Title I: Politics, Poverty, and Knowledge

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Title I faces the greatest opportunities and problems of its history. The opportunities lie in the program’s embrace of standards-based reform. Looking back from 1994, Title I’s advocacy of more ambitious goals for all students seems an historic step toward more generous conceptions of equality and a more expansive view of schools’ responsibility. But looking forward the new Title I presents deep problems, all rooted in disparities between its very ambitious educational agenda and modest resources for enactment. Title I’s political and fiscal design, the formula grant which spreads money widely and well, creates a near-entitlement to federal funds which weakens incentives for improving schools. State and local education agencies, the education professions, and most schools which serve poor children are instructionally weak. Goals and IASA sought to build a new framework around them, which would enable them to become more effective. But those weak agencies are the very organizations that must build and enact the new framework. The recent conservative turn in American politics and government reinforces these weakness. Title I seeks much more aggressive work by state, local, and federal agencies, yet the rise of conservatism pressed both major political parties and federal agencies toward limited government.

The revised Title I is a parable of old tensions in U.S. social policy, between ambitious policies and programs on the one hand and weak governments and professions on the other. President Clinton secured passage of Goals 2000 and IASA while his administration shrank government, continuing the Reagan-Bush tradition of strengthening ambitions for schools without strengthening government. And while state governments have become much more active in education in the last two decades, most had weak education agencies. The recent reforms assign them much greater responsibility, but do not seem to have brought them much greater strength. We offer an analysis of the program and its problems, and follow that with a discussion of how it might be strengthened.

I. INITIAL SUCCESS AND BEYOND

Antipoverty programs must solve three problems if they are to succeed. They must have a plausible design for moving people out of poverty. They must be thought to have done so, with some plausible basis in evidence and experience. And they must mobilize broad political support for helping the poor in a society in which most people and policymakers are not poor. Success for such programs
requires weaving solutions to problems of politics, policy design, and knowledge into a single package. Though some have solved one or another problem for a time, only a few policies or programs have solved two or all three for very long.

Title I has done best on politics, for the formula grant helped to build broad support by offering funds to most school districts. The support has been durable, even leading Republicans to oppose President Nixon's and Reagan's efforts to turn the program into a block grant. Title I also began with a promising approach to producing results, for in the 1960s it was reasonable to believe that added conventional educational resources, purchased with federal dollars, would improve education for poor children and lead them out of poverty. Distributing funds to support supplemental remedial services thus made both political and educational sense. Federal officials and local and state educators quickly developed the administrative arrangements, political understandings, and professional knowledge needed to make Title I work. The program wove together political appeal, a promising educational strategy, and the capacity to operate an intergovernmental education program. Despite some serious initial problems, Title I was generally thought to be a strong and successful program by the mid-1970s.

But as time wore on, the program appeared unable to deliver the results which its antipoverty strategy promised. Several national evaluations claimed that the program produced only modest gains that did little to close the achievement gap between Title I students and their advantaged peers. By itself that news might not have been grave, but the 1980s brought a powerful conservative movement which was eager to reduce federal investment in social programs, and a school reform movement which pressed for much more ambitious academic work. Weak evaluation results made Title I more vulnerable to these changes, and opened it to proposals for revision. We consider the developments which prompted the re-design, and then take up the new design.

Accomplishments

The early symmetry among Title I's educational and political designs, and the capabilities of the governments in which it operated, enabled remarkable achievements. For the first time in U.S. history, federal priorities had been asserted for local schools. In a political system organized around a weak central state, Title I helped to get a value that was typically ignored — better schools for the poor — represented in national, state, and local politics, and schools. Title I's formula-grant funded the new priority, and helped to make the program a managerial and political success. Within ten or fifteen years of the program's passage a national Title I system had been established, in a country whose schools always had been locally controlled, which had no shadow of the required political or administrative infrastructure, and in which many politicians asserted federal action in education to be "socialistic" or worse. These remarkable developments are by now so familiar that we take them for granted, but they were absent and widely thought to be impossible, just a few decades ago.

Title I also helped to set new professional priorities. It kept a focus on education for poor students, and legitimated that concern. That helped to persuade professionals and researchers to attend to matters that hitherto had been mostly ignored, a concern which has grown. One result has been better schools for many poor students. Another has been the development of several promising comprehensive school improvement programs, and still another has been more knowledge about school improvement.

One key to these accomplishments was a national alliance that supported better schools for
poor children, which included advocates for the poor, civil rights groups, state and local school agencies. Title I offered elements of a frame for the alliance, and the program's friends and enemies helped to make it work. Professionals, advocates for the poor, Democrats, and Republicans defended the program against repeated attacks in Washington, while the program became an intergovernmental system which supported better education for poor students at all levels of government. The alliance soon became familiar, but it would have been difficult to imagine in 1963. In the current political lexicon it is an interest group, but that is what it ordinarily takes to put issues on the public agenda in America, and keep them there. It is no surprise that such groups exist for the health care industry or oil producers, or even that some advocates would sometimes plead for disadvantaged children. But an enduring and effective alliance which supports better schools for poor children is more unusual.

Another key to the program's accomplishments was its modest or even marginal nature. Title I monies were a small fraction of total local outlays, and the instructional time that Title I bought was a small fraction of the entire school day. The program also was marginal to the organization of instruction, for it existed chiefly in pull-out groups which were removed from the core instructional program. In doing so, the program relied heavily on existing capacity and knowledge, which eased program enactment. Local educators were accustomed to work on basic skills, and pullouts didn't require teachers to make fundamental changes, to learn radically new ideas, or to work much more intensely. These and other elements of marginality were conditions of the program's existence. They enabled development of a system of intergovernmental accountability that focused on identifiable remedial work in identifiable settings, and were reinforced by the formula-grant which mobilized broad political support by spreading funds widely but thinly. Through these instruments and enabling structures, Title I became an administrative and political success in the 1970s, but that depended on its limited demands on governments and schools, and on federal deference to the very states and localities for which it was trying to set a new agenda. It was a major accomplishment for Title I to create that new agenda and to become a viable program, but like much social policy in the U.S., the major accomplishment depended on major limitations.

Problems

The accomplishment also contributed to large problems. The program and the issues that it helped to legitimize stimulated research which improved knowledge of how schools work, and encouraged the development of new conceptions of educational improvement. Though that informed efforts to improve schools, it also undercut the credibility of the program's anti-poverty strategy. For beginning in the 1970s, research suggested that improving instruction was more complicated than fiscal transfers to purchase more conventional educational resources. One of the first such studies — William Cooley and Gaea Leinhardt's research on time — was done as part of the Congressionally-mandated NIE study of compensatory education, in the mid-1970s. This work improved understanding of instruction, but thereby helped to erode belief in the program's original educational design. Pullouts, accountability for dollars rather than instruction, and a focus on conventional educational resources all became targets of increasing criticism during the late 1970s and 1980s. As understanding of educational improvement grew, the program's marginality — its modest intrusion on instruction and school organization, and its broad coverage — became more
troublesome. Critics and advocates began to argue that the program's broad targeting limited opportunities to do more intensive work, especially in high-poverty schools. The formula-grant which spread money widely was central to the program's political appeal, but it came to seem a barrier to its educational effectiveness.

These changes encouraged the idea that Title I should focus on results. That flowed in part from recognizing that conventional resources would not necessarily boost performance, but it also responded to more ambitious ideas about what schools should accomplish, and to worries about Title I's effects. Beginning with "new basics" in A Nation At Risk, reformers proposed much more ambitious teaching and learning. These ideas have echoed through the American educational and political systems for two decades, in an historically unprecedented passion for intellectually ambitious schoolwork. But the outpouring called into question Title I's remedial work on basic skills; advocates of high standards often argued against Title I's remedial focus.

That concern was reinforced by several national evaluations of Title I, which reported that students' achievement improved only a bit more than that of similar students without Title I. But two critical matters were rarely mentioned or discussed in connection with worries about Title I's failure. One was the program's educational power, and the other was the criterion of its success.

### Educational Power

Title I has been a modest intervention. One reason was that its political design centered on broad coverage and local control. Given the lack of massive federal appropriations, the program delivered relatively modest monies to schools which had lots of latitude in spending it. Within ten or twelve years of its inception, researchers knew that Title I brought quite modest resources to schools and classrooms. The mid-1970s NIE Compensatory Education Study found that in a national sample of districts, all compensatory programs together accounted for about one-fifth of available instructional time in elementary schools. Since Title I was only one of several such programs, its contribution was only part — unspecified in the study — of that one-fifth. Subsequent research showed that Title I purchased an average of 30-40 minutes of remedial instruction for eligible students, which was less than a fifth of the schools' instructional time. It also showed that few schools added instructional time to the school day, so that Title I substituted one sort of instruction for another.

An additional, long-ignored threat to Title I's educational power arises from its role as a supplement. A decade of hard political and administrative work, between the late 1960s and the late 1970s, foreclosed much chance that LEAs would use federal grants to substitute for local or state revenues. It was a substantial victory to assure that Title I would add onto local programs rather than replace them, for that increased the resources which could be mobilized to improve schools for the children of poverty.

