

What can you do to improve the quality of your children's teachers?

Rules of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).



NOTE: Schools should provide all official notices in languages that parents can understand.

Action #1 – Read the annual notice about teacher qualifications.

- At the beginning of each school year, schools must send a letter to all parents.
- The letter must explain the rights of parents to learn about teacher qualifications.
 - *Did you get the annual notice from the school at the beginning of the school year?*
 - *Ask the principal for a copy of the letter. The principal can explain the letter to you.*

Action #2 – Ask for more information about teachers.

- Parents have a right to ask for and receive information from the school about the qualifications of their children's teachers.
- Every school must keep a file with information about the qualifications of its teachers and paraprofessionals.
- The school must tell parents: (1) whether the teachers are properly licensed; (2) if they have a Bridge Program, intern, emergency, temporary, provisional, or substitute license; (3) what grade levels and subjects the licenses are in; and (4) what college degrees the teachers have.
- You can also ask about the qualifications of the paraprofessionals who work with your children. Paraprofessionals must have a high school diploma or its equivalent, plus two years of college classes or a passing score on a state examination in reading, writing, and math.
 - *Do you know the qualifications of your children's teachers and paraprofessionals? Call the principal and ask for this information. Inspect the official file at school.*
 - *Do your children have teachers who do not meet the NCLB requirements for being highly qualified? (Read the ELC fact sheet, "Do your children have 'highly qualified' teachers?") See #5 below for ways to ask the principal to address the problem.*

Action #3 – Ask for the "four week" letter.

- Schools must send a timely written notice to parents when their child is taught for four or more consecutive weeks by a teacher who is not "highly qualified".
 - *Has your child's regular teacher quit, transferred, or left the school for other reasons?*
 - *Did the school fail to notify you when your child had a teacher not "highly qualified"?*
 - *Ask the principal for the name and qualifications of the teachers for your children.*
 - *Ask the principal to send you the "four week" letter.*
 - *If the principal refuses to send the letter, write a complaint to the superintendent and the school board.*

Education Law Center/Penna. School Reform Network – ELC/PSRN

Offices in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh

215-238-6970 www.elc-pa.org 412-391-5225

ELC/PSRN works with many parents and groups. Please call us for assistance with individual school problems or more general problems with the education system. We look forward to speaking with your group. If your child's rights are violated under any law, ask for legal assistance. ELC operates a HelpLine at the numbers above. The ELC website (www.elc-pa.org) contains fact sheets and information about other organizations and sources of help.

Action #4 – Visit the classroom.

- Parents have a right: (1) to observe classroom activities; (2) to receive frequent student progress reports; and (3) to meet with teachers to discuss your children’s progress.
 - *Would it help to do the following three things?*
 1. *Call your children’s teachers and make an appointment to observe their classrooms.*
 2. *Ask for more frequent progress reports and notes about your children’s performance.*
 3. *Make appointments to meet with your children’s teachers.*
 - Ask the teachers to describe your children’s strengths and weaknesses.*
 - Ask the teachers to show you examples of your children’s work.*
 - Ask the teachers to make a plan to improve your children’s academic achievement.*
 - Do your children need extra help, such as make-up work or tutoring?*

Action #5 – Ask the school or the school district to address problems with teacher quality.

- You can ask the principal to transfer your child to another class. You do not have a legal right to demand a transfer. You may need to put this request in writing.
- You can ask the principal to give extra training, supervision, and support to the teacher. Teachers sometimes need extra help to do their jobs. Ask other parents to support your request.
- You can write a letter describing the problems to the principal or the superintendent. Explain your ideas for improving teacher quality in your children’s schools. Consider joining the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and asking them to work on these issues.
- If your child attends a school on the state “Improvement List” or the state “Persistently Dangerous List”, then you may have a right to transfer your child to a better school. [See the ELC fact sheet, “How can you transfer your child to a better school under NCLB?”.]

Action #6 – Investigate problems with the distribution of highly qualified teachers.

- NCLB states that low-income and minority students must not be taught at higher rates than other students by unqualified, out-of-field, or inexperienced teachers. This means that the more privileged students and schools should not get all of the “best” teachers. Teacher distribution is also affected by teacher turnover and where new teachers are assigned.
- Each school and school district must make a written plan to fix these problems, using voluntary transfers, professional development, recruitment programs, or other strategies.
 - *Ask the school district for a copy of its plan on the distribution of highly qualified teachers. Does the plan exist? Does the plan accurately describe the problem? Is the school district taking meaningful action to solve the problem?*
 - *You may need to investigate and document the problem for yourself. You can ask the school district to give you statistics about teacher qualifications in each school.*

Action #7 – Review the official school documents involving teacher quality issues.

- NCLB requires schools to address teacher quality issues by forming three documents: (1) a needs assessment; (2) an official plan; and (3) an annual report. School districts may develop these documents for their local schools. Parents must help to develop all three documents.
- The official plan for improving the quality of teachers and principals must do the following: (1) Provide for teacher recruitment, professional development, and mentoring; (2) Set annual goals for increasing the number of highly qualified teachers; (3) Focus on the needs of low-achieving students; (4) Target funds to schools with the lowest proportion of highly qualified teachers, the largest average class size, or identified by the state for school improvement; and (5) Help teachers to address the needs of special education students, English language learners, and other students with different learning styles.
 - *Ask for an invitation to sit on the committee that develops these documents.*
 - *Ask the school district for copies of these three documents.*
 - *Does the needs assessment accurately identify problems with teacher quality?*
 - *Does the official plan meet all five of the requirements described above?*
 - *Does the annual report honestly tell whether schools are meeting their goals?*

Action #8 – Investigate problems with the professional development of teachers.

- Professional development is the training that schools give to their teachers.
- Professional development should help teachers improve student academic achievement.
- Schools must describe their plans for professional development in the official plan for improving teacher quality.
- School districts must spend at least five percent of their NCLB funding on the professional development of teachers who are not highly qualified.
 - *Review the professional development section of the official plan for improving teacher quality. Do these plans address the real needs of your local schools?*
 - *Ask for a copy of the school district budget for professional development. Is funding targeted for schools with the lowest student achievement?*

Action #9 – Investigate whether the state is taking action against the school district.

- Any school district that fails for two consecutive years to meet its goals for improving teacher quality must form and implement an improvement plan.
- The state must identify these schools and give technical assistance for the improvement plan.
- Under two conditions, the state will take additional action and reach an agreement with the district to direct funds toward improving teacher quality: (1) the district fails to meet its teacher quality goals for three consecutive years; and (2) the district fails to make adequate yearly progress on academic measurements for three consecutive years.
 - *Investigate whether the school district has met its annual goals for improving teacher quality. Get copies of the needs assessment, the official plan, and the annual report.*
 - *If the district has not met its goals, investigate whether the state has taken the actions required by NCLB? Do you agree with the state actions? Consider asking the state to take additional actions to address the needs of low-achieving students and schools.*

How can you get more information?

- Read the ELC fact sheet, “Do your children have ‘highly qualified’ teachers?”
- See other ELC fact sheets about NCLB and many other education issues. Visit our website or call our offices. *Contact information is on the front of this page.*