

Results in Brief: Study of Title I Schoolwide and Targeted Assistance Programs

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The original purpose of the Title I program of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* was to provide supplementary services to assist low-achieving students in high-poverty schools, and schools were required to target Title I funds specifically to serve such students. In 1978, the schoolwide program (SWP) option was introduced to provide higher-poverty schools with flexibility to use Title I funds for whole-school approaches to improving achievement for low-achieving students. Unlike schools using the traditional targeted assistance program (TAP) approach, SWP schools are allowed to consolidate Title I funds with those from other federal, state, and local sources and are not required to ensure that the funds are spent only for specific students identified as low-achieving. Over time, the poverty rate threshold for eligibility to operate schoolwide programs has been lowered and the prevalence of SWP schools has grown, gradually rising from 10 percent of all Title I schools in 1994–95 to 77 percent in 2014–15.

Implicit in the intent for SWPs is that the flexibility will allow them to implement systemic approaches to improve academic outcomes for all students in schools with high concentrations of poverty, particularly low-achieving students. At the same time, the continuation of the TAP approach also reflects a specific policy intent: to focus the smaller amount of total Title I funding in lower-poverty schools on supporting students with the greatest needs, rather than diluting the funds across a larger number of students. This study examines how these two types of programs compare in the services and resources they provide with Title I funds and their decision-making processes for allocating these resources.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Do schoolwide and targeted assistance programs differ in how they use Title I funds to improve achievement for low-achieving students?
2. How do districts and schools make decisions about how to use Title I funds in schoolwide programs and targeted assistance programs?
3. To what extent do schoolwide programs consolidate Title I funds with other funds or coordinate the use of Title I funds with other funds?

STUDY DESIGN

The study is based on nationally representative surveys of Title I districts and schools as well as interviews and extant data analysis in selected case study sites. The surveys were completed by administrators in 310 Title I districts and principals in 622 SWP schools and 420 TAP schools. Response rates were 76 percent for districts and 75 percent for schools.

The case studies were conducted in a purposive sample of 35 Title I SWP and TAP schools and their districts. They included collection and analysis of school-level budgets and Title I plans, as well as site visits during which semi-structured interviews were conducted with principals, other school staff involved in Title I, and district administrators.

Study limitations include: 1) case study findings cannot be generalized to the nation as a whole, and 2) survey respondents may not have had ready access to the specific data requested on Title I expenditures and were asked to provide their best estimates.

Highlights

- Although a majority of both SWP and TAP schools used Title I funds to hire teachers, such teachers accounted for a smaller percentage of Title I staff in SWP schools (41 percent) than in TAP schools (67 percent).
- SWP schools were more than twice as likely as TAP schools to use Title I funds for instructional coaches, parent liaisons, technology support staff, and English learner (EL) specialists.
- Both SWP and TAP schools most commonly used Title I-funded staff to provide supplemental instruction in reading and/or mathematics, but SWPs were more than twice as likely as TAPs to also use these staff for instruction in other subjects, data/analytics support, parental involvement, and other approaches.
- In most Title I schools, districts and schools collaborated on decisions regarding the use of Title I funds, but principals in SWPs were more likely than those in TAPs to report making all or most decisions about how to use their school's Title I funds (25 percent vs. 12 percent).
- Few principals of SWPs said that their school consolidated Title I funds with other federal, state, and local funds (6 percent), but a larger proportion (50 percent) indicated that they coordinated the use of Title I funds with other funds.
- The biggest perceived challenge for consolidating Title I funds with other sources was state accounting rules that require separate accounting for federal programs.

USE OF TITLE I FUNDS

Although a majority of both SWP and TAP schools used Title I funds to employ teachers, such teachers accounted for a smaller percentage of Title I staff in SWP schools, which were more likely to use Title I funds for instructional coaches, parent liaisons, and other types of staff.

In SWP schools, teachers accounted for 41 percent of all Title I-funded staff, compared with 67 percent in TAP schools. In contrast, SWP schools were more likely than TAPs to employ Title I staff as instructional coaches (14 percent vs. 6 percent of Title I staff), paraprofessionals (29 percent vs. 20 percent), parent liaisons (3 percent vs. less than 1 percent), and other types of staff such as EL specialists, technology support staff, curriculum coordinators, assessment coordinators, data analysts, and administrative staff (12 percent vs. 6 percent).

