


Tool 6.1: Parent-Friendly Information on Content Standards



Click here to link to a text version of the tool.

Description

This tool provides a sample document that can be used to help parents understand the importance and use of standards-based curriculum. There is no one best method for helping parents to understand how standards are a key component of school improvement; however, this tool is one way to start the process.

Distribution

Documents such as this are commonly distributed at school-parent meetings or conferences as a support for information regarding standards. Information from this tool can also be included in newsletters, brochures, student handbooks, and other materials that are typically read by parents.

Suggestions for Use

LEA and school staff can use this tool as a handout for a presentation on the school improvement process.

The information can be reformatted into a take-home brochure for parents who attend school improvement meetings to share with other parents and community members.

School staff can share this tool with local newspapers and radio stations that disseminate school progress information. It will help to contextualize the data that is presented.

This tool, or information from this tool, can also be used to help frame Title I school improvement meetings where parents are being asked to help make decisions on improvement strategies when they have limited understanding of the term or ideas being expressed.

Understanding Standards-Based Curriculum . . .

What are content standards?

Content standards identify what students are expected to know and be able to do at each grade level in reading, language arts, science, mathematics, social studies, and other academic content areas.

For example, when they complete Grade 2, all students should be able to

- Count, read, and write numbers up to 1,000.
- Sounds out words with ease when reading

The content standards represent an essential core of knowledge and abilities that all students must have to be successful in school and in their adult life. Content standards help teachers decide what to teach at each grade level so that every student is prepared to go to the next grade, and, most importantly, be academically successful throughout school. If we expect every child to meet the same standards, then “no child is left behind.”

Why do we need content standards?

The content standards provide common goals and expectations for student learning across the state. Consistent expectations for teaching and learning provide meaningful information about how students are achieving.

Content standards help ensure that a third grader in one school is learning the same important skills in reading, writing, math, and other academic areas as the third graders in any other school.

Why do parents need to know and understand standards?

With set standards for learning in each subject area and at each grade level, parents have better information about what their child are expected to know and be able to do. With this knowledge, parents are better able to talk with teachers about their child’s abilities, support their child’s learning at home, and understand the results of standardized testing. Parents can request the standards for their child’s academic performance from their teacher(s).

How are standards used in helping students to be academically successful?

Teachers use them to	Parents use them to
<ul style="list-style-type: none">★ Guide decisions on what and how to teach students★ Coordinate what is taught in different classrooms and from year to year★ Select teaching materials, such as textbooks, so there is a match between what is taught and what students are expected to learn★ Measure student progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none">★ Connect home activities, such as nature walks or even a trip to the grocery store, to content being taught in their child’s classrooms★ Help them in understanding the individual student progress reports sent home each year★ Help them know what questions to ask at teacher–student–parent conferences when teachers talk about learning expectations

Tool 6.2: Explanation for School Report Cards

Click here to link to a text version of the tool.

Description

This tool is an example of a resource that helps non-educators understand the information contained in school report cards. There is no required method for helping parents to understand these reports; however, it is required that SEAs, LEAs, and schools assist parents in interpreting the information in report cards so that they are better able to support their child's education. This tool provides one way to do so.

Distribution

SEAs, LEAs, and school can disseminate this type of document at meetings, conferences, workshops, or through their Web site.

Suggestions for Use

LEAs and schools can distribute these types of resources during the annual meeting or during the regular teacher-student-parent conferences.

This type of tool can be used as a handout for a workshop for parents. However, staff need to help parents engage with and discuss this information if it is to have value.

Understanding Report Cards

Today, school quality is judged by how well students perform. The improvement provisions in Title I mandate that every student achieve at the “proficiency” level by 2014. The state accountability system is set up to measure how well both schools and students are meeting the proficiency goal. This document can help you understand how to read your school's report card as he or she progresses toward meeting this expectation.

Reports on schools and school systems

The state department of education prepares a report card for every school in our state and makes these available on its Web site. The report card shows data for each individual school as it compares to the whole county and/or the whole state. An electronic copy is free—just go online—or you can order a print copy by phoning the state department of education at 555.555.5555, ext. 555.

Data sources

Most of the information in the school reports comes from records that people in the schools and district offices keep. State and federal laws help school officials decide what data to collect. The data are entered into the Education Information System (EIS), and the state department uses this system to analyze data and create reports.

Subgroups

You will notice that data in the report cards are sometimes listed according to subgroups. These are groups of students who have been defined by the Title I, Part A provisions and are purposely reported separately. Generally, these are students who may struggle with learning and, in the past, were averaged into the school's overall performance. Because of this, they were easy to “leave behind,” something that separating the data helps to prevent.

