



## Grant Overview: Next Gen SIG (School Improvement Grants)

School Improvement Grants (SIGs) are authorized under section 1003 of Title I of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015. Funds are awarded on a competitive basis to school corporations with schools identified for Comprehensive School Improvement (CSI) or Targeted School Improvement (TSI). In the 2021-2022 academic year, the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) introduced the Next Gen SIG to provide funds to local education agencies (LEAs) with the strongest commitment to transform students' traditional educational experience into one that more strategically aligns to students' academic and personal needs.

The grant will consist of a one-year planning phase followed by a three-year implementation phase, lasting up to four years. The initial proposal will focus on high-level vision setting and making connections to the current needs of the school. It will also require applicants to select a priority of the intervention and the model intended to be used to establish the conditions necessary for success, as well as identify key personnel associated with the intervention. Awarded proposals will then spend the remainder of the planning phase developing a comprehensive school or system transformation plan that will be implemented in the subsequent school year. Grantees should expect ongoing communication and collaboration with IDOE throughout the planning year to ensure everything is progressing towards successful implementation.

### FROM SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TO SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION

<b>SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT</b>	<b>SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Changes in curriculum or instructional materials</li><li>• Additional or targeted professional development to improve the quality of instruction</li><li>• Non-academic supports to help students overcome behavioral and mental health challenges</li><li>• Change in school leadership or teaching staff</li><li>• Additional assessments and data analysis</li><li>• Additional learning time that simply extends what the school is already doing (intervention periods, block scheduling, etc.)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dramatic changes in governance to drive decision-making to the school and community level</li><li>• Reimagining the instructional delivery model to more closely tailor how content is delivered based on the strengths and needs of students</li><li>• A new approach to student grouping and classroom assignments to ensure each child is receiving the support they need to be successful and finite resources are directed towards those who need it the most</li><li>• Rethinking the traditional school day to meet the needs of students and families, including integrating community assets into the school experience</li><li>• Infusion of expert capacity with the knowledge and skills to manage change, build coalitions, and execute the vision for transformation</li></ul>



Since the adoption of No Child Left Behind in 2001, states have been focused on providing resources – both human and monetary – to schools and school corporations to improve outcomes that do not meet student achievement benchmarks. Over the past 30 years, these efforts have been focused on changing programs and increasing effectiveness within the current system. The process traditionally consists of a needs assessment, where school leaders work with their staff and community to identify areas holding students back, followed by the development and implementation of a school improvement plan, mainly consisting of light-touch efforts that change curriculum, provide leadership coaching, focus on data analysis, etc. This approach assumes that, overall, the current set of policies will stay in place, schools will continue to be organized as they are, they will have a similar approach to teacher compensation, recruitment, and retention, and the student experience will remain largely unchanged other than potentially receiving “more” school. Simply put, school improvement efforts attempt to drive dramatic change within the existing system.

School transformation could not be more different. School transformation questions the current educational system to critically analyze all aspects of the approach through the lens of the student experience. School transformation is not locked into any preconceived notion of what “school” is; rather, it seeks to reimagine educational opportunities in the image of the students and families currently served. Many track the emergence of school transformation as a widely used strategy back to the 1003(g) school improvement grant included in the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The approach has evolved into several models all uniquely designed to fit the local needs and context of a given community. At its core, school transformation acknowledges that the current one-size-fits-all educational model, despite efforts to differentiate within, has deviated so far from the needs of students and families that it is no longer an effective vehicle to improve student outcomes.

## Current Intervention Strategies: Four Inadequacies that Must Be Addressed

### **Inadequate Design: Lack of ambition, comprehensiveness, integration, and network support**

- ▶ **Marginal change yields marginal results.** The strategies of most school intervention efforts have been chronically ill-matched with the need. The vast majority of what passes for intervention in failing schools can be understood as light renovation – the school-reform equivalent of wallpapering and new siding. What’s needed is much more fundamental than repair work on an existing structure: we need instead a thorough rethinking of how the house serves the people who live in it. That much is clear from our study of HPHP schools (see Figure 2E). It’s a big issue for school communities, which tend to think and operate in terms of projects, not strategies.
- ▶ **School intervention strategies generally stop well short of the comprehensiveness of change required.** Our review of the research on state- and district-driven intervention in low-performing schools prompted us to group intervention initiatives in three categories. Most efforts (by far) focus on *program change* – essentially, providing a range of help to improve the quality of instruction within the current model of the school. Some also build in *people change* – installing a new principal or replacing the staff, but rarely as part of a complete turnaround strategy. Very few go further and attempt to *change the context of operating conditions and incentives* in which all of the work (including the reform effort) takes place. Yet it is precisely this conditions context that tends to undercut the impact of reform, particularly in under-performing schools. (See Figure 3C, page 45.)
- ▶ **School intervention tends toward silver bullets instead of fully integrated strategies.** A strong principal; a smaller learning community; a longer school day. Individual elements of turnaround may be critically important, but each by itself is nearly always insufficient to produce major, systemic change – i.e., change that survives even after the strong principal leaves or the longer school day shrinks.
- ▶ **Intervention tends to focus on individual schools, without the intensive outside support that can be obtained through a cluster or network.** Schools fail in part because their central support network (the district) has failed them. Supremely gifted principals may turn around a school, but turnaround at scale requires intensive support from a new network, organized within or across district lines.

