

Congress Fails To Target Title I To Poorest Areas

Congress spent much of 1994 debating how to direct a greater portion of Title I money toward impoverished counties. Two years later, nothing has changed.

Between watered-down language aimed at appeasing various factions in the Democratic Congress, and a lack of new funding from the current Republican lawmakers, a new K-12 law has not yet yielded larger portions of the program's \$6.7 billion in grants going to school districts in low-income areas.

And supporters of targeting funds to poorer areas aren't optimistic there will be changes next year.

"At this point, we're fighting so hard to break out of this [funding] freeze mentality, that battle tends to take precedent over where [the money] is put," Jeff Simering, legislative director of the Council of the Great City Schools, said in an interview this week.

Compromising Positions

To garner votes needed to pass the 1994 Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), education policymakers wrote a formula that would distribute Title I grants up to the amount of fiscal 1995 funding under a formula that has existed since 1988.

Ninety percent of money continues to flow in basic grants, benefiting just about every county in the nation. Ten percent still goes out in concentration grants for counties with poverty rates exceeding 15 percent.

Under IASA, any money added above the fiscal 1995 amount is supposed to be distributed under a formula that favors areas with high

concentrations or numbers of impoverished children

But appropriators overrode the formula this year, and the House has voted to do it again for fiscal 1997.

For fiscal 1996, they gave Title I grants a 0.5 percent increase of \$32 million, and specified that extra money should be distributed under the basic and concentration formulas, ignoring the 1994 Congress's intent.

Since the appropriations supersede IASA, the Education Department did not calculate this year's county grants with the targeted formula, said Mary Jean LeTendre, ED's Title I director.

Even without that, \$32 million is not enough for the targeted formula to make much of a difference, Simering said.

Because Congress will struggle to give Title I major increases for fiscal 1997 and beyond, it should rewrite the 1988 formulas that spread money too thinly across school districts, a top appropriator said in an interview this week.

"What we really need is a change in the formula so the grandfathering is gone," said John Porter, R-Ill., the House's top education appropriator.

For fiscal 1997, the House voted to boost concentration grants by \$20 million and basic grants by \$1 million.

Senate education appropriators are waiting until September to write their line-by-line fiscal 1997 spending plan.

"It's going to be a fight for more money in the devils we know: basic and concentration grants," Simering said. —David Hoff

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Title I Quirks Pit Well-to-do, Poor Schools

By David J. Hoff

San Rafael, Calif.

The federal program intended to counteract poverty's effects on student performance is hard at work here in the wealthiest county in America, just down the road from the Fidelity Investments branch office.

Meanwhile, across the Golden Gate Bridge in the heart of San Francisco, neighborhoods with three times the poverty rate—and no investment brokers in sight—don't get any help from the \$6.7 billion Title I program.

"We have the poverty, and we should not be having to compete with suburbs," said Mary Welsh Byrd, the director of state and federal programs for the 64,000-student San Francisco Unified School District.

But Congress' method for distributing money under the huge Title I program does force poor schools to compete—against those in affluent areas like California's Marin County and against each other.

Despite the remedial education program's stated purpose of helping schools in poor areas boost achievement, critics contend the money is spread among too many districts to have a real impact in the places where poverty is most prevalent.

The nation's 20 wealthiest jurisdictions receive Title I grants ranging from \$31.714 in Falls Church, Va., to \$69.9 million in the Manhattan borough of New York City. Together, the top 20 get \$138.7 million from Title I—about 2 percent of the total, according to federal census records and data from the U.S. Department of Education. (See "Rich Areas Get Richer.")

School officials here in Marin County, where per-capita income tops \$28,000, say the area has hidden pockets of poverty and the student needs that go with them. For example, officials here point out, half the children in the tony waterfront town of Sausalito are on welfare.

Some of Title I's quirks are the result of political calculation. The rest spring from the complex mathematics written into the law's funding formula.

Marin County's 20 school districts will share \$1.2 million in Title I money this year to serve the districts' 34,000 students. Just over 5 percent of the county's students come from families officially deemed to be living in poverty. San Francisco receives \$11.9 million from Title I.

In Marin County, Title I provides an average of \$663 for each student whose family is classified as poor. In San Francisco, the district averages \$817 for each student living below the poverty line.

