

Parental Involvement Under the New Title I & Title III: From Compliance to Effective Practice



The 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), entitled the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), continues a legislative commitment to parental involvement begun in 1965. Central features of the 1988 and 1994 reauthorizations, such as school-parent compacts, parental involvement policies, and the parental involvement funding formula, remain predominantly unaltered. However, the 2001 reauthorization represents a notable shift in the expected role of parental involvement in the schools. It includes new provisions increasing parental notification requirements, parental selection of educational options, and parental involvement in governance. The new law envisions parents not only as participants, but also as *informed and empowered decisionmakers* in their children's education.

A broad base of parental involvement research affirms the benefits of partnering with parents in both learning and decisionmaking. The challenge schools and districts face is to develop effective partnerships with parents while meeting specific legal requirements for notification and options for parental decision-

making. Though it may be a common habit to make legal compliance the focus of planning, ESEA requirements can be integrated as components, rather than the dominant features, of each school and district's parental involvement plan. In addition to outlining major parental involvement elements of Title I and Title III of ESEA/NCLB, this report seeks to assist schools and districts as they consider how the requirements of the new law can support the development of sound, effective parental involvement plans.

PARENTS AS INFORMED AND EMPOWERED DECISIONMAKERS IN THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

The parental notification provisions of ESEA frame the parental role as one of *knowledgeable decisionmaker* and *active partner* in their child's education. The law recognizes that in order for parents to make informed decisions about how to further their child's success, they must be aware of his/her learning environment, able to interpret information about academic programs, and able to evaluate in understandable terms the achievement of their child and the school.

As schools prepare to meet ESEA/NCLB requirements, it is important to

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IMPORTANT NOTES

✓ This report does not address the Voluntary Public School Choice and Unsafe School Choice provisions of Title V and Title IX of ESEA/NCLB but the principles presented here are applicable to those sections of the law as well.

✓ The full text of the sections of ESEA/NCLB related to parental involvement and cited in this report are available at: www.nwrel.org/planning

✓ "Parental involvement" is the phrase used in the legislation and followed here, but "family involvement," "parental partnerships," and "public engagement" arguably are more accurate terminology choices.

COMMON THEMES IN PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

ISSUE #1

Defining Parental Involvement

Most schools have been working to involve families for years, but may not have a defined sense of what “parental involvement” really means. Many parental involvement efforts are loosely aimed at connecting parents to the school by creating familiarity with staff and facilities. However, there is an evolving understanding that effective parental involvement means more than just getting parents to the school. Rather, it utilizes parents as partners in teaching and learning, recognizes parents as legitimate participants in school governance, fosters community cohesion, and supports the development of parenting skills. Like so many other strategies, meaningful parental involvement efforts require a systematic development of plans and programs. States and districts can help schools develop a shared understanding of the definition of parental involvement and its purposes.

use sound research to inform practice. Research shows that effective home-to-school and school-to-home communication has clear benefits for teachers, parents, and students. Teachers become more aware of the needs and perspectives of their students, while parents become more familiar with teachers and the day-to-day realities of schools, and are thus better equipped to make educational decisions (Epstein, 1995). If our goal is to facilitate *knowledgeable* parental participation, we need to address the following questions (from a survey instrument jointly developed by the National Network of Partnership Schools and NWREL; Salinas et al., 1999):

- ✓ Is information on academic programs, achievement, and choices delivered in a clear, understandable format?
- ✓ Are varied methods of communication utilized (print, meetings, calls, etc.)?
- ✓ Are there strategies for reaching “hard-to-reach” parents?
- ✓ Have we established channels for parents to respond (two-way communication)?

The provisions explained below establish the importance of communication between schools and parents, but strict compliance with the law will not alone ensure deeper connections with families. Rather, schools and districts should assess the individual needs and characteristics of their communities and develop strategies they believe will facilitate meaningful two-way communication between schools and families. ESEA requirements can be used to serve these localized plans, complementing a broader vision of meaningful parental involvement.

