

Magnet Schools Assistance Program (CFDA No. 84.165)

I. Legislation

Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (20 U.S.C. 3021-3032) (expires September 30, 1999).

II. Funding History

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Appropriation</u>	<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Appropriation</u>
1984	\$75,000,000	1993	\$107,985,000
1985	75,000,000	1994	107,985,000
1990	113,189,000	1995	111,519,000
1991	109,975,000	1996	95,000,000
1992	110,000,000		

III. Analysis of Program Performance

A. Goals and Objectives

The Magnet Schools Assistance Program assists in the desegregation of schools by providing support for (1) the elimination, reduction, or prevention of minority group isolation in elementary and secondary schools with substantial proportions of minority students; (2) the development and implementation of magnet schools that will assist in achieving systemic reforms and providing all students the opportunity to meet challenging state content and performance standards; (3) the development and design of innovative educational methods and practices; and (4) courses of instruction within magnet schools that will substantially strengthen students' knowledge of academic subjects and their grasp of tangible and marketable vocational skills.

B. Strategies to Achieve the Goals

Services Supported

The Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP) provides three-year competitive grants to school districts operating under an approved desegregation plan to support the development or expansion of magnet school programs. Magnet schools provide special curricular programs designed to attract students of different racial backgrounds. The number of magnet schools nationally has more than doubled over the past decade, from about 1,000 in 1981-82 (V.2) to 2,400 in 1991-92 (V.1). The grants support more than 400 magnet schools each year, about 16 percent of the nation's magnet schools.

A national study of magnet schools (Steele and Levine, 1994) found that, in 1991-92, 39 percent of districts receiving MSAP funding used that funding to start new magnet school programs, and an additional 39 percent used it to add new magnet schools to their existing programs. Other districts used their MSAP grants for program enhancement and improvement. Magnet school programs were more extensive in districts that received federal funding, with 30 percent of schools in funded districts being

magnets, compared with 21 percent of schools in nonfunded districts. Most MSAP grantees (87 percent) continued to maintain their magnet school programs, although with some reductions in teachers and supplies, after their federal funding ended (V.1).

Steele and Levine also found that MSAP-supported magnet schools offered a wide range of distinctive programs, including programs emphasizing academic subjects such as math, science, aerospace technology, language immersion, or humanities (38 percent); instructional approaches such as basic skills, open classrooms, individualized instruction, Montessori, or enriched curricula (25 percent); career/vocational education (15 percent); gifted and talented programs (11 percent); and the arts (10 percent). MSAP-funded magnets were more likely than other magnets to offer subject-matter-oriented or career-vocational programs and less likely to provide programs focused on the arts, gifted and talented students, or a particular instructional approach (V.1).

School districts may use MSAP funds for (1) planning and promoting activities directly related to the expansion, continuation, or enhancement of academic programs and services offered at magnet schools; (2) purchasing books, materials, and equipment (including computers) that are necessary for the conduct of the magnet programs and are directly related to improving students' knowledge of math, science, history, English, foreign languages, art, or music, or improving vocational skills; and (3) paying the salaries of licensed or certified elementary and secondary school teachers in magnet schools. Steele and Levine found that recipients of MSAP funds most frequently reported using them for purchase of special equipment (100 percent of grantees) and special materials (97 percent), staff development (95 percent), hiring of teachers (93 percent), outreach (85 percent), and planning (73 percent) (V.1).

MSAP funds are targeted primarily to large urban school districts with high proportions of minority and low-income students. In 1991–92, large urban school districts enrolled 25 percent of the nation's students, but they received 82 percent of all MSAP funds. Predominantly minority districts (those in which more than 50 percent of students are minority) enrolled 30 percent of all students but received 76 percent of MSAP funds. High-poverty school districts (where more than 50 percent of students receive free or reduced-price lunches) enrolled 19 percent of all students but received 53 percent of MSAP funds. Districts receiving MSAP funds were also more likely to be large urban, predominantly minority, and high-poverty districts than were magnet districts generally (V.1).

MSAP-supported magnet schools were more likely to be whole-school dedicated magnets, where every student in the school has applied to participate in the magnet program (37 percent) than were nonfunded magnets (25 percent); MSAP-funded magnet programs were less likely to be programs within schools (37 percent) than were other magnets (51 percent) (V.1). Critics have charged that some programs within schools may segregate students of different social, economic, ethnic, and racial backgrounds by keeping students in the magnet program separate from other students in the school; whole-school approaches may be more likely to maximize contact among all groups of students in the school.

MSAP-funded districts had more extensive outreach efforts designed to encourage and facilitate student participation in magnet programs than other magnet districts. MSAP-funded districts were

more likely to make group presentations, mail information to all parents in the district, and provide transportation to enable prospective students to tour the magnet schools (V.1).

Strategic Initiatives

When the MSAP was reauthorized in 1994, the purpose of the program was expanded to ensure that school districts included their magnet schools in plans for systemic reform and plans to provide all students with the opportunity to meet challenging content and performance standards. Furthermore, program information requirements were amended to specifically require applicants to address the manner and extent to which their magnet projects would increase student achievement in the instructional area(s) offered by a magnet school.

