

# IT TAKES A PARENT:

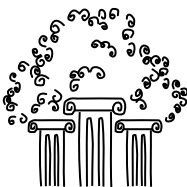
## Transforming Education in the Wake of the No Child Left Behind Act



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

Appleseed

*Sowing the Seeds of Justice*



## Acknowledgements

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**Holland+Knight**



**PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS** 

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# Preface

*The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the primary law that dedicates federal money to help economically poor children, has come a long way in 40 years. The role of schools has been expanded and national attention on student learning elevated. Today, public schools are faced with the tough assignment of assuring that every child reaches not only minimum standards, but beyond. That task should not be delegated to educators alone. In truth, if one wants to really transform education – It Takes A Parent.*

Testing and accountability have commanded almost constant attention since the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) became federal law four years ago. What is frequently overlooked is the special power of parents to lift their children to new academic heights. The partnership helps to achieve the primary aims of that law.

Without better informed and involved parents, all of the testing and data becomes, for some, the proverbial fallen tree in the forest that no one hears. Thus, NCLB should be understood, embraced, and ultimately evaluated, in part, on its success in educating and engaging parents.

## **NCLB says plainly that parents should be two things:**

1. Informed of the academic progress of their children and the performance of their schools; and
2. Involved in meaningful ways as a partner with school officials.

This report looks at how parental involvement works in public elementary and secondary schools and what still needs to be done. While the findings and recommendations are based on research in six states and eighteen school districts, the results are symbolic of what is occurring at the more than 90,000 elementary and secondary public school buildings in the 50 states.

It is clear that as a nation we have not emphasized or financially invested in parental involvement in ways that we should. The bold vision of NCLB (portraying parents as full participating partners) remains unfulfilled. A renewed focus on parental involvement is a powerful and exciting potential direction for education in the 21st Century. Indeed it could be a key to defeating persistent achievement gaps and engaging low-income and non-English speaking parents, too many of whom still stand outside the window looking in.

Parental involvement is not a silver bullet, but is an important part of the solution. Instead of looking solely at moving principals, teachers, and students out of schools, reformers should focus on bringing parents into them. The highest achieving schools do that.

This report relies on the policy knowledge and legal acuity of Holland & Knight and DLA Piper, the technology insights of a global business firm, Pricewaterhouse Coopers, and the scholarly talents of Columbia Teachers College. Each of them dedicated enormous talent and time to the project. We are deeply grateful to them.

This report is not the ending. It is a beginning of Appleseed's work at the district, state, and federal levels to move these ideas from theory to practice, from model to reality. As a nation, we have lost four years of opportunity since NCLB's enactment to take full advantage of parental involvement. We must work now to mobilize parents to improve academic performance and address ongoing achievement gaps in our schools. We hope that you will join with us.

Edwin C. Darden  
Director of Education Policy

Linda Singer  
Executive Director



# Authors' Note

We were first approached by Appleseed in the fall of 2004 with a seemingly simple question: How could we, working together, build on current education reform efforts and improve the educational opportunities and outcomes for all students, especially those in the most need?

After a period of substantial reflection and study—and a number of project outlines that have made their way to the trash bin—we arrived at a collective "Aha" moment. There was one issue that substantial educational research pointed to as critical for student learning and school success, but where too little national policy focus had centered: parental involvement.

Based on a number of conversations with experts (including school leaders, education researchers, and, yes, parents), we embarked on this pro bono project, in an effort to help shine a light on an issue that merits substantially more time and attention from policymakers and educators who are committed to helping all students succeed.

Our professional focus is on helping educators "get it right," both as a matter of education policy development and implementation, and as a matter of law. Thus, it was with great excitement that we undertook a project on an issue where the prospect existed for promoting policies aligned with federal law and a substantial body of educational research. More importantly, we saw an opportunity to directly pursue a goal that guides our efforts everyday: ensuring that every child, regardless of background, has the opportunity to achieve his or her potential.

Throughout this two-year-long effort, we have learned much, due in large part to the willingness of countless federal, state and local policymakers, experts, educators, teachers, parents and community leaders to share their experiences and advice. We are indebted for their selfless commitment to this issue, just as we are grateful for the efforts of the dozens of volunteers on this project who were the eyes, ears and voices of many who helped shape this report. (They are listed following the conclusion of this report.)

Finally, we are grateful for Appleseed's leadership in this important work, which reflects but one step in its quest toward building a just society, and in helping ensure that no child is left behind.

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## Holland+Knight

# Executive Summary

Parental involvement is an essential element in the success of students and their schools. This simple point anchors the federal law known as the “No Child Left Behind Act of 2001” (NCLB). Much like its predecessor legislation, NCLB establishes state, district and school requirements designed to promote more effective parental involvement.

The belief is this: if schools provide clear, meaningful performance data to parents, then parents will become better school partners, decision-makers and advocates for their children. The law also reflects the view that effective parental involvement spurs improvements in student learning.

The focus on effective parental involvement as a way to boost overall achievement is more than just a federal requirement, however. It is supported by a long string of social science research and by the stories of schools that beat the odds. As one Georgia parent said, “When schools, parents and students work together, then children do better with their studies.”

Taken together, federal law and social science research recognize how important it is for schools and districts to provide:

- Clear and timely communication with parents about issues affecting student learning;
- An environment that supports teachers and school leaders in engaging parents about their own children as well as to benefit the school in general; and
- Key information and support for parents so that they can be effective advocates for their children and their children’s schools.

In 2005, Appleseed embarked on an examination of federal, state and local policies and practices on parental involvement. The idea was to gather on-the-ground perspectives and information, based on more than four years of experience implementing the requirements of NCLB. It is Appleseed’s hope that those perspectives, along with the parent opinions and information in this report, will enhance state, district and local efforts to promote effective parental involvement.

The report should also provide key information to federal, state and local policymakers, who constantly face the challenge of how best to structure and fund public education. (Several noteworthy practices and practical resources are highlighted throughout the report.) In particular, this report provides policy recommendations for Congress and the U.S. Department of Education to consider as they work to improve upon the parental involvement foundations established by NCLB. Reauthorization of the law that NCLB amends is currently projected for the fall of 2007.

This report is a call to action. It treats people at the federal, state and local levels to seize the moment, to mobilize on behalf of children – especially those who are disadvantaged – and to make parent power a central theme in the effort to improve academic performance.

Parents are not the magic answer. There is, in fact, no single solution for the education struggles that so many students endure. But parents cannot be relegated to the sidelines or seen as less important than “real educators.” The highest achieving schools recognize that parents have a place at the table.

Three major themes emerged from our study, based on extensive research and interviews in eighteen school districts in six states, including dozens of interviews with education leaders and community-based organizations, and two-dozen parent focus groups.

First, despite the abundant research and extensive federal requirements, schools and districts do not universally embrace parental involvement as a central strategy for accomplishing academic gains. This pattern appears to result from a mix of causes:

- The challenge of defining clear and meaningful benchmarks by which effective parental involvement can be evaluated;
- A preoccupation with the accountability elements of NCLB, such as testing and teacher quality; and
- A lack of awareness and training on how to effectively engage parents.

Second, there is less of a need for “new rules” and more of a need that existing laws be fully understood, supported and implemented. Although some recommendations in the report address gaps in present law, most recommendations document the need for federal, state, district and school officials to better implement the laws that presently exist.

Third, despite a number of significant challenges facing schools and districts, a number of notable practices and models with real promise have emerged. This report provides examples of several successful strategies that are based in research and reality.

**Based on its research and interviews, Appleseed has made the following findings:**

1. Too many parents fail to receive clear and timely information about their children and their schools.
2. Poverty, limited English proficiency, and varying cultural expectations are among the biggest barriers to parental involvement.
3. Poor communication with parents hinders their ability to exercise NCLB's choice and supplemental education services options.
4. Creative, multi-faceted communication and engagement strategies can promote better parental involvement in schools.
5. Parental involvement is not uniformly valued by school leaders as a key accountability strategy.

**Based on these findings, which are explained in the report, Appleseed makes the following recommendations:**

1. **Quality of Information.** States, districts and schools must provide meaningful, understandable and timely information to parents regarding key school and student performance data.
2. **Proactive, Targeted Engagement Strategies.** States, districts and schools must pursue multiple, proactive strategies for communicating with and engaging parents – particularly parents who are low-income or whose first language is not English.
3. **Community Support.** Districts and schools should leverage their own limited resources by engaging community organizations.

**4. Professional Development.** Federal, state and district officials need to prioritize and fund more comprehensive professional development for teachers and administrators, with special emphasis on challenges of culture and language.

**5. Better Implementation and Stronger Accountability.** Federal, state and local policymakers and educators should recognize parental involvement as central to school improvement and place parental involvement strategies on par with other steps taken to improve student achievement.

In sum, this report makes the case that if we are as serious as we should be about promoting effective parental involvement strategies designed to improve educational opportunities and results for all students, then it is time to match our words with action. Appleseed hopes these recommendations provide an impetus for continuing efforts by education leaders, teachers, policymakers and parents to understand what is needed and what works, and to take action accordingly—promoting better student and school outcomes for all.

In this time of federal and state mandates for improving student achievement through setting high standards, providing highly qualified teachers and holding schools accountable for results, we must not overlook one of the most important components for raising the performance of schools and students—parent engagement. In a recent poll, 86% of the general public believes that support from parents is the most important way to improve schools. As education stakeholders, we must create those best practices of parental involvement that create a successful system that not only enables parents to support the learning process of their own children but also allows them to be smart consumers of education—in advocacy, decision-making, and oversight roles. The more parents participate in schooling, in a sustained way, at every level, the better for student achievement.

— Dr. Stephen D. Dolinger  
President, Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education



# Introduction

Effective and wide-ranging parental participation in the education of their children is one of the most important factors in a child's success in school and, correspondingly, a central characteristic of successful schools.<sup>1</sup> Too frequently, however, schools and districts continue to face challenges that impede efforts to effectively advance parental involvement, especially for parents of students who have the greatest academic challenges and related needs. As one educator put it, in many cases there is a “remarkable level of disengagement” between parents and schools. Thus, parental involvement frequently is not the kind of priority that it should be for schools, districts and other policymakers, despite convincing research about its success in raising student achievement.

With the goal of demonstrating the importance of parental involvement as a key strategy for improving student success, this report provides recommendations for education leaders and policymakers. It focuses on three major strands that are crucial to effective parental involvement:

- 1. Information:** The opportunities and challenges of parental awareness about student and school performance;
- 2. Engagement:** The importance of meaningful parental engagement with school officials and teachers; and
- 3. Advocacy:** The critical role that effective parent advocacy, based on good information and informed engagement, plays in student and school performance.<sup>2</sup>

## **Addressing these overlapping strands, this report has two aims:**

First, with a focus on education policy at federal, state and local levels, this report examines the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), which in important ways has dramatically expanded the kind of information parents receive about school and student performance. As a result, the federal law has affected the expected role of parents in public schools. With an eye toward the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (the federal law that NCLB amends), this report seeks to inform the national dialogue regarding meaningful education reform and to support the efforts of federal, state and district policymakers who continue to pursue strategies that will make the promise of NCLB a reality.

Second, in an effort to provide a coherent policy framework for educators who are designing and implementing parental involvement policies, this report provides practical information grounded in relevant academic research. It includes a variety of notable practices and models that schools, districts and states can use in their efforts to promote more effective parental involvement policies and practices.

## Methodology and Scope of Work

This report combines practical, on-the-ground perspectives (based upon interviews); federal, state and district policy research; and current social science research on key parental involvement issues and effective practices. It assembles and analyzes what we know as a matter of practice and as a matter of research in framing an action agenda promoting more effective parental involvement practices by schools, districts and states.

The findings and recommendations in this report are based substantially on qualitative research. During nine months, more than one hundred school, district and state leaders and teachers were interviewed in six states and eighteen school districts. Those interviews focused on:

- Identifying whether and how parent involvement strategies in schools are working;
- What key challenges remain; and
- How more meaningful engagement could be encouraged.<sup>3</sup>

Questions focused on the kind and quality of information parents were being provided; the role of parents in schools (especially in light of information they were given about their children's performance); and ways in which parents were, or were not, taking advantage of opportunities to effect change—either with respect to their children or within schools more generally. (The Appendix includes a self-assessment checklist for schools and districts derived from the questions that framed these conversations.)

Twenty-seven focus groups of parents were convened over a six-month period in 2006. Participants were asked about their knowledge of student and school performance data; their awareness of opportunities to engage in efforts to support school reform efforts; options provided under NCLB; and general perspectives about school and district successes and challenges.

In addition, representatives of 47 community-based organizations that provide critical support for parents and schools were interviewed in an effort to solicit information about important strategies of engagement and support. Five providers of Supplemental Education Services (SES), randomly selected among those authorized to provide services in one or more of the six partner states, were also interviewed. In those interviews, questions about challenges and successes associated with the provision of supplemental education services selected by parents, an element of federal law implemented for the first time under NCLB, were addressed.

The findings and recommendations of this report were also shaped by a review and evaluation of publicly available federal, state and district policies and practices, as well as an analysis of relevant social science research on parental involvement.<sup>4</sup>

This report also includes a number of notable practices and models that respond to key challenges and promote more effective parental involvement and student success. These examples are provided as points of reference only, not as sure-fire strategies. In parental involvement, as in other areas of education reform, there are no silver bullets. What works in one context may be less effective in another.<sup>5</sup>

# Parental Involvement: The Big Picture

Why focus on parental involvement? Educators recognize—on the basis of social science research and common experience—that parents' effective involvement is a critical element in children's academic and social development.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, federal law establishes rules and guidelines based on that conclusion, as do many state laws and district policies.<sup>7</sup> And yet, parental involvement does not receive the kind of sustained, strategic focus in districts and schools that is characteristic of other improvement efforts.<sup>8</sup> And therein lies the challenge. If we are as serious as we should be about promoting effective parental involvement strategies designed to improve educational opportunities and results for all students, then it is time to match our words with action.

"Parents who are active in their child's education and supportive of what the school is doing almost always have kids [who] are successful in the classroom." — Principal in Texas

Source: "Principals Offer Advice to High School Students' Families," available at: [http://www.uprr.com/newsinfo/releases/community/2006/0711\\_partnershipsurvey.shtml](http://www.uprr.com/newsinfo/releases/community/2006/0711_partnershipsurvey.shtml).

## That means several things.

First, it means that we must better understand the multiple dimensions of parental involvement—precisely who, and what, we're talking about.

Families, like children, come in all shapes and sizes. All are important in the lives of the children who turn to them on a daily basis for support. Thus, while we use the term "parental involvement" in this report, we mean to include all adults who are responsible for raising children.<sup>9</sup>

Three elements of parental involvement should be analyzed in examining school or district efforts to improve opportunities and outcomes for all students:

- **Information.** Parents must have access to—and must understand—key information about what their children are learning and how well they are learning it, and this information must be set in the context of school and district performance data, and the goals and operations of the schools their children attend.
- **Engagement.** With the right kind of comprehensive and easily understood information, parents can meaningfully engage in their children's education by providing direct support for learning and by working with school officials on school-improvement efforts.
- **Advocacy.** One key facet of this engagement is advocacy. Helping ensure that their children receive all of the appropriate instruction and services offered by schools is one critical role parents play. Given the many competing demands that principals and teachers face every day, it is incumbent upon parents—often in concert with community organizations that provide much needed support—to be their child's best advocate.

In short, truly effective parental involvement means more than, as some believe, merely attending school functions or assisting with the parent-teacher organizations. As one state education leader advised, the common one-dimensional vision of parental involvement—that it's about volunteering time for school functions or serving as a room parent—completely misses the mark. For students to succeed in school, parents must understand the basics of what's going on inside the classroom, have performance information that they can understand and evaluate, and be equipped with the tools to interact with school teachers and leaders to address student performance concerns.

