

A MANUAL FOR ALASKA NATIVE PARENTS
TO PROMOTE STUDENT SUCCESS

A
PROJECT

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RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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A. Introduction

I wrote this manual to provide Alaska Native parents with ideas on ways to get involved with their children in school. There is urgency to the need for Alaska Native parents to work with their children throughout their children's educational years so the children can do well in school. Being a parent is a full-time job and time seems consumed with work, activities, family, and subsistence activities. Times are different from decades ago when the typical working parent was the man of the house and the wife stayed home helping their children with homework. Today, a majority of parents work to support the families and lack the time to become more involved with youth education. Sometimes parents will not make the time to work with their children, leaving education up to the administrators and teachers in the school system. Many times, children seem to fend for themselves. Without proper guidance, the consequences can be detrimental for the children themselves, for their families, for future employers, and for the community in which they live. People are quick to criticize the current school system but will very rarely participate in youth education to make it better.

There is a direct link between the level of parental involvement and a child's success in school. When parents show an interest in their children's education then their children are more apt to excel in school. When parents are involved from the start then as their children progress through the educational system, it is easier to communicate with teachers and school administrators, increasing their children's success in school.

The lack of participation by Alaska Native parents can deprive their children of achieving their full potential. Communities lose out because as young adults with minimal education or experience move into adulthood, they are less likely to contribute to the economy in a productive manner. Employers may then face

problems with absenteeism, higher turnovers, poor work ethics, and stagnant employees. Major changes in the current educational system are unlikely but Alaska Native parents have the choice to make it work for their children.

Parents who are actively involved in their children's education won't find themselves running around to get materials at the last minute when projects are due or panic when they get called and are told that one of their children is in the principal's office. There are many ways for parents to involve themselves, from working on homework to making presentations to a class. Parents do not have to be in the school, on the school board or be sports parents to get involved. If parents show an interest in their children's education, the children likewise become more interested.

Teachers are not the only parties responsible for the education of Alaska Native children. As active partners, Alaska Native parents must take the time to work with their children at home, making sure their children are safe, healthy, and making good choices. What children learn and see at home will affect how they behave in school.

Parents:

- are their children's first teachers.
- must provide their children with the tools to succeed in life.
- have an obligation through coaching and teaching to help their children be proud, educated, contributing adults.
- Are responsible for teaching their children to live healthy lives and must be positive role models.
- should stand up for their children when it comes to education. No one else will stand up for them.
- must make their children accountable for their individual actions.

- make their children's education worth their time.
- must be proactive and not reactive.
- raise the academic achievement level of their children at the schools.
- have a right to participate in the education of their children.

Some ways that parents can be responsible for their children's education are:

- meet and talk with the teachers, one-on-one.
- share expectations with the teachers.
- keep in regular contact with the teacher.
- provide the teacher with useful information about the children so the teacher knows the children's strengths and weaknesses.

Alaska Native parents need to get involved in the education of their children right from the start. If every Alaska Native parent was directly involved in his or her child's education, imagine the positive impact on the Alaska Native students. Success would be apparent on state standardized testing, more Alaska Native students would be graduating from high school, and more Alaska Natives will be in the active workforce. To get to this level requires Alaska Native parents to communicate with schools and be active partners in the education of their children.

B. How to use this manual

My purpose in creating this manual is to engage Alaska Native parents in the education of their school age children. Becoming active allows Alaska Native parents to seek positive results and allows them to focus on all facets of a child's life, which include understanding what is being taught in school, how it is taught and who is teaching, and by providing ideas on ways parents can contribute to their children's education. The guide will use the word "you" in hopes of making the manual more personal.

The information in this manual provides avenues for you to get involved with your child's education. I consolidated information that I thought was useful with the idea of promoting Alaska Native parental involvement in the school system at the level of the youth. The manual is not all-inclusive or intended to be biased. It is to enlighten you by sharing ideas on what you, as parents, can do. I wrote the manual in practical terms for easy understanding. You may have your own ideas on what works and I would hope you would share your ideas with others.

If teachers are using this manual, it may allow them to seek ways to involve you and other Native parents and take the opportunity to see Alaska Native students in a different way. I would suggest that teachers pay some attention to the section on cultural awareness.

Using this guide will be beneficial if you have a computer with internet access to visit some of the sites mentioned. Some of the sites require Adobe Acrobat Reader and a computer that has the capability of high memory to download some of the information on the sites. There is a website that you can use if you are unfamiliar with the Internet. That website is <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/internet/title.html>. This manual is set up with bolded subtitles for easier searches. I do not intend to promote the authors of the material or promote the sale of any of the products in this packet.

The areas that this manual focuses on are:

- a. How to get involved with the school
- b. Getting involved with homework
- c. Teacher/Student relationship
- d. Communication
- e. Further education

While reading this manual, think about the following questions:

- What are some ways you help your child to succeed in school?
- How does volunteering fit in with your own schedule?
- When was the last time you volunteered in your child's school?
- Do you stop by the school to see your child?
- Do you keep in regular contact with your child's teacher(s)?
- What are your child's strengths and weakness as it relates to school?
- Do you teach your child to plan and make responsible decisions about school?
- How often do you assist with homework?
- How much homework does your child have each day?
- When a teacher invites you into the classroom, do you go?
- Do you feel comfortable talking to your child's teacher about his or her progress?
- Do you take immediate action if your child is failing in school?
- Do you praise your child for effort or achievement in school?

C. Here are some ways for you to get involved.

Learn about the political side of education

It is a good idea to keep informed about the issues and political side of education because this could be influencing the local curriculum and other facets of education in the school district. Learn about the educational issues in Alaska. Find out how your school is doing in terms of Adequate Yearly Progress, student statistics, state-mandated tests, and so forth. See page [61](#) of this manual to learn more about the No Child Left Behind law because it affects your child's education. Keep updated on current news, policies, regulation changes, testing materials, and so forth.

Volunteer, volunteer, volunteer!

There are many ways to get involved with your child's education. You do not need to have a political interest in the school to volunteer. Your volunteer time is free and takes minimal time out of your busy schedule. Your involvement and encouragement of education tells your child that he or she is worthwhile and shows you are interested in his or her education. You may help him or her to identify and pursue positive goals. You may also see changes in your child that may indicate growth or identify problem areas early on.

Teachers appreciate the time you commit. The teacher will not ask you to help if you do not volunteer. Try to put some time aside to volunteer even if you have a full schedule and be consistent. Offering your assistance once at the beginning of the year is not enough. Remember that the teacher could be very busy with ten to twenty-five students at the time and he or she may have forgotten. Teachers, especially those who are new to the profession, and/or new to the community, appear to be very preoccupied with other things because they are working for a new administration and are trying to make their first year a success.

They may not be focusing on ways parents can help. This is an opportunity for you to contribute your time and skills.

Ideally, going into the classroom or school is best, but not everyone is able to do that. Many of you work during the school day and can not get to school to help. If your job interferes with the ability to participate, get involved where you can. It is important that you maintain confidentiality if you choose to volunteer. You are in the school to provide your help, not to learn things about other people's kids to use as gossip. Be professional!

Your willingness to contribute by volunteering can dramatically change the climate of the parent-teacher relationship and possibly lower any barriers between the teacher and you. Long-term friendships may develop.

There will be times that one teacher may have a tough shell. He or she is there to teach and that seems to be the extent of his or her commitment to your community. That is the teacher that who does not say much to you when you inquire about your child, may give short answers to pointed questions, or may take longer to answer your phone calls. This teacher will be the one that you would want to dedicate more time to. Be persistent! Meet with the teacher and find common ground. Sometimes, you may be unsuccessful, but don't let that deter you from being involved. You are there for your child and are your child's best advocate.

Volunteer with commitment

If you are going to volunteer, go in on a regular basis. Treat your commitment to work with the school with importance. Once you start volunteering, the teacher will see your time as important and will utilize your services, accordingly. Your child will feel proud of your efforts and of your interest in his or her school. He or

she will have the opportunity to observe you in a positive interaction with the teacher, and may develop trust of the teacher like you.

Volunteer at least one hour a week as a resource person for the teacher or school. Working for your children's teachers allows your children and their classmates to see you contributing to their education. Write the volunteer dates on the calendar as you would write down someone's birthday. Plan your volunteer time so that it fits into your schedule, as well as the teacher's schedule. Find out what time of the week works best for you, think of the time that you are least likely to forget and schedule that time throughout the school year.

Here are some ways that you can weave volunteering into a busy life.

Go into the classroom during your lunch period. Lunch hour works fine because school is in progress and is usually enough time for you to fit into your workday and is convenient for the teacher, also. You might go in during lunch period to make copies for the teacher for a few minutes. It is great if you are located close to the school, so you could go in more regularly during your lunch hour without too much disruption to your own schedule. If not, then plan going into the school once a week, or even twice a month so that you and the teacher can plan for the visit.

Discuss your job with a class.

Kids love it when they get a different perspective on a topic such as a visit from someone who works. This gives you the opportunity to introduce them to the concept of employment opportunities that they might want to pursue when they get older. If you can relate your job to something they are learning about, offer your time. Ask the teacher about what he or she wants you to discuss in advance and plan for the visit. A session with the kids should only take a short amount of your time. Many employers are willing to have employees advocate

for their departments so your boss might even allow you to go in at another time besides lunch and consider the time as work time.

Offer a field trip to your work place and involve your co-workers.

