Symposium Proposal: Bringing Title I and Effectiveness Research Together

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Symposium Justification

Great Society programs emerged in the sixties and the largest of these programs in education, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, currently provides $15 billion a year to close gaps between disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers. Effectiveness research in education is much newer, and its more recent arrival raises the possibility that Title I is out of sync with it. Members of SREE naturally are interested in having policy and programs reflect current research and spur future research.

Title I’s basic structure has not changed for decades. It uses four formulas to determine funding and then sends funds to states to distribute to districts and ultimately to schools. The law loosely constrains how districts and schools spend those funds. For example, they can use the funds to pay for professional development of teachers, to support before or after school programs, or to pay for teachers to deliver basic-skills instruction.

But the program has issues related both to its funding and the services underwritten by those funds. Funding is modest, about $600 a year per student, and much of it is spent to support ‘schoolwide’ programs that allow schools to use funds for broad purposes. The most recent Federal effort to evaluate Title I’s effectiveness—the Prospects study in the nineties—found it did little to close gaps. Dynarski and Kainz discuss Title I at more length.

With the newest version of ESEA, the “Every Child Succeeds Act,” scheduled for re-authorization in three years, it is timely to ask how ESEA can be modernized to reflect the current state of education and social science research—how can it be ‘rebooted.’ Is it structured in the most effective way to close achievement gaps? For example, significant advances in science point to links between growing up in poverty and negative outcomes for
children in multiple developmental domains, links that were not known when the law was first
drafted. Should Title I’s structure reflect these advances? Similarly, research on the effects of
class size point to much smaller classes (15 or less) as an ingredient for higher academic
achievement. Can Title I be focused to support classes this small? Also, ESSA as currently
written promotes the use of evidence-based programming. Can Title I induce decision-
making and evaluation practices that ensure that local schools and districts effectively match
evidence-based programming to the target?

Structure of Symposium

The proposed symposium will focus on three questions posed to stimulate discussion:

(1) How does the current structure of Title I fit with current research? What parts align
with research? What parts do not?

(2) How can Title I’s structure be altered to better fit with research?

(3) Can ESSA, the current version of Title I, incorporate some or all of these structural
changes?

Symposium structure

The proposed structure is as follows, with brief bios:

Moderator: Mark Dynarski
mdynarski@gmail.com

Mark is the founder of Pemberton Research, previously a vice-president at Mathematica
Policy Research, directed national evaluations of dropout prevention, after-school programs,
youth community programs, and education technology, senior fellow (nonresident) at the
Brookings Institution and author (with Kirsten Kainz) of two recent articles about Title I for the Brookings ‘Evidence Speaks’ series.

Panelist: Marguerite Roza
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Dr. Roza is professor at Georgetown University and director of the Edunomics Lab. Her recent research traces the effects of fiscal policies at the federal, state, and district levels for their implications on resources at school and classroom levels. Her calculations of dollar implications and cost equivalent tradeoffs have prompted changes in education finance policy at all levels in the education system. More recently she served as Senior Economic Advisor to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Her work has been published by Education Sector, the Brookings Institution, Public Budgeting and Finance, Education Next, and the Peabody Journal of Education. Dr. Roza is author of the highly regarded education finance book, Educational Economics: Where Do School Funds Go?

Panelist: Nora Gordon
Nora.Gordon@georgetown.edu

Dr. Gordon is a professor at Georgetown University’s McCourt School of Public Policy and Research Associate of the National Bureau of Education Research. Her research focuses on fiscal federalism in American education policy and especially the current and historical federal role in elementary and secondary education. She has studied the causes and consequences of school desegregation, state school finance reforms, and school district consolidation.

Professor Gordon testified before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions on implementation of the ‘Every Student Succeeds Act.’ She is a member of the expert panel to the U.S. Department of Education for its “Study on the Title I Formula” which is mandated by ESSA. She is also a member of the District of Columbia’s Title I Committee of Practitioners.
Panelist: Kirsten Kainz  
kirsten.kainz@unc.edu

Dr. Kainz is an associate professor of social work at the University of North Carolina and a research scientist at the Frank Porter Graham Institute of Child Development. Additionally, she is part of the Strategic Education Research Partnership Institute in Washington, DC. Kainz designs, examines, and evaluates effective education practices for economically disadvantaged students historically under-represented in education success, especially students. As a partnership member she facilitates interactions between researchers and education practitioners to increase evidence for education decision-making. As a statistician she assists faculty members to design and conduct high quality research and evaluation studies.

Each panelist would have 15 to 20 minutes to respond to the questions. The moderator then will ask each to respond to issues raised by other panelists (5 minutes). The rest of the session would be devoted to audience discussion (comments or questions posted to panelists).
References
