

Leveraging ESSA Funding for Pre-K Family Engagement to Support Dual Language Learners

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Executive Summary

High-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) programs have the potential to close gaps in young children's school readiness and create a strong foundation for their future academic success. This is especially true for Dual Language Learners (DLLs), young children with at least one parent who speaks a language other than English at home, who comprise one-third of all U.S. children ages 0–5. Engagement of families, not just children, is widely recognized as critical to boosting ECEC programs' effectiveness in supporting healthy development, kindergarten readiness, and other key goals. For DLLs, an effective partnership between parents and early childhood educators is essential to ensuring that preschool programs support these children's unique language development, in both their home languages and English, as well as their broader learning trajectories.

Hard-won expansions of ECEC programs notwithstanding, most state and local ECEC systems have yet to build sufficient capacities to effectively serve DLLs and their families—even as the country's young child population continues to become more linguistically and culturally diverse. Efforts to increase family engagement in general and to build partnerships with DLLs' families in particular need to overcome persistent barriers and utilize cultur-

ally and linguistically responsive approaches that support all parents' key role in fostering their child's language development, cognitive growth, cultural identity, and self-esteem.

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One often-overlooked source of support for family engagement in preschool programs is Title I, Part A of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), the largest federal investment in schools that serve low-income students. With pre-K programs increasingly offered in elementary schools, there is a critical opportunity to align early childhood and K-12 systems and to leverage Title I funding to better support young children in low-income families, including those who are DLLs. ESSA requires school districts receiving Title I funding to meaningfully engage families, and subsequent federal guidance reaffirms that funding can be used to support family engagement efforts beginning in preschool and should support families from diverse backgrounds.

But while Title I includes robust frameworks for how to use Title I funds to support English Learners (ELs) in K-12, it lacks comparable directives for DLLs in preschool, leaving critical gaps in support. Addressing these gaps will be important to ensuring DLLs are effectively supported. Under Title I, for example, districts are required to have parent and family engagement policies, and they must build capacity to ensure that engagement opportunities are meaningful and accessible to all parents, such as through language access provisions for parents with limited English proficiency. Adopting a similarly robust and equity-focused approach to family engagement in preschool programs would greatly benefit DLLs, given the importance of strong partnerships between programs and these children's families.

Thus, while Title I can and should be used to support DLLs from low-income households, this will not happen automatically. In the absence of new, dedicated federal guidance or investment, states and local communities can strategically utilize the flexibility that exists within Title I, and in other funding streams such as ESSA Title III and the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5), to improve support for DLLs in ECEC. By aligning existing resources and leveraging opportunities across funding streams, states can strengthen family engagement and promote approaches that are responsive to the needs of DLLs and immigrant families.

To maximize Title I's potential for DLLs, federal and state policymakers, school administrators, and educators should prioritize the following strategies:

- ▶ **Clarify how Title I funding can be used for preschool programs.** State and local education agencies should provide guidance on using Title I funds to support high-quality preschool programs for DLLs to ensure school readiness, language development, and equitable access.

- ▶ **Provide tools, resources, and professional development for family engagement.**

State and local agencies, along with early childhood program leaders, should share promising practices and practical strategies to help schools engage DLL and immigrant families effectively.

- ▶ **Include DLLs' families in Title I parent advisory councils.** Local education agencies and program leaders should ensure that DLL and immigrant families are represented in these councils, and that they are able to contribute fully to decisions about funding and programming.

- ▶ **Align Title I with other funding streams and improve accountability.** State and local agencies and early childhood system leaders should coordinate Title I, Title III, PDG B-5, and other resources to boost their impact, while also establishing mechanisms to track funding use—important tools for ensuring that DLL families benefit equitably.

- ▶ **Strengthen state guidance on inclusion of DLLs in Title I initiatives.** State education agencies should provide clear expectations for including DLLs in early childhood Title I initiatives and promote alignment of funding streams to maximize program effectiveness.

By addressing these gaps and leveraging Title I resources effectively, state and local stakeholders can create equitable, high-quality early childhood education environments that help DLLs thrive academically, socially, and linguistically.

