opinion. Fostering and encouraging student pride and ownership in the school was identified more explicitly in high-improvement schools. Both high- and low-improvement schools reported making efforts to improve teacher involvement on culture-related issues, most notably how teachers address, handle, or otherwise attend to discipline and other student behavior-related issues.

### School Context

Across high- and low-improvement schools principals described a context in flux during SIG funding. Some schools were in the beginning stages of significant change when SIG funding arrived; for example, the addition of an International Baccalaureate program, changes school leadership, and changes in district leadership. Some schools also underwent major shifts in attitudes and perspective about their own school's performance when they were confronted with the reality of their performance based on actual student data. In some

cases, principals indicated this was the first time staff at their school had looked at actual data on student performance. As a result, teachers were initially surprised, resentful, and defensive. Principals reported these attitudes shifted with time and repeated examination of data.

## Instruction and Data Use

We examined how SIG funding impacted schools' instructional programs and use of data. With respect to instructional programs, both high- and low-improvement schools adopted multiple instructional programs and/or strategies as a part of their SIG reform. A few schools adopted comprehensive, stand-alone programs, such as Directive Interactive Instruction (DII) or International Baccalaureate (IB) Years Programme. More likely, schools implemented various instructional strategies or approaches in order to meet students' needs, such as Classroom Instruction the Works (CITW), (John) Collins Writing, or blended learning.

One trend that emerged among high-improvement schools was a disposition to adapt their program and strategies in order to remain responsive to changing conditions at the school. Low-improvement schools did not report similar flexibility or adaptability in how they approached and proceeded with their SIG reform. Low-improvement schools also struggled more with sustaining (beyond SIG) what was adopted during SIG. In some cases this was in terms of support-staff positions, coordinators, or coaches. By contrast, in two high-improvement schools, principals reported that the program or strategies adopted under SIG expanded in scope beyond their schools to other schools across the district.

With respect to SIG's impact on schools' approach to using data, both high- and low-improvement schools reported an increase in the amount of data they collect, examine, analyze, or otherwise use. Some schools (two low-improvement and two high-improvement) specifically noted that SIG helped them better use data they already collected, dive deeper into their data in terms of understanding student subgroups, expand the audiences that were involved in data analyses, or become more focused on data they already had available.

Both high- and low-improvement schools reported SIG had an impact on how they use data to inform decision-making, inform or differentiate instruction, or conduct general planning. School principals also noted that SIG provided new and additional opportunities to train teachers on data processes and data use. Both high- and low-improvement schools also reported using data to monitor implementation, including teachers' implementation of SIG-related strategies.

All schools reported using some form of data—achievement, perception, or implementation—as key measures of success under SIG. Achievement-related data included: MEAP, AIMS Web, NWEA MAP, end-of-unit assessments, curriculum assessments, grades, and benchmark data. Schools collected perception data from parents, students, and staff

through surveys and implementation data from teachers and school leadership teams. Only two principals from high-improvement schools explicitly stated they collected and examined implementation data. Low-improvement schools, by contrast, repeatedly discussed that their examination of implementation progress focused on achievement-related data.

## Staffing and Staff Selection

Overall, both high-and low-improvement school principals indicated their search for teachers and other staff under SIG was *very* to *extremely* reflective and thoughtful. One principal was not at the school during SIG and was unable to comment; another principal was unable to select staff during SIG.

Three principals explicitly indicated they used their authority to remove and select new staff. More frequently, principals indicated they had a role in staff selection and were able to provide input into the selection process, but that the decisions were not entirely their own. This trend was similar across high- and low-improvement schools. Another trend for both groups of schools (explicitly in two high- and two low-improvement schools) was an intentional and purposeful effort to bringing existing teachers up to the level required for the school's turnaround efforts to succeed, for example through retraining of staff.

When we asked principals what characteristics they looked for in selecting staff, principals did not identify singularly common traits or characteristics across either high- or low-improvement schools. Principals did, however, identify affective and attitudinal characteristics: willingness to take on challenging work, ability to build relationships and communicate with students, and commitment to students and the school's efforts. In three high-improvement schools and one low-improvement school, principals identified combinations of being a change agent and being adaptable/willing to change (e.g., as-needed given changing conditions at the school, ability to adapt teaching practices to try new things).

Overall, principals from both high- and low-improvement schools indicated they felt they selected the right staff to turnaround their schools and were able to retain the staff they needed to turnaround their schools. Among low-improvement schools, principals believed they were able to retain the right staff in part because there was a collaborative working environment, bonds were formed as teachers felt "under siege," and teachers believed in what they were working toward. At high-improvement schools, principals felt they were able to retain the right staff in large part because teachers felt supported, either by administration or fellow teachers.

