
Do Supplemental Educational Services Increase Opportunities For Minority Students?

The question of the impact of supplemental educational services

on student achievement remains to be answered. In the meantime,

Ms. Sunderman points out, this unproven NCLB strategy is diverting

districts' Title I funds away from other efforts that might be more effective.

By Gail L. Sunderman

WHEN CONGRESS included a provision in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act that required schools to offer supplemental educational services as a remedy for poor performance, it was a political compromise between supporters and opponents of vouchers. There was no precedent in federal law for this provision and no body of research that provided clear and consistent evidence that supplemental educational services improve learning outcomes for low-performing — particularly low-income or minority — students. Yet the supplemental educational services provision represents a major tenet of NCLB — that competition will produce better educational opportunities for disadvantaged students than the public schools provide. According to federal policy makers, “The . . . supplemental educational services requirements of the law not only help to enhance student achievement but also provide an incentive for low-performing schools to improve.”¹ Underlying supplemental services is the assumption that academic instruction provided outside the regular school day by public and private organizations will be able to do what schools cannot — raise

the achievement of students in consistently poorly performing schools.

NCLB included two required sanctions for schools identified as “in need of improvement,” that is, those schools that did not meet the state’s adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals. The first was that schools must offer their students the option to transfer out of low-

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performing schools. The second was that parents could purchase supplemental services with money set aside from the district's Title I budget for this purpose. NCLB defines supplemental educational services as "additional academic instruction designed to increase the academic achievement of students in low-performing schools" and indicates that they "must be high quality, research-based, and specifically designed to increase student achievement." The federal legislation also requires that

lum. The original categorical Title I program had been criticized because of curricular and instructional fragmentation in the delivery of instruction and a lack of coordination between the Title I program and the regular curriculum.³ Recognizing the problem, federal officials began to soften requirements that program services be distinct and easily identifiable. The 1988 Hawkins-Stafford Amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) — and later the 1994 Im-

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supplemental services "be provided outside the regular school day," which may include after-school and weekend programs.² By specifying who could offer these services, the law created a market for public and private organizations to provide tutoring services to students enrolled in public schools.

These requirements reversed the direction of earlier Title I legislation that focused on establishing schoolwide programs coordinated with the regular curricu-

lating America's Schools Act — gave local school districts and schools greater flexibility in deciding where and how to use Title I resources and encouraged the adoption of schoolwide programs. The federal law also lowered the poverty cutoff point required for schools to qualify for adopting a schoolwide program. While not a panacea, schoolwide programs eliminated some of the major obstacles to integrating Title I services with the school curriculum.

The earlier Title I legislation also granted increased flexibility to school professionals to address the concentration of disadvantaged students in poor neighborhoods.⁴ It directed additional resources to schools serving disadvantaged students and promoted flexibility in the use of those resources to encourage instructional innovation and coordination between the Title I program and the regular curricular program. Finally, prior ESEA legislation incorporated accountability by requiring that the same standards apply to all students, including those in high-poverty Title I schools. Taken together, these approaches were intended to foster deep and comprehensive school reform that would demonstrate results.

The supplemental services requirements reverse these approaches to a coordinated and comprehensive reform of Title I schools. There are no requirements to coordinate supplemental services with the classroom curriculum or for providers to communicate with classroom teachers. Instead, the supplemental service provisions weaken the organizational capacity of schools to develop a coherent instructional program. Requiring

that services be offered outside of the regular school day discourages coordination between the teacher and supplemental service providers. By directing resources to outside service providers, the legislation reverses earlier attempts to provide additional resources to needy schools and limits the school's ability to develop comprehensive strategies to help disadvantaged students. In fact, it reduces a school's Title I allocation, because Title I funds must be "set aside" to pay the providers. Finally, the supplemental service provisions decrease accountability by emphasizing short-term accountability for individual student achievement. Rather than focus on a broad range of school-level outcomes tied to state standards and the development of school improvement plans to meet those standards, supplemental services focus on improving individual student achievement, but only for those requesting services.

