

Archived Information

BACK TO SCHOOL CHECKLIST (Aug 2005)

Questions and Tips for Parents, Schools and the Community

ACADEMIC CURRICULUM AND ACHIEVEMENT

- Does the school have a written academic mission or credo that guides the behavior of both adults and students at the school? Does the school set high standards for students and stress continuous improvement over time?
- Does the school district have written guidelines on the amount of homework given for each grade level?
- How many students in your child's school are performing at grade level (proficient) in either reading or mathematics? How many are performing at grade level in both subjects?
- How does the achievement level of your child's school compare with the districtwide and statewide achievement levels?
- Are test scores rising or falling compared to the previous year? Has the percentage of students achieving proficiency increased or decreased?
- How many special education, minority, Limited English Proficient or economically disadvantaged students are achieving at grade level (proficient) in either reading or mathematics? How does this figure compare with districtwide and statewide levels? Are test scores rising or falling compared to the previous year?

Under *No Child Left Behind*, states determine whether a school has made Adequate Yearly Progress by comparing the percentage of students (see above) meeting proficiency standards with the statewide goals. A school may still meet its AYP target if it reduces the percentage of students "below proficient" by 10 percent from the previous year while making progress in bringing all students up to grade level.

- Were all students in your child's school tested this year?

At least 95 percent of the students in each group must take the test for the school-wide results to be valid.

- What percentage of students graduate from your child's high school? How many attend college? How do graduation and college attendance rates compare to the previous year? How do they compare to the districtwide and statewide averages?
- What percentage of students are taking challenging pre-college courses in language arts, mathematics and science? How does this compare to districtwide and statewide averages?

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- Does your child's high school offer courses and programs to prepare graduating students for the workforce?
- What percentage of juniors and seniors took college entrance tests such as the SAT and the ACT? How does this compare to districtwide and statewide averages? Did scores increase or decline over the previous year?

HELPING PARENTS AND STUDENTS

- Do you receive information from your child's school? Are brochures, progress reports and other forms of information regularly sent home with your child, mailed or e-mailed to you from the school district? Is this information available on the Internet? Is it detailed yet easy to understand?
- Does the school inform parents when their child is falling behind academically? Does the school make information on student performance available to parents and the community?
- Does the school offer afternoon, weekend or summer school instruction for students who need extra help in reading/language arts or math?
- Does the school welcome parental involvement and make it easy for parents to participate? Are regular parent-teacher meetings scheduled?
- Does your school periodically survey parents to determine satisfaction with their child's teachers, administration and programs?
- Does the school offer interpreters for parents who do not speak English? Does it provide information in more than one language?
- Does the district inform parents of the choices and options available to them under the *No Child Left Behind Act*?

Under *No Child Left Behind*, parents of children in a school receiving federal Title I funds that has not made adequate yearly progress in reading/language arts or math for two consecutive years may transfer them to another public or public charter school within their district.

Contact your school district to find out about your school's choice plan and whether your child has the opportunity to attend a school that would better meet his or her needs.

After three consecutive years of underperformance, the district must offer free supplemental services, such as tutoring and after-school instruction, to economically disadvantaged children. *Contact your school district to learn if your child is eligible or to receive a list of approved supplemental service providers.*

*For more information from the U.S. Department of Education,
call 1-800-USA-LEARN or visit www.ed.gov.*



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TEACHER TRAINING AND QUALITY

- Does your child's teacher hold a degree in the subject he or she is teaching? How many of your school's teachers meet the Highly Qualified Teacher standards under *No Child Left Behind*? How many teachers hold only emergency credentials? Does the school inform parents of their teachers' quality and credentials?

Under *No Child Left Behind*, teachers in core academic areas must be highly qualified in those subjects by the end of the 2005-06 school year. A highly qualified teacher is one who has a bachelor's degree, full state certification and demonstrated competency, as defined by the state, in each core academic subject he or she teaches.

- Does the district have a recruitment plan, including incentives, to ensure that every classroom has a highly qualified teacher?
- Does the district have a policy to encourage qualified professionals from other career areas to become classroom teachers?
- If a teacher is doing his or her job poorly, what procedures are in place for retraining, reassigning or replacing him or her? On average, how long does the process take?
- How much of the school's budget is spent in the classroom, including for teachers' salaries, books and supplies? How much is spent on administration and overhead?

STUDENT DISCIPLINE

- Is there an explicit student disciplinary policy? How does the school inform parents when their child has misbehaved and been placed in detention, suspended or expelled?
- Is a list of disciplinary rules available to parents, teachers and students alike?
- Does the school track attendance? What are the penalties for unexcused absences?
- How many incidents of violence, vandalism or substance abuse occurred on school property last year? How does that figure compare to the districtwide and statewide averages?
- Has your school been identified as a "persistently dangerous school"?

A child attending a "persistently dangerous school," as defined by the individual state, is eligible for the public school choice options under *No Child Left Behind*, as is any student who has been the victim of a violent crime on the grounds of his or her school.

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MEASURING THE PROGRESS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Measuring children's progress with annual state assessments provides teachers and parents with objective information about each child's strengths and weaknesses. With this knowledge, teachers can develop lessons to make sure each student meets state standards for his or her grade. Therefore, all children must participate in state assessments.

States can provide students with disabilities with "accommodations," such as extra time, a separate room or the use of assistive technology, to ensure that the assessment measures the student's knowledge and skills, rather than his or her disability. Also, a No Child Left Behind regulation allows schools and school districts the flexibility to measure the progress of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities with an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards.

- If your child has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), how will he or she participate in the state assessment?
- Who will decide whether your child takes the regular state achievement test or an alternate achievement test?
- Does the state assessment allow accommodations, such as increased time, a separate room or the use of assistive technology, that will allow your child to show what he or she knows and can do?