### The Facets of Parental Involvement: A Leading Model

Joyce Epstein is one of the leading national experts in the area of parental involvement in schools. Her theoretical model provides that families, schools, and community organizations exert 'overlapping spheres of influence' on children's education. Source: Epstein, School, Family and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools. Westview Press (2001). All three spheres play important, complementary roles in improving children's education. Epstein's model consists of a framework of "six important types of cooperation between, families, schools and communities" (Harvard Education Letter, 1997). The Harvard Education Letter (September/October 1997) summarizes each of Epstein's components of involvement in the following way:

- 1. Parenting:** 'Families must provide for the health and safety of children, and maintain a home environment that encourages learning and good behavior in school. Schools provide training and information to help families understand their children's development and how to support the changes they undergo.'
- 2. Communicating:** 'Schools must reach out to families with information about school programs and student progress. This includes the traditional phone calls, report cards, and parent conferences, as well as new information on topics such as school choice and making the transition from elementary school to higher grades. Communication must be in forms that families find understandable and useful. For example, schools can use translators to reach parents who don't speak English well and it must be two- way, with educators paying attention to the concerns and needs of families.'
- 3. Volunteering:** 'Parents can make significant contributions to the environment and functions of a school. Schools can get the most out of this process by creating flexible schedules, so more parents can participate, and by working to match the talents and interests of parents to the needs of students, teachers, and administrators.'
- 4. Learning at Home:** 'With the guidance and support of teachers, family members can supervise and assist their children at home with homework assignments and other school-related activities.'
- 5. Decision-making:** 'Schools can give parents meaningful roles in the school decision-making process, and provide parents with training and information so they can make the most of those opportunities. This opportunity should be open to all segments of the community, not just people who have the most time and energy to spend on school affairs.'
- 6. Collaboration with the Community:** 'Schools can help families gain access to support services offered by other agencies, such as healthcare, cultural events, tutoring services, and after-school child-care programs. They also can help families and community groups provide services to the community, such as recycling programs and food pantries.'

**Source:** <http://www.edletter.org/past/issues/1997-so/sixtypes.shtml>

*This model has been adopted by numerous school districts throughout the country, including a number of districts that provided research support for this report.*

Second, we must recognize that strong district and school leadership is needed to ensure that robust parental involvement strategies are pursued in ways that will maximize student learning and school outcomes. This means most fundamentally that schools and districts must not address parental involvement as an isolated activity—disconnected from efforts to improve schools and student outcomes—but as a strategy that should be integrated with others to maximize the potential for student and school success.

Third, we must engage with policymakers at the federal, state and local levels to identify prospective policy changes and investments—such as enhancing the capacity of state departments of education, districts and schools—that hold promise for improving student and school academic results. By focusing more strategically on parental involvement and identifying ways to promote more effective involvement that will lead to improved outcomes, our federal, state and local policies can better develop and leverage the necessary resources to ensure that, in fact, no child is left behind.

Research studies published between 1995 and 2002 consistently "showed a relationship between parent involvement...and improved student achievement. This relationship holds across families of all economic, racial/ethnic, and educational backgrounds and for students of all ages." -- The National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools



# NCLB: What Federal Law Requires

The aim of promoting student learning through standards-based reforms is not new. For many years, federal, state and local leaders have pursued education reform strategies that involve accountability systems defined by clear standards for what students should know, and when. In the 1990s, numerous states, as well as the federal government's Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, took major strides to establish rigorous education standards that would define expected student performance.

NCLB built upon and codified this reform foundation, but it also did dramatically more. Signed into law in early 2002, NCLB changed the national education landscape, ushering in a substantially more expansive federal role in education at the state and local levels.<sup>10</sup> The law established a more rigorous set of student performance requirements as a foundation for holding states, districts and schools accountable for the academic success of all students. Indeed, the cornerstone of NCLB is its focus on accountability and transparency regarding how well schools and students are performing.

Given the thousands of headlines in newspapers, magazines and web pages since NCLB became law, one could easily assume that the law focused almost exclusively on state testing systems, "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) and "highly qualified teachers." Although these represent significant and in many ways new elements in the law, there is much more to the landmark legislation.

On parental involvement in particular, NCLB's key provisions reflect an action framework that tracks the three overlapping elements of effective parent-school interaction: information, engagement and advocacy. Notably, some NCLB requirements apply only to Title I schools and districts (generally, those that are low income) while others apply to all public schools and districts, regardless of their Title I funding status. (See Table: NCLB Requirements).

## Accountability and Data Transparency

NCLB requires that each state establish a statewide system of accountability based primarily on statewide tests. Under those systems of accountability, states, schools and districts are held responsible for demonstrating AYP in raising student achievement and in closing achievement gaps—with the goal of having all students proficient by 2013-14. States, districts and schools must report and be evaluated on the basis of overall assessment results, as well as "disaggregated" performance data for subgroups of students. (Those subgroups are defined by such factors as race and ethnicity, income, limited English proficiency and students with disabilities). Reporting data by subgroups, in the words of one community group representative, "shines a bright light on under-served kids."

### Perspectives on Adequate Yearly Progress

In one interview, a Washington State community leader pointed out that AYP is most effective when schools use the results to diagnose a problem and bring parents into the discussion about what to do to improve schools and districts. Schools need to be willing to sit down with parents, examine and discuss scores, and work together on solutions.

The difficulty with AYP, this community leader said, is that blaming often comes into the picture and schools are reluctant to open the door to blame. There needs to be an environment of trust between school and parents in order to use AYP as a diagnostic tool.

## Consequences

NCLB requires that state accountability systems include “rewards and sanctions” applicable to all public schools and districts. The law establishes a series of escalating consequences and interventions for Title I schools and districts that do not meet AYP goals over time, several of which reflect the intent to give parents more options about their children's education.

In particular, when schools fail to meet AYP for two consecutive years and, as a result, are identified as “in need of improvement,” districts are required to provide technical assistance for those schools and offer their students a choice of other public schools to attend. This option permits students the opportunity to transfer to another school in the district that has not been identified for school improvement.<sup>11</sup> When schools do not meet AYP goals for three consecutive years, districts must also offer supplemental education services [SES]. These include tutoring and other academic enrichment services that are in addition to instruction provided during the school day.<sup>12</sup>



NCLB REQUIREMENTS		
Issue	Applicable to All Schools	Additional Requirements Applicable to Title I Schools
Standards and Assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rigorous academic content and achievement standards</li> <li>• State assessments aligned to standards in reading/language arts and mathematics in each of grades 3-8, and once in high school.</li> <li>• State assessments aligned to standards in science in grade clusters 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12, beginning 2007-08</li> </ul>	
Consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determinations of whether schools and districts make adequate yearly progress (AYP) based primarily on assessment results (and high school graduation rate for high schools) for school and district as a whole and for each sub-group of students based on poverty, disability, major racial and ethnic groups, etc.</li> <li>• Rewards and consequences for schools and districts based on their AYP status</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School improvement, corrective actions, and ultimate restructuring for schools that do not make AYP, including development of school improvement and corrective action plans.</li> <li>• Public school choice for students in schools in first or subsequent year of improvement, corrective action, or restructuring status</li> <li>• Supplemental educational services, generally beginning in the second year that a school is in improvement status.</li> </ul>
Highly Qualified Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All teachers of core academic subjects must be highly qualified.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notices to parents of their right to inquire as to the professional qualifications of their child's teacher and any paraprofessionals assigned to work with their child</li> <li>• Notice to parents when their child is taught for four consecutive weeks by a teacher who does not meet the federal definition of a highly qualified teacher</li> </ul>

## NCLB REQUIREMENTS

Issue	Applicable to All Schools	Additional Requirements Applicable to Title I Schools
Parental Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report cards available to parents and the public on school, district, and state performance on assessments, qualifications of teachers, and other data</li> <li>• Diagnostic reports for parents on the performance of their children on state assessments</li> <li>• Parents may transfer child to another public school if child's school persistently dangerous or child victim of a violent criminal act on school grounds</li> <li>• Districts, parents, teachers, and others make up a Committee of Practitioners that reviews and advises the state educational agency on any regulations to implement Title I and the Title I or consolidated state plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written school and district parental involvement policy</li> <li>• School-parent compact on roles of teacher, school, and parent in raising the academic achievement of the student.</li> <li>• Annual meeting for parents to explain Title I program; opportunities for parental involvement</li> <li>• Parental right to participate in developing school improvement plan.</li> <li>• Parents of English language learners have the right to know if child placed in language instructional program; to receive notice if program not meeting its objectives, and to refuse that placement and pick a different available program.</li> <li>• District improvement or corrective action for Title I district failing to make AYP for consecutive years.</li> </ul>

## The Role of Parents in School Improvement

When Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) calculations result in designating a school as in need of improvement, parents must be consulted in developing a school improvement plan, which must include strategies to promote effective parental involvement in the school. In addition, school support teams established to work with these schools must include parents.<sup>13</sup>

NCLB also includes parental involvement requirements reflected in earlier statutes.<sup>14</sup>

Districts receiving Title I funds must develop a written parental involvement policy for parents of Title I students. Required to be developed jointly with, and agreed to by, parents of Title I students, it may be part of a policy that applies to all parents in the district or may apply only to parents of Title I students.

Such policies must, among other things, describe how districts:

- Involve parents in developing the district's overall Title I plan and in the school review and improvement process;
- Coordinate and support planning and implementation of effective parental involvement activities by Title I schools to improve student academic achievement and school performance;
- Build schools' and parents' capacity for strong parental involvement; and
- Annually evaluate parental involvement policies in connection with the goal of improving academic quality. (This evaluation must include: (1) identifying barriers to greater parental participation, with particular attention to parents who are economically disadvantaged, disabled or have limited English proficiency or literacy and to racial or ethnic minority parents; and (2) addressing more effective strategies to involve parents.)

Similarly, Title I schools must develop parental involvement policies that are agreed to, developed jointly with, and distributed to parents of Title I children. These policies must describe how schools will, among other things:

- Provide information on programs and school-parent meetings; and
- Develop a school-parent compact, outlining how parents, school staff, and students will share responsibility for improved student academic achievement and how the school and parents will work in partnership to help children meet state academic standards. This compact must describe the school's responsibility to provide high-quality curriculum and instruction in a supportive and effective learning environment and must also address the ways in which parents will be responsible for supporting their children's learning, such as monitoring attendance, homework completion, and television watching; volunteering in the child's classroom; and participating in decisions related to their child's education and use of extracurricular time.

Finally, NCLB also requires that states describe in their Title I plans how state educational agencies will support the collection and dissemination of effective parental involvement policies to districts and schools. They must be:

- Based on high quality, current research on effective parental involvement that fosters achievement to high standards for all children; and
- Geared to lowering barriers to greater participation by parents in school planning, review and improvement.

### Parent Information Resource Centers (PIRCs)

Like its predecessor statute, NCLB authorizes direct, competitive grants to nonprofit organizations (or consortiums of such organizations and one or more school districts) to establish and implement Parent Information Resource Centers (PIRCs) to work with parents, schools and educational agencies in promoting parental involvement.

Annual appropriations of about \$40 million have been made in recent years, and between one and five centers have been funded in each state. Grant funds are used to provide training, information and support to parents of children in elementary and secondary schools and parents of preschool children, individuals who work with them, state educational agencies, districts, schools and organizations such as Parent Teacher Organizations that support family-school partnerships. NCLB requires that at least 50 percent of the funds serve areas with high concentrations of low-income families and that at least 30 percent of the funds be used for services to parents of preschool children.

#### Authorized uses of funds include helping parents to:

- Understand accountability systems and their child's academic achievement in relation to state standards;
- Communicate with teachers and school officials;
- Become active in developing and implementing school-parent compacts and parental involvement policies;
- Engage in school planning and improvement; and
- Obtain information on educational options.

NCLB requires that each center be school-linked or school-based, and the U.S. Department of Education requires that each center provide services on a statewide basis.

### A “Bill of Rights” for Parents Under the No Child Left Behind Act

NCLB confers upon parents (or adults responsible for raising a child) important rights for making sure that children receive the education they deserve.

#### All parents of public school students have the right:

- To have their child taught to the same high standards that apply to all students in the state and to be taught curriculum that is consistent with those high standards;
- To have their child taught by a highly qualified teacher who has the skills and subject matter knowledge to be a successful teacher;
- To receive reports on how well their child is learning reading and math based on annual tests, and to have their child’s school explain how it will work with their child in areas where he/she needs additional help; and
- To receive yearly “report cards” with information on how well their school and district are doing in graduating all groups of students and in educating them in reading, math and science, compared to other schools and to their state, as a whole.

#### Parents of children attending Title I schools (generally those with high numbers of low-income students) have the right:

- To participate in developing a policy for parents to be involved in the school and a school-parent agreement that spells out the responsibilities of the school, teacher and parent in educating their child;
- To participate in developing a plan to improve their child's school if the school is found to need improvement;
- To transfer their child to another public school if their child’s school is found to need improvement or is unsafe for their child;
- To receive free tutoring for their child from the school or from an educational company that they pick from a list approved by the state, if their child’s school is found to need improvement for two years in a row (subject to eligibility conditions based on family income); and
- To receive both--
  - information about the Title I program in regular school meetings; and
  - notices (if possible, in a language they can understand) about the qualifications of their child's teacher and their opportunities to participate in the school and to make decisions for their child.

#### Parents of English language learners attending Title I schools (generally those with high numbers of low-income students) have the right:

- To know if their child is placed in a language instructional program;
- To receive notice if the program is not meeting its objectives; and
- To refuse that placement, and to pick a different available program.

*Source: Adapted from Declaration of Rights for Parents of English Language Learners, (U.S. Department of Education, 2003) at <http://www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2003/12/12022003.html>.*



# Findings

**Five findings, based upon research and interviews, have important implications for meaningful parental involvement.**

## **FINDING 1: Too many parents fail to receive clear and timely information about their children and their schools.**

NCLB's focus on student performance data and reporting of information to parents and the public has sparked more meaningful parental engagement in many public school districts, including better awareness about student performance and the challenges that schools face. The benefits include better parent awareness and understanding of their children's learning and stronger interactions with school leaders and teachers.

In several of the districts surveyed, the information reported under NCLB was used to engage parents in conversations about student and school performance. Moreover, several district officials and parents said the emphasis in school-parent communications had shifted in the wake of NCLB. Now, there is more discussion about student performance in light of state academic standards. As one district official noted, "The focus of our schools has changed from bake sales and fundraisers to helping parents understand state standards, test-taking skills and other academic-oriented issues."

Major communication challenges remain, however. The problem is not a lack of good data about student and school performance. (In fact, parents from several of the focus groups expressed frustration with receiving too much data, which proved to be overwhelming.) Rather, there is frequently no way to extract clear and timely messages about what the performance data mean and then what parents should do in response.<sup>15</sup>

Is the information clear? When schools and districts report student performance data, they inevitably provide that information in various written formats, including:

- Student-specific reports, including results of tests the teacher has developed, periodic report cards and standardized test scores; and
- School or district reports that compile individual student results into a general report.

These reports can add up to information overload. In addition, standardized test score reports and "big picture" information about school and district performance are frequently incomprehensible.

For instance, standardized tests scores provided directly from test publishers often used highly technical language and unexplained terms. As a result, parents reported that they were not able to determine what skills the test scores measured or what the report told – or did not tell – them. This problem was worse for parents in poverty and parents who are not proficient in English.

