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What is Title 1? **by Becky L. Spivey, M.Ed.**

What is Title 1?

Title 1 is the largest federal aid program for public schools in the United States. Today, Title 1 is part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) but originated from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty". This landmark educational bill, passed during Johnson's "Great Society", changed the funding of school districts from a local level to a national responsibility. Title 1 provides federal funds to schools with high percentages of low-income students. These funds pay for extra educational services to help at-risk students achieve and succeed regardless of any disadvantages through no fault of their own.

Title I is a federal entitlement program that gives funds to schools in need based on student enrollment, the free and reduced lunch percentage for each school, and other informative data. The US Department of Education distributes Title 1 funds to State Departments of Education that, in turn, distribute the funds to individual school districts. Each school district divides its funding among qualifying schools based on their numbers of low-income children. In addition, under Title 1, participating school districts must provide supplemental educational services for eligible private school students.

Nationwide, some 50,000 public schools (14.9 million or 64% of students) from preschool to high school receive Title 1 funds. However, most of the students served through Title 1 are in grades 1-6, while another 12% are in preschool and kindergarten. An astounding 58% of all public schools in the US receive Title 1 funding.

Are all Title 1 school programs the same?

There are two types of Title 1 program models authorized under NCLB – a school-wide program and a targeted assistance program. Identification and authorization of schools to receive Title 1 funds and implement one of these programs stems from having a certain percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch prices. Both programs, however, are contingent upon (1) the school using research-based strategies to improve student achievement and (2) the school must include strategies to support/encourage parent involvement.

Schools receiving Title 1 money to support a school-wide program may use their funds to improve student achievement throughout their entire school; therefore every child benefits from the added services and programs, not just the students identified as eligible to participate. All of the school staff focuses on upgrading the entire educational program and improving the achievement of all students, in particular, the low-achieving ones. A school improvement plan must be developed and implemented with the involvement of parents, teachers, principals, and administrators.

A targeted assistance school receives some Title 1 funds yet is ineligible or has chosen not to operate a school-wide program. The term “targeted assistance” signifies that the services target only a select group of children – those identified as failing or most at risk of failing to meet the challenging content and student performance standards. This program targets the needs of a few rather than overall school improvement.

How is a Title 1 school different from a school not receiving funds?

In a Title 1 school, teachers, administrators, and all other school staff work together to:

- Identify students most in need of educational help (regardless of family income.
- Measure student progress using their state’s educational standards (and soon, the Common Core State Standards as well), Set goals for student improvement, Implement research-based instructional programs that support and supplement regular classroom instruction,
- Improve professional knowledge and skills through continuing education and intense professional development,
- Hire additional teachers and support staff, and
- Involve parents in every aspect of the school’s Title 1 program.

How do schools measure accountability for Title 1 funds?

State departments review eligibility for Title 1 funding every year. No Child Left Behind requires states to measure “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) for schools receiving Title I funds with the goal of all students reaching the proficient level on reading/language arts and mathematics tests by the 2013-2014 school year. States must define minimum levels of improvement as measured by standardized tests chosen by the state. AYP targets are set for overall achievement and for smaller subgroups of students, including major ethnic/ racial groups, economically disadvantaged students, limited English proficient (LEP) students, and students with disabilities. If a school receiving Title I funding fails to meet its AYP target for two or more consecutive years, the school falls to “in need of improvement” and faces different levels of consequences too numerous and detailed to be explained here.

Why is parental involvement a factor in Title 1 funding?

Parental involvement is a crucial factor of Title 1 legislation. Schools receiving Title 1 funding must implement programs, activities, and procedures that include and promote parent

involvement in school-related activities. Schools must also provide opportunities that encourage parents to increase their knowledge and skills as they relate to their child's education. One of the objectives of these programs and activities is to help parents understand and show them how important their involvement is in shaping the lives of their children in becoming successful and productive contributors to our society.