1 Introduction

Several decades of research show that high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) programs have the power to transform the lives of children,

supporting kindergarten readiness and providing a strong foundation for lifelong learning.¹ Federal education law was slow to acknowledge the critical role such programs play in elementary and secondary school success, with Congress only incorporating them in 2015 into the United States' major federal K-12 educational law, currently known as the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA). Originally enacted in 1965, this law has historically sought to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students, with a particular focus on addressing the diverse needs of underserved and historically marginalized student populations. While the law, in its current form, includes provisions on equitable education opportunities for English Learners (ELs), K-12 students whose first language is not English and who are in the process of learning English, ESSA does not similarly address quality instruction for Dual Language Learners (DLLs), young children with at least one parent who speaks a language other than English at home. DLLs benefit disproportionately from participating in quality ECEC programs² and require intentional support to develop as multilingual learners. Yet, federal law does not require state or local education agencies to classify them as ELs, which would ensure consistent identification and access to targeted language support services, and they are often only indirectly included in broader efforts to advance educational equity.

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Active family engagement is essential to ensuring DLLs benefit fully from ECEC programs. Given the distinctive nature of DLLs' early learning, close cooperation between educators and families helps support these children's linguistic, social, and cognitive growth, particularly nurturing their home languages

alongside English. However, for many immigrant families, barriers such as language differences and cultural misunderstandings can make it difficult to forge this critical partnership.

Under ESSA, the federal government allocates several funding streams to strengthen ECEC services—and family engagement activities in particular. These include the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5), which is specifically provided to support state early childhood systems and improve access to high-quality services for children from birth to age 5. Meanwhile, Title I of ESSA provides financial support to schools that serve low-income students. Federal guidance specifies that Title I funding should be used, among other things, to support the engagement of low-income immigrant families with DLL children,³ in recognition of the cultural, linguistic, and economic barriers many face to participation in school-based activities. Yet, significant gaps remain in how schools, districts, and states utilize these funds to support the unique needs of DLL families in early childhood education.

This policy brief explores the current role and potential uses of Title I funding in supporting the engagement of DLLs' families in their early learning. The analysis identifies both challenges and opportunities that exist to more fully tapping into Title I funds to improve outcomes for this population.

2 ESSA Title I: Intent and Possible Uses

Title I, Part A of ESSA (often simply called Title I)⁴ authorizes the largest federal investment in education, the purpose of which is to improve school effectiveness and provide all children with equitable opportunities for high-quality education.⁵ Although the majority of Title I funds are allocated to K-12 education, specifically to school districts serving low-income children, schools may also use this funding to

serve eligible children in early childhood programs.⁶ However, because the use of Title I funding for this purpose is optional, it is significantly underutilized in preschool programs. As a result, Title I provides less robust support for young DLLs than it does for school-age ELs, missing a critical opportunity to enhance DLLs' school readiness and build a strong foundation for later academic success.

A. *Equitable Support Mandates for English Learners*

Title I funding provisions include several mandates for K-12 schools to support ELs equitably, upholding both federal civil rights laws and education policies. These provisions include compliance with Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* and with the *Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974*, which prohibit discrimination based on language-minority status, race, or national origin. ESSA also states that ELs cannot be excluded from federally assisted education programs due to language proficiency and that they must receive access to high-quality instruction across all subjects, reinforcing an ongoing commitment to educational equity.⁷ As a result, Title I schoolwide and targeted assistance programs are required to describe how they will provide ELs with opportunities to meet challenging academic standards. Title I's K-12 accountability rules require states to include ELs in accountability systems and to report their performance on indicators such as English language proficiency, academic achievement, and graduation rates. Schools identified for comprehensive support and improvements due to low performance on state accountability indicators must then develop plans drawing on these accountability metrics to address areas of need.