Principals' responses were mixed about whether SIG funding affected a district's or school's overall ability to remove ineffective teachers. Teacher retention or removal was often intertwined with state- or district-level conditions that were beyond principals' control. One principal indicated the school's union made concessions that set aside seniority and included student achievement in decisions; another principal indicated the school was not at the table

when hiring and firing decisions are made; and principals from two schools indicated that SIG resulted in teachers being more receptive to the school working toward improvement.

## Staff Performance Evaluation

All principals reported staff performance was monitored, examined, or evaluated in some way under SIG. The most common component of these evaluation systems was the use of walkthroughs to monitor program implementation. Monitoring was either built around key SIG programmatic components such as International Baccalaureate, Direct Interactive Instruction (DII); or they used the Mid Continent Regional Education Laboratory Power Walkthrough software, which was built to monitor teacher implementation of CITW. Another common element to both high- and low-improvement schools' use of walkthroughs was teacher participation in being trained on and conducting walkthroughs, and in the review and examination of walkthrough data.

One component of schools' evaluation systems that remained unclear, however, was whether evaluation results carried any consequence in terms of teacher development, retention, or removal. In two high- and two low-improvement schools, principals reported their progress with instituting a staff performance evaluation system was tied to state- and district-level progress, or lack thereof, in developing a performance evaluation system.

Principals were asked about the extent to which teacher performance evaluation considered or examined: 1) implementation of programmatic interventions prescribed by SIG; and 2) actual changes in teacher practice. In just over half of schools (two high- and three low-improvement), principals indicated they considered programmatic interventions *somewhat* to *very* in their evaluation system. Only one school indicated their system considered programmatic interventions *extremely*. One school principal reported *slightly* considering programmatic interventions. A similar trend emerged in examining actual changes in teacher practice. Two high-improvement and two low-improvement schools indicated they considered changes in teacher practice *somewhat* to *very*. One high- and one low-improvement school indicated they considered actual changes in teacher practice *extremely*. One high-improvement school reported not examining actual changes in teacher practice.

In all but one case, school principals indicated they have continued to examine teacher performance after SIG funding ended. Principals at two schools added that they expected some changes to their performance evaluation system in the near future; one as it switches from the Danielson model to the Marzano model, the other may change based on the recommendations coming out of the Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness (MCEE)<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> MCEE is an independent commission of education experts created by the Governor and the state legislature as part of the state's teacher tenure reform efforts.

## District Role and Support

We asked SIG principals a series of questions about the district-level context during the period of SIG funding, including district-level turnaround activities or other significant reorganization or restructuring intended to support their SIGs. Seven of the nine school principals (four at high-improvement and three at low-improvement schools) indicated their districts were in a state of change or flux at the time of SIG funding. Change at the district level was related to a variety of factors. Among low-improvement schools, these factors were generally of greater concern: overall dysfunction, denial about school performance and ranking, or persistent challenges with staff communication. Among high-improvement schools, changes and flux were related to transition in education program (i.e., the International Baccalaureate program), district transition to an Emergency Manager<sup>8</sup>, district turnover of high-level administrators, or the overall urgency created by the state's top-to-bottom ranking system.

Approximately half of the principals (two high-improvement and two low-improvement) indicated the district was generally supportive, even though the district was in a state of change. Principals noted this support was either in the form of the district continuing its efforts to maintain a good relationship with teacher unions, advocating for the school while balancing state and federal requirements, adjusting to SIG realities and increasing support of the school with passing years, or through simply remaining “supportive” of the principal while the school and district underwent changes associated with SIG funding.

Principals from both high- and low-improvement schools reported few instances of significant district-level reorganization or structuring to support SIG, or even district-level turnaround activities specifically designed to support SIG. The few that were mentioned included: expansion of the SIG's adopted education model to other district schools, creation of a new leadership team at the district in part because of SIG, and (as an accompaniment to the new Emergency Manager) a new office of school turnaround (although the principal also stated that this office was not fully staffed). Principals did, however, describe other ways in which districts expanded their role in supporting schools' turnaround activities. Five principals reported that their districts became more involved in reviewing or supporting the review of data. In one case, this occurred through the district instituting district-wide screening procedures to place and support students; in other cases, through districts supporting principals, coaches, or teacher leaders in receiving training on data analysis and use.

Other areas where districts trained principals (either directly or through an external provider) included: leadership, curriculum, evaluation systems, Adaptive Schools<sup>9</sup>, and cognitive

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<sup>8</sup> The transition to an Emergency Manager was not related to SIG. This occurred in a large urban district and was related to financial management of the city.

<sup>9</sup> Training focused on structural changes intended to support improvement in collaborative work group functioning.

coaching. Four school principals (two high-improvement and two low-improvement) made specific mention of their districts providing coaches specifically for the principal.

