



Financing A Birth to Five Program

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The Appleton Area School District Model Hannah Matthews

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, also known as No Child Left Behind or NCLB) funds long have been used to provide preschool services for at-risk children.¹ While it is more commonly thought that Title I funds used for children below school-entry age support pre-kindergarten classes for predominantly three- and four-year-olds, in fact funds may be used for children beginning at birth.

This paper focuses on the Appleton Area School District (AASD) in Appleton, Wisconsin. The district has demonstrated that Title I can be an important part of a comprehensive birth-five program in a community.²

A District Adopts a Comprehensive Birth-Five Plan

AASD has been developing exactly this model of Title I-funded early education for the past four years. In 2006, the school district created a Birth-Five Coalition to address the needs of the youngest members of their community. The school district's Birth-Five program emerged as a response to concerns over school readiness of incoming kindergartners in the district and growing attention to the need to improve kindergarten through third grade reading performance. The district was

striving to get all of its students reading on grade level by third grade and recognized this would be impossible when children were already entering kindergarten with significant gaps.

To launch the Birth-Five program, the district began with an internal review to determine the best role for the school district in the context of the larger community. District personnel recognized the importance of the first five years of life, but also recognized that their education expertise lay outside the earliest learning years. The AASD determined that it could be most effective by expanding parent and community awareness of existing early childhood programs and services for children under five.

As the Birth-Five Coalition emerged, the community launched an Early Childhood Economic Taskforce to review the importance of early education. In addition, a local funder (the Appleton Education Foundation) began a Brain to Five speaker series in partnership with University of Wisconsin-Madison's Waisman Center and the Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, which helped spread to the community the message on the importance of early intervention.

To date, Appleton's Birth-Five focus has many components, including a Books for Babies literacy

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¹ Hannah Matthews and Danielle Ewen, *FAQ: Using Title I of ESEA for Early Education*, CLASP, 2010, http://www.clasp.org/resources_and_publications/publication?id=0709&list=publications.

² The Appleton Area School District, Birth-Five, <http://www.aasd.k12.wi.us/ProgramsDept/Birth-Five/>.

program for parents delivering at local hospitals, community parent education workshops offered in partnership with local community agencies, Parents as Teachers home visitation, Early Childhood Special Education, Title I Preschool and Even Start Family Literacy.

Birth-Five Site Resource Coordinators operate out of five target elementary schools offering supports to all families in these schools. The program identified the targeted schools based on high percentages of families with a low socio-economic status, or for whom English is not their primary language, and low rates of developmental screenings for incoming kindergartners. The Birth-Five Site Resource Coordinators work primarily on making connections between families with young children and neighborhood schools and increasing parent and community awareness of available early childhood services, including the district's developmental screenings for three- to five-year-olds. The district informs parents about a range of services including local Department of Health and Human Services programs, the local Child Care Resource and Referral services, Head Start, Parent Connection and the Family Resource Center, to name a few.

Committing ARRA Funds to Expand Birth-Five Programs

Appleton's focus on birth-five programs is possible through layering multiple state and federal funding streams, as well as contributions from corporate and philanthropic partners. Central among the district's resources are Title I funds intended to provide services for low-income children at risk of school failure.

In the AASD, Title I funds support the early education component of an Even Start Family Literacy program for children from birth to age

four, a Parents as Teachers home visiting program for children birth to age three and their caregivers (which includes English, Spanish and Hmong speaking home visitors) and the district Title I preschool program for four-year-olds. Jointly, these programs serve approximately 235 children and their parents. The district uses nearly half its regular Title I grant for early childhood, or about \$960,000.

When ARRA funds became available in spring 2009, the AASD conducted a systematic review to determine the most effective ways to use ARRA funds, which included gathering input from school personnel, reviewing research to identify best practices, establishing measurable student outcomes, identifying levels of project sustainability after 2011 and establishing expected long- and short-term impacts of the projects. Thanks to the district's Birth-Five initiatives, investments in early education emerged as a common theme from the input seeking process. School personnel see the benefit of investing additional dollars in early education efforts. While ARRA dollars were one-time only funds and there is some concern about sustainability in the future, the commitment of the district to the Birth-Five initiatives, and the community-wide support it has received, convinces school district staff that they will be able to protect birth-five investments in the future.

Title I ARRA dollars are being used to support two additional Parents as Teachers home visitors to serve an additional 16 to 20 families with children under age three. Title I funds also extend the day for Title I preschool by two hours and provide funding to maintain the Even Start program.

The AASD's comprehensive approach includes thinking strategically about maximizing and coordinating resources. The district is using ARRA IDEA funds to increase the availability of

developmental screenings. IDEA funds have allowed the district to create an early childhood diagnostic team to handle the increased number of referrals resulting from the screening program expansion.

IDEA is increasingly an important component of the district's Birth-Five program. More than half the children enrolled in IDEA preschool in the district are in community-based child care settings. The AASD recognized that it could only meet the state's statutory requirement to appropriately meet the learning needs of IDEA preschoolers if it engaged with partners in the larger community. To increase collaboration with child care partners, the district began a coaching and consultation model of services in 20 local child care centers. The district believes that this professional development benefits not just the children identified for IDEA services, but all young children in those child care settings.

All together, including instructional and material investments as well as staffing costs, the AASD is directing 69 percent of ARRA IDEA and 22 percent of ARRA Title I funds to Birth-Five initiatives. This is a significant commitment when needs are great across the school district and all grade levels.

Investing in an Early Childhood System

A district wide birth-five early childhood initiative is relatively uncommon. While many school districts are looking to the years before kindergarten to begin early learning investments, most are not looking earlier than age three. Appleton's commitment to a comprehensive birth-five approach demonstrates district personnel's awareness of the critical importance of the first three years of life and recognition that school

districts can be partners and contribute to building larger community-wide comprehensive early childhood systems. Their initiatives commit resources to meaningful linkages across health services, family support, early intervention, and early learning. They have engaged partners across settings including the school district, child care, and Head Start. Appleton demonstrates that a school district can take the lead in facilitating early childhood systems building in local communities to best use resources and meet children and families' needs.