These protections and supports amount to a relatively robust framework for ELs in K-12. However, Title I lacks a similarly detailed framework for DLLs in preschool. For example, ESSA does not explicitly

recommend that Title I funds for early childhood programs be used to meet DLLs' unique linguistic and socioemotional needs. In addition, guidance on the use of Title I funds in preschool programs does not specifically mention DLLs.⁸ This is a significant gap, given that DLLs often require tailored support to succeed in academic and language development. Recent guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for local education agencies (LEAs) and schools notes that early childhood programs receiving Title I funding are required to meet Head Start Performance Standards that address serving DLLs in early childhood settings.⁹ These standards do not, however, match the depth of Title I guidelines for serving ELs.

B. *Family Engagement*

In addition to academic and school readiness support, Title I emphasizes the importance of family engagement, requiring schools to involve parents in their children's learning and development to create strong partnerships between schools and families.¹⁰ ESSA's family engagement provisions mandate that schools notify ELs' parents of their children's language proficiency and available services and that they address any barriers to participation in these services. This provision, which was moved from Title III to Title I when the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) was reauthorized as ESSA in 2015, reinforces long-standing federal civil rights obligations requiring language access for ELs' families. These obligations originate in the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* and therefore apply to all LEAs, regardless of Title III funding status. ESSA strengthens implementation of these obligations by requiring that all LEAs, independent of federal funding for EL services, communicate with families of ELs in linguistically appropriate and accessible ways. An LEA receiving more than \$500,000 a year in Title I funds must reserve at least 1 percent of the funds for family engagement

activities. The law also specifies that 90 percent must be distributed to Title I schools, to be used in both schoolwide programs and targeted assistance programs, while the remainder may be used for district-wide family engagement initiatives.¹¹ LEAs may also use a portion of the reserved funds to support family engagement in Title I preschool programs, providing an essential avenue for schools to support DLLs and their families.

An LEA or school operating a preschool program supported by Title I funds must use the family engagement set-aside to ensure that preschool-age children—including DLLs—and their families are included in engagement policies. This includes notifying parents of family engagement policies as well as providing information such as school reports in a language parents can understand, to the extent feasible and appropriate. Preschool programs can use Title I funds to:

- ▶ provide families with information about early learning and development standards, preschool curriculum goals, and school issues, including in the form of translated materials for parents with limited English proficiency;
- ▶ offer support to families during the school year and during vacation periods, particularly as children transition into kindergarten;
- ▶ pay for interpreters at parent-teacher conferences, workshops, and community events; and
- ▶ invest in professional development related to family engagement, specifically around cultural competence and responsiveness, to equip educators with the skills to effectively serve diverse families.¹²

BOX 1 Additional Federal Funding: Title III and PDG B-5 Funding

In addition to Title I, two other notable federal funding sources—the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) and Title III of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA)—can also be used to support DLLs.

PDG B-5 funds aim to support state efforts to coordinate and improve early childhood services, including by expanding access to high-quality early childhood education programs. States can use PDG B-5 funds to support young DLLs by making culturally appropriate resources available in multiple languages, providing professional development and technical assistance to educators about child language development, supporting the development and recruitment of a diverse and multilingual workforce, developing DLL identification practices, and developing culturally and linguistically responsive family engagement strategies.

Title III funding specifically targets English Learners (ELs) and is focused on improving the academic achievement of ELs and children in immigrant families. Title III funding can be used to support the English language development and school readiness of DLLs age 3 and older; to help state, local, and school leaders provide effective language instruction and promote family engagement; and to fund professional development. It is important to note that Title III funding is meant to be supplemental, as states and localities are responsible for covering the core needs of ELs and DLLs.

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, “[Preschool Development Grant- Birth through Five](#),” updated August 18, 2025; Build Initiative, Zero to Three, and Start Early, [Supporting Multilingual Learners](#) (Boston: Build Initiative, 2023); Miriam Calderon, Amaya Garcia, Laura Bornfreund, and Harriet Dichter, [Unlocking ESSA’s Potential to Support Early Learning](#) (Washington, DC: New America, 2017).

