

IT TAKES A NORTH CAROLINA PARENT:

Transforming Education Under the No Child Left Behind Act



*Recommendations Regarding the
Vital Role of Parents and Guardians
in Achieving Student and School Success*

Appleseed



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Betsy Cavendish, Appleseed Executive Director

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It takes

a parent

It Takes A North Carolina Parent: Transforming Education Under the No Child Left Behind Act

Executive Summary

In 2001, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), a federal law, was enacted with the lofty goal of radically improving K-12 student achievement across the nation. The legislation, while dense and complex, acknowledges that schools alone are not the sole creators of student success, and stresses parent involvement as a key ingredient to student achievement.

A plethora of social science data supports the notion that increased parent involvement boosts student achievement. It is almost universally agreed that in successful schools parents are informed about curricula in their child's classrooms, regularly updated on their child's performance relative to their peers, and in general are presented with understandable and timely information. In addition, parents are encouraged to cultivate involvement in important decisions that affect learning.

Connected parents also maintain formal and informal communication channels with administrators, teachers and fellow parents. Although this report uses the word "parents" in describing the caregivers for children, the word is meant to encompass any adult who plays an equivalent role in a student's life. That could be a grandparent, an aunt or uncle, foster parents, a friend, a single parent or other circumstance involving a loving, family-style relationship.

North Carolina has a national reputation for being innovative and progressive in its approach to education. Appleseed's state-specific report is a follow-up to the groundbreaking national report released in 2006, called, "It Takes A Parent: Transforming Education in the Wake of the No Child Left Behind Act." While this entry concentrates exclusively on North Carolina, it is no less rigorous, no less important and no less timely than its predecessor. In fact, with the potential reauthorization of NCLB in 2008 remaining on Congress's agenda, this assessment arrives at a pivotal moment and can serve as a springboard for increased local action while reminding national policymakers of work left to be done.

NCLB set out to redefine the relationship between public schools and parents by providing the legal and policy foundation for parent involvement to be viewed as integral to public school education. The federal law seeks to promote relationships with families as a priority for public schools in North Carolina and across the nation. Essentially, lawmakers have asserted that because of NCLB, parents will know their child's academic strengths and weaknesses, how well schools are performing and the legal and policy options available to help their child – particularly if he or she attends a school in need of improvement.

Executive Summary Cont'd

Parents are undoubtedly a pivotal part of clearing the accountability hurdle that faces struggling schools. While parent involvement is admittedly difficult in some communities, if school officials were to more fully embrace parent participation as an improvement strategy, that investment could bolster other in-school and out-of-school efforts. And because of the proven results, parent involvement is even more crucial for students in poverty.

In North Carolina, Appleseed used most of the same techniques it did for the national effort. Appleseed convened parent on-site focus groups and also conducted interviews with community organization leaders and public school administrators. This report is based on research involving school districts within three North Carolina counties. While having a North Carolina local flavor, the findings and recommendations are congruent with, and build upon, the earlier national work.

The purpose of parent focus groups was to better understand how parents are involved in their child's education, to gain a sense of their understanding of the NCLB legislation and to pinpoint areas of strength and areas requiring improvement. Community organization interviews helped Appleseed gather an outside perspective on parent involvement. Administrators were interviewed to identify current parent involvement policies and to understand the perspectives of schools in trying to promote parent involvement.

A further reason for the research was to identify parent involvement approaches that are currently effective and to understand how schools using these approaches go about communicating and collaborating with their parent constituents. The North Carolina report differs from the national report in two respects: (1) The national report was based on findings from six states: Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, New Mexico, Texas and Washington State; (2) Fewer state officials were interviewed in North Carolina.

Based on its research and interviews, Appleseed has made four major findings:

- 1. External Barriers:** Low socioeconomic status, limited English proficiency (LEP) and varying cultural expectations are among the significant obstacles to parent involvement.
- 2. Communications Gap:** Some parents typically do not receive enough information about their student's progress nor about school-, district- or state-level parent involvement policy.
- 3. Information Unclear and Untimely:** No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation is rarely explained to parents in simple, straightforward terms, and parents do not receive test results in a timely way so they can make choices afforded by the law.
- 4. Parents Do Not Feel Welcome:** Some parents report feeling alienated by their child's schools and therefore believe they have little say in important educational decisions affecting their child. That sentiment is especially true in the middle and high school grades.

Our recommendations to address these findings encompass four major themes:

1. North Carolina school districts, individual school buildings, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the federal government must financially support and implement outreach initiatives to engage parents in poverty and parents who have limited proficiency in English.
2. Schools, states and community organizations need to adopt a more proactive posture and more creative outreach in school-parent communication. Schools must view parents as partners in the education process and demonstrate appreciation for parent advocacy that supports their work as educators.
3. The federal government, the state of North Carolina, districts and schools must disseminate NCLB progress results in a clear and timely way, must provide parents with child-specific progress and must inform parents of how to take action in response to the information.
4. Schools need to cultivate a warm, welcoming and collaborative environment where parents feel confident in their ability to approach teachers and administrators with any questions or concerns.

In sum, this report highlights for policy makers and educators how parent involvement can play a significant role in improving educational opportunities and outcomes for students. By presenting the direct perspectives of parents, community organization leaders and administrators, providing “positive and promising practices” and explaining the reasons behind the recommendations, Applesseed hopes parents and schools will gain a better understanding of current practices around the state, take stock of practices within their own schools and initiate the necessary steps to fulfill the vision NCLB and local schools as partnership enterprises.

...Tried offering food for parents during meetings, obtained bus passes for them, used telephone tree coordinators, and tried bringing meetings to neighborhoods and churches. Yet, she just can't get a significant number of parents to attend or care.

– A North Carolina administrator





Introduction

Parent involvement is widely acknowledged as a central component in both overall school success and the academic success of individual children. Recognizing this, the federal No Child Left Behind Act mandates that states, districts and schools make extraordinary efforts to enhance effective parent involvement. Now, more than six years after the landmark legislation began, parent involvement is still lagging significantly behind optimal levels in many schools and districts. This North Carolina account – which follows a 2006 Applesseed report on parent involvement in six states across the country – describes the knowledge and views of parents, community organization leaders and administrators within three County school districts in North Carolina.

In essence, parent involvement comes in two distinct forms: What a parent does at home to increase learning and what a parent does in concert with the school or inside the school building to help create an even stronger learning climate. Student success is a shared responsibility and both home and school efforts are vitally important. Yet, NCLB places the legal obligation with school districts to provide timely, accurate, clear and honest information and to establish sincere, precise and convenient mechanisms for parents to contribute in a meaningful way to improvement efforts. For that reason, we have focused on the school part of the parent involvement equation.

While laminating student artwork at an elementary school or taking tickets at a high school sports event certainly qualify as parent involvement, NCLB has grander expectations. It portrays parents as information consumers who understand the academic position of their child and their child's school and have an active voice in school improvement efforts. That mandate remains true regardless of whether the school is high-performing or low-performing. But for schools that persistently fall short of academic benchmarks, parents can be important allies in turnaround attempts.

To its credit, North Carolina has a legal framework that reinforces the importance of parent/school interactions. For example, a state law provides that employers must grant parents or guardians a total of four hours of leave annually to “attend or otherwise be involved at” a K-12 public school.¹ Further, North Carolina requires each school, regardless of achievement level, to develop a school improvement plan and team. Parents are required members of the school improvement team, and by law “shall reflect the racial and socioeconomic composition of the students enrolled in that school.”²

But parents report that the law is frequently treated as a formality honored more in the breach than in the observance. Employers frequently do not inform workers of their right to parent involvement leave or will deny it on a whim. Because parent participation is unpaid leave, some of the poorest employees cannot afford to partake. In the perfectly understandable scurry to comply with all of the mandates, schools sometimes do not assemble the state-mandated school improvement team, or the team is isolated from the key decision making process. In short, neither employers, parents nor the school system have become vested in parent involvement as a priority and a legitimate strategy for helping students do better in class.