Such supplementation seems appropriate for a national program in a federal system. But most school revenues in that system derive from local funds which voters raise with taxes on their own property, and from funds which state legislators distribute across all LEAs. Great inequalities in local fiscal circumstances create very unequal local revenues, which buy unequal educational programs. The politics of state legislatures make it difficult for them to do much more than moderately equalize local inequalities. As a result, Title I builds on very unequal local programs. A 1993 study showed that wealthy districts spent more than 35% more per pupil than poor districts: $6,725 as against $4,025. If these differ-
ences are sorted out by schools’ poverty levels, the contrasts are more dramatic: per pupil expenditures in high-poverty schools in wealthy districts were $7,126, as against $3,849 in high-poverty schools in poor districts. Title I builds on very unequal local revenues.

Those differences are reflected in local programs. Teachers in Title I schools in wealthy districts were better educated than their colleagues in poor districts, and poor districts were more likely to spend Title I on less educated aides than on regular teachers. Schools in poor districts were not only older, but were larger by one-third. Teacher turnover was nearly twice as great in high poverty schools in poor districts as in similar schools in wealthy localities. And while all school principals in high poverty schools in wealthy districts reported that their teachers were “... much above the district average” in quality, only half of principals in such schools in poor districts made such a report. Wealthy districts also spend a good deal more on teachers’ salaries and special needs programs. The authors wrote that

... the Chapter I program may be impeded in meeting its goals in low revenue districts because Chapter I funds tend to be used to provide only remedial instruction while funding is not available for other vital and related services (i.e., LEP and special education programs, attendance and health services). These types of services are interdependent with compensatory education services in meeting the overall goal of the Chapter I program...

Ironically, though Title I “supplements and not supplants,” it does so across quite unequal local schools. Title I students in wealthy districts have a better chance of getting a decent education than Title I students in poor districts. This modest program is likely to pack less of an educational punch in high-poverty schools in poor than in wealthy districts. Title I thus has been far from a homogenous “treatment,” yet that did not figure prominently in national evaluations. Those studies asked a crude question: does exposure to “the program” affect students’ test scores? Despite evidence that “the program” was much more plausible legislatively and administratively than educationally, the evaluations treated Title I as if it were educationally coherent.

Criteria of Success

That is especially troublesome in view of three national evaluations, which asked if the program “... closed the achievement gap” between Title I students and their more advantaged peers. Such a standard might appear sensible in Washington, where the mere existence of a categorical program with a viable administrative system could convey coherence, and where political importance could make it seem large. But in a reasonable world, no one could have supposed that such a modest and variable program had the educational power to close the achievement gap — a gap which arises from generations of inequality and discrimination, and which rests on many social and economic differences outside of schools.

Even if Title I had been well designed to leverage many elements of local instruction, and even if local school professionals joined eagerly in carefully designed efforts to improve teaching and learning, it would be difficult to justify using such a criterion. But research showed that nothing of the sort was true. Most schools did not use program monies strategically, but in ways that fit with conventional instruction and kept the program marginal. Most students had only conventional remedial instruction in pull-out classes for a small fraction of the day, affecting the rest of instruction little. Very few schools added instructional time for students. Weak coordination between Title I and regular instruction was
common. This evidence was well known: advocates and others regularly complained about them and the limits they imposed on Title I’s influence.\textsuperscript{15}

Title I could no more have closed the achievement gap between Title I students and their more advantaged peers than modest increases in health care for very poor Americans could make them as healthy as well to do citizens. But Congress, executive agencies, and evaluators kept asking the question, and recurring reports of little gap-closing fed a sense that the program was failing. Neither Congress nor the responsible executive agencies showed much interest in more careful studies which distinguished strongly and weakly implemented local projects, and then figured out what fraction of schools had each sort. Such work could have shown what portion of a modest stream of federal funds was turned into educationally sound projects, what it took to design and enact them, and how their effects compared with other projects.\textsuperscript{16} But it was not done.

Despite the lack of appropriate evidence, even Title I’s friends began to conclude that the program was failing, or to worry that because others had so concluded, fictional failure was becoming political fact. With the program’s effectiveness under attack, its ability to mobilize political support seemed increasingly uncertain. By the mid-1980s Title I was caught in a bind, among worries that it was failing, rising expectations for learning, and conservative pressure for less government and more family choice. Key elements of the program’s early success were recast as causes of failure. The sense that Title I should change began to grow in the same era that the Reagan administration slashed its administrative capacity, limited its influence, and promoted family choice.

II. THE REVISED TITLE I:AIMS AND INSTRUMENTS

The first steps toward a new educational design, in the 1988 amendments, were cautious. But soon after Democrats took the White House, Congress passed Goals 2000, and the next year it passed a vastly more ambitious Title I. The two bills were linked. Title I would operate in the framework of standards-based reform: schools would hold students to high academic standards, and states and LEAs would hold schools to those standards. States would adopt standards-based reform, and integrate Title I into those schemes, because if states wanted Title I funds they would need Goals 2000-like standards, assessments, and accountability. The administration proposal blended voluntarism and deference to states with incentives to accept its approach.

The 1994 amendments spelled out an ambitious educational design.\textsuperscript{17} States would create demanding content and performance standards, and use them to guide the invention of ambitious assessments. States would use the assessments to set levels of academic proficiency and criteria for satisfactory academic progress, and to identify schools in which students were failing. Localities and states would improve those failing schools, and schoolwide programs would replace pull-outs in high-poverty schools. There are other provisions, but these are the heart of the new Title I. They represent historic and hopeful changes. Title I would reject remedial work in basic skills in favor of ambitious instruction. It would focus on the core of instruction, not marginal pull-outs. It would become the lever for turning teaching and learning in a much more challenging direction for all Americans, and it would help to turn the school system on its head, by orienting schools to results rather than resources, and holding them responsible for students’ performance. For schools which typically had offered a thin academic gruel to many stu-
students, especially the poor, these would be long-overdue changes.

**Challenges to Capacity**

But for just that reason, the changes present a huge challenge to education agencies and professionals. The IASA requires standards, for instance, which have “…coherent and rigorous content… [and] encourage the teaching of advanced skills…” when most extant standards concerned basic skills and graduation requirements. They would concern content to be learned, when most earlier standards addressed courses taken. To do a good job with such standards, state or professional agencies would consider the most fundamental issues in school subjects and the related disciplines, make difficult judgements about relations among topics, account for the development of academic knowledge over time, frame standards in a clear and parsimonious way, and attend to the time available and the relations with other subjects.

Framing such standards has too long been ignored, but in part for that reason, devising them is very difficult. It requires extensive knowledge of school subjects and the underlying disciplines. It additionally requires extensive knowledge of how the material in question is taught and learned. Few professional, disciplinary, or government agencies had much experience in such matters. Creating quality standards certainly was not something which state education departments, with their limited staffs and modest instructional capabilities, were well situated to take on. The challenge contained in this provision of the new Title I would require the creation of much new knowledge, and extensive learning in many agencies and professions.

New assessments pose an equally great challenge. The 1994 amendments require that they be “…aligned with the State's challenging content and performance standards … [be] valid and reliable, and… consistent with relevant nationally recognized professional and technical standards… [and] involve multiple up-to-date measures of student performance, including measures that assess higher-order thinking skills and understanding.” The tests are to be for all students, not just those in Title I, and thus must enable participation by students who are disabled, have diverse learning needs, and have limited English proficiency. These assessments would be educationally innovative and technically sound. They would capture performance in advanced skills and understanding, but would be accessible to all students, from many backgrounds, at all levels of ability. They would define a new horizon for American education, and be the yardstick to judge how closely schools approached it.

Devising such assessments would require extensive research and development. Most extant tests do not aim very high, few are accessible to all students, and they consist chiefly of closed-end multiple choice items, which limit the complexity of the material with which they can deal. The means to devise more demanding tests, which validly and reliably assess a broader range of performance, are not well understood. The existing tests also are designed to assess the distribution of knowledge or skill within a population at one point in time, rather than to measure growth. To validly measure academic growth, assessments would have to tap the same domains in progressively more demanding ways over time. That would require decisions about what topics and skills to track, and how to progressively measure difficulty within topics. Test developers have little experience with such matters.

Valid assessment of growth in schools’ effectiveness would almost surely require following the same students in the same schools over time, which is more difficult and costly than the cur-
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rent practice of testing school populations, many of which change, at successive points in time, and hoping or pretending that the results are valid. Nearly all state and local school systems also use tests which were designed to assess the distribution of knowledge and skill within a population at one point in time, to measure growth — even though assessment experts have warned against such practices for decades. These are problems which very likely will become the focus of political conflict and litigation, if standards-based reform continues to move toward consequences for schools, students, or teachers. Though some states and private assessment agencies have extensive experience with the extant test technologies, few have much experience with the sorts of assessments for which the 1994 amendments call. Those amendments propose a basic reconsideration and re-direction of assessment, and that would require much more knowledge and extensive change in test technology.

