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Council of the Great City Schools

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Urban Schools Show Progress in Federal Program To Turn Around Low-Achieving Schools

WASHINGTON, Jan. 30 – About 70 percent of low-achieving urban schools that have received federal School Improvement Grants (SIG) to spur improvement have shown progress over the past three years, according to a detailed new study by the Council of the Great City Schools.

The study – [*School Improvement Grants: Progress Report from America's Great City Schools*](#) – found that SIG-award schools increased the numbers of students at or above Proficient levels of attainment on state assessments in reading and math. SIG-award schools in urban districts also demonstrated significant reductions in the numbers of students in the below-Basic level of performance in both subjects.

In addition, the new study shows that urban high schools receiving SIG funds were able to improve their ability to move students from grade to grade.

However, performance in SIG elementary schools continued to be low even after three years of intervention and support, and not all schools receiving SIG funding improved.

Analyzing data across states for grades three through eight in both math and reading, the study also found that gaps in the percentages of students scoring at or above Proficient between SIG-award schools and peer schools that did not receive grants narrowed steadily over the first two years of the grants, but then leveled off in the third year.

“The results of this study indicate that urban schools have made significant improvements with the federal funds they received through the School Improvement Grants, although they have much further to go,” says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly. “The gains suggest that the federal government should retain its targeted and dedicated efforts to improve the nation’s lowest performing schools.”

The report follows another study the Council released in 2012 that showed urban school districts were mounting an unprecedented number of school turnaround efforts with funds from the revamped federal School Improvement Grant program that complemented their ongoing systemwide reform efforts.

In the past three years, the SIG program and the funding behind it “have provided an important opportunity for districts to redesign their support structures for struggling schools; recruit effective teachers and principals; change the climate and expectations for students in these buildings; and engage parents and the community,” says the new report.

[*School Improvement Grants: Progress Report from America's Great City Schools*](#) identifies several features that appeared to propel successful SIG implementation efforts, including:

- A coherent and coordinated district plan for supporting and turning around the lowest-performing schools;
- Interventions focused on instructional improvements with high-quality programming and materials;
- Coordination and integration of instructional interventions and strategies;
- Professional development that built staff instructional capacity;
- Principals who were invested in a vision for improvement and conveyed these priorities to teachers, students, and the community;
- Principals who were given the flexibility to make staff changes or remove ineffective teachers and staff; and
- The ability to leverage data to identify the specific academic needs of struggling students, determine needs for professional development, and decide on intervention strategies.

The unprecedented study also examines reasons behind why some SIG schools did not improve.

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The Council of the Great City Schools is the primary coalition of the nation's largest urban public school systems. It represents 67 big-city school districts.