



## **Recommendations to Support High-quality Early Education Programs Through Reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act**

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By the time they enter kindergarten, many low-income children are already behind their peers from more advantaged backgrounds. During early childhood, low-income children face a number of risk factors that threaten healthy development and learning, including low birth weight, stunted growth, obesity, and lead poisoning—all of which are associated with physical disabilities, reduced IQ, and grade repetition.<sup>1</sup> Low-income parents tend to have higher rates of depression and stress,<sup>2</sup> which can also impact children's well-being.<sup>3</sup> Socioeconomic status is also related to language development opportunities. A study of verbal interactions in the home found that by age three, children with professional parents had heard approximately 11 million words in the previous year—compared to 3 million for children whose parents receive welfare.<sup>4</sup> Such differences in the early years have an impact at kindergarten entry: children in low-income families score below other children on measures of pre-reading and pre-mathematical skills.<sup>5</sup>

Well-designed and well-implemented early care and education programs can improve outcomes for all children, particularly those in low-income families.<sup>6</sup> High-quality programs should also address other risks to child development by helping parents access comprehensive services for themselves and their children—such as medical, dental, mental health, and family support services—that are necessary for healthy development.<sup>7</sup>

While states and local communities recognize the importance of these investments, limited funding has constrained policymakers' ability to create and expand programs that meet young children's needs from birth through school entry. For example, both Head Start and the Child Care and Development Block Grant have been essentially flat funded for most of the last five years.<sup>8</sup> State pre-kindergarten programs have been growing, but national research shows that spending per child in pre-kindergarten has declined, making it difficult to create and support high-quality programs.<sup>9</sup>

Unlike other funding sources, Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has seen some increases in funding levels since 2002. As a result, a number of policymakers interested in investing in high-quality early care and education programs have turned to Title I as a funding

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source. Title I funds are quite flexible; they can be used to create a new early education program or to expand or improve the quality of an existing one. According to nonregulatory guidance from the Department of Education, Title I funds can be used specifically to fund the following components of an early childhood program:

- teacher salaries and professional development;
- counseling services;
- minor remodeling;
- leasing or renting space in privately owned facilities;
- 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”;<sup>10</sup> and
- screening children to identify those at risk.<sup>11</sup>

In a 2000 report, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that while almost all school districts funding early education services through Title I use these funds for educational services, districts also use Title I funds for children’s meals and for medical, social, and dental services.<sup>12</sup>

The child care and early education team at CLASP has spent the last two years examining the relationship between Title I and the provision of high-quality early education programs in local communities. We have collected information on more than 100 programs and have conducted interviews with nearly half of these to understand the barriers and flexibility in the law. 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* ([http://www.clasp.org/publications/missed\\_opp.pdf](http://www.clasp.org/publications/missed_opp.pdf)). Our work has led us to the following recommendations for the reauthorization of NCLB:

1. Improve data collection.
2. Enhance language on transitions between community-based early childhood programs and local schools.
3. Sustain and support local flexibility in use of funds for discretionary purposes, such as early childhood programs.
4. Ensure that joint professional development opportunities are available to build knowledge of child development and appropriate practices with English language learners (ELLs).
5. Encourage state educational agencies to promote early childhood programs at the local level.
6. Increase funding.

## **1. Improve data collection.**

Little is known about the total amount of Title I funds spent on early education services—or about what these funds provide to children. GAO found that most children served are between three and five, with less than 1 percent of them under the age of three. More than 90 percent of the school districts that serve early education children with Title I funds have established a minimum eligibility age of three or four. Less than 20 percent of all school districts that receive Title I funds choose to use these funds for early education; of those, most use less than 10 percent of their total Title I funds for this purpose.<sup>13</sup> Districts do not report their Title I expenditures on early education to the U.S. Department of Education (ED); and the National Center for Education Statistics, which provides annual reports on children in early education, does not report data by funding stream. A number of studies cite Title I as a federal funding source for early education, or suggest it as a potential source; but these reports do not provide data on how many children are served, what services are provided with the funds, or the settings in which the funds are used.<sup>14</sup>

