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SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT LEAVE: PROVIDING LEAVE FOR PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

One of the most important factors in school performance is parental involvement.⁵ However, many parents do not have the flexibility in their work schedules or the leave policies necessary to attend school functions. As a result, legislators are creating policies to address this issue.

WHAT IS SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT LEAVE AND WHY IS IT A POLICY ISSUE?

School involvement leave policies provide parents with short-term, job-protected time away from the workplace to attend parent-teacher conferences or other school-related events. Family leave that addresses parental involvement in education is a policy issue for several reasons:

- **Worker concern.** Fully 92% of American workers feel that they have insufficient flexibility in their work schedules to take care of their family needs, including their children's education.⁴
- **Disparity among wage earners.** Low-wage workers have less access to flexible schedules, short-term leave, or paid time off.^{2, 4} At the same time, children of low-income families tend to need greater educational support.^{3, 4}
- **Changing workforce.** The majority (70%) of families with children are headed by two employed adults or by a single working guardian.⁷ In addition, these dual-earner families' work hours have increased, leaving less time for family concerns.⁴
- **Research on school performance.** Parental involvement is associated with better performance in language and mathematics, as well as social development, and appears to decrease dropout rates.^{5, 6}

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT LEAVE POLICIES?

Proponents of school involvement leave cite several benefits of these policies.

FOR FAMILIES:

- **School success.** Research shows that parental involvement in a child's education enhances academic achievement and reduces dropout rates.^{1, 5, 6}
- **Stress reduction and better health.** Families that have greater flexibility in their work schedules to meet both their work and family needs report a reduction in mental and physical health concerns and an increase in sense of competence at work and home.^{2, 8}

FOR BUSINESS:

- **Reduced absenteeism.** Two-thirds (66%) of U.S. workers report using unscheduled sick leave for personal or family reasons. These absences cost companies millions in direct payroll costs and even more when lower productivity and lost revenue are considered.³
- **Retention.** Employees cite work-life balance as the second most important reason for staying on jobs that allow such balance.⁸
- **Reduction in health-care costs and increased productivity.** Employees who feel that they are able to balance work and family responsibilities report a reduction in stress-related illnesses. This fact results in a reduction in health-care costs for employers and an overall increase in productivity.^{2, 8}
- **Future workforce.** When students succeed in school, this success not only benefits the family but also results in a better-educated future workforce.⁸

"PARENTS SHOULD NEVER HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN THEIR CHILD'S FUTURE AND PUTTING FOOD ON THE TABLE. NO PARENT SHOULD BE PREVENTED FROM GETTING INVOLVED IN THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION BECAUSE THEY FEAR LOSING THEIR JOB OR PAY SIMPLY FOR LEAVING WORK TO CARE FOR THEIR CHILD'S EDUCATIONAL NEEDS. IT HAS BEEN PROVEN OVER AND OVER AGAIN THAT A CHILD'S SUCCESS IS LARGELY DEPENDENT ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT. WE NEED TO SUPPORT THE FUTURE OF OUR CHILDREN BY SUPPORTING WORKING PARENTS."

— NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLYMAN JOEL M. MILLER ON AB 6705, NO PARENT LEFT OUTSIDE.



WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS ABOUT SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT LEAVE POLICIES?

Opponents of school involvement leave state that this legislation is an example of “a solution in search of a problem.”⁹ They argue that 88% of employers already allow employees to take time off for school functions⁴ and that to increase government mandates in this area would only result in:

- *Greater costs in replacement labor.* Businesses express concern that more mandated leave policies will result in more costs in finding temporary employees or paying overtime to existing employees.
- *Greater administrative costs and burdens.* Small businesses state that short-term leave is cumbersome to track due to the difficulty in managing small increments of time. This results in greater costs in time and labor to administer these policies.⁹
- *Greater legal costs.* Businesses argue that more government regulation requires more legal aid to guarantee compliance to avoid expensive lawsuits.
- *Lower productivity.* Employers are concerned that disruptions in critical operations due to being short staffed will affect productivity.¹¹

WHAT POLICIES HAVE BEEN ENACTED OR PROPOSED TO ADDRESS SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT LEAVE?

No federal policies currently exist to address school involvement leave. However, the Family and Medical Leave Enhancement Act of 2009 (HR 824) was introduced in February. HR 824 would amend the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) to include parental involvement leave to attend school activities or accompany a child to doctors’ appointments.

CURRENT STATUTES:

Twelve states and the District of Columbia have adopted school involvement leave laws (CA, DC, HI, IL, LA, MA, MN, NC, NV, RI, TN, TX, VT).¹ These statutes vary in how much time may be allocated for school involvement leave per year, whether this leave is paid or unpaid, whether the leave is for state employees only or extends to all working parents, and whether this leave is grouped with other types of family leave such as doctors’ appointments.

LEGISLATION BEING CONSIDERED:

Fourteen states have introduced school involvement leave bills during the 2009–2010 legislative session. These bills relate to either paid (IN, LA, NM, OK, SC, WV) or unpaid (CO, GA, NJ, NV, NY, OR, WI, TX) leave and provide:

- Leave for any school activity (CO, NJ, NM, NV, NY, OR, SC, WI)
- Leave for school conferences only (IN, OK, WV)
- Leave for school meetings for children enrolled in special education (TX)
- Leave for both school activities and routine medical visits or family care (NJ, NM)
- Leave for both school conferences and medical appointments for employees and their family members (GA)
- Tax credits to employers who provide paid school involvement leave (IN, LA, SC)

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

The following resources about school involvement leave might also be of interest to you:

A Better Balance: The Work and Family Legal Center — <http://abetterbalance.org/cms/>

- A Better Balance works to promote equality and expand choices for men and women at all income levels so they may care for their families without sacrificing their economic security. A Better Balance employs a range of legal strategies to promote flexible workplace policies, end discrimination against caregivers, and value the work of caring for families.

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) — <http://www.clasp.org/>

- CLASP conducts cutting-edge research, provides insightful policy analysis, advocates at the federal and state levels, and offers information and technical assistance on a range of family policy and equal justice issues for their audience of federal, state, and local policy makers; advocates; researchers; and the media.

The National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB) — <http://www.nfib.com/page/home>

- The National Federation of Independent Business is the nation's leading small business association, with offices in Washington, DC, and all 50 state capitals. NFIB's powerful network of grassroots activists sends their views directly to state and federal lawmakers through their unique member-only ballot, thus playing a critical role in supporting America's free-enterprise system.

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