SWP schools typically use Title I funds for a wider variety of staff types than TAP schools: while 52 percent of TAP schools employed only teachers with their Title I dollars, this was true of just 14 percent of SWPs.

Both SWP and TAP schools most commonly used Title I-funded staff to provide supplemental instruction in reading and/or mathematics, but SWPs were more than twice as likely as TAPs to use these staff for other types of instruction and instructional support.

SWP principals were somewhat more likely than those in TAP schools to report using Title I staff to provide instruction in reading (74 percent vs. 55 percent) and math (55 percent vs. 33 percent). However, SWPs were much more likely than TAPs to report using Title I staff for instruction in other subjects (26 percent vs. 5 percent), data and analytics support (40 percent vs. 18 percent), parent involvement (33 percent vs. 15 percent), technology support (20 percent vs. 6 percent), and support for English learners (21 percent vs. 9 percent) and special education (19 percent vs. 8 percent).

Few SWP schools used Title I staff for reading instruction alone (7 percent, compared with 21 percent of TAP schools), and they were more likely than TAP schools to use staff for combinations of three or more types of services.

While the majority of SWP schools reported traditional uses of Title I, namely reading and mathematics instruction, and push-in or pull-out interventions, six of the 26 SWP case study schools provide examples of more novel uses of Title I funds.

These activities included (1) counseling services to address students' social-emotional and nonacademic skills, (2) school climate interventions, (3) use of education technology and digital learning tools, (4) summer bridge programs for incoming students, (5) specialized use of academic specialists, and (6) academic enrichment activities.

MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT THE USE OF FUNDS

In most Title I schools, districts and schools collaborated on decisions regarding the use of Title I funds, but principals in

SWP schools were more likely than those in TAPs to report making all or most decisions about the use of Title I funds.

Title I school principals most frequently reported that school and district staff engaged in joint decision-making on the use of Title I funds (42 percent in SWPs and 30 percent in TAPs). However, SWP principals were more likely to report that they made most or all decisions regarding Title I funds (25 percent vs. 12 percent), while TAP principals were more likely to report that the district made decisions on all Title I funds (24 percent vs. 10 percent). TAP schools were also more likely than SWP schools to report making no changes in how they used Title I funds during the past three years (30 percent vs. 10 percent).

District administrators reported that SWP schools controlled an average of 47 percent of the Title I funds allocated to their schools, compared with 8 percent in TAP schools.

Similarly, district administrators reported that 40 percent of SWP schools controlled at least three quarters of their Title I funds, compared with just 5 percent of TAP schools. Conversely, districts reported that 90 percent of TAP schools controlled less than a quarter of the Title I funds allocated to them. These findings also played out in the case study schools, where SWP schools were more often identified as having high or moderately high autonomy, compared with TAP schools.

TITLE I FLEXIBILITY IN SCHOOLWIDE PROGRAMS

Few SWP principals reported that their school consolidated Title I funds with other federal, state, and local funds (6 percent), but a larger proportion (50 percent) indicated that they coordinated the use of Title I funds with other funds.

Eight percent of SWP principals reported that they neither consolidated nor coordinated funds from Title I and other programs; 36 percent did not know how to characterize their schools' approach. Among the case study schools, those that reported coordinating the use of Title I funds and other funds often described co-funding staff positions or services in a way that may have a similar practical result as consolidating funds.

According to district administrators, the biggest challenge for consolidating Title I funds with funds from other sources was state accounting rules that require separate accounting for federal programs.

Nearly half (47 percent) of district administrators reported that state accounting rules requiring separate accounting for federal program funds posed a moderate or major challenge to consolidating Title I funds with funds from other sources. Other reported challenges included a lack of information about how to consolidate funds (37 percent), concern about potential audit exceptions (37 percent), district accounting rules (35 percent), and a need for more training about program issues (34 percent) and finance issues (32 percent).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The complete report is available online:
<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/opepd/ppss/reports.html>.