Nationally, each year, parents participate in “Child to Work” days, which allow children, primarily ages 8 to 12, to go to work with parents on a school day to observe the world of working people. If your community does not participate in this national event, you can still offer a field trip to your work for an hour or two. Set up a time that will work for you, your co-workers and the school. Plan how you will entertain the students, encourage education and praise them for going to school. These field trip may inspire a child and set him or her on a career track at an early age.

Type papers for the teacher.

Meet with the teacher to volunteer time to offer your typing skills. This is great because you could do this at the school, work, or even at home. It should take only a few minutes of your time because the teacher will usually ask you to type something that is one to two pages in length. If you work on this assignment during work or at home, you can send the typed pages by email so that the teacher can get the document quickly and has the opportunity to make changes as necessary.

Work on displays at the school.

You may find yourself doing the weekly showcase or display area outside the classroom, when needed. Most of the time, the teacher will give you instructions on what to do. The great part is your child will feel proud that you helped to “show off” his or her class work. Other students get to know you better and you gain a deep respect for all children and vice versa.

Read to a class for fifteen minutes.

Set up a time with the teacher for once or twice a month and stick to it. This works for elementary classes. Your presence shows children in the class that some adults in the community care about their education. Reading with a class gives you insight into your child's reading pace compared to the rest of the class. Usually, the teacher will prep the kids for your visit and gives the teacher a little break.

Correct schoolwork for the teacher.

You could correct homework when you go into the classroom. Yes, the teacher has an answer book to use, so you do not have to sit there trying to figure out the correct answers. Put the aside questionable papers for the teacher to address. Your benefit in correcting schoolwork provides you with the opportunity to do spot checks on your child's schoolwork. Information that you learn from correcting schoolwork must remain confidential at all times.

Tutor students.

Let the teacher know if you would like to tutor students. Tutoring does not take much time or effort and gives you the opportunity to be a good role model. Tutor students if you are comfortable and have strengths in specific areas. You may find yourself doing some "one-on-one" with a student at the teacher's request. The teacher will tell you what problem areas to work on and with which students. Sometimes, you could just read with a student or help complete homework. Encourage the student as you work with him or her. Your own child might feel a bit jealous seeing you spend time with another child, but it will work out if you have a good relationship with your child.

Help the teacher with field trips

Sometimes, the teacher might need help on field trips and would most likely accept your offer to assist. If you are able to provide only a short amount of time assisting the teacher on a field trip, meet the class at a set location for scheduled picnics, berry picking, or whatever the field trip may be, and help out for a few minutes. Provide snacks or gear if you are unable to make it on the field trip at all.

Share your traditional skills and education.

Today, many students learn to use measuring tools for almost everything, and to learn from reading books provided by the schools. Alaska Native people are unique when it comes to creativity and artistic skills. Alaska Native artists create much of the artwork or projects by visual measurement using values, knowledge and skills passed down orally from ancestors. For students to actually experience the differences between traditional and western education would be beneficial for both teachers and the students. In fact, many schools in rural Alaska participate in culture camps where tradition bearers will work with students teaching a variety of traditional practices such as the preservation of meats, fish, berries, and plants, gathering traditional medicinal plants, using traditional tools, discussing traditional hunting and fishing practices, and providing oral history.

The culture camps provide education that many young Alaska Native youth may not get otherwise. Even if your community cannot afford the educational camps, you can still offer a field trip to students and teachers. You will provide the teacher insight into traditional education prior to western techniques when you share your cultural knowledge and practices. The teacher may gain a different perspective on traditional Alaska Native living. Some teachers will get

involved in traditional singing, dancing, and potlatches in an effort to be a part of the community.

In the classroom, share your skills, such as birch bark basket making, traditional tool making, carving, and beading. This type of volunteering will allow the teacher to observe you in action. You will also be able to observe the teacher in return. This is all part of educating him or her positively. The kids also like to be involved where they are “one-up” on the teacher. It empowers them to be sharing something they appreciate too. If you’ve got a family tree, have your child bring it in to share. Better yet, go in with your child. If there is a grandma or grandpa available, ask him or her to come along to tell stories.

Talk about your culture.

Story telling or demonstrations are a great way to enlighten the teacher because they provide insight into your child’s ancestral history that no one else could provide more accurately. Use this time to engage in discussion with the children in the classroom as well.

Offer to do some activities at home.

There may be some things that the teacher could send home for you to work on that might take just a little of your time. Most things could be done overnight. Not all of your volunteering has to be in the school. Inform the teacher if you have free time in the evening and ask if there is any thing he or she could send home for you to work on. Always ask! The teacher could send work home with your child or you could go pick things up at the school. Be sure to ask the teacher when he or she would need a project turned in. If you get a huge project, ask your child or other family member to help complete the project. You might be surprised at the participation from home.

Volunteering at some level directly in the classroom or at home contributes to your child's education. You teach your child an important lesson about helping out others when you volunteer. You could be providing a positive impression of school just by getting involved at an interactive level.

Some ideas of home activities:

Prepare poster boards for a class project for the teacher.

Provide some help by preparing the boards, putting models together, gluing, doing the cut-outs, making project formats. The teacher usually has the guides to show you how to do prep work. Science projects seem to be a regular school project for all grade levels. Research science project ideas and email to the teacher.

Construct a paper mache model, as instructed by the teacher.

You might find yourself blowing up balloons at home and putting the first model together. The teacher would provide the materials necessary for the project.

Bake something simple for the class.

There may be a school or class celebration coming up. If you find yourself too busy during the week, bake the weekend before. Cookies will stay if you freeze them for a few days. Send in snacks during mandatory state testing to the students. Involve your family members in these activities. Many times, my husband or children would be lured to the kitchen to rustle up a simple dessert to bring to the school.

The teacher needs help to find some Christmas songs and doesn't have the time to search the internet.

Assuming you have a computer, do the search for the teacher. If he or she is fine with the songs selected, copy them. Many of us Alaska Natives have grown up learning traditional Christmas songs in our native languages. If you have a traditional native song and you have the lyrics, tape record the song and share the tape so kids can learn it.

D. Check on your child's progress in school

Children who stay on top of their schoolwork generally have good grades.

You may find yourself more involved with the teacher if you want your child to have a positive experience. Involve yourself with your child to ensure he or she does well in school. Reward good behavior. Inform the teacher about what works best for your child. Tell the teacher up front if your child is restless by nature and have the teacher keep your child near the front of the class. Do periodic visits to the school to see how your child is behaving.

Check on your child's progress in school as you would gauge the temperature outside in the winter before going on a snow machine trip, meaning that checking on your child's progress should be a habitual thing to do. You should get weekly or bi-weekly reports on your child. Just ask your child's teachers for updates and most are willing to meet with you anytime. Don't wait for the teacher to call you and don't wait for parent/teacher conferences before you involve yourself with the teachers. That is too long to wait to check your child's progress! For all you know, your child could be failing.

Children who keep up with their schoolwork tend to know what is going on with each subject. School seems to be easier for them and they ask for help when they have difficulties. They have a routine down which allows them time to absorb what's being taught, and they are able to contribute and participate in class without being afraid to provide answers in the class, even if the answers aren't correct. They study for tests to keep up their grades and they tend to get a lot of support from home.

There are children who have a tougher time in school for whatever reason and they sometimes tend to ignore homework, and their grades tend to be lower.

They do not ask their teachers or parents for help, and may tend to be disruptive in class. These children are at risk for failing and they may not have strong support from home. Parents must be involved if their children do not take school seriously. Early intervention is vital! By taking the initiative, you start an interactive process with the teacher(s).

Here are some simple steps to keeping in touch:

- Make the commitment.
- Make the call to the teacher. Write the date on the calendar.
- Write questions you want to ask the teacher when you meet. Focus your questions on academics and behavioral issues.
- Meet with the teacher.
- Ask to see worksheets, workbooks, homework assignment grades, test grades, curriculum content.
- Ask about your child's participation in class and his relationship with other students.
- Discuss your parent/teacher visit with your child. Depending on how well or badly the visit goes, be ready to work on problem areas immediately. Some things can require you to drop your evening activities to work on problem areas. It does your child no good if you get mad about his or her schoolwork. He or she will tune you out! Calm down if you find yourself getting upset! Keep in mind that you are there to help provide guidance. Listen to what your child is saying. Sometimes, the problems that your child is having are just a matter of interpreting the material.
- Deal with behavioral problems firmly and effectively. Stop negative study habits by using positive discipline tools such as cutting off privileges and keeping your child home for a short time to concentrate on problem areas.

This means you will have to spend more time with your child and keep the upper hand so that he or she will get back on a good study track.

- Help where necessary and remember you are a part of the solution. if there is lack of communication between your child and the teacher, be the middle person. Sometimes, the teacher may be at fault.
- Follow up with the teacher to check progress weekly to ensure that your child is back on an academic track and following through with his or her work
- Praise your child for all good efforts. Positively reinforcing good actions helps your child to feel confident about his or her efforts.
- Comment on progress as that grade goes up. It teaches the child that hard work does pay off.

By reviewing work that your child does at school, you will have a general idea of his or her progress academically. Your child's education lies in your hands. Don't wait for the invitation. Your child will appreciate your interest in his or her education. Sometimes he or she will dislike your presence, but most of the time your child likes the fact that you want to know how he or she is doing.

E. There are some simple things you could do at home

Teach your child to prepare for school the night before.

Yes, you need to get involved at home too, because home life affects kids' performance at school. There will some kids who wait until right before school time to get ready. Some will be rushing around at the last minute. You will sometimes find yourself caught up in the "last minute" hunt so that your child gets to school on time. Make sure that your child puts homework and other necessary materials in the backpack the night before to ensure that homework or books are in there. Periodically, go through his or her backpack to make sure that your child is turning in homework. Also, get your child in the habit of putting his or her outerwear, such as coat, boots, gloves, and hat in one place. It is a good idea to keep extra gloves and hats around since these are the things that seem to get misplaced the most. It is worth your child's time to prepare the night before.

