



**\$11 million in Federal Funds Awarded to Improve New Jersey's Persistently Underperforming Schools; Acting Commissioner Challenges Schools to Submit Aggressive Strategies for Change**

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**Trenton, NJ** – Acting Commissioner Chris Cerf today welcomed the award of \$11 million in federal funds to help fix New Jersey's most persistently underperforming schools, and he made clear that districts must propose aggressive strategies in their grant applications if they hope to secure these funds.

"School Improvement Grants provide an opportunity to end business as usual in the state's most troubled schools," acting Commissioner Cerf said. "To make the most of this opportunity, we will give preference to bold, innovative plans that promise to drastically alter the practices of these struggling schools."

These funds have been made available by the U.S. Department of Education under its School Improvement Grant (SIG) program. The program is designed to provide funds to persistently low-achieving schools based on measurements such as poor scores on assessments and graduation rates below 60 percent.

Persistently low-performing New Jersey schools are eligible to apply to the state for the funds. Competitive preference will be given to schools presenting the most aggressive strategies for change. The options include the turnaround model, which involves replacing the principal and at least half the teachers.

A district could also choose to convert a school into a charter school, allow another entity to operate the school, or close the school and transfer its students to higher-performing schools.

New Jersey's share of the money, announced Friday, is part of a \$550 million federal School Improvement Grant program. Schools were notified of their grant eligibility in January and were provided training and a draft application to begin their planning. Applications for SIG funds are due by April 26.