

WHOSE SCHOOLS? OUR SCHOOLS! GET INVOLVED!

AN ACTION GUIDE FOR PARENT PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION



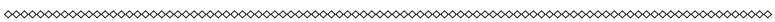
**ADVANCEMENT
= PROJECT**

Every child deserves a quality education and parents have the power to make sure that it happens. Since 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) has provided federal guidance and money to public schools (grades K-12) serving low-income students. In 2001, ESEA was changed and renamed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Although NCLB has many problems including its reliance upon standardized tests as a sole measure of student achievement, and the punishment of schools that truly need additional support, it does keep in place tools parents may use to hold schools accountable.

NCLB requires states and school districts to include parents in “regular, two-way and meaningful communication” concerning student achievement and other school activities. Parents have the right to be “full partners” in the education of their children, but few school districts have accomplished this level of parental and family participation.

Although most parents and family members know that their involvement is important to their children’s academic success, language, cultural and educational differences between them and school staff may make parents feel unwelcome and hesitant to participate in school activities. Nationally, only 32% of Black parents and 28% of Latino parents reported that they acted as volunteers or served on a committee at their children’s schools. It’s even harder for poor families and parents who may not have finished high school.

This action guide provides a summary of parental involvement rights under NCLB. Parents and family members, don’t leave your rights at the schoolhouse door! Get involved!



ABOUT THE NCLB

The NCLB is the largest federal program that supports elementary, middle and high school education. Title I of NCLB provides funding to states and school districts for programs to improve the academic achievement of all students. It is especially meant to help: low-achieving students in low-income communities; English language learners; migratory, disabled, racial/ethnic minority, neglected and delinquent students.

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States, districts and schools that receive Title I funds are required to make sure that all students receive a high quality education and are taught by qualified teachers. Title I schools must meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals for student achievement each year – which usually means that students must pass challenging state standardized tests in reading or language arts, math, and science. If schools do not meet AYP, they must work with parents and school administrators to develop a plan to improve student achievement.

UNDER NCLB, YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

1. Help develop school parental involvement policies and activities.
2. Receive and request information about student achievement and teacher qualifications in a way that is easy to understand and in your language.
3. Demand better educational opportunities for your child who is an English language learner or attends a school that needs improvement.
4. Participate in the development of state, district and school plans to improve student achievement.

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YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO: HELP DEVELOP PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT POLICIES & ACTIVITIES. (NCLB, PUBLIC LAW 107-110 SECTION 1118)

If your child’s school district or school receives Title I funds, they must involve you in developing parental involvement policies and activities. Any policy must be written in a way that is easy to understand, may be provided in languages other than English, and must describe how the school:

- will arrange annual meetings with you, at a convenient time, to inform you about the school’s Title I programs and your right to be involved;
- may provide funds for transportation, child care or home visits so that there may be more opportunities to meet with and involve you in your child’s education;
- will involve you in the planning, review and improvement of the schools educational programs;

- will provide you with timely information about Title I programs, a description and explanation of the curriculum used at the school, the forms of academic assessment used to measure student progress; and
- help you to be involved in decision-making processes by keeping you informed about student achievement and educational programs offered at the school; and providing materials and training (such as literacy training and using technology) to help you to work with your children to improve achievement.

The parental involvement policy must be made available to the local community and updated regularly to meet the changing needs of parents. In fact, the school district must evaluate the content and usefulness of the parental involvement policy each year. If you are not satisfied with the policy or the way it is being used at your child's school, you should talk with other parents and meet with school and district officials to discuss your concerns.

Finally, school districts that receive \$500,000 or more in Title I funds must reserve at least 1% of these funds for programs that will improve parental involvement, such as family literacy and parenting skills programs. You have the right to participate in decisions made by the school district about how these funds will be spent.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO: RECEIVE AND REQUEST INFORMATION ABOUT STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS. (NCLB, PUBLIC LAW 107-110 SECTION 1111)

Title I of the NCLB attempts to make it easier for parents to receive information about their children's education by requiring states and school district to provide certain information in a way that is understandable and uniform. This may be accomplished by providing information and school reports in a parent's native language, and through the use of aids (such as sign language or materials in Braille) for parents with disabilities. You are entitled to the following information:

