

# **Reforming Title I: Closing the Academic Achievement Gap for Disadvantaged Students**

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Policy Analysis Exercise  
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) aims to tackle the persistent challenge of the academic achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers by giving federal funding to school districts serving low-income students to improve educational opportunities for those students. However, despite 45 years of Title I investments and the sustained hard work of teachers, principals and school leaders, Title I has not accomplished its aspiration of closing the achievement gap and the U.S. public education system continues to fail to ensure that our most disadvantaged students have the opportunity and preparation to succeed in school and in life.

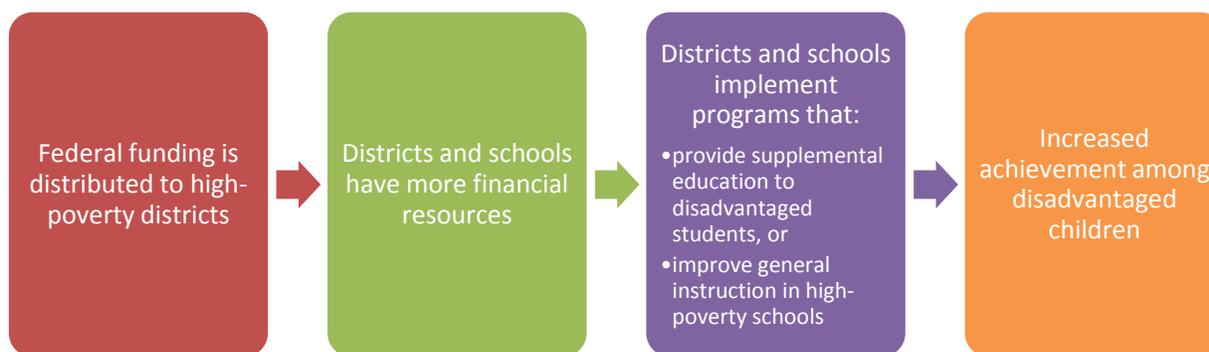
## Theory of Change

The next reauthorization of ESEA offers an opportunity to reform Title I to more effectively boost the achievement of disadvantaged students. As a first step, we need to identify potential reasons why the current Title I law is not achieving its desired impact by evaluating the theory of change underlying Title I. This theory of change posits that federal funding distributed to high-poverty school districts will provide districts and schools with increased financial resources to implement programs that provide supplemental education to disadvantaged children or improve general instruction in high-poverty schools. Such Title I investments will lead to increased achievement among disadvantaged children.

### Theory of Change for Title I

#### Assumptions

- School interventions can narrow the achievement gap between poor children and more affluent children, even absent interventions to affect poverty and other socio-economic factors
- Increased financial resources can enable schools to more effectively raise the achievement of poor students



An evaluation of this theory of change suggests several possible reasons why Title I has not accomplished its desired impact:

- **Inadequate federal funding and targeting:** Current Title I funding levels may simply not be sufficient to meet the substantial needs of schools serving disadvantaged students, and compensate for inadequate and inequitable local education funding.

- **Challenges in ensuring resources reach disadvantaged schools and students:** Evidence suggests that Title I funds distributed to districts do not necessarily result in schools having more financial resources with which to serve disadvantaged children. Title I funds may be supplanting state and local funding, effectively reducing the impact of Title I revenue.
- **Districts face difficulties in designing and implementing effective Title I programs:** At the district and school level, there is a lack of knowledge about what does and does not work to improve the achievement of disadvantaged students, and how to use Title I funds to implement effective programs. As a result, not enough Title I money supports high-impact, research-based programs and educational practices.
- **Measurement and evaluation of the impact of Title I programs is lacking:** Evaluation efforts to isolate the effects of particular Title I programs and practices are only beginning to emerge. Without quality evaluation methods, districts and schools lack a key tool to make data-driven changes to improve their Title I programs, and share effective practices with other districts.

## Promising Practices

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Case studies of thirteen school districts reveal examples of promising practices for spending Title I funds that are supported by strong research and proven to boost the achievement of disadvantaged students.

- **Expanding quality preschool opportunities:** Districts can use Title I funds to support preschool services for disadvantaged young children by increasing access to reach more children or raising the quality of existing programs.
- **Implementing early literacy interventions:** Title I can fund well-designed early interventions to address the reading challenges facing elementary school students. Intervening earlier can be more successful and cost-effective than providing remedial services in later years.
- **Engaging parents in a meaningful way:** Districts can use Title I parent involvement funds to develop strategies that more deeply engage parents their child’s education and address the particular challenges and needs of parents in that community.
- **Creating a culture of high expectations and college-readiness:** Title I funds can support efforts to cultivate a college-going culture that focuses on ensuring that all students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are held to high standards and provided with the support they need to succeed academically.
- **Extending quality instructional time:** Title I can fund efforts to extend the school day or the school year to provide additional instructional time to help disadvantaged student accelerate academically.
- **Maximizing Title I per pupil allocations:** Emerging research suggests that focusing available district Title I resources in ways that maximize the per pupil allocation provided to schools may facilitate more effective Title I programming by ensuring that funds are not diluted.

## Recommendations

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**Federal advocacy:** Children’s Defense Fund should work together with other stakeholders to advocate for the following changes in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

- **Improve and refocus the evaluation process on effective practices.**  
Evaluations required by ESEA should assess which uses of Title I funds and educational practices in Title I districts and schools are most effective at boosting the achievement of disadvantaged students. Results from such evaluations will help districts and schools improve their own Title I programs and inform federal Title I guidelines aimed at raising the quality and effectiveness of Title I programs across the nation.
- **Establish incentives or requirements to induce districts and schools to implement research-based programs and strategies.**  
ESEA should incorporate an incentive or requirement to encourage more districts and schools to implement research-based practices. Options include offering bonuses to districts and schools that faithfully implement educational practices that are based in strong research or requiring that districts spend a certain percentage of their Title I funds on research-based strategies.
- **Increase support, technical assistance and capacity building for schools and districts.**  
ESEA should provide increased support, technical assistance and capacity building to help districts and schools determine how to use their Title I funds to best serve disadvantaged students, and how to adapt research-based programs and strategies to the particular needs of their students and communities.
- **Create a more strategic balance between local autonomy and federal control that relies on greater accountability.**  
Recognizing both that districts and schools have a better understanding of the needs of their students and communities, and that the federal government has a role in creating the conditions for more effective Title I programs to flourish, the ESEA reauthorization should focus on strengthening “outcome” requirements that free schools to use multiple strategies to achieve realistic goals, instead of “process” requirements that tell districts how to use Title I funds or mandate certain school reform models.

**Local collaboration:** Children’s Defense Fund should, through its state offices covering 15 states, collaborate with local school districts to encourage them to use their Title I funds to implement promising practices and research-based programs to improve the achievement of disadvantaged students in those communities.

# INTRODUCTION

## Purpose and Overview

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One of the enduring challenges facing the U.S. public education system is how to effectively educate disadvantaged children to provide them with an equal opportunity to succeed in life that is not dependent on family background. Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 seeks to address that problem by providing funding to school districts serving low-income students to enable them to improve educational opportunities for those students. Despite a significant investment in Title I over the past 45 years, the challenges Title I was intended to solve persist, including low achievement among disadvantaged students and a continuing achievement gap between low-income students and their more affluent peers.

This policy analysis was commissioned by the Children’s Defense Fund, a national non-profit child advocacy organization, to explore how the upcoming reauthorization of Title I and ESEA could be improved to ensure that disadvantaged children succeed academically. By building on findings from case studies of thirteen school districts and interviews with education administrators at the state and regional level, this report seeks to answer the research question by analyzing potential reasons why Title I is not achieving its desired impact and identifying promising practices for district Title I programs.

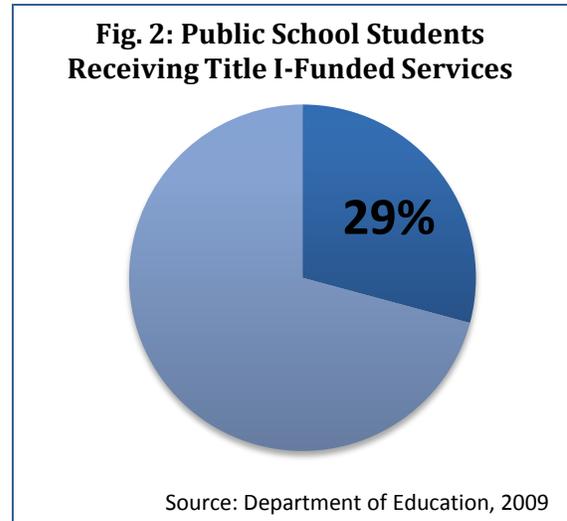
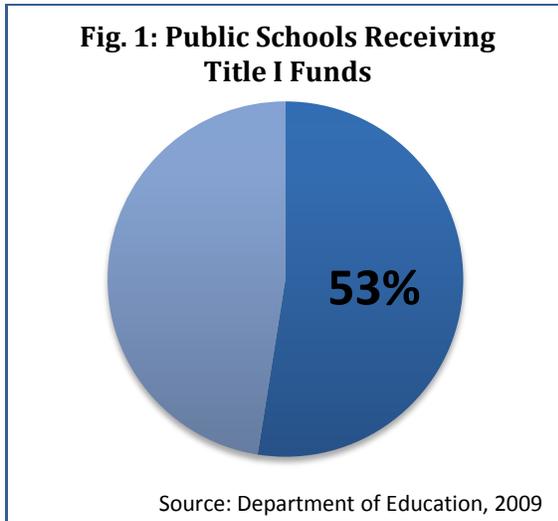
The report begins by providing context on the background of Title I, its history and evaluations of its impact. Then, the report presents a theory of change that lays out how Title I is intended to achieve its purpose of raising the achievement of disadvantaged students. The report evaluates each segment of the theory of change to assess whether the program is being implemented effectively, and identifies promising practices of strong, evidence-based Title I programming. The report concludes with recommendations about how Title I should be changed to better serve disadvantaged children, and how the Children’s Defense Fund might work with school districts to improve the effectiveness of Title I.

## Background on Title I

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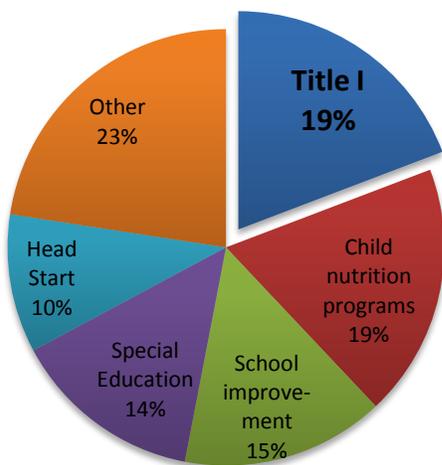
Title I of ESEA, passed in 1965 as part of President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty, represented the first significant federal involvement in public education. ESEA’s principal component, Title I Part A – referred to throughout this report as Title I – was intended to “provide financial assistance to local educational agencies serving areas with concentrations of children from low-income families to expand and improve their educational programs by various means... which contribute particularly to meeting the... needs of educationally deprived children.”<sup>1</sup> The federal funding is allocated to local educational agencies (LEAs) – school districts – based on student poverty. State educational agencies are in charge of distributing Title I funds to districts, monitoring district programs for compliance, providing technical assistance and administering special state programs. School districts are responsible for designing and running district-wide Title I programs, and allocating funding to schools to support educational services for disadvantaged children.

