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ESSA Quick Reference Brief: Serving Preschool Children through Title I-A

High-quality early learning and care opportunities lay the foundation for school readiness, ensuring children and their families feel confident and supported as they transition to kindergarten. Early learning is woven throughout the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), as a means of addressing education equity to eliminate disparities in student achievement and support students' school success.

What the Law Says

Title I, Part A allows districts to provide preschool programs to improve educational outcomes for eligible children from birth to the age at which the district provides a free public elementary education.[1] Certain children are automatically eligible to participate in a Title I preschool program including:

- children who participated in Head Start or attended a Title I preschool program in the prior two years,
- children who received services under Title I, Part C (migrant education) in the prior two years,
- preschool-age children experiencing houselessness, and
- children who are in secure care or attending a community day program.[2]

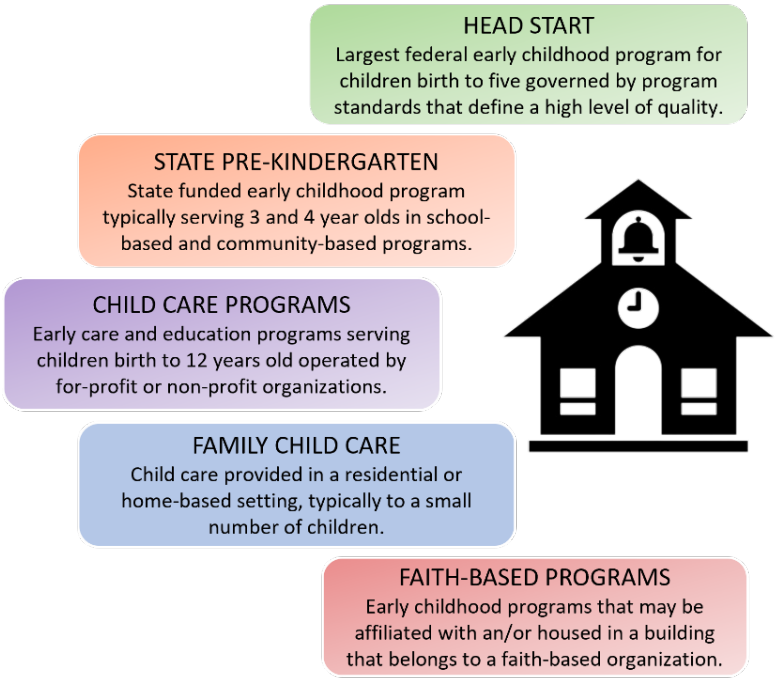
Districts receiving Title I-A funds must also coordinate with Head Start and, if feasible, other entities carrying out early childhood development programs.[3]

What it Means

Districts may use Title I-A funds to support a variety of preschool models. Student eligibility depends on whether the preschool operates at the district or school level, as well as the type of program (i.e., schoolwide or targeted assistance) under which the preschool operates.

Regardless of whether it operates a preschool program, a district that receives Title I-A funds must ensure a smooth transition to kindergarten by coordinating with Head Start[4] and other programs to:

- Develop and implement a systematic procedure for receiving records of preschool children,
- Establish channels of communication to facilitate coordination,
- Conduct meetings involving families, school staff, and Head Start teachers to discuss the developmental and other needs of children,
- Organize and participating in joint training of Head Start staff and school staff, and
- Link district educational services with Head Start agency services.



[1] *ESEA Section 1114(c); 1115(c)(1)(A)(ii)*
[2] *ESEA Section 1115(c)(2)*
[3] *ESEA Section 1119(a)*
[4] *ESEA Section 1119(b)*

Methods for Supporting Preschool Programs with Title I-A funds

A district may use Title I-A funds to support a district-operated preschool program or a school-operated preschool program[5], or for coordination with other preschool programs, based on the needs of its eligible students. Eligibility for participation depends on the type of program a district or school operates.

District Operated: A district may reserve a portion of funds from its Title I allocation to operate a preschool program for eligible children in the district as a whole or in a portion of the district.

- *An LEA **may not** use Title I funds to implement a preschool program throughout the district to benefit all preschool students in the LEA unless all the schools in the LEA are Title I schools operating schoolwide programs.*

School Operated: A Title I school may use all or a portion of its Title I funds to operate a preschool program for eligible children.