The chief purpose of standards and assessments is “…improving accountability, as well as teaching and learning…” The 1994 amendments and Goals sought to create a framework within which standards and assessments would be used to improve schools generally, but especially Title I schools. A key element was creating incentives to use standards and assessments, by holding school and district professionals accountable for students’ performance. If local professionals were rewarded for students’ success and penalized for their failure, reformers reasoned, schools would improve.

To that end, states must set three levels of performance on assessments: advanced, proficient, and partially proficient. They also must set standards for improvement, by defining “adequate yearly progress” for all schools. If this system of accountability worked as intended, some schools would do well. Others, which performed poorly but were able to take the evidence seriously and attack the problems, would find ways to improve, more or less on their own. But many schools would not take the evidence seriously, or would not use new standards and assessments well, or would not effectively attack the problem, and would not improve. They would need help.

That could be the most important and difficult feature of the IASA: though many schools are doing poorly, states and localities have little experience with school improvement, especially for failing schools. A few states have taken over particularly weak or corrupt districts, but no dramatic result in classrooms has been observed. A few states and localities have placed some schools
in some version of receivership, again with no dramatic effects. A handful of districts, prominently including Community District #2 in New York City, and El Paso Texas, have demonstrated some success in improving instruction and boosting performance, and researchers have codified some of the lessons from that work. Promising results also may be expected from private agencies, prominently including some of the designs in NAS and CSRD. But while these have more experience than state and local agencies, most are early in their development, and just beginning to learn. The agenda for building knowledge is broad, including everything from leadership development to teacher education.

The 1994 amendments set enormously important and ambitious work for schools and education agencies. Success will require building new knowledge across several key fields, including academic standards, measuring growth in knowledge, assessment of complex academic knowledge, and improving teaching and learning. Such work is badly needed to improve state and local school agencies, and professional organizations, which typically have very weak capabilities in instruction. But it is just those weak agencies and professions which, under IASA, are charged with doing the work. Could they create the knowledge required to make the extensive change in assessment, teaching, administration, professional norms, and educational priorities which the legislation envisions? Could they build more effective state and local school systems, and devise means to improve many failing schools?

**Instruments**

The answer depends partly on whether the instruments\textsuperscript{23} that Title I deploys, and the enabling structures in which it operates, can build that knowledge and achieve the program's other aims. We begin by asking how well suited those instruments are to the revised program's aims.

**Administrative Supports**

One instrument is administrative, and consists of an elaborate system of planning, managerial procedures, schedules, and federal review. The procedures are intended to regulate state and local efforts to devise standards and assessments, define adequate yearly progress, improve schools, and more. Such administration is an instrument of policy because management can enable or constrain enactment. Though the procedures are extensive, they are modest when compared with the program's educational design. Every critical decision, from the content of standards and assessments to the criteria for adequate progress, is left to states. Federal influence is kept to review of state plans, while assessments and standards are reviewed by teams of professional peers, with federal officials excluded. Department of Education officials recently have tried to expand their scrutiny of state efforts, with some success. But it is unclear how far this can be pushed, since IASA explicitly restrains federal influence on state decisions. More important, no amount of review and peer comment can substitute for the capability to devise substantial standards and assessments. Review can call attention to evidence of incapability, and encourage a search for something better, but it cannot create capability.

**Grants and Schoolwide Programs**

Two other instruments are the Title I grants, and provisions for schoolwide programs. The basic grants are Title I's chief instrument, for they create stable support to focus on better education for disadvantaged students. They enable state and
local agencies to organize staff and other resources in a predictable way. They are relatively flexible, and, since the grants supplement state and local funds, they help to mobilize more funds than the federal contribution.

These features suggest the grants' potential, but the inertia of established practice, and the extensive change the new design implies, impede realizing that potential. Inertia is rooted in the routinized instruction familiar in many US schools, and the even more drab versions in high-poverty schools. Title I alone cannot change this; no federal program could, for they operate far from schools. The question then is whether Title I's grants offer enough stimulus and support to enable states, localities, and schools to move from low-grade conventional instruction to more ambitious and demanding work.

There is no evidence that they do. One reason is the grants' size. The average annual Title I per pupil grant for elementary schools is $591, slightly less than ten percent of average per pupil expenditures. Though Title I appropriations have increased seven-fold since 1965, the increase is much more modest after adjustment for inflation. The program's fiscal capacity to support educational improvement was modest in 1965, and remains so now. The independent power of basic grants also is doubtful because they are a near-entitlement. Even if the grants were much larger, the formula which broadly distributes funds and makes the program politically viable in Congress, generates disincentives for school professionals to give federal priorities a higher place than many local concerns, including inherited practice. Though some research shows that while spending is slightly and positively associated with achievement, more money alone ordinarily is not a change agent. Change requires new instructional norms, more knowledgeable and sophisticated pedagogy, and vigorous leadership. These often require more money, especially in poorer districts, but much else must be done to use that money to good advantage. Professional education, strong leadership, sound educational designs and materials, school budgets which are keyed to educational improvement, time, and opportunities to learn are among the crucial agents. These things require more knowledge and skill, and a focused will to improve.

Concentration grants and schoolwide programs were intended to solve those problems. Reformers reasoned that if substantial amounts of Title I money could be brought to high-poverty schools, then educators would have the leverage to deeply change instruction. These concentration grants comprise 14% of the total program, and, added to basic grants can support significant interventions in high-poverty schools. Success For All (SFA), the School Development Program (SDP), and other comprehensive school reform designs operate in good part on Title I budgets, and there is scattered evidence that a few of these designs are more effective than conventional instruction.

Schoolwide programs were an administrative instrument designed to make schools, not pull-outs, the preferred unit of operations in high-poverty areas. They would help to coordinate instruction and reach many more students, to enable more flexibility in targeting services and combining funds, thus making it easier to devise powerful educational programs by collecting more resources behind them. Stafford-Hawkins had encouraged these programs if schools enrolled 75% or more free lunch eligible students, but participation was voluntary, and modest. The 1994 amendments dropped enrollment requirements to 60% in the first year and 50% thereafter.

But schoolwide programs did not add resources to high poverty schools; they operate with the basic and concentration grants discussed above. Thus schools with such programs must do much
more than would have been the case if they had retained pullouts. That is in part a matter of serving more students, and in part a matter of doing more work to revise instructional programs to deal with more students and coordinate instruction. That takes time, effort, thought, and renegotiating roles and relationships for entire schools — all with nothing beyond the existing grants.

Additionally, schoolwide programs are an organizational, not an educational scheme. Schools are eligible by proportions of poverty not the quality of programs, and the key requirements concern program planning. The amendments required states to develop special teams to support schoolwide efforts, but they included no means that would turn schoolwide programs toward educational quality. Funding schools on that basis would greatly reduce their number, and that would have frustrated both administration champions of the idea and Congressional supporters who relished broadly distributed funds. The 1994 amendments recognized the problem in a sense, for they set out several pages of advice about desired program elements, including comprehensive needs assessments, opportunities for all children to meet state standards of proficient and advanced performance, effective instructional strategies, meeting the needs of all children, and more.²⁰ But the advice was just that: schools could take it or not, without affecting their eligibility for grants or schoolwide programs.

Concentration grants bring more money to high poverty schools, and schoolwide programs enable coordination and flexibility. But even if interventions like SFA and SDP can operate within Title I budgets in high poverty schools, each intervention requires that the schools focus most or all of their instructional program on their design. In such cases, Title I grants are likely to work only if the entire school program supports them, which would require significant change, including new instructional norms, more knowledgeable pedagogy, vigorous leadership, new priorities, and new approaches to budgeting. Title I can build a fiscal foundation for change, but improved instruction depends on more complex changes in leadership, budgeting, and instruction.

Standards, Assessments and Accountability

Those observations were part of the reason to turn from Title I’s former design to standards, assessments, and accountability. Reformers assumed that they would create the frame for school improvement which grants alone had not. Can these instruments stimulate low performing schools to use grants to initiate and sustain change, and break the cycle of school failure?

Standards, assessments and accountability have two roles in Title I and Goals. One is to stimulate much more challenging teaching and learning, and the other is to create new criteria with which Americans will judge schools, students, and professionals. Both statutes use ideas about the aims and content of schooling as an instrument of policy.²¹ Standards and assessments have drawn a great deal of attention to more ambitious teaching and learning. States, localities, and professional, disciplinary and business organizations have considered, discussed, and promoted the new aims. Changing the conversation is important, and these instruments have begun to succeed.

But to succeed as the legislation intended, standards, assessments, and accountability also must provoke change in instruction. These three instruments might be thought of as the exoskeleton of instruction, for they are intended to create a framework around states, local districts, and schools, which will guide them toward much more ambitious teaching and learning, and improved schools. That exoskeleton probably would be sufficient if teachers already knew
enough to do much more ambitious work, and if
the required instructional materials existed.
Teachers could simply read the standards and
assessments and teach accordingly. But most
teachers are far from knowing enough, and few of
the required materials exist; that is why so many
reformers supported passage of Goals and IASA,
and why, even when teachers do read the stan-
dards and assessments, they produce superficial
and distorted versions of the intended result.

