



Parent Leadership Starter Kit

Complimentary copy. Additional copies available for sale (\$8.50) at www.parents.ksaplus.com, along with other guides, most of them free.

Welcome to the Parent Leadership Starter Kit

These materials are written for *parent leaders* who are ready to become more effective advocates for their own children and for all children in their community ... and who are prepared to serve as decisionmakers on school-site councils, advisory committees or school improvement teams.

The materials also are for progressive, practical *educators* who are ready to work with parents as equal partners in the education of their children.

Some people say that a parent leadership role is just for the “outspoken few” or that most parents will not “be comfortable” making decisions about education. But in our work with parents from Seattle to Kansas City, MO, to Arlington, VA, we have found that, although not all parents want to take the lead, *many* parents do — far more than we first expected.

Parents do not have to be experts in curriculum, assessment or child development to ask good questions of people who are. Parents can look at school test data and find achievement gaps. They can ask what the school is doing to improve student progress and whether there is evidence that the program is working. They can ask what their choices are and whether children in their school

are eligible for high-quality tutoring and other extra help. And they can ask how parents, individually and together, can help to improve student achievement.

Furthermore, parent leaders can reach out to other parents in ways that schools cannot. They can, for example, organize a science expo and get a big turnout, facilitate parent-teacher dialogues, connect to parents who do not speak English, and recruit volunteers for after-school programs.

Parent leaders also can tap their contacts in the community. They can approach community groups and businesses for help, lobby the mayor to restore funding cuts, do action research on school safety, and write proposals to get funding for new projects.

New Urgency

Several recent developments add urgency to the need to provide more parents with the knowledge, skills and confidence to be more effective part-

Practical Tools You Can Use

- To do this kind of work parents need information, support and assistance. That's where the Parent Leadership Starter Kit can help.*
- Use the **8 Tips on Using Your Schools's Report Card** to help you make sure you have all the information you need about your child's school.
 - Use the **10 Tips for Parents Who Choose To Stay Put** guide to help focus your school's improvement efforts.
 - Use the **11 Tips To Help Parents Create Safer Schools** guide to assess how safe your local schools are.
 - Use the **12 Things Parents Should Know about and Expect from Your Schools** guide to get started.
 - Use the **5 No Child Left Behind tip sheets** to better understand what the new federal law requires in terms of expanded information and participation.
 - And use the **Collecting and Analyzing Your School's Data** guide to begin measuring how well your school is doing.

ners with their schools. **First**, the standards-based reform movement has introduced accountability to public education. Not only does our nation accept that all children can learn, most at high levels, but the No Child Left Behind law commits the country to making that happen by 2014. Between now and then, all public schools must make adequate progress toward that goal every year or face stiff consequences. **Second**, there is no way that this will happen, that all children will become proficient in reading, science and math over the next 10 years, without a major increase in parent involvement.

Third, 30 years of research studies show that when parents are engaged in their children's learning, their children do better in school — and the schools get better. School improvement and school leadership programs must take this research into account. And **fourth**, new studies suggest that organized parent leadership is having a major impact. When parents have information, skills and organizational support, they can demand — and are getting — upgraded facilities, improved school leadership and staffing, new resources to improve teaching, higher-quality learning programs, funding for after-school programs, and more choices. These are essential supports for the improved achievement for which schools are now being held accountable.

A New Model

In many ways, the *parent leadership model* contrasts sharply with the usual forms of parent involvement, which often are deeply rooted in local tradition. Let's call this the *standard model*. It tends to focus on parents in their roles as teachers (helping at home) and supporters (volunteering in the school). Typically, parents join the PTA; help to raise funds for the annual class trip or marching band; attend plays and sporting events; and volunteer in the lunchroom, playground or classroom. In standard-model schools, parents usually expect to fight for their own children's success. They often feel little sense of responsibility, however, when other students, or groups of students, struggle or fail. They believe it is the schools' job to take care of that problem.

In the standard model, most principals, teachers and staff see themselves as highly trained and committed professionals who are doing an important job, often under difficult circumstances. They are responsible for the safety of the building and the integrity of the work that goes on there. Consequently, they are wary of who they let into their school and who they will involve in the classroom. From parent-teacher conferences to opening school facilities, school staff tend to feel that it is their job to establish the terms of parent involvement — and that parents should defer to their authority. Yet when schools perform below acceptable levels, educators are likely to blame parents for not being involved or for poorly preparing their children.

In contrast, in the parent leadership model, parent leaders hold schools accountable for results, rather than accepting the blame for low student achievement. Parent leaders believe that they, too, should share responsibility for improvement. The parent leadership model focuses on parents in their roles as advocates and decision-makers. Educators win. Parents win. And most important, students win.

More Powerful Roles for Parents

According to the research, parent involvement takes many forms — from helping children with homework to organizing demonstrations at school board meetings. Parents' activities tend to fall into four main roles:

Parents as teachers — Parents establish a home environment that promotes learning, reinforce what is being taught at school, and develop the values and life skills children need to become responsible adults.

Parents as supporters of education — Parents contribute their knowledge and skills to the school, demonstrate the importance of education and hard work, and take part in school board elections and other activities that promote education.

Parents as advocates for their own and for all children — Parents guide their children's careers in school, plan for their future, resolve problems and disputes, press schools for better programs and higher achievement, and work to make the system more responsive to all families.

Parents as decisionmakers — Parents serve on school governance councils, advisory committees and school improvement teams. They conduct action research, take part in decisions about programs and staffing, and contribute to joint problem solving at every level.

Is Your School Open to Partnership with Parents?

Although many schools reach out to today's parent leaders, others still cling to attitudes and practices that restrict parents to more limited, traditional roles. Use this self-assessment to see where your school falls on the path from "Fortress" to "Partnership." Under each question, circle the letter beside the statement that seems to describe your school best.

1

What is your school's attitude toward families?

- a. Parents belong at home, not at school. If students don't do well, it's because their families don't give them enough support.
- b. Parents are welcome when asked. There's only so much they can do.
- c. Parents can be involved at school in a number of ways. The school tries to make contact with all parents at least once a year.
- d. Our school sets high standards for all students and families. It partners with families to make sure every single student succeeds.

2

Does the school give families information about standards and the curriculum?

- a. Parents don't need to know much about this, and they probably won't understand it anyway.
- b. Parents get information about what students will be learning at the fall open house.
- c. Teachers send home folders of student work.
- d. Families help assess student portfolios, using scoring guides. They also attend regular exhibits of student work, where students explain how their work meets standards.

3

Can parents and family members easily see the principal and visit classrooms?

- a. Families should not bother the school staff. Visiting the classroom would distract the children. Besides, parents will need security clearance before they are allowed in.
- b. The school calls families if their children are having problems. Families can visit on report card pick-up day.
- c. The school has several family events every year. Parents talk to classes about their jobs and hobbies and help out as tutors.
- d. Parents are involved in all aspects of the school. They can attend staff training, and the principal has regular hours each week to meet with families. Every school committee has active parent members.

4

Does the school have an active parent group, such as a PTA or Parent Association?

- a. The principal has picked a small group of parents to help out.
- b. The active parents are mostly middle class. The others don't come or contribute.
- c. The parent group sets its own agenda and raises money for the school. Members also write the school handbook.
- d. Families decide how they want to be involved. They reach out to make sure all families take part in some way. Parents can use the phone, copier, fax and computers. The family center is always full of parents.

5

Does the school openly discuss tough issues, such as achievement gaps, racism and bullying?

- a. The problems at our school are dealt with by its professional staff.
- b. The principal sets the agenda for discussions at staff meetings. Sometimes a few parents are invited.
- c. The school gives progress reports to parents, but the test data are hard to understand.
- d. Parents and teachers have study groups and do action research on issues such as prejudice and tracking. Families are part of all major decisions.

Where Does Your School Fall?

Count the number of times you checked each letter. Multiply the times you used each letter by the corresponding values below. Then, add up your points:

- a = one point
- b = two points
- c = three points
- d = four points

5–7 points: **Fortress School.** Your school is trying to keep parents away rather than work with them. In standards-based terms, it is below basic.

8–11 points: **Come if We Call School.** Your school wants parents to be involved, but only on its terms. In standards-based terms, it is at the basic level.