Approximately 53 percent of K-12 public schools in the U.S. received Title I funds in 2007-08 (Fig. 1), and 29 percent of K-12 public school students received Title I-funded services (Fig. 2).<sup>2</sup> The majority of Title I funds (76 percent) go to elementary schools, while middle schools receive 14 percent of Title I funds and high schools receive 10 percent of Title I funds.<sup>3</sup>



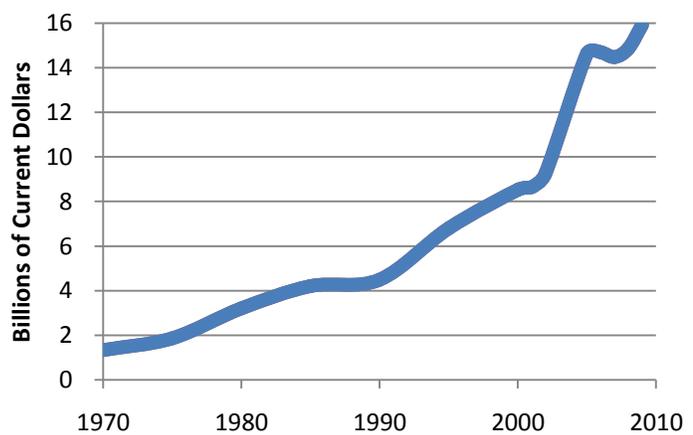
Title I appropriations totaled approximately \$14.5 billion in FY2010, making Title I the largest federal program supporting elementary and secondary education (Fig. 3).<sup>4</sup> Since Title I was enacted in 1965, funding for Title I has grown substantially (Fig. 4).<sup>5</sup>

**Fig. 3: Federal Spending on Elementary and Secondary Education in 2009**



Source: Digest of Education Statistics, 2009

**Fig. 4: Funding for Title I (1970-2009)**



Source: Digest of Education Statistics, 2009

## History of Title I

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Title I was originally conceived primarily as a vehicle for distributing federal funding to school districts based on the number of low-income children enrolled. The legislation did not specify the types of services that districts should provide to students, reflecting the view that additional funding coupled with local autonomy would improve educational opportunities and outcomes for disadvantaged children. In the absence of strict federal guidelines about how to use the Title I funds, many districts initially used the money as general aid for their standard expenditures. A 1969 study by the Washington Research Project, *Title I of ESEA: Is it Helping Poor Children?*, found that much of the funds were being used for general school purposes rather than providing educational services to low-income students.<sup>6</sup>

The report laid the way for increased federal guidelines and compliance measures designed to ensure that Title I funds were used to provide supplementary services to low-income children beyond what the children received with state and local education funding. In response to stricter rules about the use of Title I funds and a belief that disadvantaged children needed more individualized attention, many districts adopted “pull out” Title I programs, in which disadvantaged children were pulled out of the regular classroom for additional academic tutoring.

In 1981, President Ronald Reagan entered office with the goal of significantly reducing federal involvement in public education. Reagan’s attempts to convert Title I and other federal programs for disadvantaged children into block grants to the states largely failed, but the 1981 reauthorization of the ESEA, the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act, reflected a shift toward local control. The reauthorization aimed to “free the schools of unnecessary Federal supervision, direction, and control” and eliminated many of the federal requirements and regulations for Title I.<sup>7</sup>

Following the release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 and growing alarm about how well the U.S. public education system was educating children, concerns arose about the effectiveness of Title I. The 1988 ESEA amendments required states to define desired achievement outcomes for disadvantaged students in Title I schools. The amendments also encouraged high-poverty schools to develop “schoolwide” programs and use Title I funds to improve instruction for the entire school, rather than focusing the funds solely on individual students through the traditional “targeted assistance” programs.

In 1994, President Bill Clinton and Congress worked together to develop an ESEA reauthorization, the Improving America's Schools Act, that coupled higher academic standards with greater state and school district flexibility in the use of funds. The act also enabled more schools to run schoolwide programs, and gave the U.S. Secretary of Education the authority to waive certain federal rules and regulations for states and districts.

Under President George W. Bush, the 2001 ESEA reauthorization, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, included a number of significant measures intended to drive improvements in student achievement by holding states, districts, and schools more accountable for student progress. The bill requires states to develop assessments aligned with state academic standards and test students annually. The legislation set out the goal of bringing all students up to the “proficient” level on state standardized tests by the

2013-14 school year, and required schools must meet “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) targets toward that goal for both their student population as a whole and for certain demographic subgroups.

Under NCLB, schools receiving Title I funds that fail to meet AYP targets are placed in “program improvement” and face certain sanctions, including limitations on how they can use Title I funds and the potential for school restructuring if the school does not improve (see Appendix C for a full list of school program improvement consequences). Districts that fail to meet district-wide annual yearly progress are also placed in program improvement and face sanctions.

The next reauthorization of ESEA is expected to contain major reforms that incorporate some of the lessons learned during the nine years of NCLB implementation and seek to improve the effectiveness of Title I and other federal education programs.

## Evaluations of Title I

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While there has been a plethora of data about Title I gathered in the last 45 years and several congressionally mandated evaluations, it is challenging to definitively assess the effect of Title I and determine whether Title I is raising the achievement of disadvantaged children. The general consensus that has emerged from the evaluations is that the effects of Title I on the achievement of low-income students have been modest and have not lived up to the original aspirations of the program. One key challenge to evaluating Title I as a whole is that Title I is a funding mechanism rather than a clearly defined program. Title I programs are designed and operated at the district and school level and thus there are tens of thousands of different iterations of Title I, each of which may be more or less effective.

The central methodological difficulty that evaluators face is developing a way of estimating the impact of Title I, namely the difference between the achievement of students receiving Title I services and what the achievement of those *same* students would have been in the absence of Title I. A simple comparison of the test scores of Title I students to non-Title I students would be inaccurate because Title I students differ from non-Title I students in ways that affect their achievement; children from poor backgrounds tend to have low levels of achievement and those who go to schools with predominately poor student populations are doubly disadvantaged. We would expect that a low-income child, even one receiving Title I services, would perform lower than the average non-Title I student. Even a comparison of the test scores of poor Title I students to poor non-Title I students of the same income level would be biased because poor students who do not receive any Title I services are likely to be in relatively wealthy schools, which can impact student outcomes.

Researchers have used a variety of evaluation strategies in an attempt to overcome this methodological challenge, and the findings on the overall effectiveness of Title I range from modest positive effects to no effects (see Appendix D for a review of Title I evaluations). In combination with national data illustrating the persisting achievement gap between low-income and minority students and their more advantaged peers, the evaluation research on Title I suggests that despite significant investments in Title I over the past 45 years, the promise of Title I has not been achieved.

# METHODOLOGY

The core methodology used in this policy analysis is case studies of thirteen school districts. The districts were chosen to represent a diverse set of characteristics and settings, and include small, medium, and large districts in urban, suburban, and rural areas across five states – California, Colorado, Florida, Texas, and Washington. The districts range from moderate levels of poverty, with 37 percent of students eligible for free or reduced priced lunch, to very high levels of concentrated poverty, with almost 90 percent of students eligible for free or reduced priced lunch. The case studies included districts with a variety of different racial compositions, and ten of the thirteen districts have a majority non-white student population (see Appendix A for profiles of the case study districts).

## Characteristics of Case Study Districts

District	State	Setting	2010 Title I Allocation	District Enrollment	% Non-White	% Low-Income
Aurora Public Schools	CO	suburban	\$12,098,874	36,957	77%	61%
Bremerton School District	WA	suburban	\$1,704,161	4,833	41%	60%
Brevard Public Schools	FL	suburban	\$15,004,430	73,098	31%	37%
Denver Public Schools	CO	urban	\$41,328,632	77,255	75%	71%
Edinburg School District	TX	rural	\$16,974,019	31,910	98%	85%
Hidalgo School District	TX	rural	\$2,404,276	3,495	100%	89%
Northside School District	TX	urban	\$19,221,380	91,464	77%	50%
Oakland School District	CA	urban	\$22,936,530	46,616	93%	71%
Pasco County Schools	FL	suburban	\$15,633,164	66,784	27%	46%
Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Schools	TX	rural	\$16,350,241	31,223	99%	89%
Santa Rosa City Schools	TX	suburban	\$2,825,232	16,577	58%	45%
Weld Co. School District RE-1	CO	rural	\$378,068	1,784	67%	57%
Weld Co. School District RE-8	CO	rural	\$454,676	2,423	51%	62%

Each case study consisted of one or more interviews with district administrators – including assistant superintendents, district federal programs directors, program coordinators and principals – as well as a review of publically available data about district characteristics, academic performance, and Title I funding, and additional email exchanges with district officials. Some data about specific districts and quotes in the report have been disguised for reasons of confidentiality. The author also interviewed Title I administrators at the state and regional level (see Appendix B for a full list of interviews).

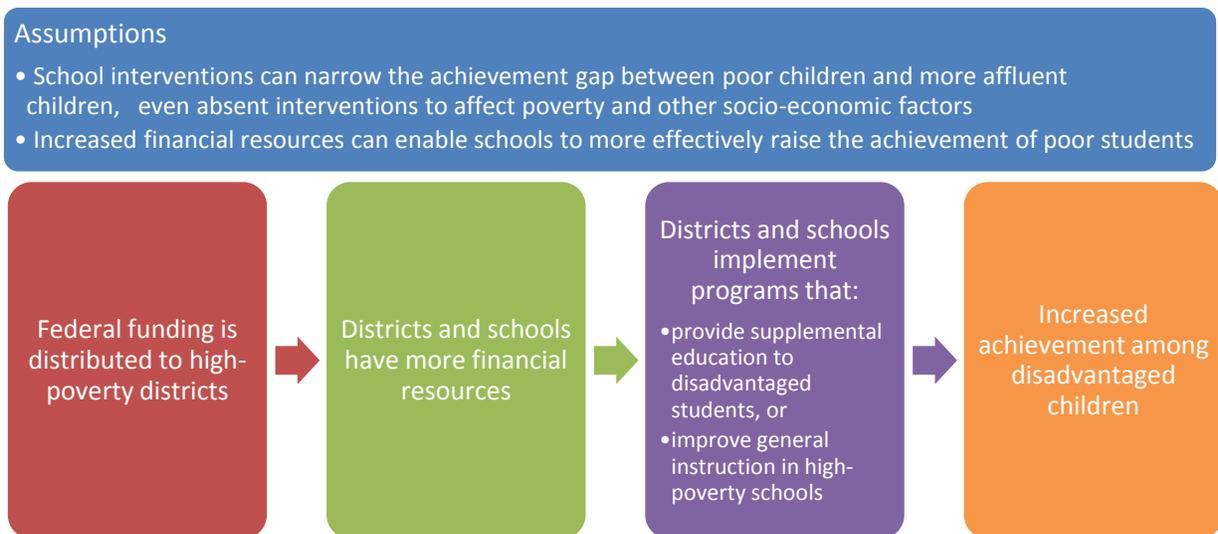
The case studies were supplemented with a content analysis of a subset of publically available district “consolidated applications for federal funds.” Consolidated applications include information about how districts plan to use their Title I funding and how districts allocate funds to schools, and descriptions of special district programs. Analyzed districts included twenty randomly selected districts in Florida, which makes all consolidated applications available online, and a selection of districts in Texas and California.

# THEORY OF CHANGE OF TITLE I

The academic achievement gap between low-income students and their more affluent peers receives considerable policy attention as one of the primary challenges facing the U.S. public education system. The achievement gap is generally traced to two distinct sets of causes: 1) **socio-economic factors** associated with living in poverty that impede student learning through a number of mechanisms – including poor health care, high mobility, community violence, lack of educational resources, low parental education, and gaps in early childhood development; and 2) **school-based factors** associated with the fact that low-income students are more likely to attend schools that lack the resources, quality teachers and leaders, and effective instructional practices to serve disadvantaged student populations. A variety of local, state and federal education initiatives target the school-related causes of the achievement gap through two different broad policy mechanisms: 1) increasing the **quantity of resources** and school inputs; or 2) directly improving the **quality of instruction** and leadership.

Title I is primarily focused on increasing the resources available to schools serving low-income students. The theory of change underlying Title I is that federal funding distributed to high-poverty school districts will provide districts and schools with increased financial resources to implement programs that provide supplemental education to disadvantaged children or improve general instruction in high-poverty schools. Such Title I investments are intended to boost academic achievement among disadvantaged children, and ultimately ensure that all children receive a high-quality education.

## Theory of Change for Title I



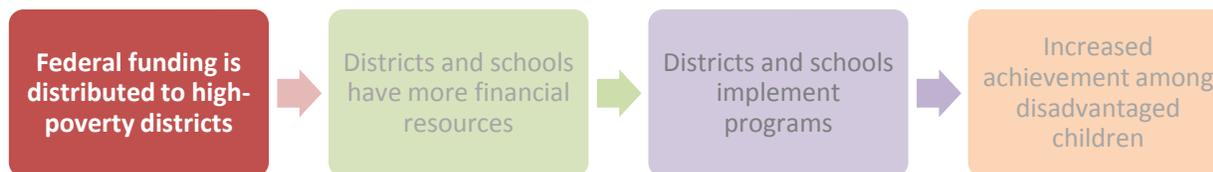
Given widespread evidence that the desired end goal of all children having access to a high-quality education is not being accomplished – particularly for the most disadvantaged children – policymakers and educators need to evaluate the theory of change to identify and address potential weaknesses and misalignments that are preventing the Title I program from achieving its desired impact. Potential misalignments exist all along the theory of change and include: lack of adequate federal funding for the

program; formulas that fail to target the funds to the most disadvantaged districts, schools and students; challenges in implementing Title I programming; and ineffective Title I programs at the district and school level.

