

Parent Options: For Parents Who Don't Transfer

No Child Left Behind became law in 2002. Since then, parents have been told about their option to transfer out of low performing schools (schools that do not make enough progress for two years in a row). Many parents have decided not to leave their neighborhood school and many districts have no schools for students to transfer into. Here are 10 options for parents who stay:



1 Find out what's going well in the school and build on that. Even with bad news and challenges, it's important to find and celebrate successes. Use good work in one area to make good work in other areas.

Get extra help for your child. If the school does not meet its learning goals for three straight years, your child may get extra help, such as after-school tutoring, paid for by the federal government. Some schools give extra help after the second year to keep parents in the school. You can press your school to do this. Check to see what extra help your school is providing. Often this support is provided by local agencies such as a YMCA, library, or Boys and Girls Club.



3 Help your child at home. Parents can do a lot: set high goals, make sure your child has a quiet place to study, read together, make sure your child gets to school on time and is doing his homework regularly. This is important, because parent involvement can — and does — improve student achievement. For hundreds of specific suggestions, check out www.pta.org or www.ed.gov/parents or call PIRCCA at 334-567-2252.

Get involved at the school. Don't feel you can only be involved at home. Parents also can help at school — a lot — and schools should make them feel welcome. Find out when parents can visit classrooms to observe and volunteer. What hours will the principal be available to meet with parents? Where do parents need to check in for visits to the schools? Do parents feel welcome when they visit?



Make sure your voice is heard at school. The No Child Left Behind law says you have a right to act on your school's improvement team. These teams are principals, teachers and parents, and set the school's priorities, such as deciding whether to hire an extra reading teacher or reduce class size. Many schools have gotten limited input from parents in the past and their plans often sit on the shelf. Now that schools face real consequences, such as losing students, there's a better chance that these plans will actually be used — and your voice will count. When you work together with other parents, you're more likely to have power and influence.



Make sure the school's improvement plan focuses on areas where the school is not doing well.

All schools now have to publish annual report cards, showing how *all* students are doing in reading and math. If the data show that math scores are low, for instance, you'll want to make sure that the school's improvement plan has steps for making the math program better. Maybe the school will spend more time on math during the school day, create an after-school program to help struggling students, improve staff training for teachers and so on. These annual report cards also need to describe how different groups of students are performing. For instance, if low-income students are lagging, the school improvement plan should describe what will be done to help those students. Start by asking if *all* classes offer high-quality teaching and a challenging curriculum so that all children will meet the standards?



Get a copy of your school's parent involvement policy from the principal, parent liaison or head of your school's parent group. Make sure it spells out how parents will be involved in meaningful ways in making decisions about the academic program. What is the process for obtaining parent input and approval of key decisions? What should the school do to make meetings and other events convenient and helpful to families? Are times flexible, is there transportation and childcare, is there enough advance notice, do the topics reflect the interests of families?



Find out what other parents think about the parent involvement policy and whether it covers their concerns. Ask them how it could be stronger. What kind of supports do they want from the school to help them be more involved, both in improving the program and in helping their children? How would they like to be involved? What kind of training will parents get in order to better understand the school's academic standards and tests?

Make sure your school has a school-parent compact was developed with and approved by parents. All Title I schools in Alabama must have compacts. The compact should describe how teachers and parents will be partners to improve student achievement. This compact should explain how the school will meet the needs of its students so that they will achieve high standards.



Make sure the compact outlines how the school will provide a helpful and effective learning environment for all students. For example, will children get extra help as soon as they need it? What kind of help? Will the school offer staff development for teachers? How will teachers keep parents informed about how their children are doing? What support will teachers give families to help their children at home?

At PIRCCA, we know that parents can help improve student achievement. PIRCCA works with parents and teachers at low performing schools in Central Alabama. We offer a wide range of materials, workshops and strategic advice to parent groups, community organizations, faith-based groups, business leaders, and teachers who are committed to ensuring that all American children, no matter what their background, get the kind of education they'll need to lead productive lives.



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