12–15 points: **Open Door School.** Your school welcomes families and supports them to be involved in a number of ways. In standards-based terms, it is proficient.

16–20 points: **Partnership School.** Your school is willing and able to work with all families. We bet the student achievement level goes up every year. In standards-based terms, it is advanced.

Excerpted from *The Case for Parent Leadership*, 2004, which is available for free at www.parents.ksaplus.com.

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12 Things Parents Should Know about and Expect from Your Schools

1

Your involvement matters — a lot. Research shows that students with involved parents are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, enroll in higher-level programs, be promoted and earn credits, attend school regularly, have better social skills, and graduate and go on to college.

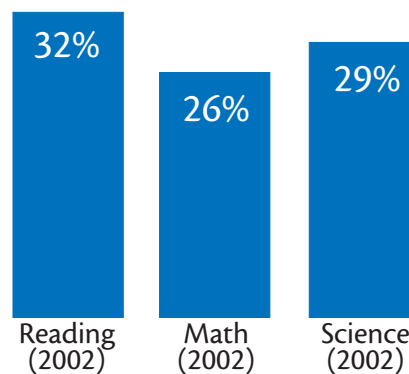
2

You can be involved in many ways. You can be involved as a **teacher** — establishing a learning environment at home for the whole family. You can be a **supporter** of education — volunteering at school and taking part in school activities that promote education. You can be an **advocate** for your own child and for all children — pressing state and local leaders for better programs and higher achievement. And you can be a **decisionmaker** — taking part in decisions about programs and staffing.

3

Children need you. American students are not doing as well in school as they should be. Less than one-third of American students are doing well in reading, writing, math, science and other important subjects, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, “the nation’s report card.” Worse, the scores of African American, Hispanic and low-income students are much lower. This is both morally wrong and economically short-sighted. Neither our democracy nor economy can thrive with this level of low achievement.

Percentage of fourth graders proficient



Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress

4

Schools need you. Public opinion polls show that parents, elected officials and educators alike agree that the lack of parent involvement is the key challenge facing schools. Teachers and principals are desperate for parents like you to be more involved. Helping your child at home, volunteering in classrooms, attending parent-teacher meetings, serving on school committees — all help is needed.

5

You should be told clearly what the learning standards are in each grade.

Parents and students alike need to know at the start of the school year what is being taught in English, math, science, social studies and other subjects in each grade. And they need to be told how that learning will be tested so they can understand how to help their children do their best. You should have access to standards guides like the one on the right.

6

You should be told about the school's behavior standards.

Students need to feel safe in order to learn. Parents should know what the school's safety and discipline standards are, how problems are handled, and what the school is doing to promote an environment of respect and responsibility.

Science

All students are expected to meet science standards in several areas, including Earth and space science, life science, physical science, research, and inquiry.

For example, by the end of first grade, your child should be able to:

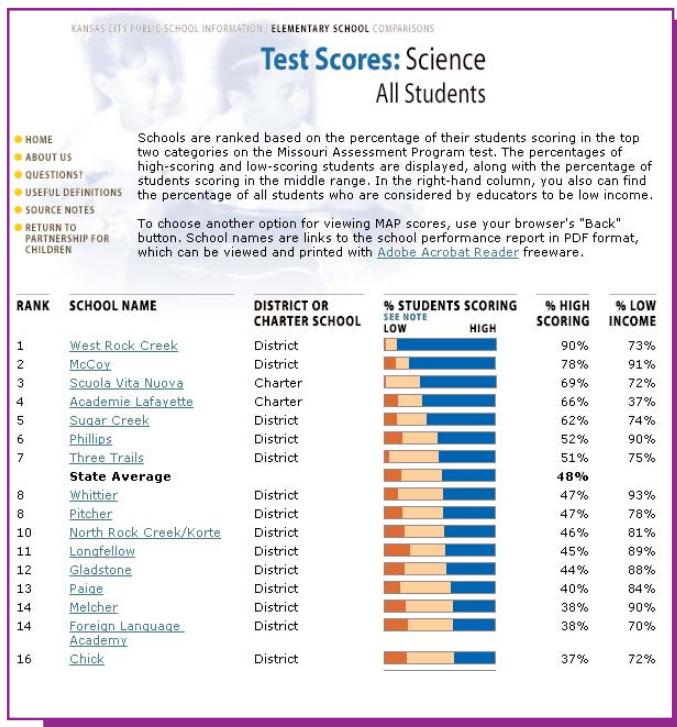
How you can help

- ▶ Play ball. Talk with your child about how his or her arm pushes the ball up into the air — and gravity pulls it down.
- ▶ Watch the rain with your child. Talk about how water evaporates into the air and collects in clouds.
- ▶ Ask your child to name some of the technologies he or she used today, from plumbing and heating to television and battery-powered toys.
- ▶ Read along with your child about whatever he or she finds exciting — dinosaurs, cars or people who live in other parts of the world.

- ▶ Understand that living things need food, water, air and a good environment to survive.
- ▶ Work with another child to solve a problem.
- ▶ Compare the ways different plants and animals grow and develop.
- ▶ Know the difference between rocks and minerals.
- ▶ Understand that rocks, minerals and soil can be classified by their color, texture and size.
- ▶ Group plants and animals according to what they look like, such as those having wide leaves or webbed feet.
- ▶ Use a scale to weigh himself or herself.
- ▶ Understand that a substance, such as water, can be in a pure form or mixed with something else, such as flour, to create a new substance.
- ▶ Know that force is one object pushing or pulling on another.

7

You should be told clearly how your child's school is doing. School districts now are required to publish parent-friendly report cards every year that show how students are performing in reading and math, attendance rates, graduation rates, and whether all student groups are making good progress. As in the example below, you should be able to see at a glance how your school compares.



8

Middle and high school parents should be told what it will take for your child to apply for college. Middle school is not too early to begin learning what kind of

courses your child should be taking if he or she wants to leave high school ready for college. For instance, many educators say all students should take algebra by eighth grade and should have at least three years of math and science in high school.

9

You should know your options. With the federal

No Child Left Behind law, students in low-income public schools that fail to meet learning goals for two years in a row now have a chance to transfer to a better school. Plus,

if your child's school still needs improvement after three years, you can request extra tutoring services. Also, as of January 2003, 36 states have charter schools, which provide alternative approaches to learning.

10

You should be able to get answers to your important ques-

tions. How do I know that my child is safe? What is my child expected to know and be able to do in reading, writing, math and other subjects? How is this learning measured? What will the school do to help if my child is behind? What can I do to help? Whether in person, on the phone or on the Internet, your school should be

willing to share the answers to these important questions.

11

You should be treated with respect. Parents and other taxpayers may not be the educational experts. But you are the owners of the schools. The educators are hired to work for you and your children, not the other way around. You have the right to be treated as a fully equal partner in your child's education.

12

You're more likely to get what you want for your child if you work with other parents. If you are in a school that is **not** parent-friendly, administrators might perceive you as a

fruitcake or a member of a powerful organization, depending on how many allies you have.

Collaboration Counts

If you think that you alone cannot do much to improve your school, you are probably right. But if you collaborate with other parents and organizations, you can make a difference. There is strength and power in numbers.

1 parent = A fruitcake

2 parents = A fruitcake and a friend

3 parents = Troublemakers

5 parents = "Let's have a meeting"

10 parents = "We'd better listen"

25 parents = "Our dear friends"

50 parents = A powerful organization

Parents are **powerful**.
Parents with
knowledge and skills
are even **more powerful** ...
and are **making a**
difference all over
the country.

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Using the No Child Left Behind Law

Creating a School-Parent Compact

Your school must have a school-parent compact that you can help create, according to the federal No Child Left Behind law.

Every school receiving federal Title I funds must have a school-parent compact, developed with and approved by parents, that describes how educators and parents will build a partnership to improve student achievement. This compact should explain how the school will meet the needs of its students so that they will achieve high standards.

Steps to take:

1

Make sure the compact outlines how the school will provide a supportive and effective learning environment for all students. For example, will children get extra help as soon as they need it? What kind of help? Will the school offer staff development for teachers?

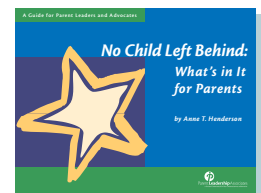
2

Specify how many parents will be involved in developing the school's annual improvement plan. Use student test data to decide what areas to focus on each year. What training will parents receive to make a meaningful contribution to this plan?