Understanding what data say

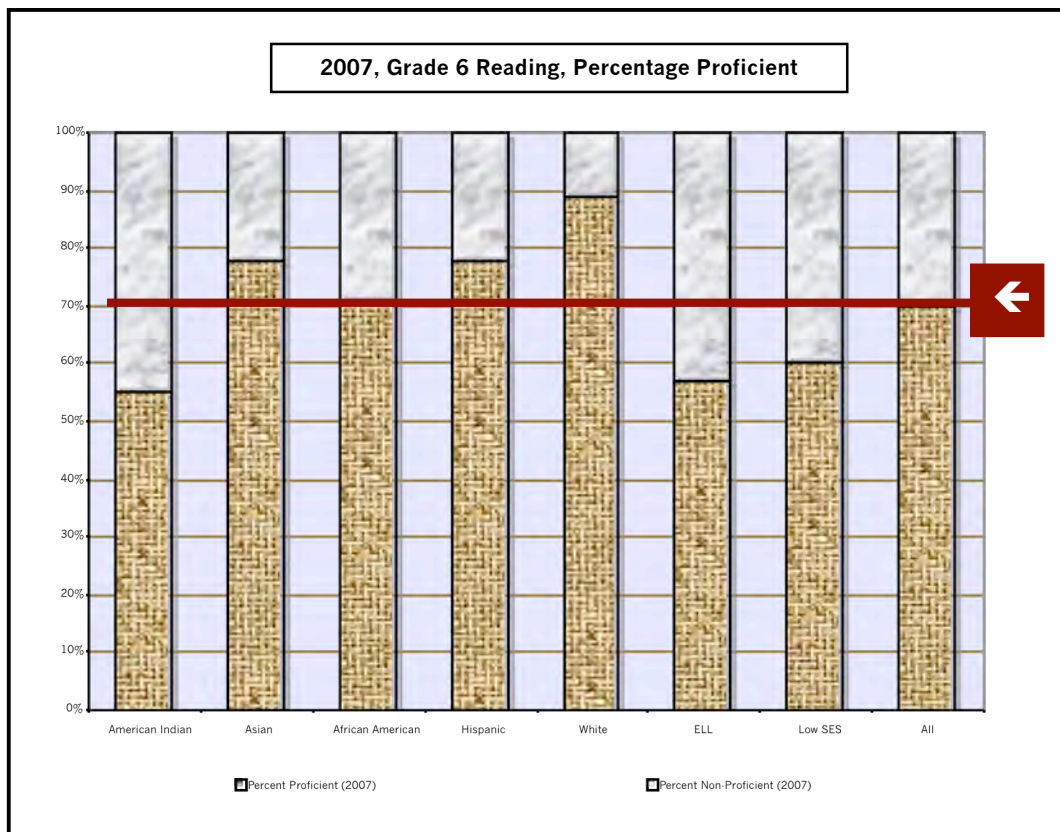
Comparing results from several years, a technique called longitudinal analysis, can help educators and parents understand trends. This works best when the same kind of information is collected each year; however, that is not always possible. For example, our state changed its statewide test from a norm-referenced one to a criterion-referenced one during the 2003–2004 school year. We can tell whether students performed better in math between 2004 and 2008 because the state used the same test each of those years. However, we can't compare these results to the 2003 results because the tests were different.

In some sections, the school is compared to the whole state; in other sections, the county results also appear.

Accountability

In the accountability section of the report card, the school is rated on student attendance and on the percentages of students who took the statewide tests in math and reading. High schools are rated also on how many students graduate. The state has set targets for all these areas, and if the school meets the targets (or does better), it makes Adequate Yearly Progress as required by NCLB.

The following chart demonstrates percentage of students who were rated as proficient on the in 6th grade reading assessment.



Each school's report card will contain several charts like this one to help communicate performance information in different areas and content subjects. Within this information, there should be a statement of where students are expected to be during that school year. For example, in the chart below, note the line with the red arrow. That is the achievement target. You will notice that not all students are meeting this school's target.

Teacher information

The Title I, Part A provisions require districts and schools to make sure teachers are “highly qualified.” The report card shows the percentages of teachers who have achieved various levels of education. The numbers that appear beside a degree, such as a Master's Degree+15, indicate the number of extra credit hours a group of teachers has taken. The section, labeled “Teachers on Permits,” shows how many teachers are working under special permits while they take classes to become fully certified.