But the 1994 Title I law does not allow districts to simply assign the average amount to each poor student. The money runs out before all students are helped because the law stipulates that students in schools receiving Title I money get the district average plus 25 percent more. To decide which schools are worthy of the federal help, districts must rank buildings by poverty level. Then they start at the top of that list and stretch the money as far as they can.

In the end, some poor urban schools lose out. And when they do, they often complain about the well-to-do suburban schools that are winners.

In the Dixie school district in Marin County, the federal rules mean that one elementary school gets all of the district's federal aid. In San Francisco, meanwhile, the money runs out before all of the schools in poor neighborhoods can get a piece of the pie.

Pockets of Poverty

Marin County's Vallecito Elementary School is tucked in a neighborhood about a half mile from the Fidelity Investment branch here. Just over 4 percent of the children in the school come from families on welfare.

While that figure seems paltry compared with rates that hover around 20 percent in parts of San Francisco and nearby Oakland, poor children at Vallecito still struggle to keep up with their peers, according to officials in the 2,900-student, K-8 Dixie district.

"When you have a lot of high-end achievers, it's incumbent on a district to focus on kids that aren't doing so well," Thomas J. Lohwasser, the district's superintendent, said.

But critics say districts like Mr. Lohwasser's should be able to find their own way to pay for the remedial reading and mathematics instruction that Title I provides for about 7 million students throughout the country.

"There are a lot of places getting Title I money that could meet their own educational needs without this program," said Paul Steidler, a senior fellow at the Alexis de Tocqueville Institution, an Arlington, Va., think tank that promotes free market solutions in public policy.

Others point out that students' learning problems in schools like the ones here in San Rafael are not as pervasive as in high-poverty cities.

"It's the predominance of poverty in a school that impacts achievement, rather than the individual poverty," said Mary Jean LeTendre, the Education Department's Title I director. "The poor kid who is attending a school that has very little poverty is going to do better than a rich kid who goes to a high-poverty school."

But when Congress tries to take away schools' funding—even schools in wealthy areas like Marin County—federal lawmakers quickly hear protests from local officials.

The 1994 law that reauthorized the Title I program forced Mr. Lohwasser of the Dixie district to spend his entire \$36,561 grant at Vallecito Elementary, the school with the district's highest poverty rate. That meant he had to cut the after-school program in the district's other two elementary schools, which had been funded with Title I money. The superintendent said he could not find enough local or state money in his \$10 million budget to continue the after-school services. "The program has really been missed," he said.

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Title I cont.

If the federal government permanently withdrew its \$36,561 grant, the district would have to lay off the three part-time aides who work in Vallecito Elementary's classrooms, Mr. Lohwasser said.

S.F. Funds Fall Short

San Francisco school officials also consider the money necessary. Sixty-three of the city's 110 schools get Title I money.

Because the city's \$11.9 million grant is not enough to cover all schools, some buildings where 14 percent of children's families subsist on welfare and 70 percent of the children qualify for free or reduced-priced meals are shut out of the program, according to district records.

At the E.R. Taylor Elementary School—where 77 percent of the students eat free or reduced-priced meals and nearly 19 percent are on the welfare rolls—the \$209,000 Title I grant pays for a Reading Recovery program throughout the school, according to Christine W. Hiroshima, the school's principal.

While the school's Title I funding has been steady over the years, fluctuations in state and local budgets have forced Ms. Hiroshima to find creative ways to continue the reading program and still offer other services such as a school nurse.

"It's a struggle just to maintain your program every year," Ms. Hiroshima said. "It's really a dilemma ... whether we'll be able to provide the extra services."

But while Taylor Elementary has a thriving reading program because of Title I, Jefferson Elementary School in the Sunset neighborhood near Golden Gate Park, with a 14 percent poverty rate, gets no money from Title I.

Mission High School—where 515 of the 1,547 students are from families on welfare—doesn't get any money because the per-pupil grant would have taken away too much money from the lower grades, according to Ms. Byrd, the district's state and federal programs director.

As it is, 23 San Francisco elementary schools don't see any Title I money.

That scenario is common throughout inner city districts, a lobbyist for big-city schools said.

"It's kind of ludicrous that a school district with [low] poverty is getting money, and you have school districts with [high] poverty and they're not able to reach all their schools," said Jeff Simering, the legislative director for the Council of the Great City Schools, a Washington-based group that represents the nation's large urban districts.

