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Title I and Early Childhood Programs:
A Look at Investments in the NCLB Era

by Danielle Ewen and Hannah Matthews

Introduction

The demographics of the country's young child population are changing in several ways, creating challenges for school districts across the country as the number of at-risk young children increases. At the same time, educators are working toward meeting new accountability requirements established in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The first component of NCLB, Title I, is the largest federal funding source for low-income students. While Title I is widely known as a funding source for elementary and secondary education, Title I funds may be used to serve young children beginning at birth. Title I of NCLB presents an opportunity for schools and school districts to increase investments in high-quality early education initiatives, which may have long-term benefits for at-risk children. Yet implementation of NCLB also presents a number of challenges that may impact the availability of resources for early education programs.

From 2000 to 2005, the number of poor children under the age of six increased by 16 percent.[1] According to the latest estimates, one in five children under the age of six lives in a poor family.[2] The growing number of poor and low-income children is particularly troublesome because these children may face a number of risk factors during early childhood that threaten healthy development and learning, including

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low birth weight, stunted growth, obesity, and lead poisoning—each of which is associated with physical disabilities, reduced IQ, and grade repetition.[3] According to the National Center for Education Statistics, nearly half of all entering kindergarteners have one or more risk factors—defined as having a mother with less than a high school degree, living in a family that has received food stamps or welfare assistance, living in a single-parent household, or having parents whose primary language is a language other than English.[4] As of 2000, one in 10 kindergarteners in the nation was an English Language Learner (ELL).[5] By 2015, it is projected that children of immigrants will comprise 30 percent of the country's school-age children.[6] Many of these children also face economic hardships and significant barriers to healthy development and school success.

Quality pre-kindergarten is necessary, but not sufficient, to raise the educational achievement of all children.

For children to get the most out of growing public investments in early learning, we must align standards, curriculum, and assessment from pre-kindergarten through kindergarten and into the early elementary grades.

- Foundation for Child Development

The growth in poverty and its associated risk factors among very young children suggests that efforts to reduce the achievement gap should begin in children's earliest years. This increase in children at risk has the potential to impact the implementation of NCLB, which requires schools to improve achievement among all children—including poor, low-income, minority, and ELL students. In 2007, states received $12.8 billion in Title I funds, which are the main vehicle for NCLB's accountability requirements. Federal education funding was estimated to comprise approximately 9 percent of total elementary and secondary education expenditures in 2006-2007.[7]

While Title I funds can be used by local educational agencies (LEAs) to support the learning needs of students in all grades, the flexibility of the funds gives LEAs the opportunity to direct funding toward the country's youngest and most vulnerable children, through high-quality programs spanning the early childhood and early elementary years. Addressing the achievement gap through the provision of high-quality early education can have large impacts, and it should be an important component of education reform. In an era of accountability, local school districts may look to Title I-funded early education as one research-proven method of increasing student achievement. Title I-funded early education programs can also help improve connections between schools, pre-kindergarten programs, child care providers, and Head Start and Early Head Start programs serving young children at risk of school failure; and they can increase and expand the availability of high-quality settings in a community. Research demonstrates that well-designed and well-implemented high-quality early education programs can improve outcomes for all children, particularly those from low-income families and immigrant families.[8] High-quality programs should support the full range of children's development and help parents access necessary services for themselves and their children, such as medical and dental care, mental health services, nutritional services, family support, and services for children with disabilities (see box on p. 3). Longitudinal research on three comprehensive early childhood programs with positive impacts on low-income children into adulthood found that these programs generally began early in the child's life and at least by age three.[9]

To sustain the benefits of early education, children must continue to receive high-quality educational opportunities and support services throughout

childhood. Research points to the importance of duration in early education interventions. Children who participated in two model early education programs showed increased gains when services continued into early elementary school. The Abecedarian Project provided high-intensity early education services for children from infancy to age five; a small number of these children continued to receive family support services into second grade. The Chicago Child-Parent Centers started with a three-year-old preschool program, family support services, and follow-up through school age. While children in both programs outperformed their peers who did not participate in either preschool program, those who continued to receive services during the early elementary years saw increased gains in academic achievement over those children who received fewer years of services.[10]

Evidence suggests as well that full-day kindergarten is another important component for local communities to build on the successes and supports that young children have gained in early childhood programs.[11] Research from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study found that children in full-day kindergarten had greater achievement in both reading and mathematics over the course of the kindergarten year, compared to children in half-day kindergarten. Full-day classes also allowed teachers more time to focus on activities outside of reading and language arts, including math, social studies, science, and art.[12] To be most beneficial to young children, full-day kindergarten should build upon children's earlier educational experiences by aligning curriculum, standards, and instruction.[13]

Despite their promise, high-quality publicly funded early education programs are in short supply. A chronic lack of funding has led policymakers to

CLASP BELIEVES THAT THE COMPONENTS OF HIGH-QUALITY EARLY EDUCATION INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- ✓ **Sufficient funding to attract and retain well-trained and qualified teachers in formal settings**
- ✓ **Training and information for all providers, whether informal or formal, to address the developmental needs of all children, particularly those who may be more likely to experience the risk factors associated with poverty**
- ✓ **Availability of and access to comprehensive services for families needing them, including developmental screenings and follow-up treatment; child health, mental health, and nutrition services; and access to continuous and ongoing medical care, family support, and home visiting**
- ✓ **Parental involvement opportunities for all parents, including those working full-time and those who may not speak English as their first language**
- ✓ **Infrastructure supports to ensure ongoing monitoring and quality improvement, technical assistance in all aspects of the program, and program assessment in formal settings**
- ✓ **Strategies to help children manage transitions to other classrooms or programs, including kindergarten**
- ✓ **Inclusion of children with special needs in settings with normally developing children, along with supports to teachers and parents to help all children reach their full potential**
- ✓ **Appropriately serving culturally and linguistically diverse children with bilingual and bicultural teachers and caregivers, and increasing training opportunities for all caregivers, including cultural competency and strategies for teaching English Language Learners**
- ✓ **Responsiveness to the needs of working parents, ensuring that full-workday options are available to families needing them—through planning, coordination, and collaboration with other community, state, and federal programs**

look to a wide variety of federal, state, and local funding streams to expand the availability and quality of early education programs, especially for children at risk of school failure. Among these funding streams is Title I of NCLB.

About this paper

This paper explores the wide range of ways in which school districts are using Title I funds for early education through kindergarten and examines how the implementation of NCLB has impacted those investments. It also makes recommendations for LEAs interested in creating Title I-funded early education programs or thinking about how to sustain these types of investments in the face of policy and funding challenges.

CLASP spent more than two years examining strategies to encourage and sustain Title I investments in high-quality early education programs in local communities. Our initial findings were reported in *Missed Opportunities? The Possibilities and Challenges of Funding High-Quality Preschool through Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act.*[14] Building on the research and analysis in *Missed Opportunities*, CLASP conducted extensive Web-based research to identify promising models, review local policies and documents, and find local policymakers to interview. Staff also used ongoing conversations with early education administrators to identify more than 100 schools and districts with some history of using Title I for early education programs. CLASP conducted interviews with more than 30 states and districts—including districts with increasing Title I allocations and others with decreasing allocations, and districts in states with a history of investments in pre-kindergarten and others in states without such a history—using a survey protocol that we developed to understand how schools and districts are using Title I for early education, the history of these investments, and the barriers and flexibility in the law. CLASP interviewed state and local Title I directors, early childhood directors, and district superintendents and, where possible, collected financial information on Title I early education investments. In this paper, we discuss:

- Federal and state funding for early education;
- The opportunity of Title I funding for early education;
- The story behind Title I investments in early education, through illustrations of a wide range of models from school districts;
- How NCLB is impacting Title I investments in early education; and
- Recommendations for LEAs.

