

Parental Engagement in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act- No Child Left Behind Act (ESEA-NCLB)

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed into law the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which remains the most comprehensive federal education legislation in the United States today. The original ESEA is best known for its first chapter, Title I, which designates increased funding to schools and districts with low-income students in order to fight poverty and improve education in high need communities.¹

When ESEA was first passed, the law did not include parental involvement requirements. Later that year, however, the U.S. Office of Education issued guidelines that schools should encourage parents to volunteer in the classroom.² President Richard Nixon enacted ESEA changes in 1973 that required all schools receiving Title I funds to establish Title One Parent Advisory Councils (TOPACs) which would have a membership elected by and composed of parents.³ TOPACs and parental involvement provisions were further strengthened in 1978. In addition to increasing TOPAC's capacity and authority to make decisions with school districts on the use of federal funds, the Education Amendments of 1978 required parents to be involved in developing programs and provided with information about Title I progress and their children's academic performance.⁴

The reauthorization of ESEA in 1982, however, weakened or eliminated many of these requirements, leaving ESEA without strong parental involvement provisions.⁵

More than a decade later, in 1994, President Bill Clinton signed legislation that represented a more comprehensive model of parental involvement in education.⁶ These changes required Title I schools to develop School-Parent Compacts outlining how students, parents, and schools would work together to meet state academic standards.⁷ The 1994 law also added multiple types of home and school involvement, and required Title I schools to spend at least one percent of their Title I funds on parental involvement.⁸

The newest version of ESEA, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (ESEA-NCLB), addresses parent and family involvement in education in a number of sections, most notably Section 1118 of Title I and Title V. Section 1118 of Title I provides the most comprehensive policies on parent involvement in education and district and school responsibilities for communication and collaboration with parents. Title V authorizes Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs), which are required to provide services to parents, schools, and the community that facilitate and develop parental involvement in education. ESEA-NCLB also contains, for the first time in law, a broad definition of parental involvement, based on the PTA National Standards for Parent and Family Involvement. Though the current ESEA-NCLB provides guidance on parental involvement, federal monitoring has found that State Education Agencies (SEAs), Local Education Agencies (LEAs), and schools are struggling to fully implement ESEA-NCLB's parental involvement requirements.⁹

One of the National Parent Teacher Association's (PTA) founding principles is its dedication to engaging parents in the education of their children. Since the PTA's inception, it has provided workshops and resources on child development to parent groups and community leaders. In 1911, PTA advocated for a separate home education division within the U.S. Bureau of Education. Quite different from the present-day home schooling movement, home education was an international movement that encouraged parents to become knowledgeable on child development and education issues. The U.S. Bureau of Education created the division and named the PTA president as its director until 1919, when the division became a separate government agency. In recent years, PTA has developed the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships as well as assessment tools to measure these standards in schools. Recognizing the importance of parent involvement in a child's education, PTA has worked to ensure that provisions encouraging parental involvement were included in the 2001 reauthorization of ESEA-NCLB. This version of ESEA-NCLB expired in 2007 and is due again for reauthorization. As Congress and the Administration focus their efforts on ESEA-NCLB, parents, PTA members, and other child advocates have a unique opportunity to improve the law by ensuring that effective family engagement in education is a cornerstone of reauthorization.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT PROVISIONS AND PROGRAMS UNDER CURRENT LAW

There are several provisions within ESEA-NCLB regarding parent involvement in education. Following is an explanation of these provisions, starting with the two most relevant sections of the law, Section 1118 of Title I and Title V, and following with an overview of the other parental involvement provisions in ESEA-NCLB.

Title I, Section 1118

This section contains ESEA-NCLB's major parental involvement requirements. Title I districts and schools receive a portion of federal funding proportionate to the amount of low-income children residing in the area. Districts receiving more than \$500,000 in Title I funds must set aside at least one percent for parental involvement activities and distribute at least 95 percent of those funds to Title I schools.