¹ See Chapter 95-28.3 of North Carolina General Statutes.

² See Chapter 115C-105.27 of North Carolina General Statutes.



Introduction Cont'd

In addition, this report highlights an interesting disconnect between the perspectives of parents and the perspectives of administrators, school board members and others inside the education operation. Opinions are at times diametrically opposite on precisely the same subject. For example, administrators say they are good about getting out information to parents, while parents claim they do not receive enough information or background and it is not clearly presented. The General Assembly in North Carolina recognized the communication problem and sought to do something about it. Elected officials appropriated funding to the North Carolina Parent Teacher Association (PTA) to hire professionals, and they bolster the efforts of volunteers in 12 targeted schools. PTA employs strategies that have been proven effective, such as home visits.

Parent involvement is not a silver bullet, and it is not always easy. Parents have busy lives and sometimes do not properly value the need for their participation. As well, some parents wish to hover around their children or to prompt confrontations with school officials, rather than solve problems and create improvements for all. While admittedly that is a part of the day-to-day reality of school officials, policies and practices must be built around the majority of parents – those who are cooperative and eager to see their child reach his or her full potential.

This report focuses on four major findings, and subsequent recommendations, for education leaders and policymakers:

External Barriers: Low socioeconomic status, limited English proficiency (LEP) and varying cultural expectations are among the significant obstacles to parent involvement.

Communications Gap: Some parents typically do not receive enough information about their student's progress nor about school-, district- or state-level parent involvement policy.

Information Unclear and Untimely: No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation is rarely explained to parents in simple, straightforward terms, and parents do not receive test results in a timely way so they can make choices afforded by the law.

Parents Do Not Feel Welcome: Some parents report feeling alienated by their child's schools and therefore believe they have little say in important educational decisions affecting their child. That sense is especially true in the middle and high school years.

METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

This report is based on information garnered from parent focus groups, community organization leader and administrator interviews from three County school districts in North Carolina, as well as research on issues currently influencing parent involvement. It also incorporates research on positive and promising examples of effective parent involvement practices. Overall, in the 2005-2006 school year, 45.7 percent of North Carolina's 2,343 schools met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Furthermore, during

this same year, 49.7 percent, or 1,165 schools³ were Title I schools, meaning they received federal funds earmarked for improving academic achievement.

The focus groups were designed to better understand how parents are involved in their child's education, what they know about the No Child Left Behind legislation, and if they perceive this legislation to have had any impact on their child's education or their participation in their child's education.⁴ Through community organization and administrator interviews we garnered individual perspectives, data and information on the state's and the district's roles in promoting effective parent involvement. Administrators also shared observations about the relative success of districts and schools in promoting effective parent involvement. We also identify promising practices that effectively communicate information that parents expressed an interest in receiving.

We convened six focus groups of parents over a two-month period in 2007. Parent focus groups within the three counties yielded important information regarding parent concerns about, as well as praises for, the current state of parent involvement opportunities in their child's schools, and how this relates to NCLB. Community organization leaders were interviewed to glean their knowledge and perspective on parent involvement practices.

Finally, this report also includes examples from across the country and North Carolina of positive and promising practices to advance parent involvement. These are not necessarily applicable to all situations, but are useful reference points for education leaders and policymakers to consider.



³ <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/federalprograms/csprpartII.pdf>

⁴ Appleseed parent focus group protocol.





Findings and Recommendations

Finding 1, External Barriers: Low socioeconomic status, limited English proficiency (LEP) and varying cultural expectations are among the significant obstacles to parent involvement.

Parents report that economically poor families and parents with limited English proficiency are at a disadvantage in accessing information on their child's progress, school policies and in general communicating with teachers or administrators. Parents believe that some key information is not available in languages other than English. Parents also said dire financial circumstances and demanding work schedules prevented them from attending parent-teacher conferences and other school events.

Perspectives of parents and community organization leaders

Some key information is not available in other languages: While some information is available in multi-lingual formats (e.g., school handbook, notices for school- and PTA-initiated activities), parents observed that other key information is either not available, difficult to access or not readily provided in various languages (especially non-Spanish languages). This may create a barrier for many limited English-speaking parents who wish to stay informed about their child's progress and participate in parent activities. The information vacuum has at times led to feelings of alienation and exclusion, causing many LEP parents to "not feel served," as one parent put it, thereby limiting their parent involvement.

Achievement gaps involving minority and LEP student populations not presented adequately: Much of the information given related to academic achievement gaps involving minority populations is limited and does not fully inform parents about problems.

Inflexible work environments and having to work multiple jobs foreclose parent involvement: While parents must be held accountable for participating in their child's education, they pointed to challenges that make it difficult. They spoke of such barriers as working multiple jobs to make ends meet, transportation issues and difficulty in getting time off as reasons for not doing more.

Perspectives of administrators

Language barriers need to be addressed: Given the high proportion of LEP parents in a number of communities, addressing language barriers should be a priority item to help school districts enhance parent involvement. For example, one director of special services noted that 50 different languages were represented in his district. By addressing this issue, administrators demonstrate their commitment to fostering a parent-school partnership. Thus, schools save time in explaining details of the legislation by understanding how to most effectively communicate with parents in the community. Multi-cultural inclusion imposes extra costs for schools for such services as translating materials and hiring interpreters; still, the benefits are well worth the investment.



Findings and Recommendations Cont'd

Recommendation 1: North Carolina school districts, individual school buildings, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the federal government must financially support and implement outreach initiatives to engage parents in poverty and parents with limited English proficiency.

Schools should:

Target The Languages Spoken Within Each School District: Bilingual teachers and other professionals may not exist in sufficient number to meet the high demands of immigrant or non-English speaking families. Multi-lingual parent coordinators in schools and translation headphones may be two effective alternatives.

Translate Written Materials At Meetings: One of the biggest deterrents preventing immigrant and non-English speaking families from attending parent-teacher conferences or other school events is the communication barrier. Therefore, having translated documents available to parents at these meetings is a useful tool for schools that do not have interpreters. These written materials should outline important points covered in the meeting or at the event, and by doing so will serve as a valuable reference for parents to take home and also to distribute to those who could not attend.

Include Parent Involvement In Principal Evaluations: Building principal evaluations could potentially include an assessment of the administrator's parent engagement strategies. Feedback from parents, for example, about how effectively principals guide teachers and connect with parents could be an involvement strategy. By making parent involvement a criterion for job evaluation, a school system sends a message about its value as an educational priority.

Community Organizations Should:

Train Parents As Advocates: This is an important step to instill parents with the confidence to successfully improve their child's school outcomes.

Create Partnerships Between Schools, The PTA, And Community Organizations: Community organizations, including faith-based groups, may be a way for schools and under-served parents to connect. Community organizations are trusted entities within the community and can serve as a bridge to the school district. In addition, community groups bring their own resources and expertise to help in other ways.

Develop Outreach Programs In Non-Conventional Settings: As one community organization leader explained, "If we really want [parents] to be involved, we have to go to them." For example, this can

involve parent group discussions at local coffee shops or school district kiosks at malls or supermarkets.⁵ School officials should also consider home visits and other creative ideas.

