

Combining Funding Streams to Support Prekindergarten Programs: Strategies for Administrators

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This is the second in a series of briefing papers on information and strategies for Indiana school corporations that provide prekindergarten. The first paper — *What Is the Purpose of Your Prekindergarten Program?* (Cross & Conn-Powers, 2009, September) offered practical strategies that support a decision to develop and implement a prekindergarten program. The paper provided guidelines for successful decision-making through a series of manageable steps, beginning with establishing a clear sense of the program’s purpose.

Combining Funding Streams to Support Prekindergarten Programs (Cross, 2009, October) logically follows the first paper because identifying an unambiguous program purpose is essential to securing funding. A clearly stated purpose helps programs determine which funds to seek, how to frame a funding request, how to align program activities with funders’ requirements, and how to demonstrate program success.

Combining Funding Streams to Support Prekindergarten Programs: Strategies for Administrators was written by Alice Frazier Cross of the Early Childhood Center. The mission of the Early Childhood Center is to advance the universal design of early education practices that promote school readiness for all children. The Center engages in research, program and product development, and community outreach in early education enhancing school readiness for all children. Center efforts employ universal design principles to strengthen the physical, instructional, health, and social-emotional elements of early education that helps all children and their families enter school successfully.

The work of the Indiana Institute encompasses the entire life span, from birth through older adulthood, and addresses topical areas that include:

- Early intervention
- School improvement and inclusion

The Early Childhood Center of the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community is exploring Indiana’s prekindergarten development and implementation issues identified during their recent studies.

The brief, *Is Indiana Ready for State-Sponsored Prekindergarten Programs?* (Conn-Powers, Cross, & Zapf, 2006), identified the need for research and information around purposes, goals, outcomes, service delivery options, and funding. A 2008 survey of Indiana school administrators provided additional details regarding the information areas essential to developing and implementing programs. Indiana’s prekindergarten programs are locally planned and funded, and the absence of a state-funded system inhibits efforts to inform and coordinate program development.

Of Indiana’s 293 public school corporations, only about 120 provide prekindergarten education, not including programs for the provision of state and federal early childhood special education. Indiana is one of the few states holding out on funding a system of early education.

- Transition, employment, and careers
- Aging issues
- Planning and policy studies
- Disability information and referral
- Autism spectrum disorders
- Individual and family perspectives

The Indiana Institute on Disability and Community pursues its mission with support from Indiana University and funding from federal and state agencies, and foundations. The information presented herein does not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Trustees of Indiana University, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

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Strategies That Guide the Fund-Seeking Process

Indiana school corporations are increasingly adopting prekindergarten as a means to promote children's school readiness and to sustain their learning during the early elementary grades. In Indiana and other states, funding is often the greatest challenge of establishing a local prekindergarten program. Indiana school corporations must be able to identify, evaluate, and secure flexible and sustained funding for their programs. No simple "road map" exists for seeking Indiana prekindergarten funding.

This paper assists programs, schools, and corporations by examining:

- Strategies that guide the fund-seeking process,
- Challenges, advantages, and disadvantages in combining funds,
- Most commonly used funding sources, with examples from Indiana schools, and
- Potential funding sources for Indiana programs.

The Finance Project, a national research and consulting firm, has recently published one of the most powerful documents available for identifying funds for early learning. The guide *Finding Funding* (Lind, Crocker, Stewart, Torrico, Bhat, & Schmid, 2009) presents a strategic financing approach that employs logical steps oriented by the purpose of the organization or initiative seeking resources. The guide cautions that, "for initiatives to be successful and sustainable over time . . . leaders need to avoid the pitfall of chasing dollars opportunistically" (p. 7).

The steps involved in this strategic financing approach are:

- Identifying what is to be funded,
- Estimating costs,
- Determining what resources are already in place,
- Identifying funding gaps, and
- Evaluating various funding sources.

Finding Funding may be an intimidating length, but two-thirds of its pages are appendices listing important funding resources for prekindergarten programs. The guide provides information about ways to access federal, state, local, foundation, and community resources; presents a "drill-down analyses" of formula, block, and discretionary grants; offers examples from the field listing state and local funding sources; and provides information about selected foundations and corporate giving programs.

