



How to Make Sure Your Child Is Not Left Behind

A Connecticut Parent's Guide to Advocating for Equal Educational Opportunities

CONNECTICUT APPLESEED
CONNECTICUT COALITION FOR ACHIEVEMENT NOW (CONNCAN)
CONNECTICUT STATE CONFERENCE OF NAACP BRANCHES
LAWYERS' COMMITTEE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS UNDER LAW



Connecticut Appleseed



Parent Empowerment

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for Equal Educational Opportunities
April 2007

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Introduction

*n*o Child Left Behind (NCLB) is a federal law passed in 2002 that aims to close the achievement gaps between low-income and higher-income students and students of color and their white peers. NCLB combines increases in federal support for public schools with greater **accountability** for results. It introduced new requirements that schools must meet in terms of student achievement, teacher quality, and parental choice.

Because of these new requirements and the higher expectations they set, NCLB has become the 900-pound gorilla sitting in every public school classroom. After five years of operation, many teachers and administrators are frustrated with these requirements, and the public has primarily heard criticism of NCLB without learning about the advantages.

For example, while the tests required by NCLB take time and effort, they also provide an important tool for parents to help monitor what is happening, or not happening, in their children's schools. NCLB also provides parents and students:

- **FREE TUTORING SERVICES;**
- **THE RIGHT TO TRANSFER TO A HIGHER-PERFORMING SCHOOL IN THE DISTRICT; AND**
- **A VOICE IN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANS.**

This guidebook is designed to empower parents to take control of their children's educational opportunities and to work to close Connecticut's over-sized achievement gap. Overall, this guidebook embraces two primary goals:

- 1. TO INFORM PARENTS ABOUT THEIR RIGHTS UNDER NCLB.**
- 2. TO SHOW PARENTS HOW TO USE THE TOOLS AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE UNDER NCLB TO BECOME EFFECTIVE ADVOCATES FOR THEIR CHILDREN.**

As you read through this guidebook, you will find educational terms highlighted in **bold**. Please refer to page 37, "Common Terms Every Parent Should Know," for definitions of these terms.

We hope that Connecticut parents, together with their communities, will use this guidebook over the course of their children's education to develop the know-how to achieve significant changes in their schools and their children's futures!

Collaborating Organizations

Connecticut Appleseed

A statewide, non-partisan non-profit organization that addresses Connecticut social problems by deploying volunteer lawyers to achieve large-scale change through legal and legislative advocacy, negotiation, education and other initiatives. Using the results of its six-state research report, Improving Parental Involvement in the Wake of No Child Left Behind, Connecticut Appleseed works with other organizations to emphasize the importance of parental involvement and to educate parents on their rights and roles in strengthening schools.

**25 Dudley Road
Wilton, Connecticut 06897
203.210.5356**

www.ctappleseed.org

Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization established in 1963 at the request of President John F. Kennedy to involve the private bar in providing legal services to address racial discrimination and to secure equal justice under law. The Lawyers' Committee's Education Project vigorously advocates for equal educational opportunities for minority and poor youth within the nation's public schools through legal and legislative advocacy and community education.

**1401 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20005
202.662.8600**

www.lawyerscommittee.org

Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now (ConnCAN)

A statewide outreach, education, and research non-profit organization with an active member network of parents, teachers, students, and business and community leaders. ConnCAN's mission is to close Connecticut's academic achievement gap by raising awareness of the problem, building consensus on reform initiatives, and empowering parents to make informed choices regarding their child's education.

**429 Capitol Ave, 2nd Floor
Hartford, Connecticut 06106
860.727.9977**

**85 Willow Street
New Haven, Connecticut 06511
203.772.4017**

www.conncan.org

Connecticut State Conference of NAACP Branches

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the nation's oldest civil rights organization, works to ensure the political, educational, social and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate racial hatred and racial discrimination.

**32 Grand Street
Hartford, Connecticut 06106
860.727.9962**

www.naacpct.org

1: Achievement Gap

WHAT IS THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP?

A nationwide phenomenon where lower-income, African-American and Hispanic students as a group do worse academically and score lower on standardized tests than other students. The achievement gap is often the result of:

1. LOWER QUALITY TEACHING AND CURRICULA,
2. LOWER STANDARDS AND EXPECTATIONS OF ACHIEVEMENT, AND
3. LESS ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY LEARNING ACTIVITIES.

CONNECTICUT HAS THE NATION'S LARGEST ACHIEVEMENT GAP

There is a big difference in the quality of public education Connecticut students receive based on their residence, their parents' incomes, and the color of their skin.

In the fourth grade, for example, the difference in academic achievement between poor and non-poor students in Connecticut is 3.0 grade levels (the worst in the nation). This gap grows to 3.3 grade levels by the eighth grade, meaning that as a whole, low-income eighth graders in Connecticut generally have the same reading and math skills of non-poor students halfway through the fourth grade.

The gap is even larger along racial lines, with **8th grade African American** students performing math on the level of a white

student halfway through the third grade, putting them **nearly five years behind!** The gap between Connecticut's Latino and white students on the eighth grade math test is slightly smaller (3.9 grade levels), but still large enough to make it the worst in the nation.

The **largest gap of all is between Connecticut's poorer cities and wealthy suburbs.** In 2006, 79% of the high school students in our wealthiest suburbs reached the state goal in math, compared to only 12% in New Haven, Bridgeport, Hartford, and Waterbury.

Remember, KNOWLEDGE is POWER. The more information parents have about student performance in school, the better they can advocate for their children.

Reality of Achievement Gap Your Child May Be:

- **HELD BACK IN SCHOOL;**
- **DENIED CRITICAL READING, WRITING AND MATH SKILLS; AND**
- **DENIED A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA.**

The Result: No Higher Education, No Career Opportunities, Less Income

What Can Connecticut Parents Do About The Achievement Gap?



**ACTION
SUMMARY**

STEP UP AND LET SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND THE STATE KNOW that these kinds of achievement gaps in Connecticut public schools are **UNACCEPTABLE**.

WORK WITH SCHOOLS TO SUPPORT REFORMS AND WORK WITH STUDENTS to help them improve their learning.

MONITOR THE PROGRESS OF YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION and hold schools accountable for results.

USE NCLB to your advantage.

2: No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Basics

How Does It Work?

- STATES MUST DEVELOP HIGH-QUALITY AND RIGOROUS CURRICULA FOR ALL STUDENTS.
- STATES MUST TEST STUDENTS TO ENSURE THEY HAVE LEARNED SKILLS IN CORE SUBJECT AREAS (MATH, SCIENCE & READING)
- EVERY CLASSROOM MUST HAVE A **HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHER**.
- SCHOOLS MUST PROVIDE MORE CHOICES AND SERVICES TO PARENTS.

NCLB, SUBGROUPS AND THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

- NCLB DATA SHOWS PARENTS THE GAP BETWEEN **SUBGROUPS**, AND TELLS PARENTS WHETHER OR NOT SCHOOLS ARE SUCCEEDING IN CLOSING THE GAPS.
- NCLB MOVES LOW-INCOME STUDENTS, STUDENTS OF COLOR, ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS, AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FRONT AND CENTER AND HOLDS SCHOOLS ACCOUNTABLE FOR GETTING RESULTS.
- SCHOOLS, SCHOOL DISTRICTS, AND STATES CAN NO LONGER USE THE SCORES OF HIGH-PERFORMING STUDENTS TO COVER UP THEIR FAILURE TO MEET THE NEEDS OF LOWER-PERFORMING STUDENTS.