Take care of you and your family. If there are other issues in your home that seem to be beyond your control such as substance or domestic abuse, which are affecting your ability to pay attention to your child's progress in school, get help. Talk to a friend or relative. Talk to the teacher or principal if needed. Situations at home will affect your child's learning at school.

Set a curfew so your child is inside the house early enough to get ready for bed.

Start your child on a curfew when your child is very young and keep up the practice. It is a good idea to give your child a nightly curfew throughout his or her school years. Setting a curfew is important. Children who have early curfews and go to bed earlier are more alert at school. A suggestion for all those under 8th grade would be 8:30 pm, at the latest. The younger ones should be in earlier. Your child may fuss about coming in while his or her friends may still out but he

or she will get used to the curfew. His or her fussing will be ongoing. Be firm and set consequences for curfew violations.

Make sure your child is getting enough rest at night.

Your child's education should be a priority on school nights so make sure he or she gets to sleep at a decent hour. If your child tends to be dragging around, chances are he or she needs proper rest. There are many reasons your child could be tired, but one of the main reasons today is simply because he or she stays up late chatting on the computer. If your child is into computer chatting, set rules and require that he or she follow your rules. For teenagers, chatting should end at around 9pm or 10pm on school nights including Sundays. Chatting on-line for those under 6th grade should end earlier. Bedtime should also be set. A recommendation would for younger children would be 8:30pm; middle school children by 9:30 at the latest; high school children seem okay if they are in bed by 10pm, but no later than 11:00pm. If you are a night owl, get your children to bed before you relax to watch television, get on the computer, or read.

Provide your child with a good breakfast before sending him or her off to school.

Breakfast is one of the most important meals of the day, so make sure you get your children off to school with a good breakfast. Kids, who are well rested, well fed and are living in a healthy environment, are usually alert in school. Cook for your child in the morning. Not only are you providing a good hot meal, but also your actions are a good example of parental responsibility. There are days that you and your children will oversleep. It is not uncommon and it does not make you a bad person. Keep extra peanut butter and jelly, bread, healthy cereals, fruits, and granola bars for days that you wake up late or don't have time to cook breakfast,. Having a PB&J sandwich on the way out the door should keep your

child until lunch. As long as you provide a good breakfast a majority of time, the periodic snack is okay.

Checking on your child on a regular basis and taking an active role at home are important steps you can take to get involved with your child. Make the choice to participate in your child's education. The time is overdue for Alaska Native parents to actively participate and be partners in their child's education. The long-term benefits are worth your time and effort. Involvement starts with you. I have attached some reference materials that I felt were essential to encourage Alaska Native parents to become partners with the educational systems.

F. SOME ESSENTIAL SITES THAT PROMOTE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

If you have a soft copy of this manual, you can get to some of the websites listed below follow these steps.

1. Open your internet server;
2. Go back to this manual;
3. Put mouse cursor on the website address;
4. Right click on “open hyperlink” or hold down “Control” key on your key pad and mouse click. Website should open

Beyond Tokenism: Parents As Partners in Literacy, Cairney, Trevor H. & Munsie, Lynne Published May 1995. This book provides parents with ideas and directions for providing positive parent partnerships with schools.

<http://www.parentcenter.com/learning/schoolsuccess> Many ways you can become involved in your school.

“I Never Knew I Was Needed Until You Called.” The Reading Teacher, Volume 48, Number 7 (1995) (pages 614-617) This article provides ideas on what parents can do to become active partners in the education of their youth.

http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/homework/parentalsupport/benefits_ps/ Why should you help with homework? You are like the drill sergeant at home to make sure your child does the assignments.

http://www.parentingweb.com/dev_edu/improveread.htm Ways to encourage your child to read. Tip: allow yourself time to read to your child or have your child read to you twenty minutes each night.

<http://familyeducation.com/topic/front/0,1156,63-20046-1,00.html> Approaching your child’s teacher about grades. Teachers want to work with you. Don’t forget that. Just ask the right questions.

<http://familyeducation.com/article/0,1120,1-1488,00.html> Ten most important questions to keep in mind. This also brings up an important reminder for parents to read brochures that the teachers send home periodically-it addresses these same types of questions.

One Person Can Make a Difference, Ordinary People Doing Extraordinary Things. Jampolsky, Gerald G., M.D, Bantam Books, New York, 1990,

“Parental Involvement Linked to Success” found in *Elicaq*, Volume 14, Number 1, p3.

“Parent Participation In The Schools: Are The Benefits Worth The Burdens?” Short article that promotes parental involvement in schools, supporting the need for parents to be familiar with their youth’s school system and may give one the idea that as a parent, there is some common ground that could be shared.

Bergstrom, A., Cleary, L., & Peacock, T. (2003) The seventh generation: Native youth speak about finding the good path. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools. A study of 120 high school-age American Indian youth from Canada and the United States, with topics ranging from personal stories, identity issues to school life. The youth's feelings are captured like no other.

Riera, Michael, PhD, 1995, Uncommon Sense for Parents and Teenagers, Chapter 8: Academics, Grades, Motivation. (Publisher Celestial Arts.) Advice on how to talk to your child about school.

<http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content2/talking.assessment.k12.4.html> Talking to your child about grades is sometimes very sensitive. The standardized testing is a complex thing to explain and understand. This site provides some advice on how to approach your child when the time comes. You can even use this advice to discuss normal classroom testing.

http://www.seidata.com/technical_support/tutorial/Reviews/PARENT.htm Focusing on the family and just want to go to a rich information base, this one has links dedicated to parenting. It is well worth the search, especially for information on the younger children.

http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/voice/voice113.shtml "Most Direct Route to Parents is an E-Line." An article suggesting electronic mail connection to teachers. How communicating with your teacher, can start at the touch of a computer key. Email is a part of today's communication system. You will find that most teachers would like a link to parents because since they are busy too, they could do mass emails attaching your child's progress report on a weekly basis.

http://www.educationworld.com/a_issues/issues168.shtml Find out what teachers across the nation are doing to educate children.

<http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content2/news2/pta.html> The National Parent Teacher Association (PTA), was founded in 1897, and serves as an advocate for children and families in schools, the community, and before government agencies. It has approximately 6.5 million members, involved in child education, health and welfare issues. This site offers tips on working with youth and school. You can also learn about the Alaska site by logging on to the State Of Alaska, Department of Education site.

<http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/INAR.html> Addresses the unfavorable issue of "dropping out" of high school. Issues surrounding American Indians/ Alaska Natives. Understanding the issues behind dropouts empowers parents to be more proactive.

<https://www.girlsandboystown.org/store/products.asp?dept=15&title=Education> This is not an essential site, but shows some books that some parents might be interested in.

G. Homework

Alaska Native parents should work with their children on homework. Children need to know that we care about every aspect of school so they will have an interest too. Attend open houses and meet with the teachers during open houses so you are aware of the teacher's school plans. Get involved with your child and help with homework. Don't shy away from homework or your child may learn to avoid it as well. Assisting with homework may seem easier said than done, especially when your child would rather do other things, such as watch TV or play electronic games. It's important to get the upper hand right up front and be consistent.

Teachers assign homework for many reasons

- Ultimately, homework allows children to understand classroom work.
- It is important for children to review and understand the materials in the classroom so they keep up with other children.
- Homework benefits children academically by preparing them better for tests.
- Homework teaches good study habits, work habits, and responsibility.
- Homework contributes to children's independence and to their self esteem.
- Homework allows children to use their "thinking caps."
- Sometimes, teachers assign homework when children have limited time in class.

Every child should do homework as a regular part of his or her school experience to reinforce what the teacher is teaching in school. Set homework rules early in your child's education so your child will keep up with the class.

In the first two years of school, homework is usually limited and your child usually gets the work completed in school. There should be an increase in homework as your child gets older. It seems that your child is learning more by the 3rd grade. For example, your child will study more vocabulary words, practice writing complete paragraphs, and be doing more in-depth math. Be concerned if not much work is assigned by at least the 3rd grade.

Be consistent in your rules about studying and good grades when you set ground rules. It is common for your child to pull you into helping with homework assignments. Homework allows him or her to learn formulas or concepts, research, and to study for tests. Let your child know up front to work problems through before asking for help. Never do the homework for your child. It only teaches your child to cheat or expect others to do the work for him or her. Make sure your child does the homework each night and turns the work in the next day. If you get confused on your child's homework assignments, keep negative opinions to yourself. Your child will often mirror what you do.

Make homework fun and be organized. Help your child organize the school load to give your child some control. Teach your child to use a calendar of some sort and use one yourself. Utilize a calendar to keep track of medical appointments, sports events, family birthdays, and so forth. You could set a good example by completing your work on time. At the beginning of the year, teachers may require every child to keep a homework folder in his or her backpack. Have your child keep track of the school schedule and homework assignments, and write down test dates in his or her day minder. Write down test dates on the family calendar so that you can remind him or her to study. Call the teacher to see when your child will be testing so that you can be proactive in ensuring he or she studies.