Benefits and Challenges of Combining Funds

Survey research conducted in 2007 indicated that most Indiana prekindergarten programs rely on multiple funding sources (Cross & Conn-Powers, 2007). The strategic financing approach described above can assist programs in identifying costs and funding sources for specific program needs. For example, a local planning group may anticipate that federal Title 1 grants would be used to fund the instructional component of prekindergarten. They may also want to provide nutritious meals and snacks through the National School Lunch Program. Moreover, they might expect to use general school funding for facilities, utilities, and maintenance. Without these multiple funding streams, most programs would not be able to meet all the needs of children. This strategy for funding is called *braiding or coordination*.

Braiding varies in scope, from braiding multiple funds for classrooms in a single school to braiding multiple funding streams to support prekindergarten education across an entire school system (Flynn & Hayes, 2003). An excellent example of braiding on a large scale is described in a recent presentation by Montgomery County (Maryland) Superintendent of Schools Jerry D. Weast, Ph. D. (Weast, 2009), which relates how the school district wove Title 1 stimulus dollars with existing Head Start dollars to move from a half- to full-day program.

Braiding directs multiple funding streams to different activities. *Blending or pooling* puts two or more funding sources into one pool, a process that often requires special waivers.

Pooling is most common at the state and county levels (Flynn & Hayes, 2003, p. 5). Blending can also be achieved by “making funding streams less ‘categorical’ by removing, reducing, or aligning requirements and regulations”(p. 5).

Challenges associated with both blending and braiding strategies emerge in the following three program implementation areas (Flynn & Hayes, 2003, p. 5):

- **Eligibility requirements** — who can receive the educational services provided through one funding stream or another and how participation is managed when the program is unable to serve all eligible children. The federal McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youths program has specific criteria defining homeless children. Eligibility for the Even Start Family Literacy program is based on literacy needs.
- **Program regulations** — how each program must be implemented. In one example, Head Start requires provision of comprehensive services defined by federal performance standards.

Alternatively, Early Reading First, another federal program, supports children’s literacy and language development through application of scientifically based reading research and centers of excellence.

- **Funding flow and administration** — how the funds come to a program and how they are managed. For example, Title 1 funding moves from the federal Department of Education (DOE) to the Indiana Department of Education, from which school corporations apply for funding. Head Start agencies bypass the state level and submit applications for funds directly to the U.S. Administration for Children and Families (ACF).

Table 1 shows the benefits and challenges of combining funds by either braiding or blending. Acquiring waivers or permissions may inhibit school districts’ use of blended funding, but this approach can be a valuable strategy to meet participant, provider, and program needs. Likewise, braiding should be retained as a potential strategy even though it presents the complexity of overseeing and documenting multiple funding streams.

Table 1. Benefits and Challenges of Using Blended or Braided Funding Sources

	Benefits	Challenges
Blended funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces complexity of reporting and accounting required by diverse funders • May fund activities not allowed by categorical programs • Encourages and supports an inclusive service delivery model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevents tracking specific funds to a particular activity, service, or outcome • Generates hesitation on the part of some state or local agencies to contribute to a blended pool • Requires significant planning and policy development to reach interagency agreement prior to seeking funds
Braided funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports detailed tracking and accounting • Enhances ability to determine outcomes and success of specific programs and funding streams • Allows for integration of large funding pools while maintaining both accountability and flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires strong oversight for complex accounting • Requires attention to issues of supplementing v. supplanting of funded activities and “maintenance of effort” documentation • Encourages retention of separate v. combined programming and classrooms

(Sources: Flynn & Hayes, 2003; Koyanagi, Boudreaux, & Lind, 2003; Walker, J. L., 2009; Wat, & Gayl, 2009, July)

Blending and braiding can occur both within a school corporation (for example, when Even Start and Title 1 funds are braided) and between a corporation and one or more community providers (such as when organizations merge Title 1 and Head Start service delivery). Either of these patterns requires careful and considerable planning and communication before instruction and services begin.