Federal and State Funding for Early Education

For many states and local school districts, the desire to provide early education programs prior to elementary school is limited by a lack of funding. The primary sources of funding for child care and early education for low-income children before age of school entry are the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families block grant (TANF), and the federal Early Head Start and Head Start programs (see box on p. 6)—along with state- and locally-funded pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs. In addition, local school districts may choose to use their own federal Title I funds, or other local funds, to provide early childhood programs. Title I funds may be layered with child care subsidies, Head Start, and state pre-kindergarten funding to extend or expand services for young children.

Federal early education funding

The largest federal early education programs have widely differing funding levels, eligibility requirements, and program standards. Funding for these programs has been nearly flat for several years, leading to persistent shortfalls in program

capacity and quality. Child care subsidies fall far short of meeting the need, with less than 14 percent of eligible children served; in addition, approximately 150,000 children have lost child care assistance since 2000.[15] Head Start, the federally funded preschool program, currently serves only about half the eligible population of three- and four-year-old children, while Early Head Start serves less than 3 percent of eligible children under age three.[16] Several smaller programs provide additional federal funding for early education, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which includes targeted funding for services for infants, toddlers, and preschool-age children.

State- and locally-funded pre-kindergarten programs

Funding for state pre-kindergarten, however, has grown over the last decade. In the 2005-2006 school year, states reported spending about $3.5 billion in state and federal funds on state pre-kindergarten initiatives.[17] States often layer multiple funding sources—such as TANF, Title I, and Head Start funds—to provide state pre-kindergarten. States also invest their own funds, through school funding formulae, categorical grants to schools and community-based organizations, and targeted funding for early education from general state funds and special taxes. Some local communities support early education through taxation and grants.

While funding has grown, participation in these state pre-kindergarten programs is limited. Across the country, state pre-kindergarten programs serve 20 percent of all four-year-olds and 3 percent of three-year-olds.[18] While 39 states currently have publicly funded pre-kindergarten, Georgia, Florida, and Oklahoma are the only states to provide universal access to pre-kindergarten for all four-year-olds, regardless of income or other criteria. Illinois, New York, and West Virginia have policies in place to move toward universal access to pre-kindergarten.[19] In the remaining states, pre-kindergarten eligibility is largely targeted to at-risk populations, including low-income children, ELL children, and children with disabilities. Because funds are often limited, in many areas there are long waiting lists even for eligible children.

State pre-kindergarten program design and standards vary widely. Most programs offer part-day services, averaging 2.5 to 3.5 hours per day during the school year. The availability of comprehensive services—such as health screenings, meals, and family support services—also varies.[20] Thirty-four states require programs to provide vision, hearing, and health screenings and referrals or additional support services. Twenty-three states require programs to provide at least one meal to participating children.[21] Eleven states—Alabama, Arkansas, Iowa, Maine, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and Wisconsin—require local programs to layer funds together to fully fund the pre-kindergarten program or to extend the day, and some of these programs have reported using Title I funds in this way.[22] According to data collected by the National Institute for Early Education Research, at least 11 states report the use of Title I funds within their state pre-kindergarten program, either to create a local match of state dollars, to provide comprehensive services or support children with special needs, to extend the day, or to improve quality.[23]

State-funded full-day kindergarten

States fund full-day kindergarten using a mix of school funding and categorical grants. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics shows that nearly every child in the United States (98 percent) attends at least a part-day kindergarten program before entering first grade.[24]

MAJOR FEDERAL FUNDING STREAMS FOR EARLY EDUCATION

***CCDBG*. CCDBG helps families receiving welfare, families transitioning off welfare, and low-income working families. Families receive CCDBG assistance, based on parental hours worked, to pay for the care of their children from birth through 12 years of age; most families also must pay a co-payment. CCDBG allows states a great deal of flexibility in how they design their programs, within minimal federal guidelines. States set income eligibility, payment rates for providers, and family co-payment rates; they also make decisions on investments in initiatives to increase the quality of care. There are minimal health and safety standards, and families may choose any legally operating child care provider. States provide most child care assistance to families through vouchers or certificates, although 11 percent of children served receive assistance through contracts or grants. In 2007, CCDBG was funded at $5 billion in federal funds, with states contributing an additional $2.2 billion.[25] More than 1.7 million children received CCDBG-funded child care in 2005; in 2006, a total of 2.3 million children received child care assistance from all sources (including CCDBG and TANF).[26]**

***TANF*. The $17 billion TANF block grant provides federal funds to states to support a broad range of benefits and services. Child care assistance is one acceptable use of TANF funds; there are no federal standards for child care directly funded by TANF. States are also permitted to transfer up to 30 percent of their annual TANF block grant to CCDBG. In recent years, child care assistance has been the second largest use of TANF funds nationally. The amount of TANF funds used for child care, however, has declined steadily from its peak of $4 billion in 2000 to $3.1 billion in 2006.[27] TANF funds may also be used to serve children in pre-kindergarten or other early education programs. In 2004, 22 states reported using some federal or state TANF-related funds for such programs.[28]**

***Head Start and Early Head Start*. Since 1965, the federal Head Start program has served low-income three- and four-year-old children and their families with comprehensive early education and family support services. A set-aside provides funding for Early Head Start, which provides comprehensive early education and support services for children under age three and for pregnant women. Head Start and Early Head Start programs must meet specific federal Program Performance Standards aimed at ensuring that services focus on the "whole child," including supports for cognitive, developmental, and socio-emotional needs; medical and dental screenings and referrals; nutritional services; parental involvement activities and referrals to social service providers for the entire family; and mental health services. Head Start Program Performance Standards require that all children receive a complete medical screening after enrollment; staff must work with parents to provide referrals for follow-up treatment, if necessary, and to ensure access to ongoing sources of dental and medical care for their children. Head Start programs may offer part-day (less than six hours) or full-day (six hours or more) services for four or five days a week. Head Start was funded at $6.9 billion in 2007. Approximately 1 million children participate in Head Start and Early Head Start each year.[29]**

Nationally, approximately 60 percent of all kindergarten-aged students attend full-day programs.[30] However, only nine states *require* that school districts offer a full-day kindergarten program: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and West Virginia.[31]

Most funding for full-day kindergarten comes from school funding formulae, although states may differ in the per-child amount provided for a half- vs. a full-day program.[32] States may also provide targeted funds to local districts, based on the eligibility of the district or on risk factors of the children and families served.[33] LEAs may use these funds to create full-day kindergarten programs, even if the state does not mandate a full-day program. However, these funds may not grow in the same way that other school funding does, as they may not be linked to the school funding formula. State and school administrators also report that Title I funds are used in many districts to provide half- and full-day kindergarten.[34]

CHICAGO CHILD-PARENT CENTERS: HIGH-QUALITY TITLE I-FUNDED EARLY EDUCATION

The CPC program began in 1967 as a comprehensive educational and family support program for at-risk children from preschool to third grade and their parents. The CPC program was designed to promote the academic achievement of poor children residing in high-poverty neighborhoods within the enrollment areas of Title I schools and to facilitate parental involvement. Components of the original program included parent and community outreach, home visiting, parental involvement activities, comprehensive health screening and services, and a language-focused curriculum. Parent resource teachers and school community representatives led outreach and parental involvement activities. Parental involvement and schoolwide services, including health and nutrition services, continued during the early elementary years. Parents had access to a resource room with activities and tools for educational enrichment of both children and parents. The CPC program featured small class sizes at all grade levels and a curriculum that was aligned across the years from pre-kindergarten through third grade.

