

# Children's Defense Fund's Priorities for Ensuring that the Reauthorization of ESEA Adequately Addresses the Needs of Poor and Vulnerable Young Children

Early Learning Stakeholder Meeting  
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Submitted by:

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## Children's Defense Fund's Priorities for Ensuring that the Reauthorization of ESEA Adequately Addresses the Needs of Poor and Vulnerable Young Children

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) appreciates the opportunity to present information for your consideration in your work related to the upcoming reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). CDF has long been the voice for children who have none due to discrimination based on race, poverty, and in some cases geography. In that context I would like to request:

- As you look to reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) urges you to pay special attention to the needs of the lowest income children and those who are the most vulnerable, with special attention to young children. CDF has a long history in trying to ensure that Title I of ESEA is fully used to ensure that all children have a fair, equal and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and to achieve to their fullest. One of our very first reports as the Washington Research Project published in 1969 was *Title I: Is it Helping Poor Children?*
- As you consider your priorities for the reauthorization of ESEA, we urge you to consider the revision of the current funding formula that determines funding to states to improve resources for all children, including those in preschool and through age 8.
  1. **Push to fully fund ESEA.** Historically ESEA has not been fully funded and by not doing so the intent of the Act has been compromised. With increasing pressure to focus on children in middle and high school, full funding is especially critical to help maintain and expand services for young children.
  - 2) **Ensure that Title I continues as a non-competitive authorized program** so that states with a low tax base and large number of low income families and communities will be able to benefit fully from the funds available. While we are enthusiastic about the reforms and creative approaches to achievement that are emerging from the *Race to the Top*, we believe that a competitive approach in Title I could leave thousands of poor children with far fewer resources than they need.
  - 3) **Address the numerous inequities in the current process for awarding Title I funds to states**, which put small higher poverty districts with large numbers of low income children at a real disadvantage and prevent states, many of them with large numbers of poor minority children, from receiving what they should be getting under the act. We are concerned about the negative impact that the combination of "number weighting" and "percentage weighting," the use of the "statewide average per pupil spending level," and the significant underfunding of the program is having on large numbers of poor minority children.
  - 4) **Use ESEA to better serve children in child welfare and juvenile justice systems.** There are important opportunities within ESEA to address the educational needs of these children.
    - We encourage an examination of the ways that states are currently spending Title I, Part D resources for neglected, delinquent and other at-risk children and youth to understand the current priorities of states and districts and to help identify changes needed as the formula is revised.
    - In addition, we ask that the Department take special steps to ensure that state and local education agencies are collaborating with local and state child welfare agencies to promote school stability and achievement for children in foster care. S.2801, the Fostering Success in Education Act, introduced at the end of last year by Sens. Al Franken and Patty Murray, takes important steps forward to do this. It builds on the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (P.L. 110-351) that is now being implemented in the states.
  - 5) **Include 3 and 4-year old children in the calculations for the funding formula for Title I.** The Department recognizes the importance of these early years and the successful transition of children to school is dependent on the ease at which programs can partner and leverage funds at the local level.

- 6) **Increase and improve the data collected** on the use of Title I funds and their impact on the programs provided to preschool children. Data collected by local education agencies regarding the age of children served prior to kindergarten entry, program type and description and percentage of total funds received are examples of the data proposed to be collected.
- CDF encourages the insertion of language in Title II that supports the development of state and local professional development opportunities for school-based teachers and community-based providers working with Title I eligible children. In addition to promoting training on child development and learning, professional development should promote high quality learning environments and evidenced-based instructional strategies. We recommend that the reauthorization specifically promote training for teachers about:
  - 1) **The needs of children in the most vulnerable circumstances** such as those who are in foster care or are homeless to help teachers to better address their unique needs.
  - 2) **The impact of poverty on children’s learning and social behavior** in group settings and effective ways to engage parents in the child’s learning.
  - 3) **Appropriate instructional practices for teachers working with English Language Learners and their parents** and other special populations.

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