

Questions from the 2009 Title I Program Improvement Workshop

Q: *When completing the program improvement plan, do schools/districts need to document having all four types of data?*

A: No, not necessarily, although it is recommended that any thorough needs assessment include all four types of data. In addition, the more data you can document, the better your plan will score. However, it is not mandated that the plan include all four types of data.

Q: *We are a small rural school that is in district program improvement. How do we complete the district program improvement plan, especially the activities and targeted audience sections, when our schools made AYP?*

A: Whether you are writing a district or a school plan, what should drive your plan is to focus on where you did not make AYP. On your AYP reports, there will be asterisks in any area where you did not make AYP. Your plan should address how you intend to specifically improve in those areas where you did not make AYP.

Q: *We are a small rural school. Do we need to submit separate plans for our elementary and middle schools which are all in one building?*

A: According to Title I regulations, each building that is identified for improvement must submit their own plan. Some elementary and secondary programs are in one building; however, they each generate their own AYP report. The state Title I office will consider any request from a district to consolidate a program improvement plan on a case-by-case basis, based on the rationale provided. Any district/school asking for this consideration should send a written request to the state Title I director.

Q: *Can stimulus funds be used for a portable classroom for Title I or to construct a Title I classroom?*

A: No, Title I stimulus funds cannot be used for a portable classroom for Title I or to construct a Title I classroom. However, the state funded improvement grant that each district will receive during the 2009-2010 school year can be used for school renovation or construction. Additional information regarding school renovation or construction can be accessed at www.dpi.state.nd.us/finance/construct/index.shtm on the department's website.

Q: *Can stimulus funds be used to purchase Smart Boards and overhead projectors?*

A: Yes, within reason. Purchasing equipment is certainly an allowable use of Title I funds. Districts and schools are reminded that there are Title II D and stimulus Title II D funds available specifically for equipment purchases. Title I targeted assistance programs can only purchase equipment for Title I classrooms.

Q: *Can summer school be put in both the Instructional and Student Activities sections of the program improvement plan?*

A: Yes. It is perfectly acceptable to put certain activities in multiple categories of the Title I program improvement plan.

Q: *Can we pay our teachers and staff to assist in the development of the program improvement plan during June?*

A: Yes. Districts could use their school year 2008-2009 Title I funds or their Title I stimulus funds to pay stipends to staff to develop the Title I program improvement plan. If Title I stimulus funds are used, the district needs to submit their application and get approval before obligating any funds or submit the Title I - Pre Award Cost Approval Request to get prior approval to spend the funds. A budget revision is required if regular 2008-2009 Title I funds are utilized for this purpose.

Q: *Can we use Title I funds to purchase incentives or offer cash rewards to elicit more parent interest in their children's education?*

A: There are very stringent rules on using Title I funds for incentives. Cash rewards are never allowed. The state Title I office has developed guidance on using Title I funds for incentives which can be accessed on the Title I website at www.dpi.state.nd.us/title1/targeted/general/facts/incentives.pdf.

Q: *How can schools be sure that the programs we use or want to purchase are approved? (i.e., Read 180, Read Right)*

A: The Department of Public Instruction does not have an approved list of evidence-based programs for use by schools and districts to raise achievement. It is a district/school responsibility to ensure that the programs they purchase with Title I funds are evidence-based. Districts may order and use whatever evidence-based programs they choose with Title I funds.

Q: *May we use a NCA survey (which includes community, staff, and students) as a data source for our needs assessment?*

A: Most definitely! Districts and schools can include any data source they choose to provide information on the Title I program improvement plan.

Q: *Our school has been identified for program improvement in the past. We had a period of being out of program improvement, and now our school is in the first year of program improvement. What is the next step?*

A: The first several steps involve establishing a committee to gather data and feedback from all staff in preparation for submitting information to the state department. The program improvement plan and application for additional funds are both due to the state Title I office by July 1, 2009. In addition, staff should familiarize themselves with the Title I program improvement website at www.dpi.state.nd.us/title1/progress/index.shtm. All forms, guidance, and information pertaining to Title I program improvement can be accessed on the website.

Q: *If both the district and school are in program improvement, do two letters have to go out to parents, or can the letter include information for both the district and the school program improvement so the parents receive only one letter?*

A: A district may choose to write one letter to parents to share information on both the district and school AYP results. Careful consideration should be given to ensure that the letter contains all of the required elements for both district and school AYP notification.

Q: *What can be done to assist schools with getting elementary children to school on cold days? The family of this particular child does not have a car and lives about six blocks away.*

A: Schoolwide programs can choose to hire an attendance officer if absenteeism is a critical issue for the school. It would be permissible for the attendance officer to use a school vehicle, or personal vehicle and get reimbursed, to pick up students to ensure they are in school.

Q: *If a parent selects an online supplemental services provider who requests to use the school facilities and a staff person to monitor, adding extra cost to the district, is the district obligated to allow the parent to use that provider?*

A: Parents must be allowed to use the provider of their choice. However, the district is not obligated to provide space in the school building or a staff person to supervise. If the school chooses to provide these extra services, they may not pay the cost from the 20% set-aside for supplemental services. A district can choose to provide space for an online provider and pay a site coordinator to monitor the situation; however, the funds would need to be Title I funds above and beyond the 20% set-aside or paid from another source. Another option that many online providers use is to provide the parents/child with a computer for use in the home to access the tutoring services.

Q: *Why does the top of the AYP report still say 4, 8, and 11 when we now test at 3-8 and 11?*

A: The department realizes that it is somewhat confusing to still have 4, 8, and 11 on the AYP reports. The top of the AYP report still lists 4, 8, and 11 because those grades represent the intermediate goals for AYP, even though we now give the NDSA in grades 3-8 and 11. The report does reflect information from all grades tested in that building.

Q: *If a teacher comes out of retirement to work and is offered a signing bonus, how does it affect their retirement?*

A: The state Title I office cannot address questions pertaining to retirement benefits. An individual would need to contact the Teacher's Fund for Retirement office for retirement questions. The Title I office has a one-page Fast Facts document pertaining to offering signing bonuses on our website at www.dpi.state.nd.us/title1/targeted/general/facts/bonus.pdf.

Q: *If a school is considering implementing extended day program as part of corrective action, can they mandate all students to attend?*

A: A district or school cannot officially mandate that a student attend a summer school or a before- or after-school program. However, there are ways that districts can strongly encourage students who need these services to attend. One idea to get at-risk students to attend an extended day program would be to have an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) for every at-risk student. This plan would outline what the school and home will do to ensure the success of each student. The requirement for the student to participate in certain programs could be written into the ILP. The parents would sign off on the plan showing their support.

Q: *Is it allowable to purchase a bus with Title I funds?*

A: Possibly. Typically or historically, districts have not used their Title I funds to purchase a vehicle. A district would need to pass the "reasonable and necessary" test in order for such expenditure to be allowable. It may be deemed "reasonable and necessary" in some unique circumstances to purchase a bus with Title I funds. For example, a small rural district may be able to justify the need for a bus for a Title I preschool program or after-school program. A bus purchased with Title I funds could only be used for Title I activities, therefore, you would have to justify that such a large expenditure would be utilized enough to make the purchase a reasonable use of the funds.