3 The Importance of Strong Family Engagement for Young DLLs

Family engagement is an essential part of high-quality early childhood education, as equitable and collaborative relationships between parents and educators have a positive impact on children's socio-emotional development and future academic success.¹³ This requires active engagement from both parents and educators, sharing the responsibility of supporting children's growth. Strategies to support family engagement involve home-based activities such as reading to children, educational outings, and discussing school; school-based activities such as volunteering in classrooms or attending workshops; and home-school conferencing, which involves consistent and clear communication between parents and educators.¹⁴ Beyond these forms of family engagement, additional mechanisms such as school accountability committees can create opportunities for schools, families, and community members to collaborate and share perspectives on how school funds should be utilized.¹⁵

Family engagement strategies and practices should reflect the diverse backgrounds, needs, and interests of the families involved. For DLLs, who are simultaneously developing two language systems, parents play an essential role in supporting cognitive growth and school readiness. Therefore, early childhood educators should communicate to DLLs' parents the importance and value of multilingualism and encourage them to speak in their home language during home-based family engagement activities—a practice that not only reinforces language skills but also fosters a child's cognitive development, cultural identity, and self-esteem.¹⁶

Outside of home-based practices, immigrant families often face cultural and linguistic barriers that

make accessing school-based activities and maintaining home-school collaboration challenging.¹⁷ Families from different cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds may engage with their children's education in ways that differ from educator experiences or expectations, which can lead to misunderstandings and miscommunications.¹⁸ If educators do not implement culturally sensitive and inclusive family engagement practices, they risk discouraging immigrant families from participating fully in their children's education. Recognizing and respecting these differences is key to fostering meaningful, collaborative relationships that benefit all children equitably.

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Many immigrant families, including mixed-status families (those in which some members have a lawful immigration status or U.S. citizenship, while others are unauthorized), may also have concerns about privacy and how their personal information may be used or shared. These concerns can make families hesitant to share information necessary for accurate program planning and support, such as information about their child's home language. To address this, educators and programs should take deliberate steps to build trust, clearly communicate data protections, and create a welcoming environment that reassures families their information will be used appropriately. This trust-building is a critical component of family engagement, as it enables parents to participate fully and helps ensure DLLs receive the tailored support they need.¹⁹

DLLs from low-income households face additional challenges that can affect their early childhood educational experiences. For example, economic hardship often limits access to books and other educational resources that support home learning and home language development. To effectively address the needs of DLLs in such situations, schools and educators should involve families in activity planning and in decision-making processes more broadly. Eligible preschool programs that utilize Title I funds to support family engagement should ensure the needs of DLLs and their families are prioritized, along with those of all low-income students, to create meaningful, inclusive support systems.

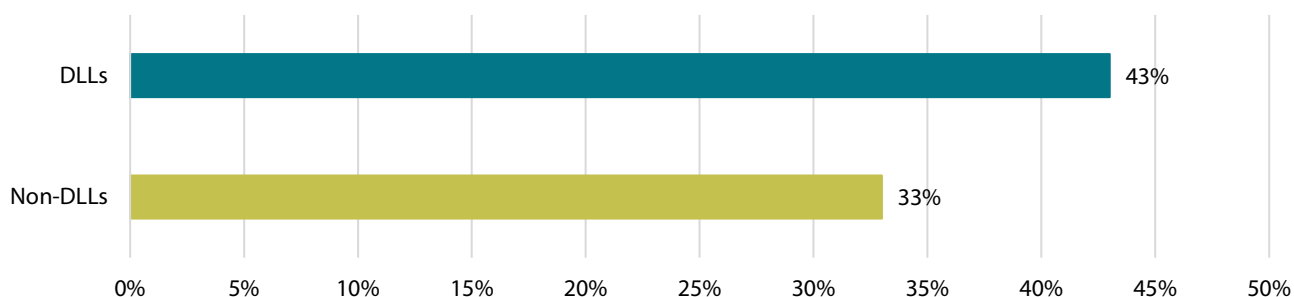
4 DLLs within the Title I Population

DLLs comprise a substantial portion of the low-income child population that Title I funds are designed to support. Nationwide, DLLs are more likely than non-DLL children to live in a low-income household, defined as a household with an annual income below 200 percent of the federal poverty line (see Figure 1). As a result, while DLLs represented 33 percent of all young children ages 0–5 in 2019–23, they made up 39 percent of young children in low-income households.²⁰

But even though DLLs make up a significant share of the low-income children Title I programs are intended to support, Title I-funded family engagement efforts are not always designed with their needs and circumstances in mind.²¹ Barriers to participation may vary based on the characteristics of DLLs' households, including languages spoken and parents' level of formal education. These attributes should be considered in family engagement and other program and policy design decisions.