3

Specify what materials the school will produce to inform parents about the state's standards and tests, the school's curriculum, and what it takes to pass the tests. Will these materials be translated? Will the materials be supplemented by meetings so that parents can ask questions? Will interpretation services be provided at meetings? How about transportation and child care?

One of five guides to help parent leaders better understand how the federal No Child Left Behind law affects them and their children. Excerpted from *No Child Left Behind: What's in It for Parents*, a 36-page guide available at www.parents.ksaplus.com



4

Specify how teachers will keep parents informed about how their children are doing. Will students get effective help if they need it, as soon as they need it? Is the goal of this help to make sure they catch up fully with their classmates? What support will teachers give families to help their children at home?

5

Define the terms of parent-teacher collaboration. What is “reasonable access” to staff and classrooms to observe and volunteer? What hours will the principal be available to meet with parents? What are the security procedures for visits to the school?

6

Identify the actions and supports parents and teachers think are needed to improve achievement. Families may need information, materials and encouragement to help their students with complex subjects, such as math or science. If so, the compact should describe what support the school will offer and how families will use that support.

7

Spell out when parents will receive key information, such as the annual report card, information on choice/transfer options, and information on supplemental services options.

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Receiving Timely Information about School Performance

You must receive timely information on school performance, teacher qualifications, your child’s learning choices and your options to be involved, according to the federal No Child Left Behind law.

A core underpinning of the law is that parents in schools receiving federal Title I funds will be regularly informed about how their child is doing; how their child’s school is doing; whether their child is eligible for a school transfer, free tutoring or special testing; what their child should be learning every year and how that learning is measured; what the school is doing to improve; and how parents can be involved.

As a parent, you have a right to:

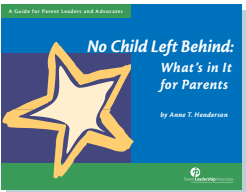
1 Annual report cards with information on student achievement, graduation rates and teacher qualifications. Student achievement scores must be reported for multiple student groups, e.g., minorities, low income, special education, limited English proficient (LEP). And the information must be easy to understand and “to the extent practicable” in multiple languages. You also should get annual progress reports on the school system’s success in meeting academic goals and involving parents.

2 Notification from the school district if your child’s school is “in need of improvement” because it failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) for two consecutive years or more. The information must explain why the school fell short, how it compares to other schools, what improvement steps are being taken, how parents can be involved and what options they have (such as transferring your child to another school or requesting free tutoring services).

3 Timely notification about your choice/transfer options — if your child is in a school that has not made AYP for two years. The information must include data on the new school’s academic performance and may also include descriptions of the school’s special programs, teacher qualifications and parent involvement opportunities. You should be notified promptly after the school has been identified ... and “well before” the start of the new school year.

4 Timely notification about the free supplemental services your child can receive if he/she is in a school that hasn’t made AYP for three years. You should be told the identity of approved local supplemental service providers and given a description of services. You should be notified promptly after the school has been identified ... and “well before” the start of the new school year.

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5

An invitation to help develop the school's improvement plans and the school's and/or district's parent involvement policies.

6

An invitation to a meeting to learn about the school's performance and your rights to be involved in helping to improve the school. Schools must offer a flexible number of meetings so as many parents as possible can attend.

7

Easy-to-understand information about the school's curriculum, tests and the performance goals for students on each test, and your child's scores on the state tests in at least reading and math.

8

Information about the qualifications of classroom teachers and paraprofessionals in your school.

9

Timely notification if your child has been taught for four or more consecutive weeks by a non-"highly qualified" teacher.

Parents of students with the most significant cognitive difficulties have an additional right. You should expect:

1. Information that your child is eligible for an alternative state proficiency test.

Parents of English as a Second Language (ESL) students have additional rights. You should expect:

1. Regular meetings with school staff, discussing how you can be involved in helping your child learn and the school improve.
2. Information about why your child has been placed in an LEP program, his/her level of proficiency, how your child is being taught, and how the program will help your child. If your child has a disability, the school also needs to show how the language instruction will meet the child's individualized education plan (IEP). You also must be told of your rights to opt out of this language instruction program.
3. Information about whether your child's language program has met annual goals.

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Using the No Child Left Behind Law

Using Annual Report Cards on Your Schools

You must receive a detailed annual report card on how your child's school is performing, according to the federal No Child Left Behind law.

The school district must distribute an annual report card on how every school and the district as a whole are performing. This report must include data on how different groups of students are doing.

Steps to take:

1

Make sure you can understand what's in the report card. The law says the reports must be easy for parents to understand. Is it translated? Does it compare your child's school to the district and state averages? Does it describe what the school is doing to improve? Does it describe how parents can use the data in the report card to push for improvements?

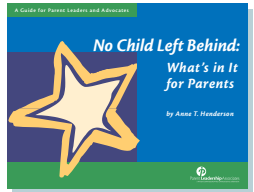
2

Make sure the report card makes it clear if you are eligible to transfer your child to another school or to request free tutoring services. Does it tell you how to apply for these transfers and services?

3

Examine how (or if) your school's Title I school improvement plan addresses the data in the school report card. For example, if reading scores are low, what is the school doing to improve reading instruction? If students with limited English are not making progress, how will the school modify its program for English language learners? If the percent of teachers who are not qualified is high, what is the plan to upgrade their skills or bring in certified teachers?

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4

Examine how (or if) the district's Title I school improvement plan addresses the information in the district report card. Use this data in the annual evaluation of the Title I plan and parent involvement policy.

5

Make sure there is a meeting for parents at each school to explain the district and school report cards and how to interpret their children's individual reports on test results.

This four-page guide helps parents know what to look for in the new school and district accountability reports now required by the No Child Left Behind law. The guide includes examples of good practice.

**Available at
www.parents.ksaplus.com.**

8 Tips on Using Your School's Report Card

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Under the No Child Left Behind law, school districts must distribute a report card on how every school and the district as a whole are performing. This report also must include data on how different groups of students are doing.

For many parents, this report card will be new. It's different from the reports you get from your child's teachers during the year. And it's different from the test score reports that parents often get toward the end of the school year. These reports tell you how your own child is doing. These new school reports tell you how your child's school is doing — compared to last year and the year before — and compared to other schools.

These new school reports provide a great opportunity for parents to better understand where the school is doing well and where it has challenges. Are all groups of students being well served? Or are some lagging behind? Equipped with this information, parents can work with teachers and school staff to make improvements that will help their own child and hopefully all children.

Here are eight ideas for how parents can make the most of their school reports.

1 Make sure you receive a report. Districts are supposed to publish and disseminate the report cards as close to the opening of school as possible. Because of delays in getting data, some districts might not publish their reports until late fall, but whenever you live, you should expect to see something before the winter holidays. If you don't receive a report by then, talk to your principal, parent liaison or PTA/PTO leader.

2 Make sure the report has the required information. No Child Left Behind requires that school reports include reading and math test scores for different groups of students: whites, African Americans, Hispanics and other nonwhites, low-income students, students with disabilities, and students with limited English language skills. The report cards also must include information on the qualifications of the school's teachers. High schools must report on graduation rates. Elementary and middle schools must include at least one other indicator, usually attendance. The example from Kansas City, Missouri — prepared by KSA-Plus Communications and School Wise Press — shows the kind of information required.

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Using the No Child Left Behind Law

Developing School Improvement and Parent Involvement Plans

You can help create your school's school improvement plan and parent involvement policy, according to the federal No Child Left Behind law.

Every school receiving federal Title I funds must have a detailed school improvement plan, showing what specific steps are being taken to improve student achievement. NCLB also says schools must have a written parent involvement policy, developed with and approved by parents. This policy should spell out how parents will be involved in meaningful ways in making decisions about the program and how parents will be involved in the school. The policy must be updated periodically to reflect the changing concerns of parents.

