

## **Title I as a Tool for Parent Involvement**

How does the law require that parents be involved?

### **I. Building Parents' Capacity for Involvement**

Under Title I schools are required to provide assistance to parents to help them understand the National Education Goals and the standards and assessments which will be used to determine children's progress. Schools are also required to help parents understand the Title I law and how to help their children. Each school district (except the smallest ones) is required to spend at least 1% of its Title I funds on training/education program for parents. Parents must be involved in decisions about how that money is to be spent. In fact, parents must jointly develop and approve the district and school's parent involvement policies which should spell out how this money is spent.

#### **WHAT YOU CAN DO:**

- Work with the school district in planning use of the 1% (or more) of its Title I funds.
- Make sure that the school/school district is working with all parents to make sure that they understand what high standards all children should meet and how all children will be assessed. (What kinds of tests will be used, for example, or alternative ways of measuring progress?)
- Make sure that parents of students with disabilities or of limited English proficiency have the same access to information as all other parents, including getting information in a language and form they can understand, and that activities and meetings are conducted in a language they understand.
- Make sure that, as required, schools educate teachers, principals, and other staff in how to work well with parents, the importance of parental involvement, and that parents have a chance to help design and develop training for school personnel. This is allowed under the law.
- Make sure that parents understand all aspects of their children's education. If there are issues parents do not understand, ask the school system to hold sessions to teach parents about those things.

### **II. Parent Involvement Policies**

#### **A. Local Education Agency Parent Involvement Policy**

Each local educational agency (LEA) must have a parent involvement policy, jointly developed with, and approved by, and distributed to parents. This policy must outline how the LEA will:

- involve parents in the joint development of the LEA Title I plan.

- build parents' capacity for involvement. Parents must have the tools they need in order to participate fully in decisions regarding their children's education.
- Coordinate strategies with parents in other programs, such as Even Start and Head Start.
- conduct annual evaluations of the effectiveness of parent involvement.
- use the results of the annual evaluations in designing strategies for school improvement, and revising the parent involvement policy as needed.

Sometimes, "approval" is interpreted by school districts as requiring a signature on a form, proving that parents have "approved" something. In fact, joint development and approval should mean something far more. Schools must give parents the information they need to be full participants in their children's education. Schools must give parents the information they need and parents should have a meaningful role in the process of planning for and implementing school change.

#### WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Talk to parents to determine if the parent involvement policy in place is effective, and whether they were involved in drafting it. Work with a group of parents to decide how it could be a stronger tool for improving the quality of the district Title I program, and determine how to use the stronger language in the law -- that the policy be "jointly developed with" and "approved by" parents -- to ensure a voice for parents in the process. For example, the written policy should ensure that parents have:

- approval over the LEA's Title I plan.
- training on such topics as parents deem necessary to participate fully in the Title I planning, review, and implementation processes, and the provision of other services which will facilitate parental involvement (child care, transportation, flexible meetings, etc). These expenses can be paid for by the 1% of Title I funds that districts must spend to facilitate parent involvement. If your district receives less than \$500,000 in Title I funds, and thus is not required to spend 1% of its funds on parent involvement, the LEA and schools must still work to build the capacity of parents to be full participants in their children's education.
- approval over expenditure of the 1% of Title I funds that schools must spend to facilitate parent involvement.

The policy should be as specific as possible. A policy which only repeats the law's requirements without spelling out how an LEA will meet the requirement is inadequate. For example the parent involvement policy should articulate how parents will be assured adequate and meaningful involvement, including a schedule of meetings and trainings, an outline of the approval process of the Title I plan and expenditure of funds to facilitate parent involvement, and a discussion of how other parent involvement requirements of the law will be met.

