

Supplemental Educational Services Web cast

Panel Discussion

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For this segment of the broadcast, I am joined by **Tom Corwin**, Associate Deputy Undersecretary for the Office of Innovation and Improvement. As **Nina Rees** said in the introduction, the Office of Innovation and Improvement and the Title I Program Office share oversight responsibilities for the implementation of the supplemental education services provisions.

In this segment we're going to review some of the fundamentals of the requirements for the program implementation. And to start, Tom, could we review just shortly what supplemental services are, and why they're important.

Tom CORWIN, Associate Deputy Undersecretary for the Office of Innovation and Improvement

Hello Susan. Yes, let's talk a little bit about Supplemental Educational Services and what they are. Briefly, under No Child Left Behind, Supplemental Educational Services are tutoring and other extra support, supplemental support, for students from low-income families attending schools in their second year of improvement, or a later year.

In implementing supplemental services, we've actually had a lot of questions about how they are different from Title I. I actually think there are some important differences. The first is, the element of parental choice—the strong element of parental choice that's included in supplemental services. Parents are given the option of choosing a supplemental service provider and a set of supplemental services for their children.

A second thing I think is important is a requirement that the services be aligned with the regular instruction in the school, and with the state's academic standards. Supplemental services is supposed to be instruction that enables children to reach the academic standards of the state, along with the other children in the school.

Finally, I might add, a very important part is accountability—the way the statute rules out, as we've enunciated it, in our regulations and our non-regulatory guidance. If Supplemental

Services are not effective, a provider cannot demonstrate that it's showing the results that are intended, and is not enabling the students to help to reach the standards, the state is required to withdraw approval for that provider. So, there really is an incentive to show results and a requirement that the providers be held accountable for meeting the results.

Susan WILHELM

So, really what we are talking about here is an extra tool to support what's going on in the classroom and help kids improve their achievement. What students are we talking about providing services to?

Tom CORWIN

We've had some questions at times about, which are those students—who are the students from low-income families? How does this school district know which ones they are? And the statute is pretty explicit on that point. It says, in identifying the students as coming from low-income families, the district is required to use the same definition of students from low-income families that is uses in determining its Title I allocations to schools within the district.

Most typically I think that's the students who are receiving a free or reduced-price lunch from the district. If that's how the district determines its Title I allocations on the basis on the counts of those children, those are the children in the district who are eligible for supplemental services.

Susan WILHELM

Do they have to be the same students that performed low on the assessment, or the same students that were in a sub-group that did not meet the AYP target?

Tom CORWIN

Actually, they're not supposed to be. It's all students from low-income families attending those schools, whether or not they performed below the proficient level, or poorly on an assessment; whether or not they are in a particular sub-group. However, if the district finds that it can't fully meet the demand—it has more parental interest, or more parents signing up their children for supplemental services than it can meet, the requirement of the statute is that the district gives priority to lowest achieving eligible children.

Then we get questions about what it means to be low achieving, or lowest achieving. There's actually quite a bit of flexibility around that in the statute, in the regulations, and I think in our non-regulatory guidance we give some examples of how districts might determine who is the lowest achieving.

Susan WILHELM

What about kids who are not from families that are low-income? Can they get supplemental educational services?

Tom CORWIN

Well, that's a good question. We've had a number of districts asking us about that. You might have a situation, Susan, where the districts feel that the services offered by the providers in that district are very positive; that they have a potential to have a strong impact

on academic achievement. They might not think it's fair for the non-low-income students not to be able to participate. They might think the whole academic achievement of the school will be increased if all the students could participate.

And what we've determined, and what we said in the guidance, is in fact the district can serve those other students. However, they can't fund supplemental services for the non-eligible children out of what we usually refer to as the "20% set-aside." The money from Title I, or another source, that the district has to reserve for supplemental services and the other one, choice related transportation. So they might use other Title I money, or other funds available in the district to serve those children, And in fact, we would encourage them to do so, subject to the conditions that I just laid out.

Susan WILHELM

So definitely, there are options at the LEA level for how this is implemented once they get the basic kids who are from the low-income families.

Tom CORWIN

And I should mention as well though, you don't want to get in a situation where the district isn't serving eligible kids because they want to serve ineligible ones. I think that the basic requirement is to serve as many of the eligible children, meaning the children from the low-income families first. And then if there is additional resources, or what have you, to go ahead and serve some other ones, if, in the opinion of administrators in the district level or the school, that's a good thing to do.

Susan WILHELM

Let's shift a little bit and talk about the times when supp services are supposed to be offered. In general, when should supp services begin and end?