Gathering Votes

Whether schools like Marin County's Vallecito Elementary should continue to receive Title I money while some San Francisco schools go without has been the subject of intense debate in Washington for more than three years.

Plans to target the federal money on the poorest of the poor school districts may advance the goal of helping more poor children but it doesn't get votes needed for approval, especially in the House, where members closely track the federal money that flows into their home districts.

When House members voted on the bill to reauthorize Title I in 1994, they could check one of several computer printouts detailing how much money was due to go to their districts under the formula proposed in the bill.

If too many districts came up with zeros, the measure never would have passed, House aides said.

Instead, lawmakers passed the new formula, which includes a plan intended to target money toward urban areas like San Francisco and poor rural areas for appropriations that surpass the fiscal 1995 spending level. Even though Congress has raised Title I spending by more than \$500 million since 1994, none of the cash has gone into the targeted formula.

Other changes barred from the program any district with fewer than 10 poor children or less than 2 percent of its enrollment in poverty.

Because well-off school districts receive so little money, the impact of those changes is "marginal," the Congressional Research Service said in an analysis of the 1994 law.

But in Marin County, the change, which took effect this school year, disqualified five districts that received about \$10,000 last year.

In California's \$708 million Title I grant, the changes kept about \$1 million from wealthy districts.

Congress is making other small steps to steer more Title I money toward the poorest schools. Last year, lawmakers boosted the appropriation for the "concentration grant" portion of the formula from \$684 million to almost \$1 billion. Officials in Washington also raised the biggest part of Title I, the basic grants, by 2.5 percent.

Mr. Simering, who knows the realities of winning votes in Congress, said it is almost inevitable that districts in places like Marin County will continue to get a portion of Title I money.

"The hope is that you don't shower those that are substantially less needy with too much money," he said.

STUDY FINDS WHAT WORKS FOR DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

An new Education Department study shows low-income students succeed when schools help them in early grades and fully implement programs and whole-campus reforms.

The report sounds a more optimistic note than a long-awaited longitudinal survey on Chapter 1, which found that the \$7 billion program overall did not help low-income students close the achievement gap with their better-off peers (ED, April 2).

"We know that some programs, well implemented, can make dramatic differences in students' academic achievement," the researchers concluded. At the same time, however, they acknowledged how daunting the task is.

After studying 10 effective strategies in 25 sites, the researchers conclude, "We still have not provided adequate human and fiscal resources, appropriately targeted, to make large-scale program improvements a reliably consistent reality."

Both reports are to be sent today to Congress, which will likely use them as ammunition in the annual funding battle. Confirm Conventional Wisdom To examine the 10 strategies, the researchers followed groups of first-, third- and ninth-grade students over three years beginning in 1990, visited schools and looked at individual student scores.

Most of the report's findings echo the latest research into serving disadvantaged children. The students "began the study far below the national average, yet made academic gains toward or exceeding national means. In some schools the gains were dramatic," the researchers say.

They report doesn't identify individual schools but says one each of the Comer School Development Program schools and the Success for All schools made particularly impressive gains.

"There is good reason to believe that most children of poverty, when well educated, can achieve at similar levels,"

the report said.

Success In The Making

The key isn't in the strategy but how it is implemented, the researchers say.

No one strategy is right for the variety of disadvantaged schools. "The specific program chosen only matters if the program is reasonably rigorously implemented," the study said.

Half-hearted, inconsistent implementation led to only minor gains, while schools that were scrupulous about initial and long-term implementation did best.

In some cases, poor management also thwarted students' progress. For instance, younger students had plenty of access to reading and math curricula, but little science or writing experience. This was due in part to the strong focus on reading and math and on inadequate planning time for teachers.

Schools need a realistic perception of their strengths and weaknesses and should consider a wide variety of options—which they often don't—before embarking on reforms, the report says.

Support from the district, school administration and faculty is crucial: Schools that could hand-pick teachers and administrators committed to the reform program did better at sustaining it.

The researchers say teachers who don't support the program should be allowed to transfer to other schools, keep their seniority, and not suffer any negative consequences.

When these types of implementation issues weren't addressed, they "permanently crippled otherwise promising programs," the report says.

The researchers say programs for first-graders raised their reading comprehension scores on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills to near the national average by the end of third grade, but results for older students were not nearly as good.

Schools often drew unifying strength

and focus from associations with external, reform-focused organizations and whole school reform resulted in better scores.