Example of Teacher Information Section of NCLB Report Card			
Level of Education	School	County	State
By percent			
Bachelor's Degree	23.8%	23.4%	24.2%
Bachelor's Degree+15	22.5%	32.1%	29.4%
Master's Degree	17.7%	12.2%	16.4%
Master's Degree+15		5.9%	8.7%
Doctorate		0.5%	1.1%
By number			
Teachers on Permits	1	23	1,018

Your school is required to notify you of your right to know the qualifications of your child's teachers and the classroom paraprofessionals and if your child is taught by an unqualified teacher for more than 4 weeks.

Discipline

This section indicates whether the school met the standard for keeping discipline referrals as low as possible. Information in this section may also be displayed in charts. This section is intended to make sure you know if your child is attending a safe school. The following table provides an example of how the report will keep you informed about the safety in your school. As you see, this school had numerous safety issues in 2004. While there are still safety concerns in 2007, the school has made changes in its approach to creating a safe school, and discipline has improved significantly.

Safe Schools Chart				
Number of Instances, 2004–2007				
Type of Activity	2004	2005	2006	2007
Number of Suspensions	128	78	20	0
Number of Expulsions	79	52	47	20
Number of Acts of Extreme Violence	48	31	15	2

Attendance/graduation rates

This section of the report card shows attendance and graduation rates. NA (or N/A) means not applicable, and it appears in the box for graduation rate if the school is an elementary or middle school. School attendance is not only an accountability issue for AYP; it is also a determining factor in school funding. This chart reflects an improvement in attendance.


Attendance, Overall Year Percentage by Campus Percentage of Instances, 2004–2007				
School	2004	2005	2006	2007
Yellow Elementary	89	93	96	98
Orange Middle School	87	95	94	97
Red High School	83	82	90	93

School information

The school report will also provide information on the demographics of the school and other general information. For example, you might see the following types of information:

- Total number of students in the school
- Number of students in each demographic subgroup (i.e., African American, White, Hispanic, and others)
- Average number of students in each class
- Dropout rate (not applicable for elementary schools)
- Percentages of highly qualified teachers
- Number of students for every administrator and teacher
- Average years of experience of principals, teacher, counselors, librarians, and so on
- Number of Advanced Placement or dual college credit classes at the secondary level
- Percentages of students who took the ACT and SAT tests with a composite, or average, score students earned and percentage of students taking Advanced Placement exams.

Tool 6.3: Explanation of State Accountability System



Click here to link to a text version of the tool.

Description

This tool provides a sample format for explaining the state's accountability system. It is intended to help non-educators understand the state's system. There is no required method for helping parents to understand this process; however, it is required that SEAs, LEAs, and schools assist parents in understanding the accountability system and the information it produces so that they are better able to support their child's education. This tool is one example of how to provide assistance.

Distribution

Developers for this tool can disseminate this type of document at meetings, conferences, or workshops or through their Web site.

Suggestions for Use

LEAs and schools can distribute these types of resources during the annual meeting or during the regular teacher-student-parent conferences.

This type of tool can be used as a handout for a workshop for parents. However, staff need to help parents engage with and discuss this information if it is to have value.

A Review of the State's Accountability System

No Child Left Behind requires that all students must be academically proficient (demonstrating a high level of skill) in mathematics, reading/language arts, and science by 2014. The state accountability system is set up to measure how well both schools and students are doing toward meeting the proficiency goal.

Moreover, schools who serve Title I eligible students have additional obligations. Title I provides funding for high poverty schools to help students who are behind academically or at risk of falling behind. About 45% of our state's public schools are Title I schools. You can find out if your school is a Title I school by asking your principal or by going to department of education Web site for a listing of Title I schools.

This document will help you understand how our state uses standards and assessments to reach our goal to ensure that every child receives a quality education and reaches high academic expectations. However, if you have additional questions, you should call your local school. You can also find additional information on the department of education Web site or the U.S. Department of Education Web site at www.ed.gov.

Academic Standards

Title I, Part A requires that states develop standards and that those standards be measured as part of its accountability procedures. Even though our state has used academic standards and accountability procedures for many years, we reviewed and updated our assessments and procedures to ensure we would be able to meet the challenges of the new Title I legislation.

Academic standards are public statements about what all students should know and be able to do. Our state has standards for all academic subjects for each grade. Your local school district can provide copies of the standards, which are available on the state department's Web site and in print on request from the department of education as well. Below is an example of a fifth-grade math standard.

