



To: Interested California LEAs
From: Rick Miller, CORE Executive Director
Date: May 28, 2013
Re: Update on CORE ESEA Waiver: The School Quality Improvement System

The California Office to Reform Education (CORE) has resubmitted an Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) [Waiver plan](#) to the U.S. Department of Education (USED). Like the original submission on February 28, 2013, the Waiver includes the participation of nine CORE districts: Clovis, Fresno, Los Angeles, Long Beach, Sacramento, Oakland, Sanger, Santa Ana, and San Francisco Unified school districts. The CORE waiver plan is now referred to as the School Quality Improvement System.

This is the first and only district-level ESEA Waiver accepted by USED for review. Following USED's normal iterative process for reviewing waiver requests, the first version of the School Quality Improvement Plan was submitted for peer review on March 22nd, 2013. Based on the input of peer reviewers, USED provided feedback on issues that needed to be addressed or clarified in the waiver plan.

CORE has reviewed this feedback and has updated and expanded the School Quality Improvement Plan to address these concerns. The updated and expanded version was submitted to USED on May 28, 2013. We remain optimistic that USED will ultimately approve the School Quality Improvement Plan in time for participating districts to start using it for federal accountability purposes going into the 2013-14 school year.

Since the beginning of this process, CORE has made clear that any LEA in California that is willing to agree to fulfill all the commitments in the School Quality Improvement System is welcome to participate. LEAs interested in joining the School Quality Improvement System this year will need to review, understand, and be prepared to request specific waivers from the USED (page 13 of the School Quality Improvement System Application); agree to the USED assurances (page 14 of the School Quality Improvement System Application); and be prepared to sign an MOU with CORE (Appendix A. page 149 of the School Quality Improvement System Application).

In addition, in order for an LEA to receive federal approval to participate in the School Quality Improvement System for accountability purposes, the LEA will need to document outreach to key stakeholders regarding the plan. As such, any LEA interested in approval this year will have needed to communicate with teachers, administrators, bargaining units, and other key LEA and community stakeholders about the School Quality Improvement System requirements, and importantly, document that engagement effort, including feedback received from stakeholders. A sample format for documenting such engagement can be found [here](#).

In response to USED feedback, and to more effectively achieve college and career readiness for all students, the resubmitted School Quality Improvement System includes the following changes and expanded detail:

Principle One – College and Career-Ready Expectations for All Students:

- Additional detail was added regarding each participating LEA's plan to implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), including proposed activities, timelines,

plans to expand access to college-level courses through CCSS, as well as assurance that the CCSS will address specific subgroups, such as English Learners and students with disabilities.

- Edits were made to clarify that students currently tested under the California Modified Assessment (CMA) will be tested with Common Core-aligned assessments beginning in 2014-15 (SBAC).

Principle Two – Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, and Support:

- The accountability calculation that is at the heart of the School Quality Improvement System is the School Quality Improvement Index. The School Quality Improvement Index will measure school performance on a scale of 1-100, and is to be fully implemented during the 2015-16 school year.
- At a minimum, results of annual assessments in grades 3 through 8 and high school will be included in the School Quality Improvement Index, rather than only at the highest grade level in a school.
- Though not requested or required by the USDOE, the minimum sample (“n”) size for inclusion of subgroup performance in the School Quality Improvement Index will be reduced to 20 students. Across the initial participating LEAs, schools will be held accountable for the performance of nearly 200,000 additional students, particularly in the African American, English Learner, students with disabilities and Hispanic/Latino subgroups.
- The School Quality Improvement Index will include points awarded across the following domains:
 - **Academic Domain (60%):** Key indicators in this domain include: performance in Math, ELA, and all other state-administered assessments; student growth as defined by the School Quality Improvement System; graduation rate (high school only), with points awarded for both the federally-defined 4-year cohort graduation rate, and 5- and 6-year rates; and persistence rates (middle schools only) defined as the percentage of graduated 8th graders that go on to enroll in 10th grade. Points awarded are divided between all students and subgroups as defined in the CA NCLB Workbook (major racial and ethnic groups, economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency).
 - **Social-Emotional Domain (20%):** Factors include: chronic absentee rate; suspension/expulsion rate; and non-cognitive factors for the “all students” group and all subgroups. Indicators will be determined and piloted during the 2013-14 school year.
 - **Culture-Climate Domain (20%):** Factors include: school performance on student/staff/parent surveys for the “all students” group and all subgroups; ELL re-designation; and Special Education identification for the purpose of reducing disproportionality. Indicators will be determined and piloted during the 2013-14 school year.