The CPC program has been hailed as a model early childhood program, based on positive results from decades-long longitudinal studies of its participants. Children who participated in the CPC early childhood program have shown greater academic performance, greater educational attainment, lower rates of grade repetition, lower rates of juvenile delinquency, and higher employment than their peers who did not attend the CPC program. Children who continued to receive CPC support services into early elementary school demonstrated the greatest levels of academic achievement, as measured by test scores, showing the benefits of coordinated and continuous academic and support services during the elementary years.[35]

Today, 13 CPC preschool programs operate throughout Chicago; most classes are half-day programs. Most children are enrolled in the program at age three and may receive two years of continuous early childhood services. A kindergarten program—half- or full-day, depending on the elementary school—follows the CPC early education program. (In 2006, 73 percent of Chicago Public Schools' kindergarteners attended full-day kindergarten.[36]) Four of the 13 CPC sites have parent resource teachers to facilitate parental involvement. At the remaining sites, the head teacher assumes the duties once held by the parent resource teacher and school community representative. Support services are no longer provided during the early elementary years.[37]

In 2006, the CPC early childhood program served 1,360 children and their parents in 38 classrooms.[38] Chicago Public Schools directs approximately $6 million in Title I funds to the CPC program (approximately 2 percent of a nearly $300 million allocation). Funding for the CPCs was reduced from $15 million in 2004; consequently, eight CPCs were converted to either Head Start or state pre-kindergarten classrooms. As the demographics of Chicago have changed, some neighborhoods where CPCs operated no longer have a concentration of poor children to attend early education programs.[39]

The Opportunity of Title I Funding for Early Education

Federal Title I funds are awarded to state educational agencies (SEAs), which then provide them to LEAs. Once a school district or school receives its allotment of Title I funds, it can prioritize their use based on the needs of the local student population. While Title I is used primarily for elementary and secondary education services, schools and districts can decide to use Title I funds for early education beginning at birth and up to the age at which the school district requires attendance in elementary education. Sixty percent of students receiving Title I-funded services in 2003 were in first through sixth grade. Thirteen percent were in kindergarten or below.[40]

There is limited information on how schools districts use their Title I funds. The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) estimates that only 17 percent of all school districts that received Title I funds in school year 1999-2000 chose to use a portion of these

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funds to serve children younger than the age of school entry; more recent estimates are not available. Most of these school districts used less than 10 percent of their total Title I funds for these youngest children,[41] although there are exceptions. The U.S. Department of Education has estimated that in 2000, $200 million—or 2 to 3 percent of Title I funds nationwide—was used for early education prior to school entry.[42] The Department of Education has not estimated the amount of Title I funds spent on full-day kindergarten programs.

Many districts have been using Title I funds for their early childhood programs for decades. The longest-running Title I early education program is the Chicago Child-Parent Centers (CPC), run by the Chicago Public Schools since 1967—making it the second-oldest federally funded early education program in the United States, after Head Start (see box on p. 7).

How Title I funds may be used for early education prior to elementary school

Title I-funded early education programs may be provided to children from birth up to the age at which the school district provides elementary education. Funds may be used in public schools or other early childhood settings in the community, including child care centers and Head Start programs.[43] Title I can be used to create a new program or to expand or improve the quality of an existing one.[44] Programs funded by Title I must comply with federal Head Start Education Performance Standards. Depending on the type of Title I early education program at the district or school level, eligibility may be based on a child's residence within the enrollment area of a Title I school or district or may be determined by an assessment showing the child is at risk of not meeting the state's academic standards.[45]

When using Title I funds for early education services, LEAs must have a plan for coordinating and integrating Title I with other early childhood educational services—such as Head Start, Even Start, and other preschools—as well as a plan for the transition of children in these programs into elementary school. Specifically, Title I funds can be used to fund the following components of an early education program: teacher salaries and professional development (whether or not teachers are in a Title I classroom), counseling services, minor remodeling, and leasing or renting space in privately owned facilities.[46] Funds can be used for comprehensive services if a comprehensive needs assessment shows that a child needs health, nutrition, or other social services and funds are not "reasonably available from other public or private sources."[47] Title I funds can also be used to screen children in order to identify those at risk.[48] According to GAO, while almost all school districts funding early education through Title I use these funds for educational services, some districts also use Title I funds for children's meals, social services, and medical and dental services.[49]

Title I funds may also be used in conjunction with other early education funding in the following ways:

- **Head Start**: Title I funds may expand or extend a Head Start program if they are used for children who meet the eligibility criteria for Title I.
- **Even Start**: Title I programs using an Even Start model must integrate early childhood education, adult literacy or adult basic education, and parenting education into a unified family literacy program and must comply with Even Start program requirements.
- **Other programs**: Title I funds may be used in conjunction with other existing programs, including state-funded pre-kindergarten programs, community-based child care programs, and CCDBG.

Title I may fund early education at the district or school level.

In 2003, the latest year information is available, 456,492 children received Title I-funded early education services. Unfortunately, there is no available data on the specific ages of these children or on the types of services and programs they received. While the number of children receiving Title I-funded early education services has increased, their percentage as a share of all children who receive Title I services increased only slightly, to 3 percent in 2003 (see Table 1). The decision to provide early education services using Title I funds can be made either at the LEA level (generally the school district) or the school level.

Decision making by LEAs. An LEA can use Title I funds for an early education program that serves all eligible, at-risk children in the district, in a portion of the district, or in particular Title I schools.[50] Children are eligible for these Title I-funded early education services if they live in the enrollment area of the program (i.e., the district if it is a district-wide program or the school in which the program is housed if a school-specific program), and they are shown to be at risk of not meeting the state's academic standards. The assessment of whether or not a child is "at risk" must be made based on "multiple, educationally related, objective criteria established by the LEA. . . . With respect to preschool children, this determination must be made on the basis of criteria such as teacher judgment, interviews with parents, and developmentally appropriate measures of child development."[51] If there is not enough money to serve all children, a child's family income can be considered as a way of prioritizing eligibility.[52] Children who have participated in Head Start, Even Start, Early Reading First, or a Title I early education program at any time over the past two years; homeless children; and children in institutions for neglected or delinquent children are also eligible for Title I-funded services.[53]

Decision making by schools. Title I funds are awarded to individual schools by LEAs. The decision to fund early education programs can also be made at the school level through schoolwide reform efforts or targeted assistance school programs. Most young children served in a Title I early education program receive services through a schoolwide program (see Table 1).[54]

TABLE 1. TITLE I PRESCHOOL PARTICIPANTS[1]

Year	Number of Children in Title I-funded Preschool Programs in Public Targeted Programs	Number of Children in Title I-funded Preschool Programs in Public School-wide Programs	Total Number of Children in Title I Preschool Programs[2]	Total Number of Children as Percent of All Title I Participants
1996	48,354	214,596	264,141	2%
1997	49,104	249,903	300,315	2%
1998	41,157	245,455	293,912	2%
1999	43,367	265,939	310,995	2%
2000	26,315	301,144	329,755	2%
2001	24,304	338,635	366,534	2%
2002	23,263	381,587	410,292	2%
2003	19,680	432,312	456,492	3%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, *State ESEA Title I Participation Information*, 1996-1997 to 2003-2004.

1 The U.S. Department of Education defines Title I preschool as any program serving children below the age of school entry.

2 Total number of children includes children served in private schools and therefore does not equal the sum of targeted and schoolwide programs.