Language barriers can hinder some DLL families' access to early childhood education programs, especially those speaking lower-incidence languages. While in 2019–23, 56 percent of DLLs lived in households that reported speaking Spanish in the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), the other 44 percent were part of households speaking a wide range of languages other than English or Spanish, including but not limited to Chinese, Arabic, Tagalog, and French.²² In the same period, 42 percent of DLLs had at least one parent who reported speaking English less than "very well" in the ACS. These parents may find it challenging to identify and enroll their children in early childhood programs and to communicate with educators and staff members.²³

FIGURE 1
Share of Children Ages 0 to 5 in the United States Who Reside in Low-Income Households, by DLL Status, 2019–23



Source: MPI tabulation of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2019–23 ACS, pooled.

Parents' levels of formal education can also shape children's participation in early childhood education services and should be considered when developing family engagement strategies. In 2019–23, 25 percent of DLLs had at least one parent whose highest level of education was less than a high school diploma or equivalent, and DLLs made up 60 percent of all young children for whom this was the case.²⁴ An extensive body of research shows a correlation between parental educational attainment and a child's academic achievement.²⁵ Family engagement strategies should therefore be designed to ensure that all families can access and use information about their children's education, regardless of parents' educational background. This may include providing clear, accessible communications, offering multiple ways for families to engage, and avoiding assumptions about parents' familiarity with school systems and educational terminology.

5 Challenges and Promising Practices for Utilizing Title I to Support DLL Family Engagement

Successfully tapping Title I funds to support family engagement for DLLs is widely understood to be difficult. One key challenge is the siloed nature of the systems used to administer federal program funds at the state and local levels. Title I and Title III are largely administered separately, with little coordination between the two funding streams. This disconnect often leads to fragmented approaches that hinder the potential for integrated funding strategies that would more effectively support DLLs. For example, joint efforts between Title I and Title III could facilitate greater use of culturally and linguistically responsive family engagement strategies to address language barriers that often impede the meaningful

participation of DLL families in their children's education. If administrative hurdles to coordination can be overcome, braiding and blending these federal funding streams can help ensure DLLs are supported in Title I preschool programs and benefit equitably from funding their presence helps bring to schools.²⁶

Furthermore, at the school and district levels, early childhood education leaders are reported to frequently be excluded from decision-making processes that determine the allocation and use of Title I funds. When this occurs, important needs can be overlooked, including efforts to ensure DLLs benefit from early interventions and family engagement activities. Early childhood educators, who are most familiar with the needs of DLLs, should be full participants in these conversations, as their input is critical for designing programs that support DLLs and other young children equitably.²⁷

Promising Practices

Due to limited reporting on the use of Title I funds, promising practices that specifically reach families of young DLLs are difficult to identify in a systematic way. Nonetheless, there are various ways schools and districts can connect with and support DLL families in their communities, leveraging Title I funds. In interviews with educators and a scan of practices nationwide, the following promising approaches stand out:

Partnering with Community-Based Organizations to Reach Families and Communities Where They Are

Partnering with community-based organizations that have strong relationships with and knowledge of immigrant and DLL families can help school districts to efficiently reach these families in familiar spaces and maximize the impact of federal funding by leveraging outside resources to complement it. In Chicago, a longstanding partnership between

the Logan Square Neighborhood Association, the Southwest Organizing Project, and Chicago Public Schools, for example, has supported the Parent Mentor Program, an initiative that provides training for parents (many of whom speak languages other than English) on academic instruction, professional development, community engagement, and leadership skills.²⁸ These same parents then receive stipends to assist teachers in classrooms at their children's schools. In this way, parent mentors connect schools to their surrounding communities, drawing on the strengths of families and providing extra resources for students, with an emphasis on the needs of students with a home language other than English.