That means the exoskeleton is insufficient to
change teaching and learning as the legislation
envisions. That change requires new instruments
of instruction, including instructional materials,
teachers' knowledge of the subjects to be taught,
their understanding of how students think about
those materials, and teachers' opportunities to
learn those things. These could be regarded as the
inner organs of instruction, and they are not con-
tained in the exoskeleton. Neither Title I nor
other versions of standards-based reform have
devoted much attention to these elements, focusing
instead on changing standards, assessments,
and accountability. One reason is the apparent

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assumption that changes in the exoskeleton either
will directly stimulate change in teaching and
learning, or that they will stimulate the produc-
tion of appropriate instruments of instruction,
which then will change teaching and learning.
Another is that the agencies which have initiated

standards-based reform are instructionally
impoverished; few staffers know much about
instruction or its instruments, and so are unlikely
to be aware of how critical these instruments
are.33

Thus there are grave limits on the role that
standards, assessment and accountability alone
can play in Title I and other standards-based
reforms. Unless states, localities, or other agencies
create instruments of instruction which fill out
the exoskeleton's missing inner structure, educa-
tors will lack the materials, pedagogical knowl-
edge, knowledge of content, and opportunities to
learn which are critical to enactment. Lacking
those things, they can continue to use existing
knowledge and materials which are not consistent
with standards and assessments. Or they can try
to use assessments and perhaps standards as
though they were curriculum. Or they can simply
fail to respond.

The other role for standards, assessment and
accountability is public education. Goals and
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miliar sort of schooling. Standards-
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resources they mobilize, and to judge by ambitious conceptions of performance.
America is large and diverse, and gov-
ernment is quite decentralized; without
broad public understanding and support
of many different local efforts in many
states, a reform which differs so rad-
ically from existing practice could not be sus-
tained. Standards and assessments are not only
elements of the new educational design, but also
instruments for popular persuasion about that
design.34

Goals and Title I seek to persuade in several
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The reporting and public education requirements for the Goals Panel is one. Another is discussion of the standards and assessments in speeches by members of the administration, liaison with parents’ organizations, advertising the ideas at education summit meetings, and drawing states and corporations in as partners. A nother is the development and use of standards and assessments, for they incarnate the new criteria, make them a focus of professional and public discussion, and thus enable them to become agents of professional and public education about public education. Professionals are a key influence on children’s schooling, and unless they are persuaded that the new Title I makes sense, it could not work. The Department of Education has tried to focus educators’ attention on more demanding work, to persuade them that all students can do it, and to make that expectation central to professional action. The Department has used publications aimed at professionals, and conferences which draw in Title I state and local staff, to promote the new ideas. It now appears to be considering the creation of networks of professionals which will support consultation and related work in support of the reform.35

Work of this sort is critical to enacting Title I, because it depends on so much change in so many minds. Ideas are a very different policy instrument than mandates or appropriations, but changing minds is essential to support enactment of programs like Title I. There are, however, some important limits on the efficacy of these instruments. Some arise from the weak infrastructure for public education about public education. Professional organizations are not accustomed to doing such work either nationally or at the state level, and they lack many of the technical and human resources. Though several important organizations actively support IASA and standards-based reform, their efforts at public and professional education have been modest. The lack of active and intense support from these organizations is especially important when government is weak, and much social problem-solving depends on non-government agencies. In such a system, weak private agencies limit what government can do.

Other limits arise from weakness in existing standards and assessments. The chief case in point is OTL standards, for the legislative compromise which helped to pass Goals eliminated the requirement that states devise and use such standards. States thus need not discern differences in students’ opportunities to learn, or communicate with professionals or citizens about them. The national government and advocates are left with no way to take account of differences in students’ opportunities to learn, or to bring evidence on such differences to bear in public discussion.

Standards, assessments, and accountability are important policy instruments, but their influence depends on their quality. One weakness in their influence is the lack of much political, professional, or public attention to the quality of standards and assessments, or to the elements of quality. A nother is the lack of much attention to great inequalities in U.S. schools, and therefore in the quality of students’ opportunities to learn. Both impede understanding of what it will take to improve schools.

Despite these limitations, standards, assessments and accountability have played a significant role in public education about educational improvement. Arguments for more ambitious academic work and more vigorous national leadership seem to have had a dramatic effect. Few Americans supported strong national academic standards in the late 1970s, but by the early 1990s huge majorities supported them. Support has
continued through the 1990s, through changes in many state education programs, the adoption of the national goals, and the programs discussed here. There is little sign of public disaffection, despite increasing controversy about standards-based reform.36

Withholding Funds

A last instrument is withholding Title I funds for non-compliance. This seems particularly potent, since all states and most school districts depend on Title I funds. The 1994 amendments also authorize the Secretary of Education to withhold states’ administrative allocations in the event they fail to comply with the administrative procedures discussed above. These funds support all or most of state Title I management systems; since as much as 80% of state education department administrative budgets derive from federal sources, the threat is no small matter. Even wealthy states would have difficulty managing without the federal funds. But using these fiscal instruments is not that simple, in part because executive agencies like the Department of Education also depend on states and localities for political support.

The 1994 amendments also require states to adopt either Goals 2000, or a comparable framework of demanding standards, assessments, and accountability. The Clinton Administration expected that the desire for Title I funds, and the fear of losing them, would induce state policy makers to fall in line with Goals 2000. But that has been difficult, for Goals turned out to be a much weaker reed than initially envisioned. One reason was that Congress killed one of Goals 2000’s two key provisions — NESIC’s voluntary national standards and assessment review process — soon after the Republican majority was elected in 1994. Operating such an agency objectively enough to offer honest advice, and diplomatically enough to enable states to ask for advice and listen to it, would have been difficult in the best of circumstances. But if done well, it could have created a useful conversation about the new standards and assessments, and offered helpful advice. One result is that there has been no independent national review of state standards and assessments, and thus less basis than had been expected for deciding whether states were or were not on the right path toward Goals.37 With NESIC gone, the review process fell to the Ed.D., which was neither designed nor staffed for such work. It also removed some independence from the review process, since NESIC was to have been above the partisan fray rather than its victim.

Goals also offers grants to states to support the development of standards and assessments, under its Title III. State proposals are reviewed by panels of peers, which then recommend whether the Secretary should fund the proposals. The Department could have written stiff specifications for the grants, and funded only those which strongly supported the development of standards, assessments, and accountability, but in practice it did not. Secretary of Education Richard Riley is a former governor, and state education agencies can be one of the Department’s important political allies — for example, in battles for education appropriations — and that limits the extent to which federal officials are willing to provoke them. Selective federal enforcement can be effective if done judiciously, but Goals created an enormously ambitious new framework for schools and school systems, in which most states would be far from full compliance. It would be difficult to find one or two apples which everyone knew were bad, to be used as examples, and easy to find many states which were struggling with a host of difficult problems. If these were not enough inhibitions, Executive Branch actions often are a matter of interest for Congress. Congress authorizes and funds executive agen-
cies, and uses those processes to review, prod, and rein them in. The same Republican Congress which killed NESIC was disinclined to support aggressive efforts to press states in a direction they hesitated to take, especially if the direction was given by a Democratic program. The Department of Education became even more cautious about pressing states after 1995, which also eased the threat of fund cutoffs.

Funds cutoff can be influential. If the political winds are right, it could prompt improved state enactment. But one limit on that influence is that it is exercised in a decentralized federal system, in which states and localities have more influence than the central government. Another is conservatives in Congress, whose objections to federal influence will tend to rule out all but the most egregious cases of non-compliance. Still another is the near entitlement in Title I's formula and by now settled in tradition. Another limit is the enormous changes which Title I envisions, for the key problems are not compliance with clear regulations, but inventing a new system of schooling in response to revolutionary mandates. That presents very different and much more complicated problems than requiring states to supplement not supplant and compelling a few egregious offenders to return monies which were inappropriately spent.

Finally, a key instrument — better knowledge about school improvement — doesn't exist. Our discussion of the new Title I shows that better knowledge is the central requirement for most of the program's key instruments, and critical to Title I's success. Yet the legislation nowhere provides means to build that knowledge. Federally sponsored research addresses a few scraps of the needed work, and private funding addresses a few others, but most of the knowledge needs are simply unmet. The need for R&D to support school improvement is so widely ignored that there has not even been an effort to define a suitable agenda, and many crucial elements needed to enact Title I and related efforts remain unspecified. One example is curriculum and other instructional materials which are consistent with ambitious standards. Another is research on what is loosely termed alignment, to probe the consequences of trying to create consistency among assessments, curriculum, and standards at different levels of topic specification. Still another is assessments which are both aligned with defensible standards and valid for measuring growth. A few agencies are at work on a few bits of these and other needs, but knowledge development is the weakest link in a frail chain.

The new Title I is ambitious in its vision of improvement, but offers modest instruments in support of the vision. While the program can support substantial intervention in high poverty schools, its effectiveness will depend on schools dramatically changing their use of these and most other resources. While Title I offers educators who wish to overhaul their schools and school systems some technical support, it is modest when compared to the program's ambitions.