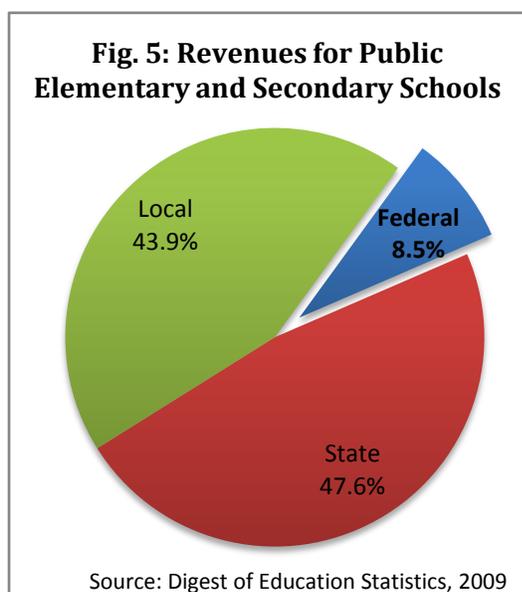
Other potential explanations for why Title I is not achieving its desired impact relate to the assumptions that form the basis for Title I's theory of change. First, the theory of change assumes that school interventions by themselves can narrow the achievement gap – but it may be that school interventions are simply ineffectual without complementary efforts to mitigate the socio-economic causes of the achievement gap. Second, Title I is a resource-focused strategy based on the idea that schools serving poor children simply need more resources to raise student achievement – but it could be that the quantity of resources is not the central barrier facing schools serving disadvantaged students and that efforts to change the institutional structure and incentives within the system are a more appropriate policy mechanism.

Analyzing and evaluating each segment of the Title I theory of change to identify potential misalignments, challenges and opportunities suggests reforms that could be made to Title I in the upcoming reauthorization of ESEA. This report briefly discusses the all four segments of the theory of change, and focuses on the program design and implementation of Title I by highlighting major challenges facing districts and identifying promising practices for using Title I funds effectively.

## Federal Funding Adequacy and Targeting



The first segment of the Title I theory of change represents the distribution of funding to districts. One possible explanation for the failure of Title I to achieve its desired impact is that the current funding levels may simply not be adequate to meet the substantial needs of schools serving disadvantaged students. Particularly in light of the heightened student achievement targets under NCLB, the costs of ensuring that all disadvantaged students meet those standards may be much higher than the amount of

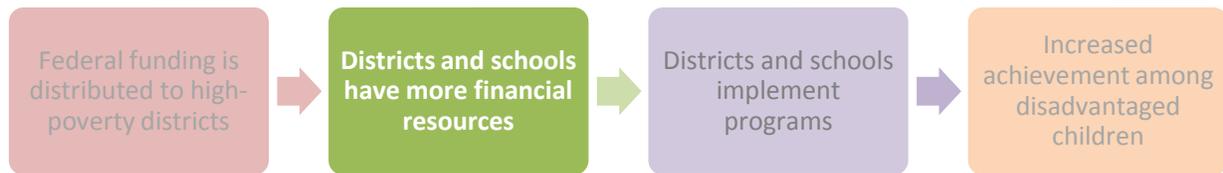


resources currently available to schools. State and national research evaluating the “adequacy” of school finance to ensure that all students receive a quality education concludes that current spending is significantly less than what is needed to provide a quality education, particularly for disadvantaged students.<sup>8</sup> As one district administrator points out, when the core general education system is not fully funded, “Title I has to bridge the gap between inadequate core education and the additional needs of disadvantaged students.” Furthermore, given that federal education spending – including Title I – constitutes a small share of total expenditures on public K-12 education (Fig. 5), Title I funding may not be enough to compensate for inequities in funding at the local level.<sup>9</sup>

Many of the district administrators interviewed for this report highlighted inadequate resources as the biggest challenge they faced in serving their disadvantaged students. Frequently, case study districts had a wish list of programs and projects aimed at boosting the achievement of their low-achieving students that they would want to implement if they had additional Title I resources. Common wish list items included: extending the school day, providing full-day preschool, hiring social workers to work with disadvantaged children and reducing class sizes.

Another potential misalignment is that Title I funds may not be effectively directed to the highest poverty districts and schools. A 2007 evaluation by the School Finance Redesign Project found substantial inequities in Title I funding across states and districts.<sup>10</sup> The most recent federal assessment of Title I found that the average allocation per low-income student in the high-poverty schools (\$558) was significantly lower than in low-poverty schools (\$763).<sup>11</sup> The research on funding equity has fueled efforts to reform the Title I formulas to better target funds to the most disadvantaged schools and students.

## Resource Challenges



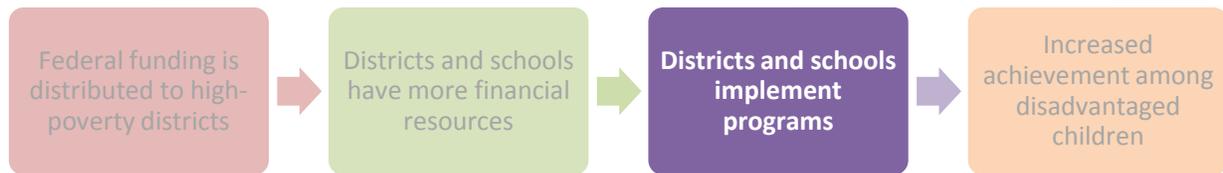
Evaluating the second segment of the theory of change reveals an important disconnect between theory and reality: federal funding distributed to high-poverty districts does not necessarily result in those districts having more financial resources with which to serve disadvantaged children. In recent years, there have been substantial education budget cuts at the state and local level, which means that all schools have fewer resources. Especially in light of recent cuts, several district leaders made it clear that their districts were just scraping by with Title I funds and the leaders were worried that they would not be able to meet their schools' basic needs without Title I funds. While Title I is meant to support only supplemental education, the reality is that in many districts during tight economic times Title I is funding basic school needs.

Evidence also suggests that state and local governments may be supplanting some of the Title I funds in schools, effectively reducing the impact of Title I revenue. National research shows that low-income schools and districts receiving Title I have little net increase in school spending.<sup>12</sup> A New York City study found that although schools received approximately \$500 per pupil in Title I funds, the actual increase in spending averaged only \$284 per pupil, largely because state compensatory education funding to those schools decreased substantially.<sup>13</sup>

Several of the case studies provide anecdotal evidence that Title I funds often supplant state and local resources. Districts officials note that many of their non-Title I schools, particularly those with relatively high levels of student poverty, have needs that are not being met and wish that they were able to provide low-income children at those schools with Title I services. Often, district officials explain that they find other resources to support those non-Title I schools or state compensatory funding is increased for schools that do not receive Title I funds.

The result of such funding shifts, particularly in times of stagnating or decreasing district and state revenue for education, is that Title I school districts tend to not receive as much district and state funding as they would have without Title I funding. Therefore, the difference in total school spending per pupil between Title I schools and non-Title I schools in a district is often much smaller than the amount the schools receive from Title I. Such actions taken by district and state officials are generally justified as an attempt to help serve more low-income or educationally deprived children, but the result may be to undermine the effectiveness of Title I funding in improving the achievement of low-income students in the highest poverty schools.

## Program Design and Implementation



The core segment of the theory of change is that districts and schools spend their Title I resources to implement programs that boost the achievement of disadvantaged students. In trying to figure out why Title I is not achieving its desired impact of closing the achievement gap, it is important to closely analyze how Title I programs are being designed and implemented to identify potential leverage points for improving the effectiveness of Title I. The complexity of Title I arises from the fact that programs are separately designed and implemented by more than 13,000 school districts and tens of thousands of schools (see Appendix E for an exploration of how districts use their Title I funds). As a result, there is no one uniform Title I program that can be analyzed and tweaked.

## Major Challenges

### Knowing and Doing What Works

One of the major challenges district and school administrators face in designing and implementing Title I programs is the lack of knowledge about what works to improve the achievement of disadvantaged students. Providing districts and schools with more resources will be ineffective unless those resources are used in ways that actually meet the needs of disadvantaged students and enable them to succeed academically. While there is a great need for additional research on what uses of Title I funds are most effective, a growing body of rigorous scientific evidence on the educational approaches and programs that are proven to increase achievement among disadvantaged students can provide a basis for how to invest Title I dollars. However, many districts and schools do not have adequate information about which programs actually work. As one district administrator explains, even districts that “try to follow the mandate of ‘research-based’ programs” face challenges in trying to distinguish which research is independent, legitimate and validated across multiple sites. Without such information, districts have been slow to adopt proven, evidence-based practices with their Title I funds, particularly when implementing such practices requires a substantial departure from what the district is currently doing.

### Knowing and Discontinuing What Does Not Work

A related challenge is the lack of information about what uses of Title I funds have little measurable impact on the achievement of disadvantaged students (see the “Measurement and Evaluation of Impact” section below for further exploration of this issue). While Title I spending on practices such as additional teachers and paraprofessionals to decrease class size or provide “pull out” support for struggling students have been common over the past several decades, remarkably little is known about whether such expenditures actually boost achievement among the students Title I intends to help. Even

when evidence about ineffective educational programs and practices is available, school systems can be slow to respond to phase out approaches that are not working.

One example of an ineffective practice is Supplemental Education Services (SES), a mandate created in 2001 by NCLB. Districts that have schools in year 2 of program improvement (meaning that they have missed AYP for three consecutive years) or beyond, must set aside 20 percent of their Title I funds for SES and transportation for school choice. SES provides free tutoring or extra academic help to students outside the regular school day. Parents choose from a list of state-approved SES providers, which may include private educational providers, public schools and non-profit organizations. In many districts, the vast majority of families with children eligible for SES services choose not to participate and SES benefits a small number of children. Often, the children who do take advantage of SES benefits are already performing well on assessment tests, meaning that SES fails to reach the students most in need of help.

There is considerable evidence that SES has not been effective in improving student achievement, especially considering the high cost of the services. The maximum per-child expenditure for SES differs by district based on a federal formula; the median is approximately \$1,300 per child.<sup>14</sup> Evaluations of SES programs, including those based on rigorous statistical methods, find that SES providers are of uneven quality and that SES participants, on the whole, make little or no achievement gains relative to non-SES participants.<sup>15</sup> Only recently have states, which have the responsibility of approving SES providers, started to look at evaluation and assessment data and not approve SES providers who are shown to be ineffective.

District, regional, and state administrators interviewed for this report also noted the ineffectiveness of SES. Administrators in several districts believed that bringing for-profit providers into the system meant that precious public education funding was profiting private companies and individuals without actually producing results for students. As the Title I director at one small rural district explained, some private SES providers hire district teachers, use district facilities and materials, and pocket the difference between the amount they receive from the district for SES and the amount they pay for the teacher and materials, which the Title I director quantified as representing a “profit skimming of 30 percent.”

Another challenge that SES presents is that districts must set aside a full 20 percent of their allocation for SES, even if the districts do not have many SES participants, and the process for reallocating unspent SES money to other purposes is burdensome. As an assistant superintendent for a small district explained, districts have to wait until the end of the year to reallocate, which means that the SES set aside impedes strategic planning.

District administrators believe that they could use the SES money much more effectively to directly provide supplemental education to students. In particular, district administrators wanted to spend the money on district-run after-school, before-school and summer programming that was aligned with school curriculum and targeted to a greater number of the most needy and lowest performing students.

## Promising Practices

The case studies revealed several examples of promising practices that are funded either fully or partially with Title I funds. Five of these promising practices have a strong research base demonstrating that the program, properly implemented, can successfully increase the achievement of disadvantaged students. One promising practice – maximizing per pupil allocations – has an emerging research base and would benefit from additional evaluation to confirm the effectiveness of the practice in boosting achievement. Examining these promising practices, and some of the challenges to implementing such practices, will suggest ways that ESEA might be amended to better encourage and enable districts and schools to implement research-based Title I strategies.

