The National Education Association (NEA), the nation’s largest professional employee organization, is committed to advancing the cause of public education. NEA’s 3 million members work at every level of education—from pre-school to university graduate programs. NEA has affiliate organizations in every state and in more than 14,000 communities across the United States.

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What the Federal Law for Elementary and Secondary Schools Says About Your Role in the Education of Your Child

Here’s the good news.

Parents and families are valued partners.

ESSA rolls out the welcome mat for families to be actively involved in their public schools. Here is what you need to know to ensure your child has access to a quality public education.

How it works:

The state agrees to accept federal dollars (they all do).

In return for the federal funding, the state agrees to meet certain requirements, such as—

► develop a state plan to educate all children;
► determine what students should know and do, and create a plan to measure their progress;
► determine how to evaluate schools and issue a report card for each school; and
► develop a plan to help schools and students that need extra support.

So, where do you fit in? All of the above.

Surprised? You are an important part of what states are required to do. In fact, ESSA requires districts to set aside funds to ensure you have a significant role. This guide will assist you in understanding this role. Your voice matters!
Q. What is the difference between a Title I targeted assistance program and a schoolwide program?

Title I schools operate under one of two models: targeted assistance that supplements the regular education program for individual students deemed most in need of special assistance, or a schoolwide program that allows schools to use Title I funds—in combination with other Federal, State, and local funds—to improve the overall instructional program for all students in a school. Typically, schools in which at least 40% of enrollment are students from low-income families are eligible to operate schoolwide programs.

Q. Why do we have a federal law?

To make sure all students have the same opportunity to receive a high-quality public education and to close opportunity gaps, especially among students who are from low-income families, are English learners, are from migrant families, are homeless or in foster care, are in the juvenile justice system, or have disabilities.

Q. What is Title I?

Title I is the largest federal grant program under ESSA. It provides funding to districts and schools with large numbers or percentages of children from low-income families so they have access to similar programs and opportunities as their more affluent peers. Schools receiving funds under this part of the law are called Title I schools. In return for the federal funding, districts and schools are accountable for student academic achievement and for improving underperforming schools.

DID YOU KNOW?
The Title I program serves an estimated 25 million students in more than 80% of school districts and nearly 60% of all public schools.
ESSA requires that parents and families have a say in—

- the state and district plans for implementing the law,
- the district’s plan to improve schools that don’t meet the state’s performance criteria, and
- the comprehensive plan for Title I schools operating a schoolwide program.

ESSA requires that parents and families receive notification of the—

- state’s challenging academic standards—what all students are expected to know and be able to do, including being prepared for college and career;
- state’s academic assessments—the statewide tests given to students annually;
- state’s accountability system—the process of evaluating school performance based on certain measures of student achievement, growth, and school quality;
- professional qualifications of their student’s classroom teachers in Title I schools (upon request); and
- information on student participation in any state or local test, including a parental right to opt the child out of the test, in Title I schools (upon request).

The Every Student Succeeds Act defines “parental involvement” as:

- the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring that parents play an integral role in assisting their child’s learning;
- parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child’s education at school; and
- parents are full partners in their child’s education and are included, as appropriate, in decision making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child.
ESSA emphasizes the importance of parent and family involvement in their local schools and their child’s education.

ESSA calls it “engagement” and requires school districts and schools to ask parents and families to be an active part of the process.

If a school district receives Title I funds, it must work with parents and families to create a written parent and family engagement policy, which must be part of the district’s overall plan.

Each year the district, along with parents and family members, must review the policy to see what worked, what didn’t, and determine how it can be improved, such as—

► engaging more families,
► identifying obstacles that are preventing families from being more involved,
► assessing what else families need to help support their child’s education,
► sharing best practices on how to talk with teachers about their child’s education, and
► ensuring that every family has a positive experience each time they interact with the school.

TAKE ACTION

If one does not already exist, suggest to your school district that it create a parent advisory board to help improve parent and family engagement policies in all schools across the district. Make sure the board reflects all parents, family members, and students served in the district to ensure all voices are heard and all needs can be met.

SCHOOL POLICY

Families must also be involved in writing the school’s policy on parent and family engagement. The written policy must be shared with all families, and, if possible, in languages that families can understand. Schools must—

► hold an annual meeting, at a convenient time, to let families know of their right to be involved;
► offer meetings at various times to maximize participation, and may provide transportation, child care, or home visits for these meetings with families;
► invite families to review and offer ways to improve the policy; and
► provide families with timely information about the education of their child and, if requested by families, set up regular meetings.
Families with children receiving Title I services must be involved in the decisions on how the school district will spend its money for parent and family engagement activities.