For example, a survey in Washington State found that 29 percent of preschool programs are at least partially funded through Title I.<sup>15</sup> The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) compiles a yearly report on the status of public early education in the states. The NIEER *Yearbook* notes that it is difficult to adequately report on Title I funds for early education because many states do not require tracking of the funds at the local level. While NIEER found that eight of the 44 state programs surveyed do use Title I funds for early education, few states reported the amount allocated for this purpose.<sup>16</sup>

Available data from ED suggests that nationally, 2 percent of all children served in Title I—or about 408,000 in the 2002-2003 school year—are in pre-kindergarten.<sup>17</sup> This percentage appears to be unchanged over time. However, when analyzing the data on the number of children served with Title I funds, it is important to remember that, according to GAO, “these services include educational and medical services and social services.... [B]ecause services were funded with both Title I and non-Title I funds, it is difficult to determine the extent to which Title I funds supported specific services.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, while there are estimates of the numbers of children served with these funds, the nature of Title I services and of the opportunity these funds provide to supplement other funding sources means that these children may also be reported in other funding streams.

*CLASP recommends that the reauthorization include specific language requiring local education agencies to report on 1) the number of children served by age, for all children under the age of kindergarten entry; 2) a description of the program and/or services received by children in these age groups; and 3) total expenditures for this age group.*

## **2. Enhance language on the role of local schools in improving transitions between community-based early childhood programs and local schools.**

The current language in the act is quite clear that local education agencies (LEAs) must work with Head Start, state-funded pre-kindergarten programs, Early Reading First, and other early

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education programs to coordinate and transition children between these settings and schools.<sup>19</sup> However, the role of the local school in these transition activities is vague at best.

Proposed language in the Head Start reauthorization bills being discussed in both the House and the Senate will require that local Head Start agencies work with individual schools on transition and coordination. This puts an enormous burden on these Head Start agencies to take the lead role in building a relationship with schools.

*CLASP recommends that the reauthorization include language (similar to that in S. 556) that requires local schools to work with their local Head Start agency, as well as with other child care and early education programs serving young children in their catchment area, to ensure that effective transition policies and practices are in place.*

### **3. Sustain and support local flexibility in use of funds for discretionary purposes, such as early childhood programs.**

NCLB may place two interests in direct competition for funding: the desire of schools and districts to invest in young children early in their learning careers, in order to achieve long-term gains in closing the achievement gap, and the short-term need for immediate interventions in first, second, and third grade to raise third grade test scores. Schools that are identified for school improvement status may need to redirect resources to concentrate on the primary grades and to meet set-aside and spending requirements, which may cause the overall amount of Title I funds available for early education programs to diminish over time.

As schools and LEAs move into required improvement activities, their flexibility is substantially limited. If a school is found to be in need of improvement, the LEA in which the school is located 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 requires less than this amount, the school can spend the remainder on other services or carry over the set-aside amount to the next year. An additional 10 percent, at a minimum, must be set aside for professional development.

In many cases, these funds may already be allocated to services and programs that are meeting the long-term goals of the school or LEA, leaving no extra funds to set aside. As a result, some school districts have been forced to discontinue investments in early childhood programs in order to meet the set-aside requirements. For example, in 2006, the Peabody Public Schools in Massachusetts were forced to eliminate their 30-year-old Title I-funded early education program as a result of an overall reduction in their Title I allocation and an elementary school moving into school improvement status. Once Peabody met its funding obligations to the elementary school and to the set-aside requirements,<sup>20</sup> there were not sufficient funds left over to fund the preschool programs, and they were eliminated. When this happens, there may not be sufficient early childhood space in the surrounding community to provide these services, leaving children who would benefit from high-quality early childhood services without access to these programs.

