

# SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANT (SIG) PRACTICE: LABOR-MANAGEMENT COLLABORATION PROCESS

COLLIER COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS ♦ COLLIER COUNTY, FLORIDA

Collier County Public Schools (Collier) faced two key challenges in carrying out planned strategies to turn around its lowest performing schools: (1) allocating the limited time available during the school day to support students through additional instruction and targeted interventions, and (2) rewarding the highest performing teachers—those who contribute most to student achievement growth—in its low-performing schools. In response, Collier sought to collaborate with the district’s teachers union to increase the operational flexibility of SIG schools to address these challenges.

## THE STRATEGY: District and Union Collaboration to Increase Operational Flexibility for Low-Performing Schools

Prompted by the designation of two SIG schools and an additional low-performing school, the district built on its existing collaborative relationship with the teachers union, the Collier County Education Association (CCEA). Together, they negotiated increases in the operational flexibility of these schools. As a result, in 2010, the district and CCEA established and implemented:

- Processes and procedures for developing memoranda of understanding (MOUs) to modify the district’s collective bargaining agreement on increased school time and performance pay for teachers
- Increased learning time for students
- Performance pay program for teachers

Financed by SIG funds, the increased time and teacher pay flexibilities became available in the 2010–11 school year.

**Processes and Procedures.** In Collier, the process of working with CCEA to develop MOUs took several months. The process began with a draft MOU, authored by the district, to align the request for increased flexibility with state and federal laws and regulations as well as with available funding. Both groups met several times to reconcile concerns in the original draft and produce a workable version of the draft MOUs to be shared widely. Following additional negotiations, Collier and CCEA leaders came to a shared agreement authorizing the flexibilities and annual review of these flexibilities in the MOUs to determine whether they should continue. The MOUs are bolstered by ongoing communication and annual reviews.

Collier County Public Schools
<b>Start of SIG Implementation:</b> 2010–11
<b>Locale:</b> Suburb, Midsize
<b>Enrollment:</b> 43,238
<b>Free or Reduced-Price Lunch:</b> 60%
<b>Racial/Ethnic Composition:</b> 44% Hispanic, 39% White, 12% Black, 2% Other, 1% Asian, 1% American Indian
<b>English Learners:</b> 13%
<b>Students With Disabilities:</b> 13%

Cohorts 1 and 2 SIG Schools in Collier County			
SIG Model	# of Schools	School Level	# of Schools
Transformation	2	Elementary	1
Turnaround	0	Middle	0
Restart	0	High	1
Closure	0	Other	0

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*Ongoing Communication.* Weekly meetings between the district’s executive director of human resources,<sup>1</sup> the CCEA executive director, and the CCEA member-rights advocate set the foundation for each MOU. Meeting agendas are set collaboratively by both sides. These meetings provide an opportunity for all parties to voice concerns, preview reforms, and avoid formal grievances before the MOU negotiations begin.

The district team drafted the MOUs and then held three meetings with CCEA members to build consensus. The first meeting focused on sharing information, identifying potential concerns, and discussing ways that those concerns might be addressed. In the second meeting, each side’s questions and concerns were addressed. By the third meeting, the two sides negotiated both MOUs.

*Annual Reviews.* Collier and the teachers union conduct an annual review of each MOU. This process allows both parties to revisit areas of the negotiation that are of concern and address these issues on a routine basis. As of the 2013–14 school year, these MOUs have been reviewed and approved each year since 2010–11.

**Increased Learning Time.** The increased-time MOU gave the district discretion over decisions about increased learning time in its two SIG schools and a third school identified by the state as low-performing.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the amount of time in a school day, the MOU addresses how teachers are compensated for their additional time. The district and CCEA agreed to modify how teachers’ hours are calculated. Because the number of increased hours at each school varies, CCEA wanted teachers’ time to be rounded up to the closest quarter hour when calculating compensation. The district agreed to this request and to other compensation adjustments.

Financed by a combination of SIG funds and state and district funds, the increased-time MOU has three key components:

- More time for students during the school day—not to exceed one hour per day
- A longer year for staff by adding staff professional learning days—not to exceed five additional days per year
- Flexibility for individual schools to decide how to add time for students and lengthen the year for staff

*More Time for Students.* For the 2012–13 school year, the increased-time MOU provided an additional 30 minutes per day, five days a week, open to all students in the district. Collier included all of its schools in the MOU to enable them to target any school that could benefit from the additional time. Although all Collier schools are included in the MOU, the district maintained discretion to identify a subset of the schools to participate in increased learning time. Collier negotiated for the MOU to extend to all schools and all students after determining that this strategy for supporting student achievement had been particularly effective in the past with the district’s targeted struggling students. Previously, schools that chose to use this strategy could structure the time as they saw fit. Under the MOU, the district standardized the length of time and days offered, requiring that this intervention be offered to all students in the selected schools. Both SIG schools, along with the state-identified low-performing school, are required to participate in this intervention. The memorandum also specifies that increased-time teachers receive a supplement to their salary equal to an additional 10 percent of their base salary, paid out through the regular payroll throughout the school year.<sup>3</sup>