Achievement-level reporting.

States, LEAs, and individual schools are required to publish report cards that are

to be expressed in “an understandable format” and distributed to all parents annually. Report cards include academic progress at the state-, district-, and schoolwide levels; achievement differences between demographic groups; relevant comparisons to other communities; and actual achievement versus stated goals. Finally, schools are required to report to parents each child’s individual achievement on state academic assessments.

Right to be informed of academic content and staff qualifications.

ESEA/NCLB also expresses a parent’s right to be informed of the academic content and professional qualifications of the faculty in the child’s classroom. All schools receiving Title I funding must, at the beginning of the school year, inform parents of their *right* to request information about the qualifications and certification of their child’s instructor, and whether their child is provided services by a paraprofessional. Schools must also inform a parent if the child has received instruction for more than one month from a teacher who is not “highly qualified.”

NCLB continues several earlier ESEA provisions as well. Parental Involvement Policies mandate that each Title I school deliver to parents a description of school curriculum, academic assessment techniques, and proficiency goals, and allow parents a reasonable opportunity to observe classroom activities. Title III English language learner (ELL) programs retain responsibility for informing parents of language instruction program content, the reason their child was identified, assessment information, and exit requirements, among other information. ESEA/NCLB states that schools that use Title I funds to provide English language instruction must now meet these

same notification requirements as Title III programs.

Parental notification of failure and reform. ESEA/NCLB also extends the responsibility of schools to report academic “failure” to parents. LEAs with Title I schools that fail to make Adequate Yearly Progress for two years in a row must now notify parents of certain information. This includes a definition of what school improvement identification means, the reasons for identification, academic comparisons to other LEA schools, the steps being taken by the school and LEA to address low achievement, and a description of how parents can be involved in reform efforts. Likewise, a new provision in English language learner programs requires any ELL program that fails to make Adequate Yearly Progress for any fiscal year to inform parents with children in the program of the failure within 30 days.

Parental options. Though it is generally understood that NCLB expands school choice options for parents, the law stretches beyond mere provision of choice by establishing the *explicit responsibility of schools and LEAs to inform and clarify educational options* available to parents. ESEA/NCLB ensures that parents are clearly informed of both the educational choices available to them and supplemental information that may assist their decisionmaking.

Any Title I school or program that fails to make Adequate Yearly Progress for two consecutive years will be identified for School Improvement. Students in schools identified for School Improvement have the option to transfer to another public school in their district. It is the responsibility of LEAs to inform parents in an “understand-

able and uniform format” of transfer options, including public charters, and the availability of transportation funds. ESEA/NCLB directs the use of up to 15 percent of Title I funds to provide transportation services.

Students at Title I schools are eligible to receive supplemental services (such as private tutoring or remediation) outside the regular school day in the second year of School Improvement status. In order to educate parents about their options, LEAs are responsible for identifying approved providers, stating their qualifications, and including a brief description of their services. SEAs are responsible for developing criteria for services and publishing an approved list of providers. Upon request, parents may receive assistance from the LEA with selecting a provider.

PARENTS AS PARTNERS IN THEIR CHILDREN’S LEARNING

School-parent compacts. A continuing ESEA provision requires the creation of a “school-parent compact” that articulates the responsibilities of schools and parents for student progress. The law states that compacts shall “describe the school’s responsibility to provide high-quality curriculum and instruction in a supportive and effective learning environment . . . and the ways in which each parent will be responsible for supporting their child’s learning” (Title I, Part A, § 1118(d)(1)).