## Expanding Quality Preschool Opportunities

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Children from disadvantaged families tend to enter kindergarten already behind their peers from more advantaged backgrounds. This has prompted many districts to embrace expanded preschool opportunities as a strategy to help ensure that all children are prepared to enter kindergarten and able to excel academically in school. Districts and schools are allowed to use their Title I funds to support preschool services for children at-risk of not meeting academic standards. Some districts use Title I to supplement Head Start, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services-funded comprehensive early childhood program, or other state or district-funded preschool programs. Preschool-centered school reform strategies recommended by experts include: expanding preschool access to more disadvantaged children by creating new programs or growing existing programs, aligning preschool to third grade learning goals and standards, raising the quality of existing preschool programs, extending preschool program hours, enhancing professional development opportunities, and providing health, nutrition or other social services to students.<sup>16</sup>

### Research Base

A vast body of research, including rigorous randomized experiments, demonstrates the benefits of preschool opportunities. Preschool helps children develop the linguistic, cognitive, social and emotional building blocks for later development. Children who attend quality preschool do significantly better in K-12 than children who do not. Preschool participants score better on reading and math achievement tests, are less likely to be placed in special education and held back a grade, and are more likely to graduate high school.<sup>17</sup> Research shows that low-income, Latino and African American children show the greatest gains from quality preschool.<sup>18</sup> According to James Heckman, Nobel Laureate in Economics, early interventions for disadvantaged children produce higher returns than remedial programs to help teenagers and young adults catch up later on.<sup>19</sup>

### In Practice: Brevard Public Schools' Step FOURward

Brevard Public Schools in Florida uses Title I funds to provide full-day pre-kindergarten to children at nineteen Title I elementary schools through its Step FOURward program. Step FOURward supplements the state-funded Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) half-day program for all Florida four year olds, and offers a full-day, high-quality program with certified teachers. According to Mona Potter, Early Childhood/VPK Coordinator, Brevard Public Schools' philosophy is that early learning programs have the greatest impact on students and "the earlier we can work with disadvantaged students, the sooner we can start closing the [achievement] gap." In 2009-10, Brevard dedicated 14 percent of its Title I funds to Step FOURward and served more than 650 students. Results from the 2009 state kindergarten screenings reveal that students who participated in one of Brevard's Step FOURward preschools were more likely to be ready for kindergarten than the average student in Brevard County or in Florida. On the Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading (FAIR) inventory, 79 percent of Step FOURward participants had the early literacy skills that prepared them for kindergarten, compared to 65 percent statewide.<sup>20</sup> Ms. Potter also says that the district's preschool programs are getting more effective as time goes on; fourteen of the nineteen Step FOURward sites have shown gains over the last two years, according to VPK provider readiness rates.

Brevard Public Schools
Viera, FL
2010 Title I Allocation: \$15,004,430
73,098 students
69% White, 15% Black, 8% Hispanic, 14% Other
37% Low-Income

### In Practice: Bremerton's Early Learning Program

In 2001, Bremerton School District in Washington launched an Early Learning Program to create partnerships with community-based preschool providers to improve the quality of existing preschools rather than creating new ones. As Linda Sullivan-Dudzic, the district's director of special programs explains, the district goals are "to increase the number of children entering kindergarten with early literacy [and math] skills... and to decrease the number of children... with learning disabilities." Through these partnerships, the district is able to reach 840 three and four year olds each year. The district offers literacy coaches, research-driven curriculum materials, state assessment data and staff development opportunities to help preschool providers improve. The district also aligns what happens in preschool with what is taught in elementary school. As a result, 66 percent of the children entering kindergarten in Bremerton have early reading skills, such as recognizing letters and sounds or writing their name, compared to only 4 percent in 2001. The program has been recognized as a model, and the district received a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to help other Washington districts learn how to create early learning partnerships.

Bremerton School District
Bremerton, WA (outside Seattle)
Suburban
2010 Title I Allocation: \$1,704,161
4,833 students
59% White, 10% Asian, 9% Black, 11% Other
60% Low-Income

## Other Examples

Several other districts in Florida – including the Dade, Duval, and Okaloosa counties – also use Title I funds to supplement the state Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten program in order to extend the half-day preschool program to full-day, provide comprehensive services like developmental and health screenings, improve the transition between preschool and kindergarten or support parent involvement activities.

## Implementation Challenges

Despite the significant benefits of preschool, relatively few school districts use their Title I funds for preschool services. While there is a broad recognition of the preventative value of preschool, when districts have to balance scarce resources for competing priorities, they may decide that they need to focus Title I funding in ways that have an immediate impact on raising student test scores during grades 3-8 – the grades that count toward a school’s AYP – rather than the long-term strategy of investing in preschool-aged children. Other districts cite the substantial expense of opening and operating a new preschool program to explain why they cannot afford to invest in preschool. Those districts may be missing opportunities to leverage a smaller amount of Title I resources to build partnerships to improve quality in existing preschools, as Bremerton was able to do. Some district administrators do not know that it is permissible to use Title I money for preschool services, and other administrators are unaware of the considerable flexibility that Title I provides in allows funds to be used for a broad range of expenses related to preschool.

## Implementing Early Literacy Interventions

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Educators recognize that children’s early literacy difficulties tend to persist, or even intensify, in later years if they are not addressed. Based on a strong body of academic research, as well as the growing consensus that intervening early is more effective than providing remedial and special education services in later years, many districts and schools have dedicated Title I funds toward early literacy intervention. Effective programs tend to provide evidence-based, intensive instruction in small groups or one-on-one that is targeted to help students develop early literacy skills that research demonstrates are necessary for successful reading comprehension.

## Research Base

Evidence suggests that children who encounter reading difficulty early in school generally continue to struggle through their educational careers. Experts say that early intervention by the school is necessary to help put at-risk students on a path toward success. “Success in the early grades does not guarantee success through-out the school years... but failure in the early grades does virtually guarantee failure in later schooling,” according to an influential study on early school failure.<sup>21</sup> A strong body of research suggests that the vast majority of children’s reading problems are preventable if children receive additional support in the form of effective early literacy intervention.<sup>22</sup> Such interventions can

reduce special education placements and need for long-term remediation.<sup>23</sup> Rigorous research has been completed on a number of early literacy intervention programs, and the Department of Education’s What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) includes more than seven interventions that have proven positive effects.<sup>24</sup>

One of the most successful interventions is Reading Recovery, a not-for-profit intervention that provides daily, one-on-one tutoring by trained teachers to the lowest-achieving first-graders for 12-20 weeks. Based on five rigorous studies, the WWC found medium to large positive effects in alphabets and general reading achievement and potentially positive effects in fluency and comprehension.<sup>25</sup> In 2010, a consortium of universities received a \$45.6 billion Investing in Innovation (i3) grant from the Department of Education to scale up Reading Recovery to new schools and districts.

### In Practice: Denver Public Schools’ Reading Recovery Intervention

In 1995, Denver Public Schools (DPS) implemented the Reading Recovery (RR) intervention for the first grade students in Title I schools who are furthest below grade level. DPS also implemented Descubriendo la Lectura (DLL), a reconstruction of Reading Recovery for students learning to read in Spanish. The goals of these interventions are to dramatically reduce the number of first grade students who have extreme difficulty learning to read and write, and reduce the cost of these learners to the educational system. In 2010-11, DPS dedicated approximately \$1.8 million of its Title I funds to Reading Recovery, which supports about two-thirds of the program. According to Karin Cecere, a DLL/RR Teacher Leader, one the strongest components of the program is the intensive focus on “developing teacher expertise” and capacity. The district envisions that “the cadre of [RR/DLL] teachers will become the foundation of a set of highly trained reading specialists in the district.” The focus on professional development enables the district to help teachers learn how to use the Reading Recovery concepts so the program can be sustainable in future years even if additional funding is unavailable. Currently, 20 Title I schools offer the program, reaching approximately 440 students. District evaluations found that 71 percent of students who received a full series of Reading Recovery lessons were reading at or above first grade proficiency level.<sup>26</sup>

Denver Public Schools
Denver, CO
Urban
2010 Title I Allocation: \$41,328,632
77,255 students
54% Hispanic, 25% White, 16% Black, 5% Other
71% Low-Income

### Other Examples

Santa Rosa County (FL) Schools’ Title I-funded Early Intervention Program aims to improve literacy among early elementary school students (grades K-3) at all Title I schools. The research-based program provides the lowest achieving students with 90 minutes of intensive reading intervention per day in small groups.

## Implementation Challenges

One significant implementation challenge for districts considering early literacy intervention is determining what particular program elements are most effective. Despite the growing set of evaluations of different programs, many district administrators lack good information about what programs and practices are based in a rigorous evidence base. Even when a multitude of information about a potential program is available, including claims of effectiveness from educational publishers and program developers, it is difficult to distinguish which research is independent and valid. Districts also struggle with the decision of whether to implement an externally created intervention, like Reading Recovery, or a home-grown one. Another challenge is the cost of intensive early literacy intervention, particularly for programs that involve one-on-one tutoring using trained teachers.

## Engaging Parents in a Meaningful Way

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ESEA and federal guidance on Title I emphasize that parental involvement should be a key component of Title I programs. All districts are required to set aside 1 percent of their Title I funds for parental involvement activities, with the vast majority of that set aside to be spent at the school level.<sup>27</sup> In addition, districts are required to develop parent involvement policies and engage parents in decision-making around how to spend Title I funds. The most promising parent involvement programs go beyond occasional parent nights to develop strategies that more deeply engage parents in their child's education process and address the particular challenges and needs of parents in that community.

### The Research Base

Research consistently demonstrates that students with involved parents, regardless of family income or background, are more likely to: earn higher grades and test scores, enroll in higher-level programs, attend school regularly, have better social skills and behavior, and graduate from high school and go on to college.<sup>28</sup> The research suggests that parent involvement programs and school efforts to involve parents can be effective in engaging parents and make a difference for students. Schools with highly rated parent involvement programs made greater gains on state tests than schools with lower-rated programs.<sup>29</sup>

Joyce Epstein of Johns Hopkins University has developed a framework defining six types of parent involvement: 1) parenting (assisting families with parenting skills and setting home conditions that support children as students); 2) communicating (effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications); 3) volunteering (involving parents as volunteers to support students and school programs); 4) learning at home (involving families with their children in learning activities at home); 5) decision making (including parents as participants in school decisions and governance); and 6) collaborating with the community (coordinating resources and services from the community for families, students, and the school).<sup>30</sup> Title I parent involvement programs that include these core elements show particular promise for engaging and supporting parents so that they are better able to help their children succeed in school.

## In Practice: Pharr-San Juan-Alamo’s Parent Involvement Center

The Pharr-San Juan-Alamo (PSJA) school district in the Texas Rio Grande Valley has created a district-wide parent involvement center that is funded predominately by Title I. The center is aimed at increasing parents’ involvement in their children’s education, as well as helping parents learn skills that will enable them to achieve self-sufficiency. The program builds on Epstein’s parent involvement framework, and adds a

Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District
Pharr, TX (Rio Grande Valley)
Rural
2010 Title I Allocation: \$16,350,241
31,223 students
99% Hispanic, 1% White
89% Low-Income
42% English Learners

seventh element to address the particular challenges of the parents in the community, “family support,” which encompasses the center’s efforts to support the family through classes and workshops. As Belia Rodriguez, coordinator of the parental involvement program, explains, “Parents are one of the most important influences in positive child and youth development. Yet many families in our area lack the support they need. By providing opportunities to develop marketable skills and personal development, we support and strengthen the family.” At the Parent Involvement Center, parents can take free classes in a variety of skill areas, including English as a Second Language, GED, sewing, auto mechanics, computers, cooking, welding and Spanish literacy. Parent educators at each of the district’s 44 schools hold parenting workshops designed to address the specific needs of the school and the community.

### Other Examples

Aurora (CO) Public Schools partners with the Learning Source, nonprofit organization that provides educational opportunities for adults and families, to run seven successful school-based family literacy centers, funded through Title I. Parents attend free classes four days per week and commit to attending weekly parent workshops and volunteering in their child’s classroom at least once per week.

### Implementation Challenges

One key challenge districts and schools face in designing parent involvement programs is lack of knowledge about how to spend parent involvement funds effectively. While some districts like PSJA have used their Title I funds to develop well-designed parent engagement strategies, many districts have difficulty figuring out how to spend their 1 percent parent involvement set aside. Some district officials want to see the set aside eliminated so that they can have more flexibility in using their Title I funding to meet student needs they perceive to be more pressing. Several district administrators highlight the challenges in engaging “hard to reach” parents who are working multiple jobs or have child care commitments, as well as linguistic and cultural barriers. Many districts and schools spent their Title I parent involvement funds on parent nights and workshops that tended to be under-attended. A state Title I director points out districts need support and technical assistance on how to improve their parent involvement to better engage families. Belia Rodriguez of PSJA suggests two key elements that are central to effective parent involvement programs: “You have to believe in parental involvement to have an effective program and you have to understand the parent and community needs.”

## Creating a Culture of High Expectations and College-Readiness

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Many districts and schools serving low-income students recognize that a positive school culture and high expectations can have a significant impact on student behavior and academic performance, and are using Title I funds in a variety of ways to support efforts to cultivate a culture of high expectations. In particular, many districts are focused on refining their curriculum to focus on college-readiness and creating an expectation that all students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, will go to college. Some ways Title I funds can support a college-going or high expectation culture include: implementation of research-based curriculums or programs that emphasize college-readiness, hiring additional guidance counselors and professional development to help teachers and leaders develop strategies for maintaining high expectations.

