

INTEROFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

Los Angeles Unified School District

Independent Analysis Unit

DRAFT INFORMATIVE

TO: Members, Board of Education
Vivian Ekchian, Acting Superintendent

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SUBJECT: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANTS IN L.A. UNIFIED

SUMMARY

The purpose of this informative is to describe student outcomes for L.A. Unified schools receiving School Improvement Grants (SIG) and to outline the ways in which these L.A. Unified schools have used SIG funds. The following four findings emerged from this analysis:

- Elementary schools tend to experience more positive gains in student achievement than middle and high schools.
- There are substantial gains in student achievement for the majority of grade levels in Cohort 3 schools, particularly Woodcrest Elementary School.
- Schools spend SIG funds in a wide variety of ways.
- The majority of SIG funding is spent on professional development and instruction.
- SIG allocations are substantially larger than a school's typical Title I allocation.

School Improvement Grants, authorized under section 1003(g) of Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, are awarded to state educational agencies which, in turn, will award subgrants to local educational agencies that demonstrate the greatest need for the funds and the strongest commitment to use the funds. The first cohort of recipients began implementing reforms during the 2010-2011 school year, and grants are awarded over a three-year period.

SIG recipients agree to implement one of four school intervention models: transformation, turnaround, restart, or closure. Across the four cohorts of SIG recipients in L.A. Unified, 16 schools implemented a restart model, 13 schools used a transformation model, and two implemented a turnaround model. The U.S. Department of Education has prescribed specific practices for each of these models.¹ These practices include but are not limited to: increasing learning time, replacing the school principal, implementing a new governance structure, and providing social-emotional supports.

The U.S. Department of Education conducted an evaluation² of the first three cohorts of SIG recipients nationwide and found that:

- *SIG schools made gains in math and reading proficiency.* Specifically, Cohort 1 schools increased the percentage of students who are proficient in math by 8 and by 6 percentage points in reading.

¹ <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/sigguidance11012010.pdf>

² <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/data/school-impro-grants-nat-sum-sy1213.pdf>

- *Graduation rates improved in SIG high schools* compared to all public high schools.
- *SIG schools increased learning time*, namely through before and after school activities, longer school days, and summer school.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT OF SIG SCHOOLS IN L.A. UNIFIED

We focus on Cohort 3 and 4 schools in L.A. Unified because they are the most recent cohorts. Cohort 3 schools finished their last year of implementation in 2016-2017, which is the same year that Cohort 4 began pre-implementation. There are eight schools in Cohort 3, and five schools in Cohort 4. The majority of schools in Cohort 3 and 4 implemented the restart model, and all schools have 82% or more students eligible for free or reduced price lunch (FRL). Table 1 outlines characteristics of Cohort 3 and 4 schools in L.A. Unified.

Table 1. Characteristics of Cohort 3 and 4 SIG recipients in L.A. Unified

School	Cohort	Intervention Model	% FRL
Angeles Mesa ES	3	Restart	88%
Audubon MS	3	Restart	82%
Fulton College Prep	3	Transformation	89%
International Learning Studies Center	3	Restart	91%
Los Angeles HS	3	Restart	93%
San Fernando HS	3	Restart	93%
Sun Valley Magnet	3	Transformation	88%
Woodcrest ES	3	Restart	88%
Augustus Hawkins (CDAGS)	4	Restart	88%
Barton Hill ES	4	Restart	92%
Tom Bradley Global Awareness Magnet	4	Restart	88%
Daniel Webster MS	4	Restart	83%
Washington Prep HS	4	Restart	88%

Table 2 provides a detailed view of student scores on the Smarter Balanced Assessment during Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3 of implementation for Cohort 3. Cells highlighted in gray represent grade levels in which test scores declined across the three years of implementation. District averages are also presented in Table 2 to provide a point of comparison. Schools receiving SIGs are historically low-achieving, by definition, thus the shares of students proficient in Common Core State Standards are noticeably lower compared to district-wide averages.

Disaggregating student achievement data by grade provides a nuanced picture of student achievement. Had we looked at proficiency rates that were aggregated to the school level, we might have overlooked the negative trend in achievement for 11th graders at Sun Valley Magnet.