School-parent compacts, though introduced in the 1994 ESEA, have been somewhat underutilized. At least one-quarter of Title I schools have not yet developed compacts and many more have created very basic compacts (Better Education, 2001). The compact can, however, be a very effective vehicle for

ISSUE #2

Scientifically-based Research

As approaches to meaningful parental involvement are still evolving, there is generally a lack of awareness of (existing) effective efforts and initiatives. Local school systems do not have the capacity to identify and evaluate programs across their state or the nation. Section 1111(d) of the new Title I charges states with collecting and disseminating “effective parental involvement practices” that are “based on the most current research that meets the highest professional and technical standards” (Title I, Part A, § 1111(d)). Schools and districts should look to their state education agencies for the information that they collect and disseminate about effective practices. Local educators can also consider the practical guides to current research that are available from other entities such as those listed on the last page of this publication.

Issue #3

Evaluation

As with any legislation requiring new reporting and accountability, NCLB requirements threaten to reinforce parental involvement as a game of numbers—how many parents attended our functions? How many parents served on committees for our site-based planning? Though numerical reporting is a common tool for demonstrating parental participation, it does not necessarily reflect meaningful parental involvement. A redefinition of parental involvement necessitates the use of evaluation models that appropriately measure success according to meaningful parental involvement goals. Most districts/schools, though, are not aware of effective evaluation models. Please refer to your state education agency and the resources listed on the last page of this publication for further assistance or information—particularly “Topic 3: Measuring Youth Success” in *Planning for Youth Success* cited under NWREL Resources.

defining, not only parent and school roles, but also *specific strategies for involving parents in student learning* (Epstein & Hollifield, 1996).

Parental involvement research supports the development of parental partnerships on several levels. The ESEA compact section suggests parental responsibility for “monitoring attendance, homework, and television watching” (Title I, Part A, § 1116(d)(1)). Increasingly, however, schools are investigating ways to involve parents in *learning* through activities such as interactive assignments, family goal setting, and family reading time.

As school-parent compacts must be developed jointly with parents, the planning process presents an excellent forum for parents and schools to discuss shared expectations supported by both groups, and articulate in writing parent partnership in learning strategies that are helpful to students, acceptable to parents, and supported by teachers.

Parental involvement for English language learners. The new law likewise calls for parental involvement in ELL programs. Both Title I and Title III ELL programs must now extend opportunities for parents to participate in their child’s education. ESEA/NCLB specifically requires that schools and districts receiving Title III funding for ELL programs:

Shall implement an effective means of outreach to parents of limited English proficient children to inform such parents of how they can—(A) be involved in the education of their children; and (B) be active participants in assisting their children—(i) to learn English; (ii) to achieve at high levels in core academic subjects; and (iii) to meet the

same challenging State academic content and student academic achievement standards as all children are expected to meet. (Title III, § 3302(e))

A deliberate, joint process, similar to that of developing compacts, can lead to a shared understanding of roles and specific programs for involving parents.

PARENTS AS EFFECTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN SCHOOL PLANNING AND GOVERNANCE

ESEA reauthorizations have progressively broadened the mandate to include parents in district- and school-wide decisions. Under the 1994 ESEA, schools must include parents in the development and revision of Title I plans, parental involvement policies, school compacts, and targeted assistance school plans. The 2002 ESEA further emphasizes the legitimate role of parents not only in decisions affecting parental involvement, but in *all* school-level decisions. Some (though not all) new provisions require:

- ✓ Title I Schoolwide Program plans developed with parents
- ✓ Parent members on School Support Teams for failing schools
- ✓ ELL Parental Involvement Policy developed with parents
- ✓ Indian Education grants approved by LEA-level committees where parents are the *majority* of membership
- ✓ Voluntary public school choice plans developed with parents
- ✓ Parent comments included in SEA and LEA Title I plans if parents are unsatisfied

According to the National PTA, parental participation in policymaking both acknowledges the “importance of

parents' knowledge of and experience with children," and values parents as "full partners in the educating of their children" (National PTA, 2002). Effective parental involvement in decision-making increases parents' sense of ownership, support for the school, and likelihood of volunteering (Davies, 1996).