### **Inadequate Incentive Change: Current efforts do too little to change the status quo and are marked more by compliance than buy-in**

- ▶ **School intervention has failed to use carrots and sticks effectively to generate commitment to change.** This failure has ramifications at every level in the system: policymakers, district leaders, principals, teachers, parents, students. Intervention represents an opportunity for leverage to be applied to change behavior, which as

Fullan (among other researchers) points out, can then lead to changed beliefs. But that leverage – and the consequent sense of urgency – does not take place because state accountability systems have been weak or unclear in establishing firm timelines and consequences for underperformance. Neither have most intervention strategies understood the vital importance of “carrots” (such as increased latitude over decision-making, professional norms for compensation and collaboration, and participation in groundbreaking reform) in enlisting buy-in for turnaround.

### **Inadequate Capacity: Failing schools get in-service training instead of the all-encompassing people strategy and strong external partners they need**

- ▶ **School intervention chronically under-values the importance of recruiting and placing people in the right jobs.** The reasons why are understandable. Changing program strategies and offering in-service training is safe territory, compared to the complexity and controversy inherent in a total human resource strategy. Most intervention initiatives include provisions for professional development, but most often, that is as far as it goes. The choices, changes, and comprehensive “people strategies” that might come from an honest appraisal of current personnel, management, and HR practices including compensation and incentive strategies are set aside for another day.
- ▶ **Turnaround requires special skills from school leaders and external partners, and the resource base in both categories is glaringly weak.** Turnaround is only now becoming appreciated as a special discipline in education. Training for specialized school leaders in turnaround management is in its infancy. The lack of a strong base of outside turnaround partners clearly stems from lack of public investment in this critical resource. What little demand there is has been driven by private grants.

### **Inadequate Political Will: Lack of constituency, lack of turnaround skills, and uncertain outcomes reduce the likelihood of a strong state response**

- ▶ **School intervention has suffered from episodic, confusing policy design, consistent under-funding, and indecisive political support.** NCLB, ironically, has not helped. Its five restructuring options include one “wild-card” alternative that has been used as a limited-change escape from the other, more dramatic options. The Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) provisions are moving so many schools into corrective action and restructuring categories that states have begun reducing their commitment to intervention. Because failing schools have no political constituency, financially pressed state governments have found it difficult to launch and sustain the kind of intervention effort that might make a difference. And finally, responsibility for managing intervention has fallen to state education agencies that are already under-resourced and over-extended and, generally, are politically sensitive agencies ill-suited to crafting powerful, imaginative turnaround strategy.



## **ELIGIBLE ENTITIES & AVAILABLE FUNDS**

The Next Gen SIG program is open to schools identified for TSI and CSI pursuant to Indiana's approved ESSA State Plan. Successful grantees will receive up to \$300,000 in Planning Grant funds for the first academic year and up to \$3 million distributed over the next three years for implementation. A list of eligible schools can be downloaded here -*COMING SOON*.

## **SINGLE SCHOOL & MULTI-YEAR GRANT**

Applicants will be asked to identify whether the proposal is designed to transform one school or strategically transform multiple schools within the LEA. All schools included in a single-year or multi-year grant must meet the eligibility requirements for the Next Gen SIG program outlined above.

Single School Grant: The single school grant is specifically designed for LEAs with fewer than three TSI and/or CSI schools, or LEAs that have a school with unique needs or are looking to transform the conditions within one school to meet student needs. An LEA may apply for a single school grant for one or more of their eligible schools and need not submit a grant application for each eligible school.

Multi-School Grant: The multi-school grant is specifically for LEAs with four or more TSI and/or CSI schools. These funds will be leveraged to help districts design and implement sustainable, large-scale school improvement initiatives (e.g., Transformation Zones, Innovation Networks) that transform the conditions for learning to meet student needs and improve student outcomes. Districts will not be required to include each of their eligible schools in their application but will be asked to justify the selection of the schools included in the multi-school application.

## **GRANT TIMELINE & STRUCTURE**

School transformation requires careful planning and comprehensive stakeholder engagement to ensure the changes necessary to dramatically improve outcomes for children are informed by those most directly impacted by them. Therefore, the Next Gen SIG will include a planning phase and an implementation phase.

Planning Phase: During the planning phase, grantees will form an Education Transformation Team (ETT) that will work with school officials to finalize the vision and details of the transformation plan and work with different stakeholders to formalize agreements that establish the conditions necessary for transformation. The planning phase will allow grantees to strengthen the needs assessment described in the initial application with a focus on identifying the systemic barriers inhibiting student progress and teacher success. The Education Transformation Team will also work to invest communities in the vision for school transformation and ensure their voice is represented in the final proposal. IDOE will work with grantees to establish an agreed upon set of benchmarks to evaluate progress throughout the planning period. Through regular engagements with the Education Transformation Team during the planning year, IDOE will provide support and feedback on progress towards the benchmarks. The expectation will be that every grantee that receives a planning grant will move into the implementation phase; however, implementation funding will be contingent upon the successful completion of the agreed-upon benchmarks during the planning year.



