



GRANT CORNER

Exert More Control Over Your Students' Achievement By 'Flexing' Your Monetary Muscles

Follow in the footsteps of the first school district to drive funds straight to its biggest problem areas.

Do you want to spend your federal funds in areas where they're really needed? Under NCLB's **Local-Flexibility Demonstration Program**, your school district can consolidate funds it already has for priority programs, such as after-school reading projects or extra teacher training.

Seattle Public Schools, the first school district in the country to receive "local-flexibility authority" under NCLB provision Title VI — Flexibility and Accountability, has already begun to see the results of its targeted local spending. **Eli's** experts let you in on how your school district can control its own destiny, too.

Get The Upper Hand In Your Funding Decisions

The Local-Flexibility Demonstration Program is not an actual grant. Rather, under the provision, school districts can consolidate federal funds and have a direct hand in where money is placed. Instead of being locked into spending for specific purposes, you can transfer funds for any purpose under NCLB, explains **Jane Nesbitt**, senior program associate at **Learning Innovations at WestEd** in Burlington, VT.

"To be able to take those dollars and put them where they needed to be was most beneficial for us and that's the key piece ... you can put the money where it needs to go and that's going to benefit the big picture," says **Sandra Scott**, principal of **Concord Elementary** in Seattle.

Close Achievement Gaps With Renewed Resources

The "big picture" for Concord was bleak prior to Local-Flex. The school was labeled "needs improvement," and it did not have the financial resources necessary to generate programs to narrow achievement gaps. But when the district received Local-Flex authority, Concord was able to attend to its most needy students. "Literacy Coaches worked to document necessary changes in the school's reading program. Plus, Building Base Coaches came into the school and helped staff articulate our curriculum and build upon the skills we had," explains Scott.

After a little over one year, the Seattle school district implemented several interventions to ensure student and staff improvement, including:

- expert coaching in reading and math;
- target support for bilingual students;

- mentors for beginning-need teachers and higher-need students;
- deployment of instructional technology master teachers; and
- enhanced student re-entry programs.

How To Start: Tailor Your Plan To Your Priorities

Local-Flex allows school districts to operate under a five-year plan for improvement and replaces yearly plans submitted to the DOE; so, before considering the program, carefully outline your areas for improvement.

Example: Seattle's plan focused on two major areas — developing teacher knowledge, skill and quality; and utilizing technology in the classroom as a means of instruction — with the goal of meeting state standards and boosting AYP. The district also wanted to be "more agile and timely in addressing and targeting urgent, emerging changes and student and staff needs" explains **Jay Iman**, grants manager, **Seattle Public Schools**.

Application Tip: Local-Flex grant readers are looking for applications that outline plans for decreasing achievement gaps and making improvement in the following categories:

- Baseline academic data
- Measurable educational goals
- Academic objectives
- Strategies to meet goals

Clearly defining your district's academic goals along with specific strategies to achieve those goals is a surefire way to receive approval for Local-Flex, promises Iman.

Resource: Does your district actively gauge student and staff performance, make data driven decisions or implement effective, culturally responsive strategies? If so, Local-Flex may be ideal. Find out how the program can work for you by taking the "Self-Assessment Survey" offered by the Department of Education at: www.neirtec.org/flexibility/example/selfassess.asp.

The Bottom Line: The benefits of Local-Flex offer districts the agency to structure and strengthen programs in a manner that offers more opportunities for improvement. By integrating consolidated funds, you can then utilize other federal funds not restricted under the Local-Flex umbrella.

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Everything You Need To Know About The Local-Flexibility Demonstration Program

Application available: Since March 18, 2004.

Application transmittal deadline: No specific application deadline. Applications are reviewed on a rolling basis until the Secretary enters into agreements with 80 local educational agencies (LEAs) — the maximum number authorized under this legislation.

Eligible applicants:

1. If an LEA has a Local-Flex agreement, its state educational agency (SEA) may seek State-Flex authority only if the LEA's Local-Flex agreement is incorporated as one of the proposed performance agreements in the SEA's State-Flex proposal.
2. In states where State-Flex agreements exist, four to ten LEAs per state — at least half must be high poverty LEAs — can enter into low-performance agreements directly with their SEAs. (In this case, LEAs cannot apply for Local-Flex authority).
3. The District of Columbia, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and outlying areas are not eligible.

Estimated range of awards: Up to 80 awards for LEAs, but no more than three in the same state. At this time, the Seattle School district is the only LEA to have entered into a Local-Flex agreement.

Purpose of program: To give LEAs greater flexibility in using federal funds to:

- improve and be accountable for students' academic achievement;
- improve teacher quality and subject matter mastery in reading, math and science;
- encourage educators, parents, administrators and schools to successfully address students' needs; and
- narrow achievement gaps between low- and high-achieving students.

Requirements: Applications must include: (1) a five-year plan that shows how the district would consolidate funds to improve student achievement and make continued academic progress as defined by the state; (2) provide details on how the district would narrow achievement gaps among students; (3) academic achievement data; (4) specific and measurable annual education goals that the district proposes to achieve under Local-Flex; and (5) strategies for meeting those goals.

For more information, contact: Jill Staton at 202-401-0039 or LocalFlex@ed.gov. For a comprehensive reading of the grant's purpose and requirements, visit: www.ed.gov/programs/localflex/app104.doc. □



Renew Your Teacher Quality Compliance In Light Of IDEA Reauthorization

*Special ed teachers must be
competent in all subject areas*

Where No Child Left Behind is vague, the reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has given teeth to special education teaching standards.

IDEA now makes it plain how NCLB's "highly qualified" teacher requirement comes into play, especially for those who teach multiple subject areas. *Translation:* Like your general education teachers, those who teach special education students must be highly qualified by the end of the 2005-2006 school year.

Require State Certificates And Proven Skills

First and foremost, "all special education teachers must have a special education certificate," reports **Alexa Marrero**, a spokesperson for Congress's **Education and Workforce Committee**, which drafted the final legislation.

However, within the category of special education teachers, IDEA distinguishes between those who teach to "alternate achievement standards" and those who teach multiple subjects.

Type 1: Educators who teach kids with the most significant cognitive disabilities, which is about 10 percent of all special education students, will either have to have an elementary certification or be able to demonstrate

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Bonus: Plus, if you apply for and receive Local-Flex funding, your district may put itself ahead of the game for future federal funding.

Editor's Note: Next month, the Northeast and Islands Regional Technology in Education Consortium is sponsoring a "Face-To-Face" meeting about Local-Flex in Seattle Public Schools. For more information on this event or the Local-Flex program, visit www.neirtec.org/flexibility or www.seattleschools.org. □