ADEQUATE YEARLY PROGRESS

Each state sets its own levels of student improvement in order to meet the goals of NCLB. These levels are known as **Adequate Yearly Progress** or “AYP.” AYP in Connecticut means:

- 95% OF STUDENTS IN A SUBGROUP MUST TAKE STATE ASSESSMENT TESTS.
- EACH SUBGROUP IN A SCHOOL MUST MEET A STANDARD OR SHOW PROGRESS UNDER AN ADDITIONAL ITEM, SUCH AS WRITING OR GRADUATION RATE.
- A CERTAIN PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS IN EACH SUBGROUP MUST PASS THE STATE TESTS IN EACH OF THE SUBJECTS AND GRADES TESTED WITH THE GOAL OF 100% OF STUDENTS IN EACH SUBGROUP PASSING THESE TESTS BY 2014.

ANNUAL REPORT CARDS—CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Schools and school districts are required to distribute test results to parents with the following information:

- STUDENT AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE (SEPARATED BY SUBGROUP) AND WHETHER OR NOT THE SCHOOL MET AYP REQUIREMENTS.
- SCHOOL DISTRICT PERFORMANCE.
- PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS NOT TESTED (SEPARATED BY SUBGROUP).
- TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS.

Schools face different NCLB requirements when they fail to make AYP and must offer students and parents certain services and options depending on their status.

Failure/Sanctions

Doesn't make AYP for:	Status	NCLB Requirements	Student-Parent Entitlements
2 years	In Need of Improvement	School must develop a 2 year plan explaining how it will improve. School must notify parents.	Child may request to transfer to a higher performing school within the district. Lowest achieving students from low income families requesting transfers receive first priority.
3 years	In Need of Improvement	Same as above	Low income students are eligible to receive Supplementary Educational Services (SES, e.g. free tutoring).
4 years	Identified for Corrective Action	School must replace staff, establish new curriculum, appoint outside expert to help restructure	School must consult and send notice to parents before any corrective action is taken. Students continue to have the right to transfer and receive SES.
5 years	Failing school	School district may close school and reopen it as a charter school, permit a private entity to operate school, or turn the school over to the state	School district must continue to offer school choice and SES. Parents can voice their opinion to the school district and state regarding the type of restructuring preferred for the school.

3: NCLB and Connecticut Parents

*n*ow that you have read about the basics, this section describes important aspects of NCLB that parents must know about in order to make the law work for their children and their communities. Throughout this section, we provide specific action points that every parent can take to exercise their rights under NCLB.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT POLICIES

Every year the school district must give parents a written copy of their parental involvement policy. **It is your responsibility as a parent to read these policies and ask the school questions about information that you do not understand.**

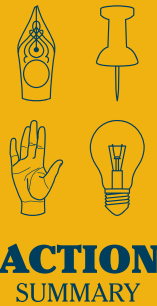
NCLB also requires every school receiving Title I money to develop a **School-Parent Compact**. This Compact must:

- **OUTLINE RESPONSIBILITIES FOR STUDENTS LEARNING AT HOME AND IN SCHOOL.**
- **DESCRIBE HOW SCHOOLS AND PARENTS WILL COMMUNICATE.**

A school district must set aside funds for parental involvement activities, with at least 1 percent of its Title I, Part A funding used for these activities if it receives more than \$500,000.

Under the law, parents with students in Title I schools have the right to tell the school how they would like the school to spend these funds.

What Can Connecticut Parents Do About Parental Involvement Policies?



CONTACT THE SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE for a copy of the district's parental involvement policies.

THINK ABOUT HOW YOU IDEALLY WOULD LIKE TO BE INVOLVED WITH THE SCHOOL AND YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION. What are some ways you and the school can make your ideas happen?

ASK THE SUPERINTENDENT'S AND THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. How do you seek parent advice to improve my child's school?
2. How can I provide advice?
3. What are some challenges with parental involvement?
4. What types of parental activities do you offer?
5. How can I participate?
6. How much funding is available for parental activities? How can I receive funding if I want to organize a parental activity?
7. How do schools utilize Title I school-parent compacts?

FILE A COMPLAINT THROUGH A CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION grievance procedure if your school or school district is not following its parental involvement policies or NCLB parental involvement requirements.

4: NCLB Testing in Connecticut

the Connecticut State Department of Education issues the following tests to students in order to comply with NCLB, to track school and district progress, and to provide information to parents on their child's performance.¹

- **CONNECTICUT MASTERY TEST (CMT):** EVERY YEAR IN MARCH ALL STUDENTS IN GRADES 3–8 TAKE READING, MATH, AND WRITING TESTS.
- **CONNECTICUT ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE TEST (CAPT):** IN GRADE 10, STUDENTS TAKE THE READING, WRITING, SCIENCE, AND MATH TEST IN MARCH.

How Should I Review My Child's Scores?

When reviewing, ask and search for answers to the following questions:

- **HOW DID MY CHILD PERFORM?**
- **WHAT ARE HIS OR HER STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES?**
- **WHERE DOES MY CHILD FALL SHORT? (SCHOOL, DISTRICT, STATE, NATIONAL)**
- **HOW DO THESE TEST SCORES COMPARE WITH MY CHILD'S GRADES AND CURRICULUM?**
- **WHAT IS MY CHILD LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM? WHAT KIND OF HOMEWORK DOES HE OR SHE RECEIVE?**

How Should I Review School AND District Report Cards?

Please note that test results are available to the public at the end of July. The state posts results on its Connecticut Online Report Center: www.ctreports.com.

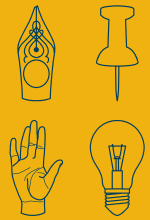
- **HOW DID THE SCHOOL DO?**
- **HOW DID THE DISTRICT DO?**
- **ARE THERE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS? HOW LARGE?**
- **HOW WOULD I LIKE THE SCHOOL TO IMPROVE?**
- **WHAT WOULD I LIKE TO DO TO IMPROVE MY CHILD'S SKILLS AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES?**

ConnCAN School AND District Report Cards

The Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now or "ConnCAN" is a non-profit organization independent from the public school system and government agencies. ConnCAN understands that parents may have difficulty understanding all the numbers and categories on an NCLB report card. Therefore, it creates its own report cards to help parents monitor their children's education.

¹ In 2005, the state of Connecticut sued the US Department of Education over the cost of testing under NCLB. The state of Connecticut claimed that the federal government has not provided enough money to pay for the assessments that NCLB requires of all Connecticut students. The Connecticut branch of the NAACP intervened in this NCLB lawsuit, and the Lawyers' Committee joined the NAACP as one of its co-counsel. The NAACP argues that the state's costly lawsuit hurts poor and minority children by diverting resources that could be used to improve struggling schools away from education. As of April 2007, the case is still pending; but the judge has dismissed most of the state's complaints.

What Can I Do To Help My Child Prepare For NCLB Tests?



**ACTION
SUMMARY**

ASK YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL IF THEY ARE USING INTERIM or formative assessments throughout the school year to ensure that students are on track to score at "Goal" or above on the state tests.

ASK YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL FOR PRACTICE EXAMS.

ASK YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER ABOUT THE SKILLS and content that will be tested.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF IN-SCHOOL PRACTICE TESTS given during the months leading up to CMT or CAPT.

MAKE SURE YOUR CHILD UNDERSTANDS all test instructions before the test.

DISCOURAGE YOUR CHILD FROM CRAMMING the night before the test.

MAKE SURE YOUR CHILD HAS A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP and breakfast.