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- *Schoolwide reform program*. In a schoolwide program, Title I funds can be used in conjunction with other federal, state, and local funds to upgrade the school's entire educational program.[55] A school is eligible to institute a schoolwide reform program if at least 40 percent of its student population is low income. A school that is eligible for a schoolwide program may *choose* to use Title I funds to establish or enhance early education programs for children below the age of school entry.[56] A Title I schoolwide program is open to all children living within the attendance area of that school. All schoolwide reforms must include programs to facilitate the transition of young children from early childhood programs to elementary school and to coordinate with a wide array of federal, state, and local services, including Head Start, violence prevention, and nutrition programs.[57] Schools must also develop, in consultation with their LEAs, comprehensive plans for reforming instruction. When appropriate, these plans are developed in coordination with other early childhood programs, including Early Reading First, Even Start, and Head Start.[58]
- *Targeted assistance programs*. Funds can also be used for early education through "targeted assistance" programs. Schools that receive Title I funds and whose low-income student population comprises less than 40 percent of their students may use Title I for targeted assistance to individual eligible students.[59] Eligibility for a Title I targeted assistance program is open to children considered at risk for meeting a state's achievement standards, as determined by multiple educationally related, objective criteria established by the district.

Still, districts and schools may be constrained by lack of funding.

It is clear, at least in some districts, that federal Title I funding levels and NCLB accountability requirements are impacting the availability of Title I funds to provide early education services. While school districts have enormous flexibility in the *potential* uses of Title I funds, the program's current funding levels and its requirements for uses of funds once a school enters "school improvement status" (see below) have resulted in limited flexibility for affected districts in the last few years.

When NCLB was passed, Congress provided funding authorization levels commensurate with the law's accountability and other requirements. Actual appropriations, however, remained below the authorized levels. Consequently, between 2002 and 2005, there was a $27 billion gap between what Congress promised for Title I of NCLB and what Congress provided. After two years of flat funding, in 2007, Title I received an increase in funding of less than 1 percent ($124 million). Yet, not all states, and consequently not all districts, will receive increases in Title I funding in the coming school year. The distribution of Title I funding to states is based on a complex formula that includes an annual updating of the number of low-income children in each state, based on estimates by the U.S. Census. Changes in each state's share of the number of low-income children nationwide result in changes to annual state allocations (see Table 2 for the top 10 losing and gaining states).[60]

NCLB accountability requirements

NCLB created a new set of accountability requirements, which have funding implications for schools beyond the resources needed to implement them. Through annual assessments, starting in third grade, schools must demonstrate that they have made "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) toward

state-established student achievement standards in specific academic subject areas and by specific student population subgroups—including racial and ethnic student groups, ELLs, students with disabilities, and low-income students. If schools fail to meet progress in any of these subject areas or for any student subgroup for two consecutive years, they are placed in "school improvement" status. If a school that has been identified as in need of improvement fails to meet AYP targets for two more years after being put into the school improvement category, the LEA can identify corrective actions. If the school continues to fail to meet AYP for five consecutive years, it is put into school restructuring status, which involves major changes in the operation of the school.[61]

In the 2006-2007 school year, approximately 20 percent of Title I schools were identified for school improvement. Of these schools, 42 percent had not made AYP for at least four consecutive years and were in, or were entering, corrective action or restructuring. As schools enter the fifth year of NCLB implementation, the number of schools in corrective action and restructuring is growing. Between 2005 and 2006, the number of Title I schools in corrective action and restructuring increased by more than 60 percent. Schools identified for improvement are overwhelmingly in urban school districts and have higher proportions of poor and minority students than other Title I schools.[62]

If a school is designated as in need of improvement, the school's LEA must set aside an amount equal to 20 percent of its Title I allocation to fund supplemental educational services and transportation for students who wish to transfer to other schools. If demand for these services is less than this amount, the school can spend the remainder on other services or carry over the set-aside amount to the next year.[63] An additional 10 percent, at a minimum, must be set aside for professional development.[64]

Additionally, SEAs are required to set aside 4 percent of their total Title I allocation to assist schools that are in school improvement. These funds, however, may only be reserved from school districts with increasing Title I allocations. Due to this provision, in the 2007-2008 school year, 29 states will be unable to reserve the full 4 percent for school improvement. School districts in these states will not receive the full increases they would otherwise expect to receive from the overall increase in funding for Title I, because a portion of these funds will be reserved for school improvement. In Florida, Hawaii, and West Virginia, no school district will receive an increase in Title I funding.[65]

TABLE 2. CHANGE IN STATE TITLE I ALLOCATION, 2007-2008 SCHOOL YEAR

Top Ten Losing States, by Percent Decrease		Top Ten Gaining States, by Percent Increase	
Hawaii	13.8%	Wisconsin	30.4%
West Virginia	10.0%	Indiana	24.8%
Florida	9.2%	Connecticut	11.5%
Oklahoma	8.9%	New Hampshire	10.5%
New Mexico	7.6%	Illinois	9.9%
Oregon	7.0%	Ohio	9.5%
Montana	5.7%	Maryland	9.3%
District of Columbia	5.5%	Michigan	7.9%
New Jersey	4.9%	Kansas	7.9%
California	4.6%	Utah	7.6%

Source: Center on Education Policy, *Title I Funds – Who's Gaining and Who's Losing*, 2007.

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Despite the funding challenges, school improvement may offer an opportunity for a district to think about the provision of a high-quality early education program. A school that has been identified as in need of improvement is required to write a two-year school improvement plan to identify and address the academic areas that caused the school to be identified for improvement, as well as the interventions it intends to use to improve these academic areas. NCLB requires the strategies identified in the plan to be "based on scientifically based research that will strengthen the core academic subjects in the school and address the specific academic issues that caused the school to be identified for school improvement."[66] Non-regulatory guidance from the U.S. Department of Education indicates that schools are permitted to use school improvement funds for early education "if the preschool program is a strategy that addresses the specific academic issues that caused the district or school to be identified for school improvement, and if the preschool program is carried out in accordance with the district's or school's improvement plan."[67] If a school or district has identified the early elementary grades as in need of strengthening, a comprehensive early education program could provide young children with the school readiness skills needed to be successful.

Even with funding constraints and the requirements of NCLB, small and large school districts across the country have been able to use Title I funds to create and sustain high-quality early education programs for their young children. CLASP's research identified a wide array of early childhood programs and services supported by Title I. Schools are using Title I to serve infants and toddlers, as well as three- and four-year-old children, and to support specific groups of children, including ELLs. The Title I early education models that we found vary significantly by district, as do their histories.

The Story Behind Title I Investments in Early Education

CLASP interviewed early education and Title I administrators in more than 30 school districts, including districts with long-term investments and others with short-term investments, districts with increasing Title I allocations and those with decreasing allocations, and districts in states with a history of investments in pre-kindergarten and those in states without such a history. The stories behind use of Title I for early childhood are as diverse as the schools to which the funding flows. District administrators related strategies and lessons learned from using Title I for early education programs, after which CLASP identified the following factors that may affect the creation or sustainability of high-quality early education programs:

- Resourceful school leaders dedicated to using Title I funds for early education,
- Partnerships with other agencies designed to utilize the flexibility of Title I funds to meet the comprehensive needs of families,
- Use of data to make the case for investments and to sustain those investments, and
- State policy and funding changes that influence Title I decisions.

Resourceful school leaders dedicated to using Title I funds for early education

CLASP interviews found that the use of Title I funds for early education programs often resulted from the leadership of a single person within the school district—someone who was dedicated to providing early childhood programs and saw an opportunity when Title I funds grew, when state policies changed and made new funds available, or when public support was in favor of using existing funds in a new way.