Make Outreach Initiatives Personal: It is important that communication with parents be personal and comfortable. It is especially effective to connect newcomers with other parents and educators who share similar economic and/or cultural backgrounds. One way is to have a person designated to the task.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the U.S. Department of Education should:

Promote Professional Development and Pre-Job Training: The North Carolina department of public instruction and federal government should provide funding and create opportunities for professional development of administrators and teachers, with a particular emphasis on helping current teachers and administrators reach parents with limited English proficiency and parents from foreign cultures. A curriculum should also be developed for aspiring teachers and principals as part of acquiring their certification.

Provide Resources And Services To Parents: One of the biggest barriers to parent involvement includes long job hours and home responsibilities that supersede getting involved with their child's schools.⁶ One way to address these concerns is to have activities at various times of the day and evening and during weekends, and to include child care services, transportation funding and food.

Finding 2, Communications Gap: Parents typically do not receive enough information about school-, district- or state-level parent involvement policy.

In order for parents to successfully be involved with their child's academic performance, they must receive detailed information in a timely fashion. Parents generally expressed frustration with being unaware of parent involvement policy and receiving test results long after their child took the exam. By contrast, administrators agreed that schools collect and provide sufficient, even detailed information on performance and compliance, and distribute it in an effective manner.

Perspectives of parents and community organization leaders

Information should be timelier: Parents said they learn pivotal information too late to exercise the tutoring (supplemental educational services) or school selection (choice) options provided by NCLB. For instance, although assessments provide useful information regarding a child's abilities, the exams are not always processed and distributed in a timely way. The time lag causes parents to receive their child's test scores sometimes more than six months after tests were taken. This limits both parents'

⁵ Wan, Willam (2008, February 24). At Mall, Multilingual Outreach: Kiosk Adds to Ways Schools Offer Aid to Foreign-Born Parents. Retrieved February 27, 2008 from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/23/AR2008022301984.html> (An article about one county's effort to communicate with parents at a local mall by giving out an assortment of flyers in six different languages that address a number of topics ranging from "how to help your child with math homework to how to sign up for news alert e-mails in Spanish or French.")

⁶ "Given a list of concerns that might impede parent involvement in schools, schools indicated to what extent they perceived that each was a barrier. Among the parent-centered barriers, the highest percentage of schools perceived lack of time on the part of parents as a barrier to a great or moderate extent (87 percent)." U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/frss/publications/98032/index.asp?sectionID=7>



Findings and Recommendations Cont'd

ability to assess where their children currently stand, as well as their ability to develop improvement strategies and solutions along with teachers. Further, since the right to transfer to another higher-performing school and the right to free tutoring are both pegged to test scores, this right can be essentially nullified if test scores are unavailable for long periods.

Perspectives of administrators and board members

Parents need to want information, and want to act upon it: Many administrators said districts cannot force parents to be involved with their child's education. One school board member stated, "The School Board cannot 'want' parental involvement more than the parents." The fact remains, however, that school districts, in order to be truly effective, must provide access to information, create opportunities to explain the information and to some degree take the lead in encouraging parent involvement. Schools must earnestly address the fact that part of their role as educators is to actively include parents in a child's education.

Recommendation 2: Schools, states and community organizations must encourage more frequent parent-teacher communication. Schools must view parents as partners in the education process, reward parent advocacy and provide incentives for increased parent involvement.

Schools Should:

Better Publicize Information About Parent Involvement Policy: Many of the parents reported that they did not recall receiving or seeing the school or district-wide parent involvement policy. Parents certainly need to focus more closely on information being sent home by schools, but school districts in turn also need to place greater emphasis on getting the word out in creative and memorable ways. **Recognize Exceptional Parents:** While parents may gain self-fulfillment from helping their children and becoming involved in their child's schools, it is important to recognize parents who are outstanding. Recognizing and/or rewarding exceptional parent practices will motivate these parents to continue their involvement, and provide an example for other parents to follow. See, e.g. Maryland's Parent Involvement Matters Award under Positive and Promising Practices, Appendix, Section A (Page 25).

Community Organizations Should:

Hold Parent Meetings And Local Gatherings: Community organizations are often effective at fostering welcoming environments and providing support to parents. Specifically, parents who are limited in English proficiency or who are economically disadvantaged may feel intimidated by schools

and not connected to teachers. Community organizations are well-suited to help parents be good advocates for their children. By holding parent meetings and informal local gatherings, community organizations can inform parents of their schools' parent involvement policies, encourage parents to become involved, talk about test data and what it means and bridge communication with schools by inviting school officials and/or teachers to such gatherings.

Finding 3, Information Unclear and Untimely: No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation is rarely explained to parents in simple, straightforward terms, and parents do not receive test results in a timely way so they can make choices afforded by the law.

Parents across North Carolina were vague in their understanding of the No Child Left Behind Act. For instance, the terms AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) and SES (Supplemental Educational Services) were unfamiliar to many. Most parents reported finding the information they receive confusing or singularly unhelpful because of the "dense" presentation. Other parents said they were bombarded with data but yet were uncertain how to interpret what they received, how it relates to the big picture and how they should respond.

Likewise, some parents objected to the practice of putting information exclusively on the Internet, since some parents lack Internet access, do not speak English or have scant knowledge of this technology.

No formal introduction or explanation of NCLB: A number of parents said the NCLB school report card is not explained in a clear and concise manner. The result is a hesitant consensus that NCLB has a negative impact on their children. Among their impressions: NCLB legislation focuses exclusively on tests, thereby causing the school experience to become "less lovable"; this focus on test performance leads instructors to emphasize test-taking skills rather than encouraging learning for learning's sake; and NCLB diminishes other subjects such as music and arts and vocational education.

Conflicting information presented: Many parents do not fully understand why the available information is contradictory. For example, schools may be receiving overall scores by one measure that is seemingly quite low, while simultaneously being lauded as a school of distinction or a school of excellence. Both are factually accurate, because two different accountability systems apply: one by the state of North Carolina and the other separately compiled for reporting to the federal government under NCLB. But it is nonetheless confusing. In receiving these admittedly mixed messages, many parents feel either discouraged and/or uncertain about when and how they should get involved in certain dynamics within their child's school.

Lack of familiarity with Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and Supplemental Educational Services (SES): The terms, AYP and SES were unfamiliar to many parents. In general, some (but not all) parents were aware that meeting AYP was important, and that the term was connected to NCLB. But most



Findings and Recommendations Cont'd

parents did not know the consequences of failing to meet AYP. Furthermore, only a handful of parents had a clear idea of what SES is, and what services are provided. Parents reported never being informed about, or offered, any school-initiated information sessions on this topic. Overall, many parents felt that as a general rule, the NCLB-created parents' rights are not clearly communicated.

Perspectives of administrators

Backlash toward mandated tests that do not support a growth model: Administrators discussed NCLB's failure to measure progress on a per-child basis, since North Carolina is accustomed to its own state-based growth model. They said parents become frustrated with NCLB's mandated testing that lacks individual child progress. Furthermore, administrators noted that many parents do not comprehend the difference between NCLB's grade model (which tests different groups of children each year by focusing on results by grade level) and North Carolina's growth model (which seeks to track the progress of individual students as they move grade-to-grade). The distinction creates further confusion. Despite the backlash from parents, administrators said they believe NCLB tests are good, but that implementation has been challenging.

School Transfer: School administrators tend to assume that if a child remains at a school that failed to meet AYP that the parent made a conscious choice and must approve of the school's practices. To the contrary, parents report being unaware of the option of school transfer, or unable to transfer their child to a higher performing school due to transportation concerns or other reasons.