If your child is not doing work in school even if given the time, support the teacher by making your child do the work at home to reinforce the idea that studying provides the opportunity to get a higher grade. Constructively reinforce the notion that he or she completes work while in school then time in the evening could be for what the child wants to do. Reinforce that school time is for schoolwork. State clearly that he or she will have to face the consequences of his or her actions if he or she does not study and gets bad grades. Stick to your disciplinary action through your child's stubbornness. Restrict him or her from things that he or she likes to get his or her attention. Keep the child home for a few days to allow that child time to reflect on good or bad choices. Tell your child that he or she has to be in right after school every day until he or she shows improvement. Gauge improvement by reviewing all schoolwork until you see an improvement in the grade or the teacher lets you know. Be prepared for an upset child. Be prepared to assist with assignments where necessary and to work with the teacher on a regular basis. Be consistent. Be fair. This positive discipline will pay off. Talk to your friends about how they deal with their kids in situations like this.

Call the teacher if you don't see enough homework

Sometimes, students utilize school time to do the work and come home with no assignments or projects to work on. There are kids who deliberately leave their assignments at school. If your child is not utilizing school time properly, address the situation immediately. If the teacher provides your child with a weekly update or schedule or expects your child to use a planner, then review your son or daughter's day-planner because assignments should be in there. If your child is not using the schedule as intended, encourage your child to do so.

Your first visit to address the "homework" situation usually is with the teacher. Find out why your child is not bringing homework home. If the teacher just does

not assign homework, then request ways you can enhance your child's learning. Ask the teacher to provide practice sheets if you feel that your child would benefit from more practice. Many will work with you. On the positive side, your child could be doing the work at school during study hall and utilizing his or her free time constructively. If you just want to fill that time after school or in the evenings, research to get some practice schoolwork on your own and make sure whatever you get relates to your child's grade level. Have your child read for at least thirty minutes each day and keep reading material around.

If you find your child doing hours of homework each night, voice this with your child's teacher. There may be something else be going on that you may not be aware of. Stop in at the school at the end of the day, or call and make an appointment. Either way, it is vital to talk to the teacher. As your child gets older, he or she will not tell you much about school. Take it upon yourself to contact your child's teacher to make sure he or she is doing well in school.

At home, have a quiet place for your child to do homework.

Keep a study space available in your home for your child. Usually, the kitchen table is where your child will tend to work on homework. Sometimes, your child will use the living room floor or his or her room. There should be no noise during study time and the television should be off. Make yourself available for questions.

Have a study time set up and stick to it.

Have your child work on homework right after school when the material is still fresh on your child's mind. An early study time allows your child to finish in a timely manner. Homework after school becomes a part of your child's day if you remind your child on a regular basis. You will be able to gauge your child's study habits by the time he or she is a teenager. If your child has no homework on a

particular day, use the time to have the child read something fun, just so that your child uses the reserved time, constructively.

As a reminder, teenagers will wait until right before bedtime to tackle homework. You should not allow any phone calls during study time unless it is to discuss homework. If he or she chooses to do homework right before bedtime, you are putting the responsibility back on the child about making choices. Periodically check his or her progress to make sure that he or she is doing the work during this study time.

Allow your child to pace him or herself when it comes to completing homework or studying for tests.

Encourage your child to study or work on assigned projects every day so that he or she keeps up with schoolwork. Help him or her to set up some sort of time management system. He or she should study roughly thirty minutes each night to keep up with assignments. Usually, your child will know what to do on the schoolwork. Your child should do urgent homework first. If your child is working on a huge assignment, he or she is open to suggestions, which helps when he or she is “down to the wire. “ Situations can become stressful for some kids because they choose to wait until the last minute to study. If you notice your child waiting until the last minute, break his or her bad habit before it becomes a problem. Your child will not absorb the material by rushing through materials and he or she may turn in poor or incomplete assignments to the teacher. Keep after your child on a regular basis.

Another thing you can do to help your child is to encourage a buddy system where he or she could study with other students. The buddy system allows your child to share ideas and work on assignments with other children. This system works best during group projects, when your child and his or her friends are

learning new material in school, or during competitive school projects, such as the science fair.

Give your child a break between studies.

Allow your child small breaks in between long hours of studying so he or she understands the material, without getting overwhelmed. A suggestion would be to provide one ten to twenty minute break but it really depends on how long your child has been studying. Spend some of the break time with your child and engage in interactive discussions that do not relate to the schoolwork. A mental break is always refreshing. Use this time to praise his or her efforts. Your encouragement reinforces that the efforts he or she is putting towards school is worth the effort and it shows you care.

Have a “tool kit” of materials available at all times.

A tool kit is a set of materials that your child will use on a regular basis for doing homework. Items that you should keep handy are lead and colored pencils, pens, erasers, ruler, markers, paper, glue, computer paper, and writing paper.

Keep informational references handy.

Many homework assignments draw upon resources that you should keep on hand. The dictionary and atlas are good examples. If you can afford more than one dictionary, get a couple of different types. If you get a chance to go to garage sales in the city, keep an eye out for reference materials to add to your home library. Keeping books on world history and United States history are great references that come in handy throughout your child’s education. The teacher usually has some reference materials that could help in assisting with homework. Participate in your child’s book orders at school because those book orders have good, inexpensive reference materials also.

Use the internet to help with schoolwork

The Internet is one of the most useful resources to look up information and it is so easy to use. Get on the internet using one of the search engines such as Yahoo. Type in a key word or key words to find information on a particular topic or subject. You will find thousands of sites to utilize. If you haven't learned how to use the Internet and would like to learn, try this tutorial on the State of Alaska, Department of Education's website, <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/internet/title.html>.

The great thing about using the Internet is that many of the sites are free and user-friendly. When you find a site that is beneficial, save it for future use. There are many available tutorials and software available that students could use for assignments and you can purchase these at a decent price.

The library in your community is another resource for homework, if you have one. If not, I would strongly encourage using the internet. A good product to think about is Microsoft Encarta, which is a software product of information similar to the hardback encyclopedias. Most libraries keep encyclopedias, dictionaries, or other reference materials. Go with your child to the local library to look for information.

Allow your child to draft writing assignments.

If your child knows what he or she wants to write, but is not quick on the computer, tell him or her to write a draft on paper. Then volunteer to type out the draft exactly as written, without making any changes. Keep the written draft with the typed one so the student can show it to the teacher. Always, inform the teacher when you help with computer-based homework and tell the teacher what type of assistance you provided for your child. You should be typing from your

child's draft only when your child has many assignments to complete. You should just be typing and not making corrections. Then dedicate some of your own time to teach your child to use the keyboard. If the writing assignment is computer-based then your child should really do the assignment alone. If your child is having a difficult time to start on written assignments, suggest he or she start by creating an outline, then following the outline. Always, make your child go back to the teacher's directions to make sure his or her work aligns to the assignment. You should only type up drafts on a periodic basis so that your child takes responsibility for his or her own work. You should only provide this practice for your child up to the sixth grade.

You could help your child when the school assignments are new or complex.

Your child will learn new things at school all the time. Some of the material and methods of teaching students may be different from when you were in school. Don't assume you know the how to do homework until you see what your child is doing. Sometimes, he or she will have periodic bouts of "fussing" but keep in mind that he or she is asking for help in his or her own way. Encourage your child to make an effort before asking you for help. Build your child's skill base by offering ideas on how to approach problem areas. Ask your child to work problems repetitively if problems are complex. You may find yourself sitting beside him or her, helping him or her to understand the assignment.

Sometimes you will get confused on the methods that your children practices. For example, your child may be learning mathematical calculations using a different approach than you learned. When he or she asks for help, have him or her explain the approach he or she is learning, then attempt to assist. Allowing him or her explain the method gives him or her, the opportunity to process the

material. Sometimes it helps to go back to the basics and review the materials to get an understanding of what your child needs to complete.

Work with your child on math.

For some children, math can be complex. Be patient with your child when he or she is having difficulty with math and provide assistance when necessary. Have him or her review the instructions at the start of the each chapter to understand math concepts. Sometimes, that is all it takes. There will be times when you have to sound like a broken record, reading the instructions before tackling problems. If you keep repeating it, your child will eventually understand. Provide a sample problem, work the problem through and explain the process as you go along. Then, have your child try. Watch how your child does the problems. If you see errors your child may be making, correct him or her. Then allow him or her to do the rest of the problems. When your child finishes the assignment, review the homework to make sure your child understands. Sometimes students will provide the answers without doing the process. Teachers prefer to see the process. It helps them to gauge your child's understanding of the processes. If there is an older child or relative who can assist your child, do not be afraid to ask for help for your child. You have no reason to be embarrassed.

There are times when your child will group with other students on projects, especially by the end of grade school. Team projects will continue through high school. The success of the group depends on students doing parts of a project. This teaches teamwork, which is an important life skill. Having your child participate and carry his or her weight is vital to group grades. Support the teacher by making your child accountable for his or her portion.

Discuss testing with your child.

Regular testing allows the teacher to evaluate your child's performance. To gain insight into what the teacher expects from your child, attend open houses at the beginning of the year. Every school has some sort of gathering to introduce teachers to students or welcome the students back. Your child should get some sort of schedule. Take the opportunity to write important test dates on the calendar to keep up with your child's academic progress.

Ask the teacher for advice on ways your child could prepare for upcoming tests. Find out what the normal test days are. Usually, they are later in the week. When you find out what your child should study for, share this with your child. Have your child review materials on a regular basis instead of the night before tests. Inquire about pop quizzes. The teacher will sometimes give periodic pop quizzes for grades. Your child would do well on pop quizzes if your child understands what is going on in classes and reviews materials on a regular basis.

Praise your child for studying when he or she does.