### Research Base

Research highlights that a culture of high expectations shared by the principal, teachers, staff, and students is the “dominant theme” in enabling high-poverty schools to become high-performing.<sup>31</sup> The high expectations for students and staff should be rooted in tangible, measurable goals – what one study of high-performing, high-poverty schools calls “high expectations communicated in concrete ways.” One goal that has been adopted in many school reform efforts is the expectation that every student will go to, and be prepared for, college.<sup>32</sup> Evaluations find that school reform initiatives centered on college readiness can improve student achievement and increase enrollment in postsecondary education.<sup>33</sup> According to Pathways to College Network, an alliance of organizations committed to advancing college access and success for underserved students, key components of successful college readiness programs include: access to rigorous academic curriculum for all students; personalized learning environments for students; strong academic and social support for students; and alignment of curriculum between various levels of education.<sup>34</sup>

### In Practice: Northside’s AVID College Preparatory Program Expansion

Northside school district in San Antonio, Texas used Title I funds to support their college-preparatory Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, which was started in 2003. AVID is a research-based college preparatory program aimed at underserved students in the “academic middle” that has been implemented in 47 states, primarily at the high school and middle school level. The program

Northside Independent School District
San Antonio, TX
Urban/Suburban
2010 Title I Allocation: \$19,221,380
91,464 students
64% Hispanic, 23% White, 8% Black, 4% Other
50% Low-Income

focuses on helping students excel in a rigorous curriculum and teaching students organization, study and critical thinking skills. According to a study of high schools in Texas, schools with an AVID program saw an improvement in the areas of advanced course enrollment and high school graduation rates, compared to similar schools without an AVID program.<sup>35</sup> Recently, Northside used Title I funds to expand AVID to thirteen Title I elementary schools. The elementary school AVID program teaches study and time management skills, and immerses students in a college-going culture from an early age. The

program feeds into the middle and high school AVID program, creating a comprehensive pipeline for AVID students. According to the Northside Superintendent John Folks, “AVID students have higher attendance rates and outperform their peers on state standardized tests in every grade level.”<sup>36</sup>

## Other Examples

Hidalgo (TX) Independent School District implemented an Early College For All program that aims to ensure that *all* of its students – 89 percent of whom are economically disadvantaged – earn college credits before graduating from high school through a dual enrollment program with nearby colleges and universities. As a result, 90 percent of students graduate high school with college credits and the district’s high school completion rate in 2008 was almost 100 percent.<sup>37</sup>

## Implementation Challenges

The major challenge to using Title I funds to support a high expectations or college-going culture is the fact that money on its own is often insufficient to transform a school culture without strong leadership and buy-in from teachers, staff and students. Furthermore, there is a lack of understanding and expertise among district administrators on how to use money to support a college-going culture, and which college preparation programs and professional development opportunities are effective in facilitating real changes in culture that improve student achievement. A particular challenge for implementing college-readiness strategies is that many high-poverty middle and high schools do not receive any Title I money, due to district decisions to focus money on elementary school. High schools receive 10 percent of Title I funds, considerably less than their share of the nation’s low-income students (22 percent). Middle schools received 14 percent of Title I funds and enrolled 20 percent of all low-income students.<sup>38</sup>

## Extending Instructional Time

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Since Title I was first enacted, efforts to extend the school day or the school year have been a common use of Title I funds, with districts and schools using their Title I dollars for after-school programs and summer school. Both President Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan have also voiced their support for longer school days and school years as a key strategy to improve the achievement of disadvantaged students. The logic behind extended instructional time is that more time in school can provide more opportunities for student learning, particularly for students who are behind their peers academically and for disadvantaged students who have less opportunity for academically enriching activities outside of school. Promising elements within extended learning time initiatives include: close integration with the school curriculum and academic standards, well-trained instructors and targeting the students who can benefit most.

## Research Base

Advocates of extended learning time find support in research that reveals that children lose some of what they learn during the school year during the summer, and that such summer learning loss is most

drastic for low-income children, who lose the equivalent of one month of learning during their summer vacation.<sup>39</sup> Longer school days and school years are also a common characteristic among many of the best-documented successful school interventions, including district schools and charter schools that are making great strides to close the achievement gap between low-income students and their high-income peers.<sup>40</sup> However, research does suggest that merely increasing the quantity of school time may be ineffective and that attention needs to be focused on ensuring that the quality of any additional school time is improved. In particular, research suggest that the key leverage point between extended time efforts and improved student achievement is increasing the amount of “academic learning time,” the time in which students are actively engaged in learning.<sup>41</sup> For that reason, the most promising uses of Title I money in this area are focused on providing increased quality instructional time.

### **In Practice: Aurora Public Schools’ Fifth Block**

In 2008, Aurora Public Schools in Colorado implemented a program called “Fifth Block” that extends the school year by 23 days for approximately 4,000 students who administrators and teachers think could benefit most from additional learning time. Eligible students have shown academic growth in math and literacy during the school year but score below “proficient” on the state standardized tests. Fifth Block is a voluntary program that includes a full day of classes taught by teachers from that child’s school, with half the day dedicated to math and half the day dedicated to literacy. Transportation, school meals and nursing services are made available to students. Fifth Block is available at all schools and paid for through a mill levy passed by the community in 2008, and Title I funding is used to expand the program at the 24 Title I schools in order to serve more children. In all three years of Fifth Block, the overall attendance rate of participants has been above 90 percent.<sup>42</sup> District evaluations show that Fifth Block participants make more progress on the state standardized test than their non-participating peers.<sup>43</sup>

<b>Aurora Public Schools</b>
Aurora, CO (outside Denver)
Suburban
2010 Title I Allocation: \$12,098,874
36,957 students
51% Hispanic, 24% White, 20% Black, 5% Other
61% Low-Income

### **Other Examples**

Bremerton (WA) School District runs Title I-funded before school programs in all six Title I elementary schools. The daily program provides targeted small group instruction, as well as free breakfast and free bus transportation, to students who are in the greatest need of extra help. According to school assessment data, students who participate in the program perform much better in school.

### **Implementation Challenges**

Several of the case studies revealed challenges that districts face in implementing Title I-funded extended time efforts. While district administrators recognize that additional learning time needs to be of high quality, they have difficulty in actually implementing quality programming within their budgetary constraints. As a district Title I administrator explained, one challenge is developing programs that are

aligned with intentional learning goals, rather than simply “after school activity time.” A community program manager cited difficulty in “getting ‘highly effective teachers’ to staff extended day, after-school or summer programs [due to] teacher burn-out, desire for time off, and contract limitations.” According to one principal at a Title I school, creating longer school days or school years is difficult because teacher union contracts in his district “require that you pay an extra percentage of [teacher] salary which makes it incredibly cost prohibitive.” Another challenge is ensuring that students and families participate in extended day or summer programs, which often requires careful thinking about scheduling, content and transportation to create programs that are engaging for students and easy for students and parents to access.

## **Maximizing Title I Per Pupil Allocations**

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One of the most important choices that district administrators make in their use of Title I funds is how they allocate the money to schools, particularly how broadly they disperse the Title I funds (see Appendix F for an explanation of the district allocation process). Federal law includes several requirements about how Title I funds are allocated to schools – all schools with 75 percent of students in poverty must receive funds and, under most circumstances, only schools with more than 35 percent poverty may receive funds – but districts have important discretion in setting the poverty cut-off line, which determines how many schools are served by Title I and how much money they receive. A district can decide to allocate a greater amount of funding to only its highest poverty schools or to provide a smaller amount of funding to larger group of schools. As a result of those decisions, the per pupil allocation (PPA) given to Title I schools can vary widely, which makes a substantial difference in the amount of resources high-poverty schools have to provide services to low-income students.

An analysis of all 67 school districts in Florida revealed that district PPAs ranged from \$150 to \$1400.<sup>44</sup> Some districts only served schools with poverty levels above 75 percent, while others served elementary schools with at least 33 percent poverty; the median cut-off line was approximately 50 percent poverty. For a 600 student school with 75 percent poverty, the per pupil allocation could mean a difference of more than \$500,000. One high-poverty, urban case study district uses a poverty cut-off of 35 percent and provides Title I funds to 99 of its 109 schools, at a per pupil allocation of less than \$375. When the per pupil allocation is particularly low, the Title I money may be watered down and not have its intended effect of improving the achievement of disadvantaged students at any of the Title I schools.

### **Research Base**

The relationship between per pupil allocations and academic achievement is only beginning to attract the interest of researchers and evaluators. A not yet released evaluation of Title I conducted by the OMNI Institute for the Colorado Department of Education provides evidence that higher per pupil allocations are associated with greater program effectiveness in increasing student achievement.<sup>45</sup> Based on three years of student growth data for the lowest performing students in the state, the evaluation found that students in Title I schools with high per pupil allocations (greater than \$900) showed the greatest improvement on state standardized tests, compared with students in schools with

low or medium per pupil allocations. Students in schools with high per pupil allocations consistently had “median growth percentiles” above the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile, indicating that student achievement grew at a rate faster than the average Colorado student, which is notable given the particular disadvantages facing low-income Title I students.

### In Practice: Pasco County Schools

Pasco County Schools in Florida has made an effort to maintain high per pupil allocations for their schools, and has one of the highest per pupil allocations in the state. As district Title I supervisor Elena Garcia explains, the district “wanted to have funding at a level to make an impact” for students. In school year 2009-10, Pasco served 21 of its 81 schools, and chose to serve only elementary schools to reflect their focus on early

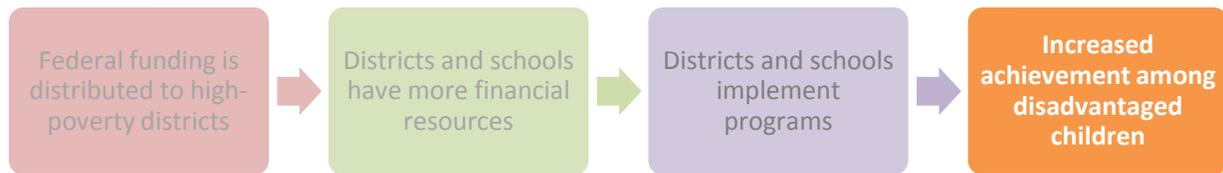
Pasco County Schools
Land O' Lakes, FL
Suburban
2010 Title I Allocation: \$15,633,164
66,994 students
73% White, 14% Hispanic, 13% Other (2009)
46% Low-Income (2009)

intervention.<sup>46</sup> Pasco sets a range of per pupil allocations, with higher poverty school receiving higher PPAs. The two highest poverty schools – each with more than 90 percent of student eligible for free or reduced price lunch – received a PPA of \$1378 in 2009-10, and all schools above 70 percent poverty received PPAs of \$985 or higher. As a result, the district’s Title I schools are outperforming non-Title I schools, according to Elena Garcia. Ms. Garcia attributes the district’s ability to implement high per pupil allocations to a collaborative decision-making process that prioritizes the needs of students over the needs of schools. However, the PPAs are likely to decrease significantly next year due to increases in poverty across the district as well as the addition of four middle schools and a high school that the district must serve under federal statute because they will have greater than 75 percent poverty.

### Implementation Challenges

District administrators interviewed for this report struggle with the decision of how broadly to disperse Title I funds, recognizing that more focused funding might be more effective in getting results but also wanting to reach as many disadvantaged students as possible. The administrators note that many of the middle poverty schools have high needs and a number of low-income students that need supplemental services as well. Political considerations also affect the decision, as programs that reach more schools tend to have broader political support. District officials note that even if they wished to serve only the highest poverty school, it would be very difficult to stop serving a school, especially because many schools have become dependent on Title I funds for basic educational needs in the midst of state and local education funding cuts. One large urban district is struggling with the decision of whether to cut off seventeen Title I schools next year. The Title I director for that district noted that it would be easier, and more politically feasible, to make a change to a higher per pupil allocation if it were required or suggested by federal or state regulation.

## Measurement and Evaluation of Impact



One of the core challenges in improving Title I is the difficulty of accurately measuring and evaluating whether the Title I programs implemented by districts and schools are actually producing increased achievement among disadvantaged children. While the annual standardized achievement tests mandated by NCLB have helped the nation’s schools progress toward better measurement, efforts to isolate the effects of particular programs and practices – including those funded by Title I – are only beginning to emerge. Many of the case study districts lacked any evaluative data about the impact of their Title I programs on disadvantaged students, and many of the evaluations that did exist were hampered by the challenge of figuring out the right “control group” – a group of non-participating students closely resembling the program participants – with which to compare program participants. Without a rigorous evaluation method, districts have difficulty determining whether differences in student outcomes are a result of a specific Title I program, or whether they merely reflect differences in the students who participated in the program.

