

2015-2016 TITLE I REGIONAL ASSISTANCE GRANT (RAG) FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the Grant Award Period?

The grant award period is July 1st to September 30th of the following year.

Annual grants are awarded as close as possible to October 1st, however delays can and do happen. Occasionally, grant awards may necessarily be amended after the initial award date to reflect changes in Title I status of Priority and Focus schools to be served, or for other reasons affecting eligibility of the school for receipt of MI Excel services.

Who is eligible?

Any ISD/RESA/RESD that serves school districts with Title I schools identified as a Priority or Focus school is eligible for this grant.

How is the allocation determined?

The annual ISD/RESA/RESD allocation is determined based on several pieces of data:

1. The number of Title I schools under their jurisdiction that are identified as Priority schools in a four year cohort.
2. For the 2015-2016 school year there are no Year 1 Priority schools. The allocation for Priority buildings in the 2015-2016 school year is 2 through 4, provided the Title I building is identified as Priority, and is based upon the most recent student head count of each of the Priority school buildings.
3. The number of districts with Title I Focus schools identified in August 2014 under the ISD jurisdiction.
4. The number of districts with Title I Priority schools identified in August 2012, 2013 and/or 2014 under the ISD jurisdiction.

What types of activities are supported by the RAG?

ISDs use their RAG funds to build staff capacity in the identified **Priority** school by supporting rapid improvement that focuses on the reason(s) why the Title I school was identified as Priority. Activities may include the following supports and services that are based on demonstrated needs:

- School Improvement Facilitator (SIF) who leads the School Support Teams-(SST) – **Required**
- Intervention Specialist (IS) who participates on the SST and provides technical assistance to the district and facilitates the data dialogues – **Required**

- Content area/instructional coaches: In order to be approved as a content area/instructional coach, candidates must have successfully completed Coaching 101 and one of the following:
 - ✓ MAISA coach training (held in 2009/10) in reading and/or math OR
 - ✓ MVU coach training – four core modules plus content area in which the candidate will be coaching for content area coaches; four core modules for instructional coaches
 - ✓ MDE recommends that the rate of compensation not exceed \$50 per hour
- Intervention Specialists provide approximately 50 days of support at the district level
- School Improvement Facilitators provide approximately 35-40 days of school level support for each identified Priority school
- Staff costs associated with the above named positions
- Professional learning for Priority school and district staff
- Substitute teacher costs to permit teaching staff in identified Priority schools to attend professional learning activities
- Culture/Climate Interventions
- Materials/supplies to support the above named activities
- Travel costs associated with the above named activities
- Limited technology hardware costs to support SIF and IS staff

ISDs use their RAG funds to build staff capacity in a district with identified **Focus** school(s) by supporting continuous improvement in district and building activities that target the reason(s) why the Title I school was identified as Focus and on closing the achievement gap. Activities may include the following supports and services that are based on demonstrated needs:

- District Improvement Facilitator (DIF) who conducts data dialogues with the district and provides technical assistance to district staff to address systemic improvements for district support of Focus schools – **Required**
- Build the capacity of the district to:
 - Identify teaching and learning priorities
 - Remove barriers to effective teaching and learning
 - Meet the professional development needs of teachers
- Staff costs (including travel) associated with DIF activities for approximately 40 hours per district for each district with one or more Focus school
- Limited technology hardware costs to support DIF staff

Can the ISD use RAG funds for classroom or student materials/supplies?

No. RAG funds may NOT be used to purchase classroom and/or student materials and supplies (including software licenses). Please refer to the previous question on the allowable uses of grant funds.

What is the due date for submission of an application for RAG funds by the ISD?

An approvable RAG application must be submitted by the ISD by December 1st for the 2015-2016 grant year in order to obtain an obligation date of July 1, 2015 for allowable expenditures to be charged to the RAG. Also to be uploaded are the MI Excel Service Plans for Priority buildings by that date. Allowable, reasonable, and necessary expenditures, and Service Plans supporting the budget, must have been approved by the MDE in order for ISD to charge those expenditures to the RAG.

What should be included in the RAG Budget Detail?

Include salaries and/or stipends for all participants to be funded with the grant funds and a **detailed** description of all other resources required for project completion. The application budget should include all activities and services grouped by salaries, benefits, purchased services, supplies and materials, and other expenditures, using appropriate Expenditure Function Codes (pages 24-32) from the Appendix-Definitions of Account Codes, to the Michigan Public School Accounting Manual:

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/appendix_33974_7.pdf.

The Budget Detail should be expanded to accommodate the level of detail required to assess its breadth and completeness, and whether costs are reasonable and necessary.

Is there carryover from one RAG budget year to the next?

Carryover of funds not expended in the 2014-2015 grant year to the 2015-2016 project year will occur for this grant year. All unexpended funds from the 2014-2015 grant year will be carried over, up to an amount that does not exceed the 2015-2016 RAG allocation. The carryover of funds to the 2015-2016 grant year will occur after the 2014-2015 grant Final Expenditure Report is certified by the ISD/RESA/ESA.

Have the requirements for submission of Service Plans changed from past years?

Yes. Different from last year, for 2016, ISDs with Regional Assistance Grants will upload all three of the required Service Plans into the MEGS+ application.

