

The ABC's of NCLB

How Parents Can Partner with NH Schools under No Child Left Behind



Many parents report being confused about the complexities of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and what it means for their child and their child's school. This article is designed to give you some basic answers. For more in-depth information, please visit www.nhpirc.org/NCLB.shtml and <http://www.education.nh.gov/nclb/>

NCLB is a federal law requiring states to set standards on what children should know and be able to do at each grade level. The goal of NCLB is to help all the nation's public school students receive a better education and to achieve an increasing level of "proficiency" each year until the target year of 2013-14, when the law states all students should be proficient. Some parts of NCLB apply to all public schools, but some apply only to Title I schools which provide funding for economically disadvantaged areas.

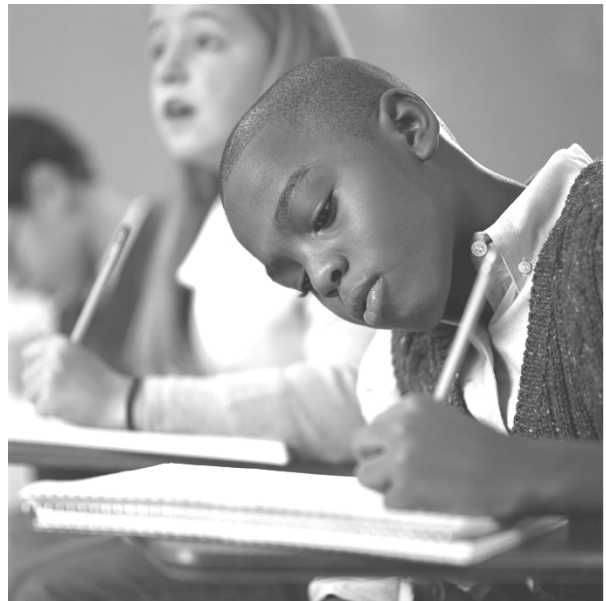
Under No Child Left Behind, adequate yearly progress (AYP) is a yearly goal that NH sets for improving its schools' academic achievement. Achievement is based on the performance of all of its students on state testing in Reading, Writing, and Mathematics. Title I schools that do not meet AYP goals can be judged to be a "School in Need of Improvement," or *SINI* for short. Schools that are SINI's must notify parents of this fact, share information about why this situation has occurred, and offer parents options for assisting their children academically, helping the school as a whole, and/or moving their child to another school.

State Testing & Accountability

NH tests students in reading, writing, and math in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school. Schools must report on how each student subgroup has performed on the test. In NH, subgroups must have at least 11 students to be counted and may be:

- Students from each major racial or ethnic group
- Students with disabilities
- Students learning the English language
- Students from families with low incomes

If the school misses performance (AYP) targets for *any subgroup* for the same subject (reading/writing or math) for two years in a row (and the subgroup may be different each year), the school is determined to be "in need of improvement" and the following year begins "Improvement Year 1." For example, if last year at your school the "students with disabilities" subgroup missed the AYP target in math, and this year it was only the "English language learners" that missed the math AYP target, the school will be judged to have "missed AYP in Math" and is then considered a SINI (School in Need of Improvement) and will be in Year 1 of Improvement starting the next school year. In order to be removed from SINI status, the school must reach AYP targets in the previously under-performing subject area for two consecutive years.



School Requirements When Under "Improvement" Status

Once a school becomes a SINI, it must notify parents of this fact, tell them why their school has reached this status, develop and share plans for improvement (which should include parents being involved in various ways), invest in teacher training, and offer parents the option to transfer their child to another school that is not a SINI (with the school paying for the transportation). For more information on school choice, see www.nhpirc.org/nclbchoice.shtml.



In the *second* year of Improvement (after missing AYP for three consecutive years), a school must in addition to school choice offer Supplemental Educational Services (SES) — basically, tutoring that takes place outside of the regular school day, available for the lowest-achieving, low-income students only, subject to funding availability. For more information on SES, see www.nhpirc.org/nclbSES.shtml.

If the school continues to miss AYP, it must engage in more rigorous efforts to improve, which may include choosing a new curriculum, restructuring the school day, or other strategies.

The Parent Involvement Provision

The Title I Law states that schools must involve parents in a variety of ways — on school improvement teams, in the development or revision of the school's or district's Parent Involvement Policy, and so on. The school must invite parents to at least annual meetings, and offer other parent involvement activities with the aim of furthering student achievement. For more information on Title I, see www.nhpirc.org/titleI.shtml.