In several states, a prevalent theme among parents, educators and community members was that having separate state and federal accountability systems and measures of success led to confusion. At times the data seemed inconsistent, obscuring the real picture of school and district performance. This further complicated parents' ability to make informed decisions about educational choices.

*Education leaders need to make data “real” for parents.*  
— *State of Washington community group participant*

*“The problem . . . is not a lack of data, but that there is no way to extract simple, clear, consistent and valued messages for the parents to understand out of all the data.”*  
— *Texas school district administrator*

Faced with the challenge of reporting data effectively, many educators and parents stressed the need for districts and schools to go beyond the written word when communicating with parents. Reflecting this point, one New Mexico principal said school representatives need to meet “one-on-one” with parents to discuss test results and plan future goals. An educator in Illinois observed that, without additional explanation, a piece of paper, “just doesn’t really cut it.”

**Is the information timely?** NCLB’s accountability focus also presents a new challenge: reducing the amount of time between when key standardized tests are given and when the results are released. States using standard pencil-and-paper assessments – still the vast majority given the expense of moving to computerized exams – generally sign contracts with testing companies to develop standardized tests. Test booklets and answer sheets are sent to schools where the tests are administered according to pre-set schedules. Afterward, testing materials are returned to the publisher or another firm that scores the answer sheets. School-level results are then typically reported to the state departments of education, where they are matched with student and school records and used to make the accountability determinations required by NCLB.

Test results for individual students are not reported until later — sometimes as long as a month after the initial school-level results are released and as long as four months after the tests have been given. In the worst of cases, parents and students receive the results well after students have begun classes in a new grade or new school. Meanwhile, states struggling to shorten the time between test administration and score reporting continue to face real challenges. As students across the country begin the 2006-2007 school year, parents in more than a dozen states will wait weeks — in a few cases even months — before learning if the schools their children attend have been identified for improvement and will be required to offer public school choice or Supplemental Education Services. State officials generally attribute the delay in releasing this information to the implementation of new tests required by NCLB which, for the first time in 2005-2006, required that states administer reading and math tests to all students in grades 3-8 and at least once in high school. A few states cite problems with test vendors as reason for the late release of AYP determinations.<sup>16</sup>

### **Factors Influencing Test Score Reporting**

- Assessments with open-ended / written response components typically take longer to score.
- With high-stakes assessments, pencil and paper answer documents are usually scored off-site.
- Third-party contracts with companies that score and report assessments often reduce the level of control states have over the timetable.
- Data cleansing and verification is a time consuming process, particularly when all levels - state, district and school are involved.
- Timing of test administration – for example, fall vs. spring – directly affects the timing of the release of test scores.



With so much riding on feedback about student performance, the slow flow of information from state to school district to specific schools can have serious consequences:

- Parents may not get results in time to have informed conversations with teachers and school officials about necessary interventions.
- Teachers may not get results in time to tailor instruction to student needs.
- Schools and districts may miss federal deadlines for notifying parents about school performance ratings.
- Parents may learn about educational options such as school choice or free tutoring too late to make informed decisions.

Indeed, a recurring theme in several interviews with parents was their concern that they were not aware of important school performance measures or of opportunities to take advantage of supplemental education services.<sup>17</sup> In the words of one Connecticut focus group parent, “I want to hear . . . news when it happens, not three months later when I go to the [parent-teacher] conference.”

Efforts are under way in a number of states to improve assessment programs, including reducing the time between test administration and reporting. Some states are enhancing their student data systems, for example, to include individual student identifiers and allow for the collection of longitudinal information that will provide parents and educators with the high-quality and timely data they need. States are also learning from their experiences and are becoming more skilled in drafting requests for proposals in their procurement of statewide assessments, negotiating contracts with testing companies to anticipate and address possible performance problems, and staffing testing departments with personnel who have expertise in managing these pivotal and complex agreements.<sup>18</sup>

## **FINDING 2: Poverty, limited English proficiency, and varying cultural expectations are among the biggest barriers to parental involvement.**

The barriers to effective communication between parents and schools are often even higher with low-income and language minority parents<sup>19</sup> – who, like other parents, care deeply about their children and want to see them succeed. The consequences of not meeting the needs of these parents become starkly apparent when considering that one of the central goals of NCLB was to reduce the achievement gap plaguing low-income, minority and limited English proficient students. That is a gap that unfortunately still remains.<sup>20</sup>

The simple reality is that many low-income and language-minority parents do not feel welcome at their children’s school. A state education official perhaps framed the challenge best when he observed, “It is critically important to . . . change things so that parents are not afraid to enter schools and [so] that they no longer see them as alien and frightening places.”

*“The teachers in our school system don’t understand us and don’t understand our culture.”*

*– a Connecticut parent*

**To meet this challenge, several issues must be addressed.**

First, low-income parents who are struggling to make ends meet often cannot adjust their schedules to accommodate school functions during the day or in the early evening. A number of educators interviewed urged that steps be taken to provide incentives for employers to provide paid leave for parents to attend major school functions involving their children.

Second, and as reflected in the majority of parent focus group interviews, many low-income parents who have immigrated from other countries are not proficient in English and may have very different expectations based on their experience elsewhere.<sup>21</sup> Faced with unfamiliar school systems, these parents often feel intimidated and uninformed. In addition, many of them have no basis for understanding the appropriate advocacy role they should play on behalf of their children.<sup>22</sup> These feelings can intensify when districts and school-based parent organizations conduct meetings without providing translation services, leading many parents to feel they are not welcome and do not count.

*"It's really frustrating that we go to meetings that are supposed to be in Spanish and English and end up being only in English. We get tired of reminding [the administration conducting the meetings] to speak in Spanish."*

*— a Texas parent*

The language barrier alone remains a significant obstacle to effective parental engagement. In some districts, interviews confirmed that, at best, the only written communication parents received was in English and Spanish, and few districts had enough staff members who could serve as translators when necessary. Schools that post materials on their website in multiple languages are taking a step forward. However, for a number of low-income families, access to Internet sites and other telecommunications vehicles is not a given. Although technology offers much promise for communication, it is not a perfect solution for all parents.

Third, minority parents said they frequently perceived cultural barriers when interacting with teachers from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Low-income parents spoke of an economic/cultural gap and a lack of understanding that kept them from relating to teachers and other key school personnel.

*"It doesn't matter how many structured activities a school creates, parents must feel welcomed, accepted, respected, and validated at their school and by school leaders. That atmosphere is something that has to be ingrained rather than something contrived by events that are primarily intended to be scored or counted."*

*— a Connecticut principal*

### **FINDING 3: Poor communication with parents hinders their ability to exercise NCLB's choice and supplemental education services options.**

Challenges about the clarity, timeliness and usefulness of information provided to parents are especially visible with supplemental education services [SES] and public school choice, given that these federally mandated consequences for schools that do not make Adequate Yearly Progress under NCLB<sup>23</sup> can be measured. For that reason, they provide important benchmarks about school-parent communications.

Most parent focus group discussions reflected that parents lacked fundamental knowledge about SES and choice options – a failure often associated with poor communication from schools or districts. It should be noted, however, that several of the concerns parents expressed about SES and choice options were not associated with breakdowns in communication. In all, research and interviews confirmed varied and substantial challenges with regard to the effective implementation of NCLB's SES and choice options.

**Supplemental education services.** Concerns about the kind and quality of SES providers – and the information parents could draw on to make informed decisions about those providers—surfaced in a number of interviews with educators. Parents expressed the desire for schools to provide background information that would help parents better evaluate their options. These issues also surfaced specifically with respect to the often limited availability of SES providers who could serve language minority students. Also, a common theme among SES providers interviewed was that too many districts did not facilitate (and in some cases, impeded) good communication between providers and parents, based on a sense of competition between district and providers for limited federal funds. In several focus groups, parents and school leaders alike observed that the cost of transportation and the distance to off-site SES providers impeded broader use of those services.

**School choice.** School choice options, which parents used even less frequently than they used SES, were criticized by parents and school officials for a number of reasons. Beyond issues of timely notice, parents generally favored sending their children to neighborhood schools — a preference in tension with the choice option itself. (Educators who were interviewed confirmed this point.) A corresponding concern for parents was the long commute that might result if they chose to send their children to other public schools.

Also, in a number of districts, few or no options for exercising “choice” were available. Under NCLB, choice works only if a district has both underperforming and highly performing schools or if neighboring districts voluntarily partner to offer choice across district lines. And as a practical matter, the highly performing schools must have the capacity to receive additional students and must be relatively close to the homes of the students involved if the option is to work as contemplated.

**U.S. Department of Education findings.** These interview findings were generally affirmed by a report recently released by the U.S. Department of Education, Title I Accountability and School Improvement From 2001 to 2004 (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). That report focused on state and district implementation of the accountability provisions of NCLB and highlighted lagging enrollment in both the public school choice and supplemental education services options under the law. The following are among the most relevant findings:

- For both the 2002-03 and 2003-04 school years, only 1 percent of eligible students participated in Title I choice. Factors contributing to low participation included:

1. Concerns that the move would be temporary;
2. Reluctance to blame the school for its underperformance;
3. Strong ties to the neighborhood school; and
4. Late notification by states of schools required to offer choice.

- The number of parents choosing to enroll their children in supplemental education services between 2002-03 and 2003-04 rose from 7 percent to 19 percent. Factors contributing to this relatively low uptake in participation included:

1. Insufficient information about the providers approved to offer SES and the substantial cost of communicating with parents, particularly when using alternatives to written communication such as TV and radio; and
2. Failure of more than half of the districts required to offer supplemental education services to actually provide these services, with 68 percent reporting that their primary reason for not providing services was that no parents signed up to receive them.

### State Data on School Choice and Supplemental Services for the 2003-2004 School Year

School Choice (under § 1116 of NCLB)	Conneticut	Georgia	Illinois	Texas	Washington
Number of Title I Schools Identified for Improvement, Corrective Action, and Restructuring from which Students Transferred	8	258	562	0	31
Number of Public Schools to which Students Transferred	36	245	152	0	18
Number of Students who Transferred to Another Public School	260	2,547	1,313	260	377
Number of Students who were eligible to Transfer to Another Public School	7,964	275,876	389,902	1,925	26,442
Supplemental Education Services (under §1116 of NCLB)	Conneticut	Georgia	Illinois	Texas	Washington
Number of Title I Schools Identified for Improvement , Corrective Action, and Restructuring whose Students received Supplemental Education Services	8	337	310	3	12
Number of Students Who Received Supplemental Education Services	711	25,451	18,000	45	250
Number of Students Who Were Eligible to Receive Supplemental Education Services	3,068	184,372	325,944	—	15,401

Source: 2003-04 NCLB Consolidated State Performance Report

#### **FINDING 4: Creative, multi-faceted communication and engagement strategies can promote better parental involvement in schools.**

Among the dozens of interviews and focus group discussions with educators and parents, if one universal theme emerged, it was that successful parent involvement strategies were multifaceted and depended on both schools and parents to do their part.

A few primary strategies were cited as being effective, and often necessary, in achieving desired levels of parent involvement.

**Pursuing multiple communication outlets.** When districts and schools were effective in reaching parents, it is clear that they did not rely on a single method of communication. Instead, successful districts and schools used newspapers, television, and the Internet, along with more traditional newsletters, to provide key information to parents. In addition, several districts and schools found it valuable to communicate key information through automated telephone messages. One parent focus group stressed the effectiveness of school representatives personally reaching out to parents in their native languages to notify them about major events or solicit their feedback.

At the same time, school officials acknowledged, and parents affirmed, these steps alone would not suffice.

*“The key to parental involvement successes ... has been direct, personal relationships created by parent involvement staff and families of at-risk students.”*

*— Texas school board member*

**Targeting parent outreach.** A number of educators and parents described in positive ways the kinds of outreach that could frequently accompany more traditional written communication. Several observed that parents might be reached – and better support for students provided – when school officials worked creatively to “meet” the parents closer to their homes and communities, in ways that were more familiar to parents.<sup>24</sup>

In one Texas district, for example, parents expressed their appreciation for a principal who literally met them half way, bringing some teachers with him to meet parents at a community center to discuss student and school issues. This simple step of physically reaching out beyond the schoolhouse doors had a major impact on parents, increasing their desire to become more involved in the school. Other positive steps included reaching out to parents on the job with “lunchbox talks” or visiting places of worship.

As for school-based events, parents and school officials repeatedly cited simple ways to attract often hard-to-reach parents to the school. For example, providing food and child care was often the key to success — as was providing transportation to and from school events. School officials also said that events highlighting student work or performance and opportunities to volunteer collectively (such as clothing drives) were important ways to engage families.

In addition, a number of interviewees discussed the importance of using creative means to discuss such matters as academic expectations, student performance and required student skills to parents. For example, one parent focus group highlighted the success of a middle school math specialist who had worked with teachers to create a “math manipulatives” box that was used at parents’ night, along with other materials, to explain key math skills being taught to students. Similarly, a Connecticut elementary principal discussed his school’s sponsorship of “literary nights” to foster parent-teacher interactions.

**Engaging community groups.** A nearly universal observation among school leaders and parents was the critical role that community organizations played in supporting parents’ efforts to help their children succeed in school. Many of the districts surveyed worked actively with community-based organizations, including religious institutions, to help meet the needs of students when the parents themselves could not provide that support. Badly needed services that were beyond the capacity of some schools — such as after-school programs, translation services for parents, and health services — frequently made the difference for high-needs families. Moreover, several interviewees said community organizations might have more credibility with many minority parents or would be able to reach high-needs parents more effectively. As one Georgia parent said of the staff members at a community agency, “I feel good having them help my children with their schoolwork. I know them because they helped me before... Here they all speak Spanish. It is better for my children that we know each other and are able to talk with each other.”

Notably, a number of parents observed that effective parent involvement was not a one-way street. “It takes two to make a child successful—the parent and the teacher,” a New Mexico parent observed. Thus, schools also serve a vital role in promoting effective parental involvement when they engage in efforts to train parents to help them better understand school operations and expectations and to be strong advocates for their children.<sup>25</sup>

### Excerpts from A Pre-NCLB Case Study: State of Washington

Principals in improving schools were more likely to say that they had asked parents to do something to improve scores....

While an uninvolved parent population might have stopped other schools, improving schools saw it as a challenge. These schools set out to find creative ways to draw parents into collaboration, such as combining a family fun night with a short discussion of how parents could help the school improve. Some schools kept their requests to parents simple, e.g., “Read to your child 20 minutes a day.” Other strategies were more elaborate....

In schools where poverty or other problems limited parent involvement, some principals turned to the broader community. Many of the improving schools made special efforts to ask community businesses and non-profit organizations to support their instructional goals rather than just donate equipment. One principal actually refused help if it was not directly tied to instruction. As she put it, “We had to take that out because they were more interested in doing social things and we couldn’t do that on the kids’ education time.”

*Source: Lake et al., Making Standards Work: A Case Study of Washington State (Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, July 1999).*

### **FINDING 5: Parental involvement is not uniformly valued by school leaders as a key accountability strategy**

Interviews with education officials indicated that parental involvement frequently does not receive the kind of attention or management focus that is necessary to make the most of prospects for better student learning and outcomes. Frequently, school officials said their primary focus on other key accountability issues (such as testing and teacher quality), along with the many day-to-day demands of the job, precluded a more sustained focus on parent involvement. Indeed, discussion in a number of parent focus groups also reflected the view that parent involvement efforts had actually suffered in the wake of NCLB as a result of the law's heightened accountability and testing focus.

At the same time, parents in numerous settings emphasized the importance of school leaders putting a high priority on parental involvement. As participants in one New Mexico community focus group indicated, if a school is doing a good job reaching out to parents to get them involved, it is because the principal is behind the effort.

