

Using Title I Funds in the Stimulus Package for Pre-K: Making the Case

Q: Can Title I funds be used for pre-k?

A: Yes! Refer to U.S. Dept of Education (ED) Guidance, 3-4-04

- The Elementary and Secondary Education Act authorizes the use of Title I funds for educational services to eligible children below the age at which Local Education Agencies (LEA) provides elementary education.
- In the 2003-2004 school year, at least 13 state pre-kindergarten programs reported using Title I funds for preschool, reaching an estimated 260,000-300,000 children. A participating school may use its Title I funds to operate a preschool program.
- An LEA may reserve an amount from the LEA's total allocation to operate a Title I preschool program for eligible children in the district as a whole or for a portion of the district.

Q: Why use Title I funds for pre-k?

A: Flexibility, accountability, and proven efficacy! As cash-strapped districts across the country look for proven strategies to improve school achievement, they should use newly available Title I funds for pre-k – it is a rare opportunity to invest in what works.

- Flexibility -- The Title I funding stream allows many possible uses, making it easy for communities to address their individual needs.
- Accountability -- Programs providing services with Title I funds, "must ensure that those services comply at a minimum with the achievement standards established in the Head Start Act." (*ED Guidance, 3-4-04, citing OHS regulation, effective 1-1-2008*)
- Efficacy -- Four decades of research shows that benefits of pre-k persist well into adulthood; low-income and otherwise at-risk children (those eligible for Title I) benefit the most from high-quality early education.

Q: Knowing that recovery funds are temporary, how could Title I money be used in ways that do not result in unsustainable continuing commitments after the funding expires?

A: Schools and LEAs should focus these funds on short-term investments with the potential for long-term benefits

- Investing in the quality of pre-k programs is the kind of strategy that the ED advocates for all ARRA funds – an investment that is both quick and wise.
 - Quick: quality improvements are critically needed; only 2 states meet the necessary 10 benchmarks of quality.
 - Wise: *Only* high-quality pre-k programs yield positive outcomes for children and communities.
- The money invested in a high-quality pre-k program also promises returns ranging from 2:1 to as high as 17:1.
- This is a unique opportunity for LEAs to improve teaching and learning, and the logical place to start is at the beginning – with pre-k.
- And there is some indication that the Obama Administration will seek to continue the recovery bill's level of funding for Title I as well as for other early education investments

Q: What are some examples of pre-k quality investments that Title I funds in ARRA could support?

A: There are many!

- Teacher training
- Boosting or maintaining teacher salaries
- Strengthening curriculum standards and aligning them with K-3 standards
- Investing in early learning infrastructure – instructional materials, monitoring systems, standards development
- Establishing longitudinal data systems
- Providing comprehensive services
- Enhancing opportunities for parent engagement
- Purchasing new research-based curriculum and ample supplies of blocks and toys
- Implementing a strong system to monitor children's progress

Q: Can Title I be used in conjunction with other funding streams?

A: Yes, and doing so can help to reach more children and improve quality

- Cases where funds are “layered” in order to create full-day pre-k, reach more children or improve program quality:
 - Houston, TX uses Title I to provide full-school-day preschool to all eligible 4-year-olds in the district.
 - Melrose, MA – screening an assessment of all children to identify those at risk. Used 100% of Title I on early ed.
 - CO – layered funds, using Title I to pay for teacher salaries and instructional materials.
- Title I preschool services may be provided in a variety of settings funded by other program dollars, as long as they are “of sufficient quality to facilitate effective program implementation” (*ED Guidance 3-4-04*):
 - District and school facilities
 - Head Start
 - Even Start
 - Early Reading First

- programs funded under CCDBG
- Site conducting a family literacy program

Q: Why should school districts use stimulus Title I funds on pre-k when there are so many other needs for this funding?

A: Use of these funds can simultaneously address both short- and long-term needs and ensure a solid return on investment.

- Improving pre-k is necessary to establish a strong alignment in the early grades because pre-k is the first and most important step in ensuring a successful transition into kindergarten and beyond.
- Pre-k is smart education *and* fiscal policy for school districts, especially in difficult economic times: parents want and need quality education; children in the district will perform better if they start ready to learn; and jobs are created by expanding the pre-k offerings.
- Investing early reduces future spending on remedial programs (also funded by Title I funds) – so it’s a smarter use of these limited dollars.
- Use of Title I funds to improve pre-k has been shown to improve later outcomes (Montgomery County Schools study).
- “The conferees expect States to use some of the funding provided for early childhood programs and activities, as proposed by the Senate.” (U.S House-Senate Conference Report, page 456)
- Giving children a strong start is even more critical at this difficult economic time, when more parents are struggling to afford quality pre-k programs and need to be in the workforce.

Q: What are the benefits of using Title I funds for pre-k?