Beyond simply providing information about how successful a Title I program is, improving program evaluation methods would provide extremely useful information to help district and school administrators make changes to their programs to improve their effectiveness. Accurate evaluations provide an important feedback mechanism that enables districts and schools to improve their own programs, and share effective practices with other schools and districts. However, districts and schools often lack the expertise to develop valid evaluations and, in light of significant state and local budget cuts, many are hesitant to divert money that could be going to direct services for students to measurement and evaluation because they do not realize the value of such efforts.

# MOVING FORWARD: HOW TO IMPROVE TITLE I

The dominant tension that underlies the debate about how to improve Title I to better serve disadvantaged children is the tension between local autonomy and federal control over Title I funds. Each pole of the continuum of local autonomy to federal control is associated with a distinct theory for how Title I could be structured to more effectively lead to improved achievement among disadvantaged children.

## Local Autonomy

Advocates of local autonomy point out that the needs of students, parents and communities differ dramatically across districts and schools. Since district and school administrators are much closer to the students, they have a better sense of their unique needs. If local administrators can use that deep understanding of student and community needs to develop Title I programs that meet those specific needs, then all students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, will be better served. In contrast, regulations, guidelines or programs developed at the federal level are presumed incapable of addressing the diverse needs of more than 13,000 school districts. Federal regulations can serve to tie the hands of local administrators and limit how they can use Title I funds. At the extreme, this theory calls for the federal government to provide financial resources and allow states, districts and schools complete autonomy over the use of those resources to meet the academic needs of disadvantaged students.

Most district and school officials interviewed for this report expressed a desire for more flexibility in making decisions about Title I funds, and many identified additional local autonomy as the single most important change they hoped to see in the reauthorization of ESEA. District and schools expressed that they did not want to be tied into using specific models of school reform. One grants director for a large suburban district said that No Child Left Behind has a “do it our way” approach that does not appreciate that districts have different needs and strategies. A regional education administrator criticized “one-size-fits-all solutions from the federal government.”

Supporters of local autonomy argue that federal regulations serve to inhibit innovation, and believe that more flexibility would enable districts to be more innovative in developing new ways of meeting the needs of their disadvantaged students. The regional education administrator points out that districts need to feel like they have some freedom in order to innovate, and that the “federal government cannot mandate innovation.” An assistant superintendent at a small rural district expressed that the federal regulations sometimes get in the way of innovative programs that the district would like to implement or fund with Title I.

## Federal Control

The theory behind increased federal control is the government can use regulations and oversight to compel districts and schools to implement Title I programs that apply the growing body of research on

what works to educate disadvantaged students. If the federal guidelines are well-designed, research-based and data-driven, increasing federal control may break the cycle of districts continuing to invest in programs and practices that do not work to improve student outcomes. Advocates of federal control point to the fact that districts and schools demonstrate, on average, a slow pace of improvement and very modest gains for disadvantaged students, despite significant Title I investments over the past 45 years. One state Title I administrator, in calling for more federal guidance, structure and accountability, explained that “we can't continue to let districts do what they've always done.”

In contrast to the majority of interviewed district administrators who described federal regulations as a barrier to district innovation, one director of state and federal programs for a large urban district countered that well-led districts know how to creatively use their different pools of money to pay for innovative programs. A state Title I director said, “There is more flexibility than people realize if [districts] really look at what kids need.” Some officials suggested that Title I money could be tied to districts implementing innovative practices, such as extended-day programs or preschool services.

One area for potential common ground between the two poles of local autonomy and federal control is the accountability structure. In general, district officials recognized and appreciated the need for increased accountability in exchange for district flexibility. As one district administrator who has been working with Title I for several decades explained, Title I during the Reagan presidency was very flexible but lacked strong accountability, and that undermined the effectiveness of the program. Several district administrators support the implementation of national standards as a means to increase school, district, and state accountability.

## Recommendations

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### Federal advocacy

Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) should work together with other stakeholders to advocate for the following changes in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

**1. Improve and refocus the evaluation process on effective practices.**

Data and evaluation have been included in ESEA and its reauthorizations since the law was first enacted, but evaluations, particularly those sponsored by the Department of Education, should be refocused on what uses of Title I funds and leadership and educational practices in Title I districts and schools are most effective at boosting the achievement of disadvantaged students. Results from such evaluations will help districts and schools improve their own Title I programs and inform decisions about how to structure federal and state Title I guidelines to raise the quality and effectiveness of Title I programs across the nation.

**2. Establish incentives or requirements to induce districts and schools to implement research-based programs and strategies.**

There is a growing body of research that demonstrates the educational programs and strategies, including the promising practices outlined in this report, that are proven to improve the achievement of disadvantaged students. Increasing the proportion of Title I funds that are invested in such research-based practices will improve the impact that the money has on disadvantaged children. While current ESEA law does require that districts use “methods and instructional strategies that are based on scientifically based research,” the reality on the ground is that many districts and schools are not fully utilizing research-based strategies.

The first step in shifting toward a more evidence-based Title I system is ensuring that district and school administrators have access to easy-to-understand compilations of relevant education research that help them distinguish between programs and practices that are based on rigorous scientific research that has been replicated in multiple sites and those that are based on dubious research from curriculum publishers and program developers. An expansion of the Department of Education’s What Works Clearinghouse, created in 2002 to identify educational interventions and programs that are based on research conducted with rigorous experimental methods, would be a promising initial stage.

The second step is incorporating into ESEA some type of incentive or requirement that will encourage more districts and schools to implement research-based practices. The Department of Education could offer financial bonuses to districts and schools that faithfully implement education practices that are based in strong research. Alternately, ESEA could require that districts spent a certain percentage of their Title I funds on research-based practices and include a description of the supporting research base in the district’s application for federal funds, and require states to monitor districts for compliance.

**3. Increase support, technical assistance and capacity building for schools and districts.**

Districts and schools need support in figuring out how to use their Title I funds to best serve disadvantaged students, and how to adapt research-based programs and strategies to the particular needs of their students and communities. ESEA could provide for increased support, technical assistance and capacity building by allowing state departments of education to withhold a larger amount of the state's Title I funds to administer technical assistance or by increasing funding for regional educational support centers to provide support. Additionally, ESEA should provide for additional opportunities districts to share best practices and discuss implementation challenges with other districts.

**4. Create a more strategic balance between local autonomy and federal control that relies on greater accountability.**

Recognizing both that local districts and schools have a better understanding of the needs of their students and communities and that the federal government has a role in creating the conditions for more effective Title I programs to flourish, the ESEA reauthorization should reflect a more strategic balance that ties local flexibility and federal oversight to greater district and school accountability to meet realistic goals to increase the achievement of disadvantaged students. Instead of increasing the "process" requirements of Title I that tell districts how to use funds or mandate certain school reform models, the federal government can increase "outcome" requirements that free schools to use multiple strategies to achieve the desired impact.

Congress and the Department of Education could consider developing a system that would balance stronger federal requirements with increased availability of waivers to allow districts to waive requirements if they had a good reason for doing so. Any additional federal requirements should be based on education research about the most effective practices for educating disadvantaged children or aimed to encourage local innovation and experimentation to address the specific needs of districts, schools, communities and students. Districts who want to waive any requirement would include an explanation and, as necessary, a detailed plan for how they will use the increased local flexibility to fulfill the goals of federal statute, in their consolidated application for federal funding, which is submitted to their state education office. States would then have the authority to approve those waivers. Waivers would have an appropriate accountability mechanism built in and the waiver would be subject to revocation if the district failed to show the desired results.

Potential accountability mechanisms would be based on the particular waiver and could include: showing growth in district, school or sub-group test scores; evaluation data that a specific Title I-funded program is effective; or evidence that needs for certain areas, like family engagement or professional development, were being met.

## **Local collaboration**

The Children’s Defense Fund should, through its state offices covering 15 states, collaborate with local school district to encourage them to use their Title I funds to implement promising practices to improve the achievement of disadvantaged students in those communities. CDF state offices can build on existing partnerships with school districts that have been developed during other work to increase the impact that Title I funds in those districts have on disadvantaged students by promoting research-based practices. Offices could share best practices across states, help connect districts with resources and incorporate other CDF efforts like Freedom Schools in to district Title I efforts. This state and local effort on improving Title I impact could be modeled off of CDF’s successful work on the Health Coverage for All Children Campaign.

## End Notes

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## Appendix A: Characteristics of Case Studies

Oakland Unified School District - California	
<b>Staff Interviewed</b>	Susana Ramirez , Director of State and Federal Programs Sheroyne Capdeville, Compliance Coordinator, State & Federal Compliance
<b>Setting</b>	Urban
<b>2010 Title I Allocation</b>	\$22,936,530
<b>District Enrollment</b>	46,616 (2010)
<b>Racial Demographics</b>	39.3% Hispanic, 32.5% Black, 15.0% Asian, 7.4% White, 5.4% Other, 0.4% American Indian (2010)
<b>Low-Income</b>	70.7% Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch (2010)
<b>English Learners</b>	32.8% (2010)
<b>Achievement Results</b>	<u>Academic Performance Index (API) – Scale from 200 to 1000</u> 2010 Growth API: 719 2010 Growth API – Economically Disadvantaged: 690 2009 Base API: 693 2009 Base API – Economically Disadvantaged: 666 <u>Percent Proficient or Above on State Standardized Test (STAR)</u> 2010 Overall English/Language Arts: 45.3% 2010 Economically Disadvantaged English/Language Arts: 38.3% 2010 Overall Math: 52.1% 2010 Economically Disadvantaged Math: 46.2%
Santa Rosa City Schools - California	
<b>Staff Interviewed</b>	Gregory A. Espinoza, Assistant Superintendent
<b>Setting</b>	Suburban
<b>2010 Title I Allocation</b>	\$2,825,232
<b>District Enrollment</b>	16,577 (2010)
<b>Racial Demographics</b>	43.3% Hispanic, 42.2% White, 6.4% Asian, 2.9% Black, 1.4% American Indian, 3.8% Other (2010)
<b>Low-Income</b>	44.9% Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch (2010)
<b>English Learners</b>	25.7% (2010)
<b>Achievement Results</b>	<u>Academic Performance Index (API) – Scale from 200 to 1000</u> 2010 Growth API: 770 2010 Growth API – Economically Disadvantaged: 686 2009 Base API: 752 2009 Base API – Economically Disadvantaged: 664 <u>Percent Proficient or Above on State Standardized Test (STAR)</u> 2010 Overall English/Language Arts: 58.4% 2010 Economically Disadvantaged English/Language Arts: 38.3% 2010 Overall Math: 60.8% 2010 Economically Disadvantaged Math: 46.1%

### Aurora Public Schools (Adams-Arapahoe 28J) - Colorado

<b>Staff Interviewed</b>	Paul Coleman, Director of Grants & Partnership Development
<b>Setting</b>	Suburban
<b>2010 Title I Allocation</b>	\$12,098,874
<b>District Enrollment</b>	36,957 (2009)
<b>Racial Demographics</b>	50.8% Hispanic, 23.5% White, 20.2% Black, 4.7% Asian, 0.9% American Indian (2009)
<b>Low Income</b>	61.3% Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch (2009)
<b>Achievement Results</b>	<u>District Performance Framework Score in 2010 – Out of 100%</u> Academic Achievement: 31.3% (does not meet target) Academic Growth: 58.3% (approaching target) Academic Growth Gaps: 55.0% (approaching target) Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness: 33.3% (does not meet target) Total: 45.1% <u>Graduation Rate</u> Graduation Rate (2010): 45.5%

### Denver Public Schools - Colorado

<b>Staff Interviewed</b>	Veronica Bradsby, Title I Director Tenley Stillwell, Community Programs Manager Karin Cecere, Reading Recovery Teacher Leader
<b>Setting</b>	Urban
<b>2010 Title I Allocation</b>	\$41,328,632
<b>District Enrollment</b>	77,255 (2009)
<b>Racial Demographics</b>	54.4% Hispanic, 24.9% White, 16.1% Black, 3.5% Asian, 1.1% American Indian (2009)
<b>Low Income</b>	70.5% Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch (2009)
<b>Achievement Results</b>	<u>District Performance Framework Score in 2010 – Out of 100%</u> Academic Achievement: 31.3% (does not meet target) Academic Growth: 58.3% (approaching target) Academic Growth Gaps: 57.2% (approaching target) Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness: 41.7% (approaching target) Total: 48.3% <u>Graduation Rate</u> Graduation Rate (2010): 51.8%