This does not mean Title I will fail. It does mean that its success will heavily depend on how states, localities, schools, and professionals use it, and on whether the knowledge needed to improve schools is created and made available. There is nothing new in federal programs' dependence on states, localities, schools, and professionals — it is central to the design of American government. Nor is there anything strange in the importance of knowledge to improving education. But there are several other noteworthy features of this dependence. One is that the new Title I's ambitious design envisions much more to be done than any previous program of this sort. Another is that the federal gov-
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III. STATE AND LOCAL RESPONSE

Whatever liberals wish or conservatives fear, social policies and programs themselves do not create strong government structures and professional capabilities out of weak ones. The new Title I wisely seeks better education for all children, especially those disadvantaged by their parents’ poverty, but that ambition has to be carried out by the existing state, local, and professional agencies. This delegation is nothing new in a formal sense, but as a substantive matter it is a major change, for the combined effect of the program’s ambitions and modest resources hands a much larger problem-solving assignment to state, local, and professional agencies than did the older Title I.

Moreover, the delegation is not accompanied by federal assistance which has increased in proportion to the program’s ambitions. The revised program contains little new federal money that states could use to strengthen their core operations, little new support for state or local training and technical assistance, and little support for developing the needed knowledge. The chief such provision in the original legislation — a modest authorization to fund state school improvement efforts — remains an unfunded victim of partisan battles on Capitol Hill. If things continue as they have since 1994, Title I’s success will depend primarily on how states and localities, and professionals in them manage this delegation, and on what knowledge about school improvement is produced by sources unrelated to Title I. We
briefly summarize what we have learned about state and local responses to the 1994 legislation, to supplement our analyses of the program's instruments and the knowledge needs which it generates.

Response to the new Title I was generally slow through the late 1990s. The strongest action was taken in states which had launched standards-based reform on their own, including Texas, North Carolina, Florida, and Kentucky. But there is controversy and uncertainty about what has actually happened, Texas being the leading case in point. Only recently did many more states move to report on assessments and accountability; there was no prior sign of an enthusiastic rush to Title I's new design. That is what we would expect from states and localities facing a program which set a very ambitious new agenda while offering neither extensive assistance nor strong incentives.

There are several promising local responses to various versions of standards-based reform, most in jurisdictions which undertook change on their own. These including El Paso, Houston, Dallas, NYC District #2, and at least a few others. There is some evidence of achievement gains for low-performing students, some of which arises from longitudinal studies in which students and teachers are linked. Reports on two of these districts support the view that serious efforts to improve schools depend on a combination of district leadership, teaching and teacher assignment, professional development, accountability, and standards.

The results of efforts to learn about these developments has been mixed. There have been some studies of state reforms, most of which are of good quality. Mostly of what we know about the states' responses to Title I are based on these studies. But the scope of states' action, even in a few of the more active states, is much greater than the existing inquiries comprise. There seem to have been fewer studies of local responses to recent reforms. Even though several of the existing studies are excellent, many questions remain, including the nature of the teaching and curriculum which produced achievement gains, the effects on students from different social strata, and the schools' and districts' capacity to sustain improvement through local leadership changes.

Learning about the response to Title I and state reform is hindered by the lack of any coordinated means to collect even rudimentary descriptive evidence on state and local responses to school improvement efforts. Though the existing studies are promising, there is nothing like a coordinated agenda for inquiry about these efforts, let alone coordination among researchers.

Standards

Most states have developed or adopted content standards, but they vary in scope and difficulty. Many are general, and appear to lack rigor. In such cases, alignment and accountability mean something quite different than in the few states with more precise and demanding standards. Several states offer their standards only as models which LEAs may or may not use, which also tends to compromise both alignment and accountability. External evaluations vary in their views of standards' rigor. The disagreements highlight the largely absent independent and careful scientific scrutiny of standards. ACHIEVE is working on a few elements of the problem, prominently including eighth grade math, but many others remain untouched.

It is unclear how federal review will deal with the quality of standards, for Title I leaves most decision-making to states. That makes some political sense, but if standards are to be of continuing use in school improvement, there must be independent means to investigate and report on their quality, usefulness, and effects. At the moment only ACHIEVE seems to fill part of
that assignment, and ACHIEVE is a creature of the states. That also makes some sense, but it limits ACHIEVE’s capacity for independent review, and ACHIEVE’s size limits the issues with which it can deal.

Assessments

Many states’ reports on their assessments were barely on time or late, and, by all accounts, their response has been quite mixed. Many, perhaps most states, appear to be using off-the-shelf tests, which were not designed for alignment to the sort of standards for which IASA called. A few states which had initiated standards-based reform on their own have developed new assessments. Some others have revised extant assessment systems. It appears that most states have not attended closely to aligning assessments and standards. Nor does there seem to be research which probes the nature of alignment, what is entailed at different levels of specificity, and many other issues. Alignment is a critical idea in standards-based reform, but, taken seriously, it has several complex dimensions. If serious consequences are attached to schools’ or LEAs’ performance, alignment is likely to assume greater importance; at the moment, it appears to have received little careful scrutiny.

Many states do not have the unified Title I and state assessment systems for which Title I calls. That is to be expected, given the problems of holding privileged and underprivileged schools to the same standards on the same tests, as the legislation requires, this would be a terrific challenge for state and local school systems.

There are scraps of research on the quality of assessments, only bits of which might be termed independent. Several of the tests appear to be only modestly difficult, the TAAS being a leading case in point. This accords with the state’s strategy of gradually raising the bar, but that suggests the importance of assessments which validly assess growth in knowledge and skill, and of tracking changes in the tests and schools’ responses. The former subject so far appears to be unexplored in Texas, and we have found no evidence of any work on the latter. Lacking such work, it will be impossible to make any valid inferences about trends in the response to the Texas (or other) reforms. Several other state assessments appear to be more demanding, but we have found no studies which compare their coverage or weigh their difficulty. It is telling that we are left with such vague descriptions, in such critical areas of school improvement.

Performance Levels and Adequate Progress

Most states appear to have set performance levels, but from what we can tell, they appear to be modest. That is no surprise, for the legislation leaves states and localities lots of room to define performance levels and adequate yearly progress, and setting levels higher makes more work, and opens up more trouble, for states and LEAs. States also seem to vary widely in the levels of performance that they define, and in the performance that they require for adequacy, and in the language they use to describe performance levels. Most define Adequate Yearly Progress in terms of the percentage of students moving from one performance level to another. As several analysts have pointed out, such a definition enables schools to satisfy AYP criteria while many students continue to perform poorly. Only a few states attend to progress at all levels of performance.

These responses suggest the importance of comparing responses to the legislation across states and over time, but a moment’s thought reveals the difficulty of making valid comparisons, given unexplored differences among assessments and standards. If much is to be learned
from state and local responses to standards-based reform, there is a need for some system of comparing standards and assessments among and within states, in part to help make sense of evidence on state and local responses. The variable responses also suggest a need for care in the interpretation of initial “success”, and for attention to change in assessments, performance levels, and schools responses over time. We found no evidence of efforts to design or undertake such research.

Accountability
Making schools and LEAs responsible for students’ academic performance is what presumably will animate school improvement in the new Title I. The legislation stipulates the years schools may have weak performance before they are called to account, but the criteria for school failure depend on a combination of decisions about the difficulty of state (or local) assessments, how performance levels are set, how AYP is defined, and what other indices are used, in addition to tests. These decisions are made by state and local officials, with the main responsibility for determining and remedying school failure assigned to LEAs. These criteria vary on several dimensions, but analysts report that only a few states, which undertook standards-based reform on their own, have relatively strong accountability systems.

In view of the assignment of most responsibility for determining and remedying school failure to LEAs, it is worth noting that research on state accountability systems finds that there has been little attention to accountability for districts. Most attention thus far has focused on schools, with the agencies which decide about school failure escaping much attention. Most districts which have imposed strong accountability requirements on schools seem to be located in states with more demanding accountability systems.

School Improvement
This is a critical part of the new Title I, for the program’s success will rest in good measure on state and local efforts to boost performance in failing schools. It also is the least developed feature in states’ and localities’ response. Few states seem to have well developed means for school improvement, beyond standards, assessments, and accountability; those which have been at work the longest have the most developed systems, but even in Kentucky, one observer reports only modest progress in improving failing schools. Independent research in a few districts in Kentucky and Texas seems to confirm this view.

One reason is that some key elements of improvement, especially professional development for teachers and administrators, are weak nearly everywhere. Research on state professional development programs suggests that most are scattered, weakly coordinated, and not focused on central issues of instruction and its improvement. A few states have begun to build regional sub-units which will offer LEAs and schools assistance with improvement, but we have found examples of research that is both dispassionate and of high quality. Yet it seems likely that understanding the operation and effects of state accountability systems will depend partly on such research.
only sketchy descriptive material on these efforts. To the extent that states have responded vigorously to standards-based reform, they have chiefly concentrated on what we term the exoskeleton.

There is scattered evidence on how teachers and students respond to standards-based reform. Some evidence and anecdotes suggest that in some high-poverty schools, in states with relatively strong accountability systems, there has been teaching where formerly there was little or none. These appear to be cases in which the tests became the school curriculum, both because few states have well developed assistance for school improvement, and because the tests are salient. In places like Texas, where tests are pretty low level, it does seem to produce some improvement, but that response is no better than the tests themselves. It could penalize students, if learning is confined to doing the tests. The only way to decide this critical issue is to carefully study students’ and teachers’ work with a range of assessments, over time.

The last decade has in addition seen a modest amount of research on teachers’ response to the sorts of ambitious reforms which Title I urges. The chief patterns which these studies reveal is the general lack of appropriate opportunities to learn the new and more demanding material, and consequently superficial and distorted enactment of reform initiatives. In the few cases in which teachers did have suitable opportunities to learn, researchers report appreciable changes in instruction, and, in one case, improved student performance. But the broad pattern has been to impose demanding reforms with weak support for professional learning and consequent lack of capability for deepening or continuing improvement in instruction. If that approach continues, it is likely to limit future opportunities for substantial change.

There are bits of evidence on direct efforts to improve failing schools. State and local school take-overs and reconstitution were very unusual until recently. Jennifer O’Day reports that approaches to reconstitution differ, but that it is difficult for LEAs to rebuild instruction, and there are only modest signs of change. Several of the comprehensive school improvement designs aim to improve high-poverty schools. Though several have been carefully devised and executed, these designs vary widely. There has been some research on their effects, of quite variable quality; some is encouraging, some is not. Though research on CSRD recently has increased, there seems to be no studies which will both probe how these designs interact with a variety of state and local accountability schemes, and deeply explore their effects on teaching and learning. Here as elsewhere, there is nothing that resembles a coordinated agenda for inquiry.

Our analysis of state and local responses to the new Title I and related reforms rests on sketchier evidence than we would like, but what we have learned does not contradict our earlier analysis. The initial response to reform supports the idea that standards, assessments, and accountability are only an exoskeleton. It could help to support change, yet even taken on its own terms, that external framework has a long way to go before it is in place and working well. Among the key missing elements are means to clarify quality and coverage in standards and assessments, means to clarify consistency between standards and assessments, and the adaptation or creation of assessments which validly measure academic growth.

But even if the exoskeleton worked well, no states and only a few localities appear to be creating the instruments which could breathe instructional life into it. These instruments include cur-
riculum which is grounded in standards and reflected in assessments, and is usable by teachers and students; materials with and from which teachers and other professionals could learn how to use curriculum and assessments; designs for work in and around schools which would create opportunities to learn these things; and incentives, in the work, to learn and improve. In addition, despite serious efforts by some researchers and professional organizations, we know much less than is needed to make informed judgments about responses to the legislation. Some federal agencies and a few foundations have supported some very useful work, but there is no sustained effort to produce the knowledge which sustained improvement requires.

IV. IMPROVING TITLE I

Title I has entered a new era. For most of its history this program sought educational improvement with conventional instruments: added money, regulating money and organization, and enforcing compliance with straightforward measures of fiscal and administrative performance. But the 1988 and 1994 amendments mobilize qualitative and unconventional policy instruments with which to improve schools, including content standards, assessments, school improvement initiatives. This shift reflects a sea change in ideas about schooling and its improvement, in which new, qualitative interventions — CSRD designs, standards-based reform, knowledge-based pay, and other initiatives — figure prominently. From allocating and regulating conventional resources, reformers have begun to regulate and directly intervene in instruction.

This change was in part deliberate. Advocates of standards-based reform argued, with growing empirical support, that inherited approaches to educational improvement were insufficient, that conventional resources and their regulation could not do the trick. Goals 2000 and the revised Title I were a self-conscious move to a very different approach, which depends on building a new qualitative framework — more ambitious goals, more substantial content standards, more demanding assessments, and stronger incentives for performance — around U.S. schools.

In another part, the change was unexpected. Advocates of standards-based reform seem not to have recognized how difficult it would be to make the new qualitative framework pay off in better teaching and learning. They seem to have assumed that the exoskeleton would “drive” change in the inner work of schools. That may be true in a very rough initial sense: some test score increases in some states and localities, on relatively low-level measures of performance, seem to support that view. But research on the response to standards-based reform suggests that teaching and learning in such cases are not likely to produce much more than modest initial increases.

On both counts, there is much to learn about how to enable schools to be more educative. There are only scattered efforts to build the knowledge which would be needed to support continued improvement, and little recognition of how critical better knowledge will be. Neither states and localities nor the federal government, nor private agencies have extensively focused on creating the inner elements of instruction which could enable the new Title I, and schools more generally, to become more effective.

Several other problems face both Title I and the new, qualitative approach to school improvement. One is the lack of a teaching force which is well educated and works in conditions which enable constructive responses to standards-based and related reforms. Another is the lack of teacher education, professional development, and work organization which could remedy those problems. There is little evidence that these are
chiefly problems of teachers' intelligence or ability, and considerable evidence that they are problems of deficient recruitment, professional education, and on-the-job learning, supervision, and decisions about advancement and job security. In many Title I schools these problems are compounded by the presence of poorly educated classroom aides, many of whom teach. A third, closely related problem is the lack of many school and district leaders who are able to lead instructional improvement. That owes a great deal to the lack of suitable education and professional development programs, and appropriate methods for recruitment, learning on the job, and advancement. These problems are critical for Title I and standards-based reform in general, since both can only work with and through school professionals.

These problems of teaching and leadership are complicated by large differences in fiscal and educational strength among states and localities. However large the problems of teaching and leadership are in relatively well-funded LEAs, they are likely to be worse in poorer districts which recruit less qualified staff, who work in larger schools with fewer supplementary services, and offer weaker educational programs.

Finally, there are no well designed means to produce the knowledge which is needed to help solve the problems above or those posed by the new Title I. State and local schools typically support few or no efforts to systematically learn from experience, and few have means to learn from research or others' experience. The federal government has weakly and inconsistently supported research and development, and only a few private foundations have interested themselves in such matters.

Title I is a supplementary program, and it must build on the existing schools. We see no alternative to considering these problems in connection with efforts to strengthen the program. Our analysis leads us to consider three major problems: weak teaching and school leadership; insufficient knowledge about school improvement, and unequal quality in students' education. By focusing on these deep problems we do not imply that nothing can be done short of doing everything. On the contrary, evidence from New York City's District 2, from El Paso, Houston, and other places show that much can be done. But research and other reports on these efforts show that improvement is an uphill struggle against larger problems in U.S. education. Though we hope and expect that work of this sort will continue, we focus on the changes which would enable it to succeed more broadly, with less extraordinary leadership and effort.

**Improving Teaching and Leadership**

These are among the most fundamental problems in U.S. education. They result from a combination of weak professional education, inadequate recruitment and professional socialization, conditions of work and professional advancement which offer insufficient opportunities to learn on the job and advance by means of learning and professional performance, and weak research and professional knowledge underlying professional education of all sorts. They are not the concern of Title I alone, but improving the effectiveness of this program will depend on solutions to this fundamental problem.

Any solution will require building knowledge about instruction, instructional guidance, teaching and administrative work and school organization. It will require building knowledge about both professional learning for teachers and school leaders, and work organization which supports and rewards learning at work. And it will require using both sorts of knowledge to inform and improve professional education and work organization for teachers and school leaders. Work of these sorts is most likely to prosper if educators work with researchers and professionals from
their own and other sectors. Government can help, but attempts at direct government solutions are likely to further regulate activities that are already over-regulated, and to load additional political freight onto already overloaded organizations and semi-professions.

Accomplishing these things would require extensive research, the development and testing of opportunities for professional learning during and prior to practice, and the development and testing of alternative ways to organize work and to support and encourage learning at work. These things would require the adaptation of some extant institutions, the invention of new ones, research on their operations and effects, and broad testing of the most promising alternatives.

Building Knowledge For School Improvement

We argued earlier that the success of Title I and related reforms depends on better knowledge and know-how of several sorts. Some is a matter of creating instruments of instruction which would enable professionals to constructively respond to standards-based reform. These include curricula which are linked to standards and assessments, assessments which are linked to standards and curricula, and can validly assess academic growth, and opportunities for teachers and school leaders to learn how to use these instruments to good effect. Though these matters can be easily described, developing, testing, and refining such instruments would be complex. One reason is that the work entails many technically and conceptually difficult issues. Another is that there is more than one way to build sound instruments of these sorts; while variety should be encouraged, comparisons of their strengths and weaknesses would be critical. Another still is that because the operation and effects of such instruments depends on the users, what they know, and the situations in which they work, development, testing, and estimating their likely value would be especially complex.

The best curricula and assessments will be of little use if school and district leaders do not use them intelligently, or if state officials introduce competing initiatives. Investigating the actions required to support improved instruction — by school professionals, private school improvement agencies, parents, students, local districts, and states — is critical.

