

PARENTSWANTTOKNOW



The Education Trust



PARENTS WANT TO KNOW ABOUT AMERICA'S SCHOOLS



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The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) set bold and necessary expectations for our nation's public schools. For the first time in history, it made schools accountable for raising achievement in reading and math, for lifting graduation rates, and for closing the gaps that separate some groups of students from others.

Nonetheless, the law has been rightly criticized for focusing on reading, math, and graduation to the exclusion of other issues. Let's be clear: **Accountability in these critical areas represented a significant**

step forward for our country, our communities, and our students. We cannot for a moment afford to back away from that decision. **But we can ask for and urgently need information beyond what our schools are now accountable for providing.** Information like funding levels for individual schools, the quality of the teachers in our classrooms, and whether our schools offer an environment that encourages learning. All of this can and should be made public. Administrators, parents, community members, and students need this



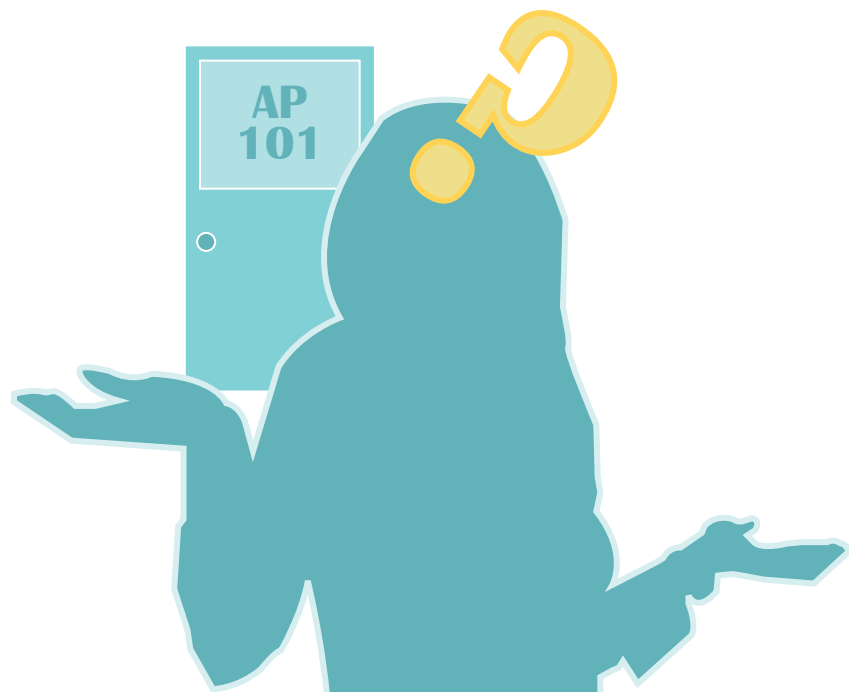
information if they are to understand school quality — and if they are to determine which actions they need to take to help their schools improve.

Public Reporting Matters

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) affords lawmakers an opportunity to right this imbalance. A reauthorized law must maintain strong accountability for student outcomes. But it must also empower parents and community members through clear and accessible public reporting on a range of school indicators. Such reporting

will inform and engage advocates as they work on behalf of students to improve our nation's schools.

Current law requires states to produce school-level report cards. But the content of these report cards, while necessary, is far too limited. The Education Trust has identified six broad topics about which parents and community members need information. This brochure highlights information now available under NCLB. It also notes critical information that should be required under federal law, but currently is not.



ACHIEVEMENT

What information do parents now have on achievement?