*"The principal makes a big difference."*

— *New Mexico parent*

And local school boards, composed of representatives of their communities, have a special opportunity — and arguably a special responsibility — to lead in setting and overseeing policies that foster parental involvement as an integral element of school improvement strategies.

Although evidence of integrating parent involvement strategies as a part of overall district improvement efforts surfaced in some instances, that evidence did not appear in all cases. Even in some cases where there was a genuine effort to reach out and involve parents, that effort was not always clearly part of a more integrated strategy linking parental involvement with other key accountability strategies. In many cases, for instance, tracking of and accountability regarding the use of Title I funds specifically reserved for parent involvement activities was not apparent. As a director of a parent information resource center emphasized, more emphasis should be placed on integrating parental involvement into school improvement efforts.

Notably, as reflected below, professional standards reflect the importance of administrator and teacher competency in dealing with parents. Despite this recognition, administrators and teachers are not consistently provided with the professional development to carry out this job. The challenge—frequently unmet—of training administrators and teachers on parental engagement frequently surfaced in interviews. Echoing a theme that emerged in several parent focus groups and educator interviews, one Illinois educator observed, "Educators are trained on education and strategy. But quality training on having relationships with families is not provided. It needs to be intentionally planned out...[Learning about w]orking with families [must be a priority]. There is a counseling and social work side that needs to be taught."<sup>26</sup>

## Professional Standards

**Principals.** Approximately 70 percent of all states use standards issued by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) in some form to license school principals, develop preparation programs, or help districts develop current leaders in their systems. The ISLLC includes as one standard of six the following: “A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.”

See Interstate Leaders Licensure Consortium, *Standards for School Leaders*, Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996.

**Teachers.** The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) gives advanced certification to experienced teachers who are already licensed by their state and who meet the teaching profession’s highest standards. National Board Certification is awarded to teachers on the basis of performance on an exam and presentation of a portfolio of work. It is nationally accepted by the teaching profession as a sign of quality and is used by states and districts as a basis for recognizing and rewarding accomplished teachers.

One of the five core propositions of NBPTS is that teachers are members of learning communities and are responsible for, among other things, working collaboratively with parents to engage them in the work of the school. Thus, a teacher’s ability to work with parents and families as partners is a key standard in each of the 24 NBPTS curriculum or grade-level certification areas.

The standards for secondary-level math teachers, for example, stress that teachers need to view families as partners who can encourage children to value mathematics; design homework assignments to encourage family discussion of school subjects; work with families to help their children develop good study habits and improve performance; communicate regularly with families about family concerns and the progress of their children; and reach beyond the family to engage the community at large in the program.

The standards for teachers of English as a new language articulate similar principles. In addition, they stress the need for teachers to involve others in the school or community in communicating with the family if the teacher does not speak the students’ home language and the role of teachers in assisting families in finding resources outside the school, such as English instruction, tutoring, health care and child care; seeking ways to take advantage of parents’ experiences and insights to enrich the quality of education for their children; and finding ways to bridge cultural differences between the school and families of linguistically diverse students—by developing strategies to communicate with the families, helping them to understand the educational process and encouraging their involvement in a variety of school activities.

**Source:** <http://www.nbpts.org>



# Recommendations for Action

## **RECOMMENDATION 1: Quality of Information. States, districts and schools must provide meaningful, understandable and timely information to parents regarding key school and student performance data.**

**The Challenge.** Based in part on the reporting requirements of NCLB, states and districts amass vast amounts of detailed information about student and school performance. Much of the data must be reported, but their technical nature often results in reports that are not easily understood. In the end, a good deal of information gathered about student and school performance is not provided in a way that helps parents decide what actions they should take in response.

States, districts and schools also face major challenges in providing important student performance data in a timely fashion so that parents, teachers and administrators can act on those results.

**Steps to Success.** In their efforts to report student and school data, states, districts and schools should directly address the interests of parents. This means that they must:

Provide clear information that explains the meaning and intended use of performance data. States, districts and schools should ensure that reports of school and district performance are presented in ways that provide clear information and explain their meaning. In particular, states, districts and schools should take steps to provide appropriate interpretations of testing data, which should describe in simple language:

- What the test has covered;
- What scores mean and do not mean;
- How the scores will be used by the school, district or state (including specific consequences associated with the results, if any); and
- What steps parents should take with the data.

Relying on reports produced by test publishers that merely provide data-driven results, without more, will in most cases accomplish little in effectively educating parents about student and school performance.

Factor in issues of timely response when making test administration decisions. Deciding when tests will be given and when scores will be released involves balancing an array of complicated factors. A central factor to consider with respect to test administration decisions is whether parents, teachers and school officials receive test results in ample time to make use of them in the classroom and at home, as well as to make decisions about parental options under NCLB.

## Notable Practices and Resources: Useful and Timely Information to Parents

**1. Interactive Illinois Report Card.** The Illinois State Board of Education, with help from Just for the Kids, the Business Roundtable, and Northern Illinois University, has developed a state-of-the-art web site for reporting information on school and district performance. The web site presents a wealth of information for parents:

- providing attractive and clear charts and graphs on each school's and district's test performance;
- comparing each school's performance to the best schools in the state, using scatter plot charts;
- explaining what the tests cover and how they are administered;
- explaining state standards and instructional tools available in the schools, including best practices;
- explaining the accountability system;
- explaining the school improvement process, with links to school improvement plans; and
- providing, in both English and Spanish, the demographic information, information on teacher experience, average teacher salaries, and instructional expenditures per student (for each school).

In effect, the web site links performance data for schools and districts to the overall effort to redesign and improve education, linking scores with curriculum, resources, standards, and best practices. It includes specific links that provide contextual information designed specifically for parents, educators, and the business community.  
Website: <http://iirc.niu.edu>

### 2. Templates and Model Language

Appendix B to this report contains key principles on parent communications and model notices for school or district report cards, notices of school improvement status, and announcements of SES opportunities.

### 3. Advancing Communication in Education Through Technology

Along with the increases in federal testing and reporting requirements has come significant growth in the availability of tools for assessment management, and data warehousing, analysis, and reporting tools designed specifically for K-12 education. These offerings, largely in the form of software packages and web-based interfaces, are being marketed at the school, district, and state levels. Many such tools, often highly customizable, are intended to help educators understand and act on student and school performance data with the goal of boosting student achievement and closing achievement gaps. Specific tools include: benchmarking; rapid scoring of assessments; student and school performance reports; graphs and charts; comparative and longitudinal data analysis; disaggregation of performance data; ad-hoc querying, statistical and psychometric services, and more.

The following, among the growing list of companies providing services of the sort described, are provided as points of reference:

Edusoft ([www.edusoft.com](http://www.edusoft.com))

eMetric ([www.emetric.net](http://www.emetric.net))

Pearson Inform ([www.concertinform.com](http://www.concertinform.com))

TetraData Corporation ([www.tetradata.com](http://www.tetradata.com))

The Grow Network ([www.grownetwork.com](http://www.grownetwork.com))

Wireless Generation ([www.wirelessgeneration.com](http://www.wirelessgeneration.com))

**RECOMMENDATION 2: Proactive, Targeted Engagement Strategies. Districts and schools must pursue multiple, proactive strategies for communicating with and engaging parents—particularly parents who are low-income or whose first language is not English.**

**The Challenge.** Just as a one-size-fits-all strategy is not effective when teaching students, neither is it effective when communicating with parents. This is especially true given the increasingly diverse population served by U.S. schools.

With demographic shifts, new challenges emerge. In particular, the growing number of language-minority students and parents calls for new and different strategies for effective parent outreach. Additionally, the challenges in reaching low-income parents also still remain. Many parents lack basic knowledge about the avenues within schools that they can pursue to become better informed about their children's education. Many schools intentionally or not, send the message that they do not want parents to participate—or to participate only in very limited ways. Moreover, school officials, teachers and counselors frequently have workloads that limit their ability to effectively connect with parents, requiring the support of organizations that can supplement their efforts.

**Steps to Success.** As a first step, schools must demonstrate to all parents that they are welcome at school. Holding meetings and having office hours at convenient times for parents to meet with teachers or principals are important first steps. Making available services that draw parents in – nutrition, or adult literacy classes, for example – and allowing community organizations to use schools facilities will help make schools feel more open to parents. In addition, the use of parent resource rooms, where parents can get information on successful school plans, use computers, meet other parents or meet with teachers and administrators can help open doors. Ultimately, principals must send the message in their communications and actions and through their faculty and staff that parents are part of the school community.

Second, districts and schools should work to maximize the avenues through which they reach and communicate with parents. When communicating important information, schools and districts should use several different methods to reach parents – in writing, by telephone, television and the Internet; through one-on-one and group meetings at school; and through community partners.

A number of basic but often overlooked steps are important in facilitating the flow of good information and the engagement of parents. Districts and schools should:

Translate written materials and provide interpreter services. Newsletters, website and other communications translated into appropriate languages are critically important in reaching language-minority parents. Technology is making such translations increasingly possible. Signs displayed at the school and other modes of basic communication also should be posted in multiple languages, in part to communicate that parents from all backgrounds are welcome.

Reach out beyond school house doors. To overcome parents' distrust and limited experience in being educated advocates, school officials should work with community organizations that reach low-income or language-minority families. Educators and administrators should leave their buildings to connect with families at their homes or at community events and centers.

Invest in training parents who can facilitate communications. Schools and districts should invest in efforts to provide parents with tools for access to school information and train them in ways to engage school officials and become effective advocates for their children. As the notable practices section that follows describes, there are excellent examples of school districts that hold “parent academies” or study circles to provide background to parents, to actively solicit their feedback, and to break down barriers between

parents and school official. These strategies can be especially important in creating greater understanding and trust across lines of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic groups. Just as teachers and administrators need training to prepare them to work with parents, parents, too, often need help to prepare them to support their children's education.

### **Notable Practices and Resources: School Districts and Partners**

#### **1. Cobb County Public Schools Refugee Immigrant Parent Outreach Program (RIPOS), Cobb County, GA.**

RIPOS was created in February 2002 as a solution to Cobb County's problem of trying to communicate with its diverse immigrant population. The Cobb County school district, which consists of families speaking 81 major languages, was having difficulty conveying critical information in an understandable manner to non-English speaking parents. As a result, the Cobb County school district developed the Refugee Immigrant Parent Outreach Program (RIPOS) to facilitate communications between schools and international families. To accommodate the district's 81 language needs, the service employs nine full-time trained translators and interpreters, as well as 40 part-time interpreters/translators who are hired on an as-needed basis. A facilitator is responsible for meeting the language needs of schools in each of the six areas within the district. When schools need a document or meeting to be translated into one or more languages, they contact their area's facilitator about what language translation services they need and when. In addition to offering translating services, RIPOS staff gives presentations to school staffs about the culture of the student population and offers workshops to parents in their own language to inform them of their rights as parents, the school's graduation requirements, financial aid, and other educational matters.

**Source:**

Avila, Verdi, N. (2005). School home communication in multiple languages. *The School Administrator*. Retrieved August 3, 2006, from the American Association of School Administrators. <http://www.aasa.org/publications/saarticledetail.cfm?ItemNumber=3152>

#### **2. Parent Communications and Involvement Workgroup (PCIW) in San Diego City Schools, San Diego, CA.**

The Parent Communications and Involvement Workgroup (PCIW) was founded in 2003 to create district-wide standards on parent-school-communications, and parent involvement. Members of this group work together to collect ideas and generate strategies for increasing parent involvement and communication. Standards created by this group seek to engage parents at the district, school, classroom and home levels. In addition, communication techniques are designed to reach a multitude of parents and educators. Members include PTA and other parent committee representatives, teachers, principals, and additional school personnel.

**Source:**

<http://www.sandi.net/parents/pciw/index.htm>

#### **3. KDNA Public Radio Station, Yakima Valley, WA.**

The KDNA Spanish language public radio station broadcasts vignettes and public service programs on parent involvement in the schools in its rural listening area, including participation by school officials who provide information on NCLB and other school programs. Programs are designed to address different cultural expectations for parents' role in the schools.

**Source:**

[http://www.radiokdna.org/community\\_services.htm](http://www.radiokdna.org/community_services.htm)

### Notable Practices and Resources: School Districts

#### 4. The Parent Academy of Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Miami-Dade, FL.

This unique, year-round initiative, created in 2005, allows parents to enroll in classes and courses throughout the county that provide them with the necessary experience and skills to guide their children's education. The overarching goal of this initiative is to help parents become equal partners in supporting and improving their children's education. Parents in this county have the opportunity to enroll in classes and courses ranging from understanding the county's school system, to helping children with math. Other courses include child development, effective discipline, and good nutrition.

In addition, parents are offered classes on life skills such as resume writing, financial management, and how to find a job. Parents can even choose to enroll in credential-awarding courses so that they can work towards earning a degree. Classes are taught by college professors, teachers, administrators, business people, and parents. This diverse faculty offers parents with a wealth of knowledge from instructor's individual areas of expertise, and caters to the community's wide-ranging interests and needs.

Although it is not required that participants have a school-age child currently enrolled in the county schools, priority is given to parents who do. Courses are taught in a variety of locations and settings including, in schools, businesses, community sites, and on-line, making it extremely convenient for parents to enroll. In addition, many courses are also offered in other languages such as Spanish. The program relies on funding from generous donations of private individuals and businesses as well as cooperate sponsorships.

**Source:** <http://theparentacademy.dadeschools.net/index.htm> — home page

#### 5. Study Circles Program in Montgomery County Maryland Public Schools, Montgomery County, MD.

The Study Circles Program has been implemented in Montgomery County Public Schools since 2003. The program organizes roundtable discussions with parents, teachers and students to address racial and cultural barriers to parental involvement and student achievement. Each study circle meets for six two-hour sessions and includes 15 parents with diverse backgrounds, teachers, and, when appropriate, students. Two trained facilitators lead the discussion groups to ensure that everyone has a chance to talk and that conversations are productive. Discussions draw on members' previous experiences. All members' perspectives (whether parents, teachers or students) hold equal weight.

The goal of the study circles are to create relationships of trust, to help people learn about one another's cultures, discuss racial and cultural issues and how they might create barriers in student achievement and parent involvement, and finally to address these barriers by creating action teams to tackle the issues.

**Source:** <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/studycircles/>

#### 6. Alps Elementary School Family Resource & Literacy Center, Clarke County School District, Athens, GA.

Alps Elementary School has established a Family Resource and Literacy Center to serve as a place for families to obtain the information, support, and services they need to help them care for their children. The Center is located at the school. A Family Resource Coordinator is on-site two days a week. The Center provides:

- A welcoming place for families to meet and information on/referrals to community services
- Ongoing workshops and training sessions
- Lending library with parenting books, tapes and videos as well as books, games and puzzles to use at home with your children
- Parent support groups and volunteer opportunities

## **Notable Practices and Resources: State Departments of Education**

### **7. Parental Notification Compliance and Translation Service, Georgia Department of Education, Atlanta, GA.**

In 2005, the Georgia State Board of Education approved a contract to provide all of the state's public school districts with access to a commercially available tool for communicating with parents about the performance of students and schools and about their rights and options under various federal education laws. The service, delivered by TransACT, gives educators and administrators an extensive online library of parent notice letters, forms, and guidance documents to help improve the quality, accuracy, and availability of information. Administrators also have access to tools that provide them with detailed information about the specific requirements and timelines for notices. Forms and letters are available in a number of languages and subscribers also have access to custom translation services to translate documents into more than 100 languages.