Table 2. Percent of students meeting or exceeding standards at Cohort 3 SIG schools.³

School Name	Grade	Subject	Year 1: % Met or Exceeded Standards	Year 2: % Met or Exceeded Standards	Year 3: % Met or Exceeded Standards	% point change from Year 1 to Year 3	Percentage change from Year 1 to Year 3
District wide average	All	Math	25	28	30	5	20%
		ELA	33	39	40	7	21%
Angeles Mesa ES	3	Math	10	20	29	19	186%
		ELA	19	20	33	14	75%
	4	Math	6	12	12	6	99%
		ELA	10	22	20	10	104%
	5	Math	2	19	5	3	174%
		ELA	18	34	15	-3	-15%
Audubon MS	6	Math	11	10	5	-6	-58%
		ELA	14	13	14	0	0
	7	Math	12	8	9	-3	-25%
		ELA	12	12	19	7	57%
	8	Math	10	5	4	-6	-58%
		ELA	15	15	19	4	24%
Fulton College Prep	6	Math	7	8	10	3	46%
		ELA	14	16	23	9	64%
	7	Math	6	6	5	-1	-13%
		ELA	13	17	14	1	11%
	8	Math	9	8	7	-2	-21%
		ELA	20	20	22	2	8%
	11	Math	14	18	22	8	54%
		ELA	39	58	56	17	43%
Los Angeles HS	11	Math	21	23	24	3	15%
		ELA	50	42	42	-8	-15%
San Fernando HS	11	Math	21	27	21	0	2%
		ELA	52	53	53	1	2%
Sun Valley Magnet	6	Math	15	19	25	10	68%
		ELA	10	21	29	19	185%
	7	Math	19	12	16	-3	-16%
		ELA	18	14	21	3	16%
	8	Math	13	19	14	1	8%
		ELA	18	26	26	8	46%
	11 ⁴	Math	-	44	25	-19	-42%
		ELA	-	52	45	-7	-13%
Woodcrest ES	3	Math	13	23	38	25	193%
		ELA	6	18	23	17	288%
	4	Math	5	18	18	13	264%
		ELA	7	20	24	17	241%
	5	Math	4	7	17	13	314%
		ELA	9	22	26	17	192%

³ Student achievement data was gathered from the California Department of Education (CDE). However, the CDE database was not able to provide information for International Learning Studies Center, a SIG recipient in Cohort 3.

⁴ Since test scores for 11th-graders at Sun Valley Magnet were unavailable for the 2014-2015 school year, the percent change in this row represents the change from Year 2 to Year 3 of implementation.

Elementary schools tend to experience more positive gains than middle and high schools. Woodcrest Elementary is the only school in Cohort 3 to have consistent gains across all subjects and grades and across all three years of implementation. Remarkably, the percent of 5th graders who met or exceeded the math standards increased by 314% at Woodcrest Elementary School across the three years of implementation. Audubon Middle School has experienced a steady decline in the percent of students who met or exceeded math standards. This declining pattern is consistent across all grade levels at Audubon Middle School.

We were not able to provide baseline student scores the year before implementation, since the state of California switched to a new testing system during the first year of Cohort 3's SIG implementation.

Since Cohort 4 has not finished implementing SIG reforms, we discuss student outcomes for Cohort 4 separately from Cohort 3. School year 2016-2017 serves as the pre-implementation year for Cohort 4 because planning began during that year. Though there are some positive effects on student achievement during the 2016-2017 school year, these changes should be interpreted with caution as full implementation did not begin until the 2017-2018 school year. We are not able to provide student achievement results for Year 1, Year 2, or Year 3 of implementation for Cohort 3 since these schools began full implementation during the current school year.

Table 3. Percent of students meeting or exceeding standards at Cohort 4 SIG schools.

