

June 26, 2017

TO THE ADMINISTRATOR ADDRESSED:

SUBJECT: LEAs with Schools Identified as Priority and/or Focus for school year 2017–2018

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) became law on December 10, 2015, replacing the No Child Left Behind Act on July 1, 2017. Under the provisions of Texas Education Code (TEC), Chapter 39, the state is required to provide interventions to improve identified low-performing schools. The ESSA statute increases the flexibility and decision-making authority afforded to states, encourages states and schools to be innovative, and holds states accountable for results. ESSA provides a unique opportunity for the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to chart a path for shifting key decisions related to school improvement, funding, and resources.

As the state prepares to implement the requirements under ESSA for school year 2018–2019, TEA will utilize school year 2017–2018 as a transition year. During the transition year, the agency will identify new priority and focus campuses, continue to develop an aligned system of state and federal identification and interventions, and provide technical assistance and resources. This letter provides information regarding identification, intervention requirements, and funding for priority and focus schools for school year 2017–2018.

Identification

Using data obtained from the [2016 Accountability Reports](#) released in August 2016, the agency has generated a list of priority and focus schools based on statewide reading and mathematics assessments and graduation rates. The list of priority and focus schools for school year 2017–2018 may be accessed at:

http://tea.texas.gov/Student_Testing_and_Accountability/Monitoring_and_Interventions/School_Improvement_and_Support/Priority,_Focus,_and_Reward_Schools/.

Utilizing a revised methodology, one or more campuses in your district may have been identified as a priority or focus school. This methodology will identify priority and focus schools for the 2017–2018 school year. The revised methodology uses portions of the methodology approved under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) conditional waiver with modifications that support the anticipated identification under ESSA for school year 2018–2019.

Priority schools include a combination of Texas Title I Priority Schools (TTIPS) from Cycles 3, 4 and 5, Title I schools with graduation rates less than 60%¹, and the lowest achieving Title I campuses based on state accountability identification of Improvement Required and reading/math safeguard performance in the seven federal student groups at the federal safeguard target of 87%.

Focus schools include ten percent of Title I schools not already identified as priority schools with the next lowest achieving campuses based on state accountability identification of Improvement

¹ The Graduation Rate is determined as the highest of the 2015 four-year and 2014 five-year completion rates. This calculation is consistent with the graduation rate analysis used under the state accountability system. A minimum size requirement of 10 students is used for the 4- and 5-year completion rate denominators. Campuses that do not meet the minimum size requirement will not be added to the priority list based on graduation rates.

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Required and reading/math safeguard performance in the seven federal student groups at the federal safeguard target of 87%.

Due in part to school year 2017–2018 being a transition year, there will not be an exit process for schools identified as priority or focus for school year 2017–2018. Information on exiting priority or focus status will be released in Fall of 2018 when new priority and focus schools are identified under ESSA for school year 2018-2019.

Intervention Requirements

Priority and focus schools are required to designate a District Coordinator of School Improvement (DCSI) and to begin and/or continue engaging in the Texas Accountability Intervention System (TAIS) continuous improvement framework that is aligned around the ESEA turnaround principles and the Critical Success Factors (CSFs). The district is responsible for assisting identified schools in all aspects of the school improvement process which include data analysis, needs assessment, and developing, implementing, and monitoring a plan for improvement. Additional information on reporting requirements, required trainings, and available supports and resources will be announced soon.

Funding

Section 1003 of ESSA authorizes state education agencies to issue funds to LEAs to address the needs of schools identified for improvement and thereby improve student performance. Identified priority non-TTIPS schools and focus non-TTIPS schools are eligible to receive supplemental funds through the Section 1003 School Improvement Priority/Focus grant application.

To receive Section 1003 funds, the district must have identified priority and focus schools for school year 2017–2018 and agree to comply with all intervention requirements. Priority or focus schools identified for school year 2017–2018 who are currently awarded and/or receiving TTIPS funding are not eligible to receive Section 1003 priority and focus school funding for school year 2017–2018. Any school applying to participate in any future TTIPS cycles and awarded future TTIPS funds will forfeit the use of Section 1003 School Improvement Priority/Focus funds on the TTIPS awarded campus.

Districts with identified priority and focus schools are eligible to receive supplemental funds through the Title I, Section 1003 School Improvement Priority/Focus 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 and include the number of students enrolled on the campus (SY2016-2017). The following are estimated amounts of grantee awards:

| Priority school | | Focus school | |
|------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Number of Students | Estimated Allocation | Number of Students | Estimated Allocation |
| 1-500 | \$65,000 | 1-500 | \$15,000 |
| 501-1000 | \$90,000 | 501-1000 | \$20,000 |
| 1001-2500 | \$140,000 | 1001-2500 | \$25,000 |
| 2501-3500 | \$190,000 | 2501-3500 | \$30,000 |
| 3501+ | \$240,000 | 3501+ | \$30,000 |

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These funds must only be used to support district and campus-level school improvement efforts that directly benefit priority and focus schools. Please note: These amounts are estimates only and may be reduced.

The 2017–2018 Texas Title I, Section 1003 School Improvement Priority/Focus school grant will be available to eligible districts via the eGrants system in September 2017. The grant period will run from October 1, 2017 to September 30, 2018. Pre-award costs are allowable as of the date of this letter and only for travel costs and registration fees incurred to attend required training. Please note, the application will include a limitation of 60% on salaries (class-object code 6100).

Technical Assistance to Priority and Focus Schools

The Division of School Improvement will provide information on technical assistance and resources in the near future. TEA staff will continue to partner with your local Education Service Center (ESC) Turnaround Teams and technical assistance providers who will support districts and schools in the TAIS continuous improvement framework and in meeting intervention requirements.

Contact Information

More information on the intervention requirements, support for priority and focus schools, plan submission processes, timelines, as well as available resources, will soon be communicated by staff at the Texas Education Agency and your regional ESC. The list of priority and focus schools, methodology, and frequently asked questions (FAQs) document can be viewed at http://tea.texas.gov/Student_Testing_and_Accountability/Monitoring_and_Interventions/School_Improvement_and_Support/Priority,_Focus,_and_Reward_Schools/.

For questions related to identification, funding, and interventions, please contact Lizette Ridgeway or Leticia Govea in the Division of School Improvement at (512) 463-5226 or Sldivision@tea.texas.gov.

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

Sincerely,

C. Lizette Ridgeway, Director
Division of School Improvement