

Legislative Efforts to Make Title I Funding Portable to Public and Private Schools

AASA Opposes Efforts to Make Title I Funding “Portable”

AASA opposes any and all efforts to make Title I funding “portable” by allowing the money to “follow a child” to any public or private school. Such proposals would undermine Title I’s fundamental purpose of assisting public schools with high concentrations of poverty and high-need students. Some portability proposals would allow the funds to move to both public and private schools, which is simply a voucher by another name. Other Title I portability proposals would limit the funds to public schools, but they are designed to make it easier to implement private school vouchers in the future. Accordingly, we oppose any measures to create or support Title I portability in legislation—even if the funds would be limited to public schools.

Dismantling the Title I Formula Would Make It Easier to Transform Title I Into a Voucher

Currently, states distribute dollars to districts based on the number of students in poverty and the percentage of total students in poverty in each district. This weighted formula ensures that large, highly affluent districts do not receive a greater share of Title I funds than poorer, smaller districts. As a result, districts within the state receive different allocations of Title I funds.

With portability, however, every eligible child within a state would receive the same amount of Title I funds regardless of the concentration of poverty in the district she attends. This singular funding allocation allows the dollars to be more easily transferred to private schools and make it considerably easier for the state to combine this standardized funding stream with other state funding streams. In short, states with existing voucher programs could simply tack on Title I funding to create large-scale voucher schemes.

Title I Portability Undermines Local Control of Title I Dollars and Title I Program Efficiency

The high number of students who qualify for Title I coupled with the scarcity of Title I funds make it impossible for most districts to provide high quality academic assistance to all eligible students throughout the district. Consequently, superintendents choose to maximize the return on their federal Title I investment by providing comprehensive, intensive academic programs in schools serving large numbers of low-income, low-performing students early in their academic career.

Local control to target Title I dollars to schools with the highest proportion of at-risk students would be eliminated in a portability schema since the federal dollars must be distributed based on the total number of eligible students in a school. Since high schools typically have the highest student enrollments in a district, administrators would be forced to allocate the bulk of their federal funds to serve high school students, even though younger students in the district would subsequently lose access to critical services and professionals they may have had previously.

Talking Points

- Beyond being a thinly veiled approach to vouchers, public school portability runs counter to the original intent of Title I.
- Portability has the effect of directing dollars away from the very schools that need—and stand to gain the most from—Title I dollars.
- Portability undermines local control and will result in less efficient and effective Title I programs and services.
- Portability is no panacea for poor students and their families because funding for Title I is inadequate.
- Keep public funds in public schools! If Congress wants to improve educational outcomes for all low-income students, it should invest more in established formula programs that improve academic achievement rather than siphoning limited resources to private schools serving a few students.