



**Office of School Improvement  
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) About Focus Schools**

**Q: *What is a focus school?***

**A:** For accountability purposes, Title I schools with one or more proficiency gap groups not meeting performance expectations in reading and mathematics will be considered for inclusion in the focus school category. Title I schools with one or more proficiency gap groups failing to meet the 95 percent participation rate in reading and/or mathematics will also be considered for inclusion in the focus school category.

- **Gap Group 1:** Students with Disabilities, English Language Learners (ELL), and Economically Disadvantaged (unduplicated)
- **Gap Group 2:** Black students, not of Hispanic origin, including Students with Disabilities, ELL, and Economically Disadvantaged Students
- **Gap Group 3:** Hispanic students, of one or more races, including Students with Disabilities, ELL, and Economically Disadvantaged Students

Ten percent of Virginia's Title I schools (72) are identified as focus schools.

**Q: *How long does a school identified as a focus school retain this status?***

**A:** Per the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA) Flexibility Waiver: To provide ample time to plan and implement strategies that will increase student achievement in underperforming proficiency gap groups, focus schools will be identified for a period of two years. School divisions with focus schools will begin the planning process to implement intervention strategies in September 2012. Implementation will begin no later than January 2013, and will continue through the conclusion of the following school year (2013-2014). Those schools that remain on the focus school list will be expected to continue to implement intervention strategies until they exit focus school status.

**Q: *Is the local educational agency (LEA) required to notify parents regarding a school's identification as a focus school?***

**A:** Yes. Under ESEA flexibility, parents will continue to receive information on their children's progress in meeting State academic achievement standards as well as their school's success in helping all students meet those standards. Parents will know whether their children's schools are succeeding, by being identified as reward schools, or falling short, by being identified as priority or focus schools. When schools fall short, parents can be assured that school leaders will adopt strategies focused on school needs and targeted towards the students most at risk.

**Q: *How does a school exit focus school status?***

A: A school will exit the focus status if the following criteria are met:

- The proficiency gap group(s) for which the school was originally identified meet(s) the AMOs described for proficiency gap groups for two consecutive years; and
- The school no longer falls into the bottom 10 percent of Title I schools for the subsequent school year based on the focus school methodology.

**Q: *My focus school has a new principal this year. Does the school need to develop a new improvement plan?***

A: School improvement planning is designed to be a continuous improvement process involving the school leadership team which includes the principal and a member of the division leadership team. Therefore, the school improvement plan will continue to be implemented during the next year, and will be revised as needed.

**Q: *How will new members of school/division leadership teams be trained to use the Indistar® Web-based planning tool?***

A: The Office of School Improvement (OSI) has produced a series of recorded webinars that may be used to train new team members. The recorded webinars are posted on the OSI Web page at: [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/school\\_improvement/indistar/index.shtml](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/school_improvement/indistar/index.shtml)

**Q: *What is the process for compensating the VDOE division liaison?***

A: Each LEA with focus schools will be assigned a division liaison to facilitate strategies for building local capacity for improvement. The division contact person will use the LEA's procedure to secure an approved purchase order for *University Instructors, Inc.* based on the following Title I set aside requirements:

- One focus school - \$20,000
- Two focus schools - \$30,000
- Three focus schools - \$40,000
- Four or more focus schools - \$50,000

**Q: *How often should VDOE division liaisons visit their assigned LEAs?***

A: The results of the needs assessment (i.e., Needs sensing interview for Cohort 2 divisions and the *ESEA Progress Monitoring Report for Focus Schools* for Cohort 1 divisions) determine the level of support provided by the VDOE division liaisons.

The possible levels of support include:

- **Minimal** - Division liaison visits the focus schools 1-2 days per month\*
- **Moderate** - Division liaison visits the focus schools 2-3 days per month\*
- **Intensive** - Division liaison visits the focus schools 3-4 days per month\*

\* In addition to attendance at the monthly division leadership team meeting

**Q: *What types of activities should VDOE division liaisons complete during visits to their assigned LEAs?***

A: VDOE division liaisons are expected to engage in activities including, but not limited to:

- Attending division leadership team monthly meetings;
- Observing classroom instruction, at least monthly, with members of the division leadership team and/or the building principal;
- Assisting the division leadership team with planning and providing professional development for principals and teachers;
- Assisting the division leadership with analyzing student performance data and using the information to make instructional decisions; and
- Sharing information gleaned from the division leadership support team (DLST) meetings conducted at The College of William and Mary.

**Q: *If a Title I school operating a targeted assistance program is identified as a focus school, how may the LEA use Title I funds to assist the school meet the ESEA Flexibility requirements?***

A The LEA may include a set-aside of no more than 20% of its Title I, Part A, allocation to fund interventions in schools identified as priority, focus, or Title I schools required to implement an improvement plan. The LEA may also identify other federal, state, or local funds as needed to implement interventions. Finally, an LEA may identify a combination of Title I, Part A, set-aside funds and other federal, state, or local funds for this purpose.

An LEA must continue to allocate a proportionate share of non-set-aside funds to targeted assistance schools so that they may continue implementing targeted assistance programs. In addition to implementing interventions with set-aside funds as required, the schools must also continue to provide supplemental assistance to eligible students in meeting the state's challenging academic achievement standards. The school selects "eligible children" by identifying those who are failing, or most at risk of failing, to meet the state's challenging student academic achievement standards.

**Q: *If I have questions regarding the requirements for focus schools, whom should I contact?***

A: The Office of School Improvement (OSI) is responsible for assisting local educational agencies associated with identified focus schools. Dr. Yvonne Holloman, associate director of the OSI, is the contact person and may be reached at (804) 225-2064 or [yvonne.holloman@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:yvonne.holloman@doe.virginia.gov) .