



The Children We Left Behind Are Dropping Out of School:

Making the Case for Using Title I Federal Stimulus Funds for Dropout Prevention and Recovery

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A recent study by University of Chicago Nobel economist James J. Heckman emphasizes the need to sustain early investments in at-risk children through their teenage years. He reported that with additional “skill building” strategies such as mentoring, adolescent literacy, and meaningful service learning; boys from high risk families were much less likely to become delinquent than boys who did not receive these interventions. He found that when the investments “were sustained into the teen age years,” 90 percent of the boys finished high school and 40 percent went on to attend college. (Heckman and Cunha, 2007) In a subsequent publication, Heckman went on to say, “to put these numbers in perspective, sustained skill-building investments would go a long way toward shrinking and in some cases eliminating, the nation’s worrisome racial disparities in academic achievement, drug use and college attendance.” (Heckman, 2007).

Heckman’s findings help explain a common criticism of early intervention with young children that the gains tend to fade over time. His work speaks to the efficacy of continuing to invest in at risk children well into their teen age years to ensure better outcomes. This helps to make the case for providing supplemental education services for at risk youth many of whom qualify for Title I services. Many of these services could prevent students from dropping out of school.

Recent studies by Johns Hopkins University researchers of dropouts in five of Colorado’s largest school districts clearly indicate that there are visible early warning signs of which students will dropout as early as sixth grade but most predictable at ninth grade. These signs include poor attendance, being suspended from school and/or failing grades even in just one course. (Balfanz, R and MacIver, M.; 2009)

Most federal education Title I funds are used by local school districts at elementary and some middle schools for qualifying low income children. The nature of these services varies by local priority but generally focus on academic remediation and supplemental education services. Title I services are typically not used for dropout prevention nor for older students in middle schools or high schools. With the new funding opportunities provided by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), local school districts now have new resources that can be used for at risk low income students who are identifiable as potential dropouts.

As defined in law, Title I resources are to be used to fund strategies that enable all students to meet proficient and advanced levels of academic achievement. The law prescribes effective methods to: 1) strengthen the core academic program of the school; 2) increase the amount and quality of learning time, and 3) include interventions to meet educational needs of historically underserved populations. Additionally, many schools in poor communities are also failing, making students eligible for Supplemental Education Services (SES). These funds can be used to support the types of youth programming needed to ensure both academic success and healthy development. Acceptable uses of Title I funds include:

- Extended school year
- Before and after school programs
- Summer programs
- Counseling
- Pupil services
- Mentoring services
- College and career awareness and preparation
- Personal finance education
- Use of innovative teaching methods such as applied learning and team-teaching strategies
- Integration of vocational and technical education programs

(No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, PL 107-110, Jan.8, 2002. Title I, Part a, Sec 114 and 115)

As a state example, Colorado will receive over \$110 million for Title I stimulus funds in addition to the existing Title I funds which will receive an increase. Spending these funds to prevent or retrieve dropouts is a great way to invest these stimulus funds that are only in place for 2 years because the increased enrollment will generate new state per pupil operating revenue. Each year 18,000 students drop out. If we could cut the rate in half, we would increase local district state aid by \$58,500,000 (at \$6500 per pupil). This new revenue can be used to sustain the programs we create with the two-year stimulus funds.

The advantage of these funds as potential dropout prevention and intervention dollars is that they are new and additional so there is not the competition for existing Title I resources. The majority of students who are at risk for dropping out are eligible for Title I funds and indeed many participated in Title I programs in their younger years. Obviously, there will be many demands on these new funds so we need to get dropouts into the discussion immediately to get any serious consideration.

It is urgent that advocates for expanding opportunities for dropouts take immediate action to contact their school district leadership and make requests of these new funds for new programs to prevent school dropouts.

START THE DISCUSSION NOW! IF ANY STUDENTS ARE BEING LEFT BEHIND IT IS CLEARLY THOSE WHO DO NOT GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL.