

# What you can do

## Recommendations for parent/community involvement in school improvement

### 1. If your child's school has not made "Adequate Yearly Progress" (AYP), find out more.

Was your school identified because of attendance or graduation rate, test participation, and/or PSSA test scores?

- ❖ Each school is rated by one overall average test score for reading and one overall average test score for math. Look at the scores from each tested grade level separately to see where the school must make progress.
- ❖ Look at more than one year of test scores. AYP is based on two years of test scores. Three or four years will give you a better idea of whether or not low test scores are a trend.
- ❖ Consider other information about the school. You might look at teacher attendance; levels of parent and community involvement; student suspensions; scores from tests other than the

*continued*

## WHAT DOES "PARENT INVOLVEMENT" MEAN?

**"No Child Left Behind" defines parent involvement as "regular, two-way, and meaningful communication" about student learning and related issues, between the school and a parent or anyone else legally responsible for a child. According to the law, the purpose of home/school communication should be to make sure parents can help their children learn at home and that parents are involved as "full partners" in the school's program for educating their children.**



PSSA; and assessments other than tests, such as ratings of students' portfolios or graduation projects. Do these indicators tell a story about a school in trouble, or not?

Keep in mind:

- ❖ Testing experts have stated that there are technical reasons for test scores to go up or down that are not related to students' achievement.
- ❖ Many other factors can influence the test scores of individual students, including children's test anxiety, too many substitute teachers or snowdays that year, a noisy test-taking environment, and test questions that use unfamiliar words.
- ❖ Still, a history of low test scores might be part of a pattern of school failure.

## 2. Use the tools that "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) provides.

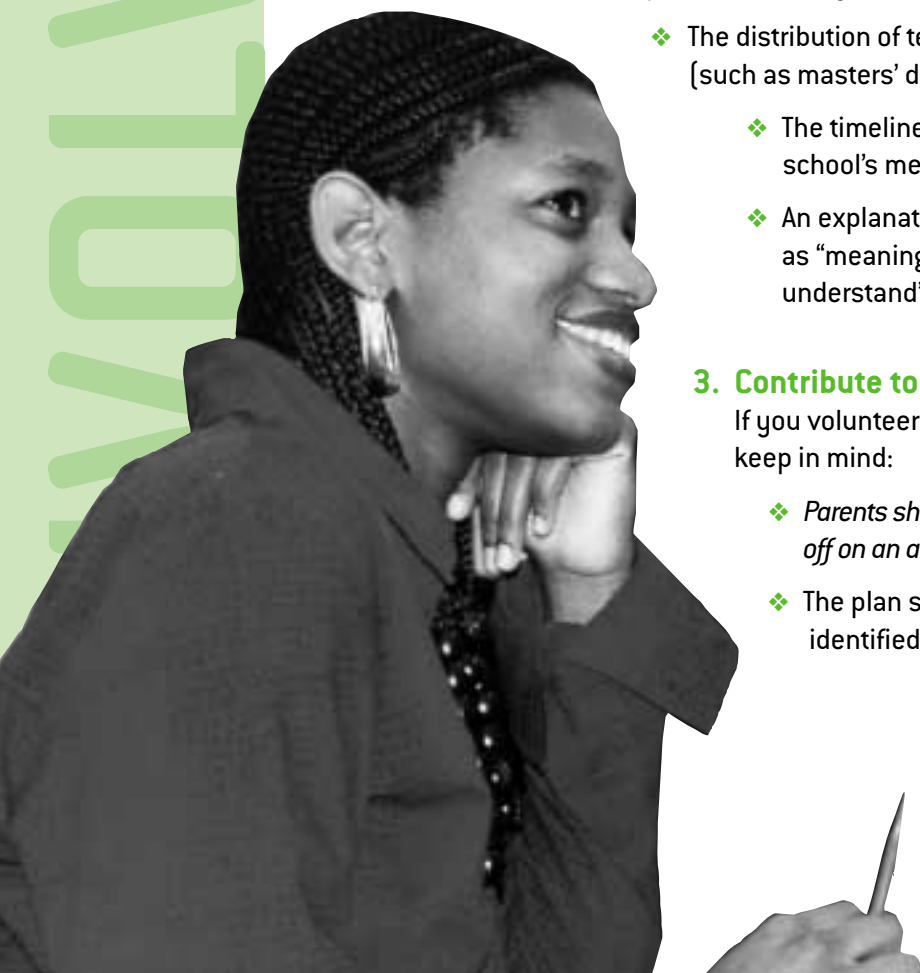
Schools and districts have new requirements for involving and informing parents. The District and your school are more likely to comply if you ask for information, monitor the reporting of data, and volunteer to participate in planning. Examples of information you might ask for:

- ❖ The Pittsburgh District's list of schools identified as not making AYP, and why they were identified
- ❖ The District's parent involvement policy, and your school's parent involvement policy
- ❖ The school's improvement plan or annual goals
  - ❖ The qualifications of your child's teachers
  - ❖ The distribution of teachers throughout the system, by credentials [such as masters' degrees] and years of experience
    - ❖ The timeline for school "report cards" to be issued, and your school's method for distributing them to parents
    - ❖ An explanation of how the District interprets NCLB terms such as "meaningful parent involvement" and "a format that parents understand"

## 3. Contribute to improving the school.

If you volunteer to help create your school's improvement plan, keep in mind:

- ❖ *Parents should be involved from the beginning, not asked to sign off on an already completed plan.*
- ❖ The plan should address school needs that have been identified based on facts, not opinions.