Competency Goal 2:	The learner will recognize and use standard units of metric and customary measurement.	
Objectives	1.01	Estimate the measure of an object in one system given the measure of that object in another system.
	1.02	Identify, estimate, and measure the angles of plane figures using appropriate tools.

Assessments

All schools must measure student achievement in reading/language in grades 3–8 each year and at least once during the high school years, and science achievement at least once in grades 3–5, 6–9, and 10–12. Each student’s test results are reported in terms of Level IV, advanced; Level III, proficient; Level II, basic; and Level I, below basic. Students at Level III have demonstrated that they are proficient in the content area.

Public Reporting

Each school must issue a "report card" for each school. We have reviewed and adapted our reporting procedures to ensure that we are meeting the requirements of Title I, Part A. These mandates require that the information on the report card be more detailed than previous reports. Each district and school is provided reports on how well the state, district, school, and individual students are performing in student achievement, attendance, dropout (high school only), school safety, and teacher quality. For example, public reports might include a table such as the one below to demonstrate how well the school compares to the district and the state in overall academic achievement.

Performance of Students in Each Grade Taking the End-of-Grade Tests by Percentage Achieving Master										
	Grade 3		Grade 4		Grade 5		Grade 6		Overall	
	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	Reading	Math
Our School	83.1	73.2	81.2	63.5	89.9	62.9	n/a	n/a	84.6	65.9
# of Tests Taken	71	71	85	85	89	89	1	1	246	246
District	77.5	69.0	80.9	64.1	84.7	61.0	79.4	63.0	81.9	64.2
State	82.9	67.8	83.4	65.0	88.4	63.1	81.5	61.9	84.9	63.4

However, these reports must also report information by specific groups of students, as you can see below. By reporting the overall data as well as the subgroup data, the academic achievement of students as a whole at a school can't mask the underachievement of certain groups of students. This possible difference is called the "achievement gap." Schools must work to ensure that this gap is closed. The chart below is an example of how subgroup data is reported.

Percentage of Students at or Above Level III (Grade Level)														
	All	Male	Female	White	African American	Hispanic	Native American	Asian/Pacific Islander	Multi-Racial	ED	NED	LEP	Migrant Students	Students with Disabilities
Our School	84.6	82.9	86.3	88.1	74.3	72.7	n/a	n/a	77.8	72.2	89.7	69.2	n/a	48.6
District	81.9	78.7	85.2	87.8	74.3	69.7	81.8	90.1	86.3	71.9	89.8	59.3	52.9	47.3
State	84.9	82.0	88.0	91.4	75.3	73.9	76.4	90.7	87.8	76.2	92.6	61.0	58.1	56.2

ED—Economically Disadvantaged Students | NED—Not Economically Disadvantaged Students | LEP—Limited English Proficient Students

Of course, parents are usually most interested in the achievement level of their child. Your school is required by law to keep you informed of your child's achievement level.

Highly Qualified Teachers

You have a right to request information on the qualifications of your child's teacher(s) or classroom paraprofessional. This information includes degrees held, certifications held, and whether the teacher is certified in the area he/she is teaching.

All teachers who teach in core academic subject areas are required to be highly qualified. Highly qualified teachers are fully certified and/or licensed by the state; hold at least a bachelor's degree from a four-year institution; and demonstrate competence in each core academic subject area in which they teach. Our state's school report cards compares teacher information from your school and district to others across the state under the "Quality Teachers" tab. Title I schools must notify parents if their child has been assigned, or has been taught for at least four consecutive weeks, by a teacher who does not meet the highly qualified criteria. Parents also may request information concerning whether their child is receiving instruction by a teacher assistant and, if so, his/her qualifications. A special communication process is utilized between schools and parents of students with disabilities or English language learners.

Parental Involvement

There are many ways parents can be involved in their child's education including the following:

- ❖ Stay informed by carefully reviewing the district and school report cards as well as your child's performance report.
- ❖ Participate in decision-making opportunities regarding funding. A school district with a Title I allocation of more than \$500,000 must determine the percentage of the allocation that it wishes to reserve for parental involvement activities. This amount must be at least one (1) percent of the school district's Title I allocation. **Title I parents are to be involved in the decisions regarding how reserved funds will be used for parental involvement.**
- ❖ Participate in planning and decision-making opportunities in a meaningful way as part of developing a written parental involvement policy and parental involvement plan/School-Parent Compact. The School-Parent Compact must provide descriptions of school staff and parent roles to support student achievement.

