

A Guide for Parents:

Helping Your Child Succeed in School



A guide to help you understand:

- No Child Left Behind
- State Learning Standards
- Parent Practices to Help Children Learn
- Parent/School Relationships



**Academic
Development
Institute**

All parents want their children to succeed in school. This guide is designed to give parents, grandparents, and other caregivers ideas and tips that will improve their children's potential for success in school. These ideas also help create a joyful family life and positive connections between *parents and children*, *parents and parents*, and *parents and their children's schools*.

Solid research shows that children from homes where parents are engaged with their children, other parents, and their children's schools:

- Earn better grades,
- Get better test scores,
- Enjoy school more, and
- Are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college.

This guide will help you understand state learning standards, the benefits provided by No Child Left Behind, and what you can do to help your child succeed in school.

Notes about the guide:

✓ TIPS YOU CAN USE

Tips you can use are marked with a purple check mark in a green box.

? QUESTIONS TO ASK

Questions you can ask to learn more from those around you are marked with a red question mark in a yellow box.

Use the Help*Check*Praise Method

Help*Check*Praise is a method parents use to develop habits and skills in their children. First, you HELP your child, by having the child do the desired action with your help. Then, you CHECK to make sure your child continues to do the task well. If he or she has trouble, more HELP may be needed. PRAISE is the final step in developing a good habit. Encourage the child to keep up the good work by giving PRAISE for a job well done.



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About ADI

The Academic Development Institute (ADI) works with families, schools, and communities so that all children may become self-directed learners, avid readers, and responsible citizens, respecting themselves and those around them. ADI's vision is of an American landscape filled with distinct school communities reflecting the hopes and dreams of the people intimately attached to them. To learn more about the work of ADI, please visit our website: www.adi.org. Learn more about No Child Left Behind at www.ed.gov/nclb.

Note: Download copies of this guide from www.adi.org.

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Part 1: State Standards and NCLB

The state learning standards are statements which define a core of basic knowledge and skills that all students enrolled in public schools are expected to know and be able to do. The schools use these standards as a guideline for teaching and testing. The standards are a way to help all the students in the state have fair, equal opportunities to learn.

A state learning standards framework sets basic guidelines for what students should know and be able to do in areas such as English/language arts, mathematics, science, social science, physical development and health, fine arts, and foreign languages. Local school boards can add their own goals and standards for their schools.

Tips for helping your child meet your state's learning standards are included in Part 2 of this guide. If you would like a copy of your state's learning standards, you can find them at public schools and public libraries or through your state's department of education.



What is No Child Left Behind?



No Child Left Behind is the federal education plan for public schools. It is designed to improve student learning and help schools do a better job of teaching. The law includes several important opportunities for parents to be involved with the schools.

A school or district can receive Title I funds if a certain percentage of its students are from low-income families. Every school district that receives federal Title I funds must have a Title I parent involvement policy that parents help to write and approve. This policy must be evaluated every year; it must explain how the district will involve parents in decision-making. Tips on becoming more involved in this process at your school are provided in Part 2 of this guide.

Title I schools that do not meet state standards are said to be “in need of improvement.” Parents of students in these schools have special rights and responsibilities, which are discussed in Part 3 of this guide.

Part 2: Good News for Parents

Research studies have shown that every parent can help their child do well in school. You don't have to understand trigonometry or buy anything special. Your parenting practices and the relationship you build with your child's school will help your child succeed. Following are proven practices that can benefit your family, with tips to help you get started, and questions to help you find more information along the way.



Parent Practices to Help Children Learn

Below are things parents know, do, or expect that help their child learn and become successful in school:

A. Parent/Child Relationship

1. Daily conversation about everyday events

- ✓ Spend a few minutes daily with each child, talking and listening with patience and love.
- ✓ Take time to understand your children's world—their friends, activities, music, etc.

2. Showing affection

- ✓ Show love to your child in many ways, from hugs to praise to special time together.