Individual school principals, district superintendents, school board members, and Title I coordinators often took the lead to push a school district to utilize all available funding streams to provide these services.

South Bay Union School District, California

South Bay Union has been using Title I for early education for more than 15 years. In the mid 1980s, South Bay Union was serving approximately 100 children through state pre-kindergarten funds. The superintendent made early education an emphasis for the district, despite insufficient state funding. The district hired an early childhood director, a rarity at the time, to expand the program and seek additional sources of funding. In the late 1990s, the district expanded the pre-kindergarten program by devoting additional general funds to early education. The Title I director at the time noticed that Title I funds were not being used for young children and worked with the early childhood director to direct Title I to early education. The district has used Title I to support its pre-kindergarten programs ever since.

South Bay Union houses all of its early education services at the district-wide preschool site, known as the VIP Village, which includes state pre-kindergarten and special education preschool services. Title I funds are primarily spent on supportive services for three- and four-year-olds, including language and literacy enrichment during the school year; an enrichment booster program during school breaks, which features small group sizes to provide attention to those four-year-olds most in need of language development; curriculum development; and parent education. In 2005, South Bay Union used approximately $75,000 in Title I for early education—or approximately 3 percent of the district's allocation.

Fayette County, Georgia Public Schools

Over a decade ago, Fayette County administrators decided,

TABLE 3. OVERVIEW OF HIGHLIGHTED DISTRICT MODELS USING TITLE I FOR EARLY EDUCATION

District	Children Served	Title I Funds Used for Early Education (Percent of Title I Allocation)	History of Title I Investments in Early Education
South Bay Union, CA	80-125 three- and four-year-old children	$75,000 in 2005 (3%)	1998 (estimated) -present
Fayette County, GA	100 four-year-old children in seven full-school-day classes	$700,000 in 2005 (100%)	1991-2006
Detroit, MI	Approximately 2,800 four-year-old children served in Head Start and state pre-kindergarten classes, which may include Title I funds	$13 million in 2006 (9%)	Unknown-present
Elk Grove, CA	270 four-year-old children	$1.5 million in 2006 (17%)	1992-present
McDowell County, WV	190 four-year-olds	$1 million in 2006 (33%)	1994-present
Pittsfield, MA	120 families (home visits) of two- to three-year-olds; 72 four-year-olds	$500,000 in 2005 (25%)	1970-2007
Houston, TX	131 full-school-day classes in 76 schools	$17.4 million in 2006 (21%)	2004-present
Peabody, MA	40 children in 2007	$69,000 in 2007 (14%)	1975-2005, 2007

Source: CLASP interviews with school district personnel.

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based on an analysis of the needs of incoming kindergarteners, to fund early education with their Title I funds. They found that low-income children from targeted areas of the county were behind their peers when they entered school, so they designed a comprehensive program to address the needs of these children. School personnel credit the superintendent for supporting early education and successfully convincing the school board and principals that this program was a necessary investment. In 2006, Fayette County had seven four-year-old Title I pre-kindergarten classes in the six elementary schools with the highest poverty rates. Because the program did not have the capacity to serve all eligible four-year olds, eligibility was determined by a developmental screening. Each family received at least one home visit per year. Fayette County has a growing immigrant population and has successfully included some of these children in its pre-kindergarten program. In 2006, 12 of 15 children in one Title I class were ELLs.

Title I-funded classes were full-school-day classes and consisted of 15 children with a certified teacher and a highly qualified para-professional. Fayette County used 100 percent of its Title I allocation for early education ($700,000 in 2005) to pay for teacher salaries, materials, and transportation for field trips. Fayette County administrators successfully protected these investments using evaluation data clearly demonstrating that the pre-kindergarten program had positive outcomes. Children who participated in Title I pre-kindergarten commonly met or exceeded minimum requirements on first grade state competency tests.

In the 2007 school year, Fayette replaced its Title I pre-kindergarten classes with Georgia state pre-kindergarten classes, which each serve 20 children. With the availability of state dollars for pre-kindergarten, Fayette is able to direct its Title I dollars to provide enrichment for kindergartners who are identified as at risk. The state pre-kindergarten classes remain within Title I schools and thus continue to serve the district's low-income children.

Partnerships with other agencies designed to utilize the flexibility of Title I funds to meet the comprehensive needs of families

The unique flexibility of Title I as a funding source for the components of high-quality early education programs allows districts to structure programs and services to meet the particular needs of children and families in their community. Title I funds can be used to fund a wide variety of comprehensive services and family supports. Because Title I can be layered with multiple funding sources, districts have thought creatively about how best to meet the needs of families in their communities. In some districts, this means using Title I for screenings, assessments, and professional development. Title I is often layered with other sources of funding to expand the hours of early education programs or the number of children served or to provide additional services to parents.

Detroit Public Schools

Detroit City Public Schools' Department of Early Childhood operates two early education programs: Head Start, serving 765 children, and the state-funded Michigan School Readiness Programs (MSRP), serving 2,062 children. Title I is used to extend classes in both programs to a full school day.

Families use a single application for Detroit's two public preschool programs, and the district determines individual children's eligibility. Head Start and MSRP teachers are trained together and can work in either setting, depending on need each year. All classes use the same materials and curriculum. Teachers have a BA and early childhood certification.

Approximately $13 million in Title I funds is used for early childhood education (about 9 percent of the $141 million 2006 allocation). These funds are supplemental and pay for additional teachers' salaries, materials, and field trips.

Declining district enrollment is a challenge for Detroit and has resulted in significant budget cuts. While Detroit previously served more than 4,000 children in early childhood programs, district enrollment has declined and some elementary schools have closed. The early childhood director told CLASP that funding early education with Title I is difficult, given reduced Title I funds. The district rallied this year to support preschool, but the program may face future threats. Successfully protecting the program will depend on leadership.

Elk Grove, California

The Elk Grove Unified School District serves 830 children in three different early education programs: Head Start, state pre-kindergarten, and Title I. The Title I Twilight program serves 270 four-year-olds in a program that runs from 3:15 to 6:15 p.m. It operates in conjunction with the after-school program and is supported by a combination of Title I parent involvement funds and 21st Century Community Learning Centers funds. Adult education funds support an onsite parent education component, which may include literacy, ESL, GED, citizenship, or parenting classes, depending on the needs of local families.

Elk Grove is a rapidly growing district, with an average of eight new students enrolling every day. While lack of classroom space during the school day initially led the district to create the Twilight preschool program, the array of services offered to families has resulted in very high rates of parent participation. In addition to the four-year-old program and adult education programs, homework help and after-school activities are offered for older children, thereby coordinating services for every member of the family and creating an environment that fosters parental involvement in education. Elk Grove uses $1.5 million in Title I for the Twilight program, about 17 percent of the district's allocation.

McDowell County, West Virginia

McDowell County Schools have been using Title I for four-year-old pre-kindergarten since approximately 1995, when McDowell initiated Title I pre-kindergarten in response to parental demand for early education services. While McDowell County has one of the highest concentrations of poverty in West Virginia, many low-income families did not qualify for Head Start because they were just over the poverty threshold. The district recognized the need for pre-kindergarten services in the community and received assistance from the state Title I director on the use of Title I funds for pre-kindergarten. The program began with two classrooms in the public elementary schools. As parent satisfaction with the program increased, parents began asking for it in all the schools. Today, McDowell has 10 Title I pre-kindergarten classrooms in public schools. In addition, Title I funds the salaries of two teachers who work in Head Start classrooms in the community. McDowell actively collaborates with Head Start providers. They meet regularly and conduct joint trainings and professional development.