Collaborators involved in blending and braiding should determine whether the increased funds would provide better educational opportunities to more children. “These partnerships integrate multiple program models and funding sources to improve quality by hiring teachers with bachelor’s degrees and by offering comprehensive health and family-support services. They also open classrooms to children from a range of income groups and expand the program day for children who need full-day, full-year care” (Stebbins & Scott, 2007, p. 3). Collaboration means abandoning competitive control of the funds and patterns of service delivery to create new instructional approaches and organizational infrastructure. This is where it is critical to have a concise, jointly developed, and agreed-on purpose. A useful document on these collaborative ventures is *Beyond the School Yard: Pre-K Collaborations with Community-Based Partners* (Wat & Gayl, 2009, July).

An example of a successful collaborative relationship in Indiana is that of the Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation and the Community Action Program of Evansville Head Start Program. This program, offered at the Daniel Wertz Early Childhood Learning Center, is guided by a carefully designed memorandum of agreement (see Figure 1). It makes use of public school facilities plus Title 1 and Head Start funding to provide an intensive full-day program for 60 children. Wat and Gayl (2009, July) suggest that collaboration can be an effective approach for enabling schools and community agencies to fund prekindergarten education in the absence of an ongoing funding stream from either the federal or state level.

Figure 1. Braiding Funds for Prekindergarten at the Daniel Wertz Early Childhood Learning Center

Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation

- Principal
- Director of Early Childhood Learning Programs
- Three licensed preschool teachers and supervision
- Three classroom spaces and playground space
- Supplies and equipment for two classrooms
- All food service and maintenance services
- Transportation for two routes

Community Action Program of Evansville

- Head Start services for children
- Supplies and equipment for one classroom
- Records, data, and reports
- Three “highly qualified” child care assistants
- One child-care director/qualified local site manager
- One floating assistant, one family advocate, one bus monitor
- Inservice development on performance standards
- Health, developmental, and socio/emotional screenings for all children
- Transportation for one route

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The Most Common Funding Sources

The place to begin hunting for funds is the federal government, which provides three of the four major funding sources for local prekindergarten programs. Grants from DOE or the ACF often serve as the core funding around which other funds are braided or blended.

The three major federal funding sources are Title 1 funds from DOE, which focus on children who are least likely to learn the content and skills needed to meet Indiana’s academic standards or to pass state proficiency tests; Even Start, also from DOE, which addresses literacy of children and families in poverty; and Head Start from ACF, which focuses on school readiness.

The fourth major source of funding for local prekindergarten programs is parent fees. Following are more detailed discussions of each funding source. There is an expanded list of funding sources included in Appendix A.

Title 1

Title 1 helps local educational agencies and schools “improve the teaching and learning of children failing, or most at-risk of failing, to meet challenging State academic achievement standards” (U.S. Government, 2009, para. 2). Title 1 is a major source of funding for state prekindergarten systems (Barnett, Epstein, Friedman, Boyd, & Husted, 2009) and for local Indiana programs, including the Cannelton school corporations. Cannelton City Schools has administered a Title 1 preschool for eight years (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Cannelton City Schools Title 1 Preschool

This preschool program is offered to children ages 3-5 who are not yet in kindergarten. Its purpose is to prepare them with the vocabulary and hands-on experiences to support literacy success. A measure of the program’s success is that students who attend and remain in the school pass the ISTEP test.

Title 1 is the primary funding source, along with resources from Even Start and the National School Lunch Program. The funding sources support early education for 30 children. Title 1 provides a certified teacher and certified teaching assistants.

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The Indiana Department of Education database of school data and Title 1 grants as well as prior prekindergarten research (Cross & Conn-Powers, 2007) indicate that an estimated 16 corporations use Title 1 to fund prekindergarten programs. A key resource for programs using Title 1 is *Serving Preschool Children Under Title 1: Non-Regulatory Guidance* (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Prospective applicants for Title 1 funding should consider both the benefits and challenges to assessing this resource. An important benefit is that Title 1 can be braided with Head Start, Even Start, and other funding to provide a full-day program with comprehensive services for prekindergarten children, as explained in *Investing Title I Funds in Pre-K* (Pre-K Now, 2009, May). The benefits of braiding Title 1 with other funds must be balanced with the challenges of recordkeeping. These include meeting requirements that the funds supplement, rather than supplant, operational budgets (Stebbins & Scott, 2007).