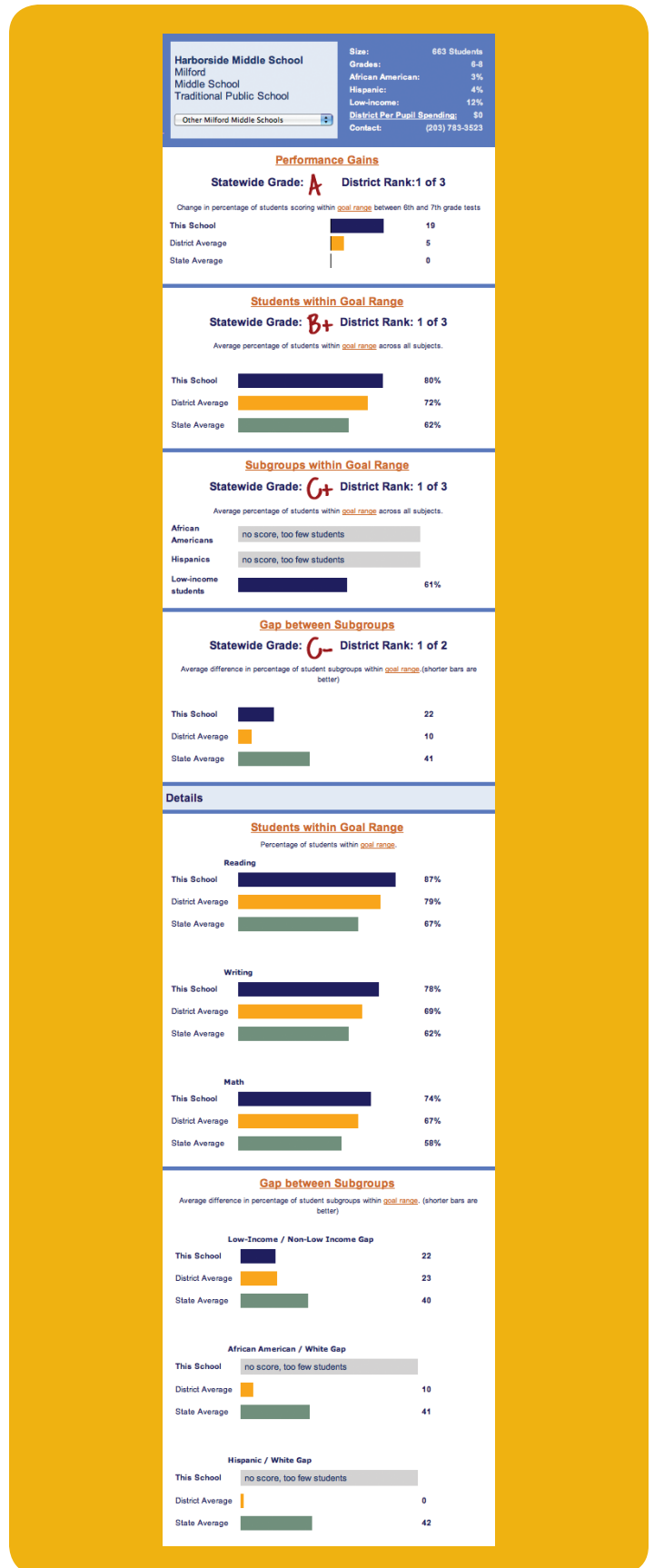
OFFER YOUR CHILD LOTS OF ENCOURAGEMENT.

KNOW THE DATES OF THE TEST, and make sure that your child is in school during the testing sessions. Do not plan any vacations, doctor or dental appointments on test dates.

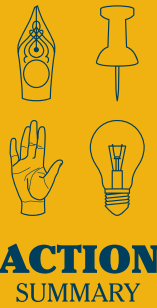
ConnCAN report cards calculate and separate NCLB data into four easy-to-understand sections displayed through parent-friendly charts and letter grades:

1. **STUDENTS WITHIN GOAL RANGE: THE AVERAGE PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS MEETING THE STATE GOALS FOR THEIR GRADE LEVEL ACROSS THE SUBJECT AREA TESTED.**
2. **SUBGROUPS WITHIN GOAL RANGE: THE AVERAGE SUBGROUP PERFORMANCE OF THOSE STUDENTS TRADITIONALLY UNDERSERVED IN CONNECTICUT, INCLUDING AFRICAN AMERICANS, HISPANICS AND LOW-INCOME STUDENTS.**
3. **GAPS BETWEEN SUBGROUPS: INCLUDING BETWEEN**
 1. LOW-INCOME AND HIGHER-INCOME STUDENTS,
 2. AFRICAN AMERICAN AND WHITE STUDENTS, AND
 3. HISPANIC AND WHITE STUDENTS.
4. **PERFORMANCE GAINS: THE CHANGE IN THE PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WITHIN GOAL RANGE DURING THEIR TIME IN THE SCHOOL—SHOWING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS IN IMPROVING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT.**

We suggest reviewing ConnCAN report cards to help you judge school and school district performance. ConnCAN report cards for every school district and every public elementary, middle, and high school in Connecticut are available online at www.conncan.org. If you don't have access to a computer or need assistance with understanding ConnCAN report cards, a ConnCAN staff member is happy to assist you at 1.877.772.1933 ext.22 or info@conncan.org.



What Can Connecticut Parents Do About NCLB Testing?



ASK YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL TO USE INTERIM OR FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS to track your child's progress throughout the year.

HELP YOUR CHILD PREPARE FOR TESTS. CONTACT YOUR PRINCIPAL TO RECEIVE YOUR CHILD'S SCORES and review scores before the first parent-teacher conference.

REVIEW SCHOOL AND DISTRICT SCORES. GO ONLINE TO WWW.CONNCAN.ORG for parent-friendly report cards on your child's school and district.

APPROACH THE SCHOOL AND SCHOOL DISTRICT in a respectful and professional manner with your concerns and questions.

5: Teacher Quality

Under NCLB all teachers must be highly qualified. **In order to be highly qualified under NCLB in Connecticut, a teacher must have all three of the following:**

- 1. A BACHELOR'S DEGREE.**
- 2. FULL STATE CERTIFICATION OR LICENSURE.**
- 3. TEACHING SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE ON EACH SUBJECT THEY TEACH.**

However, new teachers are still considered “highly qualified” on a temporary basis if they have one of the following certificates or permits:

- **TEMPORARY 90-DAY CERTIFICATE.**
- **DURATIONAL SHORTAGE AREA PERMIT.**
- **TEMPORARY AUTHORIZATION FOR MINOR ASSIGNMENT (TEACH PART-TIME).**
- **LIMITED EXTENDED AUTHORIZATION FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD.**

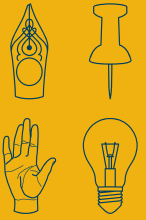
GET TO KNOW YOUR CHILD'S TEACHERS

While NCLB requires teachers pass the standards above, credentials do not guarantee a teacher will be able to relate to your child and to aid properly in his or her development.

Share with your child's teachers:

- **YOUR HIGH EXPECTATIONS AND GOALS FOR YOUR CHILD.**
- **YOUR CHILD'S INTERESTS AND HOBBIES.**
- **YOUR CHILD'S POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE CHARACTERISTICS AND HABITS YOU OBSERVE AT HOME.**
- **FAMILY BACKGROUND AND ANY HARDSHIPS YOUR CHILD FACES.**
- **YOUR CHILD'S ATTITUDE TOWARD SCHOOL WORK AND CERTAIN SUBJECTS.**

What Can Connecticut Parents Do About Teacher Quality?



ACTION
SUMMARY

ATTEND PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES and other meetings with school staff. Get to know your children's teachers and let them get to know you and your child. Clearly state your high expectations for your child and your goals for the year in their class.

ASK YOUR CHILDREN FOR POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE THOUGHTS ABOUT THEIR TEACHERS. Write down this feedback during the year and bring it to the attention of the school principal if you are not satisfied.

REVIEW THE NCLB REPORT CARDS to find out if non-qualified teachers are teaching in your child's school.

ASK YOUR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. What support or training does the school give to teachers to make sure they are highly qualified?
2. What kind of proactive recruitment efforts are made to attract highly qualified teachers?
3. How can parents be involved with teacher recruitment?
4. How are teachers assessed by the principal to ensure they are making progress in meeting the needs of all their students?

CONTACT YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT OR STATE WITH YOUR CONCERNS about the quality of teaching in your child's schools.

ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL TO SPONSOR DIVERSITY trainings for parents and staff.

6: School Improvement Plans

Once a school has failed to make AYP, it must develop a **school improvement plan**.

- **FAILING SCHOOLS MUST FORM SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEES AND DIRECTLY INVOLVE AND SEEK ADVICE FROM PARENTS ON HOW TO IMPROVE THE SCHOOL, AND THEY MUST DO SO AT CONVENIENT TIMES FOR PARENTS.**
- **THE SCHOOL MAY PROVIDE MONEY FOR TRANSPORTATION AND CHILD CARE IN ORDER FOR PARENTS TO ATTEND MEETINGS—AND PARENTS SHOULD REQUEST THE SCHOOL DO SO IF IT DOES NOT ALREADY OFFER IT.**

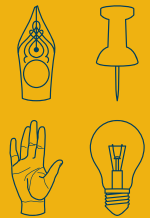
A plan is only as good as its actions. In order for a plan to come to life and accomplish what it is designed to accomplish, parents

must exercise their rights and make sure the school, district, and state follows through on the plan.

Ask your district to consider developing a **Parent Advisory Council**, if one does not already exist. This council of parents can assist the district and school improvement committees in evaluating the current policy, oversee the development of a new policy, and identify needs at Title I schools that the district should address.

You don't need to be a lawmaker or work for the school system to be involved in school policy making. You are the best advocate for your child's education!

What Can Connecticut Parents Do About School Improvement?



**ACTION
SUMMARY**

TALK TO YOUR SCHOOL'S PRINCIPAL to find out what the school is doing to close the achievement gap between different groups of students.

FIND OUT WHEN THE SCHOOL HOLDS TITLE I and school improvement meetings.

FIND OUT WHAT ELSE YOUR SCHOOL IS DOING to encourage parent participation. Make it known that you want to participate and be informed.

VOLUNTEER IN YOUR CHILD'S CLASSROOM AND SCHOOL. This provides a good opportunity to work with staff and observe the operation of the school and classroom.

ASK TO SEE YOUR SCHOOL'S PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT PLAN. What do you think? If you have new ideas about how the school and district should use its parental involvement funds, speak up!

7: School Choice— Right to Transfer

if a school is “in need of improvement” (two years or more failing to make AYP), a district must provide parents written notification of their right to transfer to a higher-performing school in their district.

The notice must include the following information:

- **THE REASON WHY SCHOOL IS IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT.**
- **AREAS IN WHICH THE SCHOOL NEEDS TO IMPROVE.**
- **WHAT THE SCHOOL AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS ARE DOING TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM.**
- **HOW PARENTS CAN GET INVOLVED IN THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN.**
- **AN EXPLANATION OF THE OPTION TO TRANSFER TO ANOTHER SCHOOL.**
- **A LIST OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS (INCLUDING CHARTER SCHOOLS) A PARENT MAY SELECT, AND THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF EACH SCHOOL.**

The district must inform parents of **more than one** school option if more than one is eligible and available to accept transfers as a choice option.

SCHOOL CHOICE OPTIONS

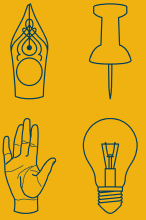
- **ANOTHER PUBLIC SCHOOL WITHIN THE DISTRICT**
- **CHARTER AND MAGNET SCHOOLS WITHIN THE DISTRICT IF AGREED UPON BY THE DISTRICT AND THE CHARTER OR MAGNET SCHOOL. HOWEVER, DISTRICTS CANNOT DISREGARD SELECTION PROCESSES SUCH AS PUBLIC LOTTERIES WHEN IDENTIFYING TRANSFER OPTIONS FOR STUDENTS.**
- **STUDENTS CANNOT TRANSFER TO A SCHOOL CURRENTLY IDENTIFIED AS “IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT” OR “PERSISTENTLY DANGEROUS”.**

TITLE I STUDENTS

- **ARE ELIGIBLE FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE **ONE YEAR** AFTER THEIR SCHOOL IS IDENTIFIED AS “IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT.”**
- **THE SCHOOL DISTRICT MUST PAY TRANSPORTATION COSTS FOR TITLE I STUDENTS TRANSFERRING TO ANOTHER SCHOOL.**
- **IF THE DISTRICT ANTICIPATES IT WILL NOT HAVE ENOUGH FUNDS TO TRANSPORT ALL ELIGIBLE STUDENTS, IT MUST GIVE THE LOWEST-ACHIEVING, LOW-INCOME STUDENTS PRIORITY REGARDING TRANSPORTATION TO THEIR SCHOOL OF CHOICE.**

In Connecticut and nationwide, not many parents know about the right to transfer their child to a better school. School districts often do not do a good job of informing parents about the transfer option because the district does not want to use its funds to provide transportation for transferring students. **Therefore, as a parent, you may need to insist the school provide information and assistance with transferring.**

What If A School Tells Me There Is No Room For My Child To Transfer Or There Are No Schools Available?



**ACTION
SUMMARY**

The parent should:

REQUEST WRITTEN REASONS WHY the district cannot offer school choice.

REQUEST THE SCHOOL DISTRICT IMMEDIATELY provide a list of public and private tutoring (SES) providers.

REQUEST THE SCHOOL DISTRICT DO THE FOLLOWING:

1. Explore the potential for creating a “school within a school” in which eligible students could participate in different learning activities of their choice.
2. Establish agreement with other districts in the area to accept transferring students.

See parent letter template (Appendix A) on how to request a transfer.

8: Supplemental Educational Services (SES)

Under NCLB, states must offer free tutoring services to students in failing schools. These services are designed to help students get back on track toward high achievement.

PARENT NOTIFICATION

School districts must annually send written letters notifying parents about the availability of supplemental educational services.

Your child is eligible if:

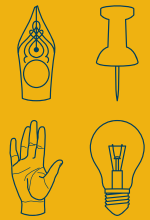
- HE OR SHE IS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE OR REDUCED-PRICE LUNCH.
- HE OR SHE ATTENDS A **TITLE I** SCHOOL THAT FAILED TO MAKE AYP **TWO YEARS IN A ROW**.
- HE OR SHE ATTENDS ANY PUBLIC SCHOOL THAT FAILED TO MAKE AYP **THREE YEARS IN A ROW**.
- THERE IS NO ROOM IN ANOTHER SCHOOL TO TRANSFER.

SES NOTIFICATIONS MUST:

- DESCRIBE PROCEDURES AND TIMELINES PARENTS MUST FOLLOW IN SELECTING A TUTORING SERVICE.
- INCLUDE ANY DEADLINES FOR SIGNING UP FOR SES.
- IDENTIFY EACH APPROVED SERVICE PROVIDERS WITHIN THE DISTRICT.
- DESCRIBE SERVICES, QUALIFICATIONS, AND SUCCESS OF EACH PROVIDER IN BOOSTING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT.
- INCLUDE INFORMATION ON HOW THE DISTRICT WILL SET PRIORITIES IF IT ANTICIPATES THAT FUNDS WILL NOT BE AVAILABLE TO PROVIDE SES TO ALL ELIGIBLE STUDENTS. (I.E. LOW-INCOME, LOW-PRIORITY STUDENTS FIRST TO ENROLL IN SES).

Three Simple Steps for SES Success:

1. CALL YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL AND FIND OUT IF YOUR CHILD QUALIFIES (YOU CAN ALSO ACCESS THIS INFORMATION BY CALLING CONNCAN'S FREE PARENT-FRIENDLY SES HOTLINE AT 1.877.772.1933 EXT.22).
2. PICK THE TUTORING PROVIDER BEST SUITED TO YOUR CHILD'S NEEDS.
3. MAKE SURE YOUR CHILD ATTENDS ALL SESSIONS AND LOOK FOR PROGRESS IN THEIR SCHOOL WORK.