Tom CORWIN

Okay, that's another interesting issue. Actually, the second part is perhaps easier because the statute directly addresses it. And it says that services are to continue until the end of the school year. Seems pretty simple. Actually, in practice it may be a little more complicated than that because I think it's going to depend somewhat on the amount of funding that the district has available for supplemental services, at least the per-child amount—and the intensity of the services that a provider proposes to offer.

But, going back to your first question for a second, "When are services supposed to begin?" Actually, the statute doesn't say anything about that. I think the intent of Congress in enacting all the provisions for supplemental services was that they begin as soon as possible at the beginning of the school year. I know, in practice at least these first two years, a number of districts didn't really do their enrollment period until September or October, well into the fall. I think that was largely because A: It was a new thing, but mostly because they didn't have a complete list yet from the state, of their schools and the different areas of improvement. So, they didn't know who the eligible students were.

With that out of the way, we're hoping and we're encouraging more and more of the districts to run this process in the spring, or perhaps early in the summer, to give parents good ideas on what their options are. To sort of take care of all the logistics, and let parents know, these are the services, and on the other hand, these are choices you might have for

different schools under the choice provisions. So that would be our expectation now, is that they begin pretty early in the school year and run as late in the school year as possible, depending on the level of resources that are available, and the costs per hour, or some other unit that the provider would charge.

Susan WILHELM

Right. I know that some LEAs may say that they can't do advanced planning because they don't get their assessment results back from their state in time. But, isn't it true, in fact, for some schools, you're going to know that they're still in improvement status and will need to offer supp services even though they haven't gotten the assessment results back.

Tom CORWIN

Oh, absolutely. As people know, a school remains in school improvement status until it's made adequate yearly progress for two years in a row. So, for some subset of the schools, the district knows, the state knows that it's going to be in improvement status another year, and that the parents and the students are going to be eligible for supplemental services for another year. And, by all means, they can go ahead and run the enrollment, offer the services to the parents, take care of the contractual issues for those students. For the new ones, I guess our encouragement is that they just do it as quickly as possible.

Susan WILHELM

Let's talk a little bit about the money. I know that as people were getting supplemental services up and operating, one question that seemed to arise a lot is how do you calculate the amount per student that needs to be spent on supplemental services? Could you spend a little time talking about that please?

Tom CORWIN

Sure. And I think it's useful to clarify that because it's a little bit tricky, and we do get questions about it. Basically, the amount that a district is required to spend per student for supplemental services is either its Title I per student allocation, or the actual cost of the services.

What do we mean by the "Title I per student allocation"? I think that's where we get the questions. It's a division problem. You divide the district's total Title I allocation without any off the top, set-asides or anything like that. The total allocation, you divide that by the number of children who are counted for the Title I formula when the Department and then the states determine the district's Title I funding.

Basically, that's the number of poor children as identified by the Census Bureau residing in the district. What's important here is that you use that Title I formula count, not for instance, the number of children receiving free and reduced-price lunch, which is going to result in a much smaller per child amount.

One more time, the amount is the district's Title I allocation divided by the number of children counted by the Department when we determined the Title I allocations. That's what we sometimes call the Census Poverty Children. So, in sum, the amount that the district is required to spend per child for supplemental services is either that calculation, or the actual cost of the services.

Susan WILHELM

I think it's also important to point out the districts can actually spend more money than what's in the cap if they need to, in some cases. For example, in rural areas or something, there may not be a provider that can come in for a lower cost. But, if they do that, then they can't count that excess cost towards the 20% cap on supp services and choice transportation. Is that correct?

Tom CORWIN

That's correct. That's a good point. We have had questions about that as well.

Susan WILHELM

Okay. Let's talk a little bit about contracting. I know that as people have been working to get supplemental services operating at the district level, sometimes contracting has proved to be a stumbling block in delayed implementation. Are there particular things that districts need to be sensitive to in putting together their contracts with the supplemental service providers?

Tom CORWIN

To be frank, at the department level, we're, I think, sort of, just getting into this, and haven't prescribed, regulated, or provided a great deal of guidance, in fact, on the contracts issue. What I think has been very useful though, is when the states have stepped in and provided as much assistance as possible to the local school districts in dealing with the contracts. What we hear in some places, is that back and forth haggling over the contracts delays the services significantly. And we don't want that to happen. Where the states have come in and done a blanket contract, or a model contract and the districts have used it, it's really streamlined the process quite a bit.