The following are among the NCLB Parental Notifications and Letters available in English, Spanish, Arabic, Hmong, Russian and Vietnamese. Similar document libraries are available for compliance with IDEA and other federal requirements:

#### **Title I, Accountability**

- Status of School Adequate Yearly Progress - Notice to Parents
- Notice of State Review of District, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) - Letter to Parents
- District Not Making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) - Letter to Parents
- Request for School Transfer, Public School Choice
- Supplemental Services for Title I Schools - Annual Notice
- Student Eligibility for Supplemental Services, Determination of
- Parent Request for Supplemental Services

#### **Title I, Parent Involvement**

- District/School Parent Involvement Policy Meeting - Invitation to Participate
- District/School Parent Involvement Meeting - Parent Participation Form
- School-Parent Compact
- What Every Parent Should Know About the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

#### **Title I, Highly Qualified Teachers**

- Right to Request Teacher Qualifications - Annual Parent Notice
- Notice of Teacher Status - Four-week Notice
- Annual Principal Verification of Highly Qualified Staff Requirements

#### **Title III, English Language Learner Program**

- Home Language Survey
- English Language Development Program Placement, Notification of
- Parent Meeting for English Language Learners, Notice of

#### **Title IX Program, General Provisions**

- Unsafe School, Notice of
- Request for School Transfer, Unsafe School
- Student Victim of a Violent Criminal Offense - Notice to Parent

**Sources:** The Georgia Department of Education and TransAct

For additional information on Georgia's use of TransAct visit [http://www.gadoe.org/ci\\_iap\\_esol.aspx](http://www.gadoe.org/ci_iap_esol.aspx) or visit TransAct directly at <http://www.transact.com>

### Notable Practices and Resources: State Departments of Education

#### 8. Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI), State of Connecticut Commission on Children, Hartford, CT.

The Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) was established by the Connecticut Commission on Children in 1992, serves as a resource for preparing parents to become advocates for children. PLTI defines parent leadership as the capacity to interact within civic society with purpose and achieve positive outcomes for children. PLTI reached its 1,000th graduate in June of 2005 and saw its first graduate elected to the Connecticut General Assembly in January of 2005.

##### Parents receive four phases of training:

- 1) A retreat to develop the group and define its mission;
- 2) A 10-week course on parent leadership;
- 3) A 10-week study of politics, policy and media; and
- 4) A community project to practice the learning within a community context.

The program is run through a statewide office and 11 local sites. Classes generally enroll 20-25 parents who are selected through a competitive interview process and who represent the demographic profile of their region. Upon completion, graduates participate in a ceremony at the state capitol where the Secretary of State presents them with diplomas bearing the state seal. Once training is completed, participants become parent mentors to the next class, thus creating a pyramid of community caring and developing a coalition of parent leaders.

The results of this program are promising. A University of New Hampshire evaluation concluded that PLTI has had far-reaching effects on participants, children, families and systems of health, learning and safety. An increase in civic skills and community involvement among PLTI graduates was also revealed. The evaluation also revealed:

- a 34% increase in public advocacy;
- a 27% increase in participation in new community activities;
- 45% of graduates said PLTI created new opportunities they did not know existed;
- 20% returned to school for advanced education;
- 15% got new jobs; and
- 11% changed careers.

##### The cumulative civic impact of PLTI is measurable. For example, in one town over seven PLTI years, graduates:

- generated approximately 42,300 hours of parent volunteer time;
- buffered the school budgets from further cuts during the state budget crisis;
- guided the implementation of a school breakfast program at eight elementary schools;
- helped to create legislation releasing millions of dollars into the community for school readiness, anti-bullying programs and other activities to improve child outcomes;
- created a baseline report on the well being of children and families to monitor progress and hold accountable the systems that are intended to educate and keep children safe.

Building on the success of this program, a 12 session pilot program called Parents Supporting Educational Excellence (Parents SEE) was started in 2005. Sessions are designed to teach parents what to expect from schools, how to partner with them, and how to be a successful civic leaders on education issues.

**Source:** Connecticut Parent Leadership Training Institute  
For additional information visit <http://www.cga.ct.gov/COC/plti.htm#more>

### **RECOMMENDATION 3: Community Support. Districts and schools should leverage their own limited resources by engaging community organizations.**

**The Challenge.** The role community organizations serve in supporting parents, which can lead to improved student achievement and school success, is sometimes overlooked in conversations about the critical connection between effective parent involvement and student success. As the findings reflect, many economically disadvantaged or non-English-speaking parents lack the skills or resources to effectively engage with schools or serve as their child's advocate. In short, they need help. School officials note, however, that school resources are stretched. In addition, parents often do not trust or feel connected with or understood by their schools. This reality in no small part explains the nearly universal acknowledgement by educators, parent groups and community groups about the vital impact that supporting trusted community organizations can have in helping students and schools succeed.

*“Effective parental involvement can be achieved when community groups can work directly with schools and organize parents in collaboration with principals and staff.”*

*— Texas district official*

**Steps to Success.** Districts and schools should include as part of any parental engagement strategy a focus on community outreach. To help build bridges and to leverage their own resources, districts and schools should:

**Evaluate student needs and available resources.** Before making connections between supporting community organizations and student needs, schools must identify those needs and the resources that can help meet them. The first step in leveraging community support is evaluating the needs of students and the kinds of resources that are available to meet them.

**Ensure that staff are charged with making community connections.** Districts and schools should clearly designate individuals who are responsible for making the necessary connections between community resources and student/parent needs. Their role should involve collaboration with other district and school leaders, as well as with community leaders and stakeholders, including parents.

**Develop clear areas of responsibility and measure results.** Staff positions that involve community outreach should have clear goals and expected outcomes, connected with other efforts to help improve student performance. In other words, any outreach and services coordination plan should be fully integrated and aligned with the district's overall accountability plan.



## Notable Practices and Models: Community Organizations Supporting Parent Engagement

### 1. Parent Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs) , Communities In Schools of Georgia, Atlanta, GA.

The Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) is a non-profit organization that has developed and implemented a The first Parent Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs) were created by the U.S. Department of Education in 1995. Today, there are more than 80 PIRCs operating throughout the country serving to inform and educate parents and others working to ensure the educational success of all students, with a focus on low-income, minority, and English language learning students.

Communities In Schools of Georgia (CIS), the nation's largest dropout prevention network, has a 25 year history of working to help disadvantaged youth successfully learn, stay in school, and prepare for life. CIS has received federal funding to operate a network of PIRCs in Georgia including at its state office in Atlanta and five regional centers.

The CIS Parental Information and Resource Centers offer three programs:

**Parents As Teachers (PAT):** This program is based on the belief that parents are the child's first and most influential teachers. PAT is a research-based curriculum, emphasizing development milestones. The program is administered by parent educators who are trained and certified as Child Development Specialists by the Parents as Teachers National Center. The parent educators use the Born to Learn™ Curriculum, which translates scientific information on early brain development into concrete suggestions on ways to teach and nurture your child.

**Parents Assuring Students Success (PASS):** PASS shows parents ways to improve their children's education. PASS is a research-based curriculum, PASS is designed to encourage greater family involvement in children's education, with a focus on connecting the home, school, parent and child. Parents attend weekly workshops designed to develop their understanding and skill in teaching children how to manage their time, listening to instruction, and concentrating in class.

**Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY):** HIPPY is a home based early intervention program that helps parents create experiences for their children that lay the foundation for success in school and later life. a two or three year program for parents with children ages three, four and five , the program is designed specially for those parents who may not feel confident in their own abilities to teach their children.

**Source:**

Communities In Schools of Georgia

For additional information on CIS of Georgia's Parent Information and Resource Centers visit <http://www.cisga.org/programs.html>

## Notable Practices and Models: Community Organizations Supporting Parent Engagement

### 2. Parent Institute for Quality Education [PIQE], San Diego, CA.

The Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) is a non-profit organization that has developed and implemented a model for increasing parental involvement in K-12 schools amongst communities where parent participation has been difficult to achieve. PIQE was formed in 1987 in San Diego. More than 350,000 parents have participated in the program, which has now partnered with elementary, middle, and high schools in districts throughout much of California. Recently, the program has expanded to include schools in Dallas Texas. 70-75% of the participants are Latino.

PIQE's goal is to work with parents to increase their skills and knowledge so they can support their children's education. The program consists of an 8-week course, and a series of 4-month follow up coaching sessions. The program is lead by PIQE facilitators, who have strong, long-time affiliations with the community participants, as well as knowledge and success with the U.S. educational system. As a result, PIQE instructors serve the important role of mediators between dominant white culture and community participants' culture. Some of the components of the model include promoting continuous dialogue between parents, schools, and community organizations; contextualizing educational issues to make the relevant to participants' daily lives; and informing participants about the U.S. educational system and their rights to exercise their power as parents to take action. Approximately 30, 000 parents participate each year. Any parent who is interested in participating may do so free of charge.

#### Sources:

Torres, Celina & Márquez. Reaching higher ground: Parental outreach programs at the postsecondary level. Los Angeles: The Tomas Rivera Policy Institute, p. 32-36. <http://www.trpi.org/PDFs/rhg.pdf>— This report provides a detailed profile of the PIQE program.

Golan, Shari & Peterson, Dana (2002). Promoting involvement of recent immigrant families in their children's education. FINE Network @ Harvard Family Research Project.

Chrispeels, J. H. & Rivero, E. (2000). Engaging Latino families for student success: Understanding the process and impact providing training to parents. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA. Authors of this report conducted a study to evaluate the effectiveness of the PIQE program and found that parental participation in the PIQE program increased their engagement in their children's education.

Parent Institute For Quality Education Annual Report (2005). Bringing schools parents and communities together in the education of every child to provide all students with options and access to post secondary education. [www.piqe.org](http://www.piqe.org) This annual report provides additional information about the history and success of the PIQE program.

### **Notable Practices and Models: State Laws and District Practices Promoting Parent and Community Involvement**

#### **3. Austin Independent School District, Austin, TX.**

Austin ISD supports the Alliance Schools Initiative, a project of the Austin Interfaith Alliance, coalition of religious congregations, schools, and other institutions. With grant funds from the State of Texas, the project works with about 20 schools in Austin to provide adult education and job referrals and to strengthen parent and community involvement in reforming the schools. Parents and community members from participating schools form a collective leadership group to identify and address common issues and needs. An Alliance Schools principals' network meets monthly and develops a program of parent academies to prepare them to participate in school leadership and decision-making. The academies teach parents how to track their children's educational progress and ask teachers the right questions. They also teach parents how to devise plans to address problems in the schools, including educating them about curriculum, school policies and budgets, and political context. See [http://www.crosscity.org/downloads/CCCSite\\_Austin\\_R.pdf](http://www.crosscity.org/downloads/CCCSite_Austin_R.pdf).

### **RECOMMENDATION 4: Professional Development. Federal, state and district officials need to prioritize and fund more comprehensive professional development for teachers and administrators, with special emphasis on challenges of culture and language.**

**The Challenge.** The connection between parent and teacher and, often, parent and principal is vital in helping students reach their potential in the classroom. Too frequently, however, teachers and principals lack the necessary background and training, particularly in settings where they do not share a common cultural heritage with parents. A recurring theme in parent focus group conversations and among education leaders was the desire to better connect, but with the frustration in not knowing the best strategies to effectively do so. Frequently, the absence of good training (pre-service or in-service) was identified as a major missing ingredient.

#### **Steps to Success.**

**Make training a priority.** The importance of parent involvement, and effective strategies for engaging parents in their children's education, should represent significant strands of instruction in schools of education and educational administration, as well as of on-the-job professional development. Special emphasis should be placed on helping teachers and administrators understand a variety of cultural contexts and convey a welcoming environment that invites all parents to lend their support.

**Provide federal incentives for training.** As a matter of federal policy, Congress should ensure that all teacher and principal training funded with federal money includes attention to engaging and dealing effectively with parents, with a focus on cultural understanding and strategies to generate support at home for student learning.

**Evaluate teachers and administrators on parental involvement.** Criteria for evaluations reflect a judgment about what is important in job performance. Leaving out parent involvement sends a message that it is not a priority for school personnel. The same is true of state licensure standards, which reflect key job qualifications. States and districts should demonstrate the importance of teachers' and administrators' role in fostering parental involvement by establishing professional development and performance, criteria associated with parental involvement.

### Notable Practices and Models: Pre-Service Teacher Education Programs

Few pre-service teacher education programs focus on educating their students (future teachers) about how to interact with families. Programs that include this focus provide pre-service teachers with experience in dealing with families in various circumstances, typically early on in their preparation and with a focus on understanding the culture of the families and communities with which they may be working. They include:

- The Parent Power Project, California State University, Fresno matches up a family and a pre-service teacher for ten weeks. The teacher interviews and gathers information from the family while doing diagnostic teaching with the child. Through this experience, the teacher learns how to work with families, and the families learn what they can do to help their child at home and in school. Based on this experience, participants design family involvement programs to implement in their current or future job situations. See <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NewSkills/chptr3a.html>.
- The Urban Teacher Education Program at Indiana University Northwest in Gary, Indiana provides for pre-service teachers to be observed by a UTEP coordinator in various parent involvement situations, such as parent teacher conferences. Prospective teachers are trained at three professional development centers located at urban schools at different grade cluster levels. Parents are involved in designing the teacher education program, including a community experience component which is integrated into other courses. For example, students in one course participate in a 21-hour placement in a community service agency. See <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NewSkills/chptr3a.html>; <http://www.iun.edu/~utep/>
- The University of Houston at Clear Lake, Houston, Texas teacher-family project began as a pre-service program for bilingual education teachers but has been expanded to prepare other teachers to work with parents. The program focuses on – (1) the responsibility of schools to initiate contact with parents, who often reluctant to question schools' authority or judgment; (2) parent education; and (3) multiple definitions of family involvement that range from getting children ready for school to representation for other parents. See <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NewSkills/chptr3a.html>
- The Rural Special Education Project at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Arizona provides direct experience with families and communities through cultural immersion. Students live and teach on a Navajo reservation for one academic year.

**Source:** See <http://www.edletter.org/past/issues/1997-so/teaching.shtml>.

**RECOMMENDATION 5: Better Implementation and Stronger Accountability. Federal, state and local policymakers and educators should recognize parental involvement as central to school improvement and place parental involvement strategies on par with other steps taken to improve student achievement.**

**The Challenge.** The elements of NCLB (and its predecessor statutes) designed to give parents more of a role in their children's education have not been fully implemented. A more robust focus on parental involvement as a core accountability strategy has been impeded by a combination of factors, including an absence of clear understanding regarding effective ways to engage parents to promote better student achievement; the uncertainty regarding the ways to best measure success with respect to parental involvement; and a preoccupation with other elements of accountability that lend themselves to clearer criteria for evaluation.

These factors have, no doubt, contributed to the focus of the U.S. Department of Education, which in turn has resulted in a parallel focus in state departments of education, districts and schools. Although parental involvement has been the focus of some Department oversight and monitoring, the stronger emphasis on other elements of accountability has relegated parental involvement to back-burner status for many district and state leaders. As a result, discussions of parental involvement tend to address it as isolated or as an end in itself and of secondary importance – rather than as integral to a well-designed accountability system.

**Steps to Success.** As with most issues of importance in education, strong leadership at the state, district and school levels is required if the promise of parental involvement is to be realized. This means, among other things, that:

1. Districts and schools (with state and federal investment and support) should:

- Work to associate key parental engagement strategies with accountability goals so that parental involvement strategies (like testing strategies) become a key part of the ongoing school reform process. Leaders of schools that are designated for school improvement, corrective action or restructuring should view this designation as an opportunity to enlist parents in turning around the school, including negotiating and agreeing to school improvement or corrective action plans with parents and community organizations that represent them.
- Have good answers to these key questions:
  - **Goals:** How are parental involvement strategies designed to help improve student learning and school/district performance?
  - **Objectives:** By what measures will school/district parental involvement strategies be evaluated? How often will the evaluation occur? Who is responsible for follow-up?
  - **Strategies:** How are parental involvement strategies incorporated and aligned with other strategies designed to promote better student achievement and school/district performance? Are connections made with testing, school safety, attendance, etc.?