In addition, the inclusion of parents in planning can be a tool for developing stronger, more responsive programs. In order for a program to succeed, planners need to assess the needs of the targeted community, measure the success of current programs, account for the diversity of the population, and understand the expectations of the community it serves (Epstein, 1995). Parents can have a positive effect on the quality of these assessments by expanding the knowledge base and diversity of perspectives (Peterson-del Mar, 1994). Simply, parents' insights about their children, understanding of the community, and reflection of community sentiment can add significantly to the planning process.

In order for parental involvement in decisionmaking to be successful, schools/districts should address the following questions:

- ✓ Do the selected parent representatives reflect the diversity of the community and adequately convey the perspectives of the community? (Epstein & Connors, 1992)

- ✓ Are participating parents sufficiently prepared to contribute to institutional decisionmaking? (Davies, 1996)

- ✓ Do school/district policies give genuine decisionmaking power to parents? (Davies, 1996)

- ✓ Does the school/district support parent organizations and committees? (Epstein & Connors, 1992)

COORDINATING COMMUNITY RESOURCES

ESEA provisions that place schools outside their traditional role, though challenging, can provide opportunities for schools and districts to strengthen ties with the surrounding community. Examples of nontraditional services include tutoring and mentoring programs (for-profit or non-profit), family literacy programs, and adult education.

As stated earlier, schools in the second year of School Improvement status must make supplemental educational services available to Title I students. District responsibilities include identifying and selecting "approved providers," assisting parents in selecting providers, and monitoring instructional content and achievement of provider services. Though a new challenge for districts, the responsibility for providing supplementary services does offer a new avenue for connecting with community groups and private resources.

Developing partnerships with other community organizations to provide programs in these areas can link families to available services, provide valuable learning opportunities for students, improve the quality of service, and lead to cooperative relationships. For example, districts can use the Title I supplementary services process to collaborate creatively with other agencies by:

- ✓ Using supplemental educational services as a starting point to link families to other services offered by participating providers

- ✓ Facilitating relationships between teachers and service providers to ensure continuity of education from classroom to tutoring or other educational services

ISSUE #4

Accountability vs. Meaningful Involvement

Educators at the district and school-site levels have two tasks competing for their attention:

- 1) developing workable systems to notify parents of achievement information and parental rights and,
- 2) facilitating local parental involvement plans that utilize schools' strengths and address the uniqueness of their parent community.

Accomplishing both is particularly challenging given the fact that states and districts report a lack of staffing, knowledge, or funding levels to achieve these ends. Ideally, schools would not be forced to choose one or the other, but would have the opportunity to implement individualized plans that still meet the reporting and notification requirements of ESEA. Again, please refer to your state education agency and the resources listed on the last page of this publication for further assistance or information.

ISSUE #5**Marginalized Communities and Parental Involvement**

As schools attempt to strengthen ties with parents and the surrounding community, it is difficult to avoid questions of cultural diversity, poverty, and ethnicity. Title I schools represent a disproportionate percentage of impoverished, culturally diverse, ethnically mixed families, as well as many parents who lack formal schooling or literacy skills. Likewise, the inclusion of parental involvement requirements in programs serving English language learners compels educators to pursue involvement with families historically underrepresented in school-level decisionmaking and traditional involvement activities.

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- ✓ Using the new supplemental service relationships to develop service learning opportunities

- ✓ Sharing facilities to improve accessibility of other services to families, and encourage school leaders and teachers to hold or attend meetings in community sites other than schools

- ✓ Cosponsoring community activities

- ✓ Cooperatively developing evaluation processes that ensure high-quality supplemental services

NORTHWEST EDUCATORS RATE “FOSTERING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT” AS A VERY HIGH PRIORITY

This report focuses on the new federal requirements for parental involvement, but it is clear that public educators already consider their efforts to foster parental involvement as a very high priority. Strong evidence of this was gained from a regional needs assessment survey of educators in five states conducted by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) in 2002. When asked to rate the level of additional effort needed in “fostering a high level of parental involvement in their children’s learning,” teachers, principals, and superintendents all rated it among their top three issues (out of 29 issues for teachers and more than 30 for the other two groups). For board chairs, it was the top issue out of 13.