Not surprisingly, schools that showed a combination of factors—strong implementation, focus on early grades, faculty involvement, and a connection to a national reform movement—showed "unusually large gains."

By the same token, there were lots of factors beyond schools' control that affected the success of the programs, including regional recessions, riots and drug infestation in surrounding neighborhoods.

Hobbled By Budget Cuts

Federal Chapter 1 funds were the primary engine for reform, the study said, a finding that "could hardly be overstated."

Chapter 1 was typically the largest flexible source of funding they had. Since revamped and renamed Title I in 1994, the program has become even more flexible (ED Special Supplement, Nov. 29, 1994).

While federal compensatory education funding remained stable during the period, local funding fluctuated. When the local money dried up, "the effect was always to permanently hobble or kill the reform effort."

For fiscal 1998, President Clinton wants to increase Title I funding by 4.8 percent, from about \$7.2 billion this year to \$7.54 billion (ED, Feb. 7). House appropriators are expected next month to start writing a fiscal 1998 spending bill for education programs.

"Special Strategies Studies for Educating Disadvantaged Children: Findings and Policy Implications of a Longitudinal Study" will be available from Education Department, Planning and Evaluation Service, 600 Independence Ave. SW, Room 4162, Washington, D.C. 20202-8240, (202)401-3389. —Laureen Lazarovici■

Case Limiting Title I Gets New Day in Court

By Mark Walsh

Allentown, Pa.

Each weekday morning, teacher Susan Ritter drives an Allentown school district van up to the front curb of Sacred Heart Catholic School here.

She parks the vehicle, plugs in a hefty power cable from the school building, then shivers while the cramped van warms up and she welcomes Catholic school students who need extra help learning English as a second language. The classes are provided under Title I, the federal K-12 remedial education program.

"I don't think we are in the safest location," Ms. Ritter says about the busy street in front of Sacred Heart. But the building, one of the oldest parochial schools in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Allentown, does not have any other suitable place to park the mobile classroom.

"Sometimes trucks go by, and they seem very close," Ms. Ritter says. "There are also times when I see questionable individuals outside. I keep the door locked."

"I would prefer to be inside the school building," she adds. "I would get more instructional time with the children."

Going Mobile

Under a 1985 ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court, Ms. Ritter and other public school teachers nationwide are forbidden to provide Title I services inside religious schools. The court will hear arguments next week on whether to overturn that 5-4 decision.

Congress has mandated since the inception of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965 that disadvantaged students in private schools, whether religious or secular, be eligible for the program's remedial services.

But the Supreme Court declared in *Aguilar v. Felton* that sending public school teachers into religious schools resulted in too much entanglement between government and religion and thus violated the U.S. Constitution's ban on any government establishment of religion.

The decision meant that districts had to come up with alternatives to sending their teachers into religious schools. The most widely used methods are mobile classroom vans or trailers parked near religious schools, classes at neutral sites or in public schools, and special remedial computer programs that children can work on at home or

in their religious schools.

Five current justices are on record as calling for the reversal or reconsideration of the 1985 ruling. As Justice Antonin Scalia put it in an unrelated 1994 opinion, the *Felton* decision was "hostile to our national tradition of accommodation."

In the new appeal, *Agostini v. Felton* (Case No. 96-552), the New York City school district, joined by the Clinton administration and parents of Catholic school students, argues that the ruling 12 years ago has resulted in the expenditure of hundreds of millions of dollars on less effective alternative means of providing Title I services to children in religious schools.

"Aguilar has led to considerable cost to education and the public fisc but has yielded little constitutional benefit, in the sense of preventing any real entanglement between governmental and religious institutions," says a brief filed on behalf of U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley.

Advocates of strict church-state separation are vigorously fighting the effort to have the *Felton* decision overturned. They argue that the New York City district is seeking a replay of the issue decided in 1985 before a new, more sympathetic set of justices.

And they contend that much of the cost and logistical difficulties related to Title I alternatives such as mobile classrooms could have been avoided if public school authorities had insisted that eligible religious school children travel to public schools to receive services.

Allen H. Zelon, a member of the Committee for Public Education and Religious Liberty, a New York City group known as pearl, said public school officials there have let Catholic and Jewish school leaders dictate the use of expensive mobile classrooms as the primary alternative under the *Felton* ruling.