3. Family discussion of books, newspapers, magazines, and TV programs

- ✓ Talk with your child about what he/she is reading and what you are reading.

4. Family visits to libraries, museums, zoos, etc.

- ✓ Go with your children to places where learning is a family activity.

- ? Ask school personnel or other parents for ideas of free or low-cost places your family could visit together.

5. Encouragement to try new words

- ✓ Make a family game out of looking up new words—who can find the most new words in the newspaper, or who can guess the correct meaning of a new word heard on TV before you look it up in a dictionary?

B. Routine of Family Life

1. Formal study time at home

- ✓ Make daily study time a “family value,” something each child does with or without homework assignments from school.

2. A daily routine that includes time to eat, sleep, play, work, study, and read

- ✓ Establish a family routine with regular mealtimes, bedtimes, homework time, and outdoor play/exercise time.
- ✓ Make sure your child eats healthy, nutritious foods and visits a doctor and dentist regularly.

3. A quiet place to study and read

- ✓ Find a spot with good light for a reading/studying area.

4. Family interest in hobbies, games, and activities of educational value

- ✓ Share family stories and traditions; they give a sense of meaning and belonging.
- ✓ Set times for family fun, such as a regular weekly game night.



C. Family Expectations and Supervision

1. Priority given to schoolwork and reading over television and recreation

- ✓ You don't have to sell your TV, but DO set time limits on TV, computer, and phone. Too much time at a screen takes away from time your child should be spending somewhere else.

2. Children expected to be on time

- ✓ Help your children pack backpacks each night with everything they need for school.

3. Children expected to do their best and take responsibility for what they do

- ✓ Emphasize good study habits and a good attitude toward school.
- ✓ Praise your child for real effort and good attitudes about school work.

4. Concern for correct and effective use of language

- ✓ As much as you can, model proper English.
- ✓ Show and model courtesy when talking with your children by using please, thank you.

5. Parental knowledge and discussion of what is being watched on TV and computers

- ✓ Make sure you know what your child sees, and use shows as a chance to talk about values.

6. Parental knowledge of school achievement and personal growth

- ✓ Talk to your child, your child's teacher, and other school staff often.
- ✓ Check your child's progress: review report cards, attend parent-teacher conferences.
- ? Ask your child, "Tell me something you learned in (school subject)."
- ? Ask your child's teacher, "What example of responsibility or respect have you seen my child show in school?"

Parent/School Relationships that Support Children's Learning

A. Communication

Children benefit from parents and teachers talking and listening to one another. Following are some opportunities for communication:

1. Parent-teacher (and parent-teacher-student) conferences

- ✓ Take questions you have to the conference, and discuss what is on your mind.
- ✓ Let the teacher know you are watching your child's study habits and attitude toward school.
- ? Ask the teacher what he/she, you, and your child should do next to support learning.

2. Report cards

- ? Ask for a time to meet with the teacher if you have any questions or concerns about your child's report card.
- ? Ask the teacher how you can support your child in areas he/she may need to improve.

3. Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings

- ✓ Be a part of the team that makes plans for your child.
- ? Ask the teacher or principal what services are available to you and your child.

4. School or classroom newsletter and other notes from school

- ✓ Check your child's backpack daily for flyers and read them.
- ✓ Answer and return permission slips, emergency forms, and surveys.

5. Parent bulletin board

- ✓ If your school has a parent bulletin board, check it often for new information.

6. Assignment notebook

- ✓ If your child has an assignment notebook, check it daily and sign it if asked by the teacher.
- ? Ask your child's teacher if you have any questions about assignments being completed or how well they are being done.

7. General communication tips

- ✓ Set up a time to visit the classroom and meet the teacher.
- ✓ If you have a concern, set up a time to discuss it. Don't wait for a conference.
- ✓ Share any information that might help the teacher understand your child.
- ✓ Don't forget to tell the teacher, "thanks." Send a note when you especially appreciate something a teacher has done for your child.
- ✓ Know the school calendar.

