

What is a Title I Preschool Program?

Title I is not a specific program and does not have to fund “slots” or create new programs. Title I is a funding stream that may support a broad range of early education programs and services, in addition to traditional K-12 programs. Specifically, ESSA says that a district or school that operates a preschool program under this section “may use funds available under this part to establish or enhance preschool programs for children who are under 6 years of age.” In other words, Title I preschool funds early education programs for young children from birth. Title I funds have been permitted to be used for young children below compulsory school age since the creation of the ESEA. Title I preschool is not limited to federal or state-funded pre-kindergarten initiatives.

Often, Title I funds are layered with other funding sources, including child care subsidies, Head Start, Even Start, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and state pre-kindergarten funding, to support particular components of an early childhood program, to expand the hours of a program or to increase the number of children served. The Title I dollars may also be used for professional development, developmental screening, and collaboration activities between schools and community-based child care providers.

Can Title I funds only be used for preschool aged children?

Besides serving school-age children, Title I funds can be used in programs serving children from birth to the age at which the school district provides a free elementary education, usually around 5 years old. However, only 3 percent of children receiving Title I-funded services are younger than the age of school entry. Districts are not required to report the specific ages of children served, only that Title I preschool services were provided to children younger than the age of school entry.

Under Title I, preschool means a range of programmatic and support services for children from birth through the official age of school entry in a district or state. These include:

- Classroom-based instructional programs.
- Salaries and benefits for teachers and other staff.
- Home visiting programs.
- Extended day programs in Head Start or community-based child care programs.
- Professional development for early childhood professionals who serve Title I eligible children, including providers in non-school settings.
- Support services, such as nutrition, vision, dental, and counseling services.
- Screening and diagnostic assessment.
- Summer enrichment programs for young children and their families.
- Family literacy programs.
- Transition programs.
- Parental involvement initiatives.

Sources: *Non-Regulatory Guidance Early Learning in the Every Student Succeeds Act: Expanding Opportunities to Support our Youngest Learners (USED)* downloaded at <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essaelguidance10202016.pdf>; *FAQ: Using Title I of ESEA for Early Education (CLASP)* downloaded at <https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/public/resources-and-publications/publication-1/titleifaq-1.pdf>; *Fast Facts: Title I (NCES)* downloaded at <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=158>

Does Title I support comprehensive services?

Title I funds may support the provision of health, nutrition, and other social services if need is shown based on a comprehensive needs assessment and funds are not available from other sources.

Which children are eligible for Title I funded early childhood services?

Eligibility, in part, is based on whether a program is provided at the district level or school level and whether a program is a schoolwide or districtwide program (open to all children in a given geographic area) or a targeted assistance program. Title I is designed to meet the needs of children who are at-risk of academic failure. School districts and individual schools may decide what measures to use to determine at-risk status for young children. Income may be used to determine and prioritize eligibility, but cannot be the sole factor for determining eligibility. Children who have participated in Head Start or a Title I preschool program at any time over the past two years; homeless children; and children in institutions for neglected or delinquent children are also eligible for Title I-funded preschool services.

Who decides to use Title I funds for early childhood services?

LEAs have the option to use Title I funds to provide early education programs for all children in the district or part of a district. They may also decide not to use Title I funds for children younger than kindergarten or mandatory age of school entry. Decision-making authority for Title I funds may be different in each district and may include the district Title I director, the superintendent, the school board, or other individuals. Eligibility for a districtwide program is based on residence and assessment of risk for not meeting state academic standards (as determined by multiple, education-related, objective criteria determined by the state). LEAs may choose to use some or all of their Title I funds for districtwide early childhood programs, and then allocate any remainder to individual schools according to the federal Title I allocation requirements.

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

Schoolwide Program: 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. A Title I school may operate a schoolwide program if a minimum of 40 percent of the students enrolled in the school, or residing in the attendance area served by the school, are from low-income families. A Title I school with less than 40 percent poverty may request a waiver from the SEA to operate a schoolwide program. Guidance on schoolwide programs can be found in Supporting School Reform by Leveraging Federal Funds in a Schoolwide Program.

Targeted Assistance Program: A school may serve preschool children who reside in its attendance area and whom the school identifies as at risk of failing to meet the State's academic achievement standards when they reach school age.

Sources: *Non-Regulatory Guidance Early Learning in the Every Student Succeeds Act: Expanding Opportunities to Support our Youngest Learners (USED)* downloaded at <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essaelguidance10202016.pdf>; *FAQ: Using Title I of ESEA for Early Education (CLASP)* downloaded at <https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/public/resources-and-publications/publication-1/titleifaq-1.pdf>; *Fast Facts: Title I (NCES)* downloaded at <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=158>

An LEA may reserve a portion of funds from its Title I allocation to operate a preschool program for eligible children in the LEA as a whole or in a portion of the LEA.

District as a Whole: An LEA may serve preschool children who reside throughout the LEA and whom the LEA identifies as eligible because they are at risk of failing to meet the State’s academic achievement standards when they reach school age.

Portion of the District: An LEA may serve preschool children who reside in specific Title I school attendance areas (e.g. its highest-poverty school attendance areas) served by some or all of its Title schools if, for example, an LEA does not have sufficient funds to operate a preschool program for the district as a whole.

An LEA or school may use Title I funds to improve the quality or extend the day or number of days of State preschool, Head Start, child care, or other community-based early learning programs for eligible children. Title I funds may be used to provide preschool services for Title I eligible children who

- are not eligible for Head Start services based on income requirements;
- are eligible for Head Start but not served in a Head Start center due to unmet need;
- are enrolled in a State preschool, Head Start, child care, or community-based early learning program and
- are in need of additional services (e.g., extending the day, increasing number of days, etc.); or
- would benefit from home visiting because they are most at risk of failing to meet the State’s challenging academic standards.

What standards do Title I funded early childhood programs have to meet?

The program must meet, at a minimum, the education performance standards of the Head Start Program Performance Standards that are aligned with the Head Start Child Early Learning Outcomes Framework Ages Birth to Five (2015).

How are Districts Using Title I Funds to Support Birth – Third Grade?

The following examples, though not comprehensive, are illustrative of the ways in which districts are using Title I funds to support early learning.

- **Montgomery County, Maryland** uses Title I funds to support access to high-quality early learning prior to Kindergarten by providing summer learning opportunities in order to improve the transition to Kindergarten; extending Head Start to a full-length day; supporting a two-generation approach by expanding family engagement activities; and coaching and training early childhood teachers.

- In **Hamilton County Schools** (Chattanooga, Tennessee) the school district coordinates Title I funds with Head Start funds to expand the availability of high-quality classrooms. Title I funds support the instruction of high-quality teachers (those with a bachelor's degree).
- **Elk Grove, California** has used a portion of their Title I funds to link pre-K content standards to those in K-6, and provided professional development for teachers across pre-K – 3rd grade to align practices. Additionally, Elk Grove used their Title I funds to expand pre-K through a “Twilight Program” that offer four-year-old pre-K while older siblings can receive tutoring and parents can receive classes in English as a Second Language, job training, and parenting.
- **Asheville, NC** City Schools has funded two full-day, full-year classrooms for 4-year olds who qualify—supported by Title I, NC Pre-K, Head Start, and child care subsidy funds.
- **Houston, TX** has layered Title I with state pre-kindergarten and local dollars to provide full-school-day preschool to all eligible 4-year-olds in the district.