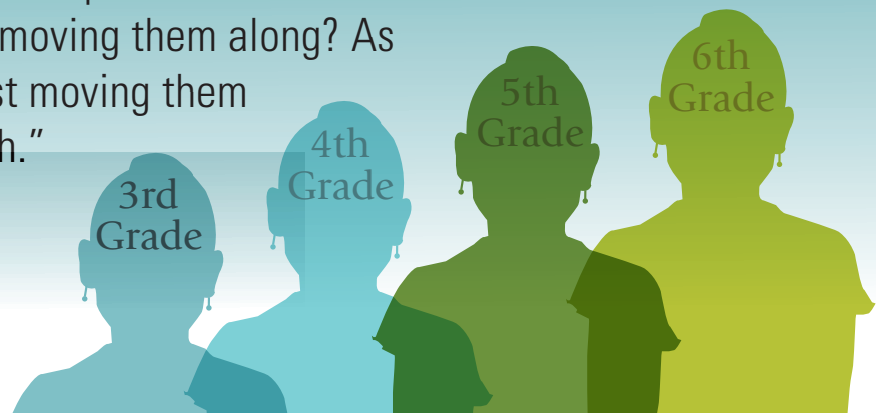
Parents can find out how many students in a school meet the standards their state has set for what kids in each grade should know and be able to do in reading and math.

Because overall averages can mask large differences between groups, the law also requires states to report this information separately for different groups of students — like different racial groups, students with disabilities, English-language learners, migrant students, low-income students, and male and female students.

What more do parents need to know about achievement?

Parents need information on whether students are growing academically over time to complement information on how students are doing in a given year. Otherwise, in schools with low achievement, parents have no way of knowing whether students are at least making progress toward meeting standards. And in schools with high achievement, parents don't know whether students are continuing to make gains — or coasting.

“I NEED TO KNOW how our students are doing year to year. I don't mean how last year's third-graders compare with this year's third-graders. I need to know how the kids who were in third grade last year are doing now that they're in the fourth grade. Are they making progress? I want to be able to tell if the teachers are continuing to motivate the kids who've done well, so they're not just coasting — and I want to be able to tell if our kids who were not on grade level last year received the help they needed to get on grade level by now. Is the principal really working to improve achievement for each one of our kids, or is he just moving them along? As far as I'm concerned, just moving them along is not good enough.”



HIGH SCHOOLS

What information do parents currently have about high schools?

States must report each high school's graduation rate, as well as student achievement in reading and math in at least one grade. All of this information has to be reported separately for different groups of students.

What more do parents need to know about high schools?

Parents need assurance that when students receive a diploma, they are ready and able to flourish in college and the workplace. This means knowing what happens to students during high school — whether they are taking and completing the courses needed to graduate on time, whether they are taking and succeeding in high-level courses like AP and IB, and how well they're doing on the SAT or ACT. It also means knowing what happens to graduates after high school — how they're faring in either college or the workplace.

"I NEED TO KNOW how many of the students at the school are passing the AP and IB tests to understand if those courses really provide the rigorous opportunities they're supposed to. My son cares about politics and I'm concerned that he's not getting much challenge in history. Just calling a course AP doesn't mean he's getting the strong content, conflicting perspectives, and primary sources he needs to really dig in. If I knew how the school's students had done on last year's final tests, I could tell whether my worries were valid. If they were, I could do something about it and if not, I could calm down."



CLIMATE

What information do parents currently have on school climate?



States aren't required to report any information about school climate on their school report cards. However, some states include attendance rates in their accountability determinations for elementary and middle schools — and so those states have to report attendance rates for different groups of students.

What more do parents need to know about school climate?

Parents don't want to send their child to a school that is unsupportive or, worse, dangerous. These types of environments impede young people's development and make learning much more difficult. To understand whether students are falling through the cracks and how schools respond to disruptive behavior, parents need information on attendance, suspension, and expulsion patterns. Likewise, parents need information on disciplinary incidents, such as fights or drug and alcohol violations.

"I NEED TO KNOW if students are being suspended or expelled for drug violations. My son is only in middle school, and my wife and I have talked with him about drugs, experimenting, choices, and consequences — but it's a whole different conversation when you know there's dealing at school."