**ACTION
SUMMARY**

What Can Connecticut Parents Do About SES?

FIND OUT IF YOUR CHILD IS ELIGIBLE FOR SES, and enroll before the deadline!

ASK SCHOOL DISTRICT OFFICIALS AND PROVIDERS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS when deciding which tutoring program is best for your child:

- When and where will the tutoring take place (at school, community center)?
- How often and for how many hours in total will my child be tutored?
- What programs, by grade levels and subject areas, are available for my child?
- What type of instruction will the tutor use (small group, one-on-one, or the computer)?
- What are the tutor's qualifications?
- Can the tutor help if your child has disabilities or is learning English?
- Is transportation available to and from where the tutoring will take place?

ASK YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT ABOUT HOW IT FUNDS SCHOOL CHOICE AND SES, or request that it spend more to meet the needs of all students eligible for choice or SES.

CONTACT THE CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION if you have not received proper notification about SES services.

See letter template (Appendix B) on how to request SES.

9: Parent Information Resource Centers

Under NCLB, the US Department of Education has the ability to provide grants to non-profit organizations that work with Title I parents, teachers, and school administrators seeking to establish resource centers to provide training, information, and support to parents, organizations, schools, and individuals. These centers are primarily designed to provide guidance to parents on how they can support their child's learning both at school and at home.

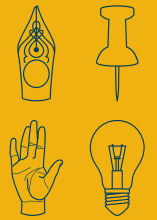
The State Education Resource Center, or SERC, is a Connecticut Parent Information and Resource Center (PIRC), connecting families, communities and educators so they can work together to improve outcomes for children.

Parents should utilize this center as a source of information and guidance for how to work with schools and create strong home-learning environments.

Contact: SERC at
1.800.445.2722

www.ctserc.org

What Can Connecticut Parents Do About PIRCs?



**ACTION
SUMMARY**

ASK FOR INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE FROM PIRCS regarding NCLB and your child’s education—search PIRC websites and contact PIRC staff.

ASK PIRCS FOR ADVICE ON HOW TO INCREASE and coordinate parental involvement activities within your school and district.

CONSIDER ORGANIZING PARENT GROUPS or organizations to apply for a grant to create your own PIRC. For more information on PIRC grants, go to the US Department of Education website at www.ed.gov.

10: NCLB and Students with Disabilities

Under NCLB, students with disabilities cannot be excluded from educational accountability. Most students with disabilities must participate in the same tests taken by their peers. Under NCLB, schools must test all students at their **assigned grade level** regardless of disability.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES UNDER NCLB

Some students with disabilities may receive **accommodations**, determined by the Planning and Placement Team or “PPT,” to ensure that their unique needs are taken into account as they are tested.

- THE PPT SHOULD BASE ACCOMMODATIONS ON THE STUDENT'S **INDIVIDUAL** NEEDS AND ACCOMMODATIONS.
- SCHOOLS **MAY NOT** DEVELOP A PREDETERMINED LIST OF ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH CERTAIN LEARNING DISABILITIES.
- PPT TEAMS **MUST NOT** EXCUSE STUDENTS FROM PARTICIPATING IN NCLB TESTING.

Some students have **very severe disabilities**. Under NCLB, the state allows these students, and **ONLY** these students, to take a different assessment to measure and meet goals appropriate for their special learning abilities.

VERY SEVERE DISABILITIES → SPECIAL ASSESSMENTS/GOALS

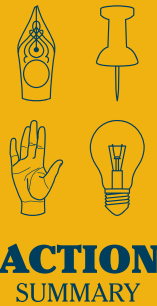
OTHER RIGHTS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES UNDER NCLB:

- ANY SCHOOL CHOICE OPTION MUST PROVIDE FREE APPROPRIATE EDUCATION (FAPE).
- SUPPLEMENTAL EDUCATION SERVICES (SES) FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES MUST FOLLOW A CHILD'S INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP), UNLESS THE PARENT GIVES PERMISSION OTHERWISE. IF NO PROVIDERS ARE AVAILABLE TO PROVIDE SES TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, THE DISTRICT MUST FIND OTHER WAYS TO PROVIDE THOSE SERVICES.
- IF A SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER IS PROVIDING INSTRUCTION IN ONE OR MORE ACADEMIC SUBJECTS, HE OR SHE MUST MEET “HIGHLY QUALIFIED” CRITERIA.

Why is this required?

- ALL STUDENTS WITHIN A GRADE TAKE THE SAME NCLB TEST TO ENSURE THEY RECEIVE A HIGH-QUALITY CURRICULUM RATHER THAN A WATERED-DOWN CURRICULUM WITH LIMITED EXPECTATIONS AND SKILL BUILDING.
- IF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES ARE FAILING NCLB TESTS, THIS SERVES AS A SIGN TO PARENTS AND SCHOOLS THAT THESE CHILDREN NEED EXTRA HELP AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES TO REACH STATE STANDARDS.

What Can Connecticut Parents Of Disabled Students Do?



FIND OUT IF YOUR CHILD RECEIVES THE SAME CURRICULUM AS STUDENTS WITHOUT DISABILITIES.

Ask your child's school:

- Does my child's IEP include instruction at grade-level content?
- Does my child receive accommodations to learn grade-level content?

USE NCLB TEST RESULTS to determine in which areas your child needs help.

FIND OUT if your child's teachers or instructional aides are "highly qualified."

PARTICIPATE IN PPT MEETINGS to determine your child's accommodations during NCLB testing.

ASK THE SCHOOL, PIRCS, AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS for information about special education rights for disabled children granted under IDEA and Section 504.

11: English Language Learner (ELL) Students and NCLB

eLL students are individuals age 3–21 in public schools, who fall under one of the following categories:

- **WAS NOT BORN IN THE UNITED STATES AND SPEAKS A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH;**
- **IS A NATIVE AMERICAN, ALASKA NATIVE, OR NATIVE RESIDENT OF OUTLYING AREAS AND COMES FROM AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH HAS HAD A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT IN THE INDIVIDUAL'S LEVEL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE; OR**
- **DOES NOT LIVE PERMANENTLY IN ONE PLACE, SPEAKS A NATIVE LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH, AND SPEAKS A DIFFERENT LANGUAGE AT HOME.**

TITLE III

Title III is a part of NCLB that provides federal funding to schools to create special programs to assist ELL students and parents.

PARENTAL NOTIFICATION

Schools using Title III funding **must inform parents of ELL students if their child has been placed in an English language instruction program** offered by the school district. This notification must include information about the following:

- **THE CHILD'S LEVEL OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY, INCLUDING HOW THE LEVEL WAS DETERMINED AND HOW WELL THE CHILD IS DOING ACADEMICALLY.**
- **THE METHOD OF TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION PROGRAM WILL USE, AS WELL AS OPTIONS FOR OTHER PROGRAMS BESIDES THE ONE THE STUDENT HAS BEEN PLACED IN.**

- **HOW THE PROGRAM WILL MEET THE CHILD'S EDUCATIONAL STRENGTHS AND NEEDS.**
- **THE REQUIREMENTS THE CHILD MUST MEET TO LEAVE THE PROGRAM.**

ACCOUNTABILITY

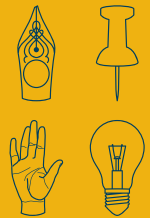
NCLB seeks to measure how well schools and language-learning programs help students reach English proficiency, develop important learning skills, and meet the same academic achievement standards as non-ELL students.

