

Guidance for the Implementation of the Title I and IDEA Stimulus Funds

In preparing Texas students for the workforce of the future, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) will continue to foster academic achievement, ensure children are school-ready, increase high school completion, and promote postsecondary education and success. The agency will meet these goals within the context of the changing demographics of the student population and the changing needs of the global economy.

As TEA recognizes, the primary intent of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) is to stimulate the economy in the short term and invest in education and other essential public services to ensure the long-term economic health of our nation. Texas' success with the Title I and IDEA stimulus funds will depend on the shared commitment and responsibility to invest quickly and wisely. The state encourages utilizing of the ARRA funds to not only help stabilize state and local government budgets, but to also **improve student achievement and reduce the achievement gap through school improvement and strategic reform.**

In our efforts to provide the best public education in the world, local education agencies and TEA must work together to optimize the use of these varied funding streams. As you begin to allocate these funds addressing your local needs, we urge you to understand the critical importance of effective statewide reform. To be effective, it should be a comprehensive, well-aligned education reform system. To assist you in your deliberations of your piece of this system, we wanted you to be aware of what the Administration and the agency want ARRA stabilization funds to accomplish. TEA is committed to utilizing funds to ensure every student in Texas has access to an effective teacher through four target investments:

1. Increasing efforts to institute rigorous post-secondary standards and high-quality (valid, reliable) assessments;
2. Enhancing pre-kindergarten to post-secondary data systems that track progress and foster continuous improvement;
3. ensure Continuing to improve teacher effectiveness and supporting the equitable distribution of qualified teachers across the state; and
4. Expanding the state's support and effective interventions for the lowest-performing schools.

We ask districts to join us in thinking very creatively and differently with the investment of these funds. The effectiveness of our state reform efforts and the state's success among our peers will be solely based on your commitment and progress toward the four targets. TEA will be vigilant with the implementation and oversight of the funds in a manner consistent with the ARRA reporting and accountability requirements. ***We strongly recommend you do the same.***

Strategic Planning for Use of Funds

LEAs have a key role to play while determining the supplemental use of both Title I and IDEA stimulus funds. This role is not only in the wise and auditable use of funds (on the appropriate Title I campuses and for IDEA eligible students), but the way in which we as a state align our reforms and serve to attain a larger strategy. It is important to develop a

strategic and sustainable plan to spend these funds in the wisest manner possible. During your planning, LEA's are asked to consider the following:

1. **Will you expenditure increase student achievement and reduce the achievement gap?**
2. **Do your plans for the funds align with other state and local strategies?**
3. **Will your investment be considered innovative and better position the district to receive additional funds from the state to support continued education reform?**

This could be done by contracting extra assistance or a delegating of employees whose jobs would otherwise not be funded. Below are some specific examples of ways the agency believes are targeted, effective, and strategic ways for LEAs to spend stimulus funds.

Teacher Quality and Personnel Shortages

LEAs should encourage and **provide tuition and stipends for teachers** who are seeking professional development or furthering their professional knowledge to become highly qualified, especially in hard to staff campuses or core academic subjects, such as science and math. LEAs are also highly encouraged to provide training and additional certifications for both general and special education teachers working with English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities.

Personnel Shortages

LEAs should utilize both Title I funds and IDEA funds, as appropriate, to recruit and retain highly qualified personnel (including administrators) in the areas of special education and bilingual education. Recruitment efforts can include **agreements with educator preparation programs to provide supplemental research-based courses in the instruction of students with disabilities and ELL**. Funds can also be used toward hiring bilingual special education educators and recruiting individuals with disabilities to teach in the classroom.

Retention activities should include **content-based mentoring and induction programs**, ongoing instructional support for new teachers through expert resources (either internally or through web-based systems) and extra pay for off-duty work (e.g., paying teachers to hold ARD meetings outside of class time). LEAs should also provide additional incentives and support for current special education teachers to become highly qualified in core content areas and incentives to attract those teachers to struggling schools.

High Quality Professional Development

A main focus of the Obama Administration's policies on education is teacher equity. LEAs should use Title I and IDEA funds to provide **high quality, focused and sustained professional development** that is research-based and is aligned to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). This opportunity is immeasurable and allows LEAs to target additional incentives for middle and high school teachers to further develop their content knowledge and/or gain expertise in instructional strategies targeted at closing the achievement gap.

