



***Key points:***

- ESSA's school improvement 7 percent set-aside combines 4 percent set-aside, SIG
- SEAs, LEAs to choose from evidence-based interventions
- Hold-harmless provision to go into effect for SY 2018-19

**Title I's 7 percent set-aside to go to school improvement**

School districts should be prepared for a possible reduction in their Title I funds in SY 2017-18, when states must begin setting aside 7 percent of their grants, said Carlas McCauley, director for [WestEd's Center on School Turnaround](#).

The 7 percent set-aside replaces both the previous 4 percent school improvement SEA set-aside and School Improvement Grants, which was a standalone funding stream under NCLB. The new combined pot will go to schools identified under ESSA for comprehensive support and improvement or targeted support and improvement.

The [Every Student Succeeds Act](#), Pub. L. No. 114-95, Section 1111(c)(4)(D) requires state accountability systems to identify schools for comprehensive support and improvement if they are in the lowest performing 5 percent of all Title I schools in the state, are a public high school failing to graduate one-third or more of its students, or do not improve subgroup success after targeted support and intervention. Under Section 1111(d)(2), schools may receive targeted support and improvement if any subgroup of students is consistently underperforming.

"It's great that this still signaled the need for dramatic school turnaround," McCauley said. However, he said, the 7 percent set-aside in Section 1003 is not additional money, but part of states' existing Title I allocations.

A "hold-harmless" provision in Section 1003(h) will take effect starting in SY 2018-19. That means that states will not be able to take the full 7 percent if doing so would result in a reduction in an LEA's Title I allocation from one year to the next.

For SY 2017-18, however, some districts' Title I, Part A allocations could be reduced when states set aside the 7 percent. "This could result in a loss of funding for some districts," McCauley wrote in a blog.

"In my experience, it's been extremely controversial to reduce Title I funds" because districts already feel they are not getting enough, he said in an interview.

Under NCLB Section 1003, states had been setting aside 4 percent for school improvement. SIG was a separate allocation. For FY 2017, separate SIG funds are struck from the proposed budget. [Title I money is proposed to increase by that amount](#), roughly 3 percent. However,

without a "hold harmless" provision, some districts may have their grants reduced, although overall grants could remain flat or even increase for other districts with an influx of low-income students.

"I wanted to raise [the issue] because states are at different stages in reading ESSA and understanding it," McCauley said. "They need to think about it now. These are important discussions with districts and other community stakeholders."

A reduction in Title I funding for some districts could mean a change in past practices, he said.

### **Greater latitude for intervention models**

The new law will allow districts to develop their own strategies for schools identified for comprehensive support and improvement and schools for targeted support and improvement. Under SIG, districts could choose one of only four options. ESSA Section 1003(b)(1)(B) states that districts may choose evidence-based interventions based on at least one well-designed and well-implemented study with strong, moderate, or promising evidence consistent with Section 8101(21).

"I think districts have the opportunity to really develop districtwide strategies," McCauley said.

For example, many low-performing schools have principals who are new to their role. They will need different support and interventions than schools where the principal has been there five years, and the school has shown some improvement on all measures for the past two years but is still low-performing. A low-performing school with high teacher turnover will need different support.

States and districts will have to pay attention to those different needs, McCauley said.

### **'Leadership matters'**

"Our most challenging schools have the least experienced principals" and the least experienced teachers, he said.

States and districts need to think about how to get and keep the best and most talented principals and teachers in turnaround schools.

Districts have to create conditions and supports in struggling schools so the best educators want to be there, McCauley said. Those schools need resources and community supports and conditions for teachers to be successful, including afterschool programs, counseling, and other services.

Schools and districts need to celebrate incremental successes while acknowledging more work needs to be done. Success is not just exiting school turnaround or moving from the bottom 5 percent to the bottom 10 percent or quartile -- it is continuous improvement, he said.

"All schools need improvement," McCauley said.

Financial incentives to work in high-poverty, low-performing schools are not the only reason the best educators will want to work there, he said. "It is the work environment," McCauley said. "All of us want to work in an environment where they feel supported and where their hard work is being acknowledged. That's where the leadership matters."

"No one wants to work for someone they don't feel is encouraging them or isn't pushing them toward a common goal."

--[Dayna Straehley](#) covers school improvement and other Title I issues for LRP Publications.

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(Sidebar)

### **Low-graduation high schools to get grants**

The [Every Student Succeeds Act](#), Pub. L. No. 114-95, Section 1111(c)(4)(D) requires SEAs to identify high schools with low graduation rates for comprehensive support and improvement even if they are not Title I schools.

[Center on School Turnaround](#) Director Carlas McCauley said that even though those high schools may not be Title I schools, they will be eligible for the school improvement grants states make with the 7 percent of Title I money that states must set aside under Section 1003.

Most of the high schools that do not graduate a third or more of their students are probably eligible for Title I and would be served if their districts had enough Title I money, he said, noting that many districts prioritize their limited Title I funds at the elementary level. He said some high school families and students decline to fill out school lunch paperwork, or school staff did not want to offer supplemental educational services or school choice under NCLB.

Even if a high school does not meet the free lunch threshold for Title I eligibility, the students who do not graduate on time probably come from low-income homes, McCauley said.

"In all likelihood, these are the students whom Title I was intended to serve," he said.

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