

IN DEFENSE OF Compensatory Education

Contrary to William Cooley's view, schoolwide Title I projects might dilute intensive service to those most in need.

GILBERT DEIMEL

We, the Illinois Association of Title I Directors, take many exceptions to the article on compensatory education in the January issue.

Although ostensibly based on research, the article reflects William Cooley's opinions which often either lack substantiating evidence or give a negative connotation to facts which could also be interpreted very positively.

Cooley finds it startling that one-third of the students in Title I for one year are not eligible for Title I the next (. . . because they test above the cut-off score for Title I). The purpose of Title I is to give students enough intensive instruction that they may return to the mainstream as soon as possible, thereafter receiving all their instruction in the mainstream. The fact that the program is successful in making this kind of gain with a third of the students in one year is testimony to the successful impact of Title I.

Cooley points out the difficulty of isolating the effect of Title I from all the other factors that might influence student gain. He is apparently unaware (since he does not mention it) of the Model A 1 testing effort being undertaken on a national level, with enormous numbers of Title I students, to do just that. In the A 1 testing model the student's gains are compared to the gains he or she might be expected to make, according to national norms, in the same period of time. When looking at large numbers of students, gains over and above a normal level of expectation may be safely attributed to Title I.

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Cooley recommends what I believe Title I is presently doing: "allow school districts to use the Title I support they received in schools which are most heavily impacted with children from poor families." This is exactly the principle on which schools are targeted for Title I. Once a school has been designated a Title I school, all children in that school qualify for help and may be accepted.

The law recognizes that schools with large numbers of low socioeconomic students usually have special learning difficulties to overcome and even Cooley admits that "rank ordering schools by economic disadvantage produces the same ordering of schools as ranking them by educational disadvantage." Once the school qualifies, there is no investigation into individual family income—all students may qualify on the basis of educational need. This aspect of the law reduces the stigma Cooley is concerned about.

Since Title I directors follow the law by first identifying those attendance centers most impacted by large numbers of low socioeconomic students and then serving the children in those buildings who are "most in need" of academic assistance, the directors do not understand the "statistics" which apparently show that only one third of the students in Title I are "poor" and only one third "educationally deprived." The directors know this is not true in their districts in Illinois. Perhaps a definition of "poor" or "educationally deprived" should be asked for.

One of the purposes of the Title I law is to provide intensive enough help so that the services really affect those "most in need." One wonders if schoolwide projects, although they might be more convenient for administrators, might not be so diluted

that they would never reach those "most in need."

Although there is a small disclaimer to the effect that this article in no way reflects the "position or policy of NIE and no official endorsement should be inferred," the article would certainly lead the casual reader to believe this was an NIE position. ■

William Cooley Replies:

I am sorry to see that some of the "owners" of Title I feel I have treated their program unfairly.

Dallam's main concern is that I used too low a cut-off on achievement. He seems to feel Title I is for the 50 percent scoring below the median. I thought Title I was for children scoring below grade level (approximately the bottom 23 percent, as my table indicates). If he is right, then Title I is missing 36.7 percent of the "low achievers," instead of the 15.7 percent indicated in my Figure 1.

Dallam's other big concern seems to be that, as a professor, I haven't visited an actual school lately. I'm afraid he picked the wrong professor on that one. I haven't been to Chester Upland, but I have been working almost full-time in an urban school district heavily impacted with Title I eligible children, and I am absolutely convinced that the district could and would offer a better compensatory education program without the present state and federal regulations.

Deimel wants to be sure readers realize that Title I directors follow the law. I certainly wasn't questioning that. My problem is with the regulations, not the regulators. Of course, it must be admitted that fewer state and federal regulations may mean fewer regulators, with more of the money going directly to the schools where the needy kids are. That might present a problem to some.

We are obviously dealing with very complex issues here. Although brief sarcastic exchanges create a lot of heat, they don't generate much light. I hope there will be an opportunity to have a more in-depth review of these issues.

Editor's note: We welcome readers' comments on this topic.

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