- **ALL ELL STUDENTS MUST PARTICIPATE IN CMT AND CAPT.**
- **ELL STUDENTS MAY TAKE THE ASSESSMENT IN THEIR NATIVE LANGUAGE FOR THEIR FIRST THREE YEARS IN US SCHOOLS.**
- **ELL TESTS MUST ESSENTIALLY BE THE SAME AS THE TEST ALL THE OTHER STUDENTS TAKE.**
- **AFTER THREE YEARS OF ATTENDING SCHOOL IN THE U.S., A STUDENT MUST BE ASSESSED IN ENGLISH.**

School districts must:

- **ESTABLISH A PLAN FOR HOW THEY WILL IMPROVE ELL STUDENT'S ENGLISH SPEAKING, READING, WRITING, AND LISTENING PROFICIENCY.**
- **TEST STUDENTS EACH YEAR TO ENSURE THAT THEY ARE MEETING THESE STANDARDS.**
- **MAKE TEST RESULTS OF ELL ANNUAL ASSESSMENTS AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC AND INDICATE IF AN ELL PROGRAM IS SUCCESSFULLY HELPING STUDENT MAKE PROGRESS.**
- **SELF-EVALUATE SCHOOLS' LANGUAGE-LEARNING PROGRAMS EVERY TWO YEARS TO DETERMINE WHETHER THE PROGRAM THEY ADOPTED IS WORKING AND ACHIEVING ITS INTENDED RESULTS.**
- **REQUIRE ELL TEACHERS TO BE FLUENT IN ENGLISH AND ANY OTHER LANGUAGE USED FOR INSTRUCTION.**

What Can Connecticut Parents Do For ELL Students?



ACTION
SUMMARY

IF YOU ARE THE PARENT OF AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER (ELL) STUDENT, talk to your school administrators and guidance counselors about ELL programs the school offers. More importantly, talk to other parents and ELL students about their impressions of ELL programs.

PARTICIPATE IN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING meetings and offer suggestions on what is working and what is not working in the English learner programs.

REQUEST YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL and district to use Title III funds to provide ELL parents with literacy, outreach, and training programs.

CONSIDER FILING A GRIEVANCE with your school district and/or the Connecticut State Department of Education if:

- Students are excluded from effective participation in school because of their inability to speak and understand the language of instruction;
- National origin minority students are inappropriately assigned to special education or low-level classes because of their lack of English skills;
- Programs for students whose English is less than proficient are not designed to teach them English as soon as possible, or if these programs do not provide a high-quality curriculum;
- The language learning program adopted by your school is not effectively teaching English to ELL students;
- Your child's school refuses your request for supplemental services to assist your child or does not provide information about alternatives to a language learning program;
- The school does not adequately fund its language learning program;
- The teacher providing the instruction in a language learning program has no training in how to teach English to ELL students; or
- Parents whose English is limited do not receive school notices or other information in a language they can understand.

REACH OUT TO ELL PARENTS IN YOUR COMMUNITY. Help ensure all children receive the best a high quality education regardless of where their parents are from or what language they speak.

12: NCLB and School Discipline

nCLB includes an **Unsafe School Choice Option**, which requires schools to permit students to transfer to another school if they are: a) victims of a violent crime, or b) attending a “persistently dangerous school.”

VICTIM OF A VIOLENT CRIMINAL OFFENSE

In Connecticut, a student is considered a victim of a violent criminal offense if:

- HE OR SHE SUFFERS BODILY INJURY AS A RESULT OF INTENTIONAL, KNOWING, OR RECKLESS ACTS COMMITTED BY ANOTHER PERSON;
- THE POLICE HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED, AND A POLICE REPORT HAS BEEN TAKEN DESCRIBING THE INCIDENT; AND
- THE FACTS (WITNESS TESTIMONY, AND/OR OTHER EVIDENCE) CONTAINED IN THE POLICE REPORT PROVE THAT A CRIME OCCURRED.

PERSISTENTLY DANGEROUS SCHOOL

In Connecticut, a persistently dangerous school is any school that for **three years in a row** has had **at least two** of the following three conditions:

1. TWO OR MORE GUN-FREE SCHOOLS VIOLATIONS (POSSESSION OF A FIREARM OR EXPLOSIVE DEVICE THAT RESULTED IN EXPULSION FROM SCHOOL);

2. “OTHER WEAPON” INCIDENTS RESULTING IN ONE EXPULSION PER 200 STUDENTS—MINIMUM OF THREE SUCH INCIDENTS (IF A SCHOOL HAS 600 STUDENTS AND FOUR STUDENTS WERE EXPELLED FOR HAVING SOME TYPE OF WEAPON, THEN THE SCHOOL WOULD HAVE ONE OF THE CONDITIONS TO QUALIFY AS “PERSISTENTLY DANGEROUS”);
3. ONE VIOLENT CRIMINAL OFFENSE RESULTING IN ONE EXPULSION PER 200 STUDENTS—MINIMUM OF THREE SUCH INCIDENTS (IF A SCHOOL HAS 600 STUDENTS AND FOUR STUDENTS WERE EXPELLED FOR A VIOLENT CRIMINAL OFFENSE, THEN THE SCHOOL WOULD BE HALFWAY TO BEING CONSIDERED “PERSISTENTLY DANGEROUS”).

NOTIFICATION

If the state determines a school is persistently dangerous based on incidents listed above, then the school district superintendent and principal must develop a plan that includes the specific types of programs, professional development, procedures and/or equipment it will use to create a positive school climate.

If you do not already know whether or not your school is persistently dangerous, find out right away by asking school administrators.

NCLB includes an Unsafe School Choice Option, which requires schools to permit students to transfer to another school if they are:

- a) victims of a violent crime, or
- b) attending a “persistently dangerous school.”

What Tools Do Parents Have To Close The Discipline Gap?

STUDENT CODE OF CONDUCT

- All schools in Connecticut are required to maintain a Code of Conduct for students.
- The code outlines unacceptable types of behavior and the punishment for engaging in those behaviors.

How to Use the Code

- Know the rules!
- Identify rules that are unclear.
- Be aware of deadlines and limitations.
- Reach out to others and find out their experiences with certain codes and rules.

DUE PROCESS IS A PROCEDURE IN BOTH US AND CONNECTICUT LAWS THAT PREVENTS THE STATE FROM TAKING AWAY A PERSON'S RIGHTS, such as a right to education, without the opportunity to be heard. Two major elements of due process in education are:

NOTICE: the school must inform the parent in writing of:

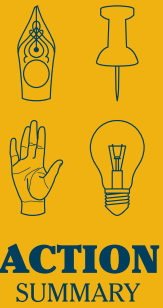
- The rule violated.
- The facts, or incident that happened, giving rise to violation of school rules.

HEARING: the school must provide a time and place for parents and students to:

- Tell his or her side of the story.
- Ask questions of witnesses.
- Receive a fair decision by unbiased persons.

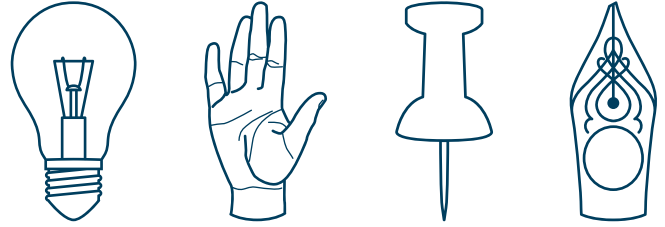
AWARENESS AND PARTICIPATION ARE KEYS TO AVOIDING DISCIPLINARY ISSUES, or at least to being prepared to confront issues. Parents should:

- Make an effort to learn as much as possible about the disciplinary rules in their child's school district.
- Help your child avoid behaviors and situations in which these rules may apply.
- Be aware of rules that might be applied disproportionately to minorities.
- Participate actively with teachers, school administrators, community groups, and the school board in raising awareness regarding the possibility of discriminatory enforcement of disciplinary codes.



INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND STUDENT SERVICES PLANS. Schools generally use the following programs and services to help students avoid discipline problems and to cope with personal issues that may cause discipline problems. Ask your school district about such programs. During school improvement, PTA, or school board meetings, suggest the school and district invest more into these types of programs to improve school safety and to close discipline and achievement gaps.