#### **B. School Parent Involvement Policy**

Each school which receives Title I funds must have a parent involvement policy as part of its Title I plan. This policy must be developed jointly with, approved by and distributed to parents and must include a description of how the school will:

- convene an initial annual meeting for parents to explain Title I.
- offer flexible meetings for parents. Such meetings should include time to share experiences, brainstorm about creative programs to involve parents, and participate in decisions about the education of their children.
- involve parents in planning, review, and improvement of the program.
- give parents timely information about the program, including a description of the school curriculum and the assessments used to measure student progress.
- implement a school-parent compact, which outlines how schools, parents, and students will share responsibility for ensuring student achievement. (See discussion below)
- build capacity to ensure the effective involvement of parents. Each school and district must provide assistance to parents to help them understand standards and assessments, and the educational program which will help their children meet the standards. Schools and districts are to provide training and materials and must coordinate with other programs, such as literacy training programs, in order to help parents help their children at home. Schools must also help teachers, principals, and other staff work well with parents.

If the school has a parental involvement policy for all parents it may be amended to meet the requirements of Title I.

#### WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Find out if our school already has a parent involvement policy. If it does, get a copy of it, and talk to parents to determine if it is effective. If it is not effective, or if there is no policy in place, work with a group of parents to determine how to develop a strong parent involvement policy. Suggestions include:

- ensuring that parents have approval of the school wide program plan, and approval of decisions made about how to plan and carry out Title I programs in Targeted Assistance Schools.
- planning meetings at flexible times so that the maximum number of parents can be involved.
- making sure that child care and transportation are provided for parents, if necessary. These expenses can be paid for by the 1% of Title I funds that districts must spend to facilitate parent involvement.
- holding periodic, scheduled meetings at the school with teachers, administrators, and other school staff to discuss the Title I curriculum, standards and assessments, or innovative strategies the school is using to improve student learning.
- determining what training parents think is necessary to enable them to participate fully in their children's education, and planning for those sessions.

### III. School-Parent Compacts

Title I requires each school that receives Title I funds to develop jointly with parents a school-parent compact that outlines how parents, school staff, and students will share responsibility for ensuring improved student achievement. The compact must also outline how schools and parents will work together to help Title I students achieve the high content and performance standards set by the state for all students.

This compact must do a number of things:

1. Describe the school's responsibility to provide high quality curriculum and instruction in a supportive and effective environment which will enable students to meet the state standards.
2. Describe how parents will be responsible for supporting their child's learning. Examples given in the law are monitoring whether children have finished their homework and how much television children watch.
3. Address the importance of communication between teachers and parents. Schools will be required to provide at least:
  - parent-teacher conferences in elementary schools, at least once a year, when parents and teachers will discuss the compact as it relates to an individual child's achievement.
  - frequent reports to parents on their children's progress [frequent is not defined].
  - reasonable access to staff and to classrooms to observe activities [reasonable is not defined].

#### WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Title I requires that parents be involved in developing the school plan, but it does not require that parents approve the school plan. Therefore it is extremely important that the school-parent compact be a strong tool for parental involvement in the school's Title I program.
- Find out how to get involved in drafting the school-parent compact. Make sure that the school knows how important this process is. and that many different parents are involved in the process. Every parent should have an opportunity to participate in the drafting of the compact.
- Make sure that the compact outlines exactly how the school must provide a "supportive and effective" environment for all students. This is key to ensuring that schools have high quality teachers, resources, and the facilities needed.
- Make sure that the compact is specific. For example, it could define how often the school must report to parents on children's progress; and "reasonable access" to staff and classrooms to observe activities.
- Make sure that these compacts will provide all parents a guarantee from the school that they will receive all of the information they need in order to make

decisions about their children's education. Remember, plans, budgets, evaluations, etc. are public documents and must be available to your parent group if you ask.

- Think about how you can support your child's education, as the compact also outlines the role of parents. However, parents and families have certain privacy rights with respect to their home life which should not be violated. The compact should specifically state that families' rights of privacy will not be violated. Moreover, schools and parents must work to ensure that this privacy is honored.