

Compensatory Education

During the 1960s a new approach called *compensatory education* was created to support access for academically underprepared and economically disadvantaged students. *Compensatory education* focuses on the individual student and the living and learning environment in which the student interacts. Proponents of this approach charge that environmental conditions, often induced by poverty, are responsible for poor academic achievement of students. Common activities of this approach include: academic preparatory work, supplemental learning enrichment activities, higher parental involvement in school, and systemic changes in the school learning environment. During the early 1960s, national civil rights legislation established the Office of Compensatory Education within the U.S. Office of Education.

Elementary and Secondary Education

Federal legislation through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and amended by the No Child Left Behind Act created a family of compensatory elementary and secondary education programs. These programs include: Head Start, Early Reading First, Education for Homeless Children and Youth, Even Start Family Literacy, and Title I. Title I (now called Chapter I) is the largest of these programs. It provides financial support through state and local education agencies to schools with either high numbers or high percentages of economically disadvantaged children. More than 50,000 schools serving about 12 million students across the U.S. use Title I funds. If 40 percent or more of the children in the school meet federal poverty guidelines, a school may offer Title I services to all students, regardless of their economic background. Some schools focus on providing supplemental reading and mathematics instruction.

Other schools focus on extending the learning environment and providing preschool, after-school, and summer bridge programs. Parental involvement is a key component.

Transition and Postsecondary Education

Concurrent with development of the aforementioned programs, compensatory education programs were created for eligible postsecondary students and those who desired to attend college. Among its provisions, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 and later the Higher Education Act of 1965, expanded access to higher education for disadvantaged students in two ways: TRIO programs and through need-based financial aid for economically-disadvantaged students (Pell and Perkins Grant Programs).

The TRIO term refers to the original “trio” of programs (Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services) funded by the federal government at hundreds of colleges to encourage access and success of previously disenfranchised students with completion of high school and graduation from college. Eligibility was limited to students who met one or more of the following characteristics: neither parent completed college, economically-disadvantaged, or eligible disability. Common grant features included academic enrichment activities, career counseling, cultural enrichment activities, and setting high expectations for college graduation. Additional TRIO programs created later were Talent Search, Student Support Services, Educational Opportunity Centers, and the Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program.

Further Readings

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