



LEAGUE OF UNITED LATIN AMERICAN CITIZENS



Education Advocacy Tool Kit

LULAC Parent Advocacy Toolkit

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I

Advocacy Tools

Effective Advocacy

Communication Tools:

Successful advocacy depends on several strategies, no matter what issue you are working on. For parents of Latino students, in addition to familiarizing yourself with the most powerful data and arguments to meet your situation, and making sure that your message is aimed at the right audience, advocates should take the time to consider the most effective means to communicate directly with elected officials as well as ways to maximize their impact by working with others or working indirectly to affect Federal officials' views.

Now that you have your basic background information and arguments in hand and know who your audience is, it's time to decide how you are going to communicate to your elected officials. Remember that the most appropriate strategy may change, depending on the timing of the communication: a general rule of thumb is that *the shorter the time frame the more acceptable less formal communications become.*

It is also important to remember that in all communications with elected officials and their staff, be sure to introduce yourself, provide affiliation information, and provide a mailing address so that your officials can respond to you.

Writing a Constituent Letter

Without question, letters are the most effective form of communication with elected officials. Letters create a sense of seriousness, due in part to the time they take to write, that cannot be captured in emails. Association or business letterhead also helps lend a visual distinctiveness and credibility to your concern. Because of new security measures in Washington, DC, U.S. mail delivery delays to Congress of up to three weeks are the norm. As a result, it is becoming more common to fax letters to offices. Below are a few guidelines to keep in mind when writing a letter:

- > Use personal or business letterhead, if possible. Be sure your name and return address is on your communication — sometimes letters become separated from the mailing envelope.
- > Identify your subject clearly. Refer to a bill number if you are writing about specific legislation.
- > State your reason for writing. Your personal experience is usually the strongest reason. Explain how the issue affects your school district, your students, or your child. Do you represent a group of parents or teachers? Be sure to include that as well.
- > Be reasonable and constructive. If you oppose a measure, state clearly why the measure is a concern. If possible, offer an alternative. Include examples or data where possible, being careful not to make any unsupportable claims. Misinformation casts doubt on you and your views.
- > Ask your elected official to provide his/her position on the issue in a written reply.
- > Be sure to thank the official if he/she votes the way you requested or indicates strong support for your issue. Everyone appreciates — and remembers — a complimentary letter.

Making a Constituent Phone Call

A telephone call can be effective when you want to record your views on an upcoming vote or when your opinion can be stated very concisely. Calls are not an effective way to educate legislators, nor do they provide the opportunity to demonstrate your expertise on an issue. In most cases, receptionists handle the calls and their goal is to simply make a record of the call. In some Congressional offices, it may be possible to speak directly with a staff member working for your elected official to provide a bit more information.

When making a telephone call to elected officials, keep in mind the following:

- > State your views clearly and succinctly — time is precious for everyone.
- > Conclude your message with a request for action.
- > Be prepared to leave your name, address, and telephone number.

Sending Email Messages

Although email has become standard business practice, the simplicity of email in some cases makes it less effective because of the time it takes for offices to wade through the volume of email that arrives on particular issues. Additionally, because all email “looks” alike, communications from organizations with many members in the district or state (e.g., local parent groups and statewide associations), which should carry additional weight because of the numbers of constituents represented by the communication, are unable to distinguish themselves easily via email.

Email is definitely better than not communicating at all. And, when there is an urgent issue, for example when there is less than 72 hours to reach your elected officials about an upcoming vote, emails, phone calls, and faxes are the only means to reach an office in time. LULAC recommends that if possible, email should be used only after a relationship with the elected official has been established, reserved for communications with staff, or used when time is of a premium.

Again, if you do use email, always be sure to include your full name and your complete mailing address so that the official can respond to you.

In Person Meetings

Face-to-face meetings are the most effective means to convey a message. Meetings often are the beginning of a long-term relationship with your elected officials and their staffs. Keep in mind that successful advocacy requires a sustained effort, not simply one letter, phone call, or meeting. Depending on the distances involved, you may never have had the opportunity to meet your elected representatives in your state capital or in Washington, DC. However, your elected officials also have local offices, sometimes staffed by part-time employees. Your local school board members also have offices where they meet with constituents. You can find the office locations and phone numbers online through local, state, and Congressional websites or in a separate government section of your phonebook.

No matter which official you're trying to see, there are several steps to take, planning as far in advance as possible:

Make an Appointment: Call your elected official's office and ask to speak with the person who sets up appointments. Be prepared to provide information about yourself (or your group), the topic you'd like to discuss, and a range of days (or times) that you would like to meet. Be prepared to send the office a request in writing, particularly if it is with a Member of Congress. If the official has more than one office, and you can be flexible about where and when you meet, be sure to let the appointments secretary know. If your legislator is completely unavailable, but has a staff person who is knowledgeable about education issues, ask if you can make an appointment with that staff member; they are often very helpful, and meetings can be very productive.

In Person Meetings

Prepare for the Meeting: Have your information ready in a concise form, just as you would when writing a letter or making a telephone call. Prepare the strongest two or three reasons why your legislator should support your views and practice your conversation with a friend. Know the opposing argument so that you can respond to questions. Develop a packet of information, if possible, to leave behind so that the legislator or staff person can begin a file on your issue. Bring a business card if you have one.

At the Meeting: Be on time, of course. But don't be surprised if your legislator is running late. Making visits to Congress requires flexibility and patience. Once the meeting begins,

- > State the reason for your visit in one sentence.

- > Then, take your cue from the legislator or staffer: if he or she seems familiar with the issue, move right ahead with your request for support for a specific vote, etc. If not, use the time to inform him/her to the key elements of the issue.

- > When possible, give local examples and make local analogies so that you are building a case on constituent needs.

- > If you are asked a question you are not able to answer, tell the legislator or staffer you do not know, but that you will find out the answer and get back to him/her.

- > Never make up an answer; wrong or misleading information will permanently damage your credibility.

- > At the end of the meeting be sure to thank the legislator for his/her time, reiterating that you will follow up with any information you may have promised.

- > If you are meeting on behalf of a state or local group, you might ask to have your picture taken together so that you may

LULAC E-Member

Sign up to be a LULAC e-member; receive timely news and alerts on current education policy issues from the LULAC National Office.

As a LULAC e-member, we will send you the LULAC weekly newsletter featuring current news and updates on federal policy issues, with links to news articles from around the country. In addition, you will receive periodic action alerts on issues of interest to you!

Sign up at the LULAC National Website: www.lulac.org/members/members2.html

Maximizing Your Impact

Strength in Numbers

It is self-evident that multiple letters and phone calls have a greater effect than does a single communication. Therefore, your challenge as an advocate is to get others to let your elected officials know about the need for high school education reform. You might try the following:

- > Ask the parents and teachers in your child's school to support local, state, and federal initiatives. In some circumstances it may be appropriate for students to contact elected officials or to testify at a hearing about their experiences.
- > Local business leaders in your community should be supportive — they need students with math, reading and science skills as future employees. Many of them may not be aware of the issues facing students and schools in your community, state, or in the nation.
- > Make contact with other education and/or parent organizations in your state. Offer to do a short presentation (to the executive committee, legislative committee, etc.) on the educational needs of students in your community and how new initiatives in your state and in Congress would make a difference in your community and state. Additionally, it may be possible to appeal directly to their members for support by writing.

Strength in Numbers continued

- > Recruiting “VIPs.” Although every constituent letter carries weight in a legislator’s office, the reality is that some citizens have more influence on specific issues or with specific elected officials than others. For example, a legislator’s lifelong friend, relative, or former business associate is likely to have influence. Likewise, a former state superintendent of education generally has built-in credibility on education issues, even when he/she does not know the legislator personally. Generating letters from these VIPs is usually a matter of asking them and then providing them with sufficient information to craft a high-impact letter. You might even offer to draft it for them.

Whenever possible, it makes sense to work with other groups in support of an issue. Developing coalitions not only increases the numbers of supporters on specific state or local issues, but also broadens awareness of your issue with the membership of the other groups.

- > A local education group can partner with a business organization to sponsor an informational meeting for parents and policymakers. Two groups supporting increased services for drop out prevention is stronger than one because the school board realizes that this is an issue of concern to more than just a dozen families. As employers, business owners and managers need employees with more than just basic skills, they are pleased to support education programs designed to reach that goal. As they learn more about the students in their communities, the business leaders may also initiate internships and mentorships for many of the students in their area.
- > Think about coalitions as broadly as possible - there are many groups in your community and state that have an interest in education issues, child issues, and business issues that can foster natural partnerships.