- *If a school operates a preschool program in a **schoolwide program** school, all preschool children who reside in the school's attendance area are eligible to be served.*
- *In a school operating a **targeted assistance program,** eligible preschool children are those who reside in its attendance area and whom the school identifies as needing support to meet the State's academic achievement standards based on multiple, educationally related, objective criteria.*[6]

Coordination with Other Early Childhood Programs: An LEA or school may use Title I funds to improve the quality or extend the day or number of days of state-funded preschool (*e.g., Oregon Prenatal to Kindergarten, Preschool Promise*), Head Start, childcare, or other community-based early learning programs for eligible children.

In addition to providing direct preschool services, Title I-A funds may also be used to support early learning in other ways, such as for professional learning, including joint professional development for early childhood staff and elementary school staff, and health, nutrition, and other comprehensive services for children in a Title I preschool program. For more detailed information, see the U.S. Department of Education Non-Regulatory Guidance on Serving Preschool Children Through Title I-A.

Allowable Uses

Under Title I, preschool means a range of programmatic and support services for children. These can include:

- Classroom-based instructional programs
- Salaries and benefits for teachers and other staff
- Home visiting programs
- Professional development for early childhood professionals who serve Title I eligible children
- Support services, such as nutrition, vision, dental, and counseling services
- Screening and diagnostic assessment
- Summer enrichment programs for young children and their families

[5] *ESEA section 1114(c) and 1115(c)*

[6] *ESEA section 1115(c)(1)(B) Multiple, educationally related, objective criteria may include data collected such as interviews with families, teacher judgment, and developmentally appropriate measures of child development. The use of family income as one factor in determining eligibility is allowable, but children should not be identified for a Title I preschool program solely on the basis of family income.*

- Family literacy programs
- Transitioning into Kindergarten programs
- Family engagement initiatives

Recommendations for Practice

- **Ensure alignment between preschool programs and the K-12 system.** A Title I-A preschool program that provides services to children from families experiencing poverty **must ensure that those services comply, at a minimum, with the education performance standards in effect under the Head Start Act.** Additionally, alignment to Oregon's Early Learning and Kindergarten Guidelines is strongly recommended.

- **Collaborate.** Coordinate outreach efforts to families so that they are aware of enrollment processes for their children. Community-based organizations can play an important role in this regard as they often have existing relationships with families. Additionally, Tribal Consultation is required for some districts[7] under ESEA. It is the responsibility of the school district to initiate this process to allow collaboration between the tribe and the district to enhance the educational opportunities of American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) students.

- **Center equity.** Students experiencing disability, migratory students, multilingual learners, children experiencing housing instability and children in foster care face barriers that limit access to early learning programs. As districts plan for the availability of high-quality preschool programs, special attention should be paid to how these students are identified and served. This includes, but is not limited to restructuring budgets, physical space, and staffing structures; training Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) teams[8] on racial equity, implicit bias, and inclusion; formalizing partnerships with community-based early childhood providers; and requiring joint training for early and special education educators.

- **Braid funding sources.** Title I-C, Title III, Title IV-B and McKinney-Vento all include provisions related to providing supports to preschool-aged children, in addition to Title I-A. Title I-A, Title I-C, Title II-A and Title III-A may also be used for professional development to improve the skills and knowledge of teachers, including preschool teachers. When braiding funds, keep in mind the supplement not supplant requirements of each program, particularly **Title I-C, Title III and Title IV-B which may not supplant other federal funds.**

Resources

- Non-Regulatory Guidance on Serving Preschool Children Through Title I-A
- Expanding Opportunities to Support our Youngest Learners
- Early Childhood Coordination Requirements in ESSA
- Oregon Department of Early Learning and Care
- Early Intervention/Early Childhood Education
- Resources for Transitioning to Kindergarten
- Jumpstart Kindergarten Toolkit
- Equity Decision Tools for School Leaders
- Tribal Consultation Toolkit

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[7] *Under section 8538, an affected LEA is one that either: 1) has 50 percent or more of its student enrollment made up of AI/AN students; or 2) received an Indian education formula grant under Title VI of the ESEA, as amended by the ESSA, in the previous fiscal year that exceeds $40,000. Consultation is required for all Title programs, not just Title VI.*

[8] *OAR 581-015-2825*