**District use of funds may include—**

- sharing information on the best ways to work with parents and family members;
- supporting schools and nonprofit organizations in providing professional development to district and school staff on parent and family engagement strategies, which may be provided jointly with parents and family members;
- supporting programs that reach parents and family members at home, in the community, and at school; or
- helping schools work with community-based or other organizations or employers with a record of success in improving and increasing parent and family engagement.

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**SCHOOL-PARENT COMPACT**

Each Title I school must work with parents to put together a school-parent compact that outlines how parents, the entire school staff, and students will share the responsibility for improving the academic achievement of each student. It’s a partnership that enables parents to support their child’s learning in various ways, such as volunteering in their child’s classroom, participating in decisions about their child’s education, and ensuring their child makes positive use of their extracurricular time.

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**EQUITY AND OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL STUDENTS**

The fundamental purpose of ESSA is to make sure that no student is ignored or forgotten—no matter their current circumstances. This federal law honors all students, including those who are—

- recent immigrants, English learners, or in families of migrants;
- Native American, Native Hawaiian, or Alaska Native; or
- residing in local institutions for neglected or delinquent children, or attending a community day school program.

ESSA insists that plans for the education of all students must include their parents’ and families’ input, and programs and services for students must promote parent and family involvement.
For parents and family members of English learners.

Under ESSA, school districts are required to inform parents or families if their child will be receiving English language instruction. Here is the information you can expect—

► the reason your child is considered an English learner,
► how well your child speaks English,
► how your child will be taught and if it differs from other programs,
► how the program fits your child and meets their needs,
► when you can expect your child to exit the program, and
► if your child has a disability, how the program is part of their individualized education program.

Know your rights!

You should also receive, in writing, your right to refuse to enroll your child in the program; remove your child from the program; seek another program, if available, and, if so, expect help in choosing another program.

TAKE ACTION

School districts with Title I schools must reach out to parents and families of English learners to let them know how they can be involved in the education of their child, and how they can actively help their child successfully learn the English language and succeed in all academic subjects. Here’s your chance to assist in your child’s education.
Is the information you receive easy to understand?

ESSA tells states, school districts, and schools that the information they share with parents and families should be easy to understand, presented clearly, accessible to those with disabilities, and, when possible, provided in a language that the parents can understand. This applies to—

- your child’s test results,
- state, district, and school report cards,
- information about English learners,
- Title I schoolwide program plans,
- Title I school’s parent and family engagement plan, and
- notices inviting parents and family members to participate in the school and their child’s education.

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU TO LEARN ALONG WITH YOUR CHILD

Title I districts or schools may offer family literacy programs if there are a large number of students who have parents who need assistance in helping their child learn to read.

The more you know the more you can help your child succeed.
Now that you know more about ESSA, here is what you can do—

1. ESSA welcomes your voice. We encourage you to use it. Start by completing NEA’s Opportunity Checklist to identify what your school needs. Encourage other parents and families, school staff, and community members to complete the checklist as well. The Opportunity Checklist can be found at myschoolmyvoice.nea.org.

2. Meet with other parents and school staff to share the results of NEA’s Opportunity Checklist. Talk about how you and other parents, school staff, and community members, working together, can make sure your school has everything it needs. Pick one or two of the highest needs identified for your school and establish a team to take a closer look. You can use NEA’s Opportunity Audit to help guide you in this process. Go to myschoolmyvoice.nea.org for the Opportunity Audit.

3. Form a partnership with other parents, school staff, and community members to develop a plan to turn your findings into action.

You can do this because you are not alone. Every parent or family member brings their own skills, knowledge, and experiences that when combined with others creates a powerful platform with a strong, unified voice. NEA’s resources at myschoolmyvoice.nea.org can assist parents and families in working together to elevate their voices to create a great public school for their children.

**NEA’s family engagement brochure series on what makes a great public school can be found at myschoolmyvoice.nea.org.**

**SHARE YOUR VIEWS ON TESTING**

ESSA enables states and school districts to audit the number, frequency, and purpose of tests conducted during the school year. Each state audit must include feedback from parents on what tests they do and do not find useful.

**THANK YOU!**

By reading through this guide, we hope you now understand your rights and responsibilities, and are ready to partner with all school staff on behalf of your child and other families. You have a voice. It’s written in law. By using it, you can improve your child’s education and the learning of all students in your child’s public school.

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