2. State educational agencies should:

- Include training in parental involvement strategies as a key component of their statewide system of support for districts and schools in improvement, and ensure that, in particular, school support teams include individuals able to train administrators and teachers in effective parental involvement approaches.
- Develop effective toolkits, notices, and networking systems to facilitate the adoption of effective parental involvement strategies by local districts.

3. The U.S. Department of Education should:

- Expand its efforts to assess the effectiveness of parental involvement strategies and efforts. Specifically, it should include in its parental involvement monitoring framework:
  - an evaluation of the nature and scope of parent involvement in the school improvement and planning process;
  - an evaluation of how and in what amount federal funds are spent for parental involvement activities, and with what outcomes;
  - an evaluation of school and district report cards and parent notices;
  - an evaluation of the state process for review of the content and timing of required parent SES and choice notifications, including the manner in which states are prepared to (and do) respond quickly when allegations of untimely and insufficient notices to parents are lodged; and
  - an evaluation of how states and districts use school choice and SES enrollment data to examine and refine, as necessary, their strategies for notifying parents and enrolling students.
- Monitor implementation of parent involvement provisions by, at a minimum, requiring information on parent involvement in Consolidated State Performance Reports. The reports should include information on use of the one percent of Title I funds required to be set aside for parent involvement activities; the percentages of Title I schools with parent involvement policies and with school-parent compacts; the percentages of schools with parent coordinators; and, for schools with school improvement or corrective action plans, the role of parents and community groups representing parents in consulting on and developing the plan.
- Provide research-based guidance to states and districts on successful parental communication and enforcement strategies.

4. Congress, in its reauthorization of the law that NCLB currently amends, should take several steps to promote more effective and educationally appropriate parental options. It should:

- Provide for an expanded role for parents in the school improvement process, including creating more detailed directives about the role parents will play in the development and implementation of any school improvement plans.

- Provide for and fund a more strategic, focused role for Parent Information Resource Centers (PIRCs), to concentrate on working with states and districts to strengthen and monitor parent involvement activities, make parental involvement activities an integral part of their strategic school-reform efforts, and build ties between schools and community groups representing and working with parents.
- Promote effective district and SES provider collaboration, as well as district and school “ownership” of SES, by requiring:
  - Districts and providers to: (1) cooperatively engage parents in the development of individual learning plans and in ongoing monitoring of student progress; and (2) exchange relevant student/classroom data through out the delivery of SES services; and
  - Schools to incorporate SES as an integral part of their Title I school improvement plans, including addressing how those services will be leveraged to improve school performance.



## Notable Practices and Models: Comprehensive, Integrated Efforts to Promote Parent Involvement

### 1. Family Engagement and Equity Policy, Clarke County School District, Athens, GA.

The Clarke County School District is recognized in Georgia as one that has made parental involvement a central component of its mission. The systemic nature of this focus is evidenced in the District's Family Engagement and Equity Policy, developed to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, to encourage the support and involvement of families and the community, and to create school cultures that promote high student achievement. The policy creates a framework for Family Engagement and Equity that is integrated in the school improvement process and that has a strong evaluation component for gauging its effectiveness [View the full text of the Family Engagement and Equity Policy at <http://www.gsbaepolicy.org/policy.asp?PC=LEBA&S=4036&RevNo=1.04&C=L&Z=P>]

The district has used a number of exemplary resources, some described below, to encourage and support a comprehensive focus on parental involvement in education. Quick Links to information on the broad array of parent resources are featured prominently on the district's web site.

**County Campus Portal:** The district has established a web-based Campus Portal to provide parents and students with instant, up-to-date information including student attendance, performance, class schedules, report cards, transcripts, and class assignments.

**The Clarke County Mentor Program:** This partnership between the district and the local chamber of commerce provides positive role models, advocates, and advisors for local students. Begun in 1991, the program has grown from 30 mentors in seven schools to more than 600 mentors in each of the district's 19 public schools.

**The Parent Advisory Board:** A unique district initiative that gives parents, elected to the Board by parents at their child's school, an opportunity to meet with the superintendent on a monthly basis and to work together to address district-wide issues of concern.

**Parent Mentors:** Through an initiative of the Georgia Department of Education, the Clarke County School District has a Parent Mentor to assist families of special needs students. Through this program, a parent of a student with special learning and/or physical needs is selected to serve as a mentor for other parents of students with special needs. They work within the district to facilitate the interaction between parents and school and district staff. Mentors provide parents with training and individualized assistance.

**Source:** Clarke County School District

For additional information, visit <http://www.clarke.k12.ga.us/home/index.jsp;jsessionid=GgsdUAZt6UcglrRP>

### 2. Connecticut Parental Involvement Reporting Law, Connecticut General Assembly, Hartford, CT.

In June 2006, the Connecticut General Assembly became one of the first in the nation to require local and regional boards of education to report parental involvement measures in annual school profile reports. The legislation, Public Act No. 06-167 requires that when local superintendents report on student needs, resources and infrastructure, student and school performance, racial/ethnic and economic isolation, and special education, they must also report for each school in the district and for the district as a whole on the measures the district has taken to improve parental involvement. The legislation specifically highlights the importance of involving parents in the planning and improvement of school programs and the importance of parents working at home with their children on learning activities.

[http://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Public+Act&bill\\_num=167&which\\_year=2006](http://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Public+Act&bill_num=167&which_year=2006)



# Conclusion

As this report's findings and recommendations show, if we are as serious as we should be about promoting effective parental involvement strategies designed to improve educational opportunities and results for all students, then it is time to match our words with action. To successfully address the challenges that we face, policymakers, school leaders, teachers and parents can pursue numerous strategies to make this vision a reality.

Those strategies must be directly responsive to the key challenges identified in this report, but they must do more. To overcome the often-cited impediment to making parental involvement central to school improvement efforts, those strategies must also be associated with clear, meaningful, and measurable benchmarks of accountability. Based on the findings and recommendations in this report, therefore, schools and districts should be able to demonstrate each of the following:

1. Parental involvement is included as a central element in any accountability plan, especially with a focus on school and district improvement goals;
2. Funding and support is provided for efforts to build the capacity of principals, teachers and parents to engage in effective parental involvement efforts designed to provide at-home and at-school support for underachieving students;
3. Staff time is dedicated to facilitating communications and engagement with low income and non-English proficient parents, with clear objectives linked to improving student performance;
4. Multiple, research-based outreach and communication strategies are pursued in order to reach parents regarding student and school performance (and actions they should consider in response); and
5. Community resources are leveraged in order to enhance the ability of schools to support parents and students in need.

**It is Appleseed's hope that the recommendations in this report provide an impetus for expanded dialogue and action, focused on what is needed and what works, so that:**

- Parents and community members can more meaningfully engage with schools and districts;
- School leaders and teachers who are striving to enhance student learning through multiple strategies can more effectively pursue parental involvement efforts, with positive results;
- Federal, state and local officials responsible for implementing current laws (and for developing new laws) have a better appreciation for the role that parental involvement must play in any effective school reform effort; and
- Education researchers can build on this qualitative study and frame more effective research protocols to guide a next generation of research about what works.

Many are already engaged in this effort, and some of their stories are told in these pages. But much of the real work of engaging and empowering parents – all parents – in their children's education lies ahead. Research and experience tell us that the outcome can be powerful indeed.



# Supporting Organizations and Individuals

This report reflects the work of over one hundred volunteers, who expressed—and followed through with—a commitment to help improve public education, from the ground up. The organizations and individuals that made contributions to this report include legal and policy experts in the field of education (including former federal, state and district education officials and teachers)—and the true experts: parents. Organizations that supported the development of this report include:

**Appleseed** is a non-partisan, non-profit network of public interest law centers working to build a just society through education, legal advocacy, community activism, and policy expertise. The work of the Appleseed Center colleagues in Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, New Mexico, Texas and Washington focused on conducting community group and parent focus group interviews and analyzing the parent focus group results. National Appleseed (and its state affiliates) provided important guidance and overall direction to the project, as well as substantial input in the preparation of this report.

**Holland & Knight LLP** is an international law firm with nationally recognized education and community services practices. Its education policy practice provides guidance to educators and policymakers throughout the United States on a range of issues, which include the promotion of effective K-12 standards reform policies that meet federal and state legal requirements. Holland & Knight's long-standing commitment to pro bono and community service work, especially for children, is embodied in the work of its Community Services Team, which serves individuals who lack effective access to the legal system.

More than 40 Holland and Knight lawyers and staff volunteered their time and energy on this project, with a lead team from the firm's education and community service groups providing overall direction to and management of the project. Holland & Knight designed the research study and protocols; guided state team efforts; conducted interviews with state, district, school and external stakeholders; reviewed and analyzed the gathered data; and prepared the final report.

**DLA Piper** is a global legal services organization with over 3000 lawyers and 59 offices in 22 countries around the world. DLA strongly believes in active participation in the wider community as individuals and as a firm—a belief underscored by its pro bono and charitable initiatives across the United States and throughout the world. Volunteers from DLA Piper conducted state, district and school interviews in Washington and Texas; and provided information used in the drafting of the report.

**The National Center for Children and Families at Teachers College, Columbia University** advances policy, education and the development of children and their families. The Center produces and applies interdisciplinary research to improve practice and to raise public awareness of social issues that affect the well-being of America's children and families. The Center reviewed relevant social science research, identified key model practices and served as a resource for Holland & Knight's lead team.

**PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PWC)** is an international leader in providing a range of industry-focused services. PWC reviewed relevant literature, interviewed chief technology and information officers at the federal, state and district levels and talked with the school level personnel involved in data systems. The PWC team also contributed to the drafting of the report.

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# Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> See Henderson and Mapp, *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement* (2002) (concluding that “[t]aken as a whole... studies found a positive and convincing relationship between family involvement and benefits for students, including improved academic achievement and further that this relationship holds across families of all economic, racial/ethnic, and educational backgrounds and for students of all ages”)

Several other studies reflect a growing body of evidence that, through high school, family/parental involvement has positive results for students in terms of “higher achievement, better attendance, more course credits earned, more responsible preparation for class, and other indicators of school success in school.” Catsambis, “Expanding Knowledge of Parental Involvement in Children’s Secondary Education: Connections with High School Seniors’ Academic Success.” *Social Psychology of Education*, 5, 149-177 (2001); see also Simon, “High School Outreach and Family Involvement.” *Social Psychology of Education*, 7, 185-209 (2004); Boethel, *Diversity: School, Family, and Community Connections* (2003) (synthesizing research on the important role that families play in student achievement among diverse and low-income populations); Bohan-Baker & Priscilla, *The Transition to Kindergarten: A Review of Current Research and Promising Practices to Involve Families*, at 4 (2004) (“[c]oncluding that studies show that when parents are involved in their children’s schooling, children achieve higher grades, and better school attendance, they have more positive attitudes, and behaviors, higher graduation rates, and greater enrollment in higher education.”) (quoting Henderson & Berla, (1994)); Jeynes, *Parental Involvement and Student Achievement: A Meta-analysis* (2005) (concluding that parental involvement is associated with higher student achievement based on findings [that] emerged consistently whether the outcome measures were grades, standardized test scores, or a variety of other measures, including teacher rating; and observing that this trend holds . . . for most components of parental involvement that were examined in the meta-analysis” and “holds not only for the overall student population but for minority students as well.”); FINE Network @ Harvard Family Research Project, *Concepts and Models of Family Involvement* (2002) (“[T]he 2001 Longitudinal Evaluation of School Change and Performance in Title I Schools reported that active teacher outreach to parents is as important as instructional practices to achieve the goals of standards-based education initiatives.”)

- <sup>2</sup> These three “strands” of effective parental engagement are derived and adapted from the landmark works of Professor Joyce Epstein and the Harvard Family Research Project, but should not be viewed as having been endorsed by Professor Epstein or the Harvard Family Research Project. See Epstein, *Six Types of School-Family-Community Involvement* (1997); see also FINE NETWORK @ Harvard Family Research Project, *Concepts and Models of Family Involvement* (2002) (maintaining that dimensions of family involvement must not be thought of as static, mutually exclusive concepts, but rather as dynamic and often overlapping working models, which vary in appropriateness given the situation. Examples identified by the Harvard Family Research Project include: parenting practices, school-family partnerships, democratic participation, and school choice.)

- <sup>3</sup> “Core” states involved in this study were Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Texas and Washington. The selection of these states was based on the interest in Appleseed Centers in those states, which had established as a strategic priority the issue of helping districts improve student opportunities and outcomes through enhanced parental involvement. Districts within those states were selected based on criteria designed to result in information from a wide-ranging cross section of districts, including with respect to:

- (1) location – with districts from rural, suburban, and urban areas of the states;
- (2) size – districts of different sizes, ranging from districts of just a few thousand students to large ones with more than 100,000 students;
- (3) demographics – including varying degrees of diversity in race and ethnicity, as well as socio-economic, English language learner, and disability status;

(4) school performance – with districts and schools both meeting and not meeting annual NCLB performance goals; and

(5) per pupil spending levels – with spending averages from just over \$6,000 to more than \$11,000 per student.

In addition, corresponding information regarding state and district practices (and parent perspectives) was provided for the State of New Mexico, in which a similar research effort was later begun.

- <sup>4</sup> Notably comprehensive resources compiling relevant research are: [1] the FINE Network @ Harvard Family Research Project (offering a compilation of academic journal articles relating to family involvement in education); and [2] the National Center For Family & Community Connections with Schools: Southwest Education Development Laboratory (which has produced two annual synthesis reports -- Henderson & Mapp, *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement (2002)*, and Boethel, *Diversity, School, Family, and Community Connections (2003)*).
- <sup>5</sup> These practices and models were selected, based on information provided by education leaders, administrators and parents during our interviews, as well as from more general research. They were included in this report based on identified impact on meeting parental involvement challenges and prospects for replicability and success.
- <sup>6</sup> See, e.g., note 1, supra. See also The Principals' Partnership 2006 Poll at <http://www.principalspartnership.com>.
- <sup>7</sup> See Zinth, *Parental Involvement in Education (2005)* (providing a survey of relevant state laws -- nearly 20 states direct districts, boards of education or schools to implement parental involvement policies; nearly 20 states maintain grant or awards programs designed to encourage or recognize schools or districts operating programs involving parents in their child's education; and fifteen states encourage employers to enable parents to attend school activities such as parent-teacher conferences).
- <sup>8</sup> See Levin and Belfield, *Families as Contractual Partners in Education*, 49 U.C.L.A. Law Rev. 1799, 1800-01 (2002) ("While many schools ... attempt to incorporate various means of parental involvement, such involvement is limited largely to the margins of the educational process rather than viewed as a critical component of that process."); see also Epstein, *Research Meets Policy and Practice: How are School Districts Addressing NCLB Requirements for Parental Involvement?* at 3 (2005) ("[E]ducators are often reluctant to share leadership with parents and community members. Most teachers and administrators have not been prepared for collaborative work in preservice or advanced education courses.")

