

# IN DEFENSE OF Compensatory Education

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In the January [1981] issue of *Educational Leadership*, William Cooley criticized Title I programs for serving an extremely high percentage of "regular achievers" and said Title I funds should reach low-income schools without restrictions. Inaccurately reporting some data from the four-year-old System Development Corporation study, and conveniently omitting other relevant results, Cooley gave a distorted impression of Title I.

Cooley committed an unpardonable sin for a credible researcher; his information is incorrect. The statistics cited in Figure 1 of his article supposedly represent information on Title I students scoring below grade level (low achievers). In reality the quoted figures are for Title I students scoring *one or more years* below grade level.

The significance of what Cooley has done in manipulating the data becomes clear when one recognizes that a second grader who is a year below grade level on the CTBS Total Battery scores at the fourth percentile. This means that Cooley is labeling every second grade youngster at the fifth percentile or above as a "regular achiever." As any knowledgeable school person knows, it is ludicrous to consider children from the 5th percentile to the 50th percentile as "regular achievers."

An examination of the SDC study shows that the authors of the

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study noted the problem with the "one year below grade level" criteria and reported supplemental figures using "below the fiftieth percentile" as an alternate definition of low achievers. These are the figures (see Figure 1) which should have been reported.

These figures portray a considerably different picture from Cooley's. Judge the difference for yourself. Here is Cooley's original paragraph (p. 298) with the erroneous statistics emphasized.

As Figure 1 shows, Title I is serving about 15 percent of the children in elementary grades. Of those in Title I, **about half are low achievers and half are not.** . . . Notice, however, that there are **more** children in Title I who are neither low achievers nor from poor families (5.2 percent of the population) than children who are both poor and low achievers (3.5 percent).

With the accurate data the paragraph should have read: "As Figure 1 shows, Title I is serving about 15 percent of the children in elementary grades. Of those in Title I, **eighty-five percent are low achievers and fifteen**

*William Cooley incorrectly interprets the data on effectiveness of Title I. The program is successfully serving academically needy students, both poor and non-poor.*

**Figure 1.** Percentages of the Elementary School Population Classified by Family Economic Status, Achievement Level, and Title I Population as Should Have Been Reported by Cooley (corrections in parentheses)

		TITLE I PARTICIPATION				Total
		In Title I		Not in Title I		
		Achievement Level				
Economic Status		Low	Regular	Low	Regular	
	Poor		3.5 (5.6)	2.7 (.5)	5.1 (9.7)	9.7 (5.0)
Non Poor		3.7 (6.8)	5.2 (1.7)	10.6 (27.0)	59.5 (43.7)	79.0 (79.2)
		7.2 (12.4)	7.9 (2.2)	15.7 (36.7)	69.2 (48.7)	100.0 (100.0)
		15.1 (14.6)		84.9 (85.4)		

percent are not . . . there are fewer children in Title I who are neither low achievers nor from poor families (1.7 percent of the population) than children who are both poor and low achievers (5.6 percent)."

Cooley also fails to mention how Title I's targeting of services compares with that of other compensatory programs, most of which are at

the state level (Figure 2). As can be seen, Title I is doing a better job of targeting services on poor, low achieving students than state compensatory programs. The higher percentage of non-poor than poor students being served with Title I funds is a direct result of the fact that most Title I schools have a higher percentage of non-poor than poor students.

Figure 2. Characteristics of Compensatory Education Participants\*

A. Title I Participants (Percentages of Title I Students)

	Low Achievers*	Regular Achievers	Total
Poor	38	3	41
Non Poor	47	12	59
TOTAL	85	15	

B. Other Compensatory Education Participants (Percentages of Students)

	Low Achievers**	Regular Achievers	Total
Poor	18	4	22
Non Poor	45	33	78
TOTAL	63	37	

\* Source: Part A is calculated from Figure 1. Part B is from M. M. Wang and others, *The Nature and Recipients of Compensatory Education, Technical Report No. 5* (Santa Monica, Calif.: System Development Corporation, 1978), p. 99.

\*\* Below 50th Percentile.

Once a target school has been selected on the basis of economic criteria, regulations require that Title I serve academically needy students without regard to their economic need. Perhaps this procedure does need to be modified if it becomes desirable to serve *only* the poor students in economically depressed schools. However, all low achieving students are not poor. Neither are all poor students low achievers—perhaps due in part to the prior effectiveness of Title I programs.

Finally, our data in the Pennsylvania Department of Education indicate that Title I is succeeding. May I suggest that Professor Cooley and other academicians who wish some ownership with ESEA Title I visit actual programs in heavily impacted LEAs such as Chester Upland School District in Pennsylvania, observe what is actually happening for children, and then tell us what the success of these children may be attributed to, if not ESEA Title I services. ■

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