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*CLASP recommends that LEAs or schools identified for improvement that have previously invested in early childhood programs be encouraged to sustain these investments, through incentives such as a lower set-aside requirement for supplemental educational services and transportation. Alternatively, the state educational agencies' 4 percent set-aside for schools in improvement could be used to help LEAs and schools maintain investments in early childhood programs.*

**4. Ensure that joint professional development opportunities are available to build knowledge of child development and appropriate practices with English language learners (ELLs).**

Professional development is a priority of NCLB, and well-trained and well-educated teachers are a key component of high-quality early childhood programs. According to research by the Department of Health and Human Services and others, knowledge of child development is a key component of quality interactions in early childhood settings.<sup>21</sup> Yet NCLB mentions the importance of learning about child development only in the context of the National Teacher Recruitment Campaign.

Further, the growth of young children from immigrant families—according to the 2000 U.S. Census, children in immigrant families are the fastest-growing segment of the nation's child population<sup>22</sup>—suggests a need to prioritize training for teachers working with these young children, many of whom are ELLs, children who are learning English as their second language. Title III includes provisions to build the professional development opportunities for teachers working with limited English proficient children; however, the focus of these efforts seems to be on children in the K-12 school population.

Finally, as more LEAs invest Title I and other funds in early childhood programs and more community-based programs partner with Head Start and schools to serve young children at risk of school failure, it is important to the success of school readiness initiatives that all teachers working with these children—whether in the schools or in community-based child care and early education programs—have the opportunity to participate in targeted professional development.

*CLASP recommends that language be inserted in Title II that supports the expansion of state and local professional development opportunities for school-based teachers and community-based providers working with Title I-eligible children to gain knowledge of child development and learning (including cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development and approaches to learning), of appropriate practices for working with ELLs and children birth to age eight, and of developmentally appropriate practices to support children's positive development and learning.*

**5. Encourage state educational agencies to promote early childhood programs at the local level.**

One of CLASP's research findings is that many LEAs may not be aware of the flexibility of Title I funds and of their ability to use these funds to invest in early childhood programs within schools and within their communities. While ED has published nonregulatory guidance that clearly demonstrates that this is an allowable use of the funds, it has not advocated that local districts consider using the money in this way.

At the state level, several states have actively encouraged their LEAs to investigate whether using Title I funds to support early childhood programs meets their needs. California's First Five Commission has begun to encourage districts at risk of failing to meet annual yearly progress to think about growing early education programs through the use of Title I funds. Using small planning grants and technical assistance to districts, First Five has helped to increase the amount of Title I funds used across the state for this purpose: between the 2001-2002 and 2005-2006 school years, the number of districts in California reserving Title I funds for preschool climbed from 30 to 57, and the amount of Title I funds available rose 76 percent, to \$13.5 million.

The technical assistance provided to school districts in California has been successful, as local administrators are enthusiastic about finding funding sources for preschool. Models from around the state have been shared through regional workshops.

*CLASP recommends that state educational agencies be allowed to use their funds to support planning grants and technical assistance to LEAs to investigate the use of Title I funds for early childhood programs.*

## **6. Increase overall funding for NCLB.**

Title I has not received an increase in funding in two years, although the number of poor children nationally has increased. As a result, 62 percent of districts had Title I funds cut or frozen in the 2006-2007 school year.<sup>23</sup>

LEAs cannot continue to maintain service levels with frozen funding. Due to inflation, costs are increasing for materials, salaries, and other expenditures—preventing LEAs from providing the same number of services and the same level of quality. CLASP research found that many local school districts are cutting or reducing their investments in early childhood programs—or foresee doing so in the future—because they have fewer resources than in previous years.

*CLASP recommends that NCLB be fully funded. At a minimum, this will require closing the current \$12 billion gap between the authorized and appropriated Title I funding amounts.*

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<sup>1</sup> Jeanne Brooks-Gunn and Greg Duncan, "The Effects of Poverty on Children," *The Future of Children*, 2 no. 2: 55-71; Shiriki Kumanyika and Sonya Grier, "Targeting Interventions for Ethnic Minority and Low-Income Populations," *The Future of Children*, 16 no. 1, retrieved May 1, 2006 from [http://www.futureofchildren.org/information2826/information\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=355756](http://www.futureofchildren.org/information2826/information_show.htm?doc_id=355756).

<sup>2</sup> Kristin Anderson Moore and Sharon Vandivere, *Stressful Family Lives: Parent and Child Well-Being*, 2000.