There are many potential explanations for the too frequent disconnect between rhetoric and reality, perhaps none more so than the following. Parental involvement is often ill-defined and, even in cases where it is defined, it is a difficult concept to effectively measure or to frame in terms of accountability. This problem stems not only from the many dimensions implicated in the issue, but also from the complexity that stems from the fact that any effort to enhance parental involvement in schools implicates both improvements *within* schools and "changes in family behavior." Levin and Belfield, *supra* at 1808. In this latter area, however, legal requirements are relatively "trivial" when compared to "the overwhelming accretion of formal demands and procedures set in schools." *Id.*

- <sup>9</sup> These definitional parameters should in no way be read as challenging the critical role that many adults who may technically not be parents or guardians must play to help students in many instances succeed. Indeed, as the Findings and Recommendations of this report will explain, helping students (particularly high-risk students) succeed in school is frequently dependent on the critical and "overlapping spheres of influence" of parents, schools, and community organizations. See Epstein, *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools*. Westview Press (2001).
- <sup>10</sup> NCLB like its predecessor legislation, the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, amends the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 [ESEA]. The ESEA is scheduled for reauthorization in the fall of 2007.
- <sup>11</sup> Separate provisions in the law give parents the right to transfer their children to another school if their school has been identified as persistently dangerous or the child is a victim of a violent criminal offense while on school grounds.
- <sup>12</sup> Supplemental education services are defined as tutoring or other supplemental academic enrichment services that are in addition to instruction provided during the school day and are designed to increase the academic achievement of eligible children on academic assessments. See 20 U.S.C. 6316(e)(12)(C). NCLB also includes many other requirements regarding notices to parents. These include, for example, notices to parents of students in Title I schools concerning the right to be informed as to the qualifications of the child's teacher and notices to parents of English language learners that their child has been placed in a language instructional program, including the right to opt their child out of that program and select another available program. See Appendix, Section A, for a more comprehensive description of those notice requirements.
- <sup>13</sup> A majority of parents of students in a Title I school may appeal a designation of the school by the state or district as in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring status.
- <sup>14</sup> The more general provisions on district and school parent involvement policies in NCLB closely track provisions previously included in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as enacted by the Improving America's Schools Act, Pub. L. 103-382 (1994).
- <sup>15</sup> See Epstein, *Research Meets Policy and Practice: How are School Districts Addressing NCLB Requirements for Parental Involvement?* at 8-11 (2005) (It is not that districts were failing to fulfill the mandate of providing information to parents on their own children's achievement test scores – 98.4% of districts fulfilled this mandate; rather the information on children's tests scores was not presented in a clear and understandable manner for a great majority of parents. . . only 58.1 % of the district leaders provided information to parents on how to help their children achieve)(citing Epstein & McClure (2005)).

Notably, it is important to remain focused on ensuring that the NCLB-required data is actually provided to parents. The U.S. Department of Education's Student Achievement and School Accountability Program Monitoring Plan and Reports reflect that only 3 of 12 states surveyed in 2005-06 had ensured that districts had published annual report cards as required by NCLB. The most frequent finding in the Department's review was that report cards did not include all of the required elements, such as with respect to highly qualified teachers and disaggregated student performance data. In several parent focus groups, parents reported never having received district or state report cards, despite the mandate of NCLB. In that vein, several parents complained about the practice of sending key information home with students, noting that information provided through student "backpack envelopes" would in many cases not end up in their hands.

- <sup>16</sup> See, e.g., *Olson, States Late with Data About AYP*, Education Week, September 6, 2006, at 1.
- <sup>17</sup> One likely reason for the disconnect parents report in their understanding of school performance measures is that some district administrators – critical links in information sharing equation – do not have adequate knowledge of the accountability elements of NCLB. During the 2003-04 school year, eighty-nine percent (up from 76 percent in 2002-03) of district Title I administrators reported having a good understanding of the elements of the AYP determinations for their schools. Without this knowledge, these district leaders are not able to help teachers and school level administrators fully inform parents of their options or of the areas in which schools need improvement. (Notably, information gaps of this type are to be expected during the early years of implementation of any expansive new law and, in this case, the gap has steadily been closing.) See Title I *Accountability and School Improvement From 2001 to 2004*, prepared for U.S. Department of Education (2006).
- <sup>18</sup> Judson H. Turner, "Department of Education Perspective on Effective Vendor Relations," in *Improving Testing: Applicability Quality Tools and Techniques* (Wild and Ramaswamy, eds. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., forthcoming)
- <sup>19</sup> See, e.g., *Boethel, Diversity: School, Family, and Community Connections*, Ch.3 (2003) (identifying research findings on barriers to minority and low income families' involvement in their children's education, barriers such as: limited family resources and logistical constraints, language barriers, different cultural beliefs regarding education, families' lack of understanding of the educational school system, and instances of exclusion and discrimination); Golan & Peterson, *Promoting Involvement of Recent Immigrant Families in their Children's Education* (2002) (stating that lack of parental involvement among immigrant parents is the result of "different cultural perspectives on parent-teacher involvement and on how students learn, previous negative experiences with schools as students and parents, feelings of intimidation based on limited educational experience, and unfamiliarity with the U.S. School System.") (quoting Nicolae & Ramos, (1990)).
- Notably, all of these challenges appear to get worse as students progress from grade to grade. In particular, parents expressed frustration, which was affirmed by educators, about the drop in parental involvement in middle and high schools. It is hard to account for the reasons why parent involvement declines at this stage. Some parents related that it has to do with students and their growing need for independence. But parents also reported that the amount of information they received from schools decreased as the children got older.
- <sup>20</sup> See *Lee, Tracking the Achievement Gaps and Assessing the Impact of NCLB on the Gaps: An In-depth Look into National and State Reading and Math Outcome Trends* (2006)(finding that the racial achievement gap in national public schools persists after NCLB – between 2002 and 2005 the White-Black and White-Hispanic gaps among 4th and 8th graders did not narrow significantly in reading and between 2003 and 2005 the gap did not narrow significantly in math).
- <sup>21</sup> Parent focus group interviews reflected that Latino parents, in particular, indicated that expectations regarding their involvement in their children's education is very different in the United States than it was in their native countries, where they were not expected to interact with school officials or be involved directly in educational decisions at the school.
- <sup>22</sup> Also, numerous interviews confirmed that undocumented parents often remained fearful that their immigration status, or that of their children, might be reported if they were active in school affairs. In this context, it is important to remember that all children have the right to attend public schools, regardless of their immigration status. See *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202 (1982).



- <sup>23</sup> Although highlighting SES and choice as key issues related to parental involvement for reasons explained in the text, this report takes no position on the wisdom or efficacy of those NCLB-mandated consequences. Among other reasons, the effectiveness of those programs (which are relatively new) in improving student achievement has not been comprehensively evaluated.
- <sup>24</sup> See also Su, *Reading, Writing, and Reform in the Bronx: Lessons for Community Engagement in Schools* (2005) (describing how five community based organizations use different strategies for promoting trust and commitment among parents and teachers and concluding that community organizations can greatly increase parental involvement interventions by combining them with other social services such as job assistance and classes, which in turn build parental feelings of empowerment, self-efficacy, and sense of obligation toward educational issues involving their children); Weiss, et al., *Beyond the Parent-teacher Conference: Diverse Patterns of Home-School Communication* (1998) (on alternative communication patterns between families and schools).
- <sup>25</sup> Any effort to enhance parental involvement in schools implicates both improvements within schools and “changes in family behavior.” Levin and Belfield, *supra* note 8 at 1808. In this latter area, however, legal requirements are relatively “trivial” when compared to “the overwhelming accretion of formal demands and procedures set in schools.” *Id.*
- <sup>26</sup> This point is borne out by other research. “Most districts and schools do not offer effective in-service education on new strategies for organizing school, family, and community partnerships. Epstein, “Links in a Professional Development Chain: Preservice and Inservice Education for Effective Programs of School, Family, and Community Partnerships,” *The New Educator*, 1 (2), 125-141 (2005).
- <sup>27</sup> In order for the data transparency requirements of NCLB to fully reach their potential for transforming parental engagement, more must be done to ensure that district and school report cards, one of the primary means for disseminating data, fully adhere to the mandates of the law. There has been improvement during the first four years of NCLB implementation. However, for the 2003-04 school year, compliance with the requirements of identifying schools that had been identified for improvement or reporting the number and percentage of schools identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring, was roughly at a 50 percent rate for districts with district report cards and at 69 percent for districts with school report cards. See *Title I Accountability and School Improvement From 2001 to 2004*, prepared for U.S. Department of Education, 2006.
- <sup>28</sup> See *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999) at Standard 5.10. This basic principle also applies to test results that, in the aggregate, are released to the public. See *id.* at Standard 11.18.
- <sup>29</sup> As part of this effort, States, districts and schools must take steps to reflect in parent communications the fact that different assessments are designed to measure different skills and learning, and correspondingly, that any one assessment likely serves very limited purposes which (as noted above) should be well explained. First, some assessments are designed primarily to serve as a basis for diagnosing student-specific strengths and needs with respect to particular subjects or skill-set areas. By contrast, assessment data generated to meet NCLB requirements relate most centrally to an evaluation of school and district level performance, based on the aggregate of individual student results. Second, irrespective of the skills or knowledge measured, some assessments are associated with student-specific “high-stakes” consequences (such as grade-to-grade promotion or high school graduation), while others are not.

<sup>30</sup> See Weiss et al., Harvard Family Research Project (2006) (stressing the importance of approaching family involvement in multiple ways). For specific case examples of schools, districts and states using multiple communication strategies for outreach to parents, see Epstein, “Attainable goals? The spirit and letter of the No Child Left Behind Act on parental involvement,” *Sociology of Education* 78(2): 179-182 (2005) (observing that Seattle Public Schools district leaders are “helping the schools develop partnership programs with highly diverse families” by having “[s]everal departments work together to develop presentations, website communications, handbooks, and other publications for parents in 10 languages;” and providing a program example of Action Team for Partnerships, run by an elementary school serving mainly Latino and Hmong families in Minnesota, with annual activities that cover all six of Epstein’s types of parental involvement.)

<sup>31</sup> See, e.g., Lopez, *Capacity Building for Southeast Asian Family-School Partnership*, (2000) (NCAS focuses on empowering parents from Southeast Asian communities to take on leadership roles in their children’s education by cultivating and reinforcing family, school and community partnerships. NCAS works to overcome ethnic and cultural barriers by creating clear dialog between families, schools and community-based organizations (CBOs). CBOs serve as a mediator between families and schools, giving parents the necessary skills and information to become involved in their children’s education, and reinforce schools’ ability to effectively serve Asian students and families.); see also Cournoyer (Ed.) *The Santa Ana Partnership* (2006) (This partnership is part of the Kellogg Engaging Latino Communities for Education (ENLACE) initiative. It offers a program lead by Hispanic parent leaders called Padres Promotores who help parents prepare their children for college. The Padres Promotores travel door-to-door informing families about their areas educational systems, ways to improve their children’s success in school, and advice for enhancing their own education.); Fisher, *Power to Immigrant Parents* (2006) (describing a parent-training program called Impact Silver Spring that works with immigrant parents to take a more active role in their children’s education. One immigrant parent reports that as a result of this program she learned how to read a report card, press for appropriate class placements, and make sure her child was receiving sufficient attention in school.); Harvard Family Research Project, *The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence: Building Capacity for Public Engagement in Education Reform* (2000)(The Prichard Committee is an independent, non-partisan group of citizens, parents, and business people, all devoted to educational reform of low income communities in Kentucky. Under this organization is the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership, which provides parents with knowledge about school reform in Kentucky and trains parents to be leaders in educational reform movements.)

<sup>32</sup> See Epstein, “Attainable Goals? The Spirit and Letter of the No Child Left Behind Act on Parental Involvement,” *Sociology of Education* 78(2): 179-182 (2005) (“Most schools retain old customs of placing one person “in charge” of parental involvement, rather than a team of educators and parents who share responsibilities for planning and implementing activities....”)

<sup>33</sup> Although national associations and accrediting boards include pre-service teacher training in parent involvement as an area for attention, such preparation is not generally a focus of state standards for accrediting teacher preparation programs or of pre-service teacher preparation programs. Prospective teachers typically receive little or no training in communicating with or developing relations with parents. Likewise, professional development programs to prepare school principals generally do not focus on the responsibilities of principals for partnering with parents and communities. Institute for Educational Leadership, *Leadership for Student Learning: Reinventing the Principalship* (2000). A 1996 U.S. Department of Education report found that 48 percent of principals in Title I schools believe that lack of staff training in how to work with families is a barrier to family involvement. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, *Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K-8* (1996) at <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/frss/publications/98032/7.asp>.

<sup>34</sup> See, U.S. Department of Education Performance Reports, available at: <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/monitoring/index.html>

- <sup>35</sup> Epstein, *Research Meets Policy and Practice: How are School Districts Addressing NCLB Requirements for Parental Involvement?* (2005) (concluding that district leaders with “detailed plans” outlining “how the district leader would conduct district-level partnership activities and assist school-based partnership programs” were “significantly more likely than other districts to implement NCLB requirements to identify a budget for partnerships...conduct professional development...actively facilitate schools’ work on partnerships...disseminate best practices...and conduct other leadership activities to increase district and schools’ capacities for productive parental involvement.”)
- <sup>36</sup> Consolidated State Performance Reports are annual reports required by the U.S. Department of Education containing required data elements on state performance and compliance under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. These, in turn, drive state data collection and oversight of district practices, having a profound effect on the kind of information that is evaluated with respect to overall school and district performance.
- <sup>37</sup> American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, National Council on Measurement in Education, *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, Standards 5.10 & 11.18 (1999).





# A Toolkit for Districts, Schools and Parents

## SECTION A: 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 parental 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 knowledge is a necessary basis for parents to become engaged in improving their child's school, helping and motivating their children in their school work, and exercising specific parental options regarding their children'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.<sup>38</sup> 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>.



<sup>38</sup>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.

## NCLB: FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS REGARDING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Notice	Specific Requirements	Timing	By State	By District	By School
<b>I. STUDENT PERFORMANCE DATA</b>	<p>All reports must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be understandable;</li> <li>• Be presented in a consistent way;</li> <li>• To extent practicable, be presented in a language parents can understand; and</li> <li>• When describing and interpreting individual student's performance on state assessments, ensure that specific academic needs can be understood and addressed.</li> </ul>				
<b>Individual student assessment reports</b> of statewide assessment results associated with AYP determinations to parents, teachers, and principals		As soon as practicable after assessment given.	✓		
<b>Annual state and district report</b> cards to parents, schools, and public	<p>State 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"> <li>• Data for district as a whole and for each school in district; and</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>	Annually	✓	✓	
<b>Progress information regarding Title I language instruction programs for LEP students</b> 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.		✓	

<b>NCLB: FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS REGARDING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT</b>					
<b>Notice</b>	<b>Specific Requirements</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>By State</b>	<b>By District</b>	<b>By School</b>
<b>II. Teacher/ Paraprofessional Qualifications</b>					
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 Timely		✓	
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).	Promptly, upon identification of schools			✓
<b>III. CONSEQUENCES</b>					
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.	Annually (at a minimum)	✓	✓	
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.)	Promptly, upon identification		✓	
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	Notice must provide reasons for the identification and explain how parents can participate in upgrading quality of the district.			✓	

## NCLB: FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS REGARDING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Notice	Specific Requirements	Timing	By State	District Policy	School Policy
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.			✓	
<b>IV. INSTRUCTION/ ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS</b>					
Notice regarding instruction to parents of limited English proficient students identified for participation in Title I language instruction program	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	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	✓		
<b>V. OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT/ ADVOCACY</b>					
Written parental involvement policies for school and district to parents of Title I children, each agreed to by parents.	<p>Policies must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• describe how parents are involved in school review and improvement process and in activities to improve student academic achievement and school performance;</li> <li>• describe how parents' capacity for involvement is to be developed;</li> <li>• provide for an evaluation of parent involvement; and</li> <li>• at school level, adopt a school-parent compact.</li> </ul>	Determined by district			



<b>NCLB: FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS REGARDING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT</b>					
<b>Notice</b>	<b>Specific Requirements</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>By State</b>	<b>By District</b>	<b>By School</b>
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 children'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		✓	

## SECTION B: Model Policies and Notices: A Resource For Districts and Schools

### KEY PRINCIPLES APPLICABLE TO ALL PARENT NOTICES

1. Written with the audience in mind. Notices should be written clearly, to provide the necessary information for the audience for which they are intended. A paramount consideration in preparing parent notices should be how parents should or might use the information provided. Each notice should be written to foster that use.
2. Multiple formats and levels of complexity. As a general rule, notices should be as brief, clear and simple as possible, avoiding technical language and jargon to the extent possible. Given the multiple levels of interest or understanding among parents in a particular school or district, district officials should consider developing a series of notices providing different levels of detail and background on information.
3. Multiple avenues of dissemination. Notices should be provided in multiple ways so as to maximize the chances of effectively communicating with parents. Parents may have access or be receptive to certain forms of communication, but not others. The internet, for example, is an effective way of reaching many – but not all – parents, so alternatives need to be provided.
4. Information to parents not proficient in English. Notices sent to parents who are not proficient in English should be provided in the parents' native language. When states, districts or schools lack the ability to do so, they should at least provide introductory information in the parents' native language and give contact information of someone from the school system or an affiliated community group who can translate.