A: When Title I funds have been used in creative ways, programs showed substantial evidence of good outcomes for children. For example:

- A recent study by Montgomery County School District shows a direct link between strategic use of Title I funds, children’s school readiness and improved graduation rates. According to the study:
 - children who attended full-day pre-k programs made greater strides in reading and mathematics than children who attended half-day programs;
 - Hispanic students and others learning English as a second language (ESOL) services demonstrated some of the best progress.
- The renowned Chicago Child Parent Center (CPC) program was funded though Title I dollars. This longitudinal study found that:
 - Children who had two years of preschool did better than those with only one, and did better still if the preschool program was followed by a dovetailed program in the early years of primary school.

- The benefits extended to adolescence in the form of better school and social adjustment.
- Nobel Laureate James J. Heckman has studied literature on CPC and concluded that program payoffs are much higher for young children than they are for interventions that occur at later ages.
- The national impact study of Title I supported this position, showing that younger students benefited more from reading instruction than older ones.

Q: Is there a downside to using Title I funds from the stimulus package on pre-k?

A: The challenge is to conduct very careful but rapid planning for use of these funds

- Careful planning is necessary for communities establishing a new program or expanding the availability of an existing one with the recovery funds - this planning must be done very quickly due to the urgent need to spend ARRA funds.
- Sustainability plans must be developed and implemented to avoid the “funding cliff” when recovery funds dry up – with smart and strategic planning, state and local funds can be used to stabilize programs later on through the school funding formula or otherwise.

Q: How could stimulus education dollars be used efficiently?

A: Effective use of stimulus funds requires a commitment to

- track the money
- seek implementation improvements
- provide evidence of those improvements
- As policy makers consider their choices, we recommend they rely on two principles:
 - invest where the proven returns are the greatest; and
 - verify results to make sure taxpayers get what they pay for.
- We are committed to working with the cross-section of all state programs that affect children to ensure effective use of funds.
- School districts have a prime opportunity to turn Title I into a more uniform funding stream that can easily be assessed for efficacy.
- We are working hard to ensure leadership on local and state levels collaborate and to think about the vision for early education system and then look at the funding streams and figure out how to use them to meet the vision.
- The Chicago CPC – which was originally funded by Title I funds – is a great example for how this federal funding stream should be put to use (2 years of pre-k and extended intervention through early elementary grades)...and that program resulted in a remarkable return on investment.

- Decisions based on these principles will promote growth beyond the stimulus, help the economy recover more quickly, and advance public confidence in government performance.

Q: How do we make the case for more Title I funds going forward?

A: This is a rare opportunity to invest in what works, and to obtain additional evidence of what goes into is smart early education policy.

- Prior to the ARRA, Title I has not received an increase in funding in two years, while the number of poor children has increased. As a result, 62% of districts had Title I funds cut or frozen in 2006-2007.
- ARRA funds are a one-time investment. Spending them promptly and wisely will help make a stronger case for more funding down the road.
 - Uses of all ARRA funds, including Title I funds, must be carefully documented
 - Collecting data on uses and outcomes will provide necessary evidence of what works.
- As the Montgomery County Public Schools study recently revealed, conducting a rigorous longitudinal evaluation of Title I funded programs would provide additional data on the efficacy of pre-k, helping make the case for an increased investment down the road.

Addressing School District Officials

- Districts must act as advocates and weigh-in at the state level to underscore the important role pre-k has to the community - employment, families, school performance.
- Pre-k is smart education *and* fiscal policy for school districts, especially in difficult economic times: parents want and need quality education; children in the district will perform better if they start ready to learn; and jobs are created by expanding the pre-k offerings.
- Investing early reduces future spending on remedial programs, that are also funded by Title I funds.
- Use of Title I funds to improve pre-k has been shown to improve later outcomes (Montgomery County Schools study).
- Improving pre-k is necessary to establishing a strong alignment in the early grades because pre-k is the first and most important step in ensuring a successful transition into kindergarten and proceeding years.
- *“The conferees expect States to use some of the funding provided for early childhood programs and activities, as proposed by the Senate.”* (Conference Report pg 456)
- Giving children a strong start is even more critical at a time like today, when more parents are struggling.

Addressing State and Federal Policy Makers

- As states struggle with budget shortfalls, pre-k programs are at risk, and the federal government is finally stepping up. To a large degree, states have led the movement to increase access to pre-k, and yet federal leadership has long been lacking.
- As cash-strapped states across the country look for smart ways to spend limited resources, they should use the newly available Title I funds for high-quality pre-kindergarten programs – it is a rare opportunity to invest in what works.
- If states are to develop a competitive workforce and help to rebuild a prosperous nation, they must invest in proven programs that develop human capital, starting where the learning begins – with early education.
- If a designated portion of funding is set aside for a rigorous longitudinal evaluation, elected officials could assure constituents that they were advancing a promising way to close the achievement gap which continues to impede states' progress.