Parent Involvement Policies

Title I districts and schools must work with parents to develop written parental involvement policies at the district and school level. Districts must include the parental involvement policy in their Title I plan and distribute it to parents in a language and format that parents can access and understand. SEAs must review districts' parental involvement policies and practices to ensure they meet the requirements in Section 1118. A district's parent involvement policy must address how the district will:

- Involve parents in the joint development of its parental involvement policy and school improvement plan
- Provide coordination, technical assistance, and other support necessary to assist schools in planning and implementing effective parent involvement activities to improve student achievement
- Build schools' and parents' capacity for strong parental involvement
- Coordinate and integrate parental involvement policies created under Section 1118 with parental involvement strategies under other programs, such as Head Start
- Conduct, with parents, an evaluation of the parental involvement policy in improving the academic quality of the school, identify any barriers to greater parental participation, and revise the policy to address these challenges

At the school level, parental involvement policies detail the ways in which parents and schools will work together to meet these expectations. Schools developing a parental involvement policy are required to inform parents of their right to participate in the policy development, and to hold at least one annual meeting, at a convenient time for parents, describing the process and parents' right to participate. Schools must distribute the school policy to parents and make it available to the community.

In addition, schools must work with parents to develop a School-Parent Compact outlining each party's responsibility to support student learning and help students meet academic standards. The compact describes the school's responsibility to provide a high-quality curriculum, instruction, and learning environment and parents' responsibility for supporting student learning. At minimum, compacts must emphasize ongoing, effective parent-teacher communication in the form of annual parent-teacher conferences, frequent reports home, and reasonable opportunities for parents to contact school staff, volunteer, and participate in or observe classroom activities.

Communication

Title I schools must provide parents with timely, understandable information on school programs, curricula, assessments, and expectations. This includes offering flexible opportunities for parent meetings as requested. Title I districts and schools must inform parents and organizations of the Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs) and provide migrant, limited English proficient (LEP), and disabled parents opportunities to fully participate in their children's education. Schools may even use a portion of their one percent set aside to provide transportation, childcare, or home visits to facilitate parental involvement and communication.

Capacity Building

Title I districts and schools must also help build capacity for parental involvement in the following ways:¹⁰

- Provide technical assistance, training, and materials to parents to increase children's academic achievement
- Inform parents of state standards, assessments, Section 1118, etc
- Work with parents to educate school staff on effective parental involvement strategies
- Integrate and coordinate parental involvement efforts with other programs to encourage and support parents in more fully participating in the education of their children
- Ensure that information communicated to parents is in a format and language they can understand
- Provide other reasonable supports for parental involvement at parents' request

Title V: Parental Information and Resource Centers and Local Family Information Centers

Parental Information and Resource Centers

Sections 5561 through 5565 of Title V authorize Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs) that provide statewide leadership, capacity-building, technical assistance, training and support in the implementation of effective parent involvement policies, programs, and activities to improve student academic achievement. PIRCs are funded through a competitive grant process administered by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement. Currently, approximately \$40 million funds 62 PIRCs across the nation, with at least one in each state. Recently, PIRCs have transitioned from providing direct services to using a quality framework that creates a statewide infrastructure for parental involvement and leadership. The National PIRC Coordination Center, operated by a federally funded partnership between Southwest Educational Development Laboratory and Harvard Family Research Project, provides technical assistance and training to PIRCs to fulfill this expanded role.

Currently PIRC's responsibilities are very broad. They include:

- Serving rural and urban areas
- Using at least half of their federal grant to serve areas with high concentrations of low-income children
- Using at least 30 percent of their federal grant for early childhood parent programs
- Focusing on serving parents of low-income, minority, and LEP children
- Networking with LEAs, schools, parents, and other relevant organizations and agencies
- Coordinating the efforts of federal, state, and local agencies that provide parent involvement or family education programming and identifying proposed needs and the best means of delivery for services

PIRC funding must be used to assist parents in one or more of the following ways:¹¹

- Assisting parents in participating effectively in their children's education and helping students meet State and local standards
- Obtaining information about a range of services and programs available to assist parents and school personnel's work with parents
- Helping parents use technology
- Supporting State or local education personnel in participating in parent involvement activities
- Coordinating and integrating early childhood programs with school-age programs

Local Family Information Centers

Section 5566 of Title V authorizes Local Family Information Centers (LFICs). If PIRC appropriations were to exceed \$50 million in a fiscal year, the U.S. Secretary of Education then has the option to grant half of the exceeding amount to local nonprofit parent organizations to establish LFICs. These centers provide direct services to parents in local communities by helping them obtain the training, information, and support they need to effectively engage in their children's education and raise their academic achievement. However, because PIRCs have never received sufficient funding, LFICs have never been funded or implemented.

