



## HOW TO USE YOUR TITLE I RESOURCES MOST EFFECTIVELY

In May 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson delivered a commencement address at the University of Michigan that would change America's educational system forever.

Speaking both to those in attendance, and the country at large still grieving over the assassination of President John F. Kennedy only six months earlier, Johnson spoke of an inspiring new direction for America that sought to transform it into a "Great Society."

**"Your imagination, your initiative, and to your indignation will determine whether we build a society where progress is the servant of our needs, or a society where old values and new visions are buried under unbridled growth. For in your time we have the opportunity to move not only toward the rich society and the powerful society, but upward to the Great Society."**<sup>1</sup>

Johnson believed that for America to develop into a "Great Society," not only must the country fight to end poverty and racial injustice, but it also needed to become a place "where every child can find knowledge to enrich his mind and to enlarge his talents."<sup>2</sup> While today's political climate has conditioned us to view grand campaign promises with suspicion, Johnson's goal to create a "Great Society" by supporting America's most disadvantaged was different because it was personal. Both in his professional life as a former educator of impoverished students, and as a child who grew up in poverty – often hungry and with the constant fear that the bank would take his house away – he realized that education had the unique ability to drastically improve the lives of the underprivileged.<sup>3</sup>

Later that year, Johnson would go on to win his reelection campaign by the largest margin in American history, earning 61% of the popular vote. This historic victory gave him the mandate and political power to enact his sweeping domestic agenda. Central to these policies was the enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, which designated over \$1 billion to specifically help economically disadvantaged students gain access to improved educational opportunities.<sup>4</sup> Known as Title I, these resources would forever comprise the majority of ESEA funds, and to this day aid millions of students nationwide each year.<sup>5</sup>

On April 11, 1965, Johnson returned to the old one-room schoolhouse in Stonewall, Texas, he attended as a child to sign ESEA into law. Seated beside him was his first teacher, Kate Deadrich Loney, as were a group of his former students. As he gazed over those in attendance, he spoke of the importance of accessible, quality education, and how as president, he believed this to be his crowning achievement:

**"As a son of a tenant farmer, I know that education is the only valid passport from poverty. As a former teacher – and, I hope, a future one – I have great expectations of what this law will mean for all of our young people. As President of the United States, I believe deeply no law I have signed or will ever sign means more to the future of America."**<sup>6</sup>

### THE LIMITS OF STANDARDIZED TESTING

Johnson's ESEA was revolutionary. Until its passing in 1965, the federal government had previously taken a hands-off approach

when it came to education, instead preferring to allow local school districts and states to have complete autonomy over K-12 education.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, this method produced drastic levels of inequality, where on average, states at the time spent about 50% more per student in suburban districts compared to their city counterparts.<sup>8</sup>

Title I of ESEA addresses this disparity by seeking to even the playing field and provide essential resources to children falling behind due to a lack of resources and access to quality education. As the amount of Title I funds has increased over the years, (\$15.9 billion in 2018), so too has the need to ensure that these resources are being used most effectively.<sup>9</sup> While accountability is essential, many educators and policymakers alike believe that the methodology experienced an overcorrection in 2001 with the ESEA revision known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

Passed by President George W. Bush, NCLB judged the effectiveness of Title I funds based on a school's yearly performance on standardized literacy and mathematics tests. Schools that



President Lyndon Johnson signs the ESEA bill into law beside his elementary school teacher, Kate Deadrich Loney

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2. Ibid

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4. (Alford, A. (1965). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965: What to Anticipate. The Phi Delta Kappan, 46(10), 483-488. Retrieved from [https://www.jstor.org/stable/20343436?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/20343436?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents)

failed to meet a certain threshold were hit with punitive sanctions. While on paper this might have seemed like a fair and unbiased approach, for schools that lacked the resources to support its lowest-performing children, these sanctions<sup>10</sup> had a snowballing effect that made it difficult to improve over time. Because standardized testing became the sole factor in determining how a school performed, teachers increasingly felt pressured to “teach to the test.”<sup>11</sup>

According to critics of this approach, not only does this lead to unengaging lesson plans that stifle student creativity<sup>12</sup>, but research from Stanford University has also found that heavy use of “decontextualized” standardized tests has “the inadvertent result of decreasing students’ opportunities to create meaning in tasks as well as their motivation to cognitively invest in them.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, because standardized tests often lack content relevant to students’ lives and everyday experiences, many students find it difficult to see their importance.