- In the School Quality Improvement System, Annual Measurable Objectives will be referred to as School Quality Improvement Goals. The School Quality Improvement Goal for all schools in Participating LEAs has been set at a school score of 90 percentage points on the School Quality Improvement Index or improvement of 4 percentage points within 4 years, with the 2014-2015 school year as a baseline. Schools that do not meet the interim School Quality Improvement Goal of improving 2 percentage points within 2 years will be required to enter into Communities of Practice focused on the area highlighted by the sub-components of the School Quality Improvement Index as most in need of improvement. After 4 years: (1) schools that did not meet either their 2 or 4 year School Quality Improvement Goal will be required to enter into a peer pairing, and (2) schools that did meet their 2 year School Quality Improvement Goal but not their 4 year School Quality Improvement Goal will be required to join a Community of Practice related to the areas of necessary improvement.
- Reward, priority, and focus schools have been identified in the School Quality Improvement System using USED guidelines for the immediate intervention and rewards in the 2013-2014 School Year and beyond. Focus and Priority schools will begin targeted interventions in 2013. All Focus and Priority Schools will conduct needs assessments in a format similar to the School Quality Review process. Priority Schools must implement the federally-defined seven turnaround principles for a minimum of three years. At the end of the 2014-2015 school year – and whenever new LEAs join the School Quality Improvement System – the list of Reward, Priority, and Focus Schools will be recalculated using school scores on the School Quality Improvement Index.

Principle Three – Supporting Effective Instruction and Leadership:

- Participating LEAs will develop a set of guidelines for local teacher and principal evaluation systems that demonstrate participating LEAs' support of the 1971 Stull Act and its 1999 amendment to incorporate student growth as a significant factor in teacher and principal evaluation systems. Participating LEAs may choose from two options of integrating student growth into evaluation systems:
 - **Option 1 - Student growth integrated through “trigger” system:** Misalignment between teacher/administrator professional practice and student performance will initiate dialogue to identify why a discrepancy between scores exists, followed by district action in the interest of professional development of the teacher, which could include, among other options, an addendum to the review of professional practice or a one-year improvement plan.
 - **Option 2 - Student growth as a defined percentage:** Student growth will represent a minimum of 20% of teacher and principal evaluation calculations.
- Student growth will be calculated using a CORE Board-developed growth model (to be developed by the 2014-2015 school year). However, if an LEA currently uses or seeks to use another high quality student growth model, the LEA will have the opportunity to apply to the CORE Board for the option to use an alternative method, provided the LEA provides a strong research-based rationale.



- CORE has developed a High-Quality Plan (page 145 of the School Quality Improvement System Application) to ensure that participating LEA's develop, adopt, pilot, and implement teacher and principal evaluation and support systems that are consistent with CORE guidelines by the 2015-16 school year.

Additional Considerations:

- While interventions and rewards for participating LEAs will be determined by the School Quality Improvement System, a school's progress against the current California NCLB Workbook and Academic Performance Index will still be made public by the California Department of Education (though no action must be taken by the LEA in response to NCLB indicators).
- An annual timeline for inclusion has been set. Beginning in the 2013-14 school year, LEAs interested in participating in the School Quality Improvement System must demonstrate stakeholder engagement and sign assurances and an MOU with CORE by the second Friday of April. Districts that would like to participate must carefully read and agree to all obligations outlined in the MOU, as well as document and report to CORE evidence of engaging teachers, their representatives, and other diverse stakeholder organizations in the School Quality Improvement System process. CORE will notify LEAs and USED if an LEA fails to meet MOU obligations; only USED can revoke the Waiver.

We will continue to provide updates about the development of the School Quality Improvement System and status of USED approval on our website: <http://COREdistricts.org>.

Thank you,

Rick Miller
Executive Director, CORE