On a smaller scale, Highline Public Schools in Washington State runs kindergarten enrollment events to reach out to families in partnership with African Community Housing and Development, a local direct service organization focused on supporting African diaspora immigrants and refugees through economic, legal, and system navigation services.²⁹ Initiatives such as these capitalize on existing efforts that are connecting meaningfully with DLL and immigrant families, while also potentially expanding the impact of Title I dollars by connecting with other, outside funding sources.

Systematizing Opportunities for Community Accountability and Transparency That Bring Diverse Voices into Important Funding Decisions

The degree of transparency and community participation in Title I funding decisions appears to vary significantly across state and local systems. Funding opportunities, decisions, and guidelines are often opaque not only to families and community members, but also to ECEC staff and leaders who could provide critically important input and insights into how funds might be most effectively utilized.

Colorado's Department of Education requires every school to have a school accountability committee that must include at least three parents of students enrolled at the school.³⁰ Within this overarching structure, as part of Aurora Public Schools' efforts to promote inclusive family engagement practices, parent engagement meetings are held regularly to ensure that parents can provide feedback and drive decision-making. During these meetings, families are informed of the possible ways Title I funds can be used, thus providing transparency and empowering families to advocate for needs and investments they see as most important.³¹ This kind of approach increases schools' accountability to the communities they serve, while also facilitating collaborative thinking and creating opportunities to implement community-based solutions to family challenges.

Encouraging Collaboration Between State and Local Administrators of Various Funding Streams to Create a Culture of Shared Responsibility and Team-Based Approaches

Many state and local managers of federal grants encounter challenges due to the siloed nature of their positions and responsibilities. However, a former federal grants director for the Moline School District in Illinois described ways she was able to creatively braid funds across multiple funding streams because of the responsibility she was given over not only Title I but also Title III and Title IV funds. Having knowledge of the specific activities each funding stream could be used for, based on the regulations governing each title, allowed her to think holistically in designing approaches that address the needs of immigrant and other students facing intersectional challenges.³²

It may be possible to achieve similar results even without such a grants management structure if ECEC and DLL education leaders and practitioners are involved in Title I funding discussions. This approach

can also help ensure that low-income multilingual and immigrant children are properly understood as targets for Title I program activities, and that early childhood programs and initiatives are meaningfully included and prioritized in efforts funded under that title.

Building Institutional Knowledge and Capacity to Promote Continuity and Sustainability

Specific leaders, champions, and relationships can encourage innovative and impactful use of Title I funds to support DLLs and families in their districts. The reliance on specific individuals and relationships, however, can mean that knowledge, initiatives, and momentum can be lost when those leaders move on from their roles. Documenting best practices and building institutional capacity is thus an important means of creating greater continuity of services for a community.

Highline Public Schools, for instance, has developed a family engagement catalog that compiles concrete family engagement strategies that have been rated on their perceived success by a diverse, district-level family action committee. This initiative not only enables the district to continue to build knowledge and capacity in this area over time but also increases community participation and transparency by directly showing families how resources are being used and giving them opportunities to weigh in on strategies that are working best for their needs.³³

6 Policy Opportunities

While much can be done at the school and community level to better leverage Title I to support the engagement of DLLs' families, as illustrated by the examples in the prior section, there are also steps

state and local policymakers can take to advance this goal. Opportunities include:

Strengthening State Guidance to Support DLL and Immigrant Families in Title I Initiatives

State governments have an opportunity to provide more direct guidance encouraging schools and districts to consider the specific needs of DLL and immigrant families in their Title I initiatives, both within and outside the realm of family engagement. While existing federal Title I guidance already sets a clear expectation that funds be used equitably for ELs, a named subgroup that must be considered in Title I planning processes, DLLs are not consistently named or addressed as a distinct population with unique linguistic and developmental needs.