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**Implementation Phase:** The Next Gen SIG program will fund up to three years of implementation with an anticipated grant award amount of approximately \$3M per school. Multi-school interventions can expect additional funds, but the total allocations should reflect a strategic approach to spending that articulates the strategic benefits and leverages the economies of scale of a multi-school intervention. IDOE will work with the ETT to articulate rigorous, specific, and measurable goals for the intervention, and establish a performance dashboard to guide conversations and continuous improvement within the existing plan. The expectation for all grantees will be that all schools included in the intervention exit CSI status by the end of the four years. If a school exits CSI status before then, they will still be eligible to receive the remainder of the grant funds.

### **INTERVENTION PRIORITY & INTERVENTION MODEL**

Next Generation SIG requires applicants to identify an intervention priority and an intervention model to serve as the foundation for the planning year.

**Intervention Priority:** The intervention priority provides a clear purpose for the proposal. This does prohibit the use of grant funds on other initiatives; rather, it serves as a foundation for the entire initiative and sends a clear signal about the work to internal and external stakeholders. The application includes three possible intervention priorities, but applicants may also submit their own.

1. **Primary Literacy Transformation** – This priority focuses on transforming the student experience to improve primary literacy. Research has regularly demonstrated the importance of reading on grade level by the end of third grade, yet thousands of students are passed along to fourth grade and beyond without the requisite literacy skills to be successful. Applications that prioritize primary literacy should focus on transforming the student experience in grades K-3 to eliminate systemic barriers and better align the entire instructional model to student needs.
2. **Student Pathways & Postsecondary Credentials** – This priority focuses on transforming a student's high school experience to blur the lines between high school and the postsecondary opportunity students choose to pursue. Shifts in postsecondary demand have increased the expectation for high school graduates and our high schools must shift their programming to align to this demand. Applications that prioritize student pathways and postsecondary credentials should focus on developing meaningful pathways in partnership with workforce and higher education partners that strategically integrate customized course sequences, meaningful work-based or project-based learning experiences, and a high-demand postsecondary credential.



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3. Personalized/Differentiated Instructional Model – This priority focuses on transforming the primary, one-size-fits-all approach to instruction into a model that promotes teacher collaboration and considers student needs when establishing class sizes, teacher assignment, instructional me, etc. Applications that prioritize this personalized/ differentiated instructional model should focus on leveraging technology, innovative student grouping, and teacher career ladders to redesign the fundamental assumptions about the student experience at school.
4. Other – Applicants can propose additional intervention priorities based on the demonstrated needs of students in the identified school(s). Successful applications that propose an alternative priority will clearly explain how addressing the selected priority will address root cause issues and improve student outcomes across the board.

Intervention Model: The intervention model plays a critical role in establishing the conditions necessary for transformation. Transformational intervention models require flexibility from state law and local policies including staffing, time, money, and programs. The following models currently exist within Indiana state law.

1. Innovation Network School – Innovation network schools may be established by teachers and an administrator at the school, the governing body of a school corporation, or through a partnership between the school corporation and an external school operator. Under current Indiana law, an innovation network school can receive additional flexibility to establish the conditions necessary to support transformation.
2. Transformation Zone – A Transformation Zone is an intervention model designed for a multi-school initiative. This model aims to cluster schools with similar needs into a zone that is afforded additional flexibility and capacity. Under current Indiana law, schools that participate in a Transformation Zone can request flexibility from certain state regulations and local policies.
3. 1003 Flexibility Waiver – The governing body of a school corporation may request a waiver from the Indiana State Board of Education to eliminate certain statutory and regulatory requirements that currently exist in Indiana law. These waivers can be customized to fit the unique needs of a particular intervention; however, applicants should be aware of the restrictions associated with this option before pursuing it as an intervention model.
4. Other – Applicants may propose additional intervention models; however, the description must clearly articulate how the proposed model secures the necessary conditions for transformation despite not being included in Indiana state law.



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## **ROLE OF AN EXPERT PARTNER**

Successful school transformation requires a specialized skill set and unique experience. Successful applications will demonstrate that the Education Transformation Team has the required skills and experience to successfully steward the intervention or select an expert partner with a track record of success with similar projects. These skills and experiences usually do not exist in an underperforming system and therefore requires the selection of an expert partner to support the work.

## **APPLICATION**

The [2024-2025 Next Gen SIG application](#) for cohort 4 will open March 1st, 2024 and close May 24th, 2024.

## **EVALUATION CRITERIA**

All grant proposals will be evaluated based on multiple criteria, including the defined assurances. Grant applications will be read and scored by a team of subject matter experts in accordance with the established rubric.

[Next Gen SIG Rubric](#)

[Next Gen SIG Eligibility List 2024-2025](#)

Contact [SchoolImprovement@doe.in.gov](mailto:SchoolImprovement@doe.in.gov) with any questions regarding this grant program.