A unique challenge to using Title 1 for prekindergarten is the so-called “redistribution dilemma.” In Indiana, when a school district or corporation is awarded Title 1 to implement a prekindergarten program, additional funds are not offered to the corporation by the state education agency. A redistribution of the grant currently received by the school or district is required. Districts often address this task during the planning stages of a program, considering issues such as which instructional programs bring about the most benefit for the children and which are supported by research-based curricula or instructional practices.

Even Start

Even Start is a unified family literacy program that works to “break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy and improve the educational opportunities of low-income families by integrating early childhood education, adult literacy or adult basic education, and parenting education” (U.S. Government, 2009, para. 2).

Figure 3. Crawfordsville Even Start

Even Start is the primary funding source for this program, which serves 154 children ages six weeks through 5 years. Classes are held in either mornings or afternoons. The program uses an array of funds to meet its goals, including a McKinney-Vento grant for working with homeless children and community grants from a local Walmart, businesses, agencies, and service groups. The program also receives goods and services from community sources to supplement its budget.

The program is directed toward achieving specific outcomes for appropriate early childhood progress in pre-literacy and social skills and for adult academic progress and parenting skills.

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An estimated 11 Indiana school corporations use Even Start to fund family literacy (Indiana Department of Education Adult Education, 2009). One example is the Crawfordsville Even Start program (see Figure 3). The federal Office of Elementary and Secondary Education provides a key resource for programs using Even Start in its online guidelines and regulations for the William F. Goodling Even Start Family Literacy Programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, September).

As when pursuing any federal funding streams, schools must weigh the benefits and challenges of using Even Start funds. Even Start has flexible funding requirements. Funds may be used for transportation, food, materials, minor remodeling, or equipment when specific criteria are met (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, September). These resources can be used to strengthen the language and literacy skills of children and parents who do not use English as their home language. A challenge of the Even Start program is meeting requirements for attendance (for both children and their parents), home visits, and parent-teacher conferences — all of which can be complicated by families with low incomes and/or low educational attainment.

Head Start

Head Start promotes “school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of low-income children, including children on federally recognized reservations and children of migratory farm workers, through the provision of comprehensive health, educational, nutritional, social and other services; and to involve parents in their children’s learning and to help parents make progress toward their educational, literacy and employment goals. Head Start also emphasizes the significant involvement of parents in the administration of their local Head Start programs” (U.S. Government, 2009, para. 1).

Figure 4. Elkhart and St. Joseph Counties Head Start Consortium

The Head Start Consortium is made up of 11 school districts in Elkhart and St. Joseph counties. The Consortium provides inclusive morning and afternoon classes for 1,020 children ages 3½ through 5 years who are not yet eligible for kindergarten.

Head Start is the primary funding source, and the South Bend Community School Corporation is the grantee on behalf of the Consortium. Each school corporation provides special education services, facilities, maintenance, and transportation. Other funds come from the National School Lunch Program and the Child and Adult Care Food Program. The St. Joseph County Foundation provides funding for staff development, and local service organizations provide a variety of materials and support.

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In common with Title 1, Head Start is a major source of funding for state prekindergarten systems (Barnett, Epstein, Friedman, Boyd, & Hustedt, 2009) and for local Indiana programs. Indiana public school corporations provide nine Head Start programs that serve about 2,300 children (Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, undated).

One large prekindergarten program is the Elkhart and St. Joseph Counties Head Start Consortium (see Figure 4). The federal Office of Head Start website offers documents, such as the Program Performance Standards, that guide decision-making and implementation.

Among the challenges to accessing Head Start funding is the fact that these grants are not often available. For those school districts that do access these funds, the performance standards ensure a strong infrastructure and comprehensive provision of services. The integration of public school programming and Head Start services has been shown to contribute to the school readiness of participating children and families (Stebbins & Scott, 2007). But the mission and culture of public schools and Head Start programs may not merge easily (Stebbins & Scott, 2007). It is critical that administrators and teaching personnel from both organizations work to establish a common purpose before implementation begins—or risk organizational failure. Stebbins and Scott (2007) describe the challenges that need to be addressed to achieve successful collaborations of Head Start and public school programs. These include: differing missions, teacher credentials, comprehensive services, and eligibility requirements. The document, *Better Outcomes for All: Promoting Partnerships Between Head Start and State Pre-K*, offers solutions and examples from state prekindergarten systems.