B. Involvement in School and Community

Remember, research shows parent involvement **at home** has the biggest effect on a child's school success. However, there are many other ways to be involved in your child's school and community. If you can, try to participate in one or more of the ways listed here:

1. Attend school activities

- ✓ Go to school plays, sports events, and award ceremonies. Even if your child isn't participating, these events are fun and great opportunities to get to know other children, their parents, and teachers.

2. Attend parent education programs set up to help you raise your children and support their school success





3. If you can, volunteer to help at school

- ✓ Here are some ways you might help:
 - ▶ Tutor and mentor children.
 - ▶ Go on field trips.
 - ▶ Supervise the playground or lunchroom.
 - ▶ Share hobbies and talents with the class.
 - ▶ Put up bulletin boards.
 - ▶ Help with a Parents' Bulletin Board or a Family Resource Library at the school.
 - ▶ Help plan and conduct Family Reading Night (or Math Night or Game Night).
 - ▶ Collect and donate materials for projects.
 - ▶ Make costumes and props.
 - ▶ Make welcome signs.
 - ▶ Ask the teacher for any project you could do at home.
 - ▶ Offer to translate.

4. Help make decisions

- ✓ Here are some ways to help make decisions:
 - ▶ Join your school's parent organization.
 - ▶ Learn school rules and policies.
 - ▶ Serve on school committees or advisory boards.
 - ▶ Join a School Improvement Plan team.
 - ▶ Help develop a family involvement policy for your school.
 - ▶ Run for your local school council or school board.
 - ▶ Voice your support or concerns on any issue that will affect your family.

? Ask questions about any policies you don't understand.

5. Stay connected with other parents

- ✓ Try some ways to connect with other parents:
 - ▶ Meet your children's friends and their parents. Talk with the parents about their rules and expectations before your children visit them.
 - ▶ At school activities, introduce yourself to other parents, get to know them and share phone numbers.
 - ▶ Be part of your school's telephone tree if one is available.
 - ▶ Encourage other parents to get involved in their child's learning.
 - ▶ Offer to lead a parent education group.
 - ▶ Give other parents rides to school events.
 - ▶ Assist with babysitting so other parents can attend school events or conferences.

? Ask your school how you can help other parents.
 ? Ask your employer for release time to participate in school activities.

6. Stay connected with your community

- ✓ Keep a list of community resources, including contact names. This list may include the school, your place of worship, medical centers, agencies, police department, and fire department. Teach your children how to use this list.
- ✓ Have a backup plan if your children cannot reach you. Who should they call? Where should they go?
- ✓ Participate with your children in community activities, such as block club parties, holiday parades, back to school events, etc.
- ✓ Participate with your children in programs offered by your public library.
- ✓ Register your children with their pictures and fingerprints when your school or police department offers this program.
- ✓ Volunteer with your children to help in your community—for instance, at a food pantry, visiting senior citizens, neighborhood cleanup.
- ✓ Encourage local businesses to partner with your school by providing financial support, volunteers, used computers or other supplies.
- ✓ Speak out for children in the community. Join a local community or school-based group and make your voice heard.
- ✓ Make sure your local elected representatives know what's working for children and families in your community and what is missing.

C. Homework

Homework can help students practice what they've learned, explore subjects more fully than time permits in school, and develop good habits and attitudes. Homework can also bring parents and educators closer together; parents who supervise homework learn about their children's education.

Students learn best when homework is assigned regularly, graded, returned promptly, and used primarily to rehearse material first presented by the teacher at school. With this in mind, here are some tips for making homework work for your child:

1. Be positive—your attitude about homework will make all the difference!

- ✓ Tell your children how important it is to study and do their best at school.
- ✓ Expect children to study at least 10 minutes per grade level per day (for example, a 3rd grader would study for 30 minutes).