Just as your child needs encouragement when he or she is struggling, he or she also needs compliments when doing well. Give your child positive comments about his or her study efforts. Let your child know that you appreciate that he or she studies. Give him or her privileges when studying is evident in school grades.

Celebrate high grades.

Parents should give positive reinforcement all the time. Show off your child's good grades or school awards. Offer incentives for good grades whenever possible. Celebrating high grades reinforces the child's self-esteem. You can show off your child's grades by simply posting grades up on the refrigerator,

making positive comments on his or her great work in school. Reward him or her with extra time on the Internet, a break from chores for a day or two, or allow your child to accept phone calls past the usual cut-off time for a few days. He or she will love these small privileges. Thank your child for working hard in school and for being a great role model. Tell him or her how proud you are of his or her efforts. Praise can go a long way. Just as you might receive incentives in the work place, your child should receive some type of recognition for his or her hard work. You are the person who could provide the most encouragement and support.

The following sites are essential to improve how parents approach homework. Many of the sites are very useful and easy to find on the internet. The sites are like having your own extensive tutoring center. I put them together with Alaska Native parents in mind. Take some time to get familiar with some of the sites. I guarantee you will be pleased and will use most of them.

QUICK HOMEWORK REFERENCES

These essential sites relate to homework, testing tips, tutoring, and seem user-friendly.

<http://www.kids-learning-zone.com/> Resources on-line to assist your child academically, by grade level through 9th grade. The tutorial focuses on math and reading help. Adopting good study habits will help in the long run.

http://www.educationworld.com/a_tech/tech061.shtml With students having homework on a regular basis, students can use their computers at home to find a helper. This website provides an abundant supply of online resources to help them along.

<http://www.dictionary.com> Find words with a click of a button. Useful when that dictionary is missing. This is a great tool for parent and child interaction and it allows for discussion.

<http://thesaurus.reference.com/> Your child comes home with twenty spelling words and has a short amount of time to work on them. If you don't have a hard copy of the thesaurus or a dictionary, he or she can go on line and get quick responses and you don't even have to help.

<http://www.factmonster.com/pages/unitconversion.html> Math help is always a great tool to have close by, especially with the methods of teaching these changed since we were kids.

<http://encarta.msn.com/encnet/departments/homework/> a variety of ways to help your child including tips, tutorials, dictionary access, and even a healthy site for "breaks" between studies. Even a parent will enjoy this one. This is a great homework helper with useful links for cramming for tests, succeeding in school, online dictionary tools and other useful tips. This site provides historical information that is helpful for research projects.

<http://www.ajkids.com> This is a fun site for kids to ask questions and get quick answers to homework problems. It's quick and easy to use. Even parents with limited computer familiarity can use it.

<http://fekids.com/kln/> Study time or break time? Kids can use this for homework and then take a break with something fun.

<http://homeworktips.about.com/> Links to sites on how to study, little helper buddies, courses, etc.

<http://www.EnchantedLearning.com/school/index.shtml> fun help with science, geography and language arts for elementary kids. Makes studying fun.

<http://school.discovery.com/students/> Homework tips. Even your child could access this site for help. Exercise that ambitious mind.

<http://mathforum.org/library/> When you don't understand what an "exponent" or other mathematical term is, it's explained here.

<http://www.m-w.com/> The Merriam Webster dictionary that even as a graduate student, I went to quite a lot.

<http://www.wordcentral.com/> A dictionary site for kids to use. Students can even build their own dictionaries.

<http://www.zen.org/%7Ebrendan/kids-homework.html> Kids on the web-some sites that will give some guidance on helping with homework.

H. Teacher/student relationship

Sometimes, your child will complain about his or her teacher, accusing the teacher of being mean or unfair. Even if your child is the best student in class, he or she will periodically complain about a particular teacher. There could be many reasons. Some teachers could be demanding more work from your child. The teacher may be working at a fast pace and your child may feel overwhelmed and not know how to express his or her frustration. Sometimes, your child may overhear another child make comments about the teacher and may want to feel part of the “in-group” so he or she will start disliking the teacher for no reason. In any case, it’s important that your child learn to work with all teachers. It will become evident that some complaints are reasonable and others are not, and your involvement with the teacher will allow you the ability to gauge which situations need intervention.

Focus on the positive.

Be mindful of how you talk about the teacher and/or school in front of your child. Your child learns how to act by your actions. Be positive about the teacher and your child will tend to be positive and your child will learn to deal with challenging situations in a constructive manner if provided with the right tools. If you observe your child actually enjoying something that the teacher did, use that experience to encourage positive things about the teacher. Keep negative comments about the teacher to yourself, even if you may have a personal problem with the teacher. It is not fair to your child that you say discouraging things about the teacher because your child may feel compelled to do the same.

As a parent, encourage positive ways of dealing with different situations. At home, teach your child life skills, such as responsibility, respect, coping, team work, and discipline. Your child will learn most of his or her important life lessons

from you. Remember that his or her behavior mirrors yours. School is a place your child will get some of skills to survive in life. He or she is going through similar things that you went through as a child. The skills learned will allow your child to determine when a situation requires change and teamwork. Your child will also learn how to cope and effectively communicate with people, even if he or she may not necessarily like some people he or she encounters. You are the key to giving your child the tools to deal with teachers in a positive manner.

Take responsibility for your child.

If you find that your child is hanging around with kids who tend to have a negative attitude towards the teacher or towards school in general, then you may want to have your child take a break from those kids for a few days or indefinitely. Your intervention may include restricting privileges. Restricting privileges may seem difficult in a small village because your child may have fewer friends. Your child's friends may tease him or her for being on restriction, but on the other hand, he or she may realize that having a negative outlook on school is not worth the punishment and may change his or her attitude.

Middle and high school age is also a tough age for your child because peer pressure sets in and you may feel like your child has no interest in anything but the social life. You may have some sleepless nights and will exhaust a lot of personal energy. Remember it is your job to teach appropriate life skills, even during these tough years. Remember to maintain the upper hand. Once you start intervening in negative situations, your child and his or her friends will realize that you are serious. Be prepared for protesting. Use your child's restriction period as a time to communicate acceptable ways of dealing with problems. Allow privileges when your child makes efforts to change his or her attitude.

Parent/Child Communication

Remember you want your child to have a positive experience in school. Get into the habit of talking with your child every day to build a close relationship early on. Talk with your child and not at your child. Learn to tune into what your child is saying and how he or she is saying things. Communicating is a two-way street and you should allow yourself to listen too. Opening this channel for communication will allow you and your child to discuss many things, even the more sensitive issues. Take the time to listen to your child because it allows you to know when your child needs your help. You will know how your child is doing academically if you talk to him or her on a regular basis. Communication is also a tool that your child will need in life. Communication is so much easier if you talk to your child all the time. It is not too late to start. He or she really does appreciate the interaction.

Allow your child to vent to you if he or she is having a problem at school. Explain that not everyone will like people he or she works with and that it is important to learn ways to get along with everyone. Tell the child that he or she has the opportunity to learn that he or she can be successful with even the most difficult people. If you have not succeeded in changing your child's opinion, then go to the school and investigate. If your child's difficulty is with a teacher, go to the classroom to see how the teacher and child are interacting.

Communicate with your child about his or her cultural background.

Native students would also benefit by knowing their ancestry. Talking with children about their Native culture will allow them to be aware of their history, understand the struggles and successes of the Alaska Native people, and to know where they came from. Although the children are not living in the same era as their parents, knowing their backgrounds would prepare for life with a stronger foundation. It seems that many native youth are growing up today, unfamiliar with their family's cultural history. In many schools, Alaska Native history is not a part of the curriculum, so many Alaska Native youth are growing up without understanding the struggle of the Alaska Native people. Imagine waking up one day, not knowing how you ended up in this world. Native people are unique and have a lot to offer.

As parents, you have the responsibility to make sure your children are proud of being Native. Allowing only the school system to teach them about their "Indian ness" may not benefit your child because the history on American Indians is grim. There is a huge void in the curriculum when it comes to American Indian or Alaska Native history, even when there are excellent materials and resources are available. Unfortunately, the curriculum that touches on American Indian history focuses primarily on how the first people were conquered. It does not go into more detail about that, inadvertently reinforcing in Alaska Native children, that their ancestry and heritage is not important. Provide your explanation of your native history to your children. Provide the balance to help your child learn their ancestral history and continue this throughout their childhood so that they are able to pass this on to future generations. Share traditional stories about how your ancestors did things, how they survived, where they used to live, and what resources were available.

If American Indian or Alaska Native history is not taught in your child's school, do not just complain about it. Do something! If you cannot change the curriculum, take it upon yourself to teach your child this history at home. Leaving this responsibility up to the current educational systems in Alaska is putting the responsibility on others who are either powerless to make the changes to add this piece to the curriculum, won't do it, or will teach what the "system" has been teaching for years. As it is now, many schools are focusing on teaching to standards that are set by the state and federal government and do not really have the time to add to their curriculum. Your child will have a dual education, if you decide to teach him or her about your tradition.

Alaska Native youth and parents are more involved in school, sports or extra curricular activities and there seems to be little or no time for subsistence activities. Some youth are not involved at all, because of the lack of interest, poor grades or some other reason and they spend their time, aimlessly. These youth are at a higher risk of getting into trouble. This is where you as a parent or community member can teach them positive ways of utilizing their free time.

I. Communicating with the teacher is important

It is a fact that many non-native teachers and a majority of the administrators teach or manage schools in Alaska's rural communities. The curriculum strongly emphasizes the western way of life, which many of the rural native families may not identify with. Many teachers will come from out of state and stay for a year or two, then leave. Unfortunately, the teacher pool does not have a high percentage of Alaska Native teachers for Alaska Native children to identify with, so there is little or no common cultural heritage in the classroom. This makes it difficult for the teachers to identify with many of the Alaska Native students.