Plan an Event

Invite Your Legislator to Visit a School Program

One very powerful way to make the case for high school education reform is to invite legislators to visit a program at your local high school, perhaps an afterschool tutoring or enrichment program. Most schools would be very happy to coordinate a visit for a state or federal legislator. Local school board members should also be urged to make visits. Everyone benefits from the positive publicity and it's an excellent way to get your message across as well as a way to begin building a relationship with the elected official's office.

What is important is that the elected officials have the chance to observe students at work, whether it is in the classroom, in an auditorium, or on a stage. It is also powerful for the legislator to have the chance to speak personally with students. Many students are articulate advocates for themselves and their programs, the students can be their own best advocate.

Once you have cleared the idea with the program administrator and school, the best way to arrange a visit is to contact the legislator's office that is closest to the school. Let the legislator's office know what you have in mind and ask for some guidance on the legislator's schedule and any other suggestions to ensure an acceptance. Be prepared to follow up quickly with a written invitation outlining the details.

Other Ideas

Get to Know Staff

As education issues become more complex, many elected officials have staff that coordinates the flow of information on the topic. As a result, well-informed staff can be key to gaining support for new legislation or for increased funding. Members of Congress have staff in their district and state offices that are responsible to keep up with issues important to constituents, which often includes making local visits or attending meetings. Plan to contact the staff person responsible for education issues and ask for a meeting to discuss high school education reform. If you represent a local or state organization, you might invite the staff person to attend your annual conference or visit a program at the school in advance of inviting the legislator to visit. You might also discuss with the staff person the possibility of joining or starting an educational advisory panel to assist the staff and legislator on education issues.

Follow up

The maxim “once is not enough” applies to communications with elected officials. Regular, thoughtful communications have an impact and can leave a positive impression with officials and their staffs. Take every opportunity to share information that supports high school educational reform and related services.

Working with the Media

Working with Reporters

The news media often does not cover education issues well, and when they do cover education-related stories, the coverage is frequently negative in tone. However, reporters are also guided by this truism: they cannot report on programs, projects, and activities of which they have no knowledge. Many knowledgeable advocates are the recognized experts in gifted education in their communities. Take advantage of the opportunity!

Take some time to do research on the news media in your area. Most news reporters welcome story ideas. You should plan to do the following:

Working with Reporters

- > Make it a habit to send news releases to the education reporters - be sure to send them advance notices (at least 72 hours) about upcoming events or programs in which your students are participating; VIP speakers addressing your school, student-generated service learning experiences; or the opening of a new school or program that serves your students, to name a few. Small, positive stories in the local press help develop good relations for your organization with local reporters and also provide a steady "diet" of stories about problems facing the education system in your area for public consumption.
- > Send "story ideas" to reporters and talk-show hosts. Over the course of the school year (and the state legislative session) there are various news "hooks" that advocates can take advantage of to help develop stories promoting education reform. For example, public debate on school bond issues, plans to modify state content standards, teacher qualifications, the release of state and local test scores, and special education funding all offer opportunities to include your education reform issues in the news coverage. Provide the reporters and talk show hosts with:
 - >> a cover letter suggesting the story idea —general information on group you are representing and the general description of the audience interest for the story (e.g., "parents with minority students entering or currently in high school")
 - >> specific information on who the reporter may contact (include role in the association, day and evening phone numbers), or the name and numbers of the person who would be available to do a radio interview.

Commentary Pieces / Op-ed Pieces

- > Identify the op-ed and editorial page editors for the daily and weekly newspapers in your area
- > Be sure to check on other guidelines the paper may have (e.g., deadlines, length of opinions, whether the submissions may be made via fax or email)

Commentary / op-ed pieces are an opportunity to raise awareness about how pending decisions (by the school board, city council, state legislature) that will affect high school students in your area. In the case of a state or local organization writing comments, it should be signed by an association officer, and should include a "call to action" - whether to the legislature or to the public at large. If being sent by an individual, sign the piece yourself and be sure to mention that you are the parent of a student at the local school. Remember to spell out the basics in your commentary. You may also want to cite official positions from LULAC, or other education agencies, to lend weight to your arguments or positions.

Letters to the Editor

- Identify the op-ed and editorial page editors for the daily and weekly newspapers in your area
- Be sure to check on other guidelines the paper may have (e.g., deadlines, length of opinions, whether the submissions may be made via fax or email)

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Letters to the editor offer the opportunity to raise high school education reform issues after-the-fact. To be accepted, letters need a connection to something reported in the paper or to something happening locally. For example, extensive newspaper coverage about the state education budget that does not include mention of drop-out prevention programs offers the chance to write about the need for funding these programs. Keep in mind that administrators, school board members, and legislators all read their local newspapers; many elected officials read the major newspapers across the state. This may be your chance to share your opinions with them



**Campaign for High
School Equity
Talking Points &
Media Tools**

Talking Points

(Revised February 2009)

1. The Campaign for High School Equity (CHSE) is taking on the most important American civil rights issue of the 21st century. Changing America's high schools for the better is a moral responsibility.
 - CHSE is advancing high-quality high school education that prepares all students for college and beyond—to a job, responsible citizenship, and success in life.
 - We're a coalition of leading civil rights organizations that have united to improve high school results for America's minority and low-income students.
 - Our public high schools are still segregated; they poorly serve students of color and youth from low-income neighborhoods. Maintaining the status quo makes our nation complicit in creating a permanent underclass.
 - Of incoming 9th graders, a full third will drop out and only a third will graduate with the skills they need for college and work.¹ Those who drop out or are unprepared for the future are more likely to be students of color than to be white.
 - African American, Hispanic, American Indian, and Alaska Native high school students have at best a six in 10 chance of graduating from high school on time with a regular diploma.²
 - At least half of Cambodians, Laotians, and Hmong aged 25 and older who are living in America have less than a high school education.³
 - Nearly six in 10 Latino English Language Learner (ELL) students ages 16-19 are high school dropouts.⁴ After Spanish, Vietnamese and Hmong are the two most common primary languages of ELL students.

2. CHSE is calling for high quality, high expectations, and accountability.
 - The focus of federal education policy should be making all students proficient and prepared for college and work, holding high schools accountable for student success, and redesigning the American high school.
 - We must provide all students with access to rigorous and engaging classes in core subjects.
 - High school should be about learning what is needed to succeed in postsecondary education and career.
 - States and school districts must be held accountable for getting students to graduation prepared for what's next.
 - To accurately assess and address educational inequities, states must publicly report data that shows differences between students of different races and ethnicities to highlight subgroups of students.
 - All states must define graduation rates by a common standard.
 - High schools should meet the needs of diverse learners through instructional practices such as reflexive learning and culturally competent learning techniques.

(continued)



3. Improving high schools will give our young people more opportunities in life, directly helping to reinvigorate the American economy and expand health care coverage for individuals and families.

- If we were to raise the high school graduation rates of students of color to the current level of whites by 2020, and if those minority graduates went on to college at rates similar to whites, the potential increase in personal income across America would be at least \$319 billion.⁵
- Cutting the dropout rate in half would benefit federal taxpayers with \$45 billion in new tax revenues or savings.⁶
- Because too many American high school students do not learn the skills they need to succeed in college or work, the nation spends more than \$2 billion a year on remedial coursework.⁷
- Raising educational levels could reduce health-related expenditures for the public sector, as well as for individuals.⁸
 - Class of 2007 dropouts will cost America more than \$17 billion in payments for Medicaid and health care for the uninsured.⁹
 - Almost 95 percent of employees with a college degree have employer-provided health care coverage, compared to 77 percent of employees who are high school graduates and 67 percent who are high school dropouts.¹⁰

4. Title I graduation rate regulations that hold schools accountable for student success will make a difference for students of color and youth from low-income neighborhoods.

- The regulations improve previous policy and practice because they:
 - require states to use the same graduation rate definition;
 - allow exclusion from graduation rate calculations only for students documented as having transferred, emigrated, or died;
 - give states, districts, and schools the option of getting credit for students who take longer than four years to graduate; and
 - require use of a statewide graduation goal and growth targets that represent “continuous and substantial improvement.”
- Disaggregated data provisions mean that states, districts, and schools must collect and report data on different ethnic/racial groups, which will provide more information about which students and schools are in need of support.