Steps to take:

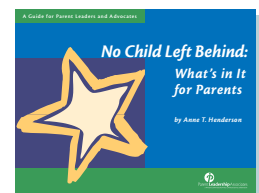
1

Get a copy of the school improvement plan. Make sure it identifies specific areas for improvement (3rd grade math, 4th grade reading, etc.) and sets specific improvement targets (such as the percentage of students scoring proficient on the state test). The plan also should talk about the additional training teachers and staff will receive, the support the school will get from the state or district, and the kinds of new curriculum that will be used, if any. The plan might also discuss the outside partnerships that the school will form with community organizations, such as the YMCA, businesses or faith-based institutions, to provide help such as mentoring and tutoring for struggling students.

2

Get a copy of your school's parent involvement policy and check whether it covers all points required in the law. These are: parent involvement in developing the school improvement program and the parent involvement policy; the school-parent compact; information about standards, tests, curriculum choice and supplemental services; and training for family and staff to work together effectively.

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3

Find out what other parents think about the policy and whether it covers their concerns. Ask them how it could be stronger. What kind of supports do they want from the school to help them be more involved, both in improving the program and in helping their children?

4

Update the parent involvement policy and make it as specific as possible. What kind of parent training will be offered and when? What is the process for obtaining parent input and approval of the policy? What should the school do to make meetings and other events convenient and accessible to families — are times flexible, is there transportation and child care, do the topics reflect the interests of families?

As a parent, here are 12 things you should know about and expect from your schools ... and yourself.

Available at
www.parents.ksaplus.com.

12 Things Parents Should Know about and Expect from Your Schools

1 Your involvement matters — a lot. Research shows that students with involved parents are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, enroll in higher-level programs, be promoted and earn credits, attend school regularly, have better social skills, and graduate and go on to college.

2 You can be involved in many ways. You can be involved as a teacher — establishing a learning environment at home for the whole family. You can be a supporter of education — volunteering at school and taking part in school activities that promote education. You can be an advocate for your own child and for all children — pressing our local leaders for better programs and higher achievement. And you can be a decisionmaker — taking part in decisions about programs and staffing.

3 Children need you. American students are not doing as well in school as they should be. Less than one-third of American students are doing well in reading, writing, math, science and other important subjects, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress. "The nation's report card." Worse, the scores of African American, Hispanic and low-income students are much lower. This is both morally wrong and economically disadvantageous. Together our democracy and economy can thrive with this level of low achievement.

Percentage of fourth-grade students

13%	20%	29%
Reading (2007)	Writing (2006)	Science (2005)
Doing well	Doing well	Doing well

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For additional resources, visit www.parents.ksaplus.com or call 703-528-7100.

Using the No Child Left Behind Law

Transferring Schools or Getting Free Supplemental Services

Your child may have a right to transfer or receive free supplemental services, such as tutoring, according to the federal No Child Left Behind law.

If your child's school receives federal Title I funds and has not made adequate progress over the past two or more years, parents have two options. You can ask to transfer your child to a school that is making adequate progress. Or you can request supplemental services and become involved in improving the school.

Steps to take:

1

Find out how your school is doing. You don't have to wait for the school to issue a report card. There are Web sites where you can find out about your school. Visit your state education department's Web site. Or go to www.schoolresults.org.

2

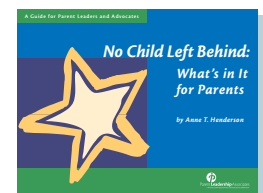
Insist that the principal or district inform you whether the school has made adequate yearly progress for the past two years. The district must notify all parents in schools that haven't made AYP — in a language and format they can understand ... and "well before" school starts so that parents can take advantage of their choices.

3

Ask for a meeting with the principal to find out what the school is doing to improve achievement. Ask questions like these:

- What will the school do to close achievement gaps between different groups of students? Your school will be judged on how well students in all groups perform, not just on the school's average results.
- What is the school doing to recruit and keep well-qualified teachers? What kind of professional development will be offered to improve instruction?
- Will the school eliminate low-level programs and give all children challenging work? What is the school's plan to make sure all children meet the state standards?

One of five guides to help parent leaders better understand how the federal No Child Left Behind law affects them and their children. Excerpted from *No Child Left Behind: What's in It for Parents*, a 36-page guide available at www.parents.ksaplus.com



4

Check out the schools to which the district says your child may transfer. The district must give you information about how students are performing in the transfer schools. Ask parents at those schools if they feel the school offers a high-quality education and if their children like going to school there. Press for reasons. (Note: If you transfer, you will not be able to get supplemental services for your child.)

5

If you decide to stay in the original school, insist on supplemental services, such as tutoring, for your child. These services are free. The school must provide you a list of approved providers, plus a description of their services.

6

If you decide to stay, get involved in making the school better. Schools in need of improvement must involve parents in developing their school improvement plan.

This guide offers information to those parents who choose to keep their children in their neighborhood school. What can they do to secure a better education for their child?

**Available at
www.parents.ksaplus.com.**

10 Tips for Parents Who Choose To Stay Put

1 Find out what's going well in the school and build on that. It's important to identify and celebrate success, and to see good work in new ways to motivate and promote good work elsewhere.

2 Get extra help for your child. If the school still is unable to bring your child up to adequate academic levels, such as after-school tutoring, look for the help of your local government. Some schools will even help after the school year to keep parents in the school. You can even enter your school in the state. Check to see what extra help your school is providing. Other tips appear in a parallel to community organizations such as a local YMCA, library, or Boys and Girls Club.

70% of parents know their child's teacher. 30% do not.

Would you transfer your child to a school identified as not in need of improvement or have additional efforts made in your child's present school?

Source: 2007 PISA Data Report (Table 10)

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8 Tips on Using Your School's Report Card

Under the No Child Left Behind law, school districts must distribute a report card on how every school and the district as a whole are performing. This report also must include data on how different groups of students are doing.

For many parents, this report card will be new. It's different from the reports you get from your child's teachers during the year. And it's different from the test score reports that parents often get toward the end of the school year. Those reports tell you how your *own child* is doing. These new school reports tell you how your child's *school* is doing — compared to last year and the year before ... and compared to other schools.

These new school reports provide a great opportunity for parents to better understand where the school is doing well and where it has challenges. Are all groups of students being well-served? Or are some lagging behind? Equipped with this information, parents can work with teachers and school staff to make improvements that will help their own child and, hopefully, all children.

Here are eight ideas for how parents can make the most of their school reports.

1

Make sure you receive a report. Districts are supposed to publish and disseminate the report cards as close to the opening of school as possible. Because of delays in getting data, some districts might not publish their reports until late fall, but wherever you live, you should expect to see something before the winter holidays. If you don't receive a report by then, talk to your principal, parent liaison or PTA/PTO leader.

2

Make sure the report has the required information. No Child Left Behind requires that school reports include reading and math test scores for different groups of students: whites, African Americans, Hispanics and other nationalities; low-income students; students with disabilities; and students with limited English language skills. The report

cards also must include information on the qualifications of the school's teachers. High schools must report on graduation rates. Elementary and middle schools must include at least one other indicator, usually attendance. The example from Kansas City, Missouri — prepared by KSA-Plus Communications and School Wise Press — shows the kind of information required.

GRADE 10		
Math		
Grade 10 students are tested, for example, on whether they can analyze data, solve problems using a system of equations, use scale drawings and determine simple probabilities.		
<i>Percentage of students scoring at Advanced or Proficient</i>		
	Our school	District
Total	32%	11%
Black	33%	13%
White	40%	14%
Hispanic	25%	12%
Asian	26%	11%
Other	35%	4%
Female	44%	15%
Male	30%	11%
Low Income	16%	9%
Not Yet English Proficient	18%	9%
Migrant	24%	9%
Learning Disabled	33%	17%

3

Identify strengths and weaknesses.

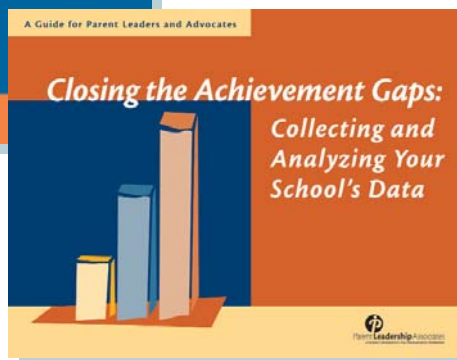
Which groups of students are doing well? Which groups are not doing so well? What are the trends from year to year? Do all students make gains, or do some groups of students stay about the same? How does the school compare to the district or state average? In some states, you also can find out how your school compares to similar schools (urban schools, suburban schools, low-income schools, etc.). With information like this, the school can better figure out how to improve.

