

How can you use NCLB to fight for local school reform?

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



Why is it important for you to get involved with school reform?

Public education is an important part of the American social, political, and economic systems. Quality schools give all children a chance to achieve the American dream. Public schools bring together the diverse members of our communities. Successful schools attract families and businesses to our neighborhoods. By getting involved, you can help to improve public schools.

Can NCLB really help to improve public education?

Yes. NCLB is a controversial law. But NCLB gives parents many new tools to fight for positive school reform.

What are the 10 best ways that you can use NCLB to improve local public schools?

Other fact sheets from the Education Law Center explain the following items in more detail. This flyer gives a basic list of the most important tools for school reform.

1. School Report Cards. The Pennsylvania Department of Education publishes an annual report card for public schools. School districts also must publish report cards about local schools. The report cards must be easy to understand and in various languages. The report cards should allow parents to compare their school to other schools for academic achievement, PSSA scores, class sizes, school attendance rates, and highly qualified teachers. *Ask the school district for report cards about local schools. Do the report cards give you the information required by NCLB? How can the report cards be improved? You can also find school report cards on the Internet at www.paayp.com or www.pde.state.pa.us.*
2. Student Achievement Data. Students take standardized tests almost every year in different subjects. The PSSA is the main test in Pennsylvania. School report cards must give information about student test results by race, ethnicity, gender, disability, migrant status, English proficiency, and economically disadvantaged status. As described above, the report cards also contain detailed information about other aspects of student achievement. *Look closely at the student achievement information. Is there an "achievement gap", where some student groups do better than others? Why is this happening? What is the school district doing to help all students? What actions should schools take to solve these problems?*
3. Rules and Regulations. Your school district must enact rules and regulations that follow NCLB requirements. These policies must explain how the district will reform local schools. *Ask the school district for a copy of its NCLB policies. Do the policies comply with NCLB requirements? How can the policies be improved to strengthen positive school reform?*

See the other side for more information.

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.

4. School Funding. Pennsylvania public schools receive millions of dollars in federal funding. NCLB is funded mostly through the Title I Program. The priority for these funds must be given to the lowest-achieving schools and the neediest students, including students in poverty, migrant children, homeless children, and children of preschool age.
Ask your school district for a copy of the Title I Program budget for local schools. Are the funds being used where they are most needed?

5. Parent Involvement Plans. Schools must form parent involvement plans when they: (a) receive Title I funds; or (b) do not make “adequate yearly progress” (AYP). All school districts must form a budget for parent involvement. Parents must receive written notice and meaningful and regular opportunities for getting involved in developing and reviewing the budgets and plans. The budget can pay for transportation and child care to help parents get involved. All of these things must improve student academic achievement.
Ask your local schools for copies of their parent involvement budget and plans. Ask to participate in developing these plans. How can schools get parents more involved?

6. Annual NCLB Plan. Your school district must file a yearly NCLB plan with the state. The local plan should describe how the district will use federal funds, will comply with NCLB rules, and will improve the academic achievement of students. The plan can cover a two-year period, but should be reviewed and updated each year. The district must involve parents in developing the plan.
Ask the school district for a copy of its NCLB plan. Call the local superintendent if you want to participate in developing the plan. How can the plan be improved?

7. Teacher Quality Issues. NCLB contains many strong tools for addressing teacher quality issues. All teachers must be “highly qualified”. Parents have a right to see the qualifications of their children’s teachers. Low-income and minority students must not be taught at higher rates than other students by unqualified, out-of-field, or inexperienced teachers. All schools and districts must have written plans and annual reports for improving teacher quality. Schools must dedicate significant funding to professional development for teachers.
Ask your local schools for copies of their plans and reports for teacher quality issues. Are the greatest needs being addressed? How can schools better address these issues?

8. School Improvement. The state reviews the annual performance of all public schools. If schools do not make “adequate yearly progress” (AYP), they are put on an “Improvement List”. Schools must tell parents and the community when they are put on the list. Schools stay on the list until they make AYP for two consecutive years. Schools must take action:
 - a. Improvement Teams. The school must form an improvement team. The state may also assign a “support team” to the school. The teams will work with school officials to make changes that improve student achievement. Parents should be included as team members.
 - b. Improvement Plan. The school must form a plan for improvement. The plan must describe how the school will implement reforms to increase student achievement. The school must involve parents in developing the plan. The district approves the plan.

GET INVOLVED TODAY. YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

How can you get more information?

- 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.*
- Call ELC for help with individual school problems for your children.
- Ask ELC to come speak with your community group or church.