There is a paradox in NCLB between demands that schools adopt research-based programs and the mandate that schools identified for improvement implement supplemental educational services. The law requires that states ensure that supplemental educational services are of high quality, research-based, and designed to help eligible children attain proficiency in meeting the state's academic achievement standards. Yet the law provides no additional money to support the administration and evaluation of these programs and does not require the same rigorous evaluation of supplemental services that is given preference elsewhere in the statute. The federal law and most state guidelines merely require districts to look at test-score gains of students before and after they receive supplemental services, a design that provides the weakest basis for identifying a causal link between the intervention and outcomes because it lacks an equivalent comparison group.

Now in their fourth year, the requirements for supplemental educational services continue to generate controversy even as local districts work hard to implement them. The Administration remains an ardent supporter of the program and has pushed states to expand the number of approved providers, even though there is little evidence of program effectiveness. Very few states have undertaken evaluations of the program, and state efforts to review providers rely primarily on information from the providers themselves or surveys that measure stakeholder satisfaction with the program. Few providers have been removed from state-approved lists, and when they have, it has been the result of a complaint-driven process rather than rigorous evaluation. Local district experience with the program is mixed.

Providers argue that districts engage in practices that make it difficult for them to carry out their programs, while districts counter that they are doing all they can to encourage participation. District officials have raised questions about what they consider to be unscrupulous practices some providers have used to attract students to their programs, and they criticize programs that use teachers who lack credentials. The program has created immense administrative and management challenges at both the state and district levels, functions that officials had to assume without additional funds to cover them.

PARTICIPATION IN SUPPLEMENTAL SERVICES

Students were eligible for supplemental educational services if they attended a school that was in its second year of school improvement — that is, if the school had not met the state's AYP goals for three consecutive years. All students in the school are eligible, regardless of individual student performance. Nationwide, the number of schools required to offer supplemental services has increased since the first year of NCLB, meaning that large numbers of students are now eligible to receive supplemental services. However, the percentage

of eligible students taking advantage of the services remains small, averaging 20% or less.⁵ Nonetheless, there is considerable variability across districts in the number of schools required to offer supplemental services as well as the number of students who participate. In a sample of 10 districts that we followed as part of a larger study on NCLB, the percentage of eligible students receiv-

ing the supplemental services program. These costs were not trivial. For example, Chicago projected that the administrative budget for supplemental educational services for the 2004-05 school year would be more than \$2 million.

It is difficult to compare eligibility for supplemental services across or even within states through different

NCLB poses the greatest challenge for those schools with many subgroups, because failure of a single subgroup to meet the proficiency requirements can cause the entire school to be identified for improvement. More homogeneous schools have fewer proficiency targets.

ing services in 2004-05 ranged from 40% in New York City to less than 3% in Fresno, California (see Table 1).

The low participation rate reflects the number of students requesting services. We found that districts were implementing the supplemental services program in good faith and that most of the students requesting services received them. To ensure that students had access to the program, district officials developed an administrative structure to manage the program, notify and enroll students, track attendance, and monitor providers. Many hired additional staff. Districts allocated their own resources or reallocated existing Title I administrative funds to cover the costs of administering the program, because NCLB does not provide additional funds for the administrative costs of implement-

years. Each state establishes its own definition of what it means to be proficient and has different standards and assessments. Where a state sets the proficiency target can affect how many schools are identified for improvement and thus the number of eligible students. In addition, since 2003 the U.S. Department of Education has made a number of regulatory changes and approved a range of state-initiated changes that govern the implementation of NCLB.⁶ These changes often make it difficult to compare the number of schools required to offer supplemental services from one year to the next, because many of the changes were designed to decrease the number of schools identified for improvement even if there was no improvement in student performance.

TABLE 1.