- ❖ Review the written parental involvement policy and plan that the school shares at its annual parent meeting.

Adequate Yearly Progress

You may hear that your school "made AYP" or "didn't make AYP." AYP stands for Adequate Yearly Progress. AYP is a calculation measuring the yearly progress toward achieving grade-level performance in math and reading for each student group in a school, district, or state. AYP is applied to each of the two subject areas, at all tested grade levels, for all population groups.

Our goal is for all public school children to perform at grade level in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science by the end of the 2013–2014 school year. The AYP procedure is designed to provide information as to whether schools, districts, and states are making progress toward meeting that goal.

If just one student group at a school does not meet a target goal, then the school does not make AYP for that year. Forty or more students across the tested grades in a school in the following categories make up students groups: (1) the school as a whole (all students), (2) White, (3) African American, (4) Hispanic, (5) Native American, (6) Asian, (7) multiracial, (8) economically disadvantaged students (students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch), (9) limited English proficient students, and (10) students with disabilities. Many students are counted in more than one group. This requirement of the law is to make sure that historically underserved students receive the attention they need and deserve.

Failure to Make AYP

If your school receives Title I funding and it doesn't make AYP in the same subject for two or more years in a row, then the school must send you a letter informing you of that fact and your options. Title I schools that haven't met state target goals for AYP for two or more years in the same subject (reading/language arts or math) are designated as "School Improvement" schools. Sanctions escalate for schools remaining in School Improvement for multiple years. (See the chart below, School Improvement Status.) To exit School Improvement, schools must make AYP for two years in a row in the subject that designated them for School Improvement. Non-Title I schools that do not make AYP do not face sanctions, but must amend their School Improvement Plans to indicate how they will improve. In past years, over half of the state's schools have not made AYP.

School Choice

Schools that are designated as in "School Improvement" must offer all parents in the school the option of transferring their child to other schools, not in School Improvement, designed by the district. The district pays the transportation costs when parents choose to transfer their child.

Title I School Improvement schools must offer School Choice until the school makes AYP for two years in a row for the subject area that was first identified as a low performance content area. School Choice must be offered in addition to other obligations that schools must fulfill if they remain in Title I School Improvement after one year.

A student who transfers to a choice school can remain at that school until he or she has completed the highest grade in the school. However, the school district is not obligated to provide transportation for the student after the end of the school year in which the original school is no longer identified for Title I School Improvement.

School Improvement Status		
After . . .	Then . . .	And implements . . .
1 year of not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in mathematics or reading/language arts	School addresses challenge areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No sanctions apply – Designs a plan for improvement
2 consecutive years of not making AYP in the same subject Designated as in <i>School Improvement</i>	School enters Year 1 of Title I School Improvement at the beginning of the next school year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – School Choice* – Designs a plan for improvement – Receives technical assistance
3 years of not making AYP in the same subject Designated as in <i>Corrective Action</i>	School enters Year 2 of Title I School Improvement at the beginning of the next school year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – School Choice – Supplemental Educational Services – Designs a plan for improvement – Receives technical assistance
4 years of not making AYP in the same subject Designated as in <i>Corrective Action</i>	School enters Year 3 of Title I School Improvement at the beginning of the next school year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – School Choice – Supplemental Educational Services – Designs a plan for improvement – Receives technical assistance
5 years of not making AYP in the same subject Designated as in <i>Restructuring</i>	School enters Year 4 of Title I School Improvement at the beginning of the next school year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – School Choice – Supplemental Educational Services – Devises a plan for Restructuring – Receives technical assistance
6 years of not making AYP in the same subject Designated as in <i>Restructuring</i>	School enters Year 5 of Title I School Improvement at the beginning of the next school year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – School Choice – Supplemental Educational Services – Restructuring – Receives technical assistance

*Schools in districts in the SES Pilot Program offer Supplemental Educational Services, not School Choice, at this stage.

NOTE: Title I schools enter School Improvement after two consecutive years of not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the same subject (reading/language arts or mathematics). Title I schools exit School Improvement after two consecutive years of making AYP in the subject that identified them for School Improvement. If a school makes AYP in the identifying subject in any one year after entering School Improvement, it does not move to the next level of sanctions in the next school year. For every year a school in School Improvement does not make AYP in the identifying subject, it moves to the next level of sanctions. It is possible for a school to exit School Improvement for one subject, while entering into or remaining in School Improvement based on the other subject.