2. Set a regular study time and place

- ✓ Make sure the study place has good lighting.
- ✓ Remove distractions, including the TV and phone.
- ✓ Pick a time when your children will study each evening; don't let them wait until just before bedtime.

3. Keep supplies (paper, pens, dictionary) nearby

4. Set a good example

- ✓ Try to do some of your own "homework" while your child studies, such as bill paying, reading, writing, etc.

5. Be interested, available, and supportive

- ✓ Encourage your child to work independently. If your child asks for help, listen and provide guidance, not answers.
- ✓ Watch your children for signs of frustration or failure. Let them take a break or talk through difficulties.

6. Stay informed

- ✓ If your child is struggling with homework, approach the teacher positively, as a partner, and find out what you can both do to help your child.

? Ask the teacher at the beginning of the school year: What kinds of assignments will you give? How much time do you expect students to spend on homework? What type of involvement do you expect from parents?

7. Help your child with time management

- ✓ Have your children do harder work first, when they are most alert. Easier work will seem to go faster after that.
- ✓ Help your children keep track of assignments and due dates, especially for larger projects.

8. Reward progress and hard work

- ✓ Serve your child a snack during or after study time.
- ✓ Praise hard work—tell your child if they did well.
- ✓ Celebrate big accomplishments with a special treat (pizza, a trip to the park, etc.).



Part 3: State Standards & School Performance



A. State Standards

As described in Part 1 of this guide, state learning standards are used to help measure each child's performance in school. As a parent, you will receive a report card and other information explaining your **child's progress** in school. As described in Part 2, it is your right to have a clear explanation of these assessments, and it is your responsibility to partner with your child's teachers to ensure school success.

Because of the No Child Left Behind law, states are also required to use state learning standards to measure each **school's progress**. All school districts are required to notify each family that a report card is available showing how each school and the district as a whole is performing. This report card must also include information on how different groups of students are doing. These school report cards give parents and the public information they can use to make good choices for their children and to help their schools improve.

✓ Get a copy of the report card for your child's school. Ask for help if you have any trouble understanding it.

? Parents may ask principals to have a meeting to explain the school report card to parents and community members.

B. Report Card Information

The school report card offers information in these areas: students and instructional setting, academic performance, and adequate yearly progress.

1. Students and Instructional Setting

This section provides valuable information on average class size, staff-to-student ratios, and parental contact percentages.

? If any of these numbers concern you, (for example, an average class size over 25) ask how the school is planning to improve.

This section also contains important information about **teachers**, including the percent of teachers with emergency or provisional credentials and the percent of classes not taught by highly qualified teachers. NCLB requires that by 2006, all teachers must be "highly qualified," meaning they have a bachelor's degree, state certification, and are qualified in the subject or grade level they are teaching. All paraprofessionals (sometimes called paras or aides) must also meet qualifying standards by 2006.

? Ask your school office whether your child's teacher meets state qualifications for the grade or subject being taught.

? Ask whether paraprofessionals provide services to your child and, if so, what their qualifications are.

2. Academic Performance

This includes overall student performance and subgroup performance in reading, math, and other subjects.

✓ Notice how your school compares to its own scores the previous year, to the district, and to the state, and how subgroups' scores compare.

? Ask what is being done to improve weak areas. For example, if reading scores are low, what is your school doing to bring them up? Or, if a certain subgroup is not doing as well as others, what are possible causes and what is being done to help?

3. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is a measure of progress toward an important goal set by NCLB—the goal of all students doing well in reading and math by 2014.

If the school report card asks, "Is this school making AYP?" and answers, "No," or if it asks, "Has this school been identified for school improvement?" and answers, "Yes," your school will have consequences. Non-title I schools are subject to sanctions by the state, and Title I schools are sanctioned by NCLB, as described in the following section (C).

✓ To find report card results and other information on a school or a state, visit www.schoolresults.org.



C. If my school did not meet AYP . . . then what?

Under NCLB, if a Title I school does not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) for two years in a row, it is said to be “in need of improvement,” and it must offer parents public school choice. Schools must continue to offer school choice each year until they make AYP for two years in a row.

