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NORTH DAKOTA TO RECEIVE \$9 MILLION TO TURN AROUND ITS PERSISTENTLY LOWEST
ACHIEVING SCHOOLS

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan today announced that North Dakota will receive \$9 million to turn around its persistently lowest achieving schools through the School Improvement Grants (SIG) program. These funds are part of the \$3.5 billion that will be made available to states this spring from money set aside in the 2009 budget and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

"When a school continues to perform in the bottom five percent of the state and isn't showing signs of growth or has graduation rates below 60 percent, something dramatic needs to be done," said Duncan. "Turning around our worst performing schools is difficult for everyone but it is critical that we show the courage to do the right thing by kids."

The \$9,019,005 made available to North Dakota is being distributed by formula to the state and will then be competed out by the state to school districts. In order for a school district to apply for these funds, it must have a state-identified "persistently lowest achieving" or a Tier III school -- a school that has failed to meet annual yearly progress for two years and is not identified as a persistently lowest achieving school.

However, Tier III schools can only receive funds once all of the state's persistently lowest achieving schools have received funds. North Dakota's application, which includes its list of persistently lowest achieving schools, as defined by the state, can be found here:
<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/summary/index.html>.

School districts will apply to the state for the funds this spring. When school districts apply, they must indicate that they will implement one of the following four models in their persistently lowest achieving schools:

- **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 other strategies.

Once schools receive SIG funds, they will be able to begin to spend them immediately to turn around schools this fall. States may apply to the Education Department for a waiver to allow them to spend funds over a three-year period. An additional \$545,633,000 has been provided for SIG in 2010 and will be awarded to states to fund additional schools in the 2011-12 school year. The department has also made a request for an additional \$900 million for the program in the 2011 budget.

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