1. **Alternative Education Programs:** Educational programs that serve students who are more likely to succeed in a non-traditional setting or who have been excluded from the regular classroom due to disciplinary reasons.
Caution: Make sure these types of programs are not a means of segregating students by race. Alternative education programs should offer the same high-quality curriculum as a regular classroom setting.
2. **Counseling:** Assistance from professionals to help students overcome emotional and social problems that can interfere with learning.
3. **School Climate Management:** Consistent management style through a code of expected behavior, a code of disciplinary responses, a code of ethics for teachers, as well as other school climate factors that aid in the success of children.
4. **School Counseling and Guidance Services:** Guidance program planning including individual and group counseling, parent-teacher conferences and consultation, and career and educational guidance.
5. **School Health Services:**
 - a. **School Psychological Services:** Psychological counseling, behavioral observations and analysis, and consultation with student support teams.
 - b. **School Social Work:** Networking of appropriate home, school, and community services address identified student problems.
6. **Diversity Trainings:** Informational sessions that help both students and teachers learn to relate to and communicate with individuals of different ages, races, sexes, and ethnic backgrounds.



So you've seen the information; what now?

13: Get Active!

Monitor your child's school

work: Look to see what kind of homework your child receives. Ask your child what he or she is learning in the classroom. Try and determine whether or not your child is learning everything that is expected for his or her grade level. Contact the Connecticut State Department of Education for a list of all of its standards/goals for each grade level.

Stay composed and respectful:

Present evidence from test scores in an informed and professional manner. Approach school administrators and teachers by making appointments and attending school meetings. They are more likely to treat you with respect and listen to what you have to say than they are if you go huffing-and-puffing into their office.

Build parent communities and

coalitions: Find other parents who have similar concerns about test results and student achievement. People usually have more force in greater numbers. Attend school board meetings and as a group voice concern. This way, the school may be less likely to view your concern as a problem that only relates to your child and parenting and more willing to accept it as a school-wide problem.

Join the school improvement

committee: Voice your opinion about changes you would like the school to make in order to improve student achievement. Participate in decisions about what type of changes to make and how the school should spend its funding toward improvement. Parents generally are not experts on education, but they do know what is good for their children. Don't hesitate to share your thoughts and needs with the school.

Go shopping for a new school and educational services: If your child's school failed to make AYP two years in a row, consider transferring your child to a higher-performing school within the district, or ask the school about tutoring providers.

Bring concerns and ideas to PTA and school meetings: Talk to other parents and school staff about achievement gaps and other issues within the school and discuss what can be done to improve achievement.

Bring concerns to student teacher conferences: Discuss your child's strengths and weaknesses to discuss what can be done to help improve your child's learning of important skills.

Become an informed voter: Think about student achievement when deciding who to elect to your school board. *Who will address this issue? Who will be willing to work with diverse parents?* Also, listen to what candidates running for other government offices have to say about education and student achievement. Make appointments with your local, state, and national representatives' offices, and use score reports to present evidence of achievement gaps within your child's school and district.

Understand school report cards—seek help if needed: Ask school staff for assistance with understanding the results of state achievement tests. Also, visit www.conncan.org or call 1.877.772.1933 ext.22 for information on the ConnCAN report cards for Connecticut schools.

Visit high-achieving schools to compare: ConnCAN report cards show you which schools have high levels of student achievement. Find out about curriculum and student learning activities at these schools. Ask schools what they do to ensure high levels of student achievement. Inform your own school about the information you learned on your visits. You may have to venture outside of your school district to find high-achieving schools.

How to Communicate with School Districts:

- PUT ALL COMPLAINTS AND IDEAS IN WRITING.
- KEEP GOOD RECORDS.
- SET UP APPOINTMENTS WITH TEACHERS AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS.
- TAKE SOMEONE WITH YOU (SPOUSE, FRIEND, ADVOCATE).
- KEEP UP-TO-DATE ON YOUR CHILD'S ASSIGNMENTS AND PROGRESS.
- STAY CALM AND INFORMED.
- NEVER FORGET WHAT YOU ARE WORKING FOR: YOUR CHILD'S FUTURE.

Conclusion

no Child Left Behind (NCLB) is a law that aims to hold state departments of education and school districts receiving federal tax dollars accountable for student performance and progress toward the goals of quality public education for all students.

While the education of your child is the responsibility of your school district, state, or federal government, it is your responsibility to ensure they are meeting their obligations to your child. In this guidebook we have outlined NCLB tools and choices for all parents to advocate for quality educational opportunities for their children.

All Connecticut school districts receiving Title I funds are required to submit parental involvement policies to the State Department of Education. However, a parental involvement policy is just words on paper unless parents push for meaningful involvement with schools and districts to enhance student learning and development. This means parents ought to:

- **USE NCLB DATA TO IDENTIFY STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES.**
- **ADVOCATE FOR SCHOOL POLICIES THAT ENSURE EVERY CLASSROOM HAS A HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHER AND THAT ALL SCHOOLS GET THE SUPPORT THEY NEED TO REACH GRADE-LEVEL GOALS.**
- **MONITOR THE USE OF DISCIPLINE IN YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL TO ENSURE IT IS FAIR AND EQUITABLE AND USED TO ADVANCE, NOT HINDER, YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION.**

These workshops and guidebooks are a first step for Connecticut parents. Our organizations, other Connecticut advocacy groups, your school district, and the Connecticut State Department of Education are available to guide your advocacy and participation. Please utilize our websites and other supplementary materials for additional information.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters, and we wish you the best of luck!

*Connecticut Appleseed
Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now (ConnCAN)
The Connecticut State Conference of the NAACP
The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law*

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Common Terms Every Parent Should Know

you will find these terms in **bold** throughout the guidebook. As you read, please refer back to this list for your reference.

ACCOMMODATIONS: changes in testing materials or procedures to ensure a standardized test measures the individual student's current knowledge and skills rather than the student's disability.

ACCOUNTABILITY: The way public schools assure the public that students are progressing as they should. Each state sets academic standards for what every child should know and learn. Every year standardized tests measure academic achievement for every child. The results of these annual tests are reported to the public and available for all parents.

ACHIEVEMENT GAP: Differences in academic performance among groups often identified by race, ethnicity, and income level. In the United States, white students tend to outperform children of color, and wealthier students often perform better than low-income students.

ADEQUATE YEARLY PROGRESS (AYP): The minimum performance level schools and school districts must achieve each year to meet state reading and math goals. A school district's report card informs parents whether or not a school has made AYP.

ALIGNMENT: The process of making standards, classroom curricula, and testing consistent so that students reach state standards.

BENCHMARK: A specific level of student achievement expected of students at particular ages, grades, or developmental levels. Benchmarks are often represented by samples of student work. A set of benchmarks can be used as checkpoints to monitor progress in meeting performance goals within and across grade levels.

CHARTER SCHOOLS: Charter schools are independent public schools designed and governed by educators, parents, community leaders, educational entrepreneurs, and others. The schools operate outside of the traditional system of public schools. They are sponsored by designated local or state educational organizations, which monitor their quality and effectiveness.

CORRECTIVE ACTION: When a school or school district does not make AYP, the state will place it under a corrective action plan. The plan will include public resources to improve teaching, administration or curricula. If a school does not achieve AYP for four years in a row, it must change its staffing and/or apply a new curriculum, appoint an outside expert to advise the school, or extend the school year or school day. If failure continues, then the state can increase its authority to make any necessary, additional changes to ensure improvement, such as changing the principal and administrators.

CURRICULUM: School subjects such as reading, language arts, and math. This includes all of the skill-building material a student learns in the classroom and through homework.

DISAGGREGATED DATA: “Data” are information or results of a test. To “disaggregate” means to separate a whole into its parts. In education, this term means that test results are sorted by groups of students who are economically disadvantaged, are from racial and ethnic subgroups, have disabilities, or have limited English fluency. This practice allows parents and teachers to see more than just the average performance score for a school. Instead, parents and teachers can see how each student group is performing compared to others.

ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT (ESEA): Also known as “Title I”, this is the principal federal law affecting K–12 education for low-income students, and NCLB is directly related to ESEA. Under this act, government funds must be used for educators’ professional development, instructional materials, resources to support educational programs, and parental involvement in Title I schools.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER (ELL): An English Language Learner is a student for whom English is a second language and who is below standard levels in reading and writing English. An ELL student is also known as a Limited English Proficient (LEP) student.

HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHER (HQT): Refers to a teacher who proves that he or she has knowledge about the subjects he or she teaches, has a college degree, and is state-certified. No Child Left Behind requires that a “Highly Qualified Teacher” teach your child in core academic subjects, such as reading, math, and science.

HIGH-QUALITY CURRICULUM: School materials and learning activities that build the skills students need to advance to college and professional careers. This includes teaching students how to think creatively, examine situations and problems, and exercise sound judgment.

“IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT”: Refers to schools receiving Title I funds that have not met state reading and math goals (AYP) for at least two years. If your child’s school is labeled a “school in need of improvement,” it should receive extra help to increase student achievement. In addition, your child has the option to transfer to another public school, including a public charter school, and your child may be eligible to receive free tutoring

and extra help with schoolwork.

LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCY (LEA): A public board of education or other public authority within a state that maintains administrative control of public elementary or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of a state.

PARENT: a person who is legally responsible for the child’s welfare and oversees matters regarding the child’s education. Although a person must be a legal guardian of a child to exercise certain legal rights under NCLB and school policies, a mentor, sibling, neighbor, or an extended family member (such as a grandmother or uncle) can nonetheless be actively involved in a child’s education and development similarly to a parent.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: Participation of parents in regular, two-way, meaningful communication involving a student’s academic learning and other school activities. “Involvement” includes ensuring that parents play an integral role in assisting their child’s learning. Schools must encourage parents to be actively involved in their children’s education as well as to participate on school advisory committees to improve education and student learning.

PARENT/SCHOOL COMPACT: A written agreement of shared responsibility between a Title I school and each individual Title I parent. This compact defines the goals and expectations of Title I schools and parents as partners in the effort to improve student achievement.

PARTICIPATION RATE: Percentage of students in a school or district taking a state assessment/test.

PERSISTENTLY DANGEROUS SCHOOLS: Refers to schools where a certain number or violent acts or weapons violations occurred over the course of a year. Under NCLB, if a school is defined as “persistently dangerous,” parents must have the option to transfer their child to attend a school that does not qualify as persistently dangerous.

PROFICIENCY: Proficiency is the ability to perform at grade

level. If a student is proficient, he or she has proven to have thinking skills necessary to be a productive member of society. The state of Connecticut sets standards that determine what makes a child proficient.

RESTRUCTURING: If a school does not achieve AYP for four years in a row, the school district must reorganize the school by either re-opening the school as a charter school, replacing the school principal and staff members, contracting with a private company to take over the school, having the state take over the school, or some other method. This restructuring must begin no later than the first day of the fifth year of failing to make AYP.

SCHOOL CHOICE: Students in a school that has not achieved AYP for at least two years in a row have the option to attend a different school in the same school system that has achieved AYP. The school district must provide transportation to another school if the sending school is Title I.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN: Each school failing to meet AYP must create written strategies for improving student performance, taking into account the annual performance goals for the school set by the State Board of Education, how and when improvements will be put in place, the use of state funds, requests for waivers, etc. The local school board must approve each school improvement plan in place for no more than a three-year period. The plans may be changed as often as necessary or appropriate.

STANDARDS: States generally set two types of standards for students. Content standards are the information, ideas, and facts students are supposed to learn in a particular grade. Performance standards represent what a student is supposed to be able to accomplish by the end of a particular grade.

STANDARDIZED TESTING: Tests taken and scored in the same manner for all students. There are two types of standardized tests: norm-referenced tests, which compares and ranks test takers to their peers; and criterion-referenced tests, which compare test-takers to a certain high-level standard.

STATE ASSESSMENTS: Tests developed by a state that students take every year in grades 3–8 take every year and that high school students take at least once. States use these tests to

compare schools to each other and to know which ones need extra help to improve.

STATE EDUCATION AGENCY (SEA): Primarily responsible for the supervision of a state's public schools. The Connecticut State Board of Education makes and approves decisions on education in Connecticut and the Connecticut State Department of Education carries out those decisions as well as decisions made by lawmakers.

SUBGROUP: Smaller groups of students separated (disaggregated) from the whole group present in a school or school system. The eight student subgroups specified by the NCLB law are 1) Native American/Alaskan Native, 2) Asian/Pacific Islander, 3) Black, 4) White, 5) Hispanic, 6) limited English proficiency, 5) economically disadvantaged, and 6) students with disabilities. Each subgroup must consist of 40 or more students in order to be considered a subgroup.

SUPPLEMENTAL EDUCATIONAL SERVICES (SES): Tutoring and extra help with schoolwork for students attending schools failing AYP who are on free or reduced priced lunch. SES is provided free of charge for parents and takes place after school, on weekends, or during the summer.

TITLE I: A set of government programs to improve the learning of children from low-income families. The U.S. Department of Education provides Title I funds to states to give to school districts based on the number of children from low-income families in each district, generally with a large number of students eligible for the free lunch program. All Title I schools must comply with the No Child Left Behind Act and are supposed to involve parents in deciding how these funds are spent and in reviewing progress.

TITLE III: Federal funding for schools to create special programs to assist "Limited English Proficiency" students and parents with learning as well as to provide funding to improve training for teachers of ELL students. Schools receiving Title III funding must comply with certain requirements under NCLB.

Appendix A: Sample Parent Letter to Request School Choice

** fill in your information in the spaces with gold lettering*

(Date)

(Name of School District)

(Address of School)

Re: Request for Student Transfer under 20 U.S.C. § 6316

To Whom It May Concern:

I am interested in transferring my child to another school for the (year of following school year, i.e. 2007–2008) school year. My child is eligible to transfer to another school under 20 U.S.C. § 6316.

Student name: (name of child)

Grade: (grade of child)

Current School: (child's school)

The following schools in (name of school district) district have been identified as possible options for parents interested in participating in transferring their child to another school. I list these schools in the order of my preference, the first listed as my top choice.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Thank you very much for your attention and assistance with this matter.

Sincerely,

(sign your name)

(your contact information)

Name: _____

Relationship to Student: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

E-mail: _____

Appendix B: Sample Parent Letter to Request Supplemental Educational Services

** fill in your information in the spaces with gold lettering*

(Date)

(Name of School District)

(Address of School)

Re: Request for Supplementary Educational Services under 20 U.S.C. § 6316

To Whom It May Concern:

I am interested in having my child participate in a supplementary education services program during the (year of following school year, i.e. 2007–2008) school year. My child is eligible for these services under 20 U.S.C. § 6316.

Student name: (name of child)

Grade: (grade of child)

Current School: (child's school)

I list the following providers in the order of my preference, the first listed as my top choice.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Thank you very much for your attention and assistance with this matter.

Sincerely,

(sign your name)

(your contact information)

Name: _____

Relationship to Student: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

E-mail: _____

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This guidebook is designed to empower parents to take control of their children's educational opportunities and to work to close Connecticut's over-sized achievement gap. Overall, this guidebook embraces two primary goals:

1. To inform parents about their rights under NCLB.
2. To show parents how to use the tools and resources available under NCLB to become effective advocates for their children.

We hope that Connecticut parents, together with their communities, will use this guidebook over the course of their children's education to develop the know-how to achieve significant changes in their schools and their children's futures!

Connecticut Appleseed
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Connecticut State Conference of NAACP Branches
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

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