

# 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.

<sup>1</sup>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](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](http://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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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.

<sup>1</sup>For more detailed information on how AYP works, see ABCs of AYP at [www.edtrust.org](http://www.edtrust.org)

<sup>2</sup>To 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](http://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.<sup>1</sup> 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.**

<sup>1</sup>For more information about the importance of teacher quality, read “Good Teaching Matters,” available at [www.edtrust.org](http://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.<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup>For 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](http://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](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.

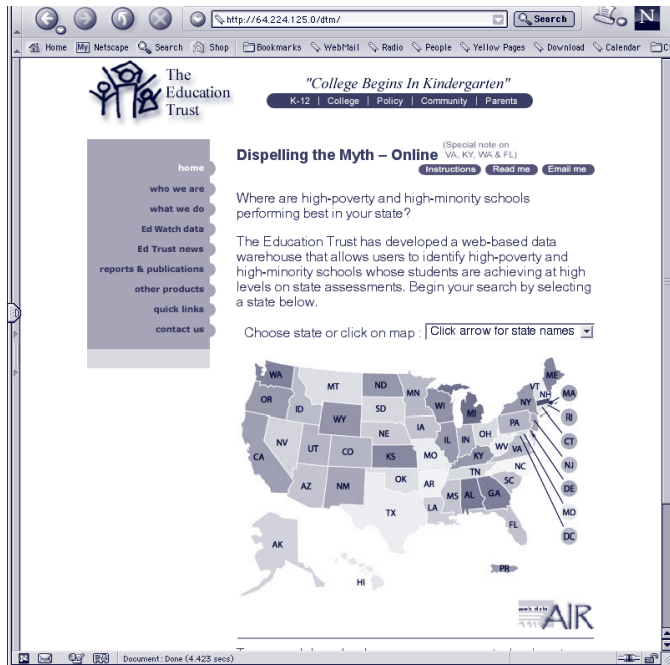
Free tutoring for struggling students in underperforming schools is one way that NCLB focuses extra attention on the students who are not yet proficient in reading and math.

### 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:

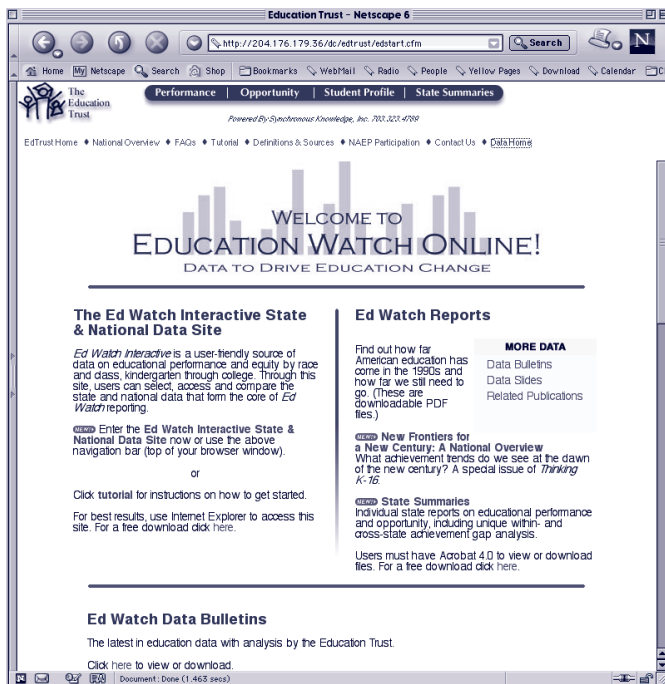
- How long has this tutoring program been in business?
- Has the company or tutoring service been successful with students who are behind in school?
- How are the services linked to the school curriculum? Is the tutoring focused on strengthening basic skills in math and/or reading?
- What does the provider 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](http://www.edtrust.org).

The Education Trust works for the high academic achievement of all students at all levels, kindergarten through college. While we know that all schools and colleges could better serve their students, The Education Trust focuses on the institutions most often left behind in plans to improve education—those serving concentrations of low-income, Latino, African American or Native American students.

The Education Trust staff brings to our work a unique combination of experience from a wide variety of backgrounds: K-12, postsecondary education, advocacy and community-based organizations. Our insistence on high academic achievement for all students at all levels K-16, our teamwork with local education and community activists, and our single-minded attention to what is best for students—especially low-income students and students of color—sets The Education Trust apart from the many other Washington-based education groups.

## Our Work

The Education Trust identifies six essential elements needed for systemic K-16 improvement. These are:

- clear, coherent and rigorous academic standards for all students at all levels, kindergarten through college, that are understood and embraced by the public;
- curriculum aligned with standards for all students;
- ongoing assessments to monitor the progress of students and of schools and colleges toward meeting the standards;
- extra instructional time for students who need it to meet standards;
- mechanisms to help faculty deepen their knowledge, evaluate the effects of their instruction on student work, and improve practice; and
- accountability systems that demand results for and from all students; that assure change in schools and colleges

that resist improvement; and that report regularly to the public with honest data on the progress of all groups of students.

## What We Do

Regardless of where it occurs, our work maintains a relentless focus on improving the education of all students, and particularly those students whom the system has traditionally left behind.

The Education Trust provides:

- assistance to school districts, colleges, and community-based organizations to help their efforts at raising student achievement, especially among minority and low-income students;
- research and wide public dissemination of data identifying achievement patterns among different groups of students;
- writing and speaking for professional and general audiences about educational patterns and practices—both those that cause and those that close achievement gaps between groups of students;
- analysis and expert testimony on policies intended to improve education; and
- advocacy that encourages schools, colleges and whole communities to mount effective campaigns so that all their students will reach high levels of academic achievement.

## Data

The Education Trust believes that the single best place to begin the job of improving education is to take a long, hard look at the data. We analyze and report national, state and local data about student achievement and the institutional practices that help or hinder students' chances for success.

## Putting Standards Into Practice

While most states and school districts

have developed standards, many educators need help putting those standards to work in real classrooms. Our Standards in Practice (SIP) professional development is an ongoing, on site process in which teams of teachers analyze the effectiveness of their assignments by examining student work. We also help districts with strategies for detracking curriculum; for aligning standards, curriculum and assessments; and for using data to drive instruction and inform decision making.

## Parent & Community Engagement

Parents and communities are crucial players in making sure their schools work for their young people. The Education Trust works with parents and community-based organizations to become advocates for high standards for all students.

## Federal & State Policy

The Education Trust staff work with federal and state policymakers on designing more effective strategies to improve achievement and close gaps between groups. These strategies are informed by data and grounded in the efforts of communities, schools and teachers to make sure all students meet high standards of performance.

## Reports & Publications

The Education Trust offers a variety of publications on topics that range from how to use data effectively to strategies for putting standards to work. We also publish the periodic series of reports, Thinking K-16, which explores education issues in depth.

## Education Trust–West

Since opening its doors in 2001, The Education Trust–West has exploded on the California circuit as a powerful voice for California's neediest students. Recently, we were described by a prominent policymaker as the “conscience of the state.” We wear that label with pride.