

Toltec schools to receive Title I label for 2011-12

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For the start of the next academic year 2011-12 Toltec Elementary School expects to have a new label, Title I, in place. Both schools, Toltec Elementary and Toltec Middle, are in the final stages of the tedious application process that began last December according to elementary school Principal Dee Dee Ivanoff. What this will mean for the schools is basically additional funding and resources, mainly for preschool and K-4 education.

Both schools in the Toltec School District have to draft their own action plan for implementing Title I programs, based upon regulations and standards set forth by the United States Department of Education. The action plan (Toltec Elementary's is nearly complete) offers a renewed vision for the use of the school wide programs, both as a reform strategy and as a means of realizing the high standards for student achievement set forth by the No Child left Behind Act of 2001.

Toltec's action plan will follow guidelines organized into three sections: the comprehensive needs assessment, the development of a comprehensive plan and annual program evaluation.

Applying for the Title I label has always been an arduous, detailed and lengthy process. But with the recent infusion of supplemental Title I funds through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), school districts are becoming increasingly interested in the unprecedented opportunities to implement and expand pre-k programs. Cutbacks by the State Legislature in educational funding has also been an important factor driving schools to explore any and all sources for additional funding.

Unfortunately, the Title I label does not translate into something as immediately noticeable such as smaller classroom sizes, however any funding that leads to improved academic performance is welcome.

Title I itself is not a specific program, but rather a funding stream that may support a broad range of early education programs and services, in addition to traditional K-12 programs. Title I defines preschool as "a program of educational services for eligible children below the age at which the school governing board or "local educational agency" (LEA) provides elementary education and is focused on raising the academic achievement of children once they reach school age." Title I preschool funds early education programs for young children from birth through the age of school entry, usually around five years old. Title I funds have been permitted to be used for young children below compulsory school age since the creation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (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.

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, or the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), was established in 1965 to provide schools that serve disadvantaged children with federal funding to meet these children's educational needs. Part A of Title I provides allocations to state educational agencies (SEAs) that in turn, distribute funds to local educational agencies on the basis of a funding formula accounting for the percentage of low-income children, as defined by the state.¹ LEAs then allocate funds to schools based on the percentage of low-income children among all of the students in the

school. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 included an additional \$13 billion in funding for Title I funds flow to states and in turn to school districts and schools. The U.S. Department of Education wrote in Title I ARRA guidance, "Department of Education encourages local educational agencies to give particular consideration to early childhood education and programs serving secondary schools, areas for which they may not have had sufficient resources in the past." Some school districts are moving forward in using these funds for early childhood initiatives. Other districts, however, may be considering the use of Title I dollars but have some concerns about just how these funds may be used.

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. Yet only three percent of children receiving Title I-funded services, or nearly 456,500 children, are younger than the age of school entry (usually about five years old). 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.

Contrary to popular understanding, Title I funds are not just for preschool to kindergarten programs. Under Title I, preschool can mean a range of programs 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 as well as parental involvement initiatives.

Eligibility for the Title I label is based in part on whether a program is provided at the district level or school level and whether a program is a school wide or district wide 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, Even Start, Early Reading First, 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.

At the District level local educational agencies decide how to use Title I funds: whether to provide early education programs for all children in the district or part of a district, for example. 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 district wide 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). Local educational agencies may choose to use some or all of their Title I funds for district wide early childhood programs, and then allocate any remainder to individual schools according to the federal Title I allocation requirements.

States themselves do not provide Title I programs and services directly nor do they control how LEAs use Title I funds. While an individual LEA may decide to use a portion or all of their funds for pre-kindergarten—either in partnership with the state pre-kindergarten funds and program design, or as a separate program. In general, the small portion of Title I funds reserved by state education agencies is used for administrative costs and activities associated with school improvement. States may choose to provide technical assistance to districts on layering or braiding Title I funds with state pre-kindergarten dollars at the local level.

It is important to understand that an individual school may decide to provide Title I preschool. Schools that serve a student population comprised of at least 40 percent low-income students may choose to use their Title I funds for early education for school wide programs open to all children living within the school's attendance area. Schools with lower rates of low-income students may choose to use Title

I funds for targeted programs open to children considered at-risk for not meeting state academic standards. The decision to spend Title I funds on early childhood may be made independently of similar decisions at the district level by a principal, superintendent or other leader in the school.

Title I funds may also be used in non-school settings. The 2004 Title I non-regulatory guidance states: Preschool services may be provided at any location that other Title I services may be provided, including public school buildings, public libraries, community centers, privately owned facilities (including facilities owned by faith-based organizations,) the child's home and other appropriate settings.

Because Title I is a flexible funding stream, and not a program, there are few program components associated with Title I that are mandatory. However, Title I preschool must include a parental involvement component and LEAs must plan for coordinating and integrating Title I preschool with other early education programs in the district, including Head Start and Even Start programs, and with Migrant Education Programs. Title I programs must also plan for the transition of children into elementary school. In Toltec's case, one Title I requirement is for the school to hold a specific number of Parents' Night programs.

Research suggests that Title I funds are often used to improve the quality of existing early childhood programs, pay for a teacher in a program, extend the day so that children receive more hours of high-quality services, or include additional children in existing programs that meet high standards.

In fact, both schools in the district already have a designated Title I teacher. Diane Frank is the Title I teacher at Toltec Elementary, while Julie Walker holds that position at Toltec middle School.