Incentives should include professional development stipends and tuition reimbursement for obtaining additional certifications or training in special education, Response to Intervention (RtI), bilingual education, and Advanced Placement (AP), among others.

LEAs should also partner with the regional education service centers to take advantage of focused training on implementation of the newly revised TEKS, the Texas College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS), the Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines and the English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS). Teachers and administrators should also receive training on the appropriate placement of, and appropriate accommodations for, students with disabilities and ELLs on assessments. LEAs should also provide supplemental training on the implementation of best practices and strategies on the use of data to inform instruction.

With particular regard to IDEA funds, **LEAs should target training and provide stipends or other financial incentives to address strategies on the development of effective individual educational programs (IEP)**, transition processes, decreasing dropout rates, ARD meeting facilitation, parental facilitation and training, and increased placement options for prekindergarten students.

High School Completion and Success

LEAs should target Title I funds to increase postsecondary readiness and provide quality career and technical courses which promote Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education. Funds also should be used to provide intensive support around key middle and high school courses that best support students in reading and math. LEAs should also fund programs specifically targeting students who demonstrate risk of dropping out or have already dropped out and want to return and graduate. Eligible uses of funds include intensive reading and math instruction and intervention, **flexible scheduling**, academic-based after-school programs, mentoring, individual learning environments, targeted academic and social support (including college and career counseling), and **preparation programs aligned with the college and career readiness standards**.

With specific regard to STEM education, LEAs should look toward internships and real world opportunities that allow students to experience why the STEM field is so critical to the demands of our global economy. Mentoring and intensive instruction for students in middle and high school should be focused on meeting the upcoming graduation requirements (especially in math and science). Further efforts should support targeted content mentoring for middle and high school math, science, and career and technical education teachers as well as other incentives to support their teaching in hard-to-staff schools.

Technology

The correct use of technology in the classroom can have a tremendous impact in struggling schools. It can be used to address some of the issues of teacher equity (although it should never be used to replace a teacher), and can be an effective tool to identify, organize and meet the individual needs of students. LEAs should use technology in the classroom to promote higher-order thinking skills, problem solving and creativity. It should also be utilized to help teachers monitor student progress, deliver instruction and provide immediate and targeted interventions in the most efficient manner. Technology can also be used to open up postsecondary career options such as web design and graphic arts, and can **provide teachers the tools to implement a large scale project-based learning environment for students**. LEAs should also consider the development and implementation of data systems that help teachers and administrators identify students at risk of failure or dropping out.

For purposes of IDEA funds, LEAs should consider technology that ensures access for students with disabilities in the general classroom and case management systems that promote data sharing among teachers and student ARDs.

Any technology purchase not put to use immediately (or within one year of purchase) is unallowable and the district will be required to pay those funds back to USDE upon auditing.

Early Childhood

Quality early education is also a top priority for the Administration. LEAs should use Title I funds to ***expand an existing half-day prekindergarten program to full day, or to start a half-day program in a school not previously served.*** Title I funds can also support professional development and training for teachers and aides, and fund technical assistance for integrating the components of a high quality early childhood curriculum. This includes early identification of students with special needs, providing early educators research-based strategies to *ensure school readiness*, and working toward the development and implementation of school readiness integration plans.

Direct Services to Struggling Districts and Campuses

In addition to the programs mentioned above, LEAs should strategically identify additional activities to target their Title I funds and IDEA funds (as appropriate) toward an aligned intervention plan for underperforming campuses. Efforts should focus on ***delivering content-based professional development***, recruiting, retaining and further developing highly qualified teachers, providing quality early childhood education and integrating technology into the classroom. LEAs should also target funds towards enabling instructional programs and interventions validated by research to directly support underperforming campuses and school leadership. Specific examples include:

- Intensive research-based reading programs including continuation of current reading programs like Reading First;
- Student-based intervention programs like Response to Intervention (RtI);
- Building capacity at the LEA level to intensify efforts and outreach to parents and students eligible for Supplemental Education Services (SES). This includes contracting or funding staff that would have otherwise been laid off to help providers enroll students, provide transportation, and reimburse any administrative costs associated with after-hours tutoring.
- Directing IDEA funds to enhance direct services to students with disabilities, including supplemental academic support for students failing the TAKS and support services for high cost students with disabilities.