McDowell County receives the third largest Title I allocation in the state. Title I funds used for pre-kindergarten have grown from approximately $600,000 to nearly $1 million—one-third of McDowell's Title I budget in 2006.

West Virginia is working toward making voluntary pre-kindergarten universally available to four-year-olds by 2012, the first year in which all pre-kindergarten classrooms in the

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state will be funded through the school funding formula. As McDowell phases in universal pre-kindergarten, it plans to redirect Title I dollars toward staff development in the pre-kindergarten program. In the 2007-2008 school year, the pre-kindergarten teachers in the Head Start classrooms previously funded by Title I will be funded through the school funding formula. Even as state-funded pre-kindergarten grows, McDowell plans to maintain its commitment to early education by using Title I to improve the quality of its program, through initiatives such as staff professional development and a more intensive parental involvement component, rather than redirecting those funds to services for older children.

Use of data to make the case for investments and to sustain those investments

CLASP found that many districts recognize the importance of data collection for tracking Title I investments and student outcomes. Districts commonly instituted a Title I early education program based on published research of the importance of high-quality early experiences and then instituted data collection and evaluation methods of their own to capture their children's experiences and create the support needed for continued investments in these programs.

Pittsfield, Massachusetts Public Schools

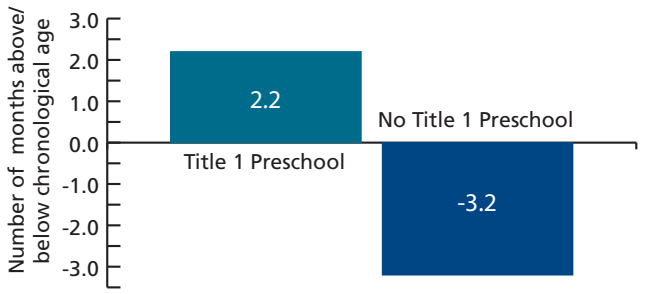
Pittsfield was the first district in Massachusetts to use Title I funds for early education. Title I supported the district's early childhood program, including the Parent-Child Home Program (PCHP) for two- and three-year olds and a four-year-old pre-kindergarten program in two community schools, from 1970 to 2007. Today, the program continues with local funding.

Through the PCHP, families receive 92 visits over two years. Family child care providers caring for eligible children are also eligible to participate. Children are selected based on several eligibility factors, including residency; outcomes on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test; and at-risk predictors, based on interviews with parents, including whether siblings attend Title I-funded schools, levels of parental education, income, whether the parent is a teen, and limited English proficiency of the child or the parents. A significant share of the PCHP budget is used for intensive staff training. Each home visitor receives up to 100 hours of specialized training each year.

Fourteen years of data show positive outcomes for children who participated in Pittsfield's Title I preschool. Kindergarten assessments show that children who participated in Title I preschool (either just as a four-year-old or earlier in the PHCP as well) scored developmentally above their age level and, on average, more than five months ahead of their counterparts who entered Title I elementary schools without participating in the Title I early education programs (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1

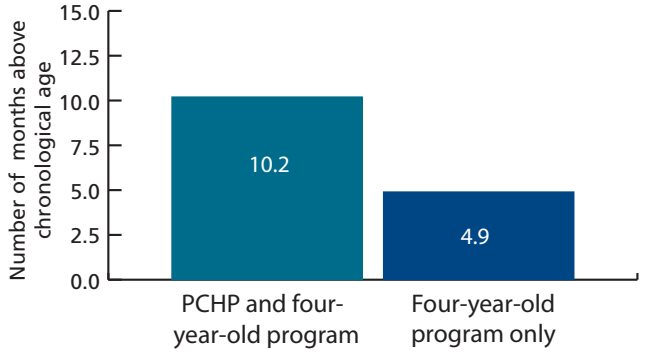
Average Results of Daberon Screening for Children Entering Kindergarten, 1992-2005



Difference is statistically significant

FIGURE 2

Average Results of Daberon Screening for Children Who Attended Title 1 PCHP Plus Four-year-old Program and Four-year-old Program Only, 2005



A 2005 analysis found that children who participated in the PCHP *and* the four-year-old Title I pre-kindergarten program experienced greater gains than children who participated in only the four-year-old program (see Figure 2). Ninety-three percent of entering kindergarteners who participated in the PCHP *and* the four-year-old program scored developmentally above their grade level, compared to 69 percent of entering kindergartners who attended *only* the four-year-old program.[68]

Longitudinal studies also show reduced drop-out rates and increased high school graduation rates for those enrolled in the PCHP program (see Table 4).[69]

Subsequent follow-up found that many PCHP participants went on to graduate from college. In 2002, 49 of 56 PCHP participants who had graduated high school and were accepted to college were identified; 31 (63 percent) of those who entered college graduated (see Table 5).

Through the 2006-2007 school year, Title I was the primary source of funding for the program. In some years, the district combined other local, state, and federal funds as well. In 2005, the PCHP served 129 families and eight family child care providers at a cost of approximately $2,560 a family. The PCHP budget totaled approximately $350,000; the four-year-old pre-kindergarten was funded at an additional $200,000. Title I paid mainly for salaries and benefits for the pre-kindergarten program. Depending on the year,

TABLE 4. LONGITUDINAL STUDY RESULTS OF PITTSFIELD PCHP PARTICIPANTS (ENROLLED 1976-1980), AT AGES 17-22

Length of Participation in PCHP	Number Included in Longitudinal Study	Dropped Out of High School	High School Graduates	High School Graduates Accepted to Postsecondary Education
Two years	70	11 (16%)	58 (83%)	41 (71%)
One year	28	8 (29%)	17 (61%)	9 (53%)
Less than one year	25	11 (44%)	12 (48%)	6 (50%)

TABLE 5. RESULTS OF PCHP PARTICIPANTS FOLLOW-UP STUDY, AT AGES 23-28

Number identified for study in 2000	49 (87%)
Accepted to college, but did not attend	11 (22%)
Graduated from two-year college	10 (20%)
Graduated from four-year college	21 (43%)
Dropped out of college	4 (8%)
Entered military	3 (7%)

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Pittsfield used between 25 and 30 percent of the district's total Title I allocation for early education.[70]

Leading up to the 2007-2008 school year, Pittsfield undertook a district-wide needs assessment. Pittsfield is a school district in corrective action. The district reviewed student outcome data in all grades—including DIBELS assessment data for children at the beginning and end of the kindergarten year and expenditures for all major grants, including Title I—to determine the optimal use of all funds. Based on this assessment, the district made the decision to redirect Title I funds to support reading, language arts, and math coaches in schools throughout the district and to no longer use them for early childhood.

Due to the early childhood program's long history and district support for the program, Pittsfield was committed to continuing to fund the PCHP and the four-year old pre-kindergarten though local funding, and it reconfigured the programs in several ways. The location of the PCHP office was physically moved to be part of two community schools, in order to facilitate increased parent involvement in the elementary school. Home visits with parents and children will be conducted for a longer period of time. About 72 infants and toddlers will participate in the PCHP this school year. The four-year old pre-kindergarten program was expanded from a four- to five-day program, serving 34 children in two elementary schools. The PCHP is funded at approximately $82,500 and the pre-kindergarten at $200,000.[71]

State policy and funding changes that influence Title I decisions

New investments by the state in early education, or incentives and efforts by the state to increase and expand early education, may influence LEAs to invest Title I funds in early education.