Parent Fees

Assessing fees for prekindergarten is a way to provide early education without affecting funding used for other educational programs. It is also a necessary approach to funding prekindergarten when part of the population to be served does not fall within at-risk categories. A review of Indiana prekindergarten websites indicates that fees assessed fall into a wide range. Six corporations charge a range of \$25 to \$82.50 for a half-day, five-day-a-week program. The average fee is \$52.

A primary benefit of using parent fees as the main funding source for prekindergarten is the flexibility this funding source provides in designing a program to meet the needs of the children and the interests of the sponsoring school corporation. The program might, for example, adopt an educational philosophy or approach that is not based on language and literacy development but on outdoor science experiences. A secondary benefit is independence from reporting requirements associated with federal or state funding.

Figure 5. Warren Early Childhood Center

This center defines its purpose as providing “the highest quality preschool and childcare opportunities at an affordable price.” The inclusive preschool classes are two hours and 55 minutes long in the morning or afternoon. Children who attend the preschool program are able to attend wrap-around childcare.

Parent fees are the primary funding source for the project-based preschool program. Preschool fees and child care fees are assessed separately. Parents choose to have their children attend from two to five days a week. Funds for the early childhood special education teachers and assistants come from special education and general funds of the corporation. Fundraising activities provide scholarships for eight children.

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The challenge of assessing fees is that schools must increase their accounts-receivable responsibilities. Some corporations will assess and receive fees on a semester basis, but when programs charge fees on a weekly basis, a clerk or secretary may become essential. It is not a task that teachers can perform along with their instructional roles.

Conclusion: Explore Braiding to Fund Prekindergarten

The nation's struggling economy and fiscal pressure on Indiana's state government make it imperative for school corporations to pursue combined funding sources for their prekindergarten programs. Funding opportunities are available, but to access them, school corporations must be prepared to define a clear purpose for their programs, to invest time in finding appropriate funds to access, and to develop strategies to direct resources in the most effective ways to serve children.

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Appendix A

Potential Funding Sources for Indiana Programs

Following is a list of funding sources that have potential to support Indiana prekindergarten programs. Fund purposes, requirements, and availability may change at any time.

U.S. Department of Education

The programs listed in this section are found in *Guide to U.S. Department of Education Programs* (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Communications and Outreach, 2008) and in the U.S. Government's *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance* (2009). Access particular sections by clicking on the following links:

Formula Grants

1. Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Education Agencies (Title I, Part A)
2. Rural and Low-Income School Program. According to Smith, Patterson, and Doggett (2008), these funds may be combined with Title 1 to provide for children living in poverty.
3. Small, Rural School Achievement Program. According to Smith, Patterson, and Doggett (2008), these funds may be combined with Title 1 to provide for children living in poverty.
4. McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youths—Grants for State and Local Activities
5. Migrant Education — Basic State Formula Grants
6. Even Start

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/Administration for Children and Families

The programs listed in this section are found in U.S. Government's Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (2009).

Project Grants

1. Head Start

Formula Grants

1. Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)
2. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

Indiana Department of Education

Information about these programs can be found at the Indiana Department of Education website and by clicking on the links taking you directly to the source:

1. Title 1
2. Non English-Speaking Program
3. Even Start
4. Indiana Literacy Early Intervention Grant

National Funds and Corporate Giving Programs with a Focus on Early Learning and Literacy

1. The Buffett Early Childhood Fund
2. PNC Financial Services Group (Head Start Demonstration Projects in Indiana)

Indiana Community Foundations that Focus on Early Learning and Literacy

1. Indianapolis Foundation
2. Dekko Foundation
3. Central Indiana Community Fund
4. Greater Cincinnati Foundation
5. Community Foundation of Greater Fort Wayne
6. Wayne County Foundation, Inc.
7. Community Foundation of Howard County, Inc.
8. Decatur County Community Foundation, Inc.
9. Adams County Community Foundation
10. United Way of Central Indiana
11. Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust