

PROMOTING PARENT & FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION



FIRST FOCUS

MAKING CHILDREN & FAMILIES THE PRIORITY



Parents play a tremendous role in the educational achievement of their children. Therefore, First Focus believes in the value of family involvement in education and works to promote home-school partnerships that provide parents with the knowledge and skills necessary to become strong advocates for their children's education. By fostering parent engagement, schools gain a better sense of the needs of the student and their family, enabling them to better provide an equitable education for each child.

No Child Left Behind and Parental Engagement

Provisions for parental involvement are outlined in the No Child Left Behind Act (Elementary and Secondary Education Act) in Section 1118, Title I. While this is the only section of the law that specifically deals with elements of parental engagement, it requires that all schools and school districts receiving Title I funding develop parent involvement policies, as well as enhance school and district capacity for the successful implementation of those policies. Title I parent engagement must comply with the following guidelines:

- Plans must be jointly developed (schools must consult parents)
- Plans must include plans to sustain active parent engagement at each Title I school
- Plans must highlight how parental engagement will be implemented into other NCLB programs (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Head Start, McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act)

First Focus promotes the meaningful engagement of parents in education as a way to help students

achieve proficiency in all academic subjects, with the goal of ultimately closing the achievement gap. In addition, Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act outlines parent participation in decision making at the state, district, and school levels.

Parent Engagement at the State Level

Any state plans or policies for parent engagement must be formulated in consultation with parents. Further, the plan must explain how the state will support and strengthen parent engagement at the district and school levels of the public education system.

Parent Engagement at the District Level

Any district plans or policies for parent engagement must be formulated in consultation with parents. All Title I school districts are mandated to produce a parent engagement policy that is finalized with the input and approval of parents. The district policy must also provide coordination and technical assistance to schools that are either in the planning or implementation phase of the district plan. The district plan must also incorporate strategies to enhance the capacities of schools and parents as it pertains to effective engagement, in addition to conducting an annual evaluation on the impact of the parent engagement plan and its impact on student achievement.

Parent Engagement at the School Level

Any school plans or policies for parent engagement must be formulated in consultation with parents. All Title I schools are mandated to produce a parent engagement policy that is finalized with the input and approval of parents. This plan also must include specifics on how school sites will abide by the requirements of the No Child Left Behind

For Additional Information Contact:

Roberto Viramontes
Senior Director
Education Policy
RobertoV@firstfocus.net
202.657.0677



Act. Schools are also responsible for hosting meetings to discuss parent engagement policies. These meetings must be organized with flexible dates and times to accommodate parent work schedules and other family needs, such as transportation, translation of presentations and materials, child care, and home visits.

The Process for Successful Parent Engagement

In a 2009 case study by the Harvard Graduate School of Education, researchers focused on three schools utilizing the community-based approach to foster effective parent engagement plans. Conclusions of the research study indicate that although the schools and communities varied from place to place, the community-based approach must include three common elements for successful parent engagement:

- Focusing on relationship building among parents and between parents and schools¹
- Providing leadership development programs for parents²
- Bridging the gap in culture and power between parents and schools³

In addition, the report concludes that in instances where schools themselves are unable to offer effective parent engagement, they can benefit from the expertise of community-based organizations that focus on parent engagement and leadership development.⁴ If schools are open to working with community partners, together they can develop parent engagement plans that enhance school-parent relationships, build parent leadership skills, and as a result develop strategies that meet the interests, values, and capacities of a particular school community.⁵

Support for Parental Information and Resource Centers

While Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs) fall under Title I of No Child Left Behind, they were first created by the U.S. Department of Education in the mid 1990s as a discretionary/competitive grant program focused on equipping parents, schools, and other organizations with the training and technical assistance required to effectively support parents in becoming informed advocates for their

children's education. With PIRCs in operation nationwide, they assist with the implementation of effective parental engagement policies, programs, and activities that lead to improvements in student academic achievement and that strengthen partnerships among parents, teachers, principals, administrators, and other stakeholders in meeting the educational needs of students.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) requires the recipients of PIRC grants to: serve both rural and urban areas; use at least half their funds to serve areas with high concentrations of low-income children; and allocate at least 30 percent of the funds they receive for early childhood parent programs. First Focus promotes the provision of training, information sharing, and support for parents and entities that work closely with parents in order to increase family engagement and improve student achievement.

For more information on PIRCs from the U.S. Department of Education, please visit <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/pirc/index.html>.

Endnotes

1 Warren, Mark R., Soo Hong, Carolyn Leung Rubin, and Phitsamay Sychitkokhong Uy. *Beyond the Bake Sale: A Community Based Relational Approach to Parent Engagement in Schools*. Harvard Graduate School of Education. Teacher College Record, Volume 111, Number 9, 1 Sept. 2009.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.