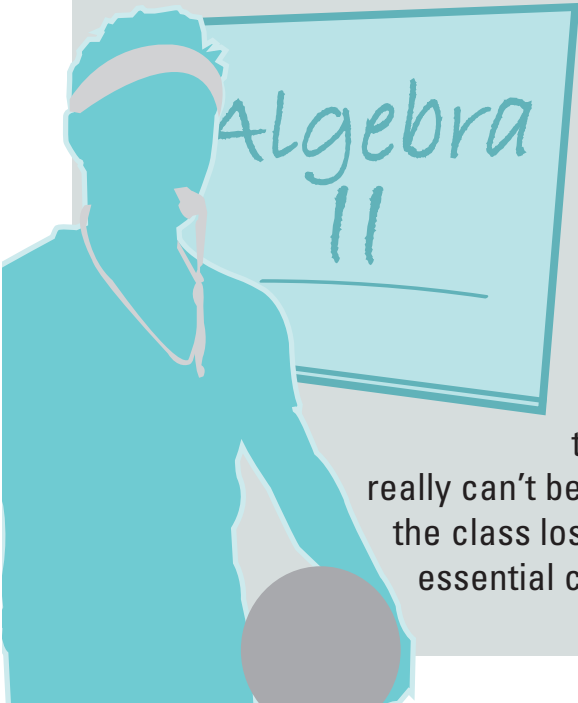
TEACHERS

What information do parents currently have on teachers?

Under NCLB, school-level report cards must include only a minimal amount of information about a school's teachers — for example, what types of qualifications they have and how many have emergency or provisional credentials (certifications for teachers who haven't yet met the state's requirements for a standard teaching license). States also have to report the percentage of classes not taught by "highly qualified" teachers at each school — in other words, teachers who haven't fully met the state's requirements for a teaching license, or who haven't demonstrated basic knowledge in the subject area he or she is teaching.

What more do parents need to know about teachers?

Teachers make bigger contributions to student learning than any other in-school factor, which makes it especially important for parents to have information on how effective a school's teachers are and how well they are rated on evaluations. Because teachers can't effectively teach subjects that they don't know, parents also need to know whether teachers are certified in the subjects they're teaching. Last, while some first-year teachers are outstanding, many others struggle, and so parents need to know how many first-year teachers a school has.



"I NEED TO KNOW when teachers are not prepared to instruct in a subject. Because there was no available data, it was only after my daughter told me that half of her class failed their first-semester final in Algebra II that I found out that the teacher had originally been hired as an English and P.E. teacher. He hadn't even minored in math in college. Especially since my daughter has always struggled in math, I was furious — she needs a strong teacher. I went to the principal who is now making the assessment on whether professional development will give the teacher the skills he needs or whether he really can't be made into a math teacher. In the meantime, the class lost a whole semester of instruction in an essential course and my daughter fell further behind."

DISTRICTS

What information do parents currently have on districts?

In addition to school-level report cards, NCLB requires report cards for each district. These have to include much of the same information as school-level report cards — like how many students meet state academic standards, how many students graduate, and whether teachers meet minimum qualifications. And in states where attendance rates factor into accountability determinations, this information must be included on district-level report cards. They must also include some additional information aimed at uncovering inequities between schools. Specifically, they need to include information on whether the percentage of classes taught by teachers who aren't highly qualified differs between high-poverty and low-poverty schools in the district.

What more do parents need to know about districts?

Parents need to understand both how their school compares to the rest of the schools in their district and whether the district gives each school a fair share of resources. To do so, parents need all of the same information on their school district that they need for their own school — information about student achievement, high schools, school climate, funding, and teachers. And, especially in districts that serve large populations of students, parents need to know whether students in high- and low-poverty schools, and schools with high and low proportions of students of color have similar access to high quality teachers and other critical resources.

“I NEED TO KNOW how kids are achieving, whether the high school is really delivering what they need to be ready for college and career. I also need to know what’s happening with attendance and discipline, how my school is funded, how capable the teachers are at my school — and I need to know about the other schools in the district. If the district can get better results at other schools, we most definitely need to know about that so we can make it happen right over here.”