5. CHSE is calling on the U.S. Department of Education to direct the maximum allowable portion of 2009 stimulus bill education funding to middle and high schools.

- Secondary schools traditionally have not received an adequate share of federal resources.
- Improving high school graduation rates for students of color and youth from low-income neighborhoods is inseparable from economic recovery.
 - Helping all students do better must be a part of any meaningful federal and state economic recovery efforts.
 - For the stimulus to make a difference to students of color and youth from low-income neighborhoods, education funding should be used to increase high school graduation rates.
- The 2009 stimulus bill is a good start, but it doesn't take the place of high school education reform.

6. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act is a window of opportunity right now.

- If Congress does not reauthorize NCLB, it will be slamming the door on thousands of American high school students.
- The most recent amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, NCLB provides a platform for improving schools.
- Congress must change NCLB immediately to better support high schools and ensure strong accountability for improving results for high school students, particularly for students of color and low-income students.

Endnotes

¹ Alliance for Excellent Education (2008). No Child Left Behind Reauthorization. www.all4ed.org/federal_policy/NCLB_ReAuth.

² Alliance for Excellent Education (2008a). United States' High Schools. www.all4ed.org/files/UnitedStates.pdf.

³ Reeves, T.J. and C.E. Bennett (2004). *We the People: Asians in the United States*. www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/censr-17.pdf.

⁴ Fry, R. (2003). *Hispanic Youth Dropping Out of U.S. Schools: Measuring the Challenge*. Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center.

⁵ Alliance for Excellent Education (2008b). "The High Cost of High School Dropouts." www.all4ed.org/files/HighCost.pdf.

⁶ Levin, H., Belfield, C., Muennig, P. and C. Rouse. (2007). *The Costs and Benefits of an Excellent Education for All of America's Children*. www.cbcse.org/media/download_gallery/Leeds_Report_Final_Jan2007.pdf.

⁷ Strong American Schools (2008). *Diploma to Nowhere*. Washington, DC.

⁸ Amos, J. (2008). *Dropouts, Diplomas, and Dollars: U.S. High Schools and the Nation's Economy*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.

⁹ Alliance for Excellent Education. (2006). *Healthier and Wealthier: Decreasing Health Care Costs by Increasing Educational Attainment*. www.all4ed.org/files/HandW.pdf.

¹⁰ Carnevale, A. (2007). "Confessions of an Education Fundamentalist: Why Grade 12 Is Not the Right End Point for Anyone," in *Minding the Gap: Why Integrating High School with College Makes Sense and How to Do It*, ed. N. Hoffman, A. Venezia, and M. S. Miller. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Template: Letter to the Editor

<Name of Media Outlet or Publication>

<Attention: >

<Address 1>

< Address 2>

<City>, <State> <Zip or Postal Code>

Dear Editor:

<State your reason for writing here. If you are responding to articles or editorials by the media outlet, use the first sentence to reference the title of the article, name of the publication, and date it appeared.>

<State your case here. Include facts, references, or research here to establish credibility. [Keep length in mind though. Acceptable letter length will vary from periodical to periodical. Look at their letters section to get a feel for an appropriate length.]>

< Include a call to action, asking readers to follow up with some activity, such as joining in calling on policymakers to address the issue. >

<End with a strong, positive statement in support of your case. >

Sincerely,

<Writer's Signature>

<Name of Writer>

<Writer's Title>

<Writer's Organization >



To the Editor:

The No Child Left Behind Act has provided the opportunity to close the insidious achievement gaps between students of color and white students in America's schools.

By holding schools less accountable for student progress, the bill proposed by Representatives Sam Graves, Republican of Missouri, and Tim Walz, Democrat of Minnesota, would make standard the educational status quo.

Fortunately, as you note, the bill is unlikely to pass.

Every student should, as a basic civil right, be guaranteed a quality education. We should not render the nation's commitment to achievement for all students meaningless by eviscerating accountability.

Instead, a stronger, reauthorized No Child Left Behind Act must include higher standards of accountability and clear, consistent requirements for reporting graduation rates and student progress. Otherwise, we will fail to provide the necessary academic opportunities to our country's future business and political leaders, jeopardizing the strength of our economy and our democracy.

Michael Wotorson
Washington, Aug. 1, 2008

The writer is the director of the Campaign for High School Equity.

Template: Writing a Press Release¹

[Use letterhead.]

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: <Name of Contact Person>

<Title>

<Organization, District, etc.>

<Telephone Number>

<E-mail Address>

<Headline - Be creative. One sentence. Use proper title case.

<City, State, Month, Day, Year >

<Introduction. Grab their attention here with a strong introductory paragraph that covers who, what, when, where, why, and how.>

<Put the body of your press release here. Expound on the information provided in your introductory paragraph. Include quotes from key staff, administrators, researchers, subject matter experts, etc.>

<The body of your press release should contain more than one paragraph. The final paragraph should restate and summarize the key points of your news release.>

For additional information, contact: <include contact information here>

[heading]About <Organization, District, etc.>

<Can include a short paragraph on background information of your organization, district, URL, etc. here.>

<CONTACT INFORMATION>

<Name of Contact Person>

<Organization, District, etc.>

<Telephone Number>

<E-mail Address>

[FYI: using –30– at the end of the release is the symbol traditionally used in press releases to signal the end of it. You can use –More– if the release is more than one page. I see the –More– used less these days because most releases are sent by email, and pages are less relevant in the body of an email message.]

¹ Based on template from PR Web™: The Free Wire Service: <http://www.prweb.com/>

Campaign for High School Equity

Preparing every student for graduation, college, work, and life

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Wednesday July 9, 2008

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“ENOUGH IS ENOUGH”; LULAC RALLIES PARENTS, COMMUNITIES TO REVERSE DROPOUT RATES

National Parent Involvement Initiative Challenges U.S. Education Policy

WASHINGTON — More than 40 percent of Latino students drop out of high school each year, in large part because of the education policies that do not hold high schools accountable for graduation rates. The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)—a founding member of the Campaign for High School Equity (CHSE), a leading coalition of civil rights organizations striving for stronger education policies—said “Enough is enough” today during a town hall meeting at its National Convention & Exposition. At the meeting, LULAC launched its national Parent Involvement Initiative to engage Hispanic parents in education reform.

“The inequalities that exist in the current U.S. education system are appalling at best,” said Rosa Rosales, president of LULAC. “In our communities, with the full support and involvement of parents, is where we will see change happen so that more of our young people graduate from high school prepared for college, work, and life. Working with CHSE, LULAC will engage its strong grassroots network to create a future for Hispanic students that is based in academic success.”

The Initiative will be piloted in 18 cities, including several that are home to “dropout factories”—schools where no more than 60 percent of entering freshmen make it to their senior year three years later. These include Los Angeles; Philadelphia; Chicago; Kansas City, Mo.; Dallas; Houston; and Milwaukee. Dropout factories make up only about 12 percent of all high schools, but they produce approximately half of America’s dropouts and two-thirds of all African American and Hispanic drop outs.

In each city, the Initiative will enlist a core team of parents and family members who are already active in their schools and districts and prepare them to take their efforts to the federal level advocating for substantial reforms to education policy. In turn, this group of parents will empower others to join in a rallying cry to take charge of the situation and change the course of federal education policy for Hispanic students and all students of color.

At the town hall meeting, Rosales was joined by federal, state, and local policymakers, as well as education advocates, to discuss and identify community-based solutions to the challenges in education policy that leave many Latino youth without academic opportunities.

Panelists, including Dr. John Arnold, chair of the National LULAC Education Commission, and CHSE members Peter Zamora of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) and Hilary Shelton, director of the NAACP’s Washington Bureau, addressed strategies for strengthening the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to better serve students of color. CHSE members called for federal policy reforms that: 1) make all students proficient and prepared for college and work; 2) hold high schools accountable for student success; and 3) redesign the American high school.

—more—

Other panelists at the town hall meeting included Holly Kuzmich, deputy chief of staff for policy, U.S. Department of Education; Dr. Joel Gomez, associate professor of educational leadership, The George Washington University; Roberto Rodriguez, senior education advisor, Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee; and Dr. Emma Violand-Sanchez, a parent and candidate for the Arlington County School Board. The group addressed necessary policy changes that will ensure equitable learning conditions, as well as federal program initiatives that will encourage parental and community involvement in U.S. high schools and strategies for redesigning high schools so that all students graduate prepared for college, work, and life.

