The Amesbury Public Schools utilize Title I funding to quickly intervene and provide academic supports to our youngest students, as research has shown preventative mechanisms to be more cost effective and have greater impact on student’s academic success than supports that are put in place once a student demonstrates academic failure.

During the 2008-2009 school year we once again faced financial challenges, with the needs outpacing the funding available, this required us to keep our focus on providing Early Literacy Interventions with the supports of Title I funded Reading Specialists, Reading Tutors and Kindergarten Assistants. To determine this focus, hypotheses were made, and data were collected and analyzed in several areas pertaining to Title I student achievement. Parents/guardians, teachers, and administrators carefully reviewed these data in order to inform the decisions that will be made concerning Title I program design and implementation. Monthly meetings are held for the Title I Director, Elementary Principals, and Reading Specialists to review literacy data and make course corrections in the program as needed. A very small percentage of the grant supports mathematics.

Each year as part of the needs assessment the need to support both students with direct instruction and teachers with best practices in the subject of mathematics is identified. Yet Early Literacy supports remains the districts highest priority for use of Title I funds.

There were several changes made to the Title I program this year. One was the expansion of the Title I Literacy Camp (students entering Grade 2) to students entering Grade 3 this program also provided math supports (Title I Literacy and Math Camp). These programs run for 2 weeks during the summer, the last week of July and the first week of August. The primary goal of this program is to stop “summer regression”, so that students return to school after Labor Day with the same skills they had in June. The district and community are pleased with the results this program has produced (see pie chart). The Title I grant allowed for the hiring of two 15 hour reading tutors, this has allowed the Title I program to expand to Grade 3 & 4 for the first time in many years. The reading specialist at each building directly oversees the two reading tutors and determines the instructional focus and staff assignments. The reading specialists provide supports to those students with the greatest needs.
Last spring after discussing a trend that we have seen for several years the Title I staff in collaboration with classroom teachers determined that the district’s DRA Benchmark target for Grade 1 students needed to be more rigorous as many students who score a 16 on the DRA in the Spring are identified for Title I services in the Fall of Second Grade. Therefore the district benchmark for Grade 1 reading proficiency has been determined to be DRA level 18. In order to determine the efficacy of Title I instructional practices at all grade levels, data was collected from several sources. Primarily we relied on DIBELS, DRA and Reading Street Unit assessments. We also relied on classroom teachers’ observations of student achievement, daily/weekly running records. Observations were also employed in kindergarten. This report will discuss the results of data collection from DIBELS, DRA and MCAS.

One source of data used to provide evidence of student achievement was the DIBELS (Dynamic Indicator of Early Literacy Skills). DIBELS data showed that in the spring of Kindergarten 78% of students were “Low Risk” (or Benchmark) on Letter Naming Fluency and 89% were “Low Risk” on Phonemic Segmentation Fluency. However, only 69% of Kindergarten students were “Low Risk” on Nonsense Word Fluency, as this skill requires aural and written knowledge to be utilized together this is not unexpected but will be monitored closely next year. The list of students identified for Title I services changes frequently during the kindergarten year as many students identified as “At Risk” in September have become “Low Risk” by January and other students are identified with greater need. This important practice is due to the collaboration between the Title I Teachers, classroom teachers and the Kindergarten assistants who provide small group supports for targeted skills. Data collected on grade 1 students showed that 95% were “Low Risk” on Phonemic Segmentation Fluency and 79% and 75% were “low risk” for Nonsense Word Fluency and Oral Reading Fluency respectively. Grade 1 Title I students as a whole showed growth of 30.6 sounds per minute on Nonsense Word Fluency from September to June. However, only 27% of Title I grade 1 students were “Low Risk” on Oral Reading Fluency in the spring. Data collected on grade 2 students showed that 79% read at grade level with fluency as determined by DIBELS ORF in the spring of 2009. The Title I subgroup had 4 additional students reach benchmark in ORF for the 1st time and 2 students moved from “At Risk” to “Some Risk” The Title I subgroup demonstrated a growth of 44.9 words per minute (WPM) from the beginning to the end of grade 2. Data collected on grade three students showed that 66% met the target of 110 words per minute. The Title I subgroup showed yearlong growth of 29 WPM with 29% of Title I students meeting or exceeding 110 wpm 50% of Title I students read at least 100 WPM. Data collected on grade four students showed that 75% met the target of 118 words per minute. The Title I subgroup showed yearlong growth of 27 WPM with 50% of Title I students meeting or exceeding 118 wpm 80% of Title I students read at least 100 WPM.

Another source of data used to provide evidence of student achievement was the MCAS for grade 4 Title I students. This data showed that in the spring of 2008 when the current fourth graders took the grade 3 MCAS 24% scored in the Warning category and 5% scored in Proficient. In the spring of 2009 this same group of students scored 5% in Warning and 24% in Proficient. The impact of the decision to have Title I staff work with 3rd and 4th grade students consistently this year has shown immediate results.

The impact on instruction for next year would be a stronger focus on teaching for comprehension and fluency for all students at the end of grade 1 and continuing the practice and the reflecting on the progress of students in grades 2 & 3. The number of Title I students in grade 4 is only 10% of the entire class this demonstrates that the current Title I programming is meeting the literacy needs of students early and enabling them to have the skills necessary as the content and vocabulary become more rigorous. The district K-12 writing team and the Elementary Literacy Team have both identified improved student achievement in the area of writing as a focus for next year. All elementary teachers were given the book Better Answers to read over the summer; in the fall literacy team members will facilitate book groups for primary and intermediate teachers at both elementary schools.
Because of the NRP recommendations the Amesbury Public Schools adopted Reading Street as its core program teachers and teacher assistants were trained in the use of this comprehensive program specifically to provide systematic, research based, comprehensive literacy instruction including phonemic awareness, phonics and vocabulary instruction to students in grades K-4. Sidewalk is an Intervention component of Reading Street that our Title I and Special Education teachers utilize with students who are reading significantly below grade level. One area of further investigation is to determine if the all teachers are providing phonics instruction as designed by Reading Street, it may be necessary to identify a phonics intervention for some Title I students. The data collected above have provided us with useful information. We will continue to focus instruction and professional development activities on the five areas of reading success identified by the NRP with a special emphasis for students on phonics and fluency. We will continue to provide services to eligible special education students in addition to their IEPs when applicable. We will continue using former Reading Recovery teachers as Early Literacy Specialists working with small groups of students and providing training in the NRPs recommendations for reading success to Title I Teacher assistants. Changes in the Title I program may need to be made once the Title I ARRA Grant is no longer supporting the district program and even with the addition of the Title I ARRA funding Math Coach services will need to be reduced as the regular Title I Grant was reduced.