Student Participation in Supplemental Educational Services by District, 2004-05

District	Eligible Students	Received Supp. Ed.	
	N	N	% of Eligible
Mesa, Ariz.	0	n/a	n/a
Washington, Ariz.	1,757	90	5.1
Fresno, Calif.	29,164	809	2.8
Los Angeles, Calif.	245,618	18,095	7.4
Atlanta, Ga.	8,084	715	8.8
DeKalb, Ga.	5,318	789	14.8
Chicago, Ill.	201,600	61,466	30.5
Buffalo, N.Y.	11,922	3,338	28.0
New York, N.Y.	215,797	87,366	40.5
Richmond, Va.	6,164	1,384	22.5

Source: District officials.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MINORITIES

The supplemental educational service provisions have important civil rights implications, because the participants are overwhelmingly nonwhite and because there are major costs associated with these programs. Our research shows that schools identified for improvement enroll a disproportionately larger percentage of minority, low-income, and limited-English-proficient students, on average, than schools making AYP. In our sample of 10 districts, the vast majority of students were minority students, including Latino students in the four western districts (Mesa and Washington, Arizona; Fresno and Los Angeles, California), black and Latino students in Chicago and New York City, and mainly black students in the three southern districts (Atlanta and De-

Kalb, Georgia; Richmond, Virginia) and Buffalo. In 2002-03, in Fresno and Los Angeles, more than half of the students in schools required to offer supplemental services were Latino. In the three districts located in the southeastern region (Richmond, Atlanta, DeKalb), more than 75% of students were black. In Chicago and in New York City, substantial numbers of both black and Latino students were eligible for services.

Schools serving minority and low-income students are more likely to be identified for improvement and required to offer supplemental services, because NCLB uses a “conjunctive” model of accountability.⁷ This model uses mean proficiency as the primary measure for determining whether schools and districts are making AYP and includes the requirement that each subgroup of students meet a separate test-score target. Unlike prior federal legislation that allowed states to use a “compensatory” model of accountability, in which high scores in one subject area compensated for low scores in another, NCLB requires that each subgroup of students meet the same minimum-proficiency level on both reading and math assessments, regardless of prior achievement levels. Thus NCLB poses the greatest challenge for those schools with many subgroups, because failure

of a single subgroup to meet the proficiency requirements can cause the entire school to be identified for improvement. More homogeneous schools have fewer proficiency targets.

Requiring that all students meet the same mean-proficiency targets challenges high-poverty schools, because the law gives no consideration to a student’s prior achievement level. Students who are further behind must make large achievement gains to reach the proficiency level. Consequently, test scores, which do not take into account a school’s contribution to student learning, often are not an accurate indicator of school effectiveness. NCLB also includes a time line requiring that all students reach the state-defined proficiency levels by 2014, something that was not included in prior legislation. These requirements pose the greatest challenge for high-poverty schools that enroll a large percentage of students who traditionally perform poorly on standardized tests.

NCLB also disrupts other school reform efforts by diverting resources away from the most disadvantaged schools. The law requires districts to set aside 20% of their Title I, Part A, allocation to pay for choice-related transportation and supplemental educational services.⁸ Districts must spend at least 5% of this amount on supplemental educational services, unless demand is less than estimated.⁹ This set-aside effectively reduces the amount of funds available for programs at the school level by diverting funds to cover the costs of supplemental services. Even when districts have very few or no students eligible for supplemental services, these funds must be set aside and cannot be released to schools until late in the academic year, which discourages districts and schools from incorporating the money into a long-term reform strategy.

SCANT RESEARCH ON EFFECTIVENESS

Research has provided little evidence to guide policy makers and educators on the benefits of supplemental educational services, particularly in improving the education of low-income and minority students. For example, rigorous evaluation of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers, an after-school program for children in urban and rural communities, has shown limited effect on student achievement and modest impact on some noncognitive indicators.¹⁰ Moreover, summer school programs, which have been developed to address the widening achievement gap during summer vacations, have failed to narrow the gap between

low- and middle-income students.¹¹

While many programs offered outside the regular school day or during the summer have shown limited success, research does point to some promising approaches that have been beneficial for improving the achievement of disadvantaged students. Research on the implementation of Title I suggests that all students benefit in schools that adopt a comprehensive approach to educating children that includes using a Title I curriculum that is coordinated with the regular curriculum, providing programs that support instruction students receive in the core curriculum, and developing expectations that are the same for all students.¹² Programs that focused on individual student remediation but were not coordinated with the regular classroom curriculum were less successful.

