

August 14, 2015

TO THE ADMINISTRATOR ADDRESSED

SUBJECT: Districts with schools identified as priority and/or focus for school year
2015-2016

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) continues to operate with approval from the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) to waive 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 this waiver, TEA will continue to support and monitor interventions for campuses identified as priority or focus based on federal requirements.

This letter provides updated information regarding identification, required submission and interventions, supports, exit process, and funding for priority and focus schools. To reference all provisions for these schools as described in the waiver, please see the [ESEA Flex Principle 2: State-Developed Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, and Support](#).

PRIORITY SCHOOLS **Identification and Requirements**

Priority schools are entering their final year of interventions based on their identification during the 2013-2014 school year.

Criteria for priority school identification were:

- School awarded a Texas Title I Priority Schools (TTIPS) grant at the time of waiver application;
- Title I high school with a graduation rate less than 60%; and/or
- Title I school with lowest achievement on reading/math system safeguards at the All Student level.

Priority schools are required to:

- Engage in the Texas Accountability Intervention System (TAIS) continuous improvement process in alignment with the ESEA turnaround principles and Critical Success Factors (CSFs);
- Prepare and implement a 2015-2016 Targeted Improvement Plan;
- Assign a Campus Intervention Team (CIT) by designating a:
 - District Coordinator of School Improvement (DCSI), and
 - Professional Service Provider (PSP);
- Utilize the Intervention and Stage Activity Manager (ISAM) system for CIT team member identifications and submissions;
- Identify members of the Campus Leadership Team (CLT);

- Address all seven CSFs in the Targeted Improvement Plan;
- Attend TAIS Trainings; DCSI and principal are required participants; and
- DCSI and principal attend the Advancing Improvement in Education (AIE) conference

Priority School Differentiation

In an effort to acknowledge priority schools that made significant gains, TEA will differentiate its support and intervention requirements for the schools that have improved in performance to the point they no longer meet the original criteria for priority school identification.

TEA will apply the priority school ranking calculation methodology using data from the [2014 Accountability Reports](#). These reports capture progress in increasing reading/math performance and/or graduation rates after one year of interventions as a priority campus.

Priority Progress schools

Priority schools having improved in performance to the point they no longer meet the original criteria for priority school identification are classified as priority progress schools. Priority progress schools will continue to follow all required interventions, but are not required to submit the campus' midyear progress reports of their targeted improvement plan. Priority progress schools are only required to submit an initial Targeted Improvement Plan and End-of-Year reporting on the implementation of the plan, unless selected by TEA for a random mid-year submission.

Priority schools

Priority schools still meeting the criteria for priority school identification listed above using 2014 data remain identified as priority schools. Priority schools will participate in all required interventions and complete all submissions in the 2015-2016 school year.

Please note ISAM currently lists Tier 1 and Tier 2 as a form of differentiation. This label will be changed in the near future to reduce confusion and identify priority progress schools. ISAM will soon be updated to reflect the new label of priority progress to identify schools having improved in performance.

FOCUS SCHOOLS

Identification and Requirements

Focus schools are entering their final year of interventions based on their identification during the 2013-2014 school year.

The criteria for focus school identification were: Rank-ordered Title I schools not identified as priority with the largest gaps in reading/math performance between all seven federal student groups and the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) safeguard targets of 75%.

Focus schools are required to:

- Engage in the Texas Accountability Intervention System (TAIS) continuous improvement process in alignment with the ESEA turnaround principles and Critical Success Factors (CSFs);

- Include instructional intervention(s) in the school's 2015-2016 campus improvement plan as required by Texas Education Code and provide designated Education Service Center (ESC) with access to the improvement plan;
- Designate a district and campus contact for focus school support and interventions;
- Work with the local ESC to:
 - Select, implement and include targeted instructional interventions designed to close achievement gaps;
 - learn specific focus school project requirements;
 - complete and submit all region-specific project activity documentation;
 - assess progress on reasons for identification as a focus school;
- **NEW!** Participate in at least one initial consultation with the local ESC contact and one additional services/event hosted by the ESC that are listed as a part of the ESC's contractual Focus School Support activity plan; and
- **NEW!** Provide campus and district contact information to the local regional ESC.

Focus School Differentiation

Similar to priority schools, TEA will differentiate intervention requirements for the schools that have improved in performance to the point they no longer meet the original criteria for focus school identification.

To identify focus schools that have made significant gains, TEA applied the focus school ranking calculation methodology using data from the [2014 Accountability Reports](#) to measure progress toward closing the achievement gaps in math and reading after one year of interventions as a focus school.

Focus progress

Focus schools having improved in performance to the point they would no longer meet the original criteria for focus school identification are classified as focus progress schools. Focus progress schools will engage in the TAIS continuous improvement process and communications with their ESC, but are not required to participate in consultation or two focus school support services/events with their ESC.

Focus

Focus schools still meeting the criteria for focus school identification as listed above using 2014 data remain identified as focus schools and shall participate in all required interventions.

Focus school identification will be released October 1, 2015.

Exit Process

As a part of the Agency's ESEA waiver renewal process with USDE, TEA is working to finalize the 2015-2016 priority and focus exit criteria. TEA will communicate the final methodology as soon as possible.

Funding

Section 1003(a) of the ESEA authorizes state education agencies to issue funds to LEAs in order to address the needs of schools identified for improvement, and thereby improve student performance.

Beginning in the 2015-2016 school year, ***districts*** with identified priority and focus schools are eligible receive supplemental funds through the Title I 1003(a) Priority and Focus School grant on behalf of their priority and focus schools. Funding allocations per district will be calculated based on the number of eligible priority and focus schools within the district at the estimated amounts of \$150,000 per priority school and \$17,000 per focus school. These funds must only be used to support district and campus- level school improvement efforts to directly benefit these schools.

The 2015-2016 Texas Title I 1003(a) priority and focus school grant will be available to eligible districts via the eGrants system in September 2015. The grant period will run from October 1, 2015 to September 30, 2016; with pre-award costs allowable as of July 1, 2015.

To receive 1003(a) funds, the district must have identified priority and focus schools and comply with all intervention requirements. Priority or focus schools awarded or receiving Texas Title I Priority School (TTIPS) funding are not eligible to receive 1003(a) priority and focus school funding.

For questions related to identification, interventions, support, and funding, please contact the Division of School Improvement and Support at (512) 463-7582 or sis@tea.texas.gov.

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

Sincerely,

Sally Partridge, Associate Commissioner
Accreditation and School Improvement