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Key Requirements of Race to the Top Grants: Turning Around Struggling Schools

LEGISLATIVE ANALYST'S OFFICE

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Hon. Julia Brownley, Chair





Requirements for Turning Around Schools Same Across Federal Programs

- The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 established rules for schools and districts not meeting performance targets.
 - Schools/districts enter federal “Program Improvement” (PI) after two consecutive years of failing to meet performance targets.
 - Upon entering PI, a school/district must undertake specified intervention activities. If schools/districts still do not meet performance targets, specified sanctions must be imposed.
 - Schools/districts remain in PI status until they meet performance targets for two consecutive years.

- The School Improvement Fund (SIF) provides federal grants for PI schools/districts subject to sanctions.
 - Roughly \$600 million in SIF dollars were available to California in 2009-10.
 - Recent SIF guidance requires states to focus on bottom 5 percent of PI schools statewide.

- Race to the Top (RTTT) provides additional federal funding for the lowest-performing PI schools in each participating RTTT district.
 - RTTT funding is intended to help schools implement a federal sanction/turnaround plan.

- The RTTT initiative’s criteria for lowest-performing schools provide strongest evidence yet that the requirements could serve as foundation for reauthorizing NCLB.



New Federal Regulations Focus on Bottom 5 Percent of Schools

- Federal guidance on RTTT and SIF both focus on reforming the bottom 5 percent of schools.
- Federal guidance provides parameters for identifying bottom 5 percent.
 - Must be PI school.
 - From PI schools, state must identify bottom 5 percent based on:
 - The academic achievement level of the “all students” group on state math and Language Arts assessments.
 - Consistent lack of progress in the all students group on state assessments over time.
 - For high schools, whether the graduation rate is consistently below 60 percent.

Status of Title I Schools in Program Improvement Statewide

Program Improvement Status	Number of Schools
Year 1	744
Year 2	318
Year 3	323
Year 4	334
Year 5	1,077
Total	2,796
Bottom 5 Percent	140



Options for Turning Around Lowest-Performing Schools

- ☑ Options for addressing bottom 5 percent of schools the same for RTTT and SIF.

- ☑ Four school reform models outlined in both RTTT and federal school improvement guidance:
 - **Closure Model:** Close the school and enroll students in a higher performing school within the district.
 - **New Governance Model:** Restart the school as a charter school or place under the control of an educational management organization.
 - **Staff Replacement Model:** Replace principal and at least 50 percent of staff while providing some operational flexibility.
 - **Transformation Model:** Comprehensively improve teaching, instruction, and local flexibility.

Attributes of the “Transformation Model”
Requirements
<p>Develop Teacher and School Leader Effectiveness Use evaluations based in significant measure on student growth and other factors like observation-based assessments. Reward effective school leaders and teachers and remove those who are ineffective. Replace the principal who led the school. Provide high-quality, embedded professional development. Implement strategies to recruit and retain high-quality staff.</p> <p>Develop Comprehensive Instructional Reform Strategies Use data to implement comprehensive, research-based instructional programs. Differentiate instruction to meet student needs.</p> <p>Extend Learning Time and Create Community-Oriented Schools Extend the school day, week, or year for students needing more time in core academics. Provide more time for teachers to collaborate. Provide more enrichment activities for students. Work to increase family and community engagement.</p> <p>Provide Operating Flexibility and Support Provide schools with flexibility relating to staffing, calendars, and budgeting. Ensure school receives technical assistance from the district, state, or other provider.</p>



Application Criteria

- States will be judged on past performance and future plans relating to turning around lowest-performing schools.

- Three RTTT criteria related to state's past reform efforts and current policies on low-performing schools:
 - Evidence the state has authority to intervene in its lowest-performing schools.
 - Evidence the state has a plan for identifying the bottom 5 percent of schools consistent with new federal guidance.
 - The state's historic performance on school improvement as evidenced by the number of schools the state or its districts have attempted to turn around.

- The RTTT initiative also requires the state to develop a plan for how it will intervene in the bottom 5 percent of schools going forward.



California Has Made Some Progress, But Major Challenges Remain



California has made some progress in intervening in low-performing schools:

- No statutory prohibition against state intervening in low-performing schools.
- State has provided authority for school and district intervention teams to intervene in failing schools on its behalf.
- Some districts have intervened in low-performing schools using federal models.



The state still faces major hurdles:

- Has not yet developed specific guidance for identifying bottom 5 percent of schools nor developed related programs.
- State does not have a strong history of intervening in low-performing schools using federal turnaround models.
 - California has almost 900 schools that have been in PI status for more than five years.



State Has Opportunity to Earn More Points

- Could define bottom 5 percent consistent with federal guidance.
- Could create clear criteria for how to evaluate district plans for turning around low-performing schools and apply those criteria to RTTT and SIF.
 - How much funding to allocate to each school.
 - The length of time the funds will be made available to the school.
 - What oversight and accountability measures will be used.
- Could use remaining SIF and PI funds to provide broader, coordinated, supplemental support.