Recommendation 3: The federal government, the state of North Carolina, school districts and schools must disseminate NCLB progress results in a clear and timely way, must provide parents with child-specific progress and must inform parents of how to take action in response to the information.

Schools Should:

Simplify Presentation Of Information: Specifically, information provided about assessment results should be presented in a straightforward manner, without the use of jargon. That way, parents can easily determine how their child is performing and how that progress compares to other students. Furthermore, information should be presented in easy-to-digest charts and graphs so parents can visually see differences in a clear format.

Explain Individual Child Test Performance And What It Measures: One parent stated, "While parents have a hard time figuring out what charts really mean, it could be very helpful to provide parents with a letter that says: your child is here, this is where your child should be,

and where your child isn't." Parents universally agreed that it would be useful if information was presented in a simplified child-specific manner. It is important that educators explain how children perform on tests, what the tests measure, and why they are important so that parents recognize how to use the results in a proactive way, rather than feeling paralyzed by the complicated presentation.

Provide Consistent, Timely Flow Of Information: It is important that test results be verified as accurate. But delays in scoring by the test-maker, and verification procedures at the state, district and individual school, could result in a long time lag. Scores should be reported as soon as possible so parents and teachers know where a child stands. This will allow parents to take action to address areas of academic difficulty and permit teachers to plan targeted assistance properly for the following year.

Community Organizations Should:

Disseminate The Most Pertinent Information: Many community organization leaders agreed that it is important to stress the ways in which school curricula and NCLB are relevant to a child's future success. For parents who have had a bad experience in school, it is particularly vital to emphasize the link between high academic achievement and getting a decent job. Also, with community group encouragement, parents can find peer support in interpreting scores and determining next steps. Community organizations can play a key role in this process.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the U.S. Department of Education Should:

Provide An Accessible, Clear, And Comprehensive Explanation Of NCLB: Currently, much of the information presented about NCLB is confusing, primarily data-driven, and only available on government websites, which are not universally accessible for all parents. This is often not an effective means of educating parents about the policy and process behind NCLB. Therefore, information explaining the meaning of standardized tests and their intended purpose should be presented by the Department of Public Instruction and the U.S. Department of Education in a simple and clear, yet thorough way.⁷

Focus On A Growth Model: North Carolina at present implements a state accountability system that follows a growth model approach. Many parents said this approach more effectively evaluates their child, as it uses the individual as a base for comparison rather than other children. It also pinpoints areas where a child has improved and where achievement has decreased. Parents almost unanimously agreed that the growth model of student evaluation is more effective and useful in understanding how their child is progressing.

⁷ U.S. Department of Education (June 2003). *No Child Left Behind: A Parents Guide*. Retrieved March 20, 2008 from www.ed.gov/parents/academic/involve/nclbguide/parentsguide.pdf. The U.S. Department of Education has in fact put together a guide for parents, intended to provide them with information about NCLB, summarizing the main stipulations behind the law, providing answers to frequently asked questions, and pointing parents in the direction of accessing additional resources. However, the document is still 44 pages long, which in itself may be too long for the average parent to peruse.



Findings and Recommendations Cont'd

Finding 4, Parents Do Not Feel Welcome: Parents report feeling alienated by their child's schools and therefore believe they have little say in important educational decisions affecting their child. That is especially true in the middle and high school years.

Overall, parents across North Carolina expressed frustration over what appeared to them as cold and unwelcoming school environments. The trouble only increased in the later school years. The frequency of communication was far less in middle school and even slimmer during the student's high school era. Parents who had faced negative school experiences themselves were particularly prone to view schools as intimidating.

Perspectives of parents and community organization leaders

School is an unknown: Most of the parents participating in the focus groups were active participants in their child's school. They noted, however, that some parents hesitated because they felt intimidated by a school system and culture they did not understand. The general parent sentiment was summed up in one comment: "A lot of the time, parents feel that they don't want to come in [to school] because they didn't have a good experience in school, so they are intimidated by the system. They think the communication jargon is so complex that they don't know what [educators are] talking about."

In addition, focus group participants seemed to agree that parents do not feel welcomed by school staff and that their communication skills (even first-language English speakers) may not be up to par. This prompts a fear that teachers may not respect them and may look down on them. Furthermore, many parents voiced their feeling that often teachers mandate or dictate rather than incorporate parent input. Also, parents cited lack of time on the part of teachers because they are burdened by other requirements of NCLB and the unrelenting demands of accountability. One parent explained:

"You're completely intimidated in some regards, and you don't feel there are any concrete steps to take to help your child."

Decline in parent involvement from elementary school to middle/high school: Overall, in every school district in our study, parents expressed frustration over the dramatic drop in school-initiated communication regarding their child's academic performance in middle school, and even more drastically in high school.⁸ Parents were largely pleased with the weekly (and in some schools even more frequent) communications sent home in elementary school. However in middle and high school, the frequency of these communications decreased dramatically, often to the point of parents receiving only end-of-semester report cards if their child is doing average or above-average work.

⁸ EPE Research Center (2004, September 21). Parent Involvement. Retrieved February 23, 2008 from <http://www.edweek.org>. (This article points to the significant drop in participation in parent-teacher conferences from 4th to 8th grade).

In upper grades, parents said, communications to home beyond the standard reports tend to be negative. Furthermore, citing a lack of time and intimidation as potential causes, parents cited frustration with teacher “inapproachability” in the higher grades. Thus, even parents who have previously been active participants in their child’s education during the elementary school years may be discouraged, and stop being involved in the middle and high school years.

Unwelcoming practices: Some schools attempted to limit access by “closing their doors” to parents and requiring that parents wishing to visit the school make an appointment. While many parents felt they were welcome to initiate communication and school involvement themselves, others, conversely, reported that their schools held an opposing philosophy, where only recognized parent representatives within the school had ease of access to the schools. As such, these “closed door” policies may be keeping some parents from being active participants in their child’s education.

Perspectives of administrators

Lack of parent attendance: Administrators said they face a challenge in implementing their parent involvement programs due to lack of parent attendance. They attributed the gap to lack of trust and comfort, lack of feeling as if parents are partners with their child’s teachers and also to the parents’ inability to attend due to job commitments. Other reasons were lack of child care or trouble with transportation. However, as one frustrated administrator expressed, she has tried offering food for parents during meetings, obtained bus passes for them, used telephone tree coordinators and tried bringing meetings to neighborhoods and churches. Yet, she just can’t get a significant number of parents to attend or care.

Schools need to initiate involvement: Administrators stressed that increased and improved parent involvement has positive effects on dropout rates. Thus, administrators need to invest time, energy, and creativity to actively recruit parents to events and meetings. By continuing the welcoming attitude towards parents throughout the child’s growth, educators have a better chance of keeping parents involved in their child’s education.

“A lot of the time, parents feel that they don’t want to come in [to school] because they didn’t have a good experience in school, so they are intimidated by the system. They think the communication jargon is so complex that they don’t know what they’re talking about.”

– A North Carolina Parent



Findings and Recommendations Cont'd

Recommendation 4: Schools need to cultivate a warm, welcoming, and collaborative environment where parents feel confident in their ability to approach teachers and administrators with any questions or concerns they may have and schools need to ensure that their personnel are communicating with parents, especially in the upper grades.

Schools Should:

Build Strong Relationships Between Principals And Parents: Often, there appears to be a lack of communication between principals and parent organizations. This translates to policies and initiatives made without parent input or buy-in from the community. By fostering greater communication, parents will feel more empowered to take active roles in the educational decisions affecting their children. Furthermore, by communicating with parents involved in organizations such as the PTA, schools can create parent partners who will facilitate communication with other parents about school policies, events and academic performance.