1. Annual report cards from states, districts and schools that include student achievement data, such as test scores and graduation rates, broken down by students' race, ethnicity, disability, and ability to speak English. This information is useful in figuring out which groups of students are making progress and which are falling behind. Annual report cards can usually be found on the Internet and some school districts may also provide this information with your child's report cards. If you do not have Internet access, you may request copies of the annual report cards from your school district.
2. Information about your child's test scores on state standardized exams and a description of the curriculum used in the school; the types of tests used to measure your child's progress; and the achievement levels your child is expected to meet.
3. Information about the professional qualifications of your child's teachers and assistant teachers, and notification when your child has been assigned to or been taught for more than four weeks by an unqualified teacher.
4. Information about Title I-funded educational programs offered at your child's school. If you are not satisfied with these programs, you should send written comments to the school and school district and schedule a meeting to discuss them. You may also want to join with other parents to do these things.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO: DEMAND BETTER EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUR CHILD WHO IS AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER WHO ATTENDS A SCHOOL THAT NEEDS IMPROVEMENT. (NCLB, PUBLIC LAW 107-110, SECTIONS 1112 , 1116 AND 1117)

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

If your child is placed in a program to learn English, then the school must tell you about this placement within 30 days after the beginning of the school year. You have the right to know:

1. the reasons for placing your child in this program;
2. the test used to measure your child's ability to speak English and your child's overall academic achievement level;
3. how your child will be taught English and whether your child's native language will be used in class;
4. how the program will meet your child's needs, including preparing your child for promotion to the next grade and graduation;
5. the requirements for completing the program and moving your child into regular English language classes; and
6. if your child has a disability, how the program will meet the goals in your child's individualized education program.

If you are unhappy with this program, then you may choose other programs if they are available, and the school district must help you select one that will help your child learn English.

Also, school districts must tell parents of English language learners how you may be involved in your children's education and improve their academic achievement.

SCHOOLS IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT

Schools or districts will be identified as in need of improvement, corrective action or restructuring (e.g., state takeover) if, for two or more years in a row, schools fail to meet the state's progress goals for student achievement, also known as adequate yearly progress (AYP). If this happens, then you have the right to:

1. Receive an explanation of the reasons why your child's school has been identified for school improvement and what actions are being taken to address the problem;
2. Transfer your child to another school that has not been identified for school improvement (the school district must pay for transportation) or receive tutoring or counseling to help improve your child's achievement levels.
3. Participate in school support teams that are developed to create and monitor school plans for improving student achievement.

You should meet with your child’s school principal to find out what options are available to you.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO: PARTICIPATE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF STATE, DISTRICT AND SCHOOL PLANS TO IMPROVE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT. (NCLB, PUBLIC LAW 107-110, SECTIONS 1111, 1112, AND 1116)

States and school districts are required to consult with parents and school administrators during the development of a Title I plans for improving student achievement. This plan must describe:

- how the school district will assist low-achieving students;
- the types of high-quality tests that will be used to measure students’ achievement;
- how Title I funds will be distributed and the types of programs that will be funded;
- how children who are most in need will be identified for additional educational services;
- actions the school district will take to help low-achieving students in schools identified as in need of improvement, how it will provide additional educational assistance to these students, and a choice of transferring students to another school;
- a parental involvement policy that explains how the school district will: include parents in school improvement processes, provide technical assistance to schools in the planning and use of parental involvement activities to improve student performance, and conduct an annual evaluation of and revisions to the parental involvement policy.

States and school districts must review and, if necessary, make changes to Title I plans. You should request a copy of these plans and if you do not agree with them, you should submit written comments to school districts and the state department of education and schedule meetings to discuss your concerns.

WHAT CAN YOU DO IF YOUR RIGHTS HAVE BEEN VIOLATED? (CODE OF FEDERAL REGULATIONS, 34 C.F.R. 299.10-11)

Title I regulations require states to set up a complaint procedure for individuals or organizations who believe that the state, school districts, or schools have violated NCLB requirements. School districts must distribute, free of charge, information about this complaint process. If you believe that your parental involvement rights have been violated, ask your state department of education or school district how you may file a complaint.

RESOURCES

Deborah Meier and George Wood, (2004). *Many Children Left Behind Act is Damaging Our Children and Our Schools*, Beacon Press, <http://www.forumforeducation.org/resources/index.php?id=9>

Kauffman, Albert and Losen, Daniel J. (2004) *NCLB Resource Guide*. Cambridge MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University. <http://www.civilrightsproject.org>.

National Education Association (NEA), *Getting Involved In Your Child's Education*, <http://www.nea.org/parents/index.html>

Advancement Project is a policy and legal action organization that advances universal opportunity and a racially just democracy. Advancement Project supports community organizations in their struggles for racial and social justice by providing policy and legal research support and communication strategies.

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