School Name	Grade	Subject	Year before pre-implementation: % Met or Exceeded Standards	Pre-Implementation year: % Met or Exceeded Standards	% point change in student achievement	Percent change in student achievement
District wide average	All	Math	25	28	3	12%
		ELA	33	39	6	18%
Augustus Hawkins	11	Math	5	13	8	157%
		ELA	31	26	-5	-15%
Barton Hill ES	3	Math	19	34	15	78%
		ELA	13	22	9	67%
	4	Math	11	11	0	1%
		ELA	16	11	-5	-31%
	5	Math	1	9	8	827%
		ELA	8	16	8	95%
6	Math	4	7	3	79%	
	ELA	7	7	0	0%	
Tom Bradley Global Awareness Magnet	3	Math	11	9	-2	-16%
		ELA	8	15	7	85%
	4	Math	9	11	2	23%
		ELA	9	8	-1	-10%
	5	Math	0	5	5	-
ELA		17	15	-2	-10%	
Daniel Webster MS	6	Math	17	16	-2	-9%
		ELA	19	25	6	29%
	7	Math	10	15	5	47%
		ELA	14	25	11	80%
	8	Math	15	7	-8	-54%
ELA		28	25	-3	-9%	
Washington Prep HS	11	Math	6	3	-3	-46%
		ELA	24	33	9	39%

Table 3 outlines student achievement for the pre-implementation year and the year before pre-implementation for Cohort 4. The majority of schools in Cohort 4 experienced gains in most of their tested grade levels between the pre-implementation year and the year before pre-implementation. Notably, Barton Hill Elementary School experienced substantial gains in 5th grade math and English language arts. Specifically, there is an 827% increase in the percent of students who met or exceeded 5th grade math standards at Barton Hill Elementary School. Similarly, there were substantial gains in 7th grade achievement at Daniel Webster Middle School. Though Augustus Hawkins experienced a 157% increase in the percent of 11th graders who met or exceeded math standards, Washington Prep High School saw a 46% decline.

USE OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANT FUNDS

The elements of SIG reform can be broadly classified into one of seven categories: increased time for instruction, professional development, family and community engagement, instruction, materials and supplies, supportive and safe school environment, and classified staff. Though the boundaries between categories may be fuzzy, we attempt to classify how each school spent its SIG funds. By doing so, we can arrive at a rough overview as to how these schools are spending SIG funds.

Table 4 outlines the seven spending categories and common examples of each type of spending. Table 4 is not intended to be a comprehensive list of costs. Rather, Table 4 is meant to provide a rough overview of the major costs associated with SIG spending. A comprehensive list of each school’s SIG spending can be found in the appendix.

Table 4. Major SIG Spending Categories

Spending Category	Examples of spending
Increasing instructional time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended day • Saturday School • Summer Bridge/School • Credit Recovery • After-School Program
Professional development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher retreats • Leadership Retreat • PD contracts with outside vendors (e.g., Growing Educators, LMU, UCLA Center X) • Conferences • Data analysis meetings
Family & community engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full-time parent liaison • Family nights • Parent institute
Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intervention teachers • Instructional coaches • Collaboration time • Teacher assistants
Safe and supportive environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychiatric social worker • School psychologist • Counselor • College Counselor

Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laptops • Projectors • Smartboards • Software licenses • Leveled readers
Classified staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nurse • Custodial staff

Table 5 describes how schools in Cohort 3 budgeted their SIG funds for school year 2016-2017. Overall, schools chose to spend the greatest proportion of their funds on *professional development*, followed by *instruction* and *increasing instructional time*, with *safe and supportive environment* coming in fourth.

However, schools within the cohort varied in how they distributed their funds. For example, Sun Valley Magnet spent the largest chunk—roughly 35%—of its SIG funds on increasing instructional time, mainly by extending the school day by 30 minutes. On the other hand, Angeles Mesa Elementary School spent its largest proportion—approximately 36%—on professional development. Specifically, this school contracted with UCLA Center X and Growing Educators to provide professional development to its staff during the 2016-2017 school year. Similar to Angeles Mesa, Woodcrest Elementary School also spent a substantial portion of its SIG budget on professional development. Roughly 40% of Woodcrest’s SIG budget was spent on professional development contracts with outside vendors such as Kagan, Cognitively Guided Instruction, and Growing Educators. Not all schools prioritized professional development, though. San Fernando High School chose to allocate 36% of its funds to instruction.

A small portion of SIG funds were spent on hiring classified staff and investing in family and community engagement.