## Discussion and Limitations

In this section we provide a brief discussion about trends that emerged from the interviews with the nine SIG I and SIG II schools in Michigan. We preface this discussion, however, by acknowledging a few limitations. Identified trends should be interpreted cautiously as they are based on a small sample of principals who self-selected to participate; not every principal selected for an interview agreed to participate. Further, schools were identified as high- and low-improvement based on aggregate achievement data, that is, scores averaged and weighted across subjects and grades. The study did not examine trends or practices that may be associated with specific subject- or grade-level improvements. This is most limiting when considering elementary schools' scores were aggregated across up to six grade levels and three subjects.

Perhaps the most striking trend arising from these data was the similarities across high- and low-improvement schools. Overall, schools were more similar than different in terms of practices across domains of interest. Schools generally had similar foci under SIG, used combinations of strategies and interventions in approaching turnaround, focused on data use and school culture and climate, and made sure to monitor and evaluate adult performance. Additionally, both types of schools generally described a context (at the school and the district) of ongoing change and flux.

Trends begin to differentiate high- from low-improvement schools when examining how school leaders' used SIG funds. Principals at high-improvement schools appeared to have a more flexible and adaptable mindset in their approach to implementing their SIG plans. At high-improvement schools, principals seemed to treat the SIG award as a license to do whatever was necessary to turnaround their schools. Consequently, they were more likely than principals at low-improvement schools to leverage SIG and try different things until they found something that worked. This was most evident when principals described stopping efforts written into the SIG plan (efforts that were not working) and instead implementing new or different things not written into their SIG plan. At low-improvement schools, it appears principals acted in a more constrained manner under the SIG. They were less likely to adapt and modify the SIG plan, less likely to try different strategies as they moved forward with implementation of their SIG plan. This could be a function of the leadership they received from the district—for example, whether the district set a tone of compliance around the SIG versus a tone of trying different strategies until finding an effective one.

High-improvement school principals also identified flexibility and adaptability as qualities they looked for in staff. These principals seemed to value not only that they could mold and

adapt SIG to their school's need, but also valued teachers and staff who were willing or able to adapt to the changing conditions at their school.

In addition, principals at both high- and low-improvement schools reported that SIG helped them become better leaders. Principals at both types of schools felt SIG increased their capacity as a school leader; however, not all principals were able to affect improvements. This distinction carries meaningful implications, including the importance of the environment and context in which a school operates. For example, what is the level of district engagement and support, or how coherent are school and district turnaround plans? Another is whether principals have similar notions of what it means to be an effective school leader in a turnaround setting. There is some insight into effective school leadership in these data. Specifically, more principals at high-improvement schools described, as a part of being better leaders, that they were stronger instructional leaders. Two high-improvement principals in particular talked about spending more meaningful time in classrooms and how the SIG played a role in helping them learn how to make that time more meaningful. A third simply discussed how important their ability to be an instructional leader was to gaining teachers' trust and to getting all teachers to follow their lead.

## Further Areas of Study

Taken in their entirety, findings from these case studies imply that high- and low-improvement schools generally implement similar practices that are generally aligned with best practices. There is some evidence from these case studies, however, that the quality of implementation, as well as the environment and context under which implementation occurs, influences the efficacy of these practices. Although collecting objective, independent, and comprehensive data about the quality of implementation and the environment in which implementation occurs may represent a significant and time-consuming endeavor, it is one that could provide valuable insight into how SIG schools can implement best practices available to them in manner that yields the positive results associated with these best practices. This type of comprehensive data collection could also inform the type of support, coaching, or mentoring school leaders need in order to implement their SIG in an effective manner.

A part of this comprehensive data collection endeavor could include data about the systems that surround and interact with SIGs, systems that provide support, oversight, or direct assistance. These systems undoubtedly impact the efficacy of SIGs. The best-written plan will have little chance of success if it is surrounded by systems that inhibit its implementation or prevent a school leader from taking the bold steps necessary to turnaround the lowest-performing schools.

# Appendix

## MDE SIG I and SIG II Interview Protocol

### Background

- 1) How long have you been principal at this school? (# years)
- 2) Why do you think your school was initially identified as a PLA/Priority school? For example, was it overall student performance, subgroup performance, achievement gap, or something else? (open-ended)