Remember that the teacher is on your side.

Respect and treat the teacher as part of your team. Ask him or her for strategies you can use at home with your child. If you ask and the teacher gives you advice, take the advice to heart! Teachers would really appreciate it when you do your part in your child's education. The teacher has the responsibility of educating your child on reading, math, social studies, writing and so forth. Let the teacher know when you see something positive happening to better your child's learning and assure him or her that you appreciate his or her efforts. Don't panic or over react if you happen to hear a teacher raise his or her voice while teaching because sometimes the teacher has to raise his or her voice to get the his or her class to pay attention. Do not concentrate solely on problems that you find with the teacher. Teachers are human after all. They appreciate words of encouragement for a job well done.

Get to know the teachers

It is important that you get to know the teacher and administrators, even if they are in the community for only one or two years. You can help your child progress through school by communicating with your child's teacher. Working

with the new teachers, meeting one-on-one, and letting them know your expectations can benefit your child by sharing our child's strengths and weaknesses with the teacher. The teacher can better address your child's specific needs when he or she knows your child character. You are the best person to ensure that the teacher understands your child. When you are able to talk to the teacher comfortably, you are creating a positive atmosphere, where both parties can team up, be honest with each other, and plan strategies to help your child.

Make it your business to tell the teacher who your child is. It is a good idea to keep the teacher informed about your child, including family situations, study habits, absences, and other information that will have an impact on your child's performance. It gives the teacher insight into your child's culture and home life. It could explain some of the mannerisms that your child has.

Sometimes, you may feel that a teacher talks down to you. You have the choice to allow this to happen or to make a change. Turn each encounter into a positive one. If the teacher is making the extra effort to inform you of your child's progress, then you should make the time to listen. When you and the teacher can trust each other, you can both work to help your child along when your child is having difficulties in school.

Teachers appreciate open communication

Teachers appreciate your interest in your child's education. Some teachers may make regular telephone calls to stay in contact with you on issues. If your child wants you to intervene with a teacher at school, do not react in a negative way. Instead, ask your child to write out what he or she wants to talk discuss with the teacher and invite your child to the visit. Talk to your child at length first to see if you can resolve things at home. If not then make the visit to the teacher.

Sometimes it is better to do a one-on-one discussion with the teacher, but there would be times that you would want to include your child, especially if you feel the situation needs intervention. At first, you may feel uncomfortable talking to the teacher but it becomes easier the more you practice. You have to make the commitment to keep the communication open and make yourself available to the teacher.

Let your presence be known

If you grew up in a system where the teachers or administration made all the decisions about your education, you may feel intimidated when visiting the school. School signs may seem unwelcoming. For example, you go to your child's school and there are signs at the main door stating that visitors must report to the office. You should still make an effort to visit the school on a regular basis. Practice by attending school functions, even if your child is not participating in some school wide events. Going to school functions such as math night, parent meetings, fundraisers, youth sports, or special programs shows your child that you care about his or her school. Teachers will interact with you if they see you at school functions. Your presence shows the teacher that you care about your child's education.

Meet with your child's teacher even when your child is doing well in school and not just when your child is doing poorly. Sometimes a teacher will say your child is doing "perfect." It could mean that the child is on time every day, handing in homework, or doing average work. Be direct and ask the teacher to give you examples of how your child is doing "perfect." Remember to keep the communication ongoing so that you will know if small issues arise and you can intervene before the issues become bigger problems. You can communicate through different forms such as regular notes, parent-teacher conferences, or brief lunchtime phone calls. Talking is not the only avenue.

Use electronic mail as a means of communication with the teacher.

Another avenue for making contact with the teacher is through electronic mail. Electronic mail or “email” is a part of today’s communication system. It is essential and easy to do. Emailing is also great when you cannot find time to go into the school, or you are uncomfortable meeting directly with a teacher. Use email if you are at home with younger children and are not able to go to the school for whatever reason. Email is also available for if you cannot wait for the traditional parent/teacher conferences. The great thing about email is you can check it from anywhere, even when you are traveling. You will find that most teachers would like to connect by email because they are busy too. Some teachers could email your child’s progress report on a weekly basis.

To set up an electronic mail account, create an e-mail address using the many free sites, such as Yahoo or Hotmail. Some schools in rural Alaska have a site called Powerhouse that you may be able to use. If you do not know how to set up an account, ask your son or daughter to assist you set up an account and help you with the computer. Most of those kids in middle to high school can explain how to set up an account and provide you with guidance until you know what to do.

Once your email is set up, use it!

- Call the school to get the teacher’s address.
- Write a short email to the teacher to introduce yourself.
- Provide the teacher with a good contact phone number in case he or she needs to call.
- Do an email every two weeks to check in with the teacher.
- Ask direct questions about progress, behavior, tests, late homework. Tell him or her you will be open to suggestions on problem areas. Give your phone number with best times to call you.

- Email back to follow up on assignments.
- Thank the teacher for being upfront with you.
- Forward emails related to your child's school progress to your child, if he or she utilizes email. Remind him or her to follow up with the teacher. For example, your daughter did not turn in an assignment or was a great help in class, and the teacher informs you by email. Sometimes, the completed assignment is in his or her desk, or on the teacher's desk in a different spot, or the child left it on the table for you to look over, before turning it in. Sometimes, the teacher just wants to inform you of your child's good behavior. You can also print out the teacher's email to discuss with your child.

Inform the teacher of your child's cultural activities.

At the beginning of every school year, teachers send home a parent form requesting information about your child. The form usually asks for general information about family, any special celebrations, and your child's strengths and weaknesses. This is an opportunity for you to share your family's cultural history so the teacher could be culturally responsive. Give information about cultural activities that your child is involved in and indicate when those usually happen. Inform the teacher if you will be taking your child out of school during any special traditional celebrations. Always ask for schoolwork so your son or daughter will keep up. Dedicate some time before, during, and after cultural activities to your child's schoolwork, so that he or she knows that he or she must still be responsible and turn in assignments, even during busy times. It is not a good idea to allow your child to drop everything for cultural activities because in the end, your child must complete the schoolwork risk a drop in a grade. It is best to have your child do most of the assigned work prior to events, so he or she would not feel pressured at the last minute.

Below are some excerpts that are vital to share with this guide, followed by some reference material for you to read. The excerpts were not been altered in any way and credit is given to the authors of the information. It is essential for parents to realize the differences between the native and non-native cultures, so that they may keep this in mind as they help their children through the school system.

Cultural history is vital to pass on to Alaska Native youth. It is your responsibility as a parent to ensure that this happens. If you are unfamiliar with your own history, take the time to learn and understand your cultural background.

Comparison of Native/Non-native cultures (Hawthorne (1967)) provides a comparison of Native and non-Native cultures generally and in terms of teaching and learning. Although this was developed almost forty years ago, the differences still exist.

	Native	Non-Native
World View	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cyclical (oral tradition) Tribe and extended family as social base Tolerance of individual differences Customs and situational ethics Less emphasis on materialism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linear (print tradition) Individual and nuclear family as social base Emphasis on conformity and compliance Rules and rigid morality Greater emphasis on material values
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More non-verbal communication Observant (less talkative) Often speak non-standard English dialect More visually and orally oriented Rarely read to, few print materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More verbal communication Participant (more talkative) Generally speaks standard English dialect More print oriented Often read to; variety of print materials in home
Preferred Teaching Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concrete demonstration by elders and experts Integrated with family, community and life Learning takes place in extended (natural) setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lecture and reading by certified professionals Separated from community and life Learning takes place in restricted (classroom) setting
Preferred Learning Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploratory Peer and personal reward system (intrinsic) Process oriented (doing) Cooperative Independent and autonomous (i.e., a facilitated learning environment) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directed External rewards Product-oriented (achieving) Competitive Dependent and controlled (i.e., a directed learning environment)
Preferred Learning Routines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexible and often non-existent Staying with a task not emphasized Time is a minor factor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rigid, structured Staying with a task emphasized Time is a factor

How Two Cultures Differ

The following chart was taken from *Narrative Literacy and Face in Interethnic Communication* (Scollon & Scollon, 1981), a study of the Athabaskan culture. It lists some cultural differences in communication between English speakers and the Athabaskan. It nicely highlights how misunderstandings can arise in the learning environment when culture is not taken into account. Not all Alaska Native cultures are the same in terms of how they communicate.

What's confusing to English speakers about Athabaskan	What's confusing to Athabaskan about English speakers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They avoid situations involving talking They only want to talk to close acquaintances They play down their own abilities They act as if they expect things to be given to them They deny planning They avoid direct questions They never start a conversation They talk off the topic They never say anything about themselves They are slow to take a turn in talking They ask questions in unusual places They talk with a flat tone of voice They are too indirect; not explicit They don't make sense They just leave without saying anything 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They talk too much They always talk first They talk to people they don't know They think they can predict the future They brag about themselves They don't help people even when they can They always talk about what's going to happen later They ask too many questions They always interrupt They only talk about what they are interested in They don't give others a chance to talk They are always getting excited when they talk They aren't careful when they talk about things or people

LITERATURE RELATING TO CULTURE

<http://www.nativeweb.org/> Most current national journal for Alaska Natives and American Indians.

<http://indiancountry.com/?1023805542> News source focusing on issues relating to American Indians. This site can even be used in those research projects that children are assigned to work on.