Supplemental Educational Services

After three years of not making AYP in the same subject, a Title I school must offer special tutoring services, known as Supplemental Educational Services, to economically disadvantaged students. Supplemental Educational Services are extra academic services such as tutoring and other academic enrichment services offered outside of the regular school day to help students improve reading and mathematics skills. State Board–approved providers serve as tutors.

Students are eligible if they are eligible for free or reduced–cost school lunch and attend a Title I school that has not made Adequate Yearly Progress in the same subject for three or more years.

Terms Mentioned in the Document

Academic (achievement) standards are set by the Standard Course of Study (SOS) outlining what all students should know and be able to do for each grade level and academic subject. It defines the minimum standards for school systems to follow and to communicate to the public. State accountability measures are derived from the state curriculum.

Accountability is the system in which the state requires that schools and districts meet achievement standards for what students should know and learn at each grade level. Assessments and public reporting of assessment results are part of the accountability system of finding out and reporting if students are making progress toward meeting the achievement standards.

Achievement gap refers to the differences in academic performance, as measured by test scores or graduation rates, between different groups of students. Under No Child Left Behind, these groups are based on racial or ethnic backgrounds, family income, student disability, or English language proficiency.

Assessment is another word for “test.” The term *assessment* is sometimes used to encompass not only standard test administration, but state–designed alternate assessments by which some students with disabilities are measured.

Core academic subjects are English, reading, language arts, math, science, foreign languages, civics and government, social studies, economics, arts, history, geography, and kindergarten through Grade 6 (K–6). Under NCLB, only teachers meeting highly qualified criteria can teach these subjects.

District Improvement is the status a district enters by not meeting target goals in the same subject (reading/language arts or math) in each of three grade spans (3–5, 6–8, and high school) for two years in a row. All school districts that receive Title I funding are subject to being placed in Title I District Improvement. A district in Title I District Improvement must inform parents of the district’s status, revise its local education plan, and set aside 10% of its Title I allotment for professional development purposes, and it can no longer be a direct provider of Supplemental Educational Services.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act is the principal federal law affecting K–12 education. When the ESEA of 1965 was reauthorized and amended in 2001, it was renamed the No Child Left Behind Act. The 2001 reauthorization represented significant changes from the 1994 reauthorization that affects all public elementary and secondary schools in the country.

Highly Qualified is an NCLB–defined teacher requirement that means a teacher has obtained full state teacher certification or has passed the state teacher licensing examination and holds a license to teach in the state; holds a minimum of a bachelor's degree; and has demonstrated subject area competence.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 is the most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The reauthorized law added strict new accountability changes and mandated that every child be taught by a Highly Qualified teacher. The law emphasizes standards for teachers and consequences for Title I schools that do not meet student achievement standards for two or more consecutive years. The law's major goal is for every school to be at 100% proficiency by 2013–2014 as measured by state tests.

Standard Course of Study (CSOS) provides a guideline of what all students should know and be able to do for each grade level and academic subject. It defines the minimum standards for school systems to follow and to communicate to the public. State accountability measures are derived from the state curriculum.

Proficient/Proficiency are terms referring to student work that meets the achievement standard set by the state for that grade level.

Restructuring is a sanction level applied to a Title I school. After five years of not making Adequate Yearly Progress, the school must plan for Restructuring. After six years of not making Adequate Yearly Progress, the school must implement the plan for Restructuring.

Sanctions is the term often used to describe the consequences for Title I schools in various levels of Title I School Improvement.

School Choice refers to the sanction applied to Title I schools not meeting state proficiency target goals for Adequate Yearly Progress in the same subject (reading/language arts, mathematics, or science) for two or more years. Those schools must offer parents the option of transferring their child to another public school designated by the district, as required by No Child Left Behind.


School Improvement is the status a Title I school enters after not making Adequate Yearly Progress for two consecutive years in the same subject (reading/language arts or math). A Title I school exits School Improvement after two consecutive years of making Adequate Yearly Progress in the subject that identified it for School Improvement (reading/language arts and/or math). It is possible for a school to exit School Improvement for one subject, while entering into or remaining in School Improvement based on the other subject.

Supplemental Educational Services (SES) are extra academic services, such as tutoring, offered outside of regular school hours free of cost to eligible students. Low-income students who are attending Title I schools in Title I School Improvement are eligible. Services are designed to increase the academic achievement of low-income students, particularly in the areas of reading, language arts, and mathematics. The State Board of Education must approve service providers.

The ABCs of Public Education is our state's major school reform effort focusing on local school accountability, an emphasis on student mastery of basic skills, and as much local board and local educator control as possible.