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The Campaign for High School Equity is a diverse coalition of national civil rights organizations representing communities of color that believe high schools should have the capacity and motivation to prepare every student for graduation, college, work, and life. In addition to LULAC, MALDEF, and NAACP, members of the Campaign include the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund, the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund, the National Council of La Raza, the National Indian Education Association, the National Urban League, The Alliance for Excellent Education, and the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center.



No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Fact Sheets

Fact Sheet #1

Standards

What does NCLB say?

Academic standards are open and public statements about what *all students should know and be able to do in each state. A typical mathematics standard, for example, states that all students should be able to solve multi-step mathematics problems and explain their answers in writing.*

Since 1994 all states have been required to adopt challenging academic standards in the core academic areas of mathematics and reading/language arts, and make them available to the public. No Child Left Behind requires states to adopt standards in science by 2005–06.

Before statewide standards, expectations for learning varied greatly across schools and districts. Even within schools, different groups of students have traditionally been held to different standards. This has often worked to the disadvantage of low-income students and students of color.

With state standards, there are consistent goals for the knowledge and skills students should learn in school. Teaching styles and methods will vary, but the educational goals remain constant.

Now parents and community groups can know what students should know at the end of a grade, or at the end of a grade span – i.e., elementary, middle and high school.

Why is this important?

We need standards for excellence and for fairness and equity. For too many poor and minority students, school has been like trying to bowl with a curtain in front of the pins. No one told students—or their parents—what they should be aiming at. Standards tear away the curtain and make the goals clear to everyone.

For example, if a child has a teacher who uses standards to ensure the curriculum and assignments are challenging and on grade-level, the child will probably learn up to grade level (or will be identified for additional assistance). Another child, with a teacher who does not teach to the standards, might not be taught up to grade level. Both children, however, could get an “A” on their report cards. Without standards and assessments linked to them there would be no way to know that the first child learned much more than the second.

Standards give us a way to know this because they tell us what the child is supposed to be taught. If a child falls behind, standards help teachers and parents to find that out and do something about it before too much time passes.

What can I do?

Start by getting a copy of your state’s academic standards. You should be able to get them from your local school or district. State standards are also available on the internet.

Once you have the standards, read them. Sometimes it is easier to understand them with a group of people, but you can also do it on your own.

Then look at your children’s homework and class work and see how they are aligned to the standards. You can ask your child’s teacher, “What are the children supposed to be learning through this assignment?”

The Education Trust has developed a resource for helping parents use standards to judge the quality of their child’s assignment.¹

It will not always be easy to understand how assignments relate to standards. But trying to do this is a good way to get involved in your child’s education.

¹See the Education Trust’s brochure called “Does My Child’s Homework Meet High Standards?” available on the internet at http://www.edtrust.org/main/main/homework_eng.asp.

Fact Sheet #2

Assessments

What does NCLB say?

Assessments and tests are necessary in order to find out whether or not students are being taught to the standards (See Fact Sheet on “Standards”). Under the previous version of the law, states only had to assess students once in elementary, middle, and high school.

Under the old system, teachers, parents and students could not judge whether students were making continuous progress toward meeting standards.

No Child Left Behind establishes new requirements for testing. Beginning in 2005-06, all schools will measure student achievement yearly in reading and math in grades 3–8, and at least once during the high school years.

Some educators complain that it is too much to test children every year. But most parents disagree. If they receive information that their fourth grader is not reading at grade level, they don’t want to wait another four years to find out whether their child has caught up!

Annual assessments allow teachers and administrators to keep better track of student progress and to intervene quickly to make changes in instruction to fix problems early on.

Although some states have implemented high stakes tests, these tests are **not** required by

NCLB. NCLB does not require that children pass any tests in order to go on to the next grade or to receive a diploma.

Why is this important?

Testing is important to a good education system because it provides information about how students are doing. The more we know, the better position we are in to fix problems when they occur.

Tests should be used to provide feedback to administrators, teachers, parents and students on the students’ academic strengths and weaknesses. This information is important for planning instruction because it highlights concepts and skills that students may need more help learning. Principals and teachers should also use this feedback to target areas where they may need additional professional development.

Since tests required by NCLB measure student progress toward meeting standards, results are generally reported in the form of the percentage of students in categories equivalent to Advanced, Proficient, Basic and Below Basic, although the terms vary by state. Information about how your state defines performance levels should be available at your school, district, or on the state department of education’s web site.

The purpose of instruction is to move students from the Below Basic and Basic categories into

the Proficient and Advanced levels. Given highly qualified teachers, challenging curriculum, extra time and lots of support, virtually all students can achieve at proficient levels. This is the whole purpose of NCLB!

What can I do?

Here are some questions you can ask to inform yourself about your state and district testing program.

- Are the tests aligned with state standards? Do they test the concepts, skills and knowledge contained in the state standards?
- Does the district have a curriculum that is aligned with the concepts, skills and knowledge required to do well on the tests?
- Do teachers receive test results on student performance in a timely fashion so that they can be used to improve instruction?
- Are test results reported to the students, parents and community in a timely fashion so that they can monitor student progress toward meeting standards?
- Are test results reported to parents and students in a way that is easy to understand?

Remember, one of the best ways to reduce test anxiety is to make sure students are well prepared with the concepts, skills and knowledge on which they will be tested.

Fact Sheet #3

Public Reporting

What does NCLB say?

No Child Left Behind requires schools to make a great deal of information publicly available, in a simple format and in languages that people can understand. Beginning with data from the 2002-03 school year, each school district must issue a “report card” for each school.

The school reports must contain:

- Student achievement levels overall, and reported separately by race, poverty level, disabled students and limited English proficient (LEP) students as well as by gender and migrant status.
- Student achievement levels compared to the district and the state, by subject and student group.
- Student achievement levels compared to statewide goals.
- Two-year trends in student achievement, to see if the school is making progress.
- Whether the school has been identified as needing improvement.
- Information documenting the schools’ teacher qualifications, including the percentage of classes taught by unqualified teachers or teachers teaching outside of their subject area.

Districts and states must also issue reports. These contain the same information as the school reports, but for the whole district and state.

Why is this important?

Information about schools is important for many reasons, including:

- Providing parents with important information about their child’s school, including how their school compares to other schools in the district and other schools in the state.
- Helping parents make good choices about where to send their children to school.
- Helping voters choose wisely about school issues like school funding and school board elections.
- Involving everyone in improving education for all children.

What can I do?

- Pick up the publicly available report cards that will be published every year. Find them at your school, school district or your state education agency. Most likely they will also be posted on the internet. Generally, you can go to your public library and use the computers there to gain access to the internet.
- Use the Education Trust’s Parent and Community Data Guide to collect and analyze information. The Education Trust web site and staff can help.
- Share the report with other parents and child advocates.

- Pay attention to local newspaper and TV stories about schools. The media play a key role in shaping public opinion about schools. As you become more familiar with the issues, you will be able to tell when news reporters are painting an accurate picture and when they are not.
- Write to your local newspaper to respond to articles, both when you agree and when you disagree. You can also submit an Op-Ed piece to the editorial section of your local newspaper to express your views.

Remember the most important issue about your school is: How well are the children learning? The purpose of public information is to help you determine that.

Other Public Reporting

In addition to report cards, NCLB requires lots of information to be made public:

- Parents must be notified if their child is taught for four or more consecutive weeks by a teacher who is not highly qualified.
- Principals of Title I schools must certify every year whether they have met teacher quality goals, including hiring highly qualified teachers and providing high quality professional development.

Using and Collecting Data

What Does NCLB say?

Data is the driving force behind No Child Left Behind. Data allows us to make clear and accurate conclusions about the performance of our schools and identify areas of specific needs. The new NCLB requirements enable educators, parents, and advocates to get information about the groups of students that have historically been short-

changed by the **opportunity gap** including the **teacher quality gap**. Data can tell us where the most highly qualified teachers are teaching, which students are being exposed to the best curriculum, and where the most resources are

provided. Without data we have opinions. With data we have facts – facts that can help us make better decisions to help students and schools improve.