"The board of education has always been unduly solicitous to the parochial schools," said Mr. Zelon, a former community school board member. He was one of the original plaintiffs in the 1978 lawsuit organized by PEARL to challenge the presence of public Title I teachers in religious schools.

Public school officials in New York City and here in Allentown respond that unless there is a public school nearby, it is undesirable to transport

Title I students from religious schools to public school buildings.

Off-the-Top Funding

If the New York City district succeeds in getting the *Felton* decision overturned, the effects will be felt across the nation, including in the 15,000-student Allentown district.

In Allentown, an industrial city of about 105,000 people, roughly 4,300 students are served in Title I overall. About 340 of those come from the city's five Catholic elementary schools. Officials of the Allentown district and the Catholic diocese say that in the 12 years since the decision, they have worked cooperatively to continue services for eligible religious school children.

But early on, both sides agreed that sending those children to public schools would not work in most cases.

"I was very much opposed to transporting students to public schools because of the loss of time involved," said John R. Clark, the assistant superintendent for government programs in the Allentown Diocese. "It would be kind of ludicrous."

The diocese extends well beyond the boundaries of Allentown itself, and Mr. Clark deals with as many as 60 school districts in five counties in eastern Pennsylvania. Unlike in New York City and in a handful of other districts across the country, no individuals or groups here have challenged the alternative methods of providing Title I instruction to parochial school students.

Ralph S. Todd, the director of instructional-support services for the Allentown district, said a reversal of the *Felton* decision likely would free more funding for the district's overall Title I allocation.

He noted that Congress has appropriated money specifically for "capital expenses" related to compliance with the Supreme Court decision. That money, currently \$41 million out of the total Title I budget of \$7.7 billion, goes for buying or leasing mobile classrooms or for computer hardware. But in many districts, the federal capital funds do not cover all the compliance costs.

To make up the rest, districts must pay for compliance with *Felton* by taking money "off the top" of their

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Title I cont.

entire Title I allocations. That is a U.S. Department of Education rule first announced in 1985 by then-Secretary William J. Bennett.

Critics have challenged the off-the-top funding rule as unfair to Title I students in public schools, but courts have upheld it. One result has been to make public and religious schools allies in their dislike of the Felton ruling. Besides the logistical difficulties the ruling has caused for both sectors, the ruling has meant that many districts have had less money to spend on Title I instruction than they otherwise would have.

That is not currently a problem in Allentown. Of the district's total Title I allocation this year of \$2.7 million, about \$160,000 goes for services to students in the Catholic schools. But the district's fleet of Title I vans is already paid for, so maintenance costs are all that remain.

Mr. Todd rejected an argument leveled by critics elsewhere that the post-Felton Title I programs for religious school students have been lavish while students in public schools make do with less.

"Our vans are not extravagant," he said.

Ice Box

At St. Francis Catholic School here, paraprofessional Aggie Schaeffer gives a reading lesson to five students seated at two tables in a small Title I van parked on the school playground. She helps about 30 students, in groups of five or six, with reading for 30 minutes a day. Luckily, she said, she is not claustrophobic.

"It's a pleasure to work with these

students no matter what the conditions," she said. But she recalled a recent day when water seeped into the van and froze on the carpet. Ms. Schaeffer took a big spill.

Linda Kressly, the principal of St. Francis, said she would like to welcome the remedial teachers back into her building.

"I think there is a lot of precious time wasted walking back and forth between the school and the van," she said.

Jamie Schafer, a 4th grade teacher at Sacred Heart Catholic School, expressed reservations about the fact that five of her students are pulled out of class on a regular basis to get extra help in reading.

"It's difficult because they are not always pulled out of class time when I am teaching reading," she said. "They're missing other subjects."

That complaint could just as easily be made against Title I programs in public schools. But in its current form, public school Title I programs place more emphasis on helping needy students while they stay in their regular classrooms. New rules also allow Title I money to go for schoolwide improvements in eligible public schools. Private schools, religious or not, are not eligible for schoolwide improvement funds.

But even if the Felton decision is reversed and public school teachers could go back into religious school buildings, it is unlikely they would provide services in students' regular classrooms.

Title I teachers "would still have to work with a distinct group of children," Mr. Clark of the Allentown

Diocese said.