4

Ask what is being done to address the weaknesses identified by the data.

For example, if reading scores are low, what is the school doing to improve reading instruction? If students with limited English are not making progress, how will the school modify its program for English language learners? If the school has a remedial program, how will those students catch up to the others, and when? If the percentage of teachers who are not qualified is high, what is the plan to upgrade their skills or bring in certified teachers?

Use our two-volume *Closing the Achievement Gaps* guides to see how well your school is educating *all* students.



Available at www.parents.ksaplus.com.

5

Have the principal schedule a meeting to explain the results.

School leaders should be willing to help parents understand the numbers ... to discuss how the school plans to improve ... why they think the plan will work ... and to ask for parents' help. This meeting also would be a good time for the principal to show parents how to interpret their children's individual reports on test results.

At the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership in Kentucky, parents use tools such as these to learn how to understand school data.

Subject	Group(s) most served by current school practices	Group(s) needing improved services
Reading		
Mathematics		
Science		
Writing		

6

Discuss what other indicators should be measured and reported.

The No Child Left Behind requirements are just a starting point. You and other parents likely want to know more about how the school is doing — extracurricular activities, parent and family involvement, awards or special programs, and so on. There is no reason why your school's report card

shouldn't also cover these areas of interest. A 1999 survey by *Education Week* and KSA-Plus Communications asked parents to rank report card indicators in order of importance.

Report Card Priorities
(scale of 0–10)

School safety	9.6
Teacher qualifications	9.3
Class size	8.9
Graduation rates	8.7
Dropout rates	8.3
Statewide test scores	8.2
Parental satisfaction survey data	8.1
SAT/ACT scores	8.1
% of students promoted to next grade	8.0
Course offerings	7.8

Source: Reporting Results: What the Public Wants to Know.

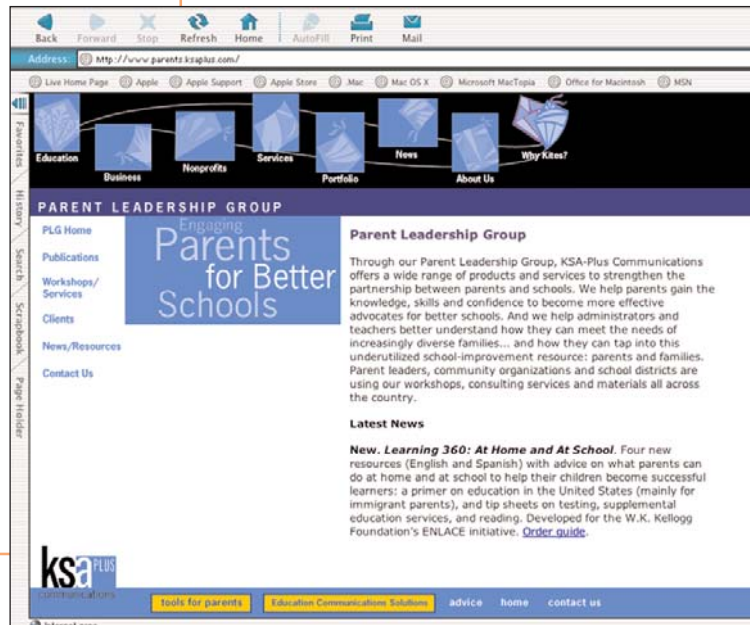
7

Keep asking questions. What is being done to improve? Which schools are doing better than ours and what can we learn from them? How can parents be most helpful — at home and in the school? What supports do teachers need to reach all students more effectively? How well are local after-school programs linked to what students are learning in class? School leaders might not have all the answers, but they should be willing to find out and to keep you informed about progress.

8

Get involved. Use the information in the school report to get more involved. Schools can't or shouldn't work on improving student achievement alone: They need dedicated parents like you to help them drive change. Again and again,

the research shows that, when parents are involved, student achievement improves. Online resources at www.parents.ksaplus.com, www.centerforparentleadership.org, www.greatschools.net, www.schoolwisepress.com and www.pta.org feature helpful advice for parents.



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10 Tips for Parents Who Choose To Stay Put

Since the No Child Left Behind law was signed in January 2002, most of the attention has been on the choice provisions — particularly the requirement that low-income schools that fail to meet their learning goals for two years in a row must allow parents to transfer their child to a school with higher scores. Headlines from New York to San Francisco have shown how tough it has been to make this policy work: late and/or inaccurate data from states to school districts, late notification from districts to parents, letters that parents find hard to understand, and choices that they don't like — such as a long, cross-town bus or subway ride. In many rural districts, there are no choices.

Lost in the debate has been an equally important issue: What happens to parents who choose to keep their children in their neighborhood school? What can they do secure a better education for their child?

Here are 10 specific options for parents:

1

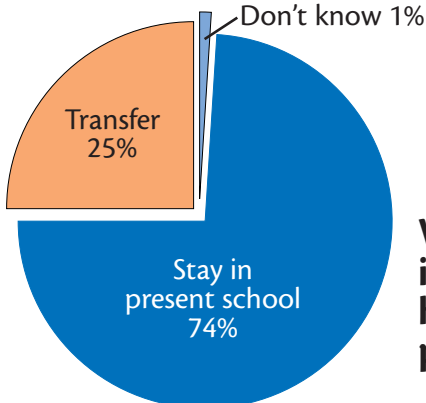
Find out what's going well in the school and build on that.

Amid the inevitable bad news and challenges, it's important to identify and celebrate successes. And to use good work in one area to motivate and promote good work elsewhere.

2

Get extra help for your child.

If the school fails to meet its learning goals for three straight years, your child is eligible for additional academic help, such as after-school tutoring, paid for by the federal government. Some schools offer extra help after the second year to keep parents in the school. You can press your school to do this. Check to see what extra help your school is providing. Often this support is provided by community organizations such as a local YMCA, library, or Boys and Girls Club.



Would you transfer your child to a school identified as not in need of improvement or have additional efforts made in your child's present school?

Source: 2003 Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup Poll

3

Help your child at home.

Parents can do a lot: set high expectations, make sure your child has a quiet place to study, read together, make sure your child gets to school on time and is doing his

homework regularly. This is important, because research shows that parent involvement can — and does — improve student achievement. For hundreds of specific suggestions, check out www.pta.org or www.ed.gov/parents.

4

Get involved at the school.

Don't feel that your involvement must happen only at home. Parents also can help at school — a lot — and should be welcomed warmly. Find out when parents can visit classrooms to observe and vol-

unteer. What hours will the principal be available to meet with parents? What are the security procedures for visits to the schools? Are parents made to feel welcome when they visit?

How Welcoming Is Your Child's School?

Is your school a Fortress, Come-If-We-Call or Partnership School? Go to www.parents.ksaplus.com and take a quick quiz to find out.

5

Make sure your voice is heard at school.

According to the No Child Left Behind law, you have a right to participate on your school's improvement team. Made up of principals, teachers and parents, these teams are responsible for setting the school's priorities, such as deciding whether to hire an extra reading teacher or reduce class size.

Many schools have gotten limited input from parents in the past and their plans often sit on the shelf. Now that schools face real consequences, such as losing students, there's a better chance that these plans will actually be used — and your voice will count. When you work together with other parents, you're more likely to have power and influence.

6

Make sure the school's improvement plan focuses on areas where the school is not doing well.

All schools now have to publish annual report cards, showing how *all* students are doing in reading and math. If the data show that math scores are low, for instance, you'll want to make sure that the school's improvement plan has steps for strengthening the math program. Maybe the school will spend more time on math during the school day, create an after-school program to help struggling students, improve staff training for teachers and so on. These annual report cards also need to describe how different groups of students are performing (see the example at right). For instance, if low-income students are lagging, the school improvement plan should describe what will be done to help those students. Start by asking if *all* classes offer high-quality teaching and a challenging curriculum so that *all* children will meet the standards?

ABC Elementary School Eighth-Grade Math Percentage of Students Proficient

Total	64%
Black	38%
White	73%
Hispanic	42%
Low-income	25%
Learning disabled	16%
English language learners	25%

7

Get a copy of your school's parent involvement policy from the principal, parent liaison or head of your school's parent group.