In reauthorization, the program also took steps to ensure that magnet programs do not focus on elite groups of students, by giving priority to programs that select students by methods such as lotteries, rather than through academic examinations.

C. Program Performance—Indicators of Impact and Effectiveness

Information on grantee performance is provided through annual performance reports. The Department is revising this performance reporting system to improve the quality, comparability, and usefulness of the performance information. In past years, the information available through this system was often incomplete and inconsistent across grantees. For example, Steel and Eaton found that program records for FY 1989 and FY 1991 grantees did not provide sufficient information to identify desegregation objectives consistent with the statutory goals of reducing, eliminating, or preventing minority isolation for 42 percent of the schools targeted for desegregation impact. Information was lacking either because grantee performance reports were missing or because grantees described desegregation objectives other than those in the statute (V.3). The Department is working, through revised guidance and technical assistance, to help grantees prepare more clear and comprehensive performance reports, based on a performance indicators framework.

Available information on each of the four statutory objectives of MSAP are summarized below:

Objective 1: Eliminate, reduce, or prevent minority group isolation in elementary and secondary schools with substantial proportions of minority students.

An evaluation of MSAP's impact on desegregation, based on data for FY 1989 and FY 1991 grantees, found that MSAP funds typically are used to promote desegregation within a very challenging context, that is, in schools that have high concentrations of minority students and are located in districts that are experiencing increases in minority enrollments. Fewer than half (47 percent) of the schools targeted by MSAP grantees for improvements in minority isolation were able to meet their desegregation objectives within the two-year period covered by MSAP grants at that time. However, an additional 17 percent of the targeted schools were able to demonstrate some progress toward their desegregation objectives. The study found that success in meeting the objectives of reducing, eliminating, or preventing minority isolation was strongly influenced by the demographic conditions surrounding the targeted school (V.3).

Objective 2: Support the development and design of innovative educational methods and practices.

In FY 1996 the Department awarded eight grants (totaling \$3 million) to support the development and design of innovative educational methods and practices.

Objective 3: Support development and implementation of magnet schools that will assist in achieving systemic reforms and providing all students the opportunity to meet challenging state content and performance standards.

Data not available.

Objective 4: Support courses of instruction within magnet schools that will substantially strengthen students' knowledge of academic subjects and their grasp of tangible and marketable vocational skills.

Although research has not examined the specific impact of MSAP funding on student achievement, several studies of magnet schools in general (including magnets that may not have a desegregation purpose) have found positive although small impacts on student achievement:

- An analysis of data from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (Gamoran, 1996) found that magnet schools are more effective than comprehensive public high schools at raising the proficiency of students in science, reading, and social studies; Catholic schools have a positive impact on math skills; and secular private schools offer no advantage, after controlling for preexisting differences among students (V.4).
- A study of New York City's career magnet high schools found modest gains in educational outcomes for average and low-achieving students. Students with average reading performance were less likely to drop out in the transition between middle school and high school and earned larger gains in reading scores and more credits toward graduation. Below-average readers also were less likely to drop out and more likely to pass the advanced mathematics test required for New York State Regents diploma, but they also showed greater absenteeism than students attending comprehensive schools and showed no improvement in either reading scores or graduation credits earned (V.5).

IV. Planned Studies

The Department of Education has proposed to conduct an evaluation, beginning in FY 1998, to track the effects of federally supported magnet programs on desegregation, school quality, and student achievement. The study will draw heavily from the performance indicator system being developed for the program, supplemented by in-depth analysis of student performance.

V. Sources of Information

1. Lauri Steel and Roger Levine, Educational Innovation in Multiracial Contexts: The Growth of Magnet Schools in American Education (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Planning and Evaluation Service, 1994). ERIC access number: ED370232.
2. James Lowry and Associates, Survey of Magnet Schools: Analyzing a Model for Quality Integrated Education (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Budget and Evaluation, 1983). ERIC access number: ED236304.
3. Lauri Steel and Marion Eaton, Reducing, Eliminating, and Preventing Minority Isolation in American Schools: The Impact of the Magnet Schools Assistance Program (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Planning and Evaluation Service, 1996). ERIC access number: ED402397.
4. Adam Gamoran, "Student Achievement in Public Magnet, Public Comprehensive, and Private City High Schools," in Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis 18(1), 1-18 (1996). ERIC access number: EJ525420.
5. Robert L. Crain, Amy L. Heebner, and Yiu-Pong Si, The Effectiveness of New York City's Career Magnet Schools: An Evaluation of Ninth-Grade Performance Using an Experimental Design (Berkeley, CA: National Center for Research in Vocational Education, 1992). ERIC access number: ED344064.

VI. Contacts for Further Information

Program Operations: Arthur Cole, (202) 260-3693

Program Studies: Lisa Towne, (202) 401-1958