PARENTS WANT TO KNOW ABOUT

FUNDING

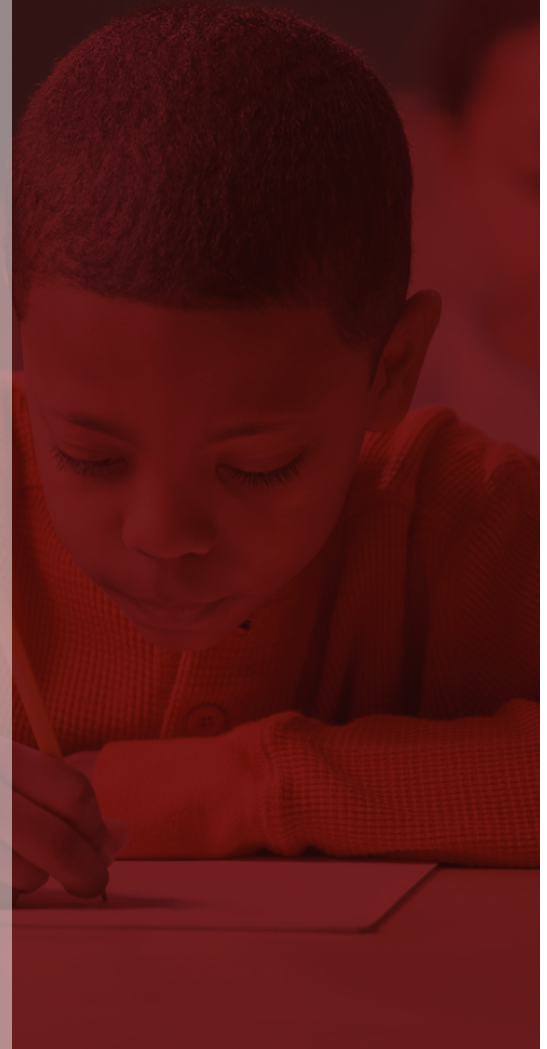
What information do parents currently have on school funding?

No Child Left Behind doesn't require states to include any funding information on school-level report cards.

What more do parents need to know about school funding?

Billions of public dollars go into our schools every year. Parents and taxpayers have a right to know how much each school is spending, and where those funds are coming from.

"I NEED TO KNOW how much we spend on each student compared with other schools. Knowing that would be eye-opening. I wonder if schools in more affluent areas get higher levels of support. Honestly, are we getting our fair share?"



Done right, accountability and public reporting work powerfully together. Accountability sets clear expectations about the performance we need from all schools. Public reporting provides parents and community members the information they need to be effective in helping schools and students meet high expectations. Members of Congress should use the reauthorization of ESEA to make good on this powerful pairing by maintaining strong accountability for results and bolstering the availability of public information about our schools.

ABOUT THE EDUCATION TRUST

The Education Trust promotes high academic achievement for all students at all levels — pre-kindergarten through college. We work alongside parents, educators, and community and business leaders across the country in transforming schools and colleges into institutions that serve all students well. Lessons learned in these efforts, together with unflinching data analyses, shape our state and national policy agendas. Our goal is to close the gaps in opportunity and achievement that consign far too many young people — especially those who are black, Latino, American Indian, or from low-income families — to lives on the margins of the American mainstream.

The
WALTON FAMILY
FOUNDATION

This publication is funded by the Walton Family Foundation. Driven by the urgent need to dramatically raise student achievement, particularly in low-income neighborhoods, the Walton Family Foundation has invested more than \$1 billion to date in initiatives that expand parental choice and equal opportunity in education. Empowering parents to choose quality schools, regardless of type — traditional public, private, or public charter school — will help spur the bold transformation of our national K-12 system of public education. Our nation's children will only reach their potential in today's global economy by having access to a high-quality, publicly funded education.



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