### Model Notices to Parents

#### School/District Report Cards

##### Key Principles

1. **Performance data.** Reports on school and district performance should be provided on state/district web-sites, in formats that not only provide the “big picture” on performance, but also that provide more detailed information that will likely address most questions likely to arise from parents. Prominent links on home pages to district-wide report cards (including links to reports for all district schools) should be included.

**2. What performance data mean.** Appropriate interpretations of performance data (including test scores) should be provided in simple language, including:

- the district's or school's purpose/intended use of the data/test scores;
- what the data/test scores mean;
- the precision or degree of confidence in making judgments regarding the use of the data/test scores;
- frequent or possible mis-uses or misinterpretations of the data/test scores; and
- any supplemental information that will minimize possible misinterpretation of the data.

*U.S. Department of Education Sample Templates for Report Cards - USED guidance on report cards includes templates for reporting performance and other data required by the No Child Left Behind Act. See [www.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/reportcardsguidance.doc](http://www.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/reportcardsguidance.doc)*

### Notable Practices

- 1. Illinois State Board of Education:** See Recommendation 1. Website: <http://iirc.niu.edu>
- 2. San Diego Unified School District:** <http://www.sandi.net/indices/parents.htm>.

San Diego's report card is cited as a notable practice for several reasons:

Notices written with the audience in mind. The report card is easy to locate on the district's web-site. The district's home page includes a link to a parent site, with general introductory information for parents concerning district policies and district and school report cards. Once on the parent site, it is easy to link to a particular school. Also, despite the length of the longer version of the report card, outlined below, the data are presented clearly in a manner that would permit parents to focus on specific areas where they seek information.

Multiple formats and levels of complexity. For each school, a short and long version of the report card are provided, with separate links for each. The longer version of each school report card provides a wealth of information about the school, well beyond NCLB requirements. In addition to the academic performance and teacher data required by NCLB, it includes information on:

- curriculum;
- opportunities for parent involvement;
- school safety and learning climate, including data on suspensions and expulsions for the school compared to the district;
- attendance rates;
- school facilities;
- class size;
- drop-out rates;
- teacher vacancies;
- AP and IB courses offered;

- average SAT scores; and
- graduates who completed course requirements for state college admissions.  
Information to parents not proficient in English. The shorter version of the school report card is provided in Spanish.

### 3. Portland (Oregon) Public Schools: <http://www.pps.k12.or.us/>

Portland's report card is cited as a notable practice for several reasons:

Notices written with the audience in mind. The school fact sheet presents data on assessment results through questions about performance that parents might be expected to ask, linking the questions to tables with applicable data. Districts may want to consider using that approach more broadly for all information in their report cards.

Multiple formats and levels of complexity. For each school, a short and long version of the report are provided, with separate links for each.

## Individual Student Reports

### Key Principles

1. States/Districts need to interpret and explain scores. Individual assessment reports to parents on the performance of their own child generally are prepared by companies that administer and score the assessments. States and districts need to edit these reports to provide appropriate contextual information and explanation interpreting the scores.
2. Need to describe meaning, common misinterpretations, and uses of scores. The reports should describe in simple language what the test covers, what scores mean, the precision of the scores, common misinterpretations of test scores, and how scores will be used.
3. Need to provide basis for addressing the student's academic needs. Under NCLB, this report is not simply an assessment report, but rather an "interpretive, descriptive, and diagnostic report," based on the assessment, which allows parents, as well as teachers and principals, to understand and address the specific academic needs of the student. To serve this purpose, the report needs to explain clearly and simply what the test shows about the student's knowledge and skills, including in what specific skill clusters or areas the student needs significant improvement, is proficient, or is advanced. It also should indicate how the student's scores compare to average or mean scores for the school, district and state.

## Model Report

### REPORT TO PARENTS ON YOUR CHILD'S PERFORMANCE ON STATE ASSESSMENTS

Dear Parent or Guardian:

This report indicates how your child performed on the State of X's ("X") assessments of language arts and math. These tests were given to all third grade public school students in X in the spring of 2006. Similar tests were given to X students in grades 4-8 and 11.

- **Purpose/Uses of Test.** The main purpose of these tests is to look at how your child's school and district are doing in helping your child and other children in the school learn the skills and content they need to know under state academic standards. (A separate report card is provided to you and other parents [when] on how your child's school and district performed overall on these tests and on other factors that contribute to a quality education.) However, these tests also are used to help identify each child's strengths and areas where they need to improve. The tests are not used to grade your child or to make any decision about whether your child should be promoted.

In summary form, this report indicates how your child performed in comparison to other children in the school, district and state. It also indicates areas where your child needs additional academic help. Your child's teacher and other school staff will use this report to plan how to work with your child in any of these areas.

- **What standards are measured by test.** The test that your child took is designed to measure students against X standards of what a student in the third grade should know and be able to do. [add short summary of content standards measured by the test]

X assigns different achievement levels to show how a student performs against these standards. Students are assigned one of four levels in reading/language arts and in mathematics: below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced. Our goal is to have all students achieving at the proficient or advanced levels by school year 2013-14. If your child is scoring at basic, or especially below basic, it means that your child needs additional help. However, children who score at proficient or even advanced overall may also need additional help in particular skill areas. This report is designed to help identify those areas.

- Caution not to misinterpret the test results. It is important to remember that no one test is perfect in showing a student's skills and knowledge. Many factors can affect how a student performs on a particular test.

## Your Child's Performance Compared to Other Students in the School, District, and State

### How to review the following tables.

- **Achievement levels.** To evaluate your child's performance, you should compare his or her achievement level with the percentages of third grade children at each achievement level in the school, district and state in the following table.
- **Skill areas where your child may need help.** To help you identify skill areas or clusters where your child may need additional help, the second table below compares the percentage of correct answers given by your child for each skill area or cluster and compares that to the percentage correct answers given by all third graders in the state. [note: a state may wish to substitute other measures of specific skill areas in place of the percentage of correct answers, and obviously will devise its own skill cluster areas, consistent with its own standards and assessments.]

<b>READING/LANGUAGE ARTS — OVERALL PERFORMANCE</b>				
	<b>Below Basic</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Advanced</b>
<b>Your child (name)</b>		X		
<b>3rd graders in your school</b>	32%	28%	35%	5%
<b>3rd graders in your district</b>	27%	26%	40%	7%
<b>3rd graders in your state</b>	22%	23%	50%	5%

<b>READING/LANGUAGE ARTS SKILL/ KNOWLEDGE CLUSTERS</b>		
<b>Cluster Area</b>	<b>Your Child's Percent Correct Answers</b>	<b>State 3rd Graders Average Percent Correct Answers</b>
Total Reading - Know and use complex words - Decode or figure out unfamiliar words - Ability to follow simple written instructions - Analyze main idea and supporting ideas in text - Apply meaning		
Total Language - Sentences, phrases, clauses - Editing skills - Writing conventions		

## Mathematics

[Insert parallel tables for math on proficiency and skill clusters.]

We hope this information is helpful to you in understanding the academic progress that is being made by your child. There are many other sources of information that you should also consider, including your child's regular report card and conferences with your child's teacher concerning your child's classroom experience. This report provides an opportunity for you to talk to your child's teacher about how to help your child improve in areas where he/she is below the proficient level and in skill areas where he/she scored the lowest percentage of correct answers. And about how you can be involved in helping your child succeed in school. Your child's teacher and I would welcome hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Name of Principal

## Notices of School Improvement Status

### Key Principles

- 1. Key information.** These notices need to briefly and fairly describe the reasons why a school was designated for improvement, the significance of that designation, what the school and district will do as a result and what rights and opportunities will result for parents.
- 2. Meeting to discuss.** Parents may have many questions about what this designation means. A school should schedule one or more meetings to discuss the basis for and implications of school improvement with parents.
- 3. Parents must understand options before having to decide.** Parents should not be asked to make decisions involving transferring their child to another school or obtaining SES for their child until they know what all the options are, including the schools to which a transfer may be made and the SES providers and programs.

Model/Sample Notice (Adapted from a format used in a sample notice provided by the Illinois State Board of Education to school districts)

Date

Name Address City, State, Zip

Dear [name of school] parent/guardian:

The purpose of this letter is to notify you that [name of school] has been found to need school improvement.

General Reasons for school improvement. That finding was made because the school did not make enough progress (often referred to as “adequate yearly progress” (AYP)) for two years in a row. Under a federal law – the No Child Left Behind Act – an annual decision is made whether a school makes AYP based on:

- student scores on state tests in reading/language arts and math;
- whether virtually all students take the tests; and
- the graduation rate for high school students [substitute other factor(s) used by the state for elementary and middle schools.]

The first two factors regarding participation and performance on assessments are applied not only for all students in the school, but also for different groups of students in the school such as economically disadvantaged students and students from major racial and ethnic groups. If any of these groups does not make AYP on either of these bases, it means that the school does not make AYP.

Specific reasons for school improvement for X school. [name of school], did not make AYP . . . [explain specific basis for school not making AYP]. [explain how the school compares in terms of academic achievement with other public schools in the district and state.]

Your options. As a result of the finding that [name of school's] needs school improvement, you have certain options for your child. Your options include –

- **Public School Choice.** You may transfer your child to another school within our district that has not been found to need school improvement. [Indicate how to obtain information on this option, including which schools may be available to accept transfers. It is desirable to hold one of more parent meetings at the school to discuss the school improvement designation and all the options for parents. Parents should not be asked to make a choice without knowing all the specific options, both for school transfers and for supplemental education services, if applicable.]
- **To which school?** While we cannot guarantee in advance a transfer to a specific school, you will be given an opportunity to indicate [number] schools in order of preference, and you will not be required to make a final decision until you know the school to which your child would be transferred.
- **Transportation.** Transportation will be provided or paid for by the district. If you choose to transfer your child to another school, your child will be able to continue attending that school through the highest grade that the school serves. However, if the school in which your child is currently enrolled makes AYP for two years in a row and is found to no longer need school improvement, the district [will] [may] no longer pay for transportation to the school to which your child has transferred.

If you choose to transfer your child, we understand that you are doing what you feel is best for your child, but you should know that your child will always be welcome at [name of school] and may return at any time.

- **Supplemental Education Services** [if applicable] If you choose to keep your child in [name of school], your child may be eligible to receive free tutoring in reading, language arts, and/or math (often referred to as "supplemental education services"). This extra help can be provided before or after school, on weekends, or during summer or other school vacations.
  - Picking the service provider. You have the right to pick a company or organization that is approved by the state to provide these tutoring services. These providers may be public or private school entities, public or private institutions of higher education, for-profit or nonprofit organizations, including faith-based organizations.
  - More information on tutoring. [As noted above, explain how to obtain information about supplemental service providers, preferably including parent meetings at the school where parents can hear from providers and register for services.] Tutoring will be available at [name of school] [the preferred place for services]. [If that is not the case, indicate where services will be provided or that arrangements are being worked out as to where the services will be provided and that information will be made available (indicate where/when) and indicate if funds will be made available for transportation to and from the site]
- Working to improve the school. All of us here at [name of school] are committed to the success of our school and to serving all of our students. We are developing a school improvement plan to address the factors that caused us to be placed in school improvement. That plan will include steps to address each student's academic performance. For example, some of the things that we are working to put in place are [list things].



- District/state support. We are not alone in our efforts; our district is working very hard to assist us. The district is supporting us in the following ways: [list support]. We are also receiving state support through [school support teams] and through other technical assistance, including . . . [list examples].
- Parents' role. Parent involvement is needed in developing and implementing our school improvement plan. That involvement is vital to improving our school. We welcome you to join in that effort. If you do, we assure you that you will have a meaningful role in helping to shape what happens at our school and how your children receive the quality education they deserve. There are many ways that you can be involved in helping us to address the issues around school improvement. Some of those include [list examples].
- Meeting[s] to discuss. [The meeting recommended in brackets above can be an important starting point to enlist parents in this effort. Include information here about the meeting or how to obtain further information about getting involved.]

We are excited and optimistic about the future and we hope that you will join us in this important effort.

Sincerely,

[School principal]

## Notices/Announcements of SES Opportunities

### Key Principles

1. **Variety of venues; fairs.** Information about the opportunity to obtain these services should be provided in a variety of formats and venues. SES provider fairs are commonly used to provide SES providers the opportunity to make in-person presentations to parents. These fairs generally should be held at the schools where parents have the SES opportunity, or at community centers in the same neighborhood.
2. **Consider simple initial notice.** Given that this opportunity is unprecedented for many eligible families and the complexity of the information to explain the opportunity and the choices, districts should consider a very simple initial notice about the chance for these services, with a person and phone number to call for follow-up information and help.
3. **Simplify registration.** The steps for parents to go through to register for SES should be kept to a minimum. If a provider fair is held, parents should be able to register for SES services from a particular provider at the fair. Parents should not be required to be physically present to register or to register at a district office that may not be readily accessible to the parent.
4. **Permit disclosures of relevant student information between school and provider.** Forms used for parents to register students for SES services should include language that permits the school or district to disclose to the provider the student's individual assessments on state tests that are used for school accountability purposes, as well as other academic information about the student.

## Models

1. **SES notices.** Links to sample initial notices to parents about the SES opportunities follow, including draft radio announcements. In addition, a sample form to help a parent in selecting an SES provider is provided. These samples were prepared by the Supplemental Education Services Quality Center, established by the American Research Institutes and funded by the U.S. Department of Education. They were selected based on their simplicity and clarity.

SES in Action: A Toolkit for Parents and Community Leaders. <http://www.tutorsforkids.org/ToolkitDownload2.asp>

2. **Formal notice and registration form.** See a sample letter prepared by the Illinois State Board of Education to advise parents of their opportunity to obtain supplemental education services for their child, and an SES Registration form provided to districts in its state by the Illinois State Board of Education. See [http://www.isbe.state.il.us/ses/pdf/SES\\_toolkit.pdf](http://www.isbe.state.il.us/ses/pdf/SES_toolkit.pdf)

### The registration form is highlighted based on—

- Its simplicity;
- Language that would serve to authorize disclosure of academic information about the child to the SES provider, consistent with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act; and
- Provision of the form in Spanish as well as English.

## SECTION C. A SELF-ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST: KEY QUESTIONS ABOUT SCHOOL AND DISTRICT PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT POLICIES AND ACTIONS

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?

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