



TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY

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December 12, 2013

Michael Williams
Commissioner

TO THE ADMINISTRATOR ADDRESSED:

SUBJECT: Districts with Schools Identified as Priority and/or Focus

The State of Texas has secured a conditional waiver from the U.S. Department of Education for specific provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), commonly known as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. Under the provisions of Texas Education Code (TEC), Chapter 39, the state is required to provide interventions to improve identified low-performing schools. This letter provides initial information regarding the identification of and required interventions and supports for schools identified as priority or focus according to waiver [Principle 2: State-Developed Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, and Support](#).

Identification

Utilizing a methodology based on guidance outlined in the waiver, one or more campuses in your district have been identified as a priority or focus school. The list of priority and focus schools for school year 2013-14 may be accessed at: http://www.tea.state.tx.us/ESEAFlex_Principle2.aspx.

Using data obtained from the [2013 Accountability Reports](#), the agency has generated a list of priority and focus schools based on statewide reading and mathematics assessments, and graduation rates. Priority schools include a combination of Tier I and II Texas Title I Priority Schools (TTIPS), Title I schools with graduation rates less than 60%, and the lowest-performing Title I schools based on achievement results on reading/math system safeguards at the All Student level. Ten percent of Title I schools, not otherwise identified as priority schools, are considered focus schools, and include campuses with the widest gaps between reading/math performance of the [federal student groups \(7\) and safeguard targets of 75%](#).

Criteria for identification are:

Priority

- TTIPS grantees
- Title I high schools with a graduation rates less than 60%; and/or
- Title I schools with lowest achievement on reading/math system safeguards at the All Student level

Focus

- Title I schools ranked by the widest gaps between reading/math performance of the federal student groups (7) and safeguard targets of 75%

To exit priority or focus status, a school must make significant progress for two consecutive years following interventions and no longer fit the criteria to be identified as a priority or focus school. Information on exiting priority or focus status will be released in the Spring of 2014.

Intervention Requirements

Priority and focus schools are required to begin and/or continue engaging in the [Texas Accountability Intervention System \(TAIS\)](#) improvement process and align it around the ESEA [turnaround principles](#) and [critical success factors \(CSFs\)](#). The district is responsible for assisting identified schools in all aspects of the school improvement process, which include data analysis, needs assessment, and developing, implementing, and monitoring a plan for improvement.

During school year 2013-14, the following interventions will be required for identified schools:

- **Priority TTIPS schools will:**
 - continue implementing current TTIPS requirements and engaging in the TAIS improvement process of data analysis, needs assessment, improvement planning, and implementation and monitoring of activities at the district and school level; and
 - ensure the ESEA turnaround principles continue to be addressed in all plans and activities required through the TTIPS grant.

- **Priority non-TTIPS schools will:**
 - designate a [District Coordinator of School Improvement \(DCSI\)](#);
 - participate in required trainings to be announced by the Texas Center for District and School Support (TCDSS), including attendance at the 2014 Advancing Improvement in Education (AIE) conference; and
 - through engaging in the TAIS improvement process referenced above, evaluate current school staff and create a plan which will be submitted at the end of the 2013-14 school year that addresses the ESEA turnaround principles. This plan, based on the turnaround principles, will be fully implemented by the school in the 2014-15 school year.

- **Focus schools will:**
 - designate a district contact;
 - review ESEA turnaround principles and identify, implement, and include in 2013-14 campus improvement plan, no less than one instructional intervention specifically targeted to address closing existing achievement gaps; and
 - include reasons for identification and targeted instructional interventions in the school's 2013-14 campus improvement plan that will be fully implemented during the school year 2014-15.

Priority and focus schools *already identified as Improvement Required* under the state accountability system will:

- continue the requirements outlined in the [To the Administrator Addressed letter](#) disseminated by the Division of Program Monitoring and Interventions dated August 15, 2013.
- embed the applicable priority or focus interventions described above into current improvement work.

Additional information on reporting requirements and trainings will be announced soon.

Funding

Section 1003(a) of the ESEA authorizes funds to address the needs of schools identified for improvement and thereby improve student performance. Identified priority non-TTIPS schools and focus schools are eligible to receive supplemental funds through the 1003(a) application.

Receipt of 1003(a) funds remains contingent on a school meeting the criteria for identification and compliance with required interventions; funding will be suspended upon notification otherwise. Pre-award costs are allowable from the date of this letter and will be allowed for registration and travel costs to TEA required trainings only. Information on the 1003(a) grant will be released soon.

Technical Assistance to Priority and Focus Schools

The Division of School Improvement and Support provides technical assistance through the TCDSS at Education Service Center (ESC) Region 13. The TCDSS office will contact district and school administrators to provide more detailed information about trainings and support services. TCDSS, partnered with local ESC Turnaround Teams, will support districts and schools in the TAIS school improvement process and meeting intervention requirements of the waiver. Additional information can be found at www.tcdss.net.

Reward Schools

To align with the Texas Title I, Distinguished Schools designation, Texas will continue recognizing high performance with school distinction designations in performance and progress for schools meeting reward criteria. A high performing reward school will be identified as a Title I school with distinctions based on reading and math performance. In addition, at the high school level, a reward school will be a Title I school with the highest graduation rates. A high progress school will be identified as a Title I school, in the top 25% in annual improvement; and/or a school in the top 25% of those demonstrating ability to close performance gaps based on system safeguards.

Identification and recognition of reward schools will occur in the spring of 2014.

Contact Information

More information on the identification of priority and focus schools, plan submission processes, timelines, and available resources and support will soon be communicated by staff at the Texas Education Agency, TCDSS and regional ESCs.

Priority and Focus schools, improvement, interventions, 1003(a) funding and TTIPS: Division of School Improvement and Support, (512) 463-7582 or sis@tea.state.tx.us

Improvement Required, DCSI, Campus Intervention Team (CIT) and Intervention Stage and Activity Manager (ISAM): Division of Program Monitoring and Interventions, (512) 463-5226 or pmidivision@tea.state.tx.us

CSFs, Professional Service Providers (PSP), Turnaround Principles, TAIS, Trainings: TCDSS (512) 919-5171 or tcdss@esc13.txed.net

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System Safeguard Results: Division of Performance Reporting, (512) 463-9704 or
performance.reporting@tea.state.tx.us

General Title I program questions: Division of State and Federal Education Policy-ESEA Unit, (512) 463-9414 or
nclb@tea.state.tx.us

Amendments to the 2013–2014 NCLB Consolidated Grant Application: Division of Grants Administration, (512) 463-8525 or grants@tea.state.tx.us

The Agency thanks you for your commitment and support to the students of Texas.

Sincerely,
Sally Partridge, Associate Commissioner
Accreditation and School Improvement