Make sure it spells out how parents will be involved in meaningful ways in making decisions about the academic program. What is the process for obtaining parent input and approval of key decisions? What should the school do to make meetings and other events convenient and helpful to families? Are times flexible, is there transportation and child care, is there enough advance notice, do the topics reflect the interests of families?

Use our two-volume *Closing the Achievement Gaps* guides to see how well your school is educating *all* students.



Available at
www.parents.ksaplus.com.

8

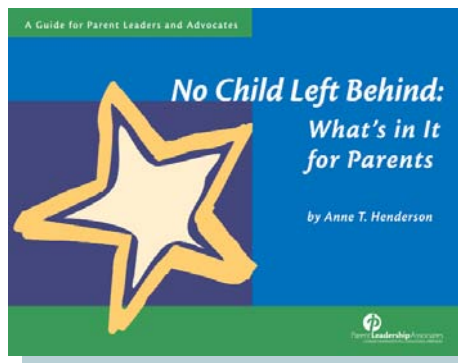
Find out what other parents think about the parent involvement policy and whether it covers their concerns. Ask

them how it could be stronger. What kind of supports do they want from the school to help them be more involved, both in improving the program and in helping their children? How would they like to be involved? What kind of training will parents get in order to better understand the school's academic standards and tests?

9

Make sure your school has a school-parent compact, developed with and approved by parents.

The compact should describe how educators and parents will build a partnership to improve student achievement. This compact should explain how the school will meet the needs of its students so that they will achieve high standards.



Details on parent involvement policies, school-parent compacts and other No Child Left Behind requirements are available at www.parents.ksaplus.com.

10

Make sure the compact outlines how the school will provide a supportive and effective learning environment for all students.

For example, will children get extra help as soon as they need it? What kind of help? Will the school offer staff development for teachers? How will teachers keep parents informed about how their children are doing? What support will teachers give families to help their children at home?

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11 Tips To Help Parents Create Safer Schools

Help prevent school violence and make your child's school safer with this starter list of ideas. Some require only individual action; some require multiple actions by many people. Some address immediate crises; others address the basic problems that cause violence. Consider this list a launching pad — there's lots more that can be done. Check out www.ncpc.org/besafe to learn more about what you can do to make schools safer and to stop school violence.

Here are 11 specific options for parents:

1

Take an active role in your child's school.

Talk regularly with teachers, staff and other parents. Volunteer in the classroom or library or for afterschool activities. Work with parent-teacher and student organizations. Getting involved will help you better understand the school's safety strengths and weaknesses as well as how you can help change occur.

"Studies have shown that schools where parents are involved in decision making and advocacy have higher levels of student achievement and greater public support."

National PTA, National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement — School Decision Making and Advocacy

2

Find out what is already being done at your child's school.

Try to learn more about the school's overall approach to safety and security. Does the school address ways to *prevent* as well as respond to violence and other crimes? How is safety addressed throughout the school — in the cafeteria, hallways, playground, locker rooms, classrooms? If you are not sure about the answers to these questions, make an appointment with your child's teacher or school principal to learn more.

3

Get organized. Does your child's school already have a safety committee? Is it concerned with preventing as well as responding to crimes? If so, join. If your school doesn't have such a group, ask the principal how you can work together to organize one. Visit www.ncpc.org/besafe for tools to help you organize a school safety and security initiative.

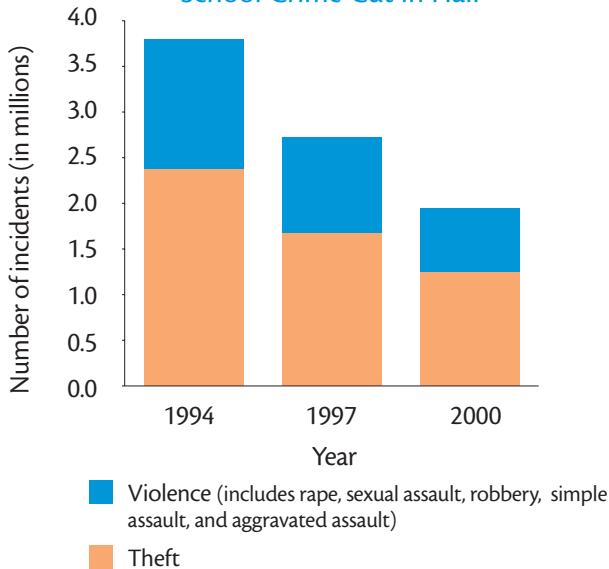
4

Make it clear that you support school policies and rules that help create and sustain a safe place for all students to learn. If your child feels a rule is wrong, discuss his or her reasons and what approach might work better. As you discuss this approach, help your son or daughter understand the importance of rules when it comes to protecting student safety and why they need to follow these important rules.

Crime and Violence in Schools — Fast Facts

- Schools are among the safest places for our children to be, with more incidents occurring away from school than at school.
- Most school crime is theft, not violent crime.
- Middle school students are more likely to be victimized than elementary or high school students, particularly by bullying.
- At least one third of all students report being targeted by hate-related words.
- Aggressive behavior among elementary students is on the rise, according to school resource officers.

School Crime Cut in Half



Sources: Bullets 1–4 from "Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2003," a publication of the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, 2003; online at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2004/2004004.pdf>; Bullet 5 from "NASRO 2003 National School-Based Law Enforcement Survey," online at www.schoolsecurity.org/resources/2003NASROSurvey.pdf.

5

Listen to and talk with your children regularly. Bullying, fist-fights and shoving are the most common safety and security issues kids face at school; theft is the most common school crime. Ask your child what problems and concerns he or she has. Your son or daughter may bring up small problems you can help solve without involving school officials. Find time for two-way conversations with your child — lots of listening, no lecturing. Try to make this kind of communication a daily habit, not a reaction to crisis.

Early Warning Signs

6

Help your child learn how to identify and solve problems.

Children who know how to approach a problem and resolve it effectively are less likely to be angry, frustrated or violent. Take advantage of “teachable moments” to help your child understand why talking about tough issues is better than resorting to violence. Act as adult role models. Settle your own conflicts peacefully and manage anger without violence.

7

Communicate your standards clearly.

Explain that you won't tolerate violent behavior. Discuss what violence is and is not. Discourage name-calling and teasing. These behaviors often escalate into fistfights (or worse). Whether the teaser is violent or not, the victim may see violence as the only way to stop it.

If your child or his or her friends demonstrate a combination of the symptoms listed below, contact your school's guidance counselor.

- Social withdrawal
- Excessive feelings of isolation and being alone
- Excessive feelings of rejection
- Being a victim of violence, including abuse
- Feelings of being picked on and persecuted
- Low school interest and poor academic performance
- Expression of violence in writings and drawings
- Uncontrolled anger
- Patterns of impulsive and chronic hitting, intimidating, and bullying behaviors
- History of discipline problems
- Past history of violent and aggressive behaviors
- Intolerance for differences and prejudicial attitudes
- Drug use and alcohol use
- Affiliation with gangs
- Inappropriate access to, possession of, and use of firearms
- Serious threats of violence

From “Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools,” a publication of the U.S. Department of Justice and Department of Education, 1998; online at www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/gtss.html?exp=0.

8

Insist on knowing your child's friends, whereabouts and activities.

It's your right. Make your home an inviting and pleasant place for your child and his or her friends; it's easier to know what children are up to when they're around. Know how to spot signs of troubling behavior in children — yours and others. See above for details on the type of behavior to watch for.

9

Work with other parents to develop standards for school-related events, acceptable out-of-school activities and places, and require adult supervision.

Support each other in enforcing these standards. Talk with each other about safety-related problems in your school and community, sources of help to strengthen and sharpen parenting skills, and similar issues.

10

Play it safe. Recognize that keeping guns in your home may put you at legal risk as well as expose you and your family to physical harm. In many states, parents can be held liable for

their children's actions, including inappropriate use of firearms. If you do choose to keep guns at home, ensure that they are securely locked, that ammunition is locked and stored separately, and that children know weapons are never to be touched without your express permission and supervision.

11

Know your rights. The federal No Child Left Behind law allows students who are in "persistently dangerous" schools to transfer. States can set their own definitions, and as of 2004 very few schools have been defined this way. But it's worth checking with your local school officials. And if

you want to have a say in what qualifies as "persistently dangerous," the law lets you participate on your state's advisory team. For details, check out www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/unsafeschoolchoice.doc.