<http://www.u.arizona.edu/~ecubbins/useful.html> It's a library dedicated to American Indians and Alaska Natives, focusing on indigenous issues.

<http://www.nativefederation.org/frames/information.html> An in-depth study done on Alaska Native history, which addresses issues surrounding our native groups.

<http://www.firstalaskans.org/home/index.cfm> First Alaskans Institute deals with issues that surround education of Alaska Natives through sponsoring summits, policy, leadership, research.

<http://www.iser.uaa.alaska.edu/publications/client/afnjobs/natemp.pdf> Information on Native employment in Alaska. Factual data when you need it for your child's project or for general information.

"Athabaskan Cultural Camp Gets a Facelift" Press Release. Written by Bernadette Chato, June 30, 2003. This is a short article about an elder's effort to work with youth in the Interior.

<http://www.ankn.uaf.edu> Alaska Native Knowledge Network has a wealth of knowledge on indigenous knowledge systems in Alaska and understanding cultural values.

<http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/standards/standards.html> lists cultural standards for students from assuming responsibility for their role in community to demonstrating their awareness of their surroundings. These guidelines may be a source to help guide students to be productive responsible persons.

<http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/standards/youth.html> Alaska Native Knowledge Network site specifically dedicated to parent involvement.

"Education Indigenous to Place," Barnhardt/Kawagley. Short published work discussing indigenous and non-indigenous value systems.

<http://www.alaskool.org/projects/ancsa/landclaims/LandClaimsTOC.htm> The Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement Act has such an impact on the lives of every Alaska Native. Find the detailed law at this website. Learn who the historic movers and shakers were of this important act.

<http://www.nativefederation.org> Research Alaska Native History and learn about the Alaska Federation of Natives, including who they are, histories, convention information, upcoming events, and more.

<http://www.alaskool.org> Provides an abundance of information helpful in researching Alaska Native history.

http://www.alaskool.org/resources/anc_reports.htm#top In the early 1990' a report called the Alaska Natives Commission did a report on the issues faced by Alaska Natives.

<http://www.tribalcollegejournal.org> Important issues in American Indian education.

Historical Status of Elementary Schools in Rural Alaskan Communities, 1867-1980, by Carol Barnhardt. This piece was originally published by the Center for Cross-Cultural Studies in 1985. To order, call the Alaska Native Knowledge network at (907) 474-5086.

<http://www.nativefederation.org/frames/history.html> A timeline on the history of Alaska Natives.
<http://www.niea.org/> Explore what is going on nationally with Indian Education and find ways that you may contribute. "The mission of the National Indian Education Association is to support traditional Native cultures and values, to enable Native learners to become contributing members of their communities, to promote Native control of educational institutions, and to improve educational opportunities and resources for American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians throughout the United States."

<http://jaie.asu.edu/v36/V36S1pa1.htm> The Journal of American Indians is dedicated to American Indians. This specific site summarizes attitudes about education of American Indians. A "must read" for parents. "In a national survey, 234 American Indian parents and community members representing fifty-five tribes or bands documented their attitudes about education, satisfaction with schools, the degree to which schools value Indian culture, their involvement with schools, and school expectations for their children. Tribally controlled schools were reported to be significantly more respectful of Indian children, expectant of their achievement and potential, and inclusive of the cultures and communities than was either BIA or public schools. Special education was perceived as significantly less satisfactory than general education, reflecting concerns about parents' understanding assessments, interventions and placement processes, and being well served by special education services. Extensive narrative comments stressed the role of culture in learning, and the concern that public and boarding schools have not appeared to try to understand Indian communities, cultures, or ways of learning. Parenting community members offered advice ranging from parent involvement to curricular approaches."

<http://www.nativescience.org/> Endorses and supports scientific research regarding Alaska Native cultures; discusses protection of indigenous cultures and intellectual property.

<http://www.sedl.org/pubs/lc02/8.html> Lists literature that focuses on the first peoples.

http://www.nativescience.org/html/traditional_knowledge.html Define and understand traditional knowledge because some of the activities you teach your youth is defined as

traditional knowledge and is something special you share with your ancestors, grandparents, parents, and children.

<http://www.si.edu/resource/faq/nmai/resource.htm> Resources for teachers and parents, which focuses is on American Indians.

J. Talk to your child about career choices

Education is important

Too many times, Alaska Native youth get out of high school with no plans to attend college, trade school, job corps, or the military. The mentality now, it seems is that graduating high school is the “big celebration.” Too many times Alaska Native youth think high school is the end of their education, so they do not look beyond the 12th grade. Getting out of high school should not be the end of their education. Alaska Native youth must be taught that high school is a stepping stone into college, trade school, or the military. If they are not planning beyond high school, he or she may still be undecided and may not view life beyond the village. If they are not getting proper training or education, then they do not contribute to the local economy in a productive way and the community loses out.

Gaining meaningful education beyond high school is important for young Native adults. It means growing up and being independent. Further education through college or vocational training opens doors to choices in jobs, careers, and it means gaining skills through training to use in the workforce. A degree is like a birth certificate. If you get a degree or training through whatever professional development choice you make, it is something that will help you through the rest of your academic or working life. It is yours and once you have it, you never lose the credentials.

You are a key to success

As a parent, you are a key to ensuring that your child grows up to be a productive adult. Get involved with your child’s education from the beginning to ensure a proper education where your child is learning material that can benefit him or her throughout his or her life. To compete for scholarships, your child should leave high school with high grades and good life skills. He or she should be able to make appropriate career decisions. Higher education and skill building takes time and if your child will allow himself or herself the time to gain useful skills in college or some sort of trade, he or she will eventually see the benefits. Give him or her tools to look beyond high school.

Talk about the military, college, trade school, etc. as a transition from high school. Your child can gain skills and to use in the workforce and learn to make responsible choices. Instead of saying, “when you’re done with high school”, saying something like “when you go to college...” or “after you join the Air Force...” As a parent, start advising your child about opportunities that are available so that he or she could start planning. As a community member, mentor other children to seek higher education. Even as a community member, you should be supportive and relay positive attitudes about higher education to children in your community.

Ways you can help

- Encourage your child to think beyond high school, even if you do not have a high school diploma, yourself. You want your child to do something meaningful with his or her life. You do not want your child to be idle or lying around doing nothing, so talk to them about their future goals. It allows your child to think ahead and to start developing long-range plans. It allows him or her to think about growing up and having a meaningful career.
- Teach your child to develop good study skills. Help in school to make sure that your child succeeds.
- Start talking to your child at an early age about what he or she wants to be when he or she grows up. It is very humorous at first because in preschool, you will get responses like, “a clown,” or “Superman.” As your child gets older and is more educated in the dominant school system, thoughts are running through their little heads. Responses change. By third grade, he or she may say he or she wants to be a “teacher” or a “cop.” By the 5th or 6th grade, he or she seems more focused, because he or she is learning some complex math methods or has done research, or has gone on field trips to local agencies or other parts of the state. His or her horizon seems to have expanded. You might hear, “I want to be a doctor,” or “a PE teacher,” or “a computer specialist” or “a lawyer,” or “I’m joining the military.” What ever it is, the important thing is he or she is starting to look at a career field.
- In middle and high school, your child will have responses that are more concrete and focused. With proper parental guidance, your child should be exploring options such

as which college will offer the best opportunities; which military arm to consider and what profession to specialize in; or what trade school will benefit him or her.

- Start asking questions when your child tells you what career track he or she wants to pursue. Questions like, “What do you need to become a lawyer?” Asking direct questions shows you are listening and that you are interested in your child’s choices.
- Get literature about his or her field of interest and share success stories.
- If possible, have your child become involved in extracurricular activities that would allow your child to explore career interests.
- Look on the internet for schools that may your child. Take advantage of opportunities to visit colleges so your child can decide which colleges most interest him or her.
- Some schools have career planning which allows your child to write to schools to request information. Make sure that your child participates, even if he or she is undecided about college. Colleges are always marketing and will send information.
- Have your child talk to adults in different professions about what they like and dislike about their job.
- If you know of a native person who might be a positive role model for your child, ask that person for advice. If you are already a college graduate, go to your child’s school to provide them with the opportunity to learn about college, first hand.
- In middle and high school, get to know the career counselor and start looking at potential college resources available in your child. The career counselor can be a resource to get your child on a career track early on. He or she can also help your child to pursue financial aid.
- Help your child to research financial aid or colleges that offer packages to Alaska Native or American Indian students or minority students. Keep an ongoing list.
- Have your child start requesting recommendations from teachers and counselors. Keep these in a central location and keep adding to it. This will come in handy when your child starts job hunting and looking into a career.

- Bring your child's dreams back to the current state of his or her grades. Coach him or her positively about math, science, reading, writing, and other courses that taught at school. Encourage good grades early to allow him or her see how this will be important when the time comes to pursue a career. Assisting with homework throughout their school years ensures that the child is learning the concepts so that he or she maintains a good grade.
- Encourage your child to take challenging courses that will benefit him or her later on. For example, math, reading, history, social studies, geography, writing, and even a foreign language are key courses for later on. Most colleges, trade schools, and even unions want students who have a grasp on mathematics and reading.

To reiterate, educate your child the on the importance of gaining education beyond high school and do your part as a parent to help him or her along so he or she can be a productive part of the workforce.

Becoming an active Alaska Native parent allows you to seek positive results and allows you to focus on all facets of your child's educational life. Involvement allows you the opportunity to contribute to your child's education. By following some of the simple steps outlined in the manual, you should have a better understanding what is being taught in school, how it is being taught, who is teaching, and to be an actively involved parent who is making a difference in a child's life. Parental involvement goes a long way. It teaches your child about making choices in life.