Help Remove Barriers To Parent Involvement: By providing convenient times for activities, food, child care, transportation, and other services, schools are able to ensure that parents' basic needs do not serve as a barrier to involvement. Schools need to make a concerted effort to let parents know what resources are available.

Create Forums For Teachers To Hear Directly From Parents: Having a forum where parents can direct their questions or resolve grievances would be a useful addition to the school's efforts on parent involvement. The benefit of the forum is that parents will feel their voice is being heard and school officials will have a ready way of getting a community check on how their decisions are being received.

Community Organizations Should:

Increase Involvement Through Parent Groups: Many administrators agree that the PTA and other community groups are a valuable tool for fostering parent involvement and helping parents feel involved in the education process. The PTA and other parent advisory committees are an effective way to help parents feel as if their opinions matter and their voices are heard.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the U.S. Department of Education Should:

Sharpen Professional Development Opportunities: The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and federal government should provide the resources necessary for administrators and teachers to attend workshops and become educated on how to foster welcoming environments, engage parents, facilitate effective communication and help their parents to help children with their academic endeavors. The state should offer annual workshops and conferences as well as ongoing technical support, facilitated by professionals, so school personnel can get foundational training on how to foster a welcoming environment for parents and how to leverage their talent to improve academic achievement. That training should include a unit on navigating culture differences.





Parent Involvement Toolkit

In 2006, Appleseed compiled a comprehensive national report providing recommendations to parents, teachers, schools, and state and federal officials to highlight the vital role of parents in helping their children to achieve student and school success. As a part of the report, Appleseed incorporated a toolkit for districts, schools, state governments and parents. The following are excerpts, but also contain a new addition of “Positive Promising Practices” developed specifically for this report. The full original Appleseed report, “It Takes A Parent: Transforming Education in the Wake of the No Child Left Behind Act,” is available at www.appleseednetwork.org

Section A: Positive and Promising Practices For Parent Involvement

North Carolina Parent Teacher Association Parent Involvement Program: The statewide PTA has received a grant from the state government to pursue innovative parent involvement initiatives. The PTA has targeted 12 schools in which they have hired professional coordinators to support parent volunteers. The PTA reports that these trusted advisors are proactively recruiting parents and giving them information about schools. They are placing telephone calls home and having conversations, making in-person home visits and breaking down the top-down model in which principals make all the decisions.

Asheville City Schools (ACSF) pilot program: The ACSF pilot program involves teachers who go to low-income housing projects to provide training for parents while sharing a meal. The focus is to demonstrate how parents can assist their children with their homework. One observer said it is important that schools go to the places and neighborhoods where parents live.

Hispanic Mentoring Program: This program introduces both parents and students to the structure of school, and offers ideas for parents on how to be effective advocates for their children. The program features four workshops, including sessions on rights and responsibilities of parents, college attendances, and school infrastructure. Following these workshops, parents are encouraged to become mentors to new Hispanic/Latino parents, creating an active network.

Comcast Parent Involvement Matters Award Program (State of Maryland): This is a collaboration between Comcast and the Maryland State Department of Education to recognize parents/guardians and parent groups for their exceptional work in support of Maryland public education. The program, highlighting 23 winners, is the first state-wide parent recognition award program of its kind in the nation. The theme of this unique parent recognition is Choose Your Seat, Get Involved. Parents from across the state were nominated by fellow parents, principals, teachers, and state and local organizations, for making a significant, positive impact on public education in their communities.



Parent Involvement Toolkit Cont'd

Translation Headphones At Meetings:

Use of translation headphones at school meetings has been particularly effective at bridging the communication gap between English-speaking and non-English speaking parents. The difficulty is that the headsets are expensive. They cost approximately \$2,500 for a set of ten headphones according to one website.⁹

One North Carolina Title I Director said, "The District has acquired and distributed (especially to targeted schools) simultaneous communication equipment with headphones for use at meetings involving parents. This permits instantaneous translation, and avoids making every meeting last two times as long while the crowd waits for the translation of what has already been said. This equipment also permits two-way communications for questions by parents."

Automatic Phone System:

Some school systems use an automated phone messaging system, wherein the superintendent, principal or other school official can inform all parents of various issues and happenings, including when various academic reports would be coming in the mail. This idea responds to problems of parents without Internet access, who have problems reading, or are homebound.

Multilingual Outreach to Parents At a Mall: (Montgomery County, Maryland)

Educators in Montgomery County, Maryland, reach out to non-English speaking parents in a local shopping mall. Educators set up a kiosk to distribute information in multiple languages for non-English speaking parents. Pamphlets include information ranging from how to help children with homework, to how to make sure parents are receiving the most up-to date notifications about their child's schooling. This innovative approach addresses not only language barriers, but also cultural barriers, as some foreign born parents often feel it is improper or disrespectful to visit their child's school or ask pointed questions about their child's progress.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/23/AR2008022301984.html?referrer=emailarticle>

Parent Workshop on Planning for Your Child's Academic Future: (Greensboro, NC)

The American Council on Education (ACE) partnered with North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University to conduct an interactive workshop. Parents learned how to guide their child successfully through completion of high school and transition to post-secondary education. Topics discussed included, how to read school transcripts, understand high school requirements, and develop a successful 4-year plan for high school courses.

<http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/CIP/parental/NCAT.htm>

⁹ See <http://www.lexicon-global.com/Equipment/main.html?gclid=CP6m2JGan51CFQJHgoddrFjcQ> for more information on translation headphone packages and pricing. Pricing on this website generally ranged from \$2,455.65 - \$3,229.15 for a set of ten headsets and other necessary equipment.

Family Involvement Guide: (Washington State PTA)

This comprehensive guide for parents, produced by the Washington State PTA, outlines family involvement in all aspects of children's education. The guide highlights the National PTA's national standards, which include: Communication, Parenting, Student Learning, Volunteering, School Decision Making and Advocacy. Parents can download this guide cost free in both English and Spanish through the Washington State PTA website.

http://www.wastatepta.org/resources/family_involvement_guide.PDF

Three for Me: (PTA National Headquarters; Chicago, Illinois)

This national volunteer organization, founded by two Indiana moms, asks parents to volunteer three hours a year per child in their child's school. Parents are asked to sign a pledge card to volunteer their time and receive a list of possible volunteer activities. This program provides parents with concrete ways to get involved. Parents who have time or job restrictions can work on volunteer projects as their schedule permits. Another major component of the program is encouraging dads to be fully involved in their child's education.

<http://www.three4me.com/>

Parent Parties: (Huntsville, Alabama)

Second Mile Parent Initiative is a non-profit organization in Alabama committed to increasing parent involvement in schools and communities. The group has developed parent parties, a creative resource for educating parents about their child's schools and encouraging parent involvement in a fun and relaxed setting. This resource includes a CD-ROM with different games and activities to engage parents in their child's education. Some parent party games include: Parent Involvement School Scavenger Hunt, Parental Survival, PINGO CARD (Parent Involvement Nurtures Great Opportunities).

<http://www.parentparties.com/>

Advocacy: (New Haven, Connecticut)

Born out of the Yale Child Study Center, this program utilizes the James P. Comer process of school organization and management. The Comer involves three governing bodies in schools: The School Planning and Management Team, The Student and Staff Support Team, and The Parent Team. The parent team encourages parent involvement in school social and academic activities. In addition, a parent representative serves on The School Planning and Management Team. This program has been implemented in 65 schools and 21 states and has been proven to have statistically significant results on students' math and reading performance, as well as their adjustment to school, self-concept, and helping to create a more positive classroom climate.