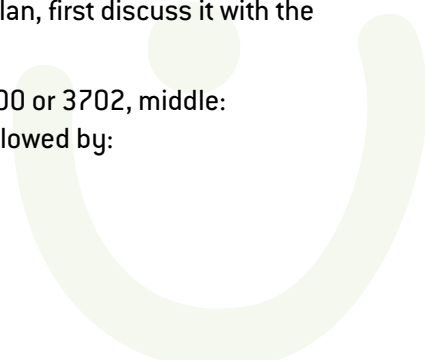
- ❖ Information about students, such as test scores, is now required to be reported by four “subgroups” (see the “Overview”). If there are significant differences in achievement between subgroups, the plan should include strategies to address those gaps and appropriate ways to measure improvement.
- ❖ Look at how resources are allocated in your school and whether or not all subgroups of students have access to them. For example, find out which students have access to the most knowledgeable, skillful teachers; small class sizes; classrooms and schedules that are most conducive to learning; computers and science labs; time with a guidance counselor or access to other sources of information. Find out which students have access to experiences that students may value, such as serving on the Parent School Community Council (PSCC) or student council, serving on committees to plan school events, participating in academic competitions, or participating in afterschool clubs and activities.
- ❖ Some studies have concluded that test scores increase when the quality of teaching improves, not when students spend more time on test preparation. Quality teaching, rather than test prep, should be the focus of improvement strategies.
- ❖ Research has shown that parent involvement is a key factor in student achievement. One survey of recent research found that in every high-poverty, high-achieving school studied, highly-engaged parents were part of the mix (“A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement,” National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, 2002).

Other actions you might take:

- ❖ Find out what changes the school plans to make. Visit your school now so you can judge on a future visit whether or not changes have occurred.
- ❖ Gather a group of parents to visit your school and a school with higher test scores. Plan to meet with the principal or teachers afterward to talk about what you saw and to ask questions. [See “What to look for in your child’s classroom” for more information.]
- ❖ Inform yourself about Pennsylvania’s state standards. Testing and teaching are supposed to be based on standards.
- ❖ Look at sample test questions from PSSA tests.

If you’re not satisfied with the opportunities offered to you to be involved in your school’s improvement efforts, or you’re not satisfied with your school’s plan, first discuss it with the principal. If necessary, you may contact:

- ❖ The appropriate Executive Director (elementary: 412.622.3700 or 3702, middle: 412.622.3712, high and special schools: 412.622.3710), followed by:
- ❖ The Chief Academic Officer: 412.622.3610, followed by:
- ❖ The Superintendent: 412.622.3600



# WHERE TO FIND INFORMATION

The District's Parent Educational Resource Centers (PERCs) have computers parents can use and staff who can help locate information. PERC staff can also provide a list of parent involvement activities schools typically offer.

North: 412.323.3302  
South: 412.488.4670  
East: 412.665.4952  
West: 412.778.2160  
Central: 412.338.8126

## About individual schools:

NCLB-related school-by-school information: [www.SchoolResults.org](http://www.SchoolResults.org)  
The Pittsburgh District's Atlas & Data Fact Book: <http://visc.sis.pitt.edu/pps/>  
Pennsylvania's "School Report Cards": [www.paprofiles.org](http://www.paprofiles.org)  
Standard & Poor's School Evaluation Services: [www.ses.standardandpoors.com](http://www.ses.standardandpoors.com)  
Your Schools Your Money: [www.yourschoolsyourmoney.ed.pa.us](http://www.yourschoolsyourmoney.ed.pa.us)

## About NCLB in the Pittsburgh Public Schools:

NCLB (Office of Funding and Compliance): 412.622.3729  
Parent Engagement: 412.622.3619

## About NCLB in Pennsylvania:

Pennsylvania Department of Education: [www.pde.state.pa.us](http://www.pde.state.pa.us)

## About state standards and the PSSA:

Pennsylvania Department of Education: [www.pde.state.pa.us](http://www.pde.state.pa.us) (go to K-12 Schools, then Assessment and Testing)  
PA Title I Parent Resource Center: 1.800.942.8035

## Sources

"Using NCLB to Improve Student Achievement: An Action Guide for Community and Parent Leaders," Public Education Network, 2002. To order a printed copy or download a free copy, go to [www.publiceducation.org](http://www.publiceducation.org), or call 202.628.7460.

"No Child Left Behind: What's in it for Parents," Anne T. Henderson, Parent Leadership Associates, 2002. To order a printed copy or download a free copy, go to [www.centerforparentleadership.org](http://www.centerforparentleadership.org), or call 859.233.9849.