

10 Tips for Parents Who Choose To Stay Put

Since the No Child Left Behind law was signed in January 2002, most of the attention has been on the choice provisions — particularly the requirement that low-income schools that fail to meet their learning goals for two years in a row must allow parents to transfer their child to a school with higher scores. Headlines from New York to San Francisco have shown how tough it has been to make this policy work: late and/or inaccurate data from states to school districts, late notification from districts to parents, letters that parents find hard to understand, and choices that they don't like — such as a long, cross-town bus or subway ride. In many rural districts, there are no choices.

Lost in the debate has been an equally important issue: What happens to parents who choose to keep their children in their neighborhood school? What can they do secure a better education for their child?

Here are 10 specific options for parents:

1

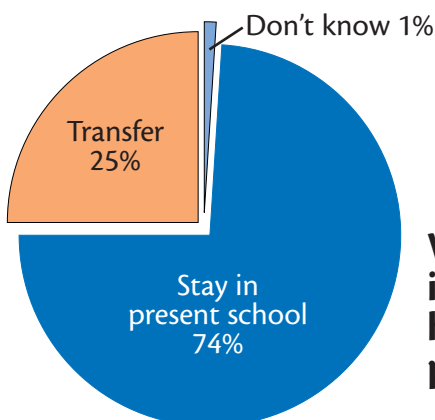
Find out what's going well in the school and build on that.

Amid the inevitable bad news and challenges, it's important to identify and celebrate successes. And to use good work in one area to motivate and promote good work elsewhere.

2

Get extra help for your child.

If the school fails to meet its learning goals for three straight years, your child is eligible for additional academic help, such as after-school tutoring, paid for by the federal government. Some schools offer 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 community organizations such as a local YMCA, library, or Boys and Girls Club.



Would you transfer your child to a school identified as not in need of improvement or have additional efforts made in your child's present school?

Source: 2003 Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup Poll

3

Help your child at home.

Parents can do a lot: set high expectations, 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 research shows that parent involvement can — and does — improve student achievement. For hundreds of specific suggestions, check out www.pta.org or www.ed.gov/parents.

4

Get involved at the school.

Don't feel that your involvement must happen only at home. Parents also can help at school — a lot — and should be welcomed warmly. Find out when parents can visit classrooms to observe and vol-

unteer. What hours will the principal be available to meet with parents? What are the security procedures for visits to the schools? Are parents made to feel welcome when they visit?

How Welcoming Is Your Child's School?

Is your school a Fortress, Come-If-We-Call or Partnership School? Go to www.ksaplus.com and take a quick quiz to find out.

5

Make sure your voice is heard at school.

According to the No Child Left Behind law, you have a right to participate on your school's improvement team. Made up of principals, teachers and parents, these teams are responsible for setting 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.

6

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 strengthening the math program. 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 (see the example at right). 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?

ABC Elementary School Eighth-Grade Math Percentage of Students Proficient

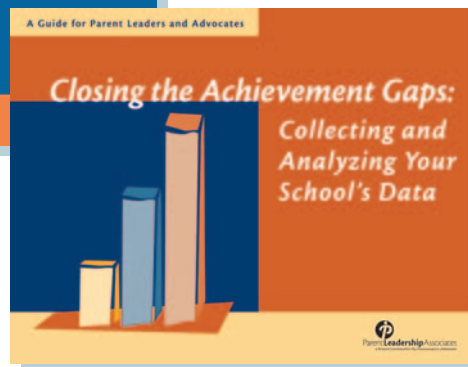
Total	64%
Black	38%
White	73%
Hispanic	42%
Low-income	25%
Learning disabled	16%
English language learners	25%

7

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?

Use our two-volume *Closing the Achievement Gaps* guides to see how well your school is educating *all* students.



Available at www.ksaplus.com.

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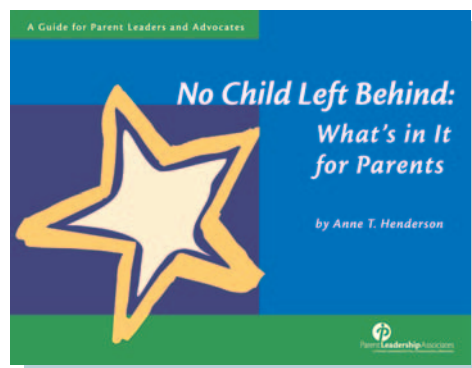
Find out what other parents think about the parent involvement policy and whether it covers their concerns. Ask

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?

9

Make sure your school has a school-parent compact, developed with and approved by parents. The compact should

describe how educators and parents will build a partnership 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.



Details on parent involvement policies, school-parent compacts and other No Child Left Behind requirements are available at www.ksaplus.com.

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Make sure the compact outlines how the school will provide a supportive 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 KSA-Plus Communications, we know that knowledgeable, engaged parents improve student achievement. Students win, educators win, communities win. We offer a wide range of materials, workshops and strategic advice to parent groups, community organizations, housing coops, faith-based groups, business leaders, elected officials and educators 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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