Procedures and Legitimacy

PEARL's main arguments against reversing Felton are that allowing public school teachers into religious schools creates a "symbolic union" between church and state and that the Title I program effectively subsidizes the religious mission of a parochial school by providing government aid for those students who lag in basic subjects.

But the group is also focusing on persuading the justices not to use the current New York City case to reverse the 1985 ruling.

The justices have asked the parties to the current appeal to address whether the procedure used by the New York City board of education to get its case back before the high court was proper. The board filed a motion seeking relief from the 1985 ruling based on the fact that a majority of justices expressed doubts about its legitimacy in a separate 1994 case, Board of Education of the Kiryas Joel Village School District v. Grumet.

Lower courts rejected the board's request but ruled that the board was on solid procedural ground, thus allowing the appeal to proceed to the Supreme Court.

PEARL argues that the high court's own legitimacy is at stake in the case. The justices should not create the impression that "constitutional doctrine vacillates merely because of changes in the court's membership," Stanley Geller, pearl's lawyer, argues in a brief.

The case will be argued April 15, with a decision expected by the end of the court's term in late June or early July.

ED REVIEWING NEW WAYS TO ALLOCATE TITLE I MONEY

A new Census Bureau procedure for distributing Title I funds is unproven and should be combined with the existing method, a scientific review panel announced Friday.

County poverty rates from older and newer data should be averaged and then applied to the newer 1994 population estimates, says a 14-member panel of the National Research Council.

The new estimates combine data from a national income survey with records from the food stamp program and income tax returns.

"This solution will smooth the transition to [the new model] for subsequent allocations, after further research has been conducted," the summary said.

Current Title I allotments are based on 1990 census figures.

The 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act requires officials to use updated figures by the upcoming school year.

Brace Yourself

Education Secretary Richard Riley is reviewing the new census model and the council's recommended formula and is to decide within a week which one to use, said Mary Jean LeTendre, the Education Department's director of compensatory education.

Earlier this week, LeTendre warned urban school administrators to be ready for changes in their budgets this school year due to population shifts (ED, March 19).

It was not clear from the research council's summary which districts would get more or less money under the panel's proposal. NRC released an executive summary of its findings before unveiling the full report next month. The panel wanted to give ED ample time to figure out how it will disburse Title I funds in July for the 1997-98 school year.

Districts with poverty rates of 30 percent or more are guaranteed 95 percent of the Title I money they received the previous year.

Too Much Too Soon?

Richard Long, executive director of the National Association of State Coordinators of Compensatory Education, said he supports updating the figures more frequently than every 10 years, but frets about yet another change hurled at Title I directors.

"Title I is in such massive transition" as a result of the 1994 reauthorization of the law. "People are coping with a lot."

Still, "people are trying to do the fair thing, and because it makes it harder it doesn't mean we shouldn't do it," he added.

The executive summary of "Small-Area Estimates of School-Age Children in Poverty: Evaluation of the 1993 County Estimates for Title I Allocations" is free from Terri Scanlon, National Research Council, 2101 Constitution Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20418, (202)334-3097; or on the Internet at <http://www2.nas.edu/new/2146.html>.

—Laureen Lazarovici■

ISTOOK AGAIN SETS SIGHTS ON SCHOOL PRAYER AMENDMENT

A conservative congressman is renewing his efforts to pass a constitutional amendment allowing prayer in public schools.

Rep. Ernest Istook, R-Okla., said Monday at a news briefing that he will introduce a bill that would make it unconstitutional for the government to infringe on citizens' "right to pray ... on public property, including public schools."

Istook backed similar legislation during the last Congress, but House members never brought it to the floor (ED, July 22, 1996).

The as-yet-unnumbered bill,

scheduled to be introduced when Congress returns from its spring recess in two weeks, also would say that "the government shall not compel joining in prayer, [or] initiate or compose school prayers."

"Courts have gone far beyond outlawing prayer in many public school settings," and have engaged in a "systematic campaign" to strip religion from public life, Istook said.

Education groups joined with civil libertarians to denounce the proposal.

"The Istook amendment would authorize state-sponsored religious

practices [including] state-endorsed prayer in our public school classrooms," according to a statement by the Coalition to Preserve Religious Liberty, an alliance of 50 religious, educational and civil liberties groups.

Representatives of the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the American Association of School Administrators joined the Coalition at a news conference Monday to oppose Istook's amendment.