Table 5. Use of SIG Funds for Cohort 3 Schools in L.A. Unified⁵

School	Increasing instructional time	Professional Development	Family & community engagement	Instruction	Safe & supportive environment	Materials	Classified staff
Angeles Mesa ES	16%	36%	0%	21%	15%	2%	10%
International Learning Studies Center	27%	22%	1%	23%	14%	2%	11%
Los Angeles HS	20%	35%	1%	12%	18%	6%	7%
San Fernando HS	8%	28%	0%	36%	22%	3%	3%
Sun Valley	35%	27%	0%	6%	27%	1%	4%
Woodcrest ES	8%	40%	0%	27%	10%	9%	6%
<i>Average</i>	19%	31%	.3%	21%	18%	4%	7%

⁵ SIG budgets could not be obtained for Audubon Middle School and Fulton College Prep. We do not include Cohort 4 because they spent a small portion of their SIG funds during the 2016-2017 pre-implementation year. In addition, spending during the pre-implementation year may not reflect overall spending patterns.

As evidenced by Table 6, SIGs provide schools with substantially more funding than their usual Title I allocations. Since SIG funds are allocated to schools over a three-year period, we divide a school’s total SIG allocation by three so that we may compare SIG funds to Title I funds. As an example, Los Angeles High School received \$735,260 in Title I funding during the 2017-2018 school year and will receive roughly \$1,899,735 per year during the three-year period of the SIG.

SIG per-student allocations vary greatly across schools because the number of FRL-eligible students at each school varies. Angeles Mesa Elementary School and San Fernando High School received the same total SIG allocation, for example, but these two schools vary substantially in their per-student SIG amount due to the different numbers of FRL-eligible students at each school. Though both Angeles Mesa Elementary School and San Fernando High School received approximately \$2 million in SIG funds, the former serves 323 FRL-eligible students, and the latter serves five-and-a-half times more (1,803) FRL-eligible students. The schools with the highest per-student SIG amount did not necessarily have the best outcomes. Thus, so far, there is no evidence that a higher per-student SIG allocation translates into higher test scores.

Table 6. SIG and Title I Allocations for Cohort 3 and 4 Schools

School	Title I Allocation Per Year (Total)	Title I Allocation Per Year (Per FRL-eligible Student)	School Improvement Grant Allocation Per Year (total)	School Improvement Grant Allocation Per Year (Per FRL-eligible Student)	Number of students eligible for FRL	% eligible for FRL
Angeles Mesa ES	\$216,095	\$669	\$1,900,000	\$5,882	323	88%
International Learning Studies Center	\$508,460	\$669	\$1,900,000	\$2,500	760	91%
Los Angeles HS	\$735,260	\$669	\$1,899,735	\$1,729	1,099	93%
San Fernando HS	\$1,206,254	\$669	\$1,900,000	\$1,054	1,803	93%
Sun Valley	\$874,417	\$669	\$1,900,000	\$1,454	1,307	88%
Woodcrest ES	\$489,727	\$669	\$1,897,272	\$2,592	732	88%
Augustus Hawkins (CDAGS)	\$272,294	\$669	\$1,759,866	\$4,324	407	88%
Barton Hill ES	\$365,957	\$669	\$2,361,726	\$4,318	547	92%
Tom Bradley Global Awareness Magnet	\$210,743	\$669	\$2,526,268	\$8,020	315	88%
Daniel Webster MS	\$238,173	\$669	\$2,392,343	\$6,720	356	83%
Washington Prep HS	\$532,545	\$669	\$2,502,938	\$3,144	796	88%

CONCLUSION

Student outcomes vary substantially across Cohort 3 schools receiving SIGs in L.A. Unified. Generally, elementary schools experienced more positive gains than middle and high schools. Angeles Mesa, Woodcrest, and Barton Hill Elementary School have experienced substantial gains in student achievement across various grade levels and subjects. All three of these schools have allocated a sizeable portion of their SIG funds to professional development. Both Angeles Mesa and Woodcrest contracted with Growing Educators for professional development and instructional support.

Since the 2016-2017 school year serves as the pre-implementation year for Cohort 4, it is too early to determine the effect of SIGs on student outcomes for Cohort 4.

The Independent Analysis Unit (IAU) is considering a future analysis of the relationship between SIG spending and student outcomes. The variation in how schools spend their SIG funds gives the IAU an opportunity to explore the effects of SIG spending on student achievement. Such an analysis would require access to detailed reports of actual SIG expenditures so that SIG spending can be accurately categorized. An additional year of achievement data would also help to identify any relationship, especially for Cohort 4 schools.