California

California's First 5 Commission has been encouraging districts at risk of failing to meet AYP to think about expanding pre-kindergarten programs through the use of Title I funds.[72] Using small planning grants and technical assistance to districts, First 5 has helped to increase the use of Title I funds across the state for this purpose. Between the 2001-2002 and 2005-2006 school years, California districts reserving a portion of their Title I funds for pre-kindergarten climbed from 30 to 57, and the amount of Title I funds used for early education services rose 76 percent, to $13.5 million.[73]

Washington

Beginning in the 2007-2008 school year, Washington is providing funding to expand full-day kindergarten to the state's poorest schools. Many of these districts have already been using Title I funds in this way and will have the ability to decide where to redirect these Title I dollars. The state Title I director reports that most school districts will be redirecting those Title I funds to support other educational services at the early elementary school and high school levels. School districts will have the ability to decide whether these funds remain supportive of early learning opportunities for young children.[74]

How Implementation of NCLB is Directly Impacting Title I Investments in Early Education

NCLB has caused states and districts to make dramatic changes in their educational systems. The legislation's impact is being felt in the early childhood area in several ways. Many district officials told CLASP in interviews that their districts were committed to supporting early childhood through Title I and that those investments were well protected. In other cases, funding limitations and other concerns—including NCLB requirements—have pushed districts to

cut back or eliminate programs for young children.

In still other districts, we found that the pressure NCLB puts on school districts to implement research-based interventions in order to show improvement in their AYP scores meant that they were able to make new investments in early childhood programs—particularly in the early years of NCLB implementation, when Title I funds were growing. While it often comes down to a single resourceful and far-seeing early education champion to sustain a commitment to early education in the face of NCLB, the complicated interplay of funding, set-aside requirements, and competing interests ultimately may tip the balance toward or away from a district's support of early education programs.

Increasing investments in early education

Full-day kindergarten in districts and states

One case study report since implementation of NCLB found that the expansion of full-day kindergarten has been used by districts as a strategy to improve student achievement. When districts were able to find funding for it, full-day kindergarten proved to be an important piece of supporting young children's learning. In 2004, Harrison Community Schools in Clare County, Michigan used unspent Title I funds reserved for choice and supplemental education services in the previous year to expand their kindergarten program to full day.[75]

In 2004, Seaford, Delaware's Title I allocation increased by $2 million. The district chose to use these new funds to launch district-wide full-day kindergarten—specifically, by doubling the number of kindergarten teachers, which allowed for the expansion from half- to full-day kindergarten. Title I also funds one para-educator per school, to help at the kindergarten level.[76]

A growing number of states are recognizing the importance of full-day kindergarten as a strategy to improve student achievement and are providing funds to districts for such services. Between January and May 2007, Colorado, Utah, Washington, North Dakota, Montana, and Indiana each passed legislation expanding the availability of full-day kindergarten through the provision of funding or policy change.[77] To the extent that Title I funds are currently used for full-day kindergarten, the availability of new state funding may free up some Title I funds for other purposes, including other early education programs.

Houston Independent School District

Houston's early childhood initiative was created in response to NCLB accountability requirements. Two recent superintendents identified early education as a priority, deciding that to improve student achievement, increased investments early in children's educational careers were essential. Kaye Stripling, past superintendent of Houston Independent School District (HISD), was committed to early education and directed all Title I funds Houston received from increased NCLB authorizations toward a new pre-kindergarten initiative. Public support for the initiative was strong, as demonstrated by voters' approval of a bond program that included funding to create several district-wide early childhood centers in the community.[78]

Current superintendent Abelardo Saavedra has continued this commitment to investments in early education. The district began using Title I for pre-kindergarten in 2004 and has since more than doubled the amount used. In 2005, Houston began offering a half-day program to all eligible four-year-olds, and in 2006 it expanded it to a full-day program. Beginning in 2006, the district reduced individual school Title I allocations; these

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funds were redirected to expand pre-kindergarten throughout the district. The full cost of the pre-kindergarten program is supported by Title I, school funding, and state pre-kindergarten expansion grants. Houston uses 21 percent of Title I funds ($17 million) for pre-kindergarten; this amount includes four district-wide early childhood centers receiving a total of $3 million.[79]

A core belief of HISD is that "the district must begin preparing children for high-school graduation and college's academic demands with a comprehensive, high-quality education that starts in pre-kindergarten."[80] HISD tracks children who participate in pre-kindergarten, and the district has already measured improvements in these children's kindergarten assessments. HISD leaders predict improved third grade test scores as a result of their early childhood initiative.

Uncertainty in Title I funds

Peabody, Massachusetts Public Schools

In 2006, Peabody Public Schools eliminated its 30-year-old Title I-funded early education program. Two factors contributed to the reduction of Peabody's Title I funds and subsequent elimination of the early education program. First, a 2003 interim census found declining poverty in Peabody, resulting in a 34 percent reduction in the district's Title I allocation—although the district superintendent disputes the Census numbers, as the population of free and reduced lunch eligible students increased from 52 percent to 60 percent in one elementary school. The superintendent at the time also expressed concern that Peabody's growing immigrant population was not adequately counted and that this contributed to flawed data showing a decline in poverty.[81]

The second contributing factor was the process of one of the two Title I elementary schools in the district moving into school improvement status. This event triggered a series of requirements, which included using funds that were previously used for four-year-old services. Once Peabody met its funding obligations to the elementary school and to the set-aside requirements, there were not sufficient funds left over to fund early education, and the four-year-old classes were eliminated.[82]

In the 2007 school year, Peabody's Title I allocation was increased, and the district reinstated one pre-kindergarten class at the Welch elementary school, due to widespread support for the program from parents, teachers, and administrators.[83] Two part-day sessions will serve 20 children each. Peabody uses $69,000 in Title I funds for pre-kindergarten, or approximately 14 percent of its Title I allocation.

Additional constraints on early education in the NCLB era

In addition to these examples, CLASP staff heard stories of other barriers to investments in early childhood programs created by the implementation of NCLB. While verification of these issues was beyond the scope of this study, we find that the challenges raised are worthy of further discussion and research.

- Several policymakers told us that young children often are not in the same school or school district by the time they take the third grade tests—the measure used to determine whether a school or district is meeting AYP. Available data show that nearly one-fourth of children under age six in low-income families (2.4 million children) moved in the last year.[84] Families move for a variety of reasons, including better jobs and housing opportunities.[85] District officials in areas of high mobility were concerned that their schools would not get any benefit from an early investment in young children who

would subsequently leave their district.

- Another barrier cited was the very short timeframes for success in the NCLB legislation. With only two years before being put into the school improvement category, and five consecutive years before a school can be put into school restructuring status, schools have very little time to invest in new solutions—even those that may have long-term positive outcomes for children, such as early education programs.
- We also heard that the pressure on individual schools to make AYP can act as a disincentive to partnerships and collaborations with other community-based organizations serving young children. Individual schools are held accountable for the progress of their students; as a result, they may be hesitant to give agencies such as Head Start and community-based child care providers (who do not have to meet the same accountability standards) any influence in the instruction of young children, particularly if there has been no previous relationship between these different entities.
- In some districts, stagnant funding for NCLB and local investments in schools meant that all available dollars, including Title I funds, were fully appropriated. Local school officials found it difficult to think about new ways to use existing funds, arguing that an investment in young children would come at the direct expense of investments in older children.

