

A Parent's Guide to Improving School Achievement

All children can learn, and all children deserve a quality education. Our schools face a variety of obstacles in meeting the needs of students from diverse backgrounds and economic circumstances. By working with parents and communities, schools can overcome these obstacles. This guide is for parents who want to help their children, and all children, reach their potential.

How can I work with my child's teacher to support school success?

It is important that your child see that you and her teacher have a mutually respectful relationship. Teachers have training and experience to help your child do well in school. If your child is having difficulty, her teacher will usually know what kind of extra support she needs and be able to help you find that support. Teachers should feel comfortable approaching you with information about your child. They should take time to communicate positive information as well as areas of concern.

As a parent, you see your child outside of school and are aware of strengths and interests not always seen in the classroom. You should communicate with the teacher about these strengths and interests, because the teacher may be able to adapt lessons to match students' learning styles and interests. You and the teacher are powerful allies supporting your child's education. You both should have high expectations for your child. You can support learning at home by, for example, assisting with homework and taking time to talk to your child about school. Ask the teacher for specific suggestions about how you can support your child's learning. Make sure your child is prepared for school each day.

What should I look for in the ways the school's principal, teachers and parents relate to each other?

Principals, teachers and parents are all important for children and their learning. The relationships among these partners should be positive and based on mutual respect.

The principal sets the tone for the school and should treat both teachers and parents with respect. The principal should encourage you as a parent to be involved in your child's education, and she should welcome your input in school decisions. The principal should encourage communication between teachers and parents.

Is my child's school a part of the community it serves?

It is important for the school and community to work together for high student achievement. Each community's strengths and weaknesses impact its schools. Strengthening the parent-school-community connection makes a school more effective.

Here are some ideas to get you started thinking about school and community.

- Does the school respect the backgrounds and cultures of its students?

- Does the school invite parents and community groups into the school to celebrate their backgrounds and cultures — in classrooms, in the halls, during evening activities?
- Do classrooms reflect the community's cultures and the challenges faced by students?
- Does the school offer supports, such as after-school programs, for its students and families?
- As a parent, do you work with the school to share your culture? Do you talk with the principal and teachers about how parents and community members can support the school?

The school should be part of its community, as well as provide children with a place where they feel safe. This is best accomplished when the school reaches out to the community — and parents reach in to the school.

My school sends me notices, but I don't always understand them. Is there anyone who can help me?

Over 30 years of research has shown that parent involvement is critical to children's success in school. You should feel welcome and valued at your child's school. If you have questions about your child's education or don't understand the papers you receive from the school, ask for assistance. The ["No Child Left Behind" Act](#) (a federal law that went into effect in January 2002 and is also called the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001) says that information regarding your child's education must be in a language and format you understand. This includes report cards, information about opportunities available to your child and most other communications from the school.

Ask your school if it has a parent coordinator. If it does not, ask that someone be named as a contact for parents. Work with your principal to ensure that all documents are translated into languages that are spoken in students' homes.

I'm worried that my child is losing interest in school.

Many parents experience this concern. While there is no magic solution, there are some common ingredients to keep children interested in school.

First, work with your school to create an environment of caring and respect among parents, teachers, students and the school administration. Students who lose interest often feel that the school doesn't "get them" or care about them. If this is what is happening, talk with the school counselor or the principal.

Second, figure out if your child is either bored or overwhelmed. Children who are not challenged in school may lose interest. Talk with your child's teacher about ways to stimulate interest. Children who are overwhelmed by school will often lose interest. If you sense your child is feeling lost, speak with the teacher about what can be done to help her catch up and stay on track.

Third, children may lose interest if school learning doesn't seem connected to their lives. Work with your child to show how school does connect to his life and to the world outside school.

Finally, speak with other parents who share the same concerns. You may want to form a support group to learn from each other and search for solutions so that you don't feel alone.

What else?

There are many more ways a school and parents can work together to help all students achieve. Explore NEA's [Help for Parents section](#) or the [National PTA Web site](#), read our [guide to parental involvement](#), or call the PTA Customer Service line (1-800-307-4782) to find out more ways that you can get involved in your child's education.

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