Getting back a little bit more to your exact question, "What are some of the issues that have to come up?" I know there have been issues about the frequency of payments. It's very important to resolve those in the contracts so that all parties know when the payments will be made.

Another issue that's come up pretty frequently has been attendance. Do the contractors get paid whether or not the student attends? Well, different people can come up with different answers to that question. But, it's important, I think, that that issue be resolved ahead of time.

And then, the third one I'd mention is the location of the services. I think some of the providers get approved by the states without exactly knowing whether they are going to have a storefront, whether they are going to provide services on-site at a local school. Maybe it's a community center. Clearly, that has to be nailed down. I don't know, either in the contract, or some other kind of agreement before the services start.

Susan WILHELM

Let's switch streams a little bit and talk a little bit about what Department resources are available to help school districts as they work through implementation of supplemental services.

Tom CORWIN

Sure. Subject to limitations of our own resources, we're really trying to do what we can to help the districts and the states do as good a job as possible on this. We have our supplemental services non-regulatory guidance, which is, the way I think of it, as a living document. We've put out two versions of it now. The second version in particular, which has been out since last August—in it, we really sought to respond to a lot of these different questions that have been raised by states and by school districts, and provide as much helpful information on them as we can. I think most of that has been dealt with at this point, but know there are still some more questions, and I think we'll probably, later this spring or into the summer, produce a third version of the guidance.

We're also interested in getting the word out about what we refer to as “best practices” in this and other areas. In my own office, the Office of Innovation and Improvement, we've launched, and will shortly be publishing, the first versions of what we're calling our “best practices guides” in a number of different areas. The first one is on Title I Choice, and then the second one, which will be out a little later this spring, will be on Supplemental Services.

They'll look specifically at the experiences of school districts that are taking on the kinds of issues that we've talked about, and seem to be working through them pretty well. As our people went out and looked at districts across the country, they actually didn't find anybody doing it perfectly. But, they did find a lot of promising things going on, or a lot of practices that seem to be making supplemental services available in an effective way to the parents. So, we'll be putting that out shortly.

We've also got a number of other things going on. We funded the creation of what we're calling the Supplemental Educational Services Quality Center. That's through a grant we've made to the American Institutes for Research here in Washington. They're going to be out in the field, working with school districts around the country to help them through some of these issues.

I guess the only other one I'd mentioned in another office in the Department, the Office of Community and Faith Based Initiatives. They're working actively with community and faith based organizations around the country on supplemental services, mainly with the idea of helping more of them to become state approved providers so that there is a broader range of providers available to parents and local school districts. I think, in particular, in some of the districts that have been hard, or where parents have had a difficult time accessing providers, have more opportunities.

Susan WILHELM

Tom, I know you've had a lot of discussions with people about implementation of Supplemental Educational Services. Based on what you are hearing, what are the key factors that have to be in place in order to make Supplemental Educational Services successful?

Tom CORWIN

Okay. Well, at the local level, one thing that I've heard is very important is that there be good communication between the school district's central staff, and people in the actual schools where students are eligible to receive supplemental services. Initially, we heard situations where the central staff sent out the letters to the parents, made the arrangements with the providers, but the school's principal's and the students' teachers didn't know anything about this. And without it, the word really didn't get through to the parents. The letter home wasn't read or wasn't understood.

But, on the other hand, when the school is brought in, when the teacher and the principal see it as an important opportunity for those students, something that can help the overall educational, or achievement level of the school rise, there's been much more of a take up—much more frequent enrollment, and I think better satisfaction all around.

I mentioned outreach to parents. I think it's essential that there be a very active parental notification and outreach effort in every school district carried by this, or covered by this. As lots of parents know, I'm a parent, as I know, just a note going home in the backpack with the child doesn't always get read, doesn't always get understood. There has to be a lot more aggressive outreach to make this work. Working with community groups, going on the local media, or just getting it to the press—there's all different ways to go about it. But, I think there has to be more than just the basic minimal letter home.

And, I should also add, in so many of these districts that are covered by the supplemental services requirement, there are parents that speak many different languages, and there obviously have to be communications that are in all those different languages. I think for the states to do an active job recruiting as many providers as possible to operate in the state, and then running a rigorous, but fair approval process at the state level is very helpful. I think an active role by the state in helping both the providers and the districts work through all these different implementation issues that we've been talking about is also very important.

Susan WILHELM

Well Tom, this has been really helpful, and I hope that our viewers have also found it useful as we've hit on these key implementation issues as background. Thank you.

Tom CORWIN

Thank you, Susan.