No Child Left Behind says that public education must report more information and make it more available to the public. Here are some examples:

- Individual reports to parents describing their children’s achievement and specific areas of need.
- Achievement levels for specific groups of students—in each state, district, and each school.
- Teacher quality and the distribution of qualified teachers among different schools.
- Lists of all schools in need of

improvement, and their plans for improvement.

- Notice of school transfer choices parents have with data on the sending and receiving schools.
- Information about free tutoring services for some children and data on the tutoring provider, especially the provider’s success rate in helping children to meet standards.
- Information for parents of English-language learners, including:
- A description of the program for teaching English to limited-English proficient students.
- A timetable for when the student is expected to join the regular English-language program.
- If the student is in middle or high school, the expected graduation rate for students in the program.

You can learn more about all these topics throughout this guide.

Why is this important?

Data is a tool not only for school districts and states, but is also a tool for parents to use in determining the quality of education their children are receiving.

No Child Left Behind recognizes parents as consumers of educational services provided by public schools. The more you know about your children’s education, the more you can be an informed consumer. This means making good choices for your children, and being involved at all levels of their education.

What can I do?

Collecting and analyzing data sounds like something you used to have to do in math class, and some people don’t have pleasant memories of their math classes. But collecting data about schools does not need to be complicated. Once you see how important it is, you will be eager to do it.

Here are some tips about how to collect data and information:

- **Be persistent.** Sometimes people will tell you they don’t have what you are looking for. If you know you are in the right place, tell the person that you have a right to this information. If you find you are not in the right place, ask where you can get the information you need.
- **Do your homework.** The more you know exactly what to look for, the easier it will be.
- **Keep records.** If you send a request by writing, always keep a dated copy for your personal records, so you can prove what you asked for. If you speak to someone by phone or in person, always ask for their name and keep track of the date. If that person refers you to someone else, use the first person’s name when you make the next call. “Mr. Jones at My Town Elementary referred me to you.”
- **Don’t give up.** It won’t always be easy, but don’t lose hope!
- **Work in teams.** More hands make lighter work.

If you want help collecting or analyzing school data, contact the Education Trust.

“Without data, you are just another person with an opinion”

Accountability

What does NCLB say?

Under NCLB, each state sets academic standards that all schools are expected to meet. Accountability means that educators take responsibility for teaching all students up to these standards.

If schools don't meet the state standards, NCLB requires the state to set up a system for helping to change what's going on in that school.

- The NCLB Act requires all students to take their state's test in reading/language arts and math once a year from grade 3 through grade 8, and at least once during high school.
- States must set goals for what constitutes Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) based on the results of these tests. (see Fact Sheet on "Adequate Yearly Progress.")
- If a school doesn't make Adequate Yearly Progress for two consecutive years, it is identified as a school in need of improvement. In that case, the school, district, and state must develop a plan for raising student achievement. In addition, parents must be notified and given the option to send their children to a higher performing school in the district.
- If a school continues to not meet goals, different strategies must be considered. The aim is to help the school more successfully educate its students. Ultimately, after six years of not meeting goals, the school community must decide on a plan for "restructuring" the school. The state, school district, and local community are responsible for choosing the restructuring plan.

Why is this important?

For too long, our society has blamed children and their families

when children have not done well in school. Of course parents and children have to meet their educational responsibilities; however, schools must be held accountable for teaching students well, and NCLB goes further than any other law in making sure that will happen.

Public schools in the United States have consistently put the least amount of educational resources into areas where they are needed the most. Schools serving low-income and minority students usually get the fewest qualified teachers; they are issued the oldest textbooks and other resources and are generally housed in the worst facilities. This creates an "opportunity gap."

No Child Left Behind accountability helps advocates who want to challenge these opportunity gaps. All schools have to make sure that all students are taught to high standards. And states and school districts need to own up to their responsibility to provide the support and assistance schools need to improve teaching and learning. **No excuses. No exceptions.**

It is important to know that there are no financial penalties in NCLB for schools that fail to make AYP. In fact, the law requires states to set aside a portion of funds received under the federal Title I program to provide additional assistance to schools that have been identified for improvement. In 2003, \$234 million dollars will be given to states to assist schools in the improvement process. Because of a formula in the law, that amount should double for 2004 and succeeding years.

NCLB does not penalize schools for low student achievement—but it does require states to measure stu-

dent achievement, hold schools accountable for results, and help struggling schools to improve.

What can I do?

NCLB pushes all schools to improve, but parents and community leaders have a responsibility to help as well. Public schools are public institutions, and we all must get involved to make sure our schools meet their responsibilities to our children.

- Get the data and know what's going on in your school.
- Make sure that when a school is identified as needing improvement that the process is taken seriously. Demand that real changes be put into place.
- Find out how the state and district will support improvement efforts. Advocate for more help and more resources from the district and state.
- Be an active participant in the school improvement process. It is a lot easier to write a plan than to change what has been going on in a school, so stick with it. Go to Board of Education meetings and ask whether the Board is getting updates on the improvement process.
- Help your school identify successful strategies for improving teaching and learning. Call or visit schools that are having more success in raising achievement. (You can find them on the "Dispelling the Myth" website at www.edtrust.org.) Share what you learn with others who are concerned with school improvement.
- Work in your community to organize outside services—tutoring, counseling, and the like—that can help struggling students improve.

Adequate Yearly Progress

What does NCLB say?

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is a signaling system. It tells whether schools are on-track to teach students what they need to know. Under NCLB, states set the same goals for all schools and students. The goals increase over time with the ultimate goal that all students will meet the state's standards for "proficient" in reading and math by 2014. AYP is the formula for telling us whether schools are meeting these goals.¹

Setting the same high standards for all students and schools is crucial for fairness and equity. You can't close achievement gaps by having lower expectations for previously low-performing schools.

There are two ways for a school to make AYP:

- If a school's actual achievement is at or above the state goal in a given year, the school is designated as making AYP.
- The AYP formula also gives credit to low-performing schools that have made significant progress. If a school or group of students within a school does not meet the goals, but the number of students below proficient is reduced by 10 percent from the year before, the school still makes AYP.²

There are two important distinctions between AYP under NCLB and most previous school accountability systems:

First, AYP is not only based on overall proficiency percentages but also on the performance of

low-income students, racial and ethnic minorities, students with limited English proficiency, and students with disabilities. If a school does not make AYP for one of these subgroups, it does not make AYP.

Second, under NCLB, all schools in a state are held to the same standards. It is no longer acceptable to say that schools educating low-income students and students of color are doing all right if they're not being taught to the same high standards as other schools.

Why is this important?

Adequate Yearly Progress is the cornerstone of a new way of defining success in schools. From now on "all students" really means all students, and "progress" means progress toward a clearly defined goal.

By basing the decision of whether a school needs to improve on the performance of its least-advantaged students, AYP promises to move achievement gaps front and center in our conversations about whether schools are making the grade.

When state goals aren't met and schools have not made adequate progress for two years in a row, the school is identified as a school "in need of improvement." The law demands that the state, the district, and the individual school describe the specific steps they will take to raise student achievement. This is what is called a "School Improvement Plan" (See Fact

Sheet on "Schools in Improvement"). It gives you more information than ever before about your schools. Steps are taken to help students in schools that do not make AYP and timelines are set with stronger interventions for schools over time when Adequate Yearly Progress is not met.

What can I do?

Adequate Yearly Progress is a crucial element in determining how well a school is doing toward improving its academic instruction and meeting state standards. If your school is identified as in need of improvement, find out why. The answer will be that one or more groups of students have not made AYP. The No Child Left Behind Act allows you to see precisely which group or groups of students are not making progress and in what areas.

- You can work closely with your child's teachers and other pertinent school personnel to address your child's needs.
- You can become part of the team developing the School Improvement Plan, which addresses how to improve the area of need, and help with the implementation of that Plan.
- Counselors, resource providers, tutors and others may be instrumental in helping children make progress. Get to know them and work with them as full partners in the process of improving the academic performance of your school.

¹For more detailed information on how AYP works, see ABCs of AYP at www.edtrust.org

²To see how this is working out with real school examples, see, *What New AYP Results Tell Us About States, Schools, and Student Performance* at www.edtrust.org

Schools In Improvement

What does NCLB say?