### Weld County School District RE-1 - Colorado

<b>Staff Interviewed</b>	Ann Lenart, State/Federal Programs
<b>Setting</b>	Rural
<b>2010 Title I Allocation</b>	\$378,068
<b>District Enrollment</b>	1,784 (2009)
<b>Racial Demographics</b>	64.6% Hispanic, 33.4% White, 0.9% Asian, 0.8% Black, 0.3% American Indian (2009)
<b>Low Income</b>	56.5% Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch (2009)
<b>Achievement Results</b>	<u>District Performance Framework Score in 2010 – Out of 100%</u> Academic Achievement: 52.1% (approaching target) Academic Growth: 52.8% (approaching target) Academic Growth Gaps: 48.3% (approaching target) Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness: 58.3% (approaching target) Total: 53.9% <u>Graduation Rate</u> Graduation Rate (2010): 79.1%

### Weld School District Re-8 - Colorado

<b>Staff Interviewed</b>	Scott Graham, Director of State and Federal Programs and Data Services Carrie Duits, Assistant Superintendent of Student Achievement
<b>Setting</b>	Rural
<b>2010 Title I Allocation</b>	\$454,676
<b>District Enrollment</b>	2,423 (2009)
<b>Racial Demographics</b>	49.2% Hispanic, 48.6% White, 1.0% Asian, 0.7% American Indian, 0.5% Black (2009)
<b>Low Income</b>	62.4% Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch (2009)
<b>Achievement Results</b>	<u>District Performance Framework Score in 2010 – Out of 100%</u> Academic Achievement: 33.3% (does not meet target) Academic Growth: 69.4% (meets target) Academic Growth Gaps: 60.3% (approaching target) Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness: 41.7% (approaching target) Total: 52.9% <u>Graduation Rate</u> Graduation Rate (2010): 69.2%

### Brevard Public Schools - Florida

<b>Staff Interviewed</b>	Mona Potter, Early Childhood/VPK Coordinator
<b>Setting</b>	suburban
<b>2010 Title I Allocation</b>	\$15,004,430
<b>District Enrollment</b>	73,098 (2009)
<b>Racial Demographics</b>	69.1% White, 14.6% Black, 8.4% Hispanic, 5.6% Multiracial, 2.1% Asian, 0.3% American Indian (2009)
<b>Low Income</b>	37.3% Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch (2009)
<b>Achievement Results</b>	District Grade (2009): A Graduation Rate (2010): 95.3%

### Pasco County Schools - Florida

<b>Staff Interviewed</b>	Elena Garcia, Supervisor of ESEA Title I
<b>Setting</b>	suburban
<b>2010 Title I Allocation</b>	\$15,633,164
<b>District Enrollment</b>	66,784 (2009)
<b>Racial Demographics</b>	73.2% White, 13.9% Hispanic, 5.7% Black, 4.6% Multiracial, 2.3% Asian, 0.3% American Indian (2009)
<b>Low Income</b>	46.0% Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch (2009)
<b>Achievement Results</b>	District Grade (2009): A Graduation Rate (2010): 83.5%

### Edinburg Consolidated Independent School District - Texas

<b>Staff Interviewed</b>	Dr. Raul D'Lorm, Principal, Avila Elementary School
<b>Setting</b>	Rural
<b>2010 Title I Allocation</b>	\$16,974,019
<b>District Enrollment</b>	31,910 (2010)
<b>Racial Demographics</b>	97% Hispanic, 2% White, 1% Other, 0% Black (2010)
<b>Low-Income</b>	85% Economically Disadvantaged (2010)
<b>English Learners</b>	31% Limited English Proficient (2010)
<b>Achievement Results</b>	<u>Percent Proficient or Above on State Standardized Test (TAKS)</u> Students Passing All Subject Tests (2010): 75% Economically Disadvantaged Students Passing All Subject Tests (2010): 73% <u>Other Student Outcomes</u> Attendance Rate (2009): 96% Graduation Rate (2009): 79%

### Hidalgo Independent School District - Texas

<b>Staff Interviewed</b>	Gloria Cepeda, Executive Director, Office of Teaching & Learning
<b>Setting</b>	Rural
<b>2010 Title I Allocation</b>	\$2,404,276
<b>District Enrollment</b>	3,495 (2010)
<b>Racial Demographics</b>	99% Hispanic, 0% Black, 0% White, 0% Other (2010)
<b>Low-Income</b>	89% Economically Disadvantaged (2010)
<b>English Learners</b>	59% Limited English Proficient (2010)
<b>Achievement Results</b>	<u>Percent Proficient or Above on State Standardized Test (TAKS)</u> Students Passing All Subject Tests (2010): 67% Economically Disadvantaged Students Passing All Subject Tests (2010): 66% <u>Other Student Outcomes</u> Attendance Rate (2009): 96% Graduation Rate (2009): 87%

### Northside Independent School District - Texas

<b>Staff Interviewed</b>	Brenda Faz-Villarreal, Coordinator, Even Start Family Literacy Program Rosemary Perez, Director, State and Federal Programs
<b>Setting</b>	Urban/Suburban
<b>2010 Title I Allocation</b>	\$19,221,380
<b>District Enrollment</b>	91,464 (2010)
<b>Racial Demographics</b>	64% Hispanic, 23% White, 8% Black, 4% Other (2010)
<b>Low-Income</b>	50% Economically Disadvantaged (2010)
<b>English Learners</b>	7% Limited English Proficient (2010)
<b>Achievement Results</b>	<u>Percent Proficient or Above on State Standardized Test (TAKS)</u> Students Passing All Subject Tests (2010): 81% Economically Disadvantaged Students Passing All Subject Tests (2010): 74% <u>Other Student Outcomes</u> Attendance Rate (2009): 95% Graduation Rate (2009): 85%

### Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District - Texas

<b>Staff Interviewed</b>	Belia Rodriguez, Coordinator, Parental Involvement Program
<b>Setting</b>	Rural
<b>2010 Title I Allocation</b>	\$16,350,241
<b>District Enrollment</b>	31,223 (2010)
<b>Racial Demographics</b>	99% Hispanic, 1% White, 0% Black, 0% Other (2010)
<b>Low-Income</b>	89% Economically Disadvantaged (2010)
<b>English Learners</b>	42% Limited English Proficient (2010)
<b>Achievement Results</b>	<u>Percent Proficient or Above on State Standardized Test (TAKS)</u> Students Passing All Subject Tests (2010): 66% Economically Disadvantaged Students Passing All Subject Tests (2010): 64% <u>Other Student Outcomes</u> Attendance Rate (2009): 96% Graduation Rate (2009): 78%

### Bremerton School District - Bremerton, Washington

<b>Staff Interviewed</b>	Jill Carlson, Principal, Crownhill Elementary School Linda Sullivan-Dudzic, Director of Special Programs
<b>Setting</b>	Suburban
<b>2010 Title I Allocation</b>	\$1,704,161
<b>District Enrollment</b>	4,833 (2010)
<b>Racial Demographics</b>	58.8% White, 10.0% Asian, 8.7% Black, 7.0% Hispanic, 15.5% Other (2010)
<b>Low-Income</b>	59.8% Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch (2010)
<b>English Learners</b>	2.6% Limited English Proficient (2010)
<b>Achievement Results</b>	<u>Percent Proficient or Above on State Standardized Test (MSP/HSPE)</u> 4 <sup>th</sup> Grade Reading (2009-10): 61.6% 4 <sup>th</sup> Grade Math (2009-10): 47.9% <u>Other Student Outcomes</u> On-Time Graduation Rate (2009): 65.5%

## Appendix B: Additional Interviews

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Tori Austin, Coordinator III, Curriculum Support, Education Services Center 20 (TX)

Trish Boland, State Title I Director, Colorado Department of Education

Nancy S. Brownell, Assistant Superintendent of Instruction, Sonoma County Office of Education (CA)

Chris Dollinger, Director of Federal and State Grants, Charlotte County Public Schools (FL)

Ronald Ferguson, Senior Lecturer in Education and Public Policy, Harvard Graduate School of Education and the Harvard Kennedy School

Erick Fineberg, Principal, Beswick Elementary School, Tustin Unified School District (CA), Member of the California Title I Committee of Practitioners

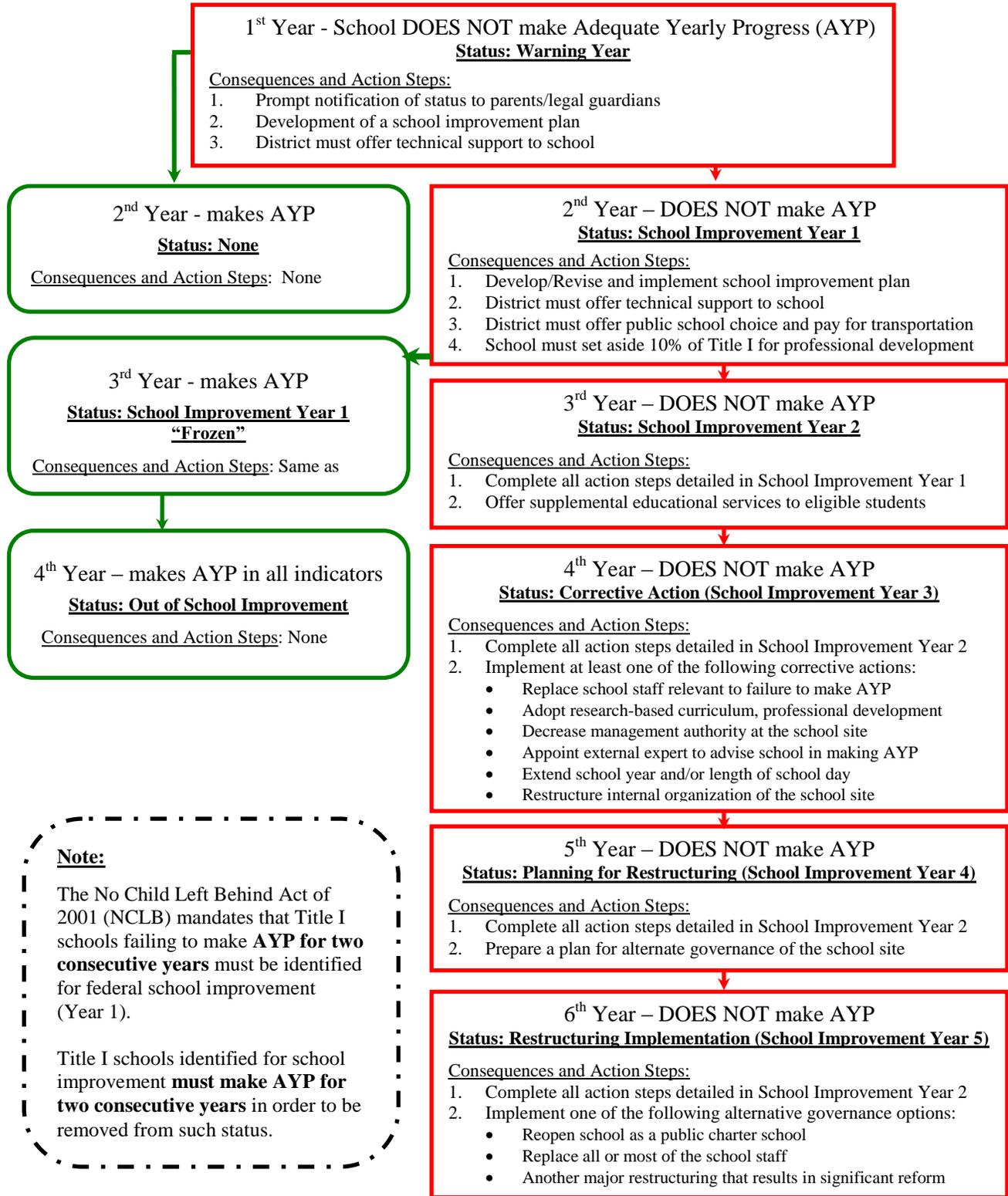
Rob Hanna, Faculty Assistant, Achievement Gap Initiative, Harvard Kennedy School

Joseph Kalt, Professor of International Political Economy, Harvard Kennedy School

Gayle Pauley, State Title I Director, Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

# Appendix C: School Program Improvement Consequences under NCLB

Adapted from: Arizona Department of Education, "Title I School Improvement – Consequence Chart"  
[www.azed.gov/intervention](http://www.azed.gov/intervention)



**Note:**  
 The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) mandates that Title I schools failing to make **AYP for two consecutive years** must be identified for federal school improvement (Year 1).  
 Title I schools identified for school improvement **must make AYP for two consecutive years** in order to be removed from such status.