—Laureen Lazarovici■

low-performing schools to use 80 percent of a state "public education grant" (PEG) to attend the school of their choice.

Currently, students must use the grants at other public schools, which are not required to accept the transfer students. Only about 50 students have made use of PEGs.

"There are many arguments both for and against a voucher program," said GOP state Sen. Teel Bivins, chairman of the Senate Education Committee. "My goal in filing this legislation is to create a pilot project where we can compare apples to apples in testing these arguments."

The parental school-choice bill is another piece of legislation under consideration. Introduced by Democratic

state Rep. Henry Cuellar, it would allow parents taking advantage of PEGs to send their children to private schools if public school turn them down.

As part of the child-centered funding bill, the University of North Texas would choose 60 school districts to participate in a school-voucher program for children who qualify for the federal school-lunch program. Republican state Rep. Kent Grusendorf introduced the bill.

All of Texas' 1,054 school districts would be required to participate under the child-centered scholarships for public private school bill, authored by Democratic state Rep. Ron Wilson.

Under the Wilson plan, every child eligible to attend public school could

attend any public or private school chosen by the child's parents. State agencies "may not in any way regulate the educational program of a private school."

Cecile Richards, daughter of former Gov. Ann Richards, has set up the Texas Freedom network to spearhead opposition to the measures.

Miss Richards accuses members of the "religious right" of pushing the voucher plans, saying they have a national agenda to elect conservatives to school boards.

"I think this will be good for minority children," said Mr. Cuellar. "How can they argue against it? Why deny those young children an opportunity just because you are afraid of competition?"

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04/12/97; Edition: JOHNSON COUNTY; Section: ZONE/OLATHE; Page 1

Title I funds a resource, not a stigma

Extra services that federal money pays for can help any student in eligible schools.

By TERRY COLLINS
Staff Writer

Ten elementary schools in Olathe share a distinction local educators believe benefits their students, yet forces them to overcome stereotypes.

The schools - Central, Countryside, Fairview, Havencroft, Northview, Ridgeview, Rolling Ridge, Tomahawk, Washington and Westview - are Title I schools.

TD Title I is a federal program that provides money to schools to help educate disadvantaged or low-income students. Schools receive Title I funds primarily based on how many students they have who are eligible for the federal free and reduced-price lunch program.

The money is used to provide additional instruction to students who are performing below their grade level in reading or math. In the Olathe district schools, more than 20 teachers and teaching assistants are paid with Title I funds, which are separate from the district's regular budget.

But educators say they must confront myths surrounding the Title I program.

Myth: Because students come from poorer backgrounds, the odds are stacked against them, and they can't learn as well.

Fact: Northview Principal Greg

Oborny said Thursday that Title I schools unfairly have a bad image nationwide. He said no one in the district - from teachers to administrators - believes there are limitations to what a student can learn.

"Title I is a vital program that helps students with severe academic needs. Nothing more, nothing less," Oborny said. "We have the same goals any school has. You expect students to do well, and we provide every opportunity for them to do just that."

"We have to try a little harder at Title I schools to communicate our message."

Oborny added the income level of students' families isn't the only reason schools receive Title I funds. Problems with excessive absences, behavior and lower math and reading scores are also considered.

Myth: Only the students who receive free or reduced-price lunches benefit from Title I funds.

Fact: LuAnn Hermrick, district language arts and curriculum instructor, said any student in a school that gets funds can take advantage of Title I programs. In the 10 Olathe Title I schools, anywhere from 30 to 50 percent of students participate in some manner.

"You could be the wealthiest child,

come from the most loved family in the district and still have the opportunity to benefit from those (Title I) funds," Hermrick said. "A child may still have several problems to overcome."

Myth: Olathe is the only school district in Johnson County with Title I schools.

Fact: Olathe is one of five school districts in the county with Title I schools. This year, Olathe received \$527,212, second to Shawnee Mission, \$1 million. Gardner got \$97,171; De Soto, \$90,409; and Spring Hill, \$59,145.

Overall, the county got almost \$2 million in federal money for disadvantaged students.

Of Olathe's Title I funding, more than \$400,000 is used for employees' salaries and benefits.

Hermrick said receiving federal funding is difficult for school districts: Each year they must wonder whether they can expand their Title I programs or if some will be cut.