Other Parental Involvement Provisions in ESEA-NCLB

Parental involvement is a component of other provisions in ESEA-NCLB as well. SEAs, LEAs, and schools are required to share several sources of information with and solicit input from parents. Following is an explanation of these requirements, organized by Title and Section.

Title I: Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged

Section 1001: One of ESEA-NCLB's purposes is to provide parents with substantial and meaningful opportunities to participate in their children's education.

Section 1111: SEAs receiving Title I funds must:

- Collect and distribute to districts and schools effective parental involvement practices that are based on the most current, high-quality research
- Assist districts and schools in developing and implementing parental involvement policies and activities

- Distribute annual state report cards on student performance and teacher quality. (Districts must also distribute annual report cards on district and school performance.)

At the start of every school year, Title I districts must notify parents of children in Title I schools that those parents' can request to see the credentials of their children's teachers or paraprofessionals. Title I schools must also notify parents if their child has been taught for four or more consecutive weeks by an instructor who is not highly qualified in the content area they are teaching.

Section 1112: Districts receiving Title I funds must develop, with school staff and Title I parents, plans describing how the district will work with schools to develop and implement effective parental involvement. Title I districts must reach out to parents of LEP students to enable those parents to become more involved in their children's education and to help their children become English proficient. SEAs must annually review Title I districts' plans to ensure they meet requirements in Section 1118.

Sections 1114 and 1115: If a Title I school fails to meet state academic standards for adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years, the district must identify the school as "in need of improvement." When notifying parents that their child's school or district has been identified for improvement, Title I schools must explain how parents can become involved to help improve the school or district. Title I schools or districts in need of improvement must also develop with parents a school improvement plan or a district-wide improvement plan. If the school has a Title I School-wide Program, the school must establish strategies to increase effective parental involvement to help improve the school.

In addition, Title I districts must review the effectiveness of schools' parental involvement activities, and assist schools in need of improvement

with identifying and addressing problems in implementing Section 1118. SEAs must annually review the effectiveness of districts' parental involvement and related activities.

Section 1116: Each year, Title I districts must notify parents with children in Title I schools in need of improvement that their children can transfer to better public schools or request supplemental educational services, such as tutoring.

Section 1117: States must create statewide School Support Teams to assist Title I schools. These teams must include parents.

Section 1903: SEAs must create a Committee of Practitioners that includes parents. The committee advises the state on implementing Title I and reviews related state rules and regulations.

Title II: Preparing, Training and Recruiting High Quality Teachers and Principals

Section 2122: Districts receiving federal Title II funds must describe how the district will train teachers and principals to better involve families in their children's education, especially immigrant and LEP families. Title II also encourages districts and schools to use technology, such as e-mail and web pages, to increase parental involvement.

Title IX: General Provisions (Statutory Definition of Parental Involvement)

Section 9101: For the first time in law, ESEA-NCLB defines "parental involvement" as:

The participation of parents in regular, two-way and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring –

- A) that parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning;
- B) that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school;
- C) that parents are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child;
- D) the carrying out of other activities, such as those described in Section 1118.

RESOURCES AND CONTACT INFORMATION

For further information on the National PTA's recommendations for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA-NCLB), please see PTA's annual Public Policy Agenda. Available online at: http://www.pta.org/PTA_PublicPolicyPDF_final.pdf

If you should have any questions about ESEA-NCLB, please contact:

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(Endnotes)

- 1 Fege, A. (Winter 2006). Getting Ruby a Quality Public Education: 42 Years of Building the Demand for Quality Public Schools through Parental and Public Involvement. *Harvard Educational Review*, Volume 76, Number 4. pp. 570-86.
- 2 D'Agostino, J. et al. (2001). Title I Parent Involvement Programs: Effects on Parenting Practices in Student Achievement. In G. Boorman, S. Stringfield, and R. Slaven (Eds), *Title I: Compensatory Education at the Crossroads* (pp. 117-36). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates.
- 3 Fege, A.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 D'Agostino, J. et al. In Weiss, H. and Stephen, N. (Book in Process). Chapter 21. *From Periphery to Center: a New Vision and Strategy for Family, School, and Community Partnerships*.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 2007-08 Expanded Title I Monitoring: Parental Involvement. Student Achievement and School Accountability Programs (SASA). U.S. Department of Education. p. 4.
- 10 Section 1118 lists many optional capacity building activities as well.
- 11 Section 5564 lists other "permissive activities" for PIRCs but does not require PIRCs to implement one or any of the permissive activities and programs.



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