



New Opportunities, New Impacts: Using Title I and ARRA Funding to Support Early Education and K-12 Access

November 17, 2009

Overview

In this webinar, experts discussed how education funders and communities can leverage the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and Title I funding to expand and improve early education programs for better K-12 alignment.

The following summary provides highlights from the webinar.

PANELISTS

- Barbara Reisman, Executive Director, The Schumann Fund for New Jersey
- Danielle Ewen, Director of Child Care and Early Education Team, Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
- Gerrit Westervelt, BUILD Initiative

DANIELLE EWEN

Using Title I for Early Education

Ewen opened the web seminar by showcasing the potential of Title I for financing high quality early education programs as well as services beyond direct education. She emphasized the flexibility of Title I as a funding source because it can be layered with federal, state or local dollars to supplement or expand existing early education programs, such as Head Start or Early Reading First. Title I can also be used in conjunction with community based childcare programs, and the Child Care and Development Block Grant. Some uses for Title I funds include:

- Serving children from birth to age at school entry
- Reaching at-risk children in low-income families
- Providing comprehensive services, including access to medical services
- Funding teacher salaries and professional development
- Counseling Services
- Diagnostic Screenings

Ewen reminded listeners that Title I is a funding stream, not a program. The dollars pay for a variety of things based on the needs of individual school districts. Ewen also noted that Title I funding is based on a local education agency's percent of low-income children aged 5-17. The funds are distributed from the states to the local education agencies and to school districts. They control where the Title I dollars go and how they should be used. Ewen said that this is positive because funds will be responsive to the needs of individual schools, but she noted the potential for negative consequences due to the dollars being diffused.

Ewen explained that Title I funds can be used for preschool at the district level and at the school level. Eligibility at the district level is based on residence or objective criteria determined by the state. Title I funds can be used at the school level by financing school wide programs or targeted assistance programs. Ewen also discussed the requirements for Title I funding to be used for early childhood programs. Some of these requirements include meeting the Head Start educational standards, employing teachers that meet the NCLB “highly qualified” standard, and including a parental involvement component.

Examples from Districts

Ewen provided example of how districts are using Title funds to purchase early childhood services and to support existing programs. In many cases, the funding has been going on for a number of years. Ewen gave the example of Chicago, which has been using Title I funds since 1967 to finance The Chicago-Child Parent Centers. They provide a continuum of comprehensive services for parents and children in their earliest years. She also noted a program in Pittsfield, Massachusetts that has been using the funding since 1967 to fund home-visiting as well as pre-kindergarten programs.

Ewen also provided examples of districts layering Title I with other funding sources. This included Houston, Texas where Title I is layered with state pre-kindergarten and local funds to provide full-school-day preschool for all eligible district 4 year olds. The same layering of funds is done in Montgomery, Maryland to support the Extended Learning Opportunities summer program in Title I schools. Ewen stressed that the highest standards are followed throughout the entire day at these programs.

Ewen highlighted the use of Title I in Davenport, Iowa where they have created a Children’s Village that serves children from birth to five years old. Title I is a part of the larger funding pool that was put together to create a continuum of services for young children from birth. Ewen said this program is an important model when thinking nationally for opportunities to create systems that connect the early childhood system with K-12 so they can be equal partners on both sides. Title I can be a piece that contributes to the whole of the funding needed to achieve such a partnership, as is evidenced by the Davenport model.

Ewen also highlighted the use of Title I funds in broad based approaches to understand the needs of children. An example of this is in Melrose, Massachusetts where all Title I dollars are used to provide comprehensive screenings and assessments of all district 4 year olds. Ewen noted the importance of this model when thinking about how to build an early childhood system, how to understand what children need, and how to identify the gaps in the system.

Lessons Learned through Title I and ARRA Investments

Ewen noted that deciding how Title I dollars are spent often comes down to a resourceful school leader, whether it be a school principal or superintendent. She stressed that partnerships between the people in the community and schools who champion early education and how it can benefit all children can lead to larger Title I investments down the line.

She also discussed leveraging ARRA funds in order to support early childhood. There are some states that are aware of the opportunity to use ARRA dollars for early childhood and are putting their funds out through Title I or the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund. Ewen noted that these states are beginning to ask more questions to local school districts about when they want to use the money for early childhood purposes, or why they haven’t considered using the money for early education.

Because ARRA dollars are time-limited, the hope is that school districts are still looking at the funds as a viable source of money. Ewen implored school districts not to miss the opportunity to use ARRA funds to augment existing programs to a higher level of quality. The short term investments that districts

can make with these funds can leverage other resources and improve the quality of services younger children have, even if it's for a limited time.

Ewen highlighted the importance of showing school district leaders who control funding that investing in early childhood is in line with the investments that they are already making to promote positive outcomes for children in elementary, middle and high schools in their districts. She reminded listeners that investments in young children from birth are a part of the continuum of services that districts want to provide to achieve their goals for their own school districts. Ewen also reiterated the need to foster the relationships between the early childhood and the K-12 community so that both sides understand that they have the same goals. Leveraging the funds available to them will help ensure that every child has the ability to achieve in a high quality educational setting.

