

No Child Left Behind

Tip Sheet: School Parent Involvement Policy

No Child Left Behind is the education plan that was signed into law by President Bush in January of 2002. It's designed to improve student achievement and help schools do a better job of teaching. The law includes a number of important opportunities for parents to be involved with the schools. These Tip Sheets from The Mississippi Forum on Children and Families are designed to help parents understand their rights under the law.

Every Title I school must have a written parent involvement policy, developed with and approved by parents of participating Title I children. This policy should explain how parents will be involved in meaningful ways in making decisions about the school and its programs and how parents will be involved in the school. The policy must be updated periodically to be sure that it is still meeting parents' needs. A school can receive Title I funds if a certain percentage of its students are from low-income families. Ask your principal if your school receives Title I funds. Here are some questions you can ask your school leaders to find out more about your school's parent involvement policy:

1. Does our school have a written parent involvement policy? If so, may I see it? If not, how can I help develop one?

- The law says that every Title I school must have such a policy

2. How was this policy developed? How were parents involved in its development?

- The law says the school must develop the policy jointly with parents

3. How often is this policy reviewed to see if it still meets the needs of parents?

- The law says the policy must be reviewed and updated periodically

Find out what other parents think about the policy and whether it covers their concerns. This could be done at a PTO or PTA meeting, or in neighborhood meetings in places where parents feel comfortable.

- 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?

Update the 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 childcare?
 - Do the topics reflect the interests of the families?

- What other things might prevent families from becoming involved and how is the school addressing those challenges?

The law says the school must hold at least one meeting each year to describe the Title 1 program and explain how parents can be involved in the program. If parents request additional meetings the school must also offer these at times and places that make it easy for parents to attend. The school must also identify and address barriers to parent participation, such as child care, transportation, language, etc. Title I schools must also involve parents in helping teachers and school administrators understand the importance of engaging parents in the educational process and how to do this effectively.

The parent involvement policy must also spell out how the school will help parents understand Mississippi's academic standards, what children are supposed to be learning, and how they will be tested to see if they are being successful. In addition, the policy must say how parents will be involved in working with teachers to improve their children's achievement.

In addition to the above requirements, schools and districts may do some of the following things to strengthen parent involvement:

- Provide necessary literacy training
- Pay reasonable and necessary expenses (such as transportation and child care) to make it easier for parents to be involved in activities
- Train parents in ways to engage other parents
- Be flexible about meeting times in order to get the most parent involvement possible, and make home visits if necessary to reach parents who cannot come to the school

This policy must be made available to the local community and to all families in the school in words they can understand.

Where is the first place I go to get this information?

You can request it from the local district's superintendent's office. If you cannot get the information you need, contact Judy Qualls at the State Department of Education at (601) 359-3515.

Where else can I go to find out more about No Child Left Behind?

- Mississippi State Department of Education: <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us>
- The U.S. Department of Education's No Child Left Behind web site at <http://www.nclb.gov>
- Call Mississippi Forum on Children and Families and ask for the PIRC coordinator at (601) 355-4911 or visit our web site at www.mfcf.org