When schools do not make AYP (see Fact Sheet on “Adequate Yearly Progress”) for two years in a row, they are identified as needing improvement. From a parent’s perspective this is a good thing. It means the school district and state have greater obligations to help this school and its students. In fact, states get federal funds specifically to help schools in improvement.

Once a school is identified as needing improvement, it must send a written notice to all parents at the school about the need for improvement and about how parents can get involved in improvement efforts. The school must also begin immediately to develop a plan for improvement, and it must work with many partners in developing the plan, including parents. This plan must include:

- Specific data that shows exactly what areas need to be improved;
- Strategies that the school will use to raise achievement;
- Strategies for training and supporting teachers and principals;
- A description of how the district and state will help the school to improve; and
- Strategies to increase parental involvement.

In addition to notification and the opportunity to participate in school improvement efforts, parents must be informed of their right to transfer their children to a better performing school. If the school is in its second year or more of school improvement, students from low-income families must be offered supplemental services such as tutoring. These supplemental services are provided outside the school day by state-approved companies or organizations. Transfers and supplemental services are provided at no cost to parents. They are paid for entirely with federal funds.

Why is this important?

Many parents have known for a long time that their schools needed improvement, but have not felt that their schools received the help or support they needed.

The school improvement process under NCLB is designed to compel school districts and states to make much needed improvements in the instructional program of underperforming schools. It is also designed to make sure that students who are behind get extra help. This is the only way these students will be able to catch up and to meet high standards.

What can I do?

The most important thing to do is to be there when your school needs help. The school improvement plan is a wonderful opportunity to get involved. The law says that schools in need of improvement must take steps to include parents.

Some states or districts seem to almost panic when they find out that many or even a few schools will be given this “label.” This “label” is simply a way to identify problem areas and to set up plans to take care of those problems. No Child Left Behind does not label schools as “failing,” even though the media likes to use this term. If your car’s engine is not working properly, you need to find out what is wrong and to figure out a way to fix it. This law does the same for schools.

It is of course possible that some schools will not improve, even with an improvement plan. There are times when more drastic measures will have to be taken. No Child Left Behind says that if a school still has not made progress after six years, the principal and the main staff can be replaced, or the school can be completely reorganized. If this happens, parents can and should be part of the restructuring process of the school.

Teacher Quality

What does NCLB say?

NCLB is the first federal education law to demand that states define what it takes to be a qualified teacher and take steps to address the unfair assignment of the least qualified teachers to the schools educating the most disadvantaged students.

Although states define a “highly qualified teacher,” NCLB sets a minimum standard:

- All teachers must meet state certification requirements and have a license;
- All teachers must have at least a college degree;
- All teachers must demonstrate that they are knowledgeable in each subject they are assigned to teach:
 - **New elementary teachers must pass a test of subject knowledge and teaching skills.**
 - **New middle school and high school teachers must demonstrate knowledge in every subject they teach, either by earning a college major in the subject or by passing a rigorous academic subject test.**
 - **Veteran teachers also need to demonstrate subject matter knowledge (if they have not already). Veteran teachers can take the state tests, or the state can develop alternate measures of subject knowledge for veteran teachers.**

States have promised that all new teachers hired in Title I schools will meet the state’s

definition of “highly qualified.” By 2005-06 ALL school teachers are expected to meet them, including veteran teachers.

Under NCLB, states and school districts must publicly report on the distribution of highly qualified and experienced teachers. This should help ensure that schools serving poor and minority students get their fair share of these teachers.

Why is this important?

Teacher quality is the most important factor affecting student achievement. **Parents know this, which is why they fight to have their children taught by the best teachers.**

The last decade of research leaves little doubt: Students who have several strong teachers in a row will soar no matter what neighborhood they come from. On the other hand, the results are devastating for students who are taught by three ineffective teachers in row. Yet students of color and low-income students continue to be short-changed when it comes to qualified and experienced teachers.

If we took the simple step of making sure that all poor and minority students had teachers of the same quality as other children, about half the achievement gap would disappear.¹ If we went further by putting our most expert teachers with the children who need them most, we could close the gap entirely.

What can I do?

Look at the school and district report cards to see the qualifications of your school’s teachers. You are entitled to information about the qualifications of the teachers in your school, and specific information about your child’s teachers.

Check with the school to see what your child’s teachers studied in college and what subjects they’re licensed to teach. Are they teaching the subjects they studied? If not, what qualifications do they have? Have they taken exams to show that they are qualified to teach this class? Schools are required to have teacher quality information on site.

Look more widely to see how teachers are distributed, both within schools and within districts. Remember, students who are behind need to catch up and the best way to do that is for them to have excellent teachers.

Make sure your school district is helping to get the best teachers for your schools. What support do teachers get? What kinds of ongoing training and professional development are provided by the school district?

Ask your school district and state for their plans for raising teacher quality. NCLB requires states and school districts to publicly report progress toward ensuring low-income and minority students get their fair share of qualified and experienced teachers. Request copies of these reports.

¹For more information about the importance of teacher quality, read “Good Teaching Matters,” available at www.edtrust.org.

High Quality Curriculum

What does NCLB say?

Standards set up an educational destination, but how students get to the destination is equally important. No Child Left Behind insists that all children should be taught up to the same standards. They need good teachers, challenging courses and rigorous assignments—that is, the work they do in class or for homework.

Why is this important?

Students can only learn what they are taught and can do no better than the work they are assigned.

Standards tell us what students should know and be able to do at every grade level. And it is the curriculum and assignments that provide the foundation for learning and building skills. What classes are students enrolled in? What materials—textbooks, reading methods, etc.—are being used? Are their assignments designed to help them meet state standards?

A sad fact about American education is that students are often sorted, often at a very early age. Some children are given challenging classes and are expected to reach high levels of achievement. Others are expected to learn only the most basic and most rudimentary skills, and are assigned to low-level classes. This is sometimes called “tracking.”

All children should be taught a college readiness curriculum in core academic classes. In today’s and tomorrow’s economy, ready for work and ready for college mean the same thing: ready for life.¹ Courses traditionally thought of as “college prep” are essential in today’s workplace, where most jobs that pay a family-supporting wage demand high skills and the ability to continue learning on the job. A challenging curriculum is the only way to ensure that all students are prepared to pursue their ambitions after high school graduation.

What can I do?

Look at the materials your children are being taught with, and the classes they are taking.

- In elementary school, make sure the materials used in your child’s classes are appropriate for their grade level. Are some children, for example, reading “below grade level?” If so, ask what the teachers are doing to make sure they catch up.
- In middle and high school, look at what classes your child is taking. Get to know your child’s guidance counselors from the very beginning, and make sure that the classes your child is taking prepares him/her to be successful in a challenging curriculum.
- Learn about the courses required for college and for different jobs and careers. Make sure your children are in courses that adequately prepare them to pursue their dreams.

¹For more information about the importance of a core curriculum, read “A New Core Curriculum For All,” (Thinking K-16, Winter 2003) available at www.edtrust.org.

Parents' Right to Know

What does NCLB say?

No Child Left Behind gives you, the parent, important new rights to receive information about your own children in Title I schools. All information should be in a simple format and in a language that you understand.

Student Achievement:

- You have a right to receive a report of how your child performed on the state's academic achievement test, with clear information about any needs which may have been identified for your child. You can then talk with your child's teachers about how to help them address those needs.
- The state and district must release report cards, which you can use to compare your child's achievement levels to those of other children in your school, district, and state.

Teacher Quality:

- At the beginning of each school year, you should receive a notice explaining that you have the right to ask for information about the qualifications of your child's teachers. (See "Teacher Quality" fact sheet)
- You have a right to know if teachers have emergency or temporary credentials.
- You have a right to know if teachers in your school are certified in the subject areas they are teaching.
- If your child is being taught by a teacher who is not fully qualified for four weeks or more, the school must send you a notice (even without you asking).

- You have a right to see the principal's declaration of compliance with the teacher quality provisions of NCLB.
- You have a right to see the district's plan for increasing teacher quality and how the district will make sure that qualified and experienced teachers are fairly distributed among all schools in the district.

Programs for English Language Learners:

- If your child is designated as an English-language learner, you have a right to know the level of your child's English proficiency, what programs are used to help teach your child English, and how those programs will meet your child's educational needs. You also have a right to know how long the program is expected to last and what it will take to exit out of the program. This must be written in a language you can understand.
- You also have a right to decline enrollment in the program, or to remove your child from the program, or to enroll in another program if available.