GERRIT WESTERVELT

Gerrit Westervelt began his presentation by reminding listeners that there are a variety of federal, state and local funding streams to support different areas of childhood development, and that a funding stream in one area can support children's development in other areas. He discussed two communities that are in the BUILD Project and have used Title I funds for early education services – Minneapolis, Minnesota and Canton, Ohio.

Title I in Minneapolis

Westervelt noted that in Minneapolis, the leaders of the public schools have embraced the idea of early childhood education as an achievement gap strategy. He said the Minneapolis public schools (MPS) district stresses the critical importance of this strategy because they understand that half of the gap in achievement scores is already present at the time of school entry. In Minneapolis they have set a goal of 80% of all incoming kindergartners to be ready for school by 2012. They have also established an Office of Early Childhood Development and have focused on providing comprehensive services, such as professional development and early childhood family education.

Westervelt explained that the MPS district started using Title I funds to support their "High Five" preschool program in 2004, after the state made significant funding cuts to early childhood services. Today the district invests up to 7% of their total Title I funding, approximately \$23 million, for early education. Westervelt highlighted that Title I has allowed the MPS district to make a great deal of progress after the state funding cuts. He noted strong superintendent leadership for early childhood as a strategy to close the achievement gap and collaboration with local foundations as key elements to Minneapolis' early education success.

SPARK in Canton, OH

Westervelt also highlighted the Kellogg Foundation's SPARK (Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids) Ohio program as a very good example of public-private collaboration. Westervelt explained that the Ohio state department of education suggested the use of Title I and ARRA dollars for education programs that are aligned with the state's Early Learning Content Standard and programs that provide assistance to families that need it. He said the Sisters of Charity and other community leaders came forward and used data on child outcomes and the SPARK program to make their case for early childhood. The Sisters of Charity Foundation offered to extend their current grant period if the district agreed to use some of their federal money to support early childhood services. The district agreed to allocate Title I/IDEA funding to cover the full cost of services, including salaries, books, supplies, assessments, etc. Westervelt applauded the Sisters of Charity Foundation for providing leadership as well as dollars to help districts start using public funds to finance school readiness.

Role of Funders

Westervelt highlighted a number of challenges to Title I early childhood use for districts, such as the timing of different funding streams, limited state role in providing guidance for Title I, and competition for Title I dollars. He said foundations can play critical roles in helping districts overcome these challenges by:

- Educating districts and state leaders about allowable uses of Title I funds for early childhood
- Convening state and foundation leaders and facilitating conversations about Title I
- Partnering with districts to provide challenge grants and incentives for them to leverage federal dollars
- Working with Title I directors and other leaders on how to leverage Title I for early childhood

QUESTION & ANSWER

Are there groups of people representing Title I who meet nationally or network that grantmakers should know about?

Ewen replied that there is a national Title I Directors Association that meets annually. Also, within states the different Title I directors for the school districts often convene to talk about issues as they apply for funds and as they coordinate their K-12 policies across the state.

How would you go about changing the Title I requirement that children be between the age of 5 and 17 to include children from birth to 5 years old? What would the implications of that be for distribution?

Ewen said that current legislation specifically states that the calculation is based on children 5 to 17 years old who are low-income. Whether five years old is the appropriate cut-off and whether a different formula is needed to capture some of the children birth to five should be discussed as Title I enters reauthorization in the coming year. Ewen said that the implications of adjusting the cut-off age is fairly significant because it may dramatically change how much money districts receive if you add in more young children. She stressed the need for schools to have a larger partnership with early childhood communities because they both serve the same children.

How can small community foundations participate?

Westervelt replied that when foundations are willing to allocate their funds differently, then the public sector will also think about using their dollars in different and creative ways. The flexibility that foundations can offer in regards to funding and leadership can provide an incentive for districts to use their Title I funds for early childhood education.

Was their competition for the use of Title I funds in Canton and Minneapolis? If so, how was this competition handled at the school district level?

Westervelt said that there was definite competition for the Title I dollars, so the money that Sisters of Charity Foundation was able to bring in was key for SPARK Ohio. More importantly, Westervelt said that many districts lack the leadership in promoting the use of Title I for early childhood. He stressed that the only way to move out of the status quo is for foundations and leaders to create a call to action, do the research, and energize districts to look at how they use their Title I funds and why it should go towards early education.

How have communities been able to get foundations more involved and willing to contribute dollars to early education? What is the advocacy role that foundations can play in the upcoming reauthorization?

Westervelt replied that their needs to be a push to get data that would support using federal funds for early education. He said many school leaders and teachers are not aware of the economic or social status of young children before the time of school entry. Foundations can be instrumental to showcase the need for investing in early childhood and the potential that is there. Westervelt said the most important thing is to paint a picture of what children and families need in a community and connecting the status and the needs of these children to the districts achievement gap and school readiness strategies.