<http://info.med.yale.edu/comer/index.html>

“While parents have a hard time figuring out what charts really mean, it could be very helpful to provide parents with a letter that says: your child is here, this is where your child should be, and where your child isn't.”

– A North Carolina Parent



Applesseed

Parent Involvement Toolkit Cont'd

Section B: School Board Policy

Encouraging parents to support public education is not only federal law, it is good policy. Many school districts in North Carolina have adopted a district-wide parent involvement policy, meaning that their belief in parent efficacy has been enshrined as an official part of the record.

That is good news. But while the words and the principles they espouse are valid, administrators and parents alike concede that too often implementation is not as faithful as it should be. As well, some school districts only have a policy for federally mandated “Title I” schools, those that receive extra federal dollars to increase academic performance. Appleseed examined the policies of 115 school districts in the state of North Carolina.

Our foundational belief was that an effective parent involvement policy has three important elements:

- 1) Establishes the importance of parent involvement and proclaims the philosophy of the board of education to promote the home-school connection as a strategy on par with others for building academic improvements that meet state and federal learning standards.
- 2) Clearly states the expectations of the board about what action steps are necessary by staff in response to the policy. In short, who will do what, when, how and within what time period?
- 3) Contains an enforcement mechanism that imposes accountability for compliance. For example: is there an annual report (verbal or written) to the board, or does the district conduct specific monitoring on policy compliance, is there on-going training and training for new employees on the topic?

While some of these aspects might be covered in implementing regulations or superintendent’s directives, we believe as a priority matter that they should be a centerpiece of the policy itself. There are at least two important reasons: the policy is the official position adopted by the board and should state clearly and specifically its meaning and mandates; board policy is generally posted on district web sites or otherwise publicly available.¹⁰

Under state law, North Carolina schools are encouraged to formulate parent involvement policies in connection with required school improvement plans.¹¹ The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction has further supported the implementation of Policies throughout the State. The North Carolina State Board of Education’s policy includes the belief that such Policies are important at the school district level.¹² Inherent in both statutory law and the statement of the state board is the belief that each school district should shepherd the process of establishing such Policies for the individual schools.

We found vast similarities among the policies, both in the language used, the structure and the references. Most relied upon the same template, which accounts for that finding. Using the elements above, we classified the policies as “compliance” policies or “substantive” policies. The compliance

¹⁰ Rather than regulations, which are usually internal documents, making them available only upon specific request by a citizen invoking state-by-state freedom of information laws.

¹¹ North Carolina General Statute [N.C. Gen. Stat.] § 115C-105.32.

¹² See Policy Number FCB-A-000, North Carolina State Board of Education Policy Manual.

ⁱ Accountability for educational progress does not entail federal withholding of funds or enforcement penalties. Instead, accountability for educational progress is focused on public – and parental – involvement and action that may be needed to promote improvements in schools and districts.

policies were exactly that, they affirmed the importance of parent involvement and made reference to relevant law and were suitable from both a legal and policy standpoint. However, we also looked for school districts that went further, customizing their policies beyond the standard language, including an accountability element, or otherwise exceeding the minimum. Those were termed “substantive.”

The following findings are based on research conducted during March and April of 2008 and are divided alphabetically by the state’s regions. The chart lists whether the policy is substantive or compliance in our view; whether it is confined to Title I or district wide; whether it is available on-line; the last update and, occasionally, clarifying notations to illuminate why we have no information or to explain points worth mentioning.



Summary of NC School System Parent Involvement Policies (By Region)

Mountain Region

School System (County or City)	Substantive/ Compliance	Title I/District Wide	Available On-line	Date of Last Update to Policy	Notes
Alleghany County Schools	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	District has no formal policy on parent involvement. It has a general "community relations" policy which mentions principles and beliefs pertaining to parent involvement.
Ashe County Schools	Compliance	District Wide	Yes	6/2/2003	Policy (per law) expressly requires schools individually to develop specific parent involvement plan as part of school improvement plan.
Avery County Schools	Compliance	District Wide	Yes	12/3/2007	
Buncombe County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	6/5/2003	
Asheville City Schools	Compliance	District Wide	Yes	4/1/2003	
Burke County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	5/26/2003	
Cherokee County Schools	Compliance	District Wide	Yes	11/9/2006	
Clay County Schools					Calls made to Board of Education, but no response received.
Graham County Schools					Calls made to Board of Education, but no response received.
Haywood County Schools	Substantive	Title I Only	Yes	11/8/2004	
Henderson County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	6/30/2006	
Jackson County Schools	Compliance	District Wide	Yes	1/31/2008	
Macon County Schools					Calls made to Board of Education, but no response received.

Mountain Region Cont'd

School System (County or City)	Substantive/ Compliance	Title I/District Wide	Available On-line	Date of Last Update to Policy	Notes
Madison County Schools	Substantive	District Wide	Yes	Unknown	
McDowell County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	9/16/2002	
Mitchell County Schools					Calls made to Board of Education, but no response received.
Polk County Schools	Compliance	District Wide	Yes	6/2/2003	Policy available in, and made a part of, 2007-08 Student Handbook.
Rutherford County Schools	Substantive	District Wide	Yes	6/6/2006	
Surry County Schools	Substantive	District Wide	Yes	9/6/2005	
Elkin City Schools	Compliance	District Wide	Yes	8/28/2000	
Mount Airy City Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	No	9/19/2000	Current district policies are under review for future revisions.
Swain County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	No	1/13/2003	2007-08 Federal Title I application (NC) also available online and includes comprehensive narratives regarding county policies and implementation plans, as well as statistics and figures.
Transylvania County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	5/19/2003	
Watauga County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	5/12/2003	
Wilkes County Schools	Compliance	District Wide	Yes	1/9/2006	
Yancey County Schools					Calls made to Board of Education, but no response received.



Piedmont Region

School System (County or City)	Substantive/ Compliance	Title I/District Wide	Available On-line	Date of Last Update to Policy	Notes
Alamance-Burlington Schools	Compliance	District Wide	Yes	04/23/2007	
Alexander County Schools	Compliance	District Wide (but includes specific Title I provisions)	Yes	02/13/2007	
Anson County Schools	Compliance	District Wide	Yes	Adopted for 2007/2008 school year	Part of overall "Best in Class" program for school district, but contains specific provisions for parent involvement
Cabarrus County Schools	Compliance	District Wide (but includes specific Title I provisions)	Yes	06/04/2007	
Kannapolis City Schools	N/A	N/A	N/A	08/09/1993	Board has guidelines for parent organizations and their interplay with schools, but no explicit parent involvement policy
Caldwell County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	05/22/2003	Has somewhat detailed plans for compliance, but does not appear to be a part of a strategic plan
Caswell County Schools	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No explicit parent involvement provisions in board policy
Catawba County Schools	Compliance	District Wide	Yes	01/28/2008	School board has also included specific Title I compliance information, which appears to be over and above general board policies
Hickory City Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	02/10/2003	
Newton-Conover City Schools	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Board has guidelines for parent organizations and their interplay with schools, but no explicit parent involvement policy
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	Substantive	District Wide, together with separate, more comprehensive Title I policy	Yes	Title I - 04/20/2004; note on district wide policy on 03/16/2005 stating that it will be updated shortly	The school system has relied on guidelines and procedures in place prior to (and based on guidelines from) NCLB
Chatham County Schools	Substantive	Title I Only	Yes	08/20/2007	