School Improvement:

- If your child's school has been identified as "in need of improvement," you should receive a notice explaining exactly why this happened and what the school is doing to improve. (See "Schools In Improvement" fact sheet)
- When schools are "in need of improvement," you should receive a notice say-

ing that your child might be eligible to transfer to another school or for free tutoring services. (See "School Choice" and "Supplemental Services" fact sheets)

Why is this important?

There's no question that parents can be an important voice in accelerating school improvement. It's useful to understand policies and get involved in the decision making process at the school and district levels and also to monitor legislation impacting education policy at the state level.

What can I do?

Work with your children. Ask them about school. Listen to what they say. Follow what they are learning. Get to know your child's teachers. Sit in and observe your child's classes if you can.

Check their homework. Compare homework assignments to state standards: are the two aligned?

Get the information you are entitled to. Look at school report cards and improvement plans. If you receive anything that you do not understand, go to the school and find out more. If you receive anything in a language you do not understand, contact the school and make sure you get what you need.

Get to know other parents and make sure everyone is being given the same information and is being treated the same way. Find out what school committees you can join and serve as a meaningful partner.

Parent Involvement

The No Child Left Behind Act won't meet its full potential for improving schools without parent and community groups organizing and pushing to make sure that policies are implemented according to the intent of the law. When parents combine facts with their passion to improve their child's education, they become a powerful force. No Child Left Behind provides data (hard facts) that parents can use to evaluate the academic progress of their children.

Each school district is required to develop an effective process for meaningful parental involvement. Each school district receiving Title I funds must have a written parent involvement policy and this policy must be developed in partnership with parents.

What is new?

No Child Left Behind has put some meat on the bones of parent involvement by mandating information that parents are entitled to. The school district parent involvement policy should specify how districts and schools will provide this information to all parents—in a language and format parents can understand.

Under NCLB; Parents have a right to:

- See information about teacher qualifications.
- Know if teachers have emergency or temporary credentials.
- Know if teachers are certified in the subject they are teaching.
- Know if your child is being taught by a teacher's aide, and if so, with what qualifications.

- Know if your child has been taught for more than four weeks in a row by a teacher who is not highly qualified.
- See the principal's declaration of compliance with the teacher quality provisions of NCLB.
- See the district's plan for increasing teacher quality and how the district will make sure that qualified teachers are equally distributed among all the schools in the district.

Schools have an obligation to encourage parental participation. They can:

- Use NCLB funds for parent training to understand standards, assessments, report cards, data and other information you are entitled to.
- Promote broad representation of parents on school improvement committees.
- Assure parents that communications will be in the language spoken in the home.
- Hold meetings with flexible hours to accommodate working parents' schedules.
- Use Title I funds to provide transportation and child care for parents, or home visits providing these services are related to parent involvement.
- Offer classes for parents who speak English as a second language or parents who would like to improve their own literacy skills.

Why is this important?

Most school systems and schools won't change the way they do business without outside help and pressure. No Child Left

Behind provides some leverage for parents and advocates.

Schools and school districts benefit when parents are informed advocates.

What can I do?

Join a parent group, get informed—become active!
You can:

- Visit high achieving schools in your district and/or state with populations similar to your school and see how they improved academic achievement.
- Get copies of the standards and sample copies of tests and learn how they are used in the classroom.
- Find out how tests and other assessments are used to evaluate and improve instructional practices.
- Monitor your child's homework to see if it's on grade level (See the Education Trust's brochure called "Does My Child's Homework Meet High Standards?" available on the internet at http://www.edtrust.org/main/main/homework_eng.asp.)
- Get to know your child's teachers.
- Go to meetings, talk with other parents.
- Learn about school issues.
- Study school report cards when they are released.
- Attend district school board meetings.

Talk to your child's teacher. You don't have to wait until "Back to School Night" or parent conferences. Your children will benefit if their teachers know that you are behind them every step of the way.

Students with Limited English Proficiency

What does NCLB say?

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) recognizes that students who are not native English speakers (Limited English Proficient “LEP”) need additional academic support. NCLB says that these students must be taught the same academic content their classmates are learning, at the same time as they are learning English. The type of language instruction program is determined by the school, but regardless of the type of program, the program must have as a goal developing students’ English proficiency while also helping them to master academic standards. The programs may use both English and a child’s native language.

The expectation in the law is that LEP students should be able to participate in traditional classes after three years in a language instruction program. Once your child has been transitioned out of a language instruction program, the district has a responsibility to monitor your child’s English-language development for two more years to ensure that they are able to fully participate in the regular academic program.

No Child Left Behind also gives important rights to the parents of LEP students. If your child has been identified as LEP you have a right to know the level of your child’s English proficiency and what programs your child will be enrolled in to learn English, as well as how those programs will meet your child’s needs. This notice should be

provided no later than 30 days after the beginning of the school year and be in a language you can understand. The notice should include:

- Your child’s level in English (such as Novice, Intermediate, or Advanced), the defining characteristics of each language proficiency level, and how their level was determined.
- The teaching methods of the program your child is being assigned to.
- How the program will help your child learn English and at the same time meet academic standards.
- The requirements for exiting the special English-language acquisition program and an estimate of how long that should take.
- If a student is in secondary school, the school should tell you the expected graduation rate for students in the program they are recommending. If your child is not expected to graduate, you should request additional support or a different program that will prepare your child to graduate.

Parents also have a right to decline enrollment in the program selected by the school, to remove a child from the program, or to choose a different language instruction program if available. Note that if you decide not to enroll your child in the program recommended by the school, the district is still obligated to work to overcome language barriers faced by your child.

Why is this important?

The basic idea of NCLB is that students should receive the type of instruction necessary to help them meet academic achievement goals, so that all students are ready to continue learning in college or the workforce by the time they finish high school. Students who are not native English speakers need additional academic support in order to transition from their primary language to English. It is extremely important that LEP students are not only given the help they need to learn English as quickly as possible but also have access to the regular curriculum.

What can I do?

Request all school reports in your native language.

Get to know other parents whose children have been through the same school or the same programs. They should be able to help you to understand how the different program options work at your school and how you can best support your child’s education.

Talk to your child’s teacher often about your expectations and ask questions so that you have a clear understanding of what program your child is in, what language your child is learning in, and how your child is being taught English. Take time to visit your child’s classroom during the school day to see what they are learning.

If you cannot communicate with your child’s teacher, find someone on the school staff who can serve as a translator or who can answer your questions.

Fact Sheet #13

School Choice

What does NCLB say?

Parents have the right to change schools if their child's school has not met goals for two consecutive years and has been identified as in need of improvement. (See Fact Sheet on "Schools In Need of Improvement.") Federal funds are provided to cover the costs of these transfers. No state or local education funds are used.

Parental choice means:

- Parents have the right to transfer to a higher performing school in the same school district. As long as the original school remains in need of improvement, the school district must provide transportation to the new school.
- If student achievement improves at the sending school and the school is no longer in need of improvement, the family has the right to keep their child in the new school, but the school no longer has to provide transportation.
- When adequate spaces aren't available, priority must be given to the lowest achieving children in low-income families. School districts are encouraged to make arrangements to allow students to transfer to neighboring districts.

- If transfer options aren't available to accommodate all transfer requests, the school district should offer supplemental services to children from low-income families in the first year of school improvement. (Usually supplemental services aren't available until the second year of school improvement. See Fact Sheet on "Supplemental Services.")

Why is this important?

All parents want their children to go to successful schools and to get a high quality education. In the past, parents often felt that their children were stuck in unsuccessful schools, and they had no choice but to stay. No Child Left Behind tries to make sure that families have choices when their neighborhood school is not successfully educating their children.

What can I do?

Be aware of your rights under the law and make careful decisions about what is best for your child. If you learn that your child's school has been identified as "in need of improvement," you should find out why, what the school is doing to address its problems, and what choices you have. Here are some things to look for when you

think about choosing a new school for your child:

- Does the school have a record of success with all its students, or only some groups?
- What are the achievement levels at the new school? How do different groups of students do on the tests? For example, look to see if certain ethnic groups do much better on the tests than others. A good school should have narrow if any gaps.
- Visit the school. Talk to school officials, teachers, and students if possible. Talk to parents of children at that school.
- What is the atmosphere like in the school? Were you welcomed?