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<sup>3</sup> National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, ed. Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips, 2000, p. 251.

<sup>4</sup> B. Hart and T.R. Risley, *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experiences of Young American Children*, 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Gershoff, *Living at the Edge: Low Income and the Development of America's Kindergartners*, 2003, retrieved May 4, 2006 from <http://www.nccp.org/media/lat03d-text.pdf>; Richard J. Coley, *An Uneven Start*, 2002; National Center for Education Statistics, *Children's Reading and Mathematics Achievement in Kindergarten and First Grade*, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> W. Steven Barnett, *Long-Term Effects of Early Childhood Programs on Cognitive and School Outcomes*, 1995.

<sup>7</sup> Jane Koppelman, *Reauthorizing Head Start: The Future Federal Role in Preschool Programs for the Poor*, 2003, [http://www.nhpf.org/pdfs\\_ib/IB789\\_HeadStart\\_4-11-03.pdf](http://www.nhpf.org/pdfs_ib/IB789_HeadStart_4-11-03.pdf); Ariella Herman, Head Start Program Information Report, Health Services Report, Descriptive Analysis, presented at the Anderson School at the University of California, Los Angeles, April 2003.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Danielle Ewen and Hannah Matthews, *Families Forgotten: Administration's Priorities Put Child Care Low on the List*. 2007, [http://www.clasp.org/publications/2008\\_budget\\_child\\_care.pdf](http://www.clasp.org/publications/2008_budget_child_care.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> National Institute for Early Education Research, *The State of Preschool 2006: State Preschool Yearbook*, 2007, <http://nieer.org/yearbook/>.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Education, *Serving Preschool Children Under Title I*, Nonregulatory guidance, March 4, 2004. Although the comprehensive services language in the statute and the policy guidance only reference targeted-assistance schools, a Department of Education official indicated in 2004 that Title I funds can be used to provide comprehensive services to all Title I-funded early education children.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of Education, *Serving Preschool Children*.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *Title I Preschool Education: More Children Served, but Gauging Effect on School Readiness Difficult*, 2000.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *Title I Preschool Education*.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Children's Defense Fund, *Key Facts: Essential Information about Child Care, Early Education and School-Age Care, 2003 Edition*, 2003; A.W. Mitchell, *Education for All Young Children: The Role of States and the Federal Government in Promoting Preschool and Kindergarten*, Working Paper Series, Foundation for Child Development, 2001. In a report that examined four state prekindergarten programs, GAO notes that "all four states generally used relatively small amounts of federal funds, such as those from Title I or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, to support their prekindergarten programs." U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Prekindergarten: Four Selected States Expanded Access by Relying on Schools and Existing Providers of Early Education and Care to Provide Services*, 2004.

<sup>15</sup> E. Speck, *Beyond the Mandate: An Analysis of a Survey of School District Early Learning Programs in Washington State*, Economic Opportunity Institute, 2004.

<sup>16</sup> W. Steven Barnett *et al.*, *The State of Preschool 2006*, National Institute for Early Education Research, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Beth Sinclair, *State ESEA Title I Participation Information for 2002-03*, 2006, <http://www.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/disadv/participation-2002-03/finalreport.doc>.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *Title I Preschool Education*.

<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, sec. 1112, 1114, 1115, 1120b.

<sup>20</sup> Section 1116 (b) (10) (D) prohibits a reduction of more than 15 percent of its prior-year allocation to a school identified for corrective action or restructuring when the district is reserving Title I funds for choice-related transportation and supplemental educational services.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Fiene, *13 Indicators of Quality Child Care: Research Update*, National Research Center for Health and Safety in Child Care, University of Colorado, 2002.

<sup>22</sup> Donald Hernandez, "Demographic Change and the Life Circumstances of Immigrant Families," *Future of Children*, 14 no. 2: 17-47.

<sup>23</sup> Center on Education Policy, *Title I Funds: Who's Gaining and Who's Losing*, 2006, <http://www.cep-dc.org/pubs/titleIFundsGainingLosing/>.

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