1. School Choice

a. Parental Notification

- ▶ Parents must be notified by their district if their child’s school is “in need of improvement.” The notices must be easy to understand and, to the extent practicable, in a language the parents can understand.
- ▶ Notices should do the following:
 1. Inform parents their child is eligible to attend another school due to less than adequate performance of the school
 2. Identify each public school (not in improvement) a parent may select for their child’s transfer
 3. Explain why the choices available may have been limited
 4. Describe the performance and quality of those schools of choice
 5. Inform parents even if no schools are eligible to receive transfers

? Ask for additional information about schools available for choice, such as any special programs or facilities, availability of after-school programs, qualifications of teachers.

- ▶ Parents have 30 days after the notice is sent to decide whether or not to request that their child be transferred to another school. Any school in their district not in need of improvement may accept students as long as they have space.

✓ If you want to transfer your child, make sure you start the process by filling out required papers before the 30-day time limit.

b. Transfer Requirements

- ▶ All students in a Title I school in need of improvement are eligible for school choice. Low-achieving, low-income students are given priority in transferring if space is limited.
- ▶ Students who transfer may stay in the new school through the highest grade it offers, as long as the family remains in the district.
- ▶ The district will pay for transportation to the new school as long as the original school remains in improvement status.
- ▶ The choice option can be exercised only once per year. A different transfer school may be chosen the next year if the original school remains in improvement status.

c. Alternatives If No Choice School Is Available

If there are no qualifying schools in the district that can accept students, the district must try to make cooperating agreements with nearby districts that do have eligible schools. If no arrangement can be made, schools must still notify parents of their school improvement status. Districts in this situation may offer supplemental educational services in the first year of school improvement.

d. Choosing to Transfer or Stay

- ✓ If you choose to stay in a school in need of improvement, follow the guidelines for helping your child outlined in Part 2 of this guide—get involved at home and at school.
- ✓ Find out what’s going well in the school and help your school build on that success.
- ? Ask the principal of a school you are considering as a choice:
 1. How do you help students who are having trouble in school?
 2. How will you help my child do better in school?
 3. How well do your students do in reading, English, math, and other subjects?
 4. How has achievement in your school changed over the last few years?
 5. How do you teach reading and math?
 6. Are all your teachers highly qualified?
 7. How will you help my child prepare for the next grade?



b. Supplemental Service Providers

- ▶ The state board of education will provide districts with an approved provider list. States will promote provider participation to offer parents as many choices as possible, and will monitor these providers to make sure they continue to offer quality, effective services.
- ▶ Providers may be a school district, a non-profit community-based or faith-based organization, or a for-profit entity.
- ▶ Your school district should provide information about each provider available in your area.
- ▶ Students with disabilities can get the same services as other students. The state list of providers must include groups and individuals who can work with students with special needs.

- ? Ask providers questions before you pick one for your child, like, “How will you help my child?” “How do you teach math or reading?” and “How will you know if my child is making progress?”
- ? Ask school staff or other parents about any experiences they have had with providers. Who do they think did a good job, and why?

2. Supplemental Educational Services

If a school does not make AYP for 3 years in a row, it must offer supplemental educational services (or “supplemental services”) to its low-income students. These services are defined by NCLB as tutoring and other high-quality academic enrichment services provided outside of school time to help students with reading, language, or math. The school district pays for this extra help; due to limited funding, low-achieving students have first priority for services.

a. Parental Notification

In the second and following years of school improvement, parents will be notified of their eligibility for school choice or supplemental services. School districts must notify parents that these services are available, identify area providers, and describe the services offered by each provider. Parents have 30 days to choose to exercise one of these options for their child.

- ✓ Note: If your child qualifies, you can choose either school choice or supplemental services for that school year, not both.
- ✓ Make sure you start the process of enrolling your child for either option before the 30-day time limit is up.





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