



Title III Supplemental Funds: Creative Ways to Support the Education of English Language Learners in Texas Schools

This report describes how two school districts in Texas supported the achievement of English language learners (ELLs) beyond classroom instruction, through ancillary education enrichment opportunities with Title III funds. These particular districts were identified as those with some of the most successful ELL programs, as determined by improvement in student achievement. (One was featured by TEA Clearinghouse, Best Practices report on April, 2010; the other district has achieved recognized status for the last two years.) One district has one of the largest ELL populations, proportionally, and the other is the third largest in Texas.

The districts' reported practices fell into three major categories: adult education that impacts parental involvement at school and school-related home support of ELLs; teachers' or schools' support activities that increase and/or enrich their value as resources for ELLs; and student services that go beyond classroom instruction and help districts cope with the diverse background of ELLs entering their schools. Each of these areas of support is described below.

Adult education

Several meta-analyses of existing research have reported that educators for years have linked parental involvement to children's educational success (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2003; Téllez & Waxman, 2010). However, it is well documented that parents of ELLs are less likely to become involved in their children's schools (DeGaetano, 2007; Delgado-Gaitán, 2004; Hamilton, Roach, & Riley, 2003; Wong & Hughes, 2006). Parents of ELLs have reported that one of the primary reasons for not becoming involved is a language barrier. Also, the educational background of parents of ELLs is likely to be different from that of their children (i.e., they attended school in a different country). Thus, they are unfamiliar with the U.S. school system and culture, which presents additional barriers to their school involvement.

In one Texas district, Saturday or evening classes were provided for parents, reaching an impressive attendance rate at the district level (800 per semester in the district). Different types of classes were offered in each school, depending

QUESTION:

What are some ways Texas school districts have implemented successful programs using Title III funds?

Summary

Two Texas districts have used Title III funds in innovative ways to support achievement of English language learners by assisting students, teachers, and parents.

Key Points

- Adult classes were provided to help parents become more involved in their children's education.
- Coaching, summer academies, and dual-language conferences helped teachers learn needed skills for teaching ELLs.
- New-arrival centers were established to provide students with ESL instruction and tutoring.



on the needs of the parents. Textbooks and teachers for the parents' classes were provided using Title III funds. Among some of the more successful adult education programs were the ESL classes (with four levels of instruction), citizenship, school engagement, and adult literacy classes. Learning English and learning about the school's expectations and citizenship helped improve parents' participation in school and their confidence in parenting, as indicated by informal observations conducted by the teachers and coordinators in these districts.

The adult classes offered through Title III funds provided support to parents in a variety of ways. First of all, the parents became more familiar with the school context and the demands that schools place on their children. In addition, they were able to improve their own English language skills. This, in turn, increased their competence to communicate with school personnel and enabled them to take advantage of more opportunities to participate in the school. Citizenship classes contributed to their understanding of the U.S. culture and made them more aware of the historical, social, and political organization of the country. Literacy skills in their native language helped them set the foundation for learning English and for developing literacy practices that were essential in supporting their children's reading development at home (DeGaetano, 2007). These combined factors play a positive role in parents' individual and family lives, improving the home environment as well as home language and literacy resources—both of which have been shown to impact school success (Delgado-Gaitán, 2004; Téllez & Waxman, 2010).

Enrichment and professional development for teachers

Another strategy employed by these districts was the provision of additional professional development support for teachers so that they could meet the language learning needs of ELLs. A two-day summer academy was offered before the beginning of the school year. Practitioners and researchers were invited to the academy to present best practices for teaching ELLs and to provide practical knowledge contextualized for the needs of the specific district. The academy was followed by ongoing support from curriculum coaches who guided and supported the implementation of best practices learned at the academy.

Coaching in sheltered instruction for ESL-certified content-area teachers was also provided throughout the year. These sessions concentrated primarily on middle and high school teachers. Title III personnel or coordinators monitored classes several times per week and shared reflections and feedback with principals and sheltered-instruction teachers. The coordinators also helped to ensure that all ELLs receiving state-provided ESL services were appropriately assigned, based on their language proficiency, by reviewing schedules and evaluation transcripts. In addition, Title III funds supported teachers and parents to attend dual-language conferences where they gained knowledge of best practices. Parents disseminated this information by presenting to their peers at regularly scheduled dual-language parent meetings.

Direct support provided to ELLs

New-arrival centers (NAC) provided ESL instruction and tutoring support for ELLs who had been in the U.S. for less than six months and who spoke little or no English. This intensive English language development program provided individualized support to students during the first year of their school attendance. This type of support was particularly valued in schools with small numbers of ELLs across the grade levels—too few to offer a bilingual class per grade. This is often the case for middle and high schools that do not offer bilingual education.

Teachers serving in NACs were extensively trained in the methodology and strategies that support the curriculum. Small classes allowed students to spend the majority of their time learning the English language and transferring skills to the content areas. Paraprofessionals in the classroom helped teachers provide the necessary small group reinforcements that were needed due to limited language skills and/or previous schooling. Title III funds allowed one district to hire two NAC coaches to help oversee and monitor these classrooms across the district.



Supplemental consumable materials were another critical form of direct support for ELLs. These materials supplemented the regular curriculum provided by the state and were essential to the programs' designs. After reviewing teachers' requests—to ensure that the materials had value, were research based, and were aligned to the district curriculum—the district used Title III funds to purchase the materials in Spanish and English, depending on the students' needs. Among the most popular requests were technology tools, such as mathematics software in English and Spanish, language development software, test preparation software in English and Spanish, and digital projectors to provide visual learning cues. Other frequently requested materials included achievement tests to assess background knowledge of new students, leveled science and biology textbooks, high-interest reading material for students reading below grade level, and supplemental reading and literacy materials.

Summary

These two Texas school districts showed that the provision of 1) adult education that impacts the parents' school involvement, 2) support that increases and enriches the relevant human resources at school, and 3) direct student services that go beyond classroom instruction is associated with improvement in students' learning. This was shown through both local and state assessments of ELLs in the districts. Creating a learning environment that is conducive to success for diverse populations often requires a flexible approach. In supporting these programs, the Title III division of the Texas Education Agency allows flexibility for locally configured and adapted programs and activities. At the same time—through application reviews, reporting, and training—the division ensures that the programs meet the requirements, provisions, and intent of sub-grants under Title III for ELLs and immigrant students. These examples reveal just some of the many creative ways in which Title III funds can be used to serve students in Texas school districts.

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