Piedmont Region Cont'd

School System (County or City)	Substantive/ Compliance	Title I/District Wide	Available On-line	Date of Last Update to Policy	Notes
Cleveland County Schools	Substantive	Title I Only	Yes	No adoption date given, but other similar policies adopted 09/13/2004	
Davidson County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	05/03/2004	
Lexington City Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	12/20/2006	
Thomasville City Schools	Compliance	District Wide (but includes specific Title I provisions)	Yes	07/01/2002	
Davie County Schools	Compliance	District Wide (but includes specific Title I provisions)	Yes	02/03/2003	Policy includes remedies for parents for school system non-compliance
Durham Public Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	01/27/2005	
Winston-Salem/ Forsyth County Schools	Compliance	District Wide; separate, more detailed Title I policy also in place	Yes	District Wide - 11/26/2002; Title I - July 1988	
Gaston County Schools	Substantive	District Wide (but includes specific Title I provisions)	Yes	02/17/2006	
Granville County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	07/01/2003	
Guilford County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	12/06/2005	
Iredell-Statesville Schools	Compliance	District Wide (but includes specific Title I provisions); separate, more detailed, sub- stantive Title I policy in place	Yes	12/10/2001	
Mooresville Graded Public School District	Compliance	District Wide (but includes specific Title I provisions)	Yes	07/02/2001	



Piedmont Region Cont'd

School System (County or City)	Substantive/ Compliance	Title I/District Wide	Available On-line	Date of Last Update to Policy	Notes
Lincoln County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	06/11/2003	
Montgomery County Schools	Substantive	District Wide	Yes	08/06/2007	
Moore County Schools	Compliance	District Wide (but includes specific Title I provisions)	Yes	06/11/2007	
Orange County Schools	Compliance	District Wide (but includes specific Title I provisions)	Yes	03/05/2007	
Chapel Hill-Carrboro Schools	Compliance	District Wide (but includes specific Title I provisions)	Yes	03/01/2007	
Asheboro City Schools	Compliance	District Wide (but includes specific Title I provisions)	Yes	11/09/2006	
Richmond County Schools	Compliance	District Wide; Title I guidelines are included in a more substantive format	Yes	10/02/2001	
Rockingham County Schools	Compliance	District Wide (but includes specific Title I provisions)	Yes	12/12/2005	
Rowan-Salisbury Schools	Compliance	District Wide (but includes specific Title I provisions); additional Title I guidelines included in a separate, more substantive policy	Yes	03/10/2003	
Stanly County Schools	Compliance	District Wide	Yes	10/05/1999	
Stokes County Schools	Compliance	District Wide (but includes specific Title I provisions)	Yes	06/05/2006	
Union County Public Schools	Compliance	District Wide	Yes	12/02/2003	
Vance County Schools	Compliance	District Wide	Yes	07/10/1995	
Wake County Public School System	Compliance	District Wide	Yes	02/07/2000	
Yadkin County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	01/03/2005	Available with School Board Policies; policy discusses general parent involvement policy, but is unavailable in posted version

Coastal Region

School System (County or City)	Substantive/ Compliance	Title I/District Wide	Available On-line	Date of Last Update to Policy	Notes
Beaufort County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	No	03/21/2005	
Bertie County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	11/05/2001	
Bladen County Schools			No		Calls made to Board of Education; policy forthcoming but not yet received
Brunswick County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	05/01/2007	
Camden County Schools			No		Calls made to Board of Education, but no response received
Carteret County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	No date given	
Columbus County Schools			No		No explicit parent involvement policy
Whiteville City Schools	Compliance	District Wide	Yes	02/10/2003	
Craven County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	08/16/2007	
Cumberland County Schools			No		Calls made to Board of Education, but no response received
Currituck County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	05/08/2006	
Dare County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	11/11/1997	
Duplin County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	07/01/2003	
Edenton/ Chowan County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	No date given	
Edgecombe County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	District Wide - 01/13/2003; Title I - 04/09/2001	
Franklin County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	06/10/2003	
Gates County Schools			No		No formal policy as part of board policies
Greene County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	03/31/2007	General policy not available, but general information available on-line as a message to parents



Coastal Region Cont'd

School System (County or City)	Substantive/ Compliance	Title I/District Wide	Available On-line	Date of Last Update to Policy	Notes
Halifax County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	2007 (no official date given)	General policy not available, but general information available on-line as a message to parents
Roanoke Rapids Graded School District			No		Calls made to District, but no response received
Weldon City Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	06/17/1997	
Harnett County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	01/07/2002	
Hertford County Schools			No	03/12/2001	Calls made to Board of Education for any further information; updated policy forthcoming but not yet received
Hoke County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	District Wide - 04/13/2006; Title I - 12/11/2001	
Hyde County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	No	No date given	
Johnston County Schools	Compliance	District Wide	Yes	07/12/2005	
Jones County Schools			No		Calls made to Board of Education, but no response received
Lee County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	02/10/2008	
Lenoir County Schools			No	05/01/2006	Calls made to Board of Education; policy forthcoming but not yet received
Martin County Schools			No		Calls made to Board of Education, but no response received
Nash-Rocky Mount Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	01/06/1998	
New Hanover County Schools	Compliance	District Wide	Yes	06/10/2003	
Northampton County Schools	Compliance	District Wide	No	03/06/2003	Calls made to Board of Education for more formal policy, but no response received
Onslow County Schools	Compliance	District Wide	Yes	03/04/2003	
Pamlico County Schools			No		Calls made to Board of Education, but no response received

Coastal Region Cont'd

School System (County or City)	Substantive/ Compliance	Title I/District Wide	Available On-line	Date of Last Update to Policy	Notes
Elizabeth City- Pasquotank Schools	Compliance	District Wide	Yes	11/26/2007	
Pender County Schools			No		Calls made to Board of Education, but no response received
Perquimans County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	04/08/2003	
Pitt County Schools			No		Calls made to Board of Education, but no response received
Robeson County Schools			No		Calls made to Board of Education, but no response received
Sampson County Schools			No		Calls made to Board of Education, but no response received
Clinton City Schools			No		Calls made to Board of Education, but no response received
Scotland County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	03/10/2008	
Tyrell County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	04/14/1999	
Warren County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	No	02/14/2000	
Washington County Schools			No		Calls made to Board of Education made, but no response received
Wayne County Schools (Wayne County Public Schools)			No		Calls made to Board of Education made, but no response received
Wilson County Schools	Compliance	Title I Only	Yes	04/21/2003	



Parent Involvement Toolkit Cont'd

Section C: Federal Requirements Regarding Parental Involvement In Schools: A Checklist

The kind and quality of information provided to parents by districts and schools about district, school and student performance can provide a critical foundation for pursuing more robust strategies designed to promote effective parent involvement and better student learning in schools.

NCLB requirements regarding such information reflect the belief that parents should know how their child, and their child's school and district, are performing with respect to state standards that define what children should be learning. NCLB reflects the belief that such knowledge is a necessary basis for parents to become engaged in improving their child's school, helping and motivating their children in their schoolwork, and exercising specific parental options regarding their child's education.

Annual accountability determinations for schools and districts, which involve decisions about whether schools and districts have made AYP, are based largely on assessment data designed to depict key performance indicators. Properly understood, these indicators establish a basis for (informed) parents to hold schools and districts accountable for educating their children. Such information provided to parents gives them the ability to demand and work for school improvement and exercise their rights as parents.