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Still another sort of work concerns the types of instructional intervention which best improve learning in elementary math and reading. One issue is the nature and effects of early academic intervention. Another is what, if any, continuing intervention is required to sustain the gains to the end of elementary school, and into high school. Still another concerns the social and financial resources which improved schooling requires, and the costs of alternative approaches. Research and
development of these sorts would take substantial and sustained investment. Researchers would have to collect and analyze evidence on the effectiveness of various approaches to school improvement, including their instructional approach and content, their costs and effects, and their scale of operations. That would require common evidence on a range of schools, classrooms, school improvement efforts, and their circumstances, for comparisons would be needed both to illuminate the nature of improvement processes and to draw valid conclusions about their effects. Such comparative work would require valid measures of the enactment of school improvement and of growth in student learning. Each would present significant challenges: observing and measuring enactment of complex instructional interventions is relatively new, and while assessment of student performance is an older field, existing tests may well be unsuitable to assess growth in learning. Major assessment and other instrument development would very probably be needed.

Work of these sorts would require a range of approaches, including experiments, ethnographies and surveys. Since we are near the beginning of evidence-based efforts to improve teaching and learning, it is likely that new school improvement designs also should be developed, and that existing ones would be modified. Development is not research, but it should be evidence-based, which would include grounding improvement designs in research on instruction, field testing of pilot versions, revision, field tests at greater scale, and evaluation all along the way.

Developing such knowledge would enable learning about which approaches to improvement were most productive, and why. It also would require tracking schools’ progress as they used new instruments of instruction, or adopted school improvement designs. For evidence on success and failure in practice would be critical to making wise judgments about the most promising approaches to improvement. Such work would make it possible to bring solid evidence to bear on problems of school improvement. That is essential to improving Title I, but it goes further. For it would require comparing varied schools, students, and approaches to improvement, and require larger and more varied samples of students, teachers, schools, and communities than Title I offers. Moreover, an evidence-based approach to better schooling is unlikely to find broad support unless it helps many schools and students. But school improvement for disadvantaged students should be a high priority.

Knowledge Use

Better knowledge would not be automatically used, in Title I or other standards-based reform efforts. Some parents, professionals, policymakers, and education organizations would do so on their own, but many — in professional organizations, executive agencies, school neighborhoods, and legislatures — would not. Non-use would be most common in the most needy schools and neighborhoods. If experience in public health and other sectors is any guide, efforts to improve awareness include stimulating broad public awareness; offering specialized advice through professional channels; outreach by voluntary organizations to parents and other citizens; and government and private support.

Awareness is not the same as use, and use is not necessarily effective. School improvement on a substantial scale, which is Title I’s chief aim, probably would require two additional lines of action: policies and practices to stimulate knowledge use and change, including mobilizing strong incentives for improvement, and help for schools and districts in using knowledge. The first is more likely to be feasible for governments than the second. For while state and local education governments can legislate, appropriate, oversee, and
require accountability, few seem to have the capability or experience to offer extensive school-by-school assistance. In addition, these agencies govern schools, are legally responsible for their performance, and have elaborate formal political, legal, and administrative relations with schools. Yet when schools try to improve they typically need extensive professional advice, assistance in often difficult learning, tolerance for mistakes and help in learning from them. The role of thoughtful, helpful, and professional teacher may be inconsistent with that of political overseer. Even if public agencies had the technical capability to do both, adding a large agenda of support and assistance onto state and local agencies’ existing responsibility for political and administrative oversight, and their management of relations with competing constituencies, seems likely to extraordinarily complicate their relations with schools.

Extended assistance with school improvement may be more feasible for private agencies which offer research-based programs of instructional improvement. Several such agencies now offer packages of curriculum, professional education, and in some cases assessment, which have been specifically designed to promote the new roles, organization, and professional learning, which better instruction entails. These agencies are variously based in universities, private firms, and research institutes, but they represent a significant development. They can help parents and professionals to make wise choices about improvement, and can offer assistance as professionals try to change practice and improve instruction. They provide more knowledgeable and intensive help than most governments.

But if we suspect that such work is likely to be crucial, we do not know enough about how to do it well, on a large scale. Designs for evidence-based school improvement are new, in and out of Title I, and though most operate within the Title I program, all but a few operate at a modest scale.

Researchers and developers are only beginning to learn about the operation and effects of these designs; better knowledge would require research on existing and new designs, especially those which give priority to working with schools which perform poorly, and which enroll many disadvantaged students.

**Organizing the Enterprise**

Success in this endeavor would depend partly on how it was sponsored and organized, for that would affect the quality of the work and its reputation. Given the mixed record of educational R&D, and the weak reputation of the agencies involved, these are matters of unusual importance. Our proposals would require building a scientific and professional community, and that would take high standards for recruitment and training. Devising properly focused and well coordinated R&D programs would take careful planning, deft leadership, and periodic, serious review. Success would be more likely if the enterprise were overseen by a panel of leading scientific and professional experts, for that would express a commitment to quality, help to attract and retain an outstanding staff, and offer professional and scientific leadership in planning and reviewing programs.

It would be very difficult to attract and hold top people unless an appreciable fraction of the research were intramural, for that is what attracts outstanding researchers and other professionals. Much more work would have to be extramural, for one agency could not do anything approaching all the work. And even if it could, success requires progress in an entire scientific and professional community.

High quality work and confidence in it require a plainly non-partisan and independent enterprise. Sponsorship by a broad coalition of private foundations, government, business, social
Science, and the professions would help. Such a coalition could build a foundation for research-based school improvement which reached well beyond government. Better knowledge about school improvement would serve the interests of students, parents, employers and workers, higher education, and the body politic. Their interests are in some sense all public, and the concern of governments. Most schools are creatures of the state, all are state sponsored and regulated, and most are state operated. But if government has an interest in school improvement, government alone cannot adequately manage that work. Governments are deeply involved in the schools' inadequacies, and cannot be dispassionate about them. And government is increasingly riven by partisanship, which would seriously impede efforts to use knowledge to improve education.

The more important education has become as a public policy issue in the decades since World War II, the more partisan it has become. Education now is one of the top two or three items on the public agenda, and it is more intensely partisan than ever. Creating better knowledge about school improvement and encouraging its use would require the capacity to do penetrating work, to make candid assessments, and to offer sometimes difficult advice. It is unlikely that any government— or even a coalition of governments— could do a good job of sponsoring such work for very long, for the conflict in roles could be intense, and the political cross-pressures crippling. That is another reason for broad and independent sponsorship. Still another is that the enterprise we propose would have to overcome a very uneven history of federal educational R&D, and much consequent suspicion. Trying to rebuild on the extant foundations would saddle any new effort with a huge handicap. A clean break and new foundations are in order. That could help to protect against partisanship by representing support across a broad spectrum, by expressing a non-partisan approach, and by removing educational R&D from the federal establishment, in which it has been politically much too vulnerable.

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An effort of this scope, scale, and importance would require national perspective and organization. Schooling is an enormous enterprise in one of the world's largest and most diverse nations. Staff and funds sufficient to sponsor a range of studies, program development, field trials, experiments, evaluations, and other work would be required. Such an institution could not be effective if it did not work closely with private and professional agencies and state and local governments, for its success would partly depend on helping to improve their work. But if governments would be among its most important partners, the agency would be more useful to them and others,
if it was situated in neutral territory, on the boundary between the public and private sectors. That implies an enterprise whose purposes were public but whose sponsors reached well beyond government and partisan interests. One possible vehicle would be a mixed, public-private corporation, and another would be a sub-agency of the National Research Council, at the National Academy of Sciences. Whatever its home, the sponsoring coalition should be represented in a governing board which helped to oversee the agency’s work as well as relations with clients and donors.

V. CONCLUSION

We argued near the outset of this paper that antipoverty programs must solve three problems if they are to succeed. They must have a plausible design for moving people out of poverty. They must be thought to have done so, with some plausible basis in evidence and experience. And they must mobilize broad political support for helping the poor in a society in which most people are not poor. Success requires weaving solutions to problems of politics, policy design, and knowledge into a single package.

Title I was increasingly at risk through the 1980s, in part because the view that it had failed to deliver for students made it vulnerable to proposals for block grants and choice, despite the formula-grant’s political appeal. Though the idea that the program had failed was misguided, it was politically consequential. Title I is much more ambitious now, and much more difficult to enact. For that reason among several others, it will be more difficult to produce convincing evidence that the program delivers for students.

The knowledge building program that we sketched would make it more likely that states and localities could deliver on the promise of the new Title I and related reforms. It would make it less likely that the new Title I and standards-based reform would be judged a failure. In the new era into which education has entered, knowledge is central to school improvement. The chief instruments of improvement are all knowledge based. Using them well also will depend on knowledge of their operations and effects. One key to improvement is having instructionally usable standards and assessments, and curriculum linked to them. Another is professionals’ opportunities to learn how to turn these instruments of instruction to students’ advantage, and to work in settings which support ambitious instruction. Still another is professionals who have the knowledge, skill, and incentives which enable and stimulate use of these resources and opportunities. Lacking much better knowledge, Title I and many related improvement efforts will be operating in a twilight zone, in which compelling evidence of improvement would be impossible. Without such knowledge, Title I will be lost educationally. If it is lost educationally, it will be at increasing risk politically.

Conventional approaches to improving education are unlikely to help very much in this new era. Enforcing compliance with policy requirements may get some states and localities off the dime, but to get much beyond the neighborhood of the dime they need knowledge, know-how, and opportunities to learn them. Neither the revised Title I nor Goals 2000, nor most state reforms, offer much help either in building knowledge, or in creating opportunities for professionals to learn. Similarly, massive new appropriations for class size reduction are unlikely to help unless there are many qualified teachers in high poverty schools, and a large reserve supply of such teachers waiting to move into vacant classrooms created by such reductions.

