

Parental Involvement in the No Child Left Behind Act

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act –the main federal law affecting education from prekindergarten through grade 12. Since its enactment in 2002, NCLB has significantly changed the way education takes place in our nation’s schools. Briefly, it has provided schools with guidelines for closing the achievement gap that exists between low-income children and their more affluent peers. In addition, NCLB has provided parents with new rights and responsibilities. In fact, NCLB strongly relies on

effective parent participation to make sure that the law is implemented properly in every school.

There are a number of areas within NCLB which pertain to parental involvement. However, the various provisions can be placed in the following overarching categories: parental notification and choice, parental involvement strategies, and accountability. In addition, there is a set of rights and responsibilities for parents of English language learners (ELLs). Following is a brief explanation of some of the parent provisions in NCLB.

Parental Notification and Choice

NCLB includes a number of provisions that aim to increase parental knowledge with the expectation that such information will encourage greater participation from parents. Some of these provisions include requirements to hold meetings with parents to inform them of general federal education requirements and parent rights; notifying parents if their child’s school has been identified for school improvement; and notifying parents of their right to request information regarding their child’s teacher.

– in a format and language they can easily understand – that it has been so identified; explain why it was identified, such as for failing to help Hispanic students make adequate progress; and explain how parents can help improve the school. States must notify parents of any school within a school district that has been identified for school improvement.

Meetings for Parents

Title I schools are required to convene an annual meeting – at a time that is most convenient for parents – to inform them of the federal law’s requirements and their right to be involved. In addition, Title I schools must hold additional meetings at flexible hours that are convenient for all parents. Moreover, schools can use Title I funds to help parents with transportation or childcare, or to make home visits, to enable them to participate in their children’s education.

Once a school has been identified as low-performing, parents must be notified that their children can choose to transfer to a school that is not low-performing within the same district. If a school fails to improve one year after it has been identified for school improvement, the school district must provide parents with notice of the availability of supplemental services, such as before- or after-school tutoring, for their children. Parents must be provided with a list of approved supplemental service providers and a description of the services they provide. If requested, parents must receive assistance in choosing a provider.

School Improvement and Choice

Under NCLB, if a local school fails to help its students make adequate progress for two consecutive years, the school must be identified for improvement by the school district. A low-performing school must notify parents in writing

Teacher Qualifications

At the start of every school year, Title I schools must inform parents of their right to request and receive information in a timely manner regarding the professional qualifications of their children’s teachers. In addition, Title I schools must inform parents in timely manner if their child has been taught for four or more consecutive weeks by a teacher who is not highly qualified.

Parental Involvement Strategies

NCLB requires states to describe how they will collect and disseminate effective parental involvement strategies to schools in their state plans to the U.S. Department of Education. The law also requires Title I school districts and schools to have a written parental involvement policy, which must be devised in collaboration with and approved by parents.

Parents must be included in school support teams intended to assist schools, particularly low-performing schools, in improving academic outcomes. Low-performing schools must develop improvement plans, which must include strategies to enhance parental involvement. In addition, teacher professional development plans must include training in effective parental involvement strategies.

Accountability

Under NCLB, parents are expected to review state- and district-level report cards on various academic indicators and to hold schools accountable for meeting academic benchmarks. State report cards must include student achievement data that are broken down by different groups, including race, ethnicity, language status, migrant status, disability, and gender. In addition, the report cards must describe the academic objectives for each subgroup of students. Since testing is a major part of NCLB, state report cards must show the percentage of students who are *not tested*. To ensure that schools do not “push out” children who may not score well, report cards must also contain information on other indicators of progress and high school graduation rates. District-level report cards have much of this same information, but also

must show which schools within the district have been identified for school improvement.

Because parents have to process a lot of new information related to the education system, NCLB also authorizes the establishment of Local Family Information Centers (LFICs), which, if funded, have the potential to provide parents with the information and training necessary to use data to hold school systems accountable. Unfortunately, this program has never been funded by President Bush and Congress, leaving many parents without the information they need to play a more active role in improving the schools their children attend.

English Language Learners

NCLB contains provisions throughout for parents of ELL students concerning involvement strategies, notification, and choice. For example, school district plans must include “effective” outreach to parents of limited-English-proficient (LEP) students about how they can get involved in their children’s education programs. Bilingual education funds can be used to provide parents of ELL students with literacy, outreach, and training so they can become active participants in their children’s education. Parents must be notified by no later than 30 days after the beginning of the school year of, among other things, why their children have been identified for ELL services, their children’s English proficiency levels, how they were assessed, their academic levels, and the instructional program in which their children are or will be participating. Parents must also receive information about

whether or not the school has met its annual English-language acquisition and academic achievement benchmarks, and their right to remove children from or to opt out of bilingual education programs. They must also receive assistance in choosing an instructional program for their children.

Without meaningful information about their rights and responsibilities, it is unlikely that parents will be in a position to take full advantage of the opportunities contained in NCLB. Community-based organizations (CBOs) can fill this need by providing Latino parents with information about the law and their rights under the law. CBOs and schools should also work in partnership with each other to fulfill the requirements of NCLB, particularly in providing important information to non-English-speaking parents.

For more information, see:

The National Parent Teacher Association: <http://www.pta.org>

The U.S. Department of Education: <http://www.ed.gov/parents/landing.jhtml?src=pn>

The National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education: <http://www.ncpie.org/>