Recommendations for Local Educational Agencies

It is clear from our research that many LEAs are not aware of the flexibility of Title I funds and the ability they have to use these funds to invest in early childhood programs within schools and within their communities. While the U.S. Department of Education has published nonregulatory guidance that clearly demonstrates that this is an allowable use of the funds, the department has not taken a leadership role to help local districts think about using the money in this way. Therefore, we offer the following recommendations to LEAs as they think about using Title I funds for early education programs or as they work to sustain investments:

- Build relationships to identify opportunities to use Title I funds for early childhood programs,
- Champion early education using research and data,
- Build on existing resources in communities,
- Invest in coordinated district-wide solutions,
- Invest in early diagnostic assessment and program evaluation,
- Link vulnerable children and families to family supports and health services, and
- Leverage funds from state and federal sources.

Build relationships to identify opportunities to use Title I funds for early childhood programs.

While Title I funds have most recently been flat, there may be some growth in the next few years, especially as the reauthorization of the program moves forward in Congress. Districts may find that they have unused funds or carryover funds available. In both situations, there may be funds that can be directed toward creating or expanding early childhood programs. Interested school leaders should create a plan for implementation that can be put into place as soon as dollars become available. They may also find it useful to build relationships with community-based child care providers in advance of funding opportunities.

Champion early education using research and data.

CLASP's research found that many school officials have not

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focused on early childhood programs and are not well versed in the research supporting investments in young children. At the same time, we found that it may only take one resourceful leader to create a new early education program. For some districts, the first step in a plan to use Title I funds for early education programs will be predicated on dissemination of the research about the importance of caring and nurturing interactions with adults on the brain development of very young children. Also important is the research on the costs and benefits of investments in early education programs such as the Abecedarian Project, the Chicago Parent Child Program, and the Perry preschool program. More recent analyses of state prekindergarten programs, Head Start, and home-visiting programs add to this evidence.[86] Ensuring that key leaders in the district have access to this information may provide the critical leverage needed to create and sustain early education programs. This research can also be used to make the case that early childhood investments are a key piece of school improvement plans.

Build on existing resources in communities.

CLASP found that LEAs that had invested in early childhood programs using Title I funds often did so as a response to the needs of the community. Home-visiting programs, investments in comprehensive services and professional development, and expansions of existing programs were funded because there was a perceived gap in services and interventions. CLASP's findings, which echo those of GAO, are that school districts are using Title I funds in early childhood to provide everything from books and other materials, to joint professional development opportunities, to salaries and benefits for teachers, to fully funded programs.

School districts interested in investing in early childhood programs do not have to start by creating a new program. They can work with the local community to identify existing needs and use Title I funds to fill in the gaps. This incremental approach offers the opportunity for school districts to form new partnerships with community-based agencies providing full-day and full-year child care and early education to low-income families. LEAs will want to think broadly about how best to meet the needs of diverse groups in their districts and how to reach out to new partners, including immigrant-serving organizations and others in language-minority communities. As these small steps are successful, districts and their community partners can work together to plan and implement expansions that both build quality and increase access for all low-income young children and to build new leaders at the local level to help advocate for these investments.

Invest in coordinated district-wide solutions.

Title I funds can be used for schoolwide programs or for targeted programs within schools. They can also be used for district-wide programming, a model that seems to work well for investments in early childhood programs. LEAs interested in establishing early childhood programs may wish to assess underutilized space, residential mobility rates, and existing community resources and identify whether families in the district would be best served by a common early childhood center that serves all eligible children. While this may be a particularly useful solution for small or rural districts, large, urban districts may also employ this model, with several early childhood centers serving the catchment areas of multiple elementary schools. The district-wide model allows the LEA to realize economies of scale, provides services to a larger group of children than a single-school model does, and can create a child-friendly setting in which to introduce very young children and their families to the

school environment. When created as part of a planning process that includes community-based early childhood providers, district-wide models can also serve as an opportunity to create new partnerships with child care and early education providers outside the school system.

Invest in early diagnostic assessment and program evaluation.

Early childhood experts agree on the importance of diagnostic assessment to determine whether young children need specific interventions and whether they should receive special education and other services.[87] Title I funds can be an important tool in providing early screenings for all young children in a district, through home visiting family assessments, diagnostic screenings, and assessments of the learning needs of children entering pre-kindergarten and kindergarten. These tools can be combined to create programs that meet the needs of young children through access to comprehensive services, direct instruction that is developmentally and culturally appropriate, and meeting high quality standards.

Further, districts can help protect the Title I investments they have made in early education programs through long-term evaluations designed to show the benefits to children and to the district. The oldest Title I-funded early childhood program, the Chicago Parent Child Centers, has also been one of the most widely evaluated and is often used as the evidentiary basis for districts and states around the country to invest in similar programs. CLASP research found that when districts had evaluation data, they were able to protect their investments in early childhood programs.

Link vulnerable children and families to family supports and health services.

Low-income children are often in circumstances that may affect their ability to learn. Access to comprehensive services such as health care, nutrition, dental and vision exams, home visiting, and transportation can improve their odds for success in school. In many communities, at-risk children may be served in child care, Head Start and Early Head Start, state pre-kindergarten, and other early education programs; but these programs may lack the resources to provide comprehensive support services to every child that needs them. LEAs can use Title I funds to provide these services in community-based settings or in school settings to expand the availability of high-quality early education programs wherever children are served.

Leverage funds from state and federal sources.

In several districts that were interviewed, LEAs were able to meet identified community needs by leveraging existing funds to layer with Title I funds, often through state pre-kindergarten programs and partnerships with Head Start grantees, child care providers, and early intervention programs. This leveraging requires knowledge of the community and of the requirements of other programs. It also requires all partners to be willing to come to a common table to work together, which may take substantial time and patience.

Conclusion

Using Title I funds for early education is not a radical, new idea. Many schools and districts have been using these funds to invest in young children for decades. While the accountability requirements of NCLB have created new challenges to sustaining or expanding those investments, NCLB also offers an opportunity and an incentive to support our youngest children. Many LEAs are committed to supporting early education, and several openings and strategies exist that may enable LEAs to take advantage of the flexibility of Title I funds to use them to support early education and to support broad educa-

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tional goals. Yet, there is emerging evidence that the requirements of NCLB and the limited funding available are putting district policymakers in the difficult position of defunding successful early childhood programs.

While there are actions that LEAs can take at present, there are also ways in which NCLB could be improved to support high-quality early education. To that end, CLASP has issued a set of federal recommendations for reauthorization of NCLB. They include improved data collection; enhanced language on transitions between community-based early childhood programs and local schools; sustaining and supporting local flexibility in use of funds for discretionary purposes, such as early childhood programs; ensuring that joint professional development opportunities are available to build knowledge of child development and appropriate practices with ELLs; encouraging SEAs to use their set-aside funds to promote and support early childhood programs at the local level; and increasing funding.[88] A long-term strategy to successfully create and sustain sound investments in young children will take efforts and strong leadership at the federal, state, and local levels.

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ABOUT OUR WORK

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) is a national nonprofit that works to improve the lives of low-income people. CLASP's mission is to improve the economic security, educational and workforce prospects, and family stability of low-income parents, children, and youth and to secure equal justice for all.

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CLASP's child care and early education work is dedicated to promoting policies that support both child development and the needs of low-income working parents. CLASP conducts policy analysis, research, and technical assistance to expand access to and resources for high-quality, comprehensive child care and early education; build effective child care and early education systems, including child care subsidies, Head Start, pre-kindergarten, and other early education initiatives; and ensure these systems can be responsive to the developmental needs of all children, in particular infants and toddlers and children in immigrant families. CLASP's child care and early education work highlights state-by-state data where available. For more information, see http://childcareandearlyed.clasp.org.

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