*Professional Learning Days.* The increased-time MOU also provides additional professional learning time for teachers—five days for each SIG school—increasing the number of school days for teachers from 196 to 201. The MOU uses the teachers’ daily rate to calculate compensation. This professional learning time includes extra days prior to the start of the contract year and extra time during the school week. Principals work with instructional leaders from their school to determine the structure and expectations for the use of this time. The high school spreads the additional professional learning time throughout the school year, giving teachers regular collaborative planning time—in addition to weekly, hour-long, subject-area meetings.<sup>4</sup>

*Flexibility.* Although the district standardized the amount of increased learning time for all schools, district administrators acknowledge that some aspects will vary among schools because the needs of each school are unique. Specifically, the district anticipates some variation with regard to each SIG school’s improvement plan as well as how additional time is used in the school for students and adults. For example, SIG schools still must comply with the specific requirements of the SIG model related to increased learning time. In response, CCEA agreed to give the district increased discretion over increased-time decisions so that the SIG schools could comply with federal and state requirements. This flexibility allows the district to develop modifications to each school’s improvement plan—an important element for implementing SIG-related strategies upon receiving funds. Collier maintains approval over the start and end times for schools that extend their school days. The district also maintains approval of the dates for extending the school year for teachers to accommodate additional professional learning days. Oversight to the details of both of these efforts allows Collier to ensure that resources can accommodate the operational demands (such as the availability of buses to accommodate the extended schedule) of the increased time; the district also ensures that the schools are able to efficiently use available resources for professional learning days.

A major concern of CCEA was that teachers who currently work in the SIG schools may not be able to work a longer day, mainly due to scheduling constraints. To address this concern, both Collier and CCEA agreed that teachers may request a transfer to another school in the district if they have schedule limitations and are unable to change their schedules.

**Performance Pay.** For teachers in the district’s lowest performing schools, Collier and CCEA negotiated a performance pay program called Reward for Excellence in Academic Progress (REAP). The key components of REAP are:

- Whole-school rewards for improved student performance
- Minimum thresholds for student achievement increases in reading and mathematics

*Whole-School Rewards.* When CCEA had concerns about rewards targeting individual teachers for improving student performance, Collier agreed to move toward a collaborative approach to allocating performance pay. The district created a rewards program that distributes reward pay across a whole school’s staff when results show that the school has improved students’ academic performance. These collective rewards, based on performance, recognize that a whole-school effort is essential to raise student achievement. As a result of this negotiation, Collier included programs to support collective efficacy in the improvement plans of both SIG schools.<sup>5</sup>

*Minimum Thresholds.* For staff to receive performance rewards, overall schoolwide performance must improve at least 10 percent from the prior year in both English language arts and mathematics, based on the percentage of students who score at proficient or higher on the state assessments in English language arts and mathematics. When a school reaches this benchmark, every instructional staff member and administrator receives \$1,000; other staff receive \$250 each.

## **CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED**

Collier’s leaders recognized that there is no one-size-fits-all approach for turning around a school. In addition, CCEA’s willingness to make exceptions to the teachers’ contract in order to address the specific needs of individual schools is critical to Collier’s strategy.

Collier’s collaborative relationship with CCEA allows additional flexibility for low-performing schools in the district. To develop this collaborative relationship, Collier and CCEA set up multiple and frequent opportunities for formal and informal communication. For example, Collier’s executive director of human resources meets regularly with two representatives of the teachers union to address and resolve any issues that arise. When these meetings were first initiated in 2011–12, they were held every other week; in 2012–13, the district began holding these meetings weekly.

Setting aside time to identify potential problems and address them quickly has contributed to a strong relationship between the district and the teachers union.

## **CONCLUSION**

Collier County Public Schools works collaboratively with the district’s teachers union on the specific needs of its lowest performing schools through relationships forged through regular and frequent communication. Key components of developing and maintaining a working relationship between the district and the teachers union include frequent meetings between key personnel, routine and open discussions about concerns, and limitations on the MOU flexibility accommodations to a single school year. Together, these strategies allow Collier and CCEA to continually improve and adjust the operational flexibility accommodations to meet the needs of students and teachers.

## **SOURCES**

Data for the tables on page 1 are from the following sources: District at-a-glance data are from the NCES Common Core of Data (2011–12); and SIG information is from SIG-Awarded Schools (2010–11, 2011–12, 2012–13) located at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/index.html>.

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## **IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS**

<sup>1</sup>The superintendent created the position of executive director of human resources in 2011 to prioritize and foster a collaborative relationship between Collier and CCEA.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to SIG schools, the state identified the 100 lowest performing schools and requires districts to address these schools’ needs as well. In Collier, there are two SIG schools and one state-identified, low-performing school. These three schools are required to have operational flexibility for increasing time during the school day.

<sup>3</sup> SIG dollars funded this supplementary teacher pay at the SIG schools, and the school’s operational budget funded the extra time at the non-SIG school.

<sup>4</sup> Each week during the one day of high school collaborative planning time, teachers analyze data from common assessments, discuss the effectiveness of instruction, discuss response to intervention strategies, and monitor the progress of individual students to provide targeted interventions. In addition, teachers monitor the implementation of schoolwide initiatives.

<sup>5</sup> Collier emphasized programs in the SIG plan that impact the collective efficacy of a school and support the goals of the REAP performance pay program. These programs include professional learning communities, classroom observations, collaborative analysis of data for instructional decision making, response to intervention programs, professional development, and the school improvement process.