



“Number Weighting” in the Title I Formula Explained in One Page

Marty Strange, Policy Director, Rural School and Community Trust

This paper was first published as a blog post, March 10, 2011

Blogging Through The Title I Swamp
Formula Fairness Campaign

A weighting system is used to artificially inflate the Title I student count in school districts with “high concentrations” of poverty. This objective is sound public policy, which we strongly support. However, the weighting system as implemented actually undermines this good purpose.

Under this system, each district’s eligible student count is inflated using a series of brackets in which the student count is multiplied by progressively higher weight factors, much like the federal income tax, where progressively higher levels of income are taxed at higher rates.

Two weighting systems are applied to each school district. One is based on the **percentage** of students who are Title I eligible (“percentage weighting”), and the other is based on the **number** that are eligible (“number weighting”). Whichever weighting system results in the larger student count for a given district is the one that is used for that district in the Title I formula.

The brackets in the number weighting system are designed so that over 80% of all districts do not place students above the first bracket. Most districts therefore gain nothing from number weighting. Only a small number of large districts benefit from number weighting.

Moreover, the number weighting system as designed is so much more powerful than the percentage weighting system that it completely overwhelms it.

A Congressional Research Service analysis for school year 2008-09 compared actual Title I allocations for each school district with the allocation they would have received if only percentage weighting were used. It showed over 10,700 districts with reduced funding and about 550 with increased funding due to the fact that number weighting is included in the formula.

High-poverty rural districts were among the hardest hit by number weighting. But so were modest-sized, high-poverty urban districts like Rochester, New York, Flint, Michigan, Laredo, Texas, and Bakersfield, California.

The biggest funding gains due to number weighting were, as expected, large urban districts with large numbers of eligible students. But some of the biggest funding gains were those experienced by large, **low-poverty** suburban districts like Fairfax County, Virginia, Gwinnett County, Georgia, and Jefferson County, Colorado.

This weighting system takes money from smaller districts, no matter how high their poverty rate, and sends it to larger districts, no matter how low their poverty rate.

For more information, including a searchable database showing impacts on every Title I school district in each state, go to www.formulafairness.com or contact Marty Strange, Rural School and Community Trust at marty.strange@comcast.net or 802.728.4383.