KSA-Plus Communications is a national firm that specializes in communicating with parents, educators, policymakers and others about school-related issues. The firm offers communications advice, technical assistance and workshops, plus print and Web publications for parents and parent leaders. This guide is one in a series of parent leadership tools available on its Web site, at www.parents.ksaplus.com.

The National Crime Prevention Council's Be Safe and Sound initiative is a national campaign to get parents and caregivers involved in efforts to improve school safety and security. By working with school principals and concerned community members, parents can create positive, lasting change in and around their children's schools. Be Safe and Sound is an initiative of the National Crime Prevention Council conducted in collaboration with National PTA and NCPC partners, The Allstate Foundation, ASSA ABLOY Group, Nextel Communications, and the Security Industry Association. To learn more about Be Safe and Sound, visit www.ncpc.org/besafe.

Collecting and Analyzing Your School's Data

Which students are succeeding in your school? Which are not? Are some schools in your community doing a better job of educating all students to high standards? If so, how are they doing it?

For instance, are some schools providing students with more opportunities to learn? Do they have more qualified teachers? Are they giving more students a chance to take challenging courses? Do they have higher attendance rates? How can educators and parents work together to improve the performance of all students?

This short guide helps you answer those questions — and, in the process, get the information you need to help create more focused and effective school improvement plans that eliminate achievement gaps and ensure that all students do well.

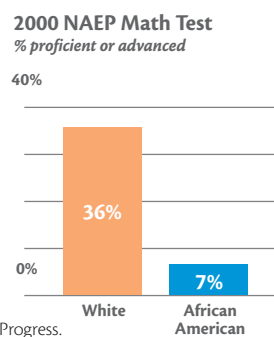
sure to look at both categories of information. Use the performance data to identify strengths, weaknesses and achievement gaps. If there are gaps, use the “opportunity to learn” data to begin figuring out why.

Getting the data

Through NCLB, data on student performance and teacher quality are public information. Have your school or district give you the information. Your state education department’s Web site also should have performance data on all local schools. Two national sites — www.schoolresults.org and www.greatschools.net — have information on all public schools.

The Achievement Gap

In 8th grade math, 36 percent of white students score proficient or advanced, compared to only 7 percent of African American students. Similar gaps exist in other grades and other subjects — and between Latino and white students and poor and non-poor students.



Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Under the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, states now must report annually on student performance by race, income, gender, English proficiency and special needs. They also must track the professional qualifications of teachers, including the percentage of classes taught by those who are not certified in the subjects they teach. Annual report cards are required for each school in your community — and for your school district as a whole.

We’ve grouped the data into two categories. The first (student performance) looks at the school’s results — test scores and graduation rates. The second (opportunity to learn) focuses on the “inputs” that produce the results, from student grouping practices and attendance rates to teacher qualifications. Make

A few cautions:

- Some data might be difficult to find. Some districts are just beginning to collect this kind of information, and the data may not be complete. Or it may vary from school to school. Do the best you can.
- You will not always be able to get data for different groups of students. If there are too few students in a subgroup (often 20 or fewer), administrators will not report the numbers for fear that it would make it too easy to identify individual students.
- In addition to “hard data,” such as test scores, dropout rates and grades, also try to collect “softer data,” such as satisfaction surveys of parents, students and staff.

1

Test scores

By the 2005–06 school year, all public school students must be tested annually in grades 3 through 8 in reading and math. High school students must be tested at least once in these two subjects. Beginning in the 2007–08 school year, states also must give science tests at least once in elementary, middle and high school.

Typically, states have four categories of scores: Advanced; Proficient (meeting the standard); Basic (below standard); and Below Basic (far below standard). Many lower-performing schools have small percentages of students in the top categories, so it often is more meaningful to analyze trends in the bottom categories; moving large percentages of students from Below Basic to Basic is a positive first step.

Also, state test results are now used to hold schools accountable for improving the performance of *all* groups of students. Any school that does not make adequate progress for two years in a row is identified as “in need of improvement.” Parents whose children attend low-income schools may request that their child be transferred or receive extra services such as tutoring.

Reading the data

- What percentage of students in each group are Proficient or above?
- Are at least 95 percent of students in each group being tested? (Some schools or districts inflate their scores by discouraging lower-achieving students from taking the test.)
- Are some groups of students doing a lot better than others? Are the trends going up or down?
- How do the averages of students in your school compare to the district and state averages?

Digging deeper

- Identify groups of students showing the strongest and weakest performance. Then use other worksheets in this guide to learn what may be contributing to performance, such as teacher quality, attendance or advanced courses.
- Ask if lessons or best practices from higher-scoring schools could be used at your school.
- Get copies of the tests to better understand what level of work is required to meet the standards. See how that level compares with the kind of classwork and homework done in your school at each grade level.

Subject _____

	Year _____		
	% of Students Proficient or Above		
	School	District	State
TOTAL STUDENTS			
African American			
Asian			
Hispanic			
Native American			
White			
Not Low Income*			
Low Income*			
Boys			
Girls			
English Speaking			
Limited English Speaking			
Learning Disabled			
Not Learning Disabled			
Migrant			
All Other Students			
% of Students Tested			

* Students qualifying for the federal free and reduced-price lunch program are generally classified as low income for statistical purposes.

2

Graduation and dropout rates (high school only)

Students who fail to graduate from high school earn less money and have a more difficult time finding good jobs. The way data are collected in reporting graduation and dropout rates can tell drastically different stories about student progress. Many school systems report only the percentage who drop out in any given year, a misleadingly low number. A better calculation compares the number of students who started in ninth grade with the number who completed 12th grade four years later.

A caution: Remember that graduation rates viewed in isolation are misleading. If a student graduates from high school but is still unprepared for college or a career, his or her diploma is meaningless.

Reading the data

- The first step is to get usable data from the school or district. For instance, for the class of 2005, you want to know the number of students who graduated in spring 2005. Divide this number by the number of ninth graders in your school in fall 2001. For instance, if there were 150 freshmen in fall 2001 but only 100 graduates in spring 2005, the school's graduation rate would be 67 percent; the school's dropout rate would be 33 percent. One limitation of this approach is that it doesn't account for students who transfer to other schools. But it is a start.
- Are some groups of students tending to graduate at higher rates than others?
- How do your school's averages — and different groups of students in your school — compare to the district and state averages?
- Are the trends going up or down?

	Class of _____		
	% of Students who Graduate on Time		
	School	District	State
TOTAL STUDENTS			
African American			
Asian			
Hispanic			
Native American			
White			
Not Low Income*			
Low Income*			
Boys			
Girls			
English Speaking			
Limited English Speaking			
Learning Disabled			
Not Learning Disabled			
Migrant			
All Other Students			

* Students qualifying for the federal free and reduced-price lunch program are generally classified as low income for statistical purposes.

Digging deeper

- Ask if lessons or best practices from other schools could be used at your school.
- Ask school leaders how they will reduce dropout rates and raise graduation rates. Some successful strategies include having smaller schools, smaller class sizes or block scheduling; identifying at-risk students early and targeting extra support to help them succeed; and enlisting the support of parents and community mentors.

3

Students placed in gifted/talented, magnet or advanced classes

Research shows that taking challenging courses is a better predictor of who will complete college than good high school grades or test scores. In middle schools, algebra I is a key course. In high schools, the key courses include algebra I and II, geometry, some calculus, trigonometry, four years of English, more than two years of foreign language, or Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) program classes. Students who take at least one math course beyond algebra II in high school are twice as likely to earn a bachelor's degree by age 30. Yet too often, these higher-level courses seem reserved for select groups of students.

Reading the data

- What percentage of students in each group are taking challenging courses, such as gifted/talented classes in elementary school, magnet classes in middle school or advanced classes (such as AP or IB) in high school?
- Are some groups of students more likely than others to be placed in certain courses?
- Are the trends going up or down?
- How do the averages of students in your school compare to the district and state averages?

Digging deeper

- Find out how students at other schools and districts are being placed. If there are major differences, ask school leaders to explain why. Ask if lessons or best practices from other schools could be used at your school.
- Ask school leaders how they will encourage more students to take more challenging courses.
- Find out how easy it is for you to ask that your child be placed in an advanced course. Does the school offer extra support for students attempting higher-level classes?
- What is the role of guidance counselors in student placement at your school? Are students actively recruited for advanced classes or just placed in a program?
- Find out how committed your school and school district are to eliminating all low-level courses (such as earth science).

	Year _____		
	% of Students in Gifted/Talented, Magnet or Advanced Classes		
	School	District	State
TOTAL STUDENTS			
African American			
Asian			
Hispanic			
Native American			
White			
Not Low Income*			
Low Income*			
Boys			
Girls			
English Speaking			
Limited English Speaking			
Learning Disabled			
Not Learning Disabled			
Migrant			
All Other Students			

* Students qualifying for the federal free and reduced-price lunch program are generally classified as low income for statistical purposes.

4

Student absenteeism

As comedian Woody Allen puts it: "Eighty percent of success is showing up." There is a direct link between attendance and achievement. Valuable learning time is lost when students miss school.

	Year _____		
	% of Students Absent 18 Days or More		
	School	District	State
TOTAL STUDENTS			
African American			
Asian			
Hispanic			
Native American			
White			
Not Low Income*			
Low Income*			
Boys			
Girls			
English Speaking			
Limited English Speaking			
Learning Disabled			
Not Learning Disabled			
Migrant			
All Other Students			

* Students qualifying for the federal free and reduced-price lunch program are generally classified as low income for statistical purposes.

Reading the data

- What percentage of students from each group are absent 18 days or more a year? That means they are missing about 10 percent of the school year; not surprisingly, research suggests that students absent this often are more likely to perform poorly.
- Do the same calculations for your entire school district and, if possible, for the state.
- Are some groups of students absent more than others?
- How do your school's averages — and different groups of students in your school — compare to the district and state averages?
- Are the trends going up or down?

Digging deeper

- Determine whether high levels of absenteeism among different groups of students are connected to poor student performance on state and national tests. Ask your principal or other school leaders to help with this analysis.
- Find out if other schools with similar groups of students have better attendance than your school. If there are major differences, ask school leaders to explain why. Ask if lessons or best practices from other schools could be used at your school.
- Ask school leaders to explain how they will reduce student absenteeism. Rewards and penalties can include publishing attendance indicators; providing a mix of incentives, such as certificates of recognition and special field trips; having parents reach out to parents of students who often are absent; hosting mandatory parent meetings; and withholding course credit unless time is made up.
- What is the school doing to find out why students are absent? Has it taken any steps to respond to students' concerns or problems?

Reading the data

5

Teacher certification and teacher expertise

A lot of research has documented what common sense tells us: Good teachers are the main difference between student success and

failure. Highly qualified teachers know their subjects well, are certified to teach and are current in new developments in their field.

- What percentage of teachers in your school are uncertified (those having only a temporary or emergency certificate)? If possible, break this down by grade level and type of program: gifted/talented or honors/advanced; special education; general or regular; remedial.
- At the middle and high school levels, what percentage of teachers are teaching “out of field”? You want to avoid having English teachers teaching math or physics, for example.
- How do your school’s averages compare to district and state averages?
- Are these trends going up or down?

Digging deeper

- Ask what your school is doing to hire certified teachers with the appropriate subject-area majors and/or minors ... and to help current teachers become certified.
- Some school districts are using financial incentives to attract more qualified teachers to the lowest-performing schools. Does your district do this?
- Ask if lessons or best practices from elsewhere could be used at your school.
- Ask if your school district or school has looked at whether teacher quality and student performance are linked. Can you find out, for instance, if students in some teachers’ classes consistently outperform students in other teachers’ classes? Does your school principal have access to this information?
- What do teachers have to do to become certified in your state? For instance, do middle and high school teachers have to demonstrate competence in the specific subjects they plan to teach?
- Is there a connection between teacher qualifications and student placements? The least-qualified teachers often are teaching students in special education or remedial programs.

	Year _____		
	% of Uncertified Teachers and/or Teaching “Out of Field”		
	School	District	State
TOTAL			
Gifted/talented and magnet programs (elementary and middle schools)			
Honors or advanced courses (middle and high school)			
General or regular education programs			
Special education programs			
Remedial programs			

6

Adding it up — and next steps

Once you've collected data, use the Performance checklist below to identify groups of students whose achievement is more than 10 points below the highest-scoring group of students. Do a separate checklist for each group of students in your school: white, African American, Latino, low income, etc.

Then, if you have a lot of "yes" answers in the Performance section, use the Possible Causes section to begin to identify possible causes for this low performance. Areas with a "yes" checkmark deserve further attention and discussion.

For instance, if it seems like too many low-income students are being placed in low-level classes or are being taught by less-qualified teachers, the school system can address this issue. But it first needs to identify the problem areas. These Add It Up checklists, coupled with the data you collected earlier, can help you focus on what matters most for improving student achievement.

Now what?

This guide addresses just a handful of indicators that you might want to look at. If you want to go deeper, purchase our *Closing the Achievement Gaps: Collecting and Analyzing Your School's Data*, which has worksheets for 22 separate indicators.

What will you do with the data you gather? How will you report this information to other parents? How will you, other parent leaders, community members and school staff use the data to find ways to help all children achieve at high levels?

Volume 1 of our two-volume series, *Closing the Achievement Gaps: Using Data To Drive Action*, can help you answer these questions. You will learn more about:

- What to do with the data you have collected.
- How to communicate data to different audiences.
- What landmines you may face along the way and how to deal with resistance.
- How different communities — from Durham, NC, to Yakima, WA — have successfully done the work you are now doing.

Student Group _____

Performance (Outcomes)	Yes	No
Are students in this group much more likely* to:		
Have low test scores		
Not graduate on time		
Possible Causes (Inputs)		
Are students in this group much more likely* to:		
Be placed in special education, remedial or general classes		
Not be placed in gifted/talented, magnet or advanced classes		
Be absent more than 18 days a year		
Be placed in classes with teachers who are not fully certified or teaching out of field		

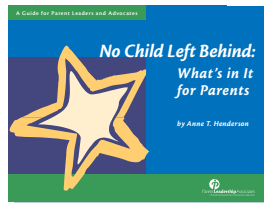
* "Much more likely" means the gap between this group of students and the highest group is 10 points or more.

More Resources from KSA-Plus

Find advice, more worksheets and examples of communities that are making a difference in our two-volume guide *Closing the Achievement Gaps*.



The federal No Child Left Behind law requires school systems to provide more data than ever to parents and community leaders. Our *NCLB: What's in It for Parents* guide highlights six ways to use this data to improve schools.



Plus, we have several four-page guides with practical advice on everything from using report cards to making your school safer.

Our **“Using Data As an Advocacy Tool”** workshop helps you get to the bottom of your school’s data — disaggregating data to identify which student groups are best served and which are least served — and what you can do to help the school improve. Half-day and full-day workshops are offered.

Available at www.parents.ksaplus.com.

Additional Resources

- **Schoolresults.org**, hosted by the U.S. Department of Education, lets you compare your school's performance in reading and math to other schools in your state.
- **Just4kids.org** uses its “opportunity gap” indicator to measure how well your school is doing compared to the highest performers in your state. Currently available in several states, including Florida, Texas and Washington.
- **Education Trust** (www.edtrust.org) offers multiple tools that document achievement gaps and showcase schools that are “beating the demographic odds” in educating all students. In particular, check out the *Achievement in America 2003* guides, plus the *Dispelling the Myth* database, which profiles high-performing schools in all 50 states.
- **Education Week** (www.edweek.com/context/topics section) has an excellent short backgrounder on the achievement gaps, plus links to many other articles and resources.
- **The Minority Student Achievement Network** (www.msanetwork.org) features activities and research under way in 21 urban and suburban districts that are committed to helping all Latino and African American students achieve at high levels.

At KSA-Plus Communications, we know that knowledgeable, engaged parents improve student achievement. Students win, educators win, communities win. We offer a wide range of materials, workshops and strategic advice to parent groups, community organizations, housing co-ops, faith-based groups, business leaders, elected officials and educators who are committed to ensuring that all American children, no matter their background, get the kind of education they will need to lead productive lives.

For additional resources, visit www.parents.ksaplus.com or call 703-528-7100.