The table below, which identifies and describes the primary parent notification requirements in NCLB, is principally derived from U.S. Department of Education sources. See Parental Involvement: Title I, Part A – Non-Regulatory Guidance, (April 23, 2004),

<http://www.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/parentinvguid.doc>

*"If we really want [parents] involved, we have to go to them."
– A Community Group Leader.*

NCLB: Federal Requirements Regarding Parental Involvement

Notice	Specific Requirements	Timing	By State	By District	By School
I. STUDENT PERFORMANCE DATA	<p>All reports must:</p> <p>Be understandable;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be presented in a consistent way; • To extent practicable, be presented in a language parents can understand; and • When describing and interpreting individual student’s performance on state assessments, ensure that specific academic needs can be understood and addressed. 				
Individual student assessment reports of statewide assessment results associated with AYP determinations to parents, teachers, and principals		As soon as practicable after assessment given.			
Annual state and district report cards to parents, schools and public	<p>District must provide aggregate information on student achievement on state assessments overall and disaggregated by sub-groups along with graduation rates, teacher qualifications, and other information.</p> <p>District must report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data for district as a whole and for each school in district; and • Information on schools designated for school improvement and how performance of students in the school compared to that of students in other schools in the district. 	Annually			
Progress information regarding Title I language instruction programs for LEP students to parents of participating students.	Districts must advise parents of progress regarding annual objectives related to the numbers or percentages of children learning English and scoring proficient on state mathematics and language arts/reading assessments.	Not later than 30 days after failure to make progress occurs.			
II. TEACHER / PARAPROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS					
Teacher and paraprofessional qualifications notices to parents of students in Title I schools.	Parents may request information on the professional qualifications of the student’s classroom teachers and paraprofessionals serving the student.	Annually, at beginning of school year			
Non-highly qualified teachers notices to each parent of a student in a Title I school	Schools must provide parents with information that the student has been assigned to or taught for four or more consecutive weeks by a teacher who is not highly qualified (based on the federal definition).	Timely			



NCLB: Federal Requirements Regarding Parental Involvement Cont'd

Notice	Specific Requirements	Timing	By State	By District	By School
III. CONSEQUENCES					
Notices regarding schools identified for school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring	Notice to parents must explain reasons for the identification and what it means; how the school compares to others; what the school, district, and state are doing to respond; how parents can become involved; any corrective action or restructuring taken or planned; and, as applicable, parental choice and supplemental services options.	Promptly, upon identification of schools			
Notices regarding supplemental education services	For schools required to offer education services, annual notices of the availability of SES, identity of the providers and brief description of services, qualifications, and demonstrated effectiveness of each provider. (Generally, SES must be offered when a school is in its second year of improvement status or is in corrective action or restructuring status.)	Annually (at a minimum)			
Notices regarding districts identified for improvement; corrective action to parents of children enrolled in district that it has been identified for improvement; separate notice to parents regarding corrective actions taken by State.	Notice must provide reasons for the identification and explain how parents can participate in upgrading quality of the district.	Promptly, upon identification			
Notices regarding unsafe schools to parents of students who attend a persistently dangerous school, as defined by the state, and to parents of victims of a violent criminal offense in public elementary or secondary schools.	Students must be allowed to attend a safe public school.				
IV. INSTRUCTION/ ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS					
Notice regarding instruction to parents of limited English proficient students identified for participation in Title I language instruction program	District must provide reasons for identification, child's level of English proficiency, methods of instruction, how the program will help the child and right of parent to have child removed from the program. For parents of LEP students with a disability, the notice must also indicate how the language instruction program meets the child's individualized education program.	Annually, not later than 30 days after start of school year for students identified before school year; otherwise, within first two weeks of child's placement in language instruction program.			
Notices to parents regarding students measured against alternate achievement standards	Notice must be provided to parents of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities that their child's achievement will be measured against alternate standards. Parents must be informed of the actual achievement level of their students.	Determined by State			

NCLB: Federal Requirements Regarding Parental Involvement Cont'd

Notice	Specific Requirements	Timing	By State	By District	By School
V. OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT/ADVOCACY					
Written parental involvement policies for school and district to parents of Title I students, each agreed to by parents.	Policies must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe how parents are involved in school review and improvement process and in activities to improve student academic achievement and school performance; • describe how parents' capacity for involvement is to be developed; • provide for an evaluation of parent involvement; and • at school level, adopt a school-parent compact. 	Determined by district			
State complaint procedures to parents for resolving issues of possible violations of federal law.		Determined by State			
Title I , invitation to parents regarding school's participation in Title I and their right to be involved.	Meeting must cover Title I requirements.	Annual			
Information for parents of limited English proficient students regarding how parents can be involved in their child's education, including notice of opportunities for regular meetings to formulate and respond to parent recommendations.	Must inform parents of how to assist children in attaining English proficiency and meet state academic achievement standards.	Indefinite			



Parent Involvement Toolkit Cont'd

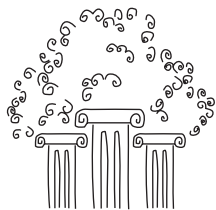
Section D: A Self-Assessment Checklist: Key Questions about School and District Parent Involvement Policies and Actions

The self-assessment checklist provides a list of key questions about school and district parent involvement policies and action. It can help schools ensure that they are both meeting federal requirement and taking the appropriate steps to engage and inform parents.

1. How do you define parental involvement?
2. What are your parental involvement goals, objectives, and strategies? What programs and policies do you have in place to achieve these goals? How do you pay for them? How do you staff them?
3. Are your parental involvement activities coordinated with other activities or programs?
4. How do you measure parent involvement and gauge the degree to which particular initiatives are having the desired effect?
5. What kind of information is provided to parents about student performance, school and district performance, school safety, and teacher quality? Through what avenues is this information disseminated?
6. What challenges do you face in involving low-income parents, parents with limited English proficiency, parents with disabilities, and parents of migratory children in the education of their children and in school programs? Do you have policies or practices in place that have been effective in addressing these challenges?
7. Do you utilize compacts or contracts with parents that set forth particular, explicit expectations regarding parent involvement?
8. Do you partner with community organizations to further your parental involvement activities? Have these partnerships led to increases in parental involvement?
9. Which schools and districts are doing a particularly good job in reaching and involving parents, especially low income parents and parents with limited English proficiency? What are they doing effectively?
10. Have you undertaken a parent satisfaction survey? What have been the results and how are these results used to improve policies and practices?
11. What kind of information do you provide to parents as part of your assessment and accountability systems, including for specific student subgroups? How are parents responding to this information?
12. Does the assessment information provided to parents describe the purposes and uses of the data, as well as the limitations on conclusions that can be based on the data? Does it describe how parents might use the data?

13. Is the information that parents receive about the accountability requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the performance of students, schools, and districts providing them with the knowledge they need to make meaningful judgments and take appropriate actions?
14. Have changes in parental involvement had an impact on teaching and/or student performance, including for particular sub-groups? How is this impact measured?
15. What information do parents want to have in order to make meaningful judgments about student, school, and district performance?
16. What level of funding would be necessary to fully carry out your vision for effective parental involvement?
17. What are the obstacles to providing better information to and achieving greater involvement by parents?
18. How are you involving parents in efforts to strengthen schools and districts, particularly those that have been identified for improvement under the No Child Left Behind Act?
19. Has parental involvement in school improvement efforts had an impact on teaching and/or student performance? How is this impact measured?
20. What information do you provide to parents about public school choice or supplemental education services [SES] options for eligible students in underperforming schools?
21. Do you offer assistance to parents who need help understanding the range of options and/or how to access them?
22. Do you track student enrollment in school choice and/or SES programs? How are you using this information to modify policies and/or practices?
23. What are the obstacles to providing better information to and achieving greater involvement by parents, specifically with regard to NCLB public school choice and SES?





Appleseed

727 15th Street, NW, 11th Floor

Washington, DC 20005

202-347-7960

www.appleseednetwork.org