Research shows that schools that undertake comprehensive parent involvement initiatives are likely to find that student academic achievement improves (see <http://www.nhparentsmakethedifference.org/whyparentsmatter.htm> for additional research findings). For example, when Amherst Street School In Nashua was found to be in need of improvement a couple of years ago, the school initiated a strong parent involvement plan (with the help of PIRC), which lifted reading scores and improved attendance rates, and resulted in the school actually improving and making AYP that year. (See <http://www.nhparentsmakethedifference.org/successstories.htm> for this and other stories.)

The ABC's

Here is our recommendation for parents who want to help their child and school under NCLB:

A. Find out if your school is a "SINI" by going to this website: <http://tinyurl.com/NHAYP>, click on "2010 AYP Results" and on the next page click on "Final School AYP Status" (this is a PDF file).

B. If your school is in need of improvement, talk to your school principal or other administrator to find out why and to inquire about the school's proposed solutions:

- Inquire about school improvement plans to address areas of need
- Inquire about ways you can help your student do better on the state testing.
- Consult with your child's teacher(s) to learn more about your child's academic progress and what you can do to help
- Inquire about options for taking advantage of available Supplemental Educational Services (SES) (starting with year 2 of Improvement), 21st Century Community Learning Centers (see www.nhpirc.org/21stcentury.shtml), peer tutoring, etc.
- Inquire about how you can be involved in the school improvement efforts, for example by:
 - Being a parent representative on a committee to review and help implement improvement plans, the written parent involvement policy/plan/guidelines, the school-parent compact, etc.
 - Getting involved with your school's parent-teacher group such as the PTA or PTO, and specifically supporting their efforts to respond to school improvement needs
 - Receiving training to deliver parent support workshops specific to the subject(s) and grade level(s) where the school is in need of improvement (call NH State PIRC for more information about this option).
 - Running for or participating in your local school board, especially regarding decisions that may be affecting academic achievement (for example, class size or other funding issues)



C. If after following the steps above, you do not feel confident that the members of your school community are doing everything they can to address the gaps in academic performance, AND if you feel that as a result your own child's academic performance at the school may suffer, you may want to consider transferring your child to another school in the district, as long as that school is not also a SINI. Before doing so, consider carefully the various consequences of such a move, including:

- the additional length of time your child will need to be on a bus
- the social and emotional impact on your child of the loss of his or her teacher(s), reduced contact with friends, etc., and
- the possible effects of the move on his or her academic performance, including the possibility that the new school will be using a different curriculum and/or be working at a different level with the subject matter.

NH State PIRC recommends that you first work with your child to help him/her with test preparation and confidence-building, then work in a proactive, positive, and helpful manner with your school's teachers and administrators to address gaps in achievement by the school as a whole. If all other options have been exhausted and you feel strongly that the benefits of sending your child to another school outweigh the drawbacks, then you should consider the public school choice option.

A Newfound Example

When the Newfound (NH) Area School District found its Middle School in need of improvement under NCLB, they decided to involve the students in a game of "Let's do our best and beat last year's scores!" Everyone in the community got involved, from parents and teachers to the Police Chief and the local radio station. Students were encouraged and rewarded for preparing for doing well on the tests through such strategies as pep rallies and raffle prizes. School staff were also coached on supporting each student. The result? With all of that support and with that atmosphere of fun, 78% of students achieved growth targets, and the school made AYP in both Reading in Math.

It's Up to You

When the federal government adopted No Child Left Behind, it recognized the power of parents and wrote them into the plan. Parents know their children best, can often encourage them to be their best, and can bring additional experience and support into the school to help make sure all students can reach their maximum potential. If you learn that your school is a SINI, don't panic or jump to conclusions. Find out how your child and/or other students need to raise test scores and do whatever you can to contribute to the success of your school. After all, it takes a village to raise a child... and it just may take your help as an committed parent to help the students in your community to reach the worthy and ambitious goals of No Child Left Behind.



NH State PIRC offers free support, workshops, and technical assistance to parents, schools, parent-teacher groups, and others in understanding and implementing practices and policies for supporting NCLB and parent involvement goals of Title I, Section 1118.

For more information, visit www.nhpirc.org or call (800) 947-7005 or (603) 848-5665.



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