State agencies can build on the federal baseline by clarifying how districts should interpret their civil rights obligation to ensure equitable access for multilingual families across all Title I-funded activities. This includes reiterating existing guidance and promoting the alignment of Title I and Title III efforts in order to improve outcomes. On a practical level, states can also highlight to district leaders, school administrators, and Title I coordinators practices that have been effective in reaching DLL and immigrant families through parent engagement strategies, leveraging existing innovation.

More explicitly including DLLs in Title I guidance would better align funding and programmatic support with their requirements, ultimately fostering greater equity and opportunities for DLLs and their families.

Enhancing Parent Engagement Through Title I Advisory Councils

Regulations also stipulate that schools and districts offer transparency and provide participatory approaches to making Title I funding decisions.³⁴

Specifically, schools and districts must set up Title I parent advisory councils to actively engage parents in decision-making processes. Full implementation of these councils would help ensure that Title I programs are not only transparent but also responsive by creating avenues for families to voice their priorities and concerns.

For DLLs' families, language barriers can hinder participation in parent advisory councils. To address this issue, districts should take additional steps to ensure inclusivity by conducting outreach in families' home languages and providing interpretation and translation services.

Taking steps to integrate parent advisory councils more meaningfully into Title I planning, while supporting equitable access to participation, can help boost DLL families' engagement and ensure their perspectives and experiences inform funding allocations and program strategies. Through such participatory approaches, schools and districts can better align their initiatives with the cultural and linguistic needs of the communities they serve, fostering an environment where diverse family voices are heard and respected in educational planning.

Clarifying How Title I Funds Can Be Used by Preschools and Braiding Them with Other Funding Streams

States and districts also have a significant opportunity to clarify the appropriate use of Title I funds for preschool programs, ensuring that these funds can be more effectively directed toward early childhood education, including for DLLs. Although Title I funding is primarily allocated for K-12 education, preschools can also tap into this funding for certain purposes, and research makes clear the importance of early intervention for groups such as low-income DLLs. By providing clearer guidance on how Title I funds can be utilized for preschool initiatives, states and districts can strengthen early childhood pro-

grams that are critical for school readiness and language development, including programs specifically designed to meet the needs of DLLs.

Moreover, federal and state education agencies should encourage states and districts to braid Title I funds with other federal and state funding sources, such as Title III and PDG B-5 funds, to create more cohesive and comprehensive support systems for DLLs in preschool settings. Braiding funding streams would allow for a more integrated approach, addressing the diverse needs of young DLLs, from language development to family engagement. This strategy can maximize the impact of available resources, ensuring that DLLs receive the tailored, culturally responsive services they need to succeed in early education and K-12 schools.

Finally, states should seek to address persistent gaps in accountability and transparency regarding how Title I funds are used to support DLLs. Improved state and district reporting mechanisms would help track whether family engagement activities funded through Title I are reaching and effectively supporting DLLs' families. Without such oversight, it is difficult to assess the success and equity of these initiatives and to make necessary adjustments. Ensuring better tracking and accountability of Title I funding will help ensure that these families benefit from the support they need and that funds are being used in ways that truly promote equity and success for all students.

7 Conclusion

A range of opportunities exist under ESSA Title I to improve how preschool programs engage DLLs' families in their young children's education. Too often, however, these opportunities remain unrealized due to a lack of accountability mechanisms and systematic support. Thoughtful efforts at the school, district, and state levels are needed to overcome the

inertia of conducting business as usual and to build the knowledge and skills needed to improve family engagement initiatives.

The potential benefits of such work cannot be overstated. Nationwide, one-third of all young children are DLLs, and demographic changes in many communities call for new and sustained efforts to ensure

that DLLs, who often disproportionately bring Title I funds to schools through their enrollment, are equitably served by these resources. By providing a welcoming environment and building strong partnerships with families during DLL children's earliest years of enrollment, schools can create a solid foundation for these students to thrive in K-12 and beyond.

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