Title I is the largest federal education–funding program. It provides funding for high-poverty schools to help students who are behind academically or at risk of falling behind.

Tool 6.4: Parent Action Resource



Click here to link to a text version of the tool.

Description

This tool is a parent–friendly sample of a resource to assist parents to foster student learning. There is no required method or form for doing this; however, it is required that SEAs, LEAs, and schools provide assistance to parents as they support their child’s education. This tool is one example of how to provide assistance.

Distribution

SEAs, LEAs, and schools can disseminate this type of document at meetings, conferences, or workshops or through a Web site.

Suggestions for Use

LEA and school staff can distribute this type of resource during the annual meeting or during the regular teacher– student–parent conferences.


This type of tool can be used as a handout for a workshop for parents. However, staff need to help parents engage with and discuss this information if it is to have value.

Preparing for Tests: Suggestions for Parents

You can be a great help to your child if you will observe these do’s about tests and testing:

- ✓ **Do talk to your child about testing.** It’s helpful for children to understand why schools give tests and to know the different kinds of test they will take. Explain that tests are like yardsticks. Teachers, schools, school districts, and even states use them to measure what is taught and how well students are learning what is taught. Most tests are designed and given by teachers to measure students’ progress in a course. These tests are associated with the grades on report cards. The results tell the teacher and the students how well they are doing. The results of some tests tell schools that they need to strengthen courses or change teaching methods. Still other tests compare students by schools, school districts, or cities. Tell your child that occasionally, he or she will take “standardized” tests. Explain that these tests use the same standards to measure student performance across the state or even across the country. Every student takes the same test according to the same rules. This makes it possible to measure each student’s performance against others’.
- ✓ **Do encourage your child.** Praise your child for the things that he or she does well. When children feel good about themselves, they can do their best on tests. Children who are afraid of failing are more likely to become anxious when taking tests and are more likely to make mistakes.
- ✓ **Do meet with your child’s teacher as often as possible to discuss his progress.** Ask the teacher to suggest activities for you and your child to do at home to help prepare for tests and to improve your child’s understanding of the schoolwork.
- ✓ **Do make sure that your child attends school regularly.** Remember, tests reflect children’s overall achievement. The more effort and energy your child puts into learning, the more likely it is that he will do well on tests.
- ✓ **Do provide a quiet, comfortable place for studying at home and make sure that your child is well rested on school days and especially on the day of a test.** Children who are tired are less able to pay attention in class or to handle the demands of a test.

Tool 6.5: Building Collaborative Partnerships Resource



Click here to link to a text version of the tool.

Description

This tool provides handouts and brief facilitation directions for a series of activities that can help to lay a foundation for meaningful engagement with parents. Because school staff and parents see education from different perspectives, they must find common ground before they can become collaborative partners. There are no specific collaborative practices required for LEAs and schools in the Title I, Part A provisions. However, LEAs and schools are expected to meaningfully engage parents in supporting their child's education and in developing their capacity, and staff capacity, to do so. This type of activity helps build shared goals and understanding about education that is often a foundation of strong parent–school collaborations.

Distribution

This tool should be used as part of the activity described or a similar type of tool. It is not as valuable as a stand-alone resource.

Suggestions for Use

LEA and school staff can use this type of process early in the year to set a tone for meaningful engagement. When staff use this type of activity, they may want to repeat it several times on different dates and at different times in order to involve a larger number of parents. Staff may want to share overall notes or ideas gathered at the meetings through a newsletter or Web site.

LEA or school staff can meet after these events to debrief what they have learned and actions they should take based on their new shared understandings.

LEAs and schools can use these types of activities as part of their processes to create a parental involvement plan or policy as well as build the capacity of staff and parents.

Collaborative Involvement–Meaningful Engagement

The following three activities may be completed at one event, or, if time is limited, they may be spread over several meetings. It is also possible to use the activities separately. The goal of these activities is to foster discussion and build shared understanding; that is, to take the first step in building an educational partnership.

For best results, use small groups of mixed participants (school staff and parents in the same group). It will be very important for the activity leader to assure the participants that there are no right answers.

For each activity, directions are given. However, activity leaders will need to make sure that each group understands the task before groups start to complete each task.

Ideally, a facilitator will stop the discussion periodically, or at the end of an activity, and engage the participants in a whole-group discussion of what they have discussed.

Activity 1: Purpose of Education

Review the following explanations for the purpose of education. These explanations are commonly found in historical descriptions of the American educational system.

