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## Transformative Change in America's Lowest-Performing Schools

*"Stemming the tide of dropouts will require turning around our low-performing schools...so today, I am issuing a challenge to educators and lawmakers, parents and teachers alike – let us make turning around our schools our collective responsibility as Americans."*

President Barack Obama  
March 10, 2009

From the earliest days of this Administration, President Obama has made the commitment to turning around America's persistently lowest-performing schools a centerpiece of his cradle-to-career education agenda. This commitment is based on high expectations and accountability to focus on the goal of all students graduating from high school career- and college-ready. To reach this goal, the Obama Administration has dedicated significant resources help schools and districts close achievement gaps and help persistently low-achieving schools implement rigorous interventions.

Nearly 5 percent of all schools across the country are consistently low-performing. The Obama Administration is committed to support states' efforts to undertake the bold and difficult interventions necessary to turn these schools around, from chronic failure to college and career readiness for all students. The Obama Administration has made an unprecedented commitment of over \$4 billion to support rigorous models for change in persistently low-performing schools.

Funding is being awarded in response to tiers of priorities identified by each state.

- Funding has recently been awarded to nearly 1,000 schools across America.
- Approximately 40% of schools receiving awards are high schools, and 22% are middle schools.
- Communities have chosen the transformation model for nearly three-quarters of these schools, and the turnaround model for nearly one-fifth.

The President's FY 12 budget proposes \$600 million to continue the School Improvement Grants for districts nationwide to dramatically improve student achievement in their lowest-achieving schools. This would build on the \$4.1 billion in School Improvement Grant funding already available to States, districts, and schools for this transformative change.

## **FOCUSING ON THE BOTTOM FIVE PERCENT – ONE SCHOOL IN TWENTY**

To win the future, America must ensure that every child graduates from high school, prepared to succeed in college and in the workforce. But the United States cannot substantially boost graduation rates and promise a quality education to every child without ending the cycle of failure in its persistently lowest-performing schools – schools that have failed to make academic progress year after year. Approximately 5,000 schools linger in this chronically underperforming category, roughly 5 percent of the total, or one school in twenty. At the high school level, roughly 2,000 schools - about 12 percent of all high schools - produce nearly half of our nation's dropouts, and up to 75 percent of minority dropouts.

Turning these schools around is difficult work. In the past, we have too often tinkered, instead of treating these schools as educational emergencies. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, states and districts frequently chose the least intensive reform options for these failing schools. Research indicates that turning around a persistently low-performing school requires intensive effort and strong support from school districts and partner organizations. Because districts often chose to implement incremental change rather than transformational reform, few schools have succeeded in turning around and improving academic outcomes for their students.

## **SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANTS**

Under the newly revitalized School Improvement Grant (SIG) program, every state must identify the lowest-performing 5 percent of schools based on low performance and lack of improvement over time. In exchange for SIG funding, states and districts are required to implement one of four interventions for each school, chosen by the community, based on what is most appropriate for each school. If a school has begun implementation of one of these four models or components of one of these models within the last two years, it may apply to use SIG funds to continue to implement the full model.

- **Turnaround Model:** Replace the principal, screen existing school staff, and rehire no more than half the teachers; adopt a new governance structure; and improve the school through curriculum reform, professional development, extending learning time, and other strategies.
- **Restart Model:** Convert a school or close it and re-open it as a charter school or under an education management organization.
- **School Closure:** Close the school and send the students to higher-achieving schools in the district.
- **Transformation Model:** Replace the principal and improve the school through comprehensive curriculum reform, professional development, extending learning time, and engaging the community and families.