### Instruction, Data Use, and Monitoring

- 3) Has/How did your approach to using data changed under SIG? (open-ended)
- 4) What do you consider your key measures of school success? (open-ended)
  - Who was involved in identifying these? (list)
  - What specific data do you use to gauge progress on these measures? (list)
  - How do you know whether these data are related to the priority areas under SIG? (open-ended)
- 5) Did/How did you gauge, examine, or evaluate adult performance under SIG? (open-ended)
  - To what extent did this examination/evaluation of adult performance consider the implementation of programmatically interventions prescribed by SIG? (1=*not at all*, 2=*slightly*, 3=*somewhat*, 4=*very*, 5=*extremely*)
  - To what extent did this examination/evaluation consider actual changes in teachers' professional practices necessary under SIG—i.e., was it tied to SIG-specific responsibilities? (1=*not at all*, 2=*slightly*, 3=*somewhat*, 4=*very*, 5=*extremely*)
  - What are a few examples of specific changes you look for?
  - Do you continue to examine or evaluate adult performance in this way? (y/n)
- 6) Was a new instructional program implemented under SIG? (y/n)
  - If yes, when it was chosen, what specific data were reviewed/considered in making that selection? (open-ended)

### Staffing

- 7) On a scale of 1 to 5 (1=*not at all*, 2=*slightly*, 3=*somewhat*, 4=*very*, 5=*extremely*), how thoughtful, reflective, purposeful was the search for teachers and staff under SIG?
  - What specifically was considered in selecting teachers and staff? (open-ended)

- 8) Was teachers' past performance reviewed or a consideration when they were hired? (y/n) If you recall, please describe what specifically was considered. (open-ended)
- 9) Overall, were you able to select what you considered were the "right staff" to turnaround this school? (y/n) Why were or why weren't you? (open-ended)
- 10) Have you been able to retain the "right staff" to turnaround this school? (y/n) Why were or why weren't you? (open-ended)

### District Role and Support

- 11) What was the political and organizational context and environment at the district during SIG implementation? (open-ended)
- 12) Describe any district-level reorientation, reorganization, reprioritization that occurred as a result of SIG. (open-ended)
- 13) Describe any training or coaching the district provided you or other turnaround school leaders in your district. (open-ended)
  - o Was this provided to you or did you seek it out? (fixed response)
- 14) Describe any district-level turnaround activities. (open-ended)
- 15) Were there any changes in the district's overall ability to remove ineffective teachers under SIG? (y/n) In the school's ability? (y/n)
  - o If so, please describe these. (open-ended)
  - o Are these still around since SIG? (y/n)

### Culture

- 16) To what extent did a focus on improving school culture permeate SIG? (1=*not at all*, 2=*slightly*, 3=*somewhat*, 4=*very*, 5=*extremely*)
- 17) Were any systemic interventions for improving school culture implemented under SIG?(y/n)
  - o If yes, please describe. (open-ended)
- 18) I'm going to ask about a series of topics and focus areas. Specifically, I'd like to ask the extent, on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=*not at all*, 2=*slightly*, 3=*somewhat*, 4=*very*, 5=*extremely*) that each was either an objective of your SIG (i.e., SIG set out to accomplish this) versus something put in place to support your school's implementation of SIG (i.e., a means to a different end)?
  - o Increased accountability
  - o Intensive PD
  - o Coaching
  - o Distributed leadership
  - o PLCs
  - o Anything you'd like to add that you think is relevant here? (open-ended)

- 19) To what extent would you say data (i.e., its collection, analyses, use) became a part of your school's culture under SIG? (1=*not at all*, 2=*slightly*, 3=*somewhat*, 4=*very*, 5=*extremely*)
- How is this different from before SIG? (open-ended)
  - Has this change, if any, remained since SIG? (y/n)
- 20) Did your school differentiate turnaround strategies from school improvement strategies under SIG? (y/n) Please describe. (open-ended)
- 21) To what extent would you say improving student achievement was a shared concern/responsibility for staff under SIG? (1=*not at all*, 2=*slightly*, 3=*somewhat*, 4=*very*, 5=*extremely*)
- Has this remained the case? (y/n)

### Context, Environment, and Support

- 22) What was the political and organizational context and environment at the school during SIG implementation? (open-ended)
- 23) As the school leader, in what area of school turnaround were you able to exert the greatest influence? (open-ended)
- The least influence? (open-ended)
- 24) Who was responsible for developing teachers' capacity in your district under SIG? (open)
- Did they/you also have the authority to develop teachers? (y/n)

### Leadership

- 25) What impact has SIG had on your capacity to lead your school? (open-ended)
- 26) Describe any efforts you or the district have undertaken to sustain changes brought by SIG? (open-ended)

### SIG Plan and Focus

- 27) What were the district's priority areas during SIG? (open-ended)
- 28) What were the school's priority areas during SIG? (open-ended)
- What was the process for identifying, setting, and monitoring these? (open-ended)
- 29) How coherent was your school's strategy for turnaround with the district's strategy? Please explain where there was coherence and where there was none. (open-ended)
- How well would you say these strategies were executed? (1=*not at all*, 2=*slightly*, 3=*somewhat*, 4=*very*, 5=*extremely*)

Additional Comments.