Other approaches that have a strong record of improving learning outcomes for minority and low-income students rely on the flexibility of school professionals to use resources to address the effects of concentrated poverty. For example, research on Title I shows that achievement gains are tied to instructional interventions — e.g., hiring qualified teachers and reducing class size — targeted at high-poverty, high-minority schools.¹³ Reducing class sizes in the early grades has the potential to narrow the achievement gap, because it produces larger achievement benefits for minority students than for white students.¹⁴ Title I funds often support these instructional interventions, so diverting funds to other purposes may affect the ability of schools to implement these and other instructional programs that benefit disadvantaged students.

So far, there are no rigorous evaluations of the supplemental services program. State monitoring of the program tends to rely on questionnaires or surveys and data submitted by the providers. Some districts have conducted their own evaluations that examine the impact of the program on student test scores, but the rigor of these evaluations varies, and generalizing from them is limited. Whether supplemental educational services ultimately help or hurt the achievement of disadvantaged students is an empirical question with deep implications for educational equity. For now, we need better evidence before we use limited public dollars to support supplemental educational service providers on a large scale. Given all we do not know about supplemental services, scaling up a policy with potentially limited benefits for student achievement and serious fiscal consequences for public school districts is not good public policy.

1. Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, *No Child Left Behind: A Desktop Reference* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 2002), p. 11.

2. *No Child Left Behind: Supplemental Educational Services, Non-Regulatory Guidance* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 12 December 2002).

3. Michael W. Kirst, “The Federal Role and Chapter 1: Rethinking Some Basic Assumptions,” in Denis P. Doyle and Bruce S. Cooper, eds., *Federal Aid to the Disadvantaged: What Future for Chapter 1?* (London: Falmer Press, 1988), pp. 97-115.

4. Kenneth K. Wong, Gail L. Sunderman, and Jaekyung Lee, “Redesigning the Federal Compensatory Education Program: Lessons from the Implementation of Title I Schoolwide Projects,” in Margaret C. Wang and Kenneth K. Wong, eds., *Implementing School Reform: Practice and Policy Imperatives* (Philadelphia: Center for Research in Human Development and Education, Temple University, 1997), pp. 59-97.

5. The Center on Education Policy reported that 20% of eligible students nationwide received services in 2005-06 (*From the Capital to the Classroom: Year 4 of the No Child Left Behind Act* [Washington, D.C.: Center on Education Policy, March 2006]). According to the U.S. Department of Education, 17% of eligible students received services in 2003-04 (Policy Letter from U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings to Chief State School Officers, 15 May 2006, retrieved 24 May 2006 from www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/secletter/060515.html). In our sample, participation averaged 16% of eligible students in 2004-05.

6. Gail L. Sunderman, *The Unraveling of No Child Left Behind: How Negotiated Changes Transform the Law* (Cambridge, Mass.: Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, 2006).

7. James S. Kim and Gail L. Sunderman, “Measuring Academic Performance Under NCLB: Implications for Educational Equity,” *Educational Researcher*, November 2005, pp. 3-13; and Robert L. Linn, “Accountability: Responsibility and Reasonable Expectations,” *Educational Researcher*, October 2003, pp. 3-13.

8. The Title I, Part A, allocation includes funds for basic programs operated by the district and allocations to local schools.

9. *No Child Left Behind: Supplemental Education Services, Non-Regulatory Guidance, Final Draft* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 22 August 2003).

10. Susanne James-Burdumy, Mark Dynarski, and John Deke, *When Schools Stay Open Late: Results from the National Evaluation of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program* (Princeton, N.J.: Mathematica Policy Research, October 2005). Mathematica conducted a national evaluation of 21st Century Learning Centers, finding that their impact was greater only when there was parent involvement.

11. Harris M. Cooper et al., *Making the Most of Summer School: A Meta-Analytic and Narrative Review* (Washington, D.C.: Society for Research in Child Development, 2000).

12. Gary Orfield and Elizabeth H. DeBray, eds., *Hard Work for Good Schools: Facts Not Fads in Title I Reform* (Cambridge, Mass.: Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, 1999); and Wong, Sunderman, and Lee, op. cit.

13. David Grissmer and Ann Flanagan, “Making Title I More Effective: Lessons from Recent Research,” in Orfield and DeBray, pp. 48-56.

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