Teamwork

Principals from the 10 Title I elementary schools have a special meeting each month known as the "Discovery Group," Oborny said. The group, which convenes after the district's monthly gathering of principals,

discusses how schools are doing and new learning strategies.

"We do a lot of brainstorming," Oborny said. "We want to have relevant learning, early intervention and challenge our students to make Title I work effectively."

Hermrick, who conducts the group's meetings, said the principals take the information they gather and pass it on to their staffs.

"We have to ensure that we not only provide students everything they get in their regular curriculum, but also to enhance what they need through the help of Title I. It takes teamwork."

Olathe educators said the greatest strength of Title I programs is students'

opportunity to participate in intimate and intense settings - one-on-one or small classrooms, no more than five students. Each class has a teacher and an assistant focusing on a particular subject.

At Northview, students attending Title I classes have their goals posted everywhere around the classroom for positive reinforcement. The goals are simple: "I need to learn" or "I can learn to read better."

On Thursday, students went through several exercises, including pronouncing the "ch" in chair and the "bl" in block, skills other students take for granted.

Debra Ford, a teaching assistant at Northview, said she and Joyce Fee, a

Title I teacher, see nearly 40 students daily. Their goal is to help students notice how they have gradually improved.

"It builds their self-esteem when the students are able to understand what they are learning," Ford said.

"When they put it all together, it's wonderful."

Fee said nothing pleases them more than to see a student make progress with the extra attention.

"Sometimes it may take a student longer to reach the goal, but we never give up. Ever. We want them to be as successful as possible.

"They are our future." ■

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CLINTON PRAISES DIVERSITY, LOOKS TO CHANGING WORLD

BY ROBERT A. RANKIN - Knight-Ridder News Service

Summary: The president tells editors the nation must prepare for the growing racial, ethnic and religious differences among Americans

President Clinton warned Friday that the United States' growing racial, ethnic and religious diversity, although potentially a great thing for the nation, could turn into a "powder keg of problems."

In remarks to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Washington, Clinton unveiled his vision of how today's children and the nation can best prepare for the 21st century.

One editor asked Clinton to offer advice to his fifth-grade son about how best to prepare for the world of tomorrow. That prompted a heartfelt discussion from the president about the challenges of racial diversity.

"It is really potentially a great thing for America that we are becoming so multiethnic at the time the world is becoming so closely tied together," Clinton said. "But it's also potentially a powder keg of problems and heartbreak and division and loss."

"How we handle it . . . may be the biggest single determinant of what we look like 50 years from now and what our position in the world is."

The off-the-cuff observation culminated a lengthy answer to the inquiring father that summed up Clinton's social vision.

- Preparing for the future

Advising today's fifth-graders about how to prepare for the future, Clinton said: "First and foremost, be a good student. Learn all you can. . . . And stay out of trouble. Don't do something dumb like get involved in drugs or alcohol or something that will wreck your life."

Clinton's second point turned straight to the challenge of diversity:

"Get to know people who are your age but who are different from you — people of a different racial or ethnic group, people of a different religion — because you are going to live in the most multiethnic, multiracial, multireligious democracy in human history."

Point three: "Learn as much as you can about the rest of the world because it will be a smaller world, and you'll need to know more about it."

Four: "Start to take the responsibilities of citizenship seriously, and find some way, even at the age of 10, to be of service to your community. . . . I think we need to build an ethic of citizen service into our young people."

The president said that the challenge of dealing with racial diversity has dominated his life because he grew up as

a Southerner. "But it's a very different issue now."

Just as social diversity poses challenges to the United States' future, so do forces of change abroad, Clinton said.

"We can only preserve our security and our well-being at home by being strongly involved in the world beyond our borders," he said.

- Appeal for chemical arms treaty

The president delivered strong appeals to Congress to give him two tools to help Americans cope with global challenges: ratification of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which aims to ban and destroy chemical arms stockpiles, and fast-track authority to negotiate new trade-liberalizing pacts.

Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush helped draft the Chemical Weapons Convention, which takes effect April 29. But the Senate is stalling its ratification.

Conservative Republicans led by Sen. Jesse Helms of North Carolina oppose it because they fear it will be ineffective and open U.S. technology to foreign inspection.

Clinton argued that the treaty would help eliminate "a silent and sudden killer" that threatens U.S. soldiers and civilians, should terrorists use such weapons.

Equally important, Clinton said, the United States' failure to ratify the treaty