Next, discuss how any or all of these explanations are reflective of your own views for the purpose for education.

Once you've talked about the definitions, answer the questions on the bottom of the page. There is space under each question for you to record ideas. Because we want to use your ideas to help us foster increased parental involvement, we ask that someone in your group share notes from your discussion with your session facilitator.

- Civil society depends on educating young people to become responsible, thoughtful, and enterprising citizens.
- Progress in every practical field depends on having a workforce that has the capacity to perform needed tasks and learn new knowledge and skills.
- One's individual development and the capacity to fulfill one's own purposes can depend on an adequate preparation in childhood.

Consider what your school needs to provide a quality education to all students and the needs of the students in the schools. What words or phrases would you like to add or remove from these explanations to describe what the purpose of education should be in our community?

How does this definition align to the strategies currently used in your school to promote student learning and to engage parents?

Activity 2: Partnerships

We would commonly define an educational partnership as

Efforts to create and foster educational partnerships in our community include . . .

- Shared understanding of educational issues and important goals necessary to promote academic success for EVERY child.
- Shared responsibility and leadership in creating a collaborative environment that supports the involvement of families, community members, and organizations in supporting the educational needs of ALL children.

Use a highlighter to mark the phrases or words in the definitions above that would best define how families and school staff should be engaged as partners in the school community.

Share the items you highlighted with the members of your group.

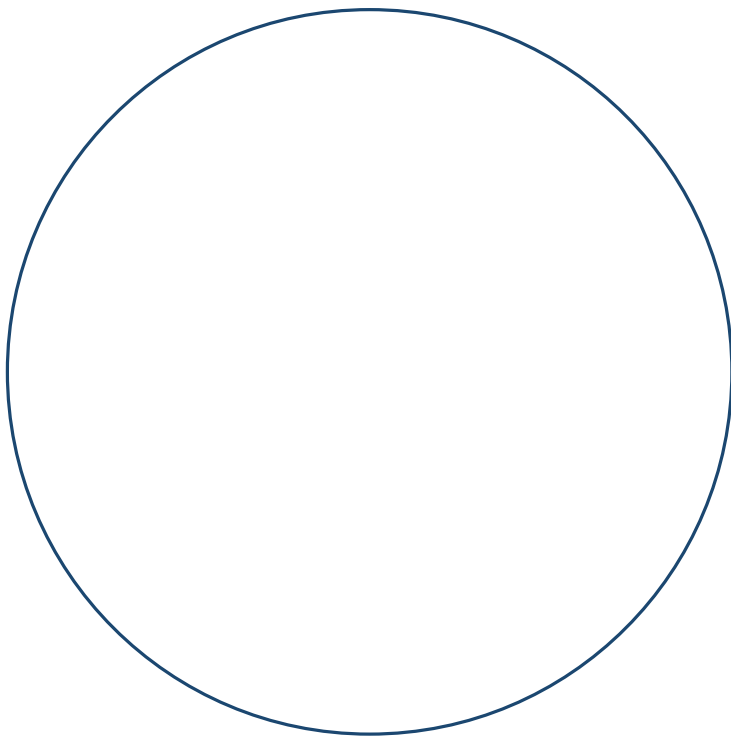
In the space provided below, work with your group to write your ideas about how the strategies you use to work with families and community members need to reflect these ideas. Because we want to use your ideas to help us foster increased parental involvement, we ask that someone in your group share notes from your discussion with your session facilitator.

Activity 3: Focused Improvement

Educators commonly talk about essential qualities of high-performing schools. The five qualities listed below are commonly seen in many of these lists.

As you consider this list, take a moment to consider how the policies and strategies used in your school allocate time and resources to each quality. Then use the pie chart at the bottom of the page to illustrate the percentage of time and resources that should be allocated to each of the five qualities.

- ✓ A shared understanding of goals and expectations for all involved in the school system is clearly communicated and shared with all stakeholders.
- ✓ High academic standards clearly define what students should know and be able to do.
- ✓ A strong group of leaders provides support for the goals and expectations of the school and the school community.
- ✓ Procedures for purposeful collection and analysis of data on students, programs, and staff underpin all decisions.
- ✓ Structures that establish strong, collaborative relationships with parent/family and community partners are in place.



Finally, once you have completed your task, discuss the percentages noted on your pie chart with your group. Through discussion, agree to a percentage of effort and resources allocated for each of the five qualities.

Because we want to use your ideas to help us foster increased parental involvement, we ask that someone in your group share notes from your discussion with your session facilitator.