After the authorized Level 5 for the district has initiated the grant, the applicant Level Applicants will click on View/Edit and scroll down to the document links below the label Attachments. A separate page may be linked for each of the three types of Service Plans that must be uploaded:

- Focus District Plans for districts with MI Excel Focus Schools
- Priority District Service Plans for districts with MI Excel Priority Schools
- Priority School Service Plans for MI Excel Priority Schools

The upload of the three Service Plans in the application should eliminate the confusion that some ISDs may have experienced in 2014-2015 about where each of the different Service Plans were to be uploaded or sent.

How long should a school receive services under the current year award?

As long as the Title I Priority school is identified by MDE as Priority, and the RAG funds remain available, it may continue to receive services.

As MDE will not identify new Focus schools in 2015 and 2016, Title I Focus schools identified in 2014 will continue their 2014 Focus identification, and Year of identification status, in both the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years. A Focus school will continue to receive RAG services provided it is a Title I receiving school.

What happens if a Priority or Focus school that the ISD/RESA/RESD receives funding for is released from Priority or Focus identification by the Office of State School Reform (SRO), or by the MDE?

Summer Release: Prior to the Start of the School Year

Once identified as a Priority school, the school remains a Priority school for four years and will remain eligible until it is released from the Priority status by the SRO. Schools and districts remain eligible for services only if the identified Priority or Focus building is a Title I receiving school. Services should continue until the first day of the new school year following the release of the school from identification as a Priority or Focus school. Any remaining funding earmarked for that school may be transferred to support any other MI Excel school the ISD/RESA/RESD currently serves. The ISD/RESA/RESD determines the priority and need for transferring funds in this scenario.

If existing contracts or obligations prevent the cessation of services, the ISD/RESA/RESA may continue services until those obligations or contracts expire, not to exceed the end of the grant period (September 30th).

Mid-School Year Release

In the case of release of an identified Title I Priority or Focus school in the middle of the school year, the RAG budget may continue to support services to the building and/or district through the end of the fiscal year, as already approved by the MDE. For the 2015-2016 RAG that would be through September 30, 2016. Priority and Focus schools released from their identification mid-year and receiving MI Excel services through the RAG are not required to submit to the MDE the required Quarterly Progress Reports going forward, but must submit all Quarterly Reports to their school board and to the MDE due as of the date of release by the SRO or the MDE.

Schools and districts with Title I Priority and Focus schools released mid-year from their identification must continue to implement the Title I set-asides approved by the MDE Office of Field Services, and required by the ESEA Waiver, and must continue to implement the activities that those set-aside funds support, through the end of the fiscal year, and/or through the end of the school year, dependent upon the activities approved.

Districts and schools should continue to implement those activities and initiatives contributing to the Priority and/or Focus school's increased student achievement that supported the release of the school's Priority or Focus identification.

Districts with schools released from Priority and Focus identification should work collaboratively with their ISD to continue those MI Excel activities and initiatives that have helped the staff and students narrow the achievement gap and resulted in improved student proficiency. Examples of activities that should be continued in released Priority schools include completion of the Instructional Learning Cycle and School Support Team meetings, and completion of documentation of these activities.

MDE believes that districts and schools should continue to participate in those ISD supported activities that will benefit students and staff to solidify the academic achievement gains already made and which are available to them through the end of grant project period (September 30th).

My ISD receives an allocation for Priority schools in the following amounts: \$65,000 for one school, \$105,000 for another, and \$80,000 for a third, for a total allocation of \$250,000. Do I have to budget those exact amounts for each Priority building or do I have some leeway in expenditures?

Actual needs will vary according to individual circumstances. MDE recommends that ISDs/RESAs/RESDs build budgets based on those needs. This seldom results in exactly \$65,000, \$80,000, or \$105,000 worth of services going to each eligible school.

What if a school is no longer Title I and the ISD had scheduled programming for it in September? Can the ISD continue to serve them since the grant period ends September 30th?

No. Services must stop by the first day of school. Federal statute is clear that these funds are for identified Title I schools only. These funds may not be used for non-Title I schools.

Could we fund professional learning with this grant and allow participants from other non-identified Title I schools or non-Title I schools to attend?

Yes, so long as these participants are charged a fee to attend or you find another funding source that allows you to cover their costs. Make sure to document how you funded the session(s) and detail the measures taken to ensure that Regional Assistance Grant funds were not spent outside of the statutory requirements and guidelines.

What if a MI-Excel School receives a Section 1003(g) School Improvement Grant (SIG)?

SIG receiving schools are **not** eligible for MI-Excel services. To that end, RAG funded services should cease no later than **August 30th** of the year in which the school receives the SIG, unless existing contracts or obligations exist that must be honored.

Any remaining RAG funds that were allocated for the SIG school may be transferred to support any other MI Excel school the ISD/RESA/RESD currently serves. The ISD/RESA/RESD determines the priority and need for transferring funds in this scenario. SIG schools may purchase SSoS services with their SIG funds. No RAG funding may be used to so support a former MI-Excel school for as long as it receives SIG funding.

New FAQs will be developed for the 2016-17 school year.