



Title I Portability – A Bad Deal for Poor Children

Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) is the primary source of federal funding to schools serving poor children. Since the law was first passed, its purpose has been to help raise achievement for poor children by providing extra support to their schools to help meet their greater educational needs. ESEA recognizes that challenges posed by poverty are significantly greater for children when poverty is concentrated and children are clustered with peers who are also poor. Proposed revisions to ESEA would allow states to implement “portability”, undermining the targeting of funds to districts and schools with concentrated poverty that is such an important aspect of Title I, Part A funding.

How Title I, Part A Funds are Currently Allocated to School Districts

- **Four Formulas** — There are currently four formulas used to determine how much Title I, Part A funding is sent by the federal government, through state governments, to school districts. These formulas each include slightly different factors (such as the number of poor children, the amount the state spends on education, the concentration of poor children and the fairness of state and local expenditures), all intended to send more money to poorer districts.
- **Eligibility Criteria** — Each of the four formulas includes a threshold number or percent of poor children a school district must have before it can receive any Title I, Part A funds. In the broadest formula, a district must have at least 10 poor children and poor children must make up at least 2 percent of the district’s students. In the most targeted formula, a district must have at least 6,500 poor children or more than 15 percent of the district’s children must be poor.
- **Current Provisions Are Not Enough** — Although these formulas all concentrate funding on poorer districts, they are not targeted nearly enough considering how little Title I, Part A funding is spread across the country and how significant the educational needs of children are in areas of concentrated poverty.

How Title I, Part A Funds are Currently Distributed to Schools within School Districts

- **Eligible Schools** — In current law, for a school to be eligible to receive Title I, Part A funds, the percent of children from low-income families (which usually means those eligible for free or reduced price lunch), must be at least as high as the percent of all children in the district who are low-income.
- **Ranking Order** — When a district does not have enough Title I, Part A funds to serve all eligible schools in a district, districts must first send funds to schools with 75 percent or more low-income children. After funding those poorest schools, the district must then fund schools in rank order of their share of low-income children.

How the Portability Provision Proposed Would Change the Allocation and Distribution of Title I, Part A Funds to School Districts and Schools within Districts

- **Eliminating Eligibility Criteria for Districts** — Under the “Title I Funds Follow the Low-Income Child State Option” provision in Sec. 1128 of S.1101, often referred to as Title I “portability,” a state educational agency could choose to allocate all Title I, Part A funds to school districts based *solely* on the percent of poor children, regardless of the concentration of poor children in the district. While high-poverty districts would still get more Title I, Part A funds than low-poverty districts, districts that previously had not met any of the threshold eligibility criteria would now be receiving funds. In the absence of significant additional Title I, Part A funds, this would come at the cost of Title I, Part A funds to poorer districts. Additionally, among those districts currently receiving Title I, Part A funds, there would no longer be additional funds provided per poor child in the very poorest districts, weakening the targeting that benefits these districts and their students now.
- **Eliminating Eligibility Criteria for Schools** — The portability provision also directs school districts to then distribute funds to schools *solely* based on the number of poor children enrolled. Instead of focusing first on the poorest schools and ensuring funds are concentrated in the higher poverty schools in the district, funds would be distributed throughout the district potentially to all schools. This weakens the targeting of limited Title I, Part A funds within districts and undermines the opportunity Title I, Part A now provides to improve educational quality in schools serving the greatest concentrations of poor children. Funds would be taken from poor children and given to wealthier children.

Why The Portability Provision Changes are a Bad Deal for Poor Children

- **Weakening Targeting** — By increasing the number of districts and schools eligible for Title I, Part A funds, every dollar will now be stretched further. The poorest schools and districts will now have to share limited funds with very low-poverty districts and schools. Given the greater educational needs of poor children in the poorest schools and districts, this change undermines the ability of dollars to be brought to bear to increase educational opportunity for these most disadvantaged children.
- **Changing the Intent of Title I** — The intent of Title I has always been to support schools serving concentrations of poor children. Limited funding should be concentrated and deployed strategically to raise achievement for poor children. By diluting funding to serve lower-poverty schools and districts, it will be impossible to create the types of school level change that are needed to improve instructional quality and raise achievement for poor children.

For those who support the historic intent of ESEA to provide additional support to schools educating concentrations of poor children, this proposal represents a significant threat to that intent and the education of those poor children.