## Appendix D: Review of Title I Evaluations

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In the decade after ESEA was passed in 1965, the early national evaluations of Title I focused on assessing whether Title I funds were actually being spent on the intended population – poor-performing, low-income students – for the intended purpose of providing some form of supplemental educational services. Studies by the Washington Research Project in 1969 and the American Institutes of Research in 1972 found localities were not implementing Title I as intended by Congress.<sup>1</sup> While stricter federal compliance rules were implemented to address those concerns, in recent years evaluators have returned to a similar question: whether Title I funds are being directed to the highest poverty districts and schools. A 2007 evaluation by the School Finance Redesign Project found substantial inequities in Title I funding across states and districts.<sup>2</sup> The research on funding equity has contributed to efforts to reform the Title I formulas to better target the funds to the most disadvantaged schools and students.

The Sustaining Effects Study of 1984, a federally mandated assessment, concluded that Title I had a modest positive effect on student achievement, but had not be able to raise the achievement of Title I participants to the level of their more advantaged peers.<sup>3</sup> The Sustaining Effects Study also found that Title I students achieved greater gains in the elementary grades and greater gains in math than in reading.<sup>4</sup> A meta-analysis of seventeen federal Title I studies from 1966 to 1993 also concluded that Title I had a modest overall impact on student achievement and that elementary school students experienced the biggest gains from Title I.<sup>5</sup> The results of the meta-analysis do suggest that Title I became more effective in later years, perhaps due to the expanded federal oversight and the growing focus on program improvement that has developed over the years.<sup>6</sup> The analysis notes that most Title I evaluations are based on a norm-referenced model, in which the standing of Title I participants on a pre-test is compared to these students' standing relative to the norm group on a post-test. Many educational researchers consider the norm-referenced model to be unreliable, indicating that the results of these evaluations may not accurately capture the true impact of Title I.<sup>7</sup>

Several recent evaluations have attempted to address the weaknesses of the norm-referenced model through a regression discontinuity research design, which compares schools that just barely qualify for Title I funding to schools in the same district that have just missed qualifying for Title I funding. Such a design compares schools that are similar on many dimensions, including student poverty rates, but

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<sup>1</sup> Washington Research Project. (1969). *Title I of ESEA: Is it Helping Poor Children*.

Wargo, M., et. al. (1972). *ESEA Title I: A reanalysis and synthesis of evaluation data from fiscal year 1965 through 1970*. Palo Alto, CA: American Institutes of Research.

<sup>2</sup> Liu, G. (2007). *Improving Title I Funding Equity across States, Districts, and Schools*. Evans School of Public Affairs Working Paper 7.

<sup>3</sup> Carter, L. (1984). *The sustaining effects study of compensatory and elementary education*. *Educational Researcher* 13(7), 4–13.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Borman, G.D., & D'Agostino, J.V. (1996). Title I and student achievement: a meta-analysis of federal evaluation results. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 18(4), 309– 326.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> van der Klaauw, W. (2008). Breaking the Link Between Poverty and Low Student Achievement: An Evaluation of Title I. *Journal of Econometrics*, 142(2), 731-756.

differ in their Title I eligibility, enabling researchers to attribute differences in student achievement in those schools to the Title I program. Two recent studies used this strategy to assess the effect of Title I on New York City schools, and found that Title I funding did not improve student achievement.<sup>8</sup>

One potential cause for the modest or non-existent effects of Title I found in these evaluations is that state and local governments may be supplanting some of the Title I funds in schools, effectively reducing the impact of Title I revenue. There is evidence on the national level that low-income schools and districts receiving Title I have little net increase in school spending.<sup>9</sup> A New York City study found that although elementary and middle schools received approximately \$500 per pupil in Title I funds, the actual increase in spending was only approximately \$284 per pupil, largely because state compensatory education funding to those schools decreased substantially.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. and Weinstein, M. G., Stiefel, L., Schwartz, A. E., & Chalico, L. (2009). *Does Title I Increase Spending and Improve Performance? Evidence from New York City*. IESP Working Paper 9-09.

<sup>9</sup> Gordon, N. (2004). Do Federal Grants Boost School Spending? Evidence from Title I. *Journal of Public Economics*, 88, 1771-1792.

<sup>10</sup> Weinstein, M. G., Stiefel, L., Schwartz, A. E., & Chalico, L. (2009). *Does Title I Increase Spending and Improve Performance? Evidence from New York City*. IESP Working Paper 9-09.

## Appendix E: How Districts Use Their Title I Funds

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Fundamentally, Title I is a mechanism to distribute federal funding to districts and schools that have high proportions of low-income students. While there is an increasing number of federal and state restrictions, regulations, and guidelines on how districts can and should use Title I funds, districts ultimately determine how the money is spent to promote the achievement of low-income students. In order to figure out how Title I funds can be used more effectively to help low-income students, and particularly how federal law and regulations can be changed to facilitate the effective use of funds to fulfill the mission of ESEA, we must look at how districts are currently using their Title I funds.

### Required District Set Asides

Under federal law, districts are required to set aside some their Title I money for certain purposes. All districts must set aside 1 percent of their Title I funds for parental involvement activities, with the vast majority of that set aside to be distributed to the schools for their use.<sup>11</sup> Districts that are in program improvement – meaning that they have failed to meet AYP for two consecutive years – have additional required set asides. Districts that are in program improvement must set aside 10 percent of their Title I funds for professional development activities. In addition, schools that are in program improvement must set aside 10 percent of their Title I school allocation for professional development activities. District officials express concerns about the professional development set aside, and the lack of flexibility it provides for districts.

Districts that have schools in year 2 of program improvement or beyond, must set aside 20 percent of their Title I funds for Supplemental Educational Services (SES) and transportation for school choice. Most districts do not have many families take advantage of district-provided school choice transportation, which funds transportation for students at program improvement schools to attend nearby district schools that are performing better. District officials say that the SES and school choice set aside serves to inhibit planning and tie the money up until it can be reallocated.

Different views on the required set aside reflect the underlying tension between local flexibility and federal oversight. District officials tend to be in favor of eliminating all of the required set asides because they impede district and school flexibility. Some of the districts actually spend more than the required amount on parent involvement or professional development, but would like the flexibility to spend all of their Title I money in ways that district decides would be most effective to help disadvantaged children, even if it does not match with what is currently in the federal statute. At the federal level, advocates and researchers note the strong evidence base supporting well-designed professional development and parent engagement efforts, and want to ensure that all districts receiving federal money, especially those that are not performing well, spend some funds on those purposes.

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<sup>11</sup> *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*, as amended, Title 1, Part A, Section 1118, (a), (3); 20 U.S.C. 6301-6339, 6571-6578

### Voluntary District Set Asides

Before allocating Title I funds to schools, districts can choose to set aside money for district-wide programming aimed at serving Title I children, as well as district administrative costs for Title I. According to the latest federal evaluation, in 2004–05, 21 percent of Title I funds were used for district-managed services, up from 8 percent in 1997-98.<sup>12</sup> Common uses for the set aside funding included such as preschool, before- and after-school and summer programs, district-wide professional development, district instructional coaches, and parent education programs. Some districts use a portion of their Title I funding to support Even Start family literacy programs.

### School Title I Spending

With approximately three-quarters of Title I funds going to individual public schools,<sup>13</sup> understanding how Title I funds are used requires looking at what schools do with their Title I allocations. In general, decisions on how to spend Title I money are made by the school principal. In some states, there are specific requirements about groups – particularly parents – that need to be involved in the decision-making process.

Under federal law, in Targeted Assistance schools must serve only eligible children who are failing, or most at risk of failing, to meet state achievement standards. Most Targeted Assistance schools provide “pull-out instruction” for those students, in which they are pulled out of the general classroom to receive small-group or individual instruction from a Title I teacher or aide in reading, math, or both. The vast majority of the schools in the case study districts were running Schoolwide programs, in which Title I funding in high-poverty schools can be used to improve the entire educational program of a school.

As a Schoolwide program, schools are allowed to consolidate their Title I funding with other federal, state, and local funds, so it is often not clear which school-level expenditures were paid for with Title I funding. Principals at Schoolwide schools tend to view the Title I funds as just another pot of money with which to address student needs and pay for their broad range of educational expenses. The vast majority of Title I spending at the school-level is generally dedicated to personnel. Academic personnel are often the biggest expenditure, including additional teachers to decrease class size, instructional coaches, paraprofessionals, and reading, English as a Second Language (ESL) and math interventionists. Some schools also spend money on personnel focused on community and social support, including parent engagement coordinators and social workers. Schools often spend some Title I money on technology and supplies, including computer labs, software programs, reading materials, and supplies for parent involvement activities.

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<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (2009). *State and Local Implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act: Volume VI – Targeting and Uses of Federal Education Funds*.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (2009). *State and Local Implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act: Volume VI – Targeting and Uses of Federal Education Funds*.

## Appendix F: District Allocation Process

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After subtracting any required and voluntary set-asides for district-wide programs and administrative costs, districts allocate the remaining money to individual schools for principals, in collaboration with parents and teachers, to utilize to support qualifying children.

The school allocation process, as required by federal regulations, generally follows this process<sup>14</sup>:

1. The district ranks all of its public schools according to their percentage of low-income children. The district can decide which of the following poverty measures to use: children ages 5-17 in poverty according to census data, children eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch, children in families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or children eligible to receive Medicaid. Most districts use the percentage of children eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch.
2. The district must first serve all schools above 75 percent poverty, including any middle schools or high schools.
3. After the district has served all schools above 75 percent poverty, the district has the option to (1) continue on with the district-wide ranking or (2) rank remaining areas by grade span groupings (generally elementary, middle, and high schools).
4. If the district uses a district-wide ranking, they select a poverty cut-off line and serve all schools above that line. Under most circumstances, only schools that have over 35 percent poverty are eligible to receive funds.
5. If the district uses grade span groupings, they may choose to have different poverty cutoff lines for each grade span grouping, or choose to only serve one or two grade span groupings.
6. Once the Title I schools are selected, a district-wide per pupil allocation is determined based on the amount of Title I funds the district has and the number of low-income students in the Title I schools. Schools then receive the per pupil allocation multiplied by their number of low-income students. In some districts, the per pupil allocation used varies by school rather than being constant across the district, but federal statute requires that no school receive a higher per-pupil allocation than a school with a higher poverty rate.

In addition to deciding the poverty cutoff for what schools to serve, districts can decide which poverty measure to use, which affects the group of students Title I is targets. Most districts use the percent of students eligible for free and reduced-priced lunch, which in FY2010-11 includes children in households making up to 185 percent of the federal poverty line (\$33,874 for a single parent with two kids). However, some districts use only the percent of students eligible for free lunch, which includes households making up to 130 percent of the federal poverty line (\$23,803 for a single parent with two kids). Using only free lunch eligibility means that the Title I funds are targeted to a higher poverty group of students. Aurora Public Schools uses eligibility for free lunch as their district poverty measure. When

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg2.html#sec1113>

using free and reduced-priced lunch as the poverty measure, it is important to note that the measure depends on whether low-income students and families actually apply to receive free lunch. High school students are often less likely to apply for free lunch, which means that the rank ordering of the schools may underestimate the relative percentage of low-income students in high schools.

Another key district allocation decision is which grade-spans to serve. Once they serve all schools with more than 75 percent poverty, the district can choose to serve all grade-spans, or to only serve elementary school or middle schools or high schools. Nationally, elementary schools received 76 percent of the Title I funds, considerably more than their share of the nation's low-income students (57 percent).<sup>15</sup> Middle schools received 14 percent of Title I funds, while high schools received 10 percent of Title I funds.<sup>16</sup> Many districts choose to serve only elementary schools, based on research that Title I funds serving elementary students are most effective as well as the growing consensus that interventions for young children pay off over the long run. Thirteen of the 20 analyzed districts in Florida chose to serve only elementary schools.<sup>17</sup> However, some district officials highlight the particular challenges that their high schools and middle schools face in addressing the needs of disadvantaged older students to support their decision to provide secondary schools with Title I funds. In Denver Public Schools, the Superintendent has decided to serve high schools with Title I because some of the district's lowest achieving schools are high schools.

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<sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (2009). *State and Local Implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act: Volume VI – Targeting and Uses of Federal Education Funds*.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Author's calculations based on data from the Florida Department of Education.

## Appendix G: Common Recommendations for Amending ESEA from District Title I Officials

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Recommendation	Number of Officials Supporting (of 16)
Increase Title I Funding	14
Provide additional local flexibility and autonomy	9
Eliminate Supplemental Educational Services (SES) set-aside	8
Eliminate the choice transportation set-aside	6
Use a growth-centered model to track student improvement on assessments	5
Reduce paperwork requirements	4
Reduce the amount of required parental notification letters	2
Loosen restrictions on professional development	2
National standards	2
Reduce professional development set aside	1
More guidance and support from state department of education	1
Eliminate parental involvement set aside	1
Increase parental involvement set aside	1

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