Given these findings, it is perhaps unsurprising that the results of NCLB did not meet expectations. Research from the Cato Institute supports this, and found that these policies had little lasting impact on the performance of underserved populations:

“Between 1999 and 2012, scores for African Americans rose from 283 to only 288 in math, and scores for Hispanics increased just one point. In reading, African American scores rose only 5 points and Hispanic scores went up only 3 points.”<sup>14</sup>

Because these increases are so low, the researchers were unable to attribute the gains exclusively to NCLB’s policies, and suggested that “given the evidence of overall ineffectiveness, there is a good argument for eliminating No Child Left Behind completely.”<sup>15</sup>

## A NEW OPPORTUNITY WITH THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT

With bipartisan support, on Dec. 10, 2015, Congress passed a new revision of ESEA called the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that did away with NCLB’s perceived “one-size-fits-all” approach to school

district accountability. Most importantly, while ESSA requires yearly math and English tests to ensure the effectiveness of Title I funds, in comparison to NCLB, states now have the flexibility to decide how and when these tests will be taken. Additionally, ESSA encourages states and districts to eliminate unnecessary testing and even provides funding for districts to audit their own testing procedures.<sup>15</sup>

ESSA also differs from NCLB in that it calls on states to consider factors beyond test scores while evaluating the performance of a school. Instead, there now exist four academic factors and a fifth school factor chosen by states that contribute to a school’s overall assessment.

Because of these new criteria, districts that receive Title I funding should feel

emboldened to use active teaching methods that embrace a student’s natural creativity. Instead of focusing on lectures and lesson plans that position students as passive learners, a far more effective approach is to give students the responsibility to find solutions on their own by assigning them group projects that replicate a real-world scenario. Not only will this lead to more engaged and happier students, but research from Harvard University found that increased happiness has a positive correlation with motivation and academic achievement!<sup>17</sup>

## A WHOLE-CHILD APPROACH TO EDUCATION

As the world economy continues its steady transition from the Information Age into the Conceptual Age – “an era where the

### ESSA SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY

#### Academic Factors

- Academic achievement
- Academic progress
- English language proficiency
- High-school graduation rates.

#### School Factors

- Kindergarten readiness
- Access to and completion of advanced coursework
- College readiness
- Discipline rates
- Chronic absenteeism

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Camp Invention® participants show off their Inventor Logs

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7. Reber, S. The History and Legacy of Title I. Retrieved from <https://poverty.ucdavis.edu/podcast/history-and-legacy-title-i>

8. Ibid

9. Ujifusa, A. (2019, April 22). What Each State Will Get in Federal Title I Grants for Disadvantaged Kids Next Year. Retrieved from <http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2019/04/>

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development of knowledge, understanding and application of information is key”<sup>18</sup> – to best prepare our children of today to become the innovators of tomorrow, many educators and policymakers have promoted a “whole-child” approach to learning. According to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), a whole-child approach to education “is an effort to transition from a focus on narrowly defined academic achievement to one that promotes the long-term development and success of all children.”<sup>19</sup> To this end, this leading organization has established five principles that define this type of education:

These tenets speak to the importance of treating students with the care and respect they deserve. While educators inherently understand the importance of empathy and communication, overemphasizing testing can lead to an outsized focus on scores and metrics. While results and accountability are of course important, developing a child’s mindset toward

## THE FIVE PRINCIPLES OF A WHOLE-CHILD EDUCATION: ←

- 1 Each student enters school healthy, and learns about and practices a healthy lifestyle.
- 2 Each student learns in an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for students and adults.
- 3 Each student is actively engaged in learning and is connected to the school and broader community.
- 4 Each student has access to personalized learning and is supported by qualified, caring adults.
- 5 Each student is challenged academically and prepared for success in college or further study, and for employment and participation in a global environment.

learning and continuous improvement is equally critical to their success.<sup>20</sup>

Not only does a whole-child approach to education improve students’ attitudes and behavior, but recent neuroscience research has shown that children’s brains are more effective at learning when they feel they are both in an emotionally and physically safe learning environment, and when they feel connected and engaged in class.<sup>21</sup>

This research, paired with new freedoms given to educators through ESSA, can revolutionize how Title I funding will be used moving forward. For courageous educators who know what their students need most, now it is time for them to lead.



A group of Camp Invention participants explores the properties of hydrophobic sand

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