At the beginning of this manual, I requested that you think about some questions. Now, I ask you to reevaluate yourself. Complete the following to see how you rate. If you rate yourself low, then think of how you will start getting involved. Make a commitment to your child and yourself.

Rate yourself:

- What are some ways you help your child to succeed in school?
- How does volunteering fit in with your own schedule?
- When was the last time you volunteered in your child's school?
- Do you stop by the school to see your child?
- Do you keep in regular contact with your child's teacher(s)?
- What are your child's strengths and weakness as it relates to school?
- Do you teach you child to plan, and make responsible decisions about school?
- How much time do you assist with homework?
- How much homework does your child have each day?
- When a teacher invites you into the classroom, do you go?
- Do you feel comfortable talking to your child's teacher about his or her progress?
- If your child is failing in school, do you take immediate action?
- Do you praise your child for effort or achievement in school?

If you answer most of them with a positive answer, keep up the job! You are giving your child an advantage in today's school system. If your answers indicate you are not involved, reconsider how you are approaching your involvement in your child's education. It is never too late to start.

K. “What No Child Left Behind Means for Your Child”

By Terry Nagel, GreatSchools.net Staff

The No Child Left Behind law may offer your child school choice or supplemental services, such as tutoring. Start here to learn what benefits the law may provide for your child and your school.

Your child may be eligible to move to a better school or could receive free tutoring under the landmark education bill that President Bush signed into law in January 2002. Your school could qualify for grants to use toward attracting top-notch teachers or other school programs. But your child and your school may not receive the full benefits of the law if you don't ask for them. A little-known secret of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act is that parents are the ultimate enforcers of the law. The U.S. Department of Education doesn't have the personnel or the budget to make sure that all of the nation's 92,000 schools comply with NCLB's complicated regulations.

Eugene Hickok, the government's undersecretary of education, explained, "Our job will not be to pass judgment on the quality of state standards or the quality of assessment based on those standards." Hickok said that, to a large degree, the key to the enforcement of No Child Left Behind will be parents who pressure schools to give their children the options provided by the federal law.

What the Law Mandates

The No Child Left Behind law took effect at the start of the 2002-2003 school year. Components of the law are:

- **By 2005, every state must test all students annually** in reading and math in grades 3 through 8. By 2007, students must be tested in science, too.
- **States must demonstrate "adequate yearly progress"** toward state learning standards for all groups of students (including economically disadvantaged students, racial/ethnic groups, disabled students and limited English proficient students). The goal is 100% proficiency for all students by the 2013-14 school year.
- **There must be “highly qualified” teachers to teach core academic subjects in every classroom by the fall of 2005.** Specifically, elementary school teachers must have a bachelor's degree and pass a rigorous test in core curriculum areas. Middle and high school teachers must demonstrate competency in the subject area they teach by passing a test or by completing an academic major, graduate degree or comparable coursework. These requirements already apply to all new hires.
- **Primary grade teachers must deliver reading instruction in Kindergarten through 3rd grade based on "scientifically based" reading research.**
- **States must have an "Unsafe School Choice Option"**—that is, a plan that allows students to transfer to a safe school if they attend a school designated as persistently dangerous school or become a victim of violent crime.

Schools classified that receive Title I funds from the government (two-thirds of all schools) and don't make adequate yearly progress face consequences:

- **Schools that haven't met "adequate yearly progress " (AYP) for two consecutive school years** (commonly called "failing schools") are identified as in need of improvement. Every student in the school will be given the option to transfer to a better-performing school in the district, with free transportation included. However, NLCB requires that priority in providing school choice be given to low achieving children from low-income families. School districts may not use lack of capacity as a reason to deny a transfer, but they have some flexibility in meeting this requirement. They may sign contracts with neighboring districts to accept students from failing schools, contract with cyber schools, create schools within schools, offer supplemental services a year early, hire more teachers, add portables or build new classrooms at more successful schools.
- **After three consecutive years of failing to meet AYP**, the school must also provide "supplemental education services" to children who remain at the school. Those services can include tutoring, remedial classes, after-school services and summer school programs.
- **After four consecutive years of failing to meet AYP**, the district must take corrective actions to improve the school, such as replacing certain staff or fully implementing a new curriculum.
- **After five consecutive years of failing to meet AYP**, the school is identified for restructuring and arrangements must be made for alternative governance actions, such as a state takeover, the hiring of a private management contractor, converting to a charter school or significant staff restructuring.

A little-known provision of the law has stirred up some controversy:

- **The U.S. military has the right to obtain lists from high schools of students' names, addresses and phone numbers** for recruiting purposes, and must be granted the same access to schools that is given to college and business recruiters. Schools that do not comply risk losing federal aid.
- **Parents that oppose this practice may "opt out."** Schools are supposed to inform parents of their right to opt out by signing a waiver. In their rush to comply with the new regulations, many schools have not informed parents of this option.

Although some school officials see little downside to this part of the No Child Left Behind law because it gives students access to information about careers and educational opportunities in the military, others object to the armed forces' aggressive recruiting techniques and view the provision as an invasion of student privacy.

Perks for Schools

There are rewards for schools that close achievement gaps between groups of students or exceed academic achievement goals. States can use federal funds to pay teachers bonuses, and they can designate schools that have made the greatest achievement gains as "Distinguished Schools."

Other benefits of No Child Left Behind include:

- **Grants for teacher training.** Parents should be aware that districts have flexibility in how they can spend federal funds designed to find and retain quality teachers, including alternative certification, merit pay and bonuses for teachers of high-need subjects such as math and science.
- **Grants for reading instruction.** A key component of No Child Left Behind is a new national initiative called Reading First that aims to help every child learn to read. Almost \$1 billion will be distributed each year over the next six years to states submitting grant proposals for

reading instruction based on "scientifically based" research in kindergarten through third grade.

The law emphasizes systematic teaching of skills such as phonemic awareness (the ability to hear and identify sounds in spoken words), phonics, oral reading fluency, vocabulary development and comprehension strategies. However, critics charge that the law discriminates against the less-structured "Whole Language" approach to reading, and believe that local districts are best equipped to make curriculum decisions.

- **Flexibility in spending federal funds.** School districts have considerable leeway in spending up to 50% of their non-Title I funds (the biggest chunk of federal funding, much of which targets disadvantaged children) in categories such as teacher quality, technology, after-school learning and Safe and Drug-Free schools. For example, a district may decide to spend 50% of its federal technology funds on recruiting quality teachers instead of on technology.

Public Accountability

There will be great transparency in how your school is performing because all schools and school districts are required to make annual report cards available to the public. The report cards must include details on:

- Student academic achievement for all student groups
- A comparison of students at the basic, proficient and advanced levels of academic achievement within the school district and compared to other students statewide
- High school graduation rates and dropout rates
- The professional qualifications of teachers
- The percentage of students not tested
- The names of schools identified as "in need of improvement"

The U.S. Department of Education also requires states to participate in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading and math assessments of fourth and eighth grade students every two years. These assessments allow parents to compare how students are performing in different states.

How the Law Is Working

Some states are scrambling harder than others to meet the requirements of No Child Left Behind. One criticism of the law is that it penalizes states with high standards. For example, after the government announced there were 8,600 failing schools, Michigan discovered it had 1,513 of them—about one-third of all Michigan schools—whereas Arkansas and Wyoming didn't have a single one.

In the District of Columbia, officials diligently found spaces for children who wanted to transfer from the city's worst-performing schools, but Texas and Kentucky dragged their feet in identifying failing schools. Ohio managed to trim its list from 760 to 212 within a matter of weeks by adjusting the criteria. One school on Ohio's original list was a school that had won a Blue Ribbon award the year before.

Parents in some districts, such as Portland Public Schools, complained that the notices they received did not make it clear that their children were eligible to transfer. In Colorado

Springs, principals at identified schools penned personal letters to parents, asking them not to leave.

Faced with tight budgets and high teacher turnover, districts also came up with creative ways to fulfill the requirement that new teachers be well qualified. California proposed defining interns with emergency credentials as highly qualified, but the U.S. Department of Education nixed the idea. New York had greater success by raising salaries and instituting a month-long alternative certification program.

What Parents Can Do

The No Child Left Behind law was designed to hold schools more accountable and empower parents. Those who understand its provisions can use it to their child's advantage. Here are some steps you can take:

- **Find out how your school is performing.** You don't need to wait for the school report card to be issued; you can discover a great deal about your school by reading its [school profile](#) on our site. You can compare your school's performance to other schools by using our [Compare Schools](#) feature. To get an idea of how your school is performing nationally, visit the [NAEP Web site](#).
- **If you suspect your school may be a failing school, ask your principal or superintendent to clarify its status.** If it is a failing school, thoroughly investigate your options.
- **Ask your school principal what the school is doing to help close any achievement gaps** between different groups of students. For example, if students with limited English speaking skills did not test as well as others, your school should have a plan designed to give those students extra help. Your school will be judged on the performance of students in all groups, not just schoolwide results.
- **Ask what your school is doing to attract, train and keep well-qualified teachers.**
- **Find out if your district has applied for a "Reading First" grant** and how it intends to spend the money.
- **Ask about your state's Unsafe School Choice Option** and whether state officials have certified in writing to the U.S. Secretary of Education that your state is in compliance with this provision as a condition of receiving funds under No Child Left Behind.

Additional Resources

For more details on the No Child Left Behind law, visit the U.S. Department of Education's [NCLB Web site](#).

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