Remember that even if you have the right to move your child to a new school, the decision is still yours. Just because a school is in need of improvement does not mean that it is not good for your child.

You should find out as much as you can about your rights and about the choices available to you. Get as much information as you can; think about the possible benefits and the possible difficulties. And finally, you should make the decision that seems best for the needs of your child.

Supplemental Services

What does NCLB say?

Under No Child Left Behind, low-income parents can get free after-school or weekend tutoring for their children when their school has not met goals for three or more years.

The school or school district must let you know if your children are eligible for this program. They should send you a notice, and this notice should be easy for you to understand. The notice should give you a list of all the accredited tutoring programs near where you live. The programs on this list have to be approved by the state. There should be a description of each program on the list. If you want supplemental services for your child, the school district will make the arrangements at no cost to you (federal funds are used to pay for supplemental services).

If your child does begin a tutoring program, the program must work closely with the school and with you to make sure that it is helping your child

with the specific difficulties he or she is having in school.

Why is this important?

Children who are having a hard time in school need extra help. Schools should provide help, but sometimes that is not enough.

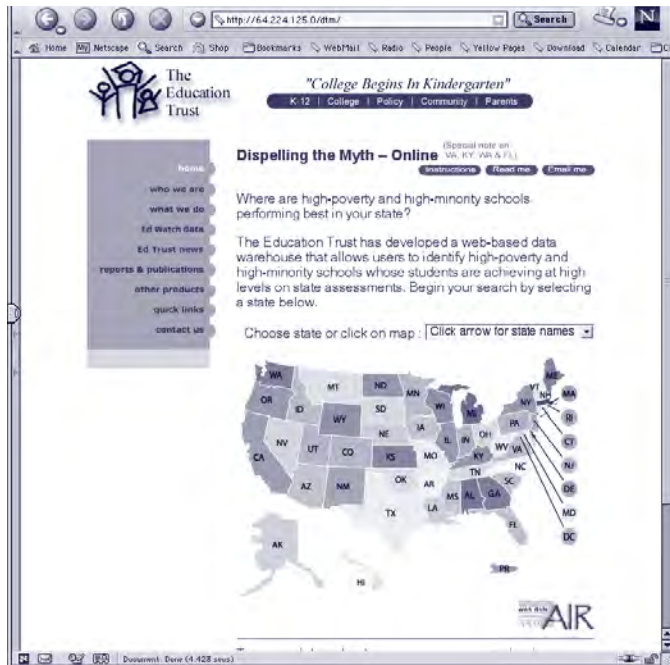
Free tutoring for struggling students in underperforming schools is one way that NCLB focuses extra attention on the students who are not yet proficient in reading and math.

What can I do?

Be very careful in choosing a program for your child. Here are the kinds of questions you should ask before deciding:

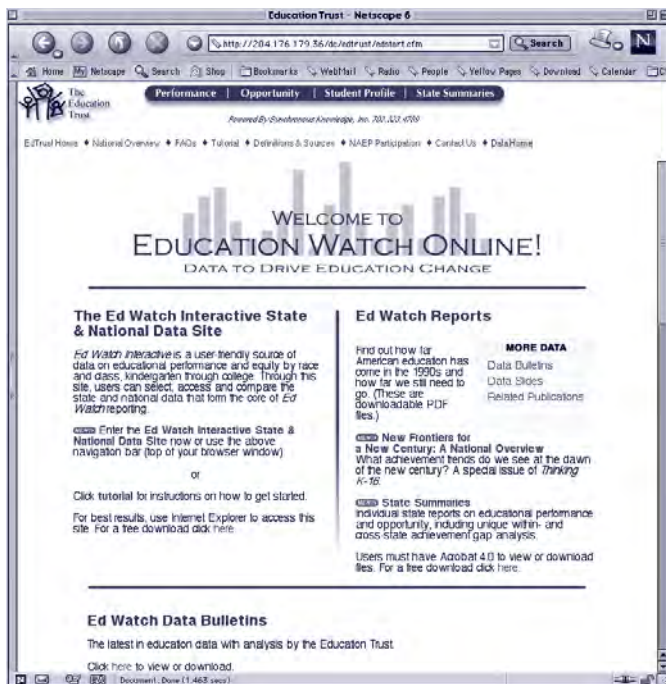
- How long has this tutoring program been in business?
- Has the company or tutoring service been successful with students who are behind in school?
- How are the services linked to the school curriculum? Is the tutoring focused on strengthening basic skills in math and/or reading?
- What does the provider do to coordinate their efforts with the students' teachers? With their schools? Is there a plan to share information throughout the tutoring?
- How will the provider explain to you what your child's problems are? (It is not helpful to say that a student is having trouble reading—that is already known. They should tell you why your child is having trouble reading, and where the problem is coming from.)
- What does the provider do that is different from how the student was taught in school?
- Will you be able to follow the progress of your child through regular progress reports?
- What feedback/progress reports will you receive? How often?
- What can you do if you are not satisfied? Who can you talk to?

Check Out the Education Trust's Web-Based Data Resources **Dispelling the Myth** and **Education Watch Online**



Dispelling the Myth,

an easy-to-use data base on high-performing, high-poverty and high-minority elementary, middle and high schools in every region of the country.



Education Watch Online,

a user-friendly source of national and state data on achievement patterns and educational opportunities by race and class, kindergarten through college.

To visit **Dispelling the Myth** and **Education Watch Online**, go to the Education Trust's Web site at www.edtrust.org.

IV

**Additional
Resources**

Additional Resources

On this page you will find links to state specific education data. The Education Trust presents an array of data in a consistent format so that educators, parents, and public officials can squarely face this issue. The individual “Education Watch State Report” shows how well schools are serving different groups of young people. Similar disturbing patterns exist in virtually every state and the nation:

- > Educational performance is too low, and big gaps separate low-income students and students of color from others.
- > Improvement, while real, is far too low.

The good news is that achievement gaps are not inevitable. Around the country, evidence is unequivocal that low-income schools and school systems are organized to support student success. We hope you will use the information in this report to close the opportunity and achievement gaps once and for all. For your specific state data, click the link below.

- | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| > Alabama | > Kentucky | > North Dakota |
| > Alaska | > Louisiana | > Ohio |
| > Arizona | > Maine | > Oklahoma |
| > Arkansas | > Maryland | > Oregon |
| > California | > Massachusetts | > Pennsylvania |
| > Colorado | > Michigan | > Rhode Island |
| > Connecticut | > Minnesota | > South Carolina |
| > D.C. | > Mississippi | > South Dakota |
| > Delaware | > Missouri | > Tennessee |
| > Florida | > Montana | > Texas |
| > Georgia | > Nebraska | > Utah |
| > Hawaii | > Nevada | > Vermont |
| > Idaho | > New Hampshire | > Virginia |
| > Illinois | > New Jersey | > Washington |
| > Indiana | > New Mexico | > West Virginia |
| > Iowa | > New York | > Wisconsin |
| > Kansas | > North Carolina | > Wyoming |

We encourage you to contact your elected officials and share your thoughts on current events and government policy. To find your state elected officials, visit <http://www.usa.gov/Contact/Elected.shtml>.

Established: 1929

With approximately 115,000 members throughout the United States and Puerto Rico, LULAC is the largest and oldest Hispanic organization in the United States. LULAC advances the economic condition, educational attainment, political influence, health and civil rights of Hispanic Americans through community-based programs operating at more than 700 LULAC councils nationwide. The organization involves and serves all Hispanic nationality groups.

Historically, LULAC has focused heavily on education, civil rights, and employment for Hispanics. LULAC councils provide more than a million dollars in scholarships to Hispanic students each year, conduct citizenship and voter registration drives, develop low income housing units, conduct youth leadership training programs, and seek to empower the Hispanic community at the local, state and national level.

In addition, the LULAC National Education Service Centers, LULAC's educational arm, provides counseling services to more than 18,000 Hispanic students per year at sixteen regional centers. SER Jobs for Progress, LULAC's employment arm, provides job skills and literacy training the Hispanic community through more than forty-eight employment training centers located throughout the United States. LULAC's Empower Hispanic America with Technology initiative created a network of 56 community technology centers to provide free high speed internet access and computer-related training to students, parents, and low income individuals. The LULAC Corporate Alliance, an advisory board of Fortune 500 companies, fosters stronger partnerships between Corporate America and the Hispanic Community.



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