Fostering greater parental involvement is an especially high priority for educators in lower performing schools and districts (“lower performing” is defined as the bottom third of schools or districts by the percentage of students meeting state reading standards in the spring of 2001):

- ✓ 94 percent of teachers in lower performing elementary schools rated fostering parental involvement as needing more effort while only 49 percent in higher performing schools did so

- ✓ 81 percent of principals in lower performing elementary schools rated fostering parental involvement as needing more effort vs. 53 percent in higher performing schools

- ✓ 77 percent of superintendents in lower performing districts rated fostering parental involvement as needing more effort vs. 50 percent in higher performing districts

Fostering parental involvement was the number-one issue for both teachers and principals in lower performing schools, and it was second for superintendents in lower performing districts. See the side note, “Issue #5: Marginalized Communities and Parental Involvement,” for information on the challenges that these educators face.

CONCLUSION

In its parental involvement provisions, the new ESEA/NCLB legislation articulates three fundamental concepts:

1. Parents have the right to be informed of the content and quality of their children’s education
2. Parents have the right and responsibility to participate in decision-making and learning at the school
3. Parents have the right to make educational choices in the best interest of their children

Ultimately, schools that include the legal requirements as part of a larger effort for establishing effective parental partnerships are more likely to improve school-community relationships, the school environment, and the academic achievement of their students.

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Effective parental involvement programs require a familiarity and understanding of a myriad of issues from parental work schedules to cultural perceptions of schools and teachers to the task of creating a welcoming and comfortable environment for parents and families. Expanded parental involvement requirements necessitate that we learn how parents in diverse communities can affect student learning, confront traditional barriers between schools and communities, and involve parents of all backgrounds. For resources specific to immigrant and language minority communities, see the organizations listed on the last page of this publication—particularly the National Center for English Language Acquisition and the Assets for Colorado Youth's online publication.

Resources

NWREL RESOURCES

School-Family-Community Partnerships Team

www.nwrel.org/partnerships/
The SFCP Team promotes child and youth success by working with schools to build culturally responsive partnerships and communities. This team is a source for further assistance. See contact information at: www.nwrel.org/partnerships/about/contact.html.

A recent publication of the SFCP Team, *Planning for Youth Success: Resource and Training Manual*, provides a structure for members of a school community to set standards for youth success unique to their community and to create a project around a shared goal. It is available at: www.nwrel.org/partnerships/pubs/pfys-pdf.html

NWREL's Planning and Policy Web: ESEA/NCLB Quotes

Key sections of the new legislation related to parental involvement are quoted on NWREL's web site at: www.nwrel.org/planning

Parent Partners: Using Parents To Enhance Education
(By Request, March 1999)
www.nwrel.org/request/march99/article1.html

OTHER RESOURCES

Assets for Colorado Youth
www.buildassets.org/Products/latinoparentreport/latinoparentreport.pdf.
See *A Review of Literature on Hispanic/Latino Parent Involvement in K-12 Education*.

Harvard Family Research Project-Family Involvement Network of Educators

www.gse.harvard.edu/~hfrp/projects/fine/resources/bibliography/index.html

National Center for English Language Acquisition's Online Library for Parent and Community Involvement

www.ncela.gwu.edu/library/parent.htm

National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools

www.sedl.org/connections/resources/
The Center is located at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. Also see the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory's research synthesis, *Emerging Issues in School, Family, & Community Connections*, at: www.sedl.org/pubs/catalog/items/fam32.html

National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University

www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/pa0cont.htm
See the family and community links.

Phi Delta Kappa

www.pdkintl.org/edres/resbul22.htm
See the research bulletin on the link between parental involvement and student achievement.



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