

No Child Left Behind

Tip Sheet: School District 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 school district that receives Title I funds must have a written Title I parent involvement policy that is developed with and approved by parents of participating Title I children, and evaluated every year. This policy must explain how the district will involve parents in developing its Title I plan and help parents know how to be included in decision-making about the program and in the schools. A school or district 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.

Steps to take and questions to ask:

Call your school superintendent's office. Ask to see a copy of your district's Title I parent involvement policy and find out the following:

- How were parents involved in developing, approving, and reviewing the policy?
 - The law says the policy must be developed jointly with parents, agreed on with parents, and distributed to parents in a language and format that they can understand. In addition, the district must conduct, with the involvement of parents, an annual review of the effectiveness of the parent/family involvement policy in increasing the participation of parents/families and use the review to identify and correct any barriers to parental participation.
- Does the policy explain clearly how parents, including those with limited English proficiency, will be involved in school review and improvement?
 - The law says that the district must state how parents will be involved in addressing academic issues for schools In Need of Improvement.
- How will the district help Title I schools engage parents in activities to improve student achievement?
 - The law says that districts will look at how the schools are involving parents and will provide technical assistance to schools In Need of Improvement in carrying out parental involvement activities and plans.
- What does the policy require schools to do?
 - The law says that schools In Need of Improvement must have school improvement plans that include ways to effectively involve parents in the school.
- Does the policy apply only to Title I schools, or to all schools in the district?
 - The law says that the policy has to apply to Title I schools, but parents can push to ensure that all schools are covered.
- How will the district make sure that the schools are fully involving parents and families?
 - The district must review the actions and activities that the schools are using to involve parents to make sure that these are effective.

- How does the district connect with parent plans in programs for young children, such as Head Start, Parents as Teachers and Even Start?
 - The law says that districts must coordinate and integrate Title I parent involvement strategies with those of programs such as these.
- What is the district doing to build partnerships with organizations (like local education funds, Boys and Girls clubs, YM and YWCAs, the Urban League, etc.) and businesses in activities that involve parents?

The district parent involvement policy must also explain how the district will work with schools to:

- Explain state standards and annual test results to parents
- Let parents know how they can be involved in the school
- Help parents work together with teachers to make sure students are doing the best they can
- Provide materials, information and other resources to help parents with home learning activities, such as telling stories, reading, playing and talking to students
- Find out from parents what's the best way to reach out to all parents so they can be involved as equal partners

Other things parents can do to ensure that the district policy meets the needs of all parents:

- Ask your district to consider developing a district parent advisory council if one does not already exist. This council can assist in evaluating the current policy, oversee the development of a new policy, and identify needs at Title I schools that the district should address.
- Submit written comments if the district's Title I plan is not satisfactory to parents of Title I students.
 - The district must include these comments when submitting its application to the state for Title I funds.
 - The state education agency can require changes in the district's parental involvement policies and practices if they do not meet Title I requirements.

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 Pam Peyton-Curry at the State Department of Education at (601) 359-3499.

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