If conventional resources and regulation are unlikely to get us very far, deregulation is unlikely
to get us further. Turning Title I into a block grant might solve a political problem for some partisans of the idea, but there is no evidence that many states have made great progress toward improving the schools which children from poor families attend. There are few places in which less restricted federal funds would enable even greater progress in the development of promising state or local action. There is instead evidence that most states, including those that may have some evidence of success, are just beginning to learn how this problem might be solved. Similarly, there is no reason to believe that school choice can solve this problem. It may be one of several useful ways to deal with failing schools, but there is no evidence that choice alone can produce better teaching and learning. There is increasing evidence that improved instruction requires a complex recipe which blends teachers with strong subject matter and pedagogical knowledge, schools and districts with knowledgeable and strong leadership, strong and usable academic standards, assessments which are useful both for diagnosing problems of learning and teaching and for exemplifying standards, and strong incentives for better learning and teaching — among other things. If old-style regulation and conventional resources will not produce even these ingredients of the recipe, neither will the conventional antidotes of deregulation and consumer choice.

Better knowledge would be useful to professionals and policymakers, and it could help build political support for education. Educators who knew much more about how to improve instruction would have more successful students, and that would improve their influence. Evidence that schools can do much better also could change the sense of what is educationally and politically possible, and that could mobilize the will to press for improvement. Parents and local officials who knew more about school improvement would have a basis to press educators who did not act.

State policymakers who knew much more about how to improve schools could set priorities for local action, and take steps if local school authorities did not act, or needed assistance. Better knowledge could focus action and enhance influence for citizens, private agencies, professionals, and public officials, which could help to build stronger constituencies for improvement.

These ideas build on experience in other fields, and recent developments in education. Better knowledge about nutrition, sanitation, and disease have been catalysts for action in personal health, in health professionals' work, in government, and in creating constituencies for public and private action to improve health. Better knowledge began to pay off in public health and medicine roughly a century ago, and the pace accelerated with more investment in medical R&D since WW II. Knowledge was not an independent force, but it enabled professionals, patients, citizens, and public officials to take action and exert influence that otherwise would have been unlikely.

The work we propose would yield no school improvement vaccine. In a nation as varied as the U.S., one remedy would rarely work everywhere. Schools, communities, students, and governance arrangements differ, as do parents' ambitions, state and local conditions, and students' interests. Such differences would count, both because approaches to improvement that are effective in one situation might not be so in another, and because better knowledge would not end local preferences or debates about schooling. But if more solid evidence on schools and their improvement would be no panacea, it could inform many decisions as well as broader deliberations about schooling. It could reduce assertions which were not informed by careful investigation. Solid evidence on effectiveness is, however, only part of judgments about education. It can inform debate and enable better informed decisions, but
could not eliminate debate or push politics aside. In a democracy, nothing more should be tolerable. In a nation which cares about its children, nothing less should suffice.

The last fifteen years have seen unprecedented public and private efforts to improve schools, and a growing popular sense that better education is a high priority. Public concern with better schooling is at an all-time high, and public distaste for political partisanship at an all-time low. Scientific and professional knowledge which helped to improve schools could be an attractive focus for action across partisan lines. The effort which we propose could help to revise the political incentives around Title I and schools more generally. For if some schools, districts, and states used new knowledge, and schools began to improve, it would generate growing pressure for others to keep up — from the media, from organized advocates, from politicians who used the comparisons to advance their own interests, and from interested parents and citizens. The growth of knowledge about school improvement, and of the capacity to help schools improve, could help all of the participants in such an effort. Better knowledge could increase the effectiveness of professionals, parents, and policymakers, because it would create a more solid basis for professional action and public accountability. That could enable government to be more effective, in part by enabling professionals, parents, and private agencies to be more effective. Better knowledge could help the federal system to work, without trying to make it do things which it will not do well.

ENDNOTES

1 This paper was written for a meeting on the federal role in education, sponsored by the Center on Education Policy, in Washington. It is not for quotation or other use without our written permission. It summarizes several key elements of a book, Poverty, Politics, and Pedagogy; Federal Policy And School Improvement, to be published in 2001.

2 For example, the number of U.S. Department of Education employees fell from 5,254 in 1992 to 4,926 in 2000. Similarly, the number of employees within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, which administers Title I, fell from 290 to 282 (Central Personnel File, U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2000). This was much less of a decrease than in the Reagan-Bush administrations: the number of Department of Education employees fell from 7,469 to 5,202 between 1980 and 1991, and from 479 to 308 in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education.

3 For example, employment in state education agencies has increased only very slightly since 1993 — from a total of 1.83 million employees in 1993 to 1.96 million in 1999, a time of vastly increased responsibility (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000).


14 See, for example, Milbrey McLaughlin’s discussion of the G E TEMPO study results of Title I in the later 1960s, in Milbrey McLaughlin, Evaluation and Reform (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1975); see also Cooley and Leinhardt, op. cit.

15 Brian Rowan, Larry Guthrie, Ginny Lee, and Grace Pung
Guthrie, The Design and Implementation of Chapter 1 Instructional Services: A study of 24 schools (Far West Laboratory, 1986).

Only one study that we know of (Rowan, Lee, Pung) probed some elements of these issues as part of the mid-1980s National Assessment.

As this summary suggests, the redesign accepted many proposals made by The National Commission on Title I, and, like that Commission, the administration drew deeply on ideas about “systemic” reform that had been developing since the late 1980s. That was no surprise: the President had been deeply involved in school reform as a governor, and several of his top education officials had been leading figures in the movement for systemic reform.

Improving America’s Schools Act sec. 1111. State plans. (b)(D(II and III).

The Department of Education has intermittently tried to support standards development, especially in reading and math, but these efforts have been quite controversial, and several were abruptly terminated.

Improving America’s Schools Act sec. 1111. State plans. (b)(2)(B,C,E)

Improving America’s Schools Act sec. 1111. State plans. (b)(2) (A,F).

Improving America’s Schools Act sec. 1001. Declaration of policy and statement of purpose. (d)(8).

We use the term instruments in the same sense as R. Elmore and L. McDonnell, “Alternative Policy Instruments” Educational Evaluation And Policy Analysis, vol. 9 no.2, Summer 1987. They refer to policy instruments as “…the mechanisms that translate substantive policy goals (e.g. improved student achievement, higher quality entering teachers) into actions.”

Chambers, J., Lieberman, J., Parrish, T., Kaleba, D., Van Campen, J., and Stullich, S. Study of Education resources and Federal Funding. Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education, 2000, p.38. This figure is higher in targeted assistance than high-poverty schools, because the Title I grants are spread over many more students in the latter schools.

Figure from Education Funding Research Council (EFRC) Title I Handbook. Washington, D.C., Author, Sept 2000, p.D -71. The EFRC calculations imply that inflation in has grown nearly by 700% since 1965, which seems implausible. If so, then the EFRC deflator understates growth in the real purchasing power of Title I. But N C E S calculates that, when adjusted for inflation, teachers’ salaries are flat between the early 1970s and the late 1990s. Since those salaries are the largest part of Title I expenditures, this suggests that the EFRC deflation is at least roughly correct. But even if we estimate conservatively, the real purchasing power of Title I has at most doubled since 1965, rather than increasing seven-fold.


The legislation also charged states to develop teams to help schools enact schoolwide programs. IASA sec. 1001. Declaration of policy and statement of purpose. Also, SEC. 1114. Schoolwide programs.


An additional consideration in the case of Goals and Title I is that it would have been politically infeasible for federal agencies to become deeply involved with instruction. But if the importance of these instruments had been understood, the legislation could have made provision for state, local, professional, or other agencies to develop these instruments, and defined such work as a critical part of the reform.

Weiss and Tschirhart, op. cit.


Several states and private agencies created ACHIEVE, a consortium with a similar mission to NESIC without any formal federal connection. The extent of state participation and influence remain to be seen.


Margaret E. Goertz and Mark C. Duffy. op. cit.


In the CPRE core study, Goertz and Duffy report that four states delegate responsibility for setting performance levels to LEAs; these states treat LEAs in the same voluntarist frame as the federal legislation frames for states. Six of the ten states set levels themselves. Goertz and Duffy, op. cit.

Walt Haney, “The Texas Miracle in Education.” Education Policy Analysis Archives Vol. 8 No. 41; Stephen P. Klein,

Goertz and Duffy, op. cit.


Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, vol. 12, no. 3, Fall 1990; Stewart and Neufeld, op. cit; Neufeld and Boothby, op. cit.


We refer to what has been called “opportunity to learn”. But that term is too precise for what is now known about the influences on learning, and too freighted with recent political argument, to be useful.

This sketch implies that a research agenda focused on the central issues of school improvement would span basic research on learning, teaching, and assessment in a few central school subjects, as well as more applied work on the impact of interventions and related subjects. Basic and applied work would both be critical to the enterprise, and interaction between such lines of work would be essential.