

Chapter 6

Helping Your Child Be Successful in School

Overview

Schools in the U.S. see families as partners in their child's education. Your child's school may have events for your family to attend. These events may include meetings with your child's teacher(s), social gatherings, and student performances, like concerts or plays. When you have questions, contact your child's teacher(s) or school staff.

You can help your child be successful in school. Know the school's attendance rules. Know how the school reports your child's progress. Ask if your child has homework and help your child in doing his or her homework every day. If your child needs more help with homework, ask your child's teacher(s) or other school staff about tutoring services.

Schools want to be partners with families. Your school-family partnership will help your child to succeed academically and in life.

Family and Student Rights

As a family member with school-aged children, you have certain rights. *This is very important.* A parent's home country, citizenship, or immigration status does not change these rights. These rights include the following:

- Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) says that school districts must provide the required communications to parents of ELs under Title I in an understandable format and, when possible, in a language that the parents understand.⁸⁰ They must provide information to all parents regardless of their native language or proficiency in English about any program, service, or activity of a school district.⁸¹ Additionally, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires that school districts and SEAs ensure meaningful communication with LEP parents in a language they can understand and to adequately notify LEP parents of information about any program, service, or activity of a school district or SEA that is called to the attention of non-LEP parents.⁸² The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that consent (agreement or permission) from parents must be requested in the parent's native language, or through another form of communication understandable to the parents.⁸³ Communication to parents may include information about
 - enrollment and registration;
 - language assistance;

⁸⁰ [ESEA 1112\(e\)\(4\)](#).

⁸¹ U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights & U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. *Fact sheet: Information for limited English proficient (LEP) parents and guardians and for schools and school districts that communicate with them.* Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-lep-parents-201501.pdf>.

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⁸³ [IDEA, 34 CFR 300.9](#).

“Helping Your Child Be Successful in School” is the sixth and final chapter of the English Learner Family Toolkit, which is meant to support families of English learners (ELs) in the U.S. education system. Each chapter has five parts: (1) Overview, (2) Family and Student Rights, (3) Suggested Questions to Ask School Staff, (4) Tips for Families, and (5) Resources. Information in each chapter varies. As readers can choose to access only certain chapters of the toolkit, it is important to note that some information may be repeated in multiple chapters.

- grievance procedures;⁸⁴
 - notices of nondiscrimination;⁸⁵
 - student discipline policies and procedures;
 - report cards;
 - requests for parent permission for student participation in district or school activities;
 - parent-teacher conferences;
 - parent handbooks;
 - gifted and talented education (GATE) programs;⁸⁶
 - disability-related services⁸⁷ for students with disabilities;
 - magnet and charter schools;⁸⁸
 - language instruction educational programs;
 - childcare; or
 - extracurricular activities.
- Public schools must test students each year in third through eighth grade, and at least one time in high school in reading/language arts and mathematics. Public schools also must test students once in each grade span (third through fifth, sixth through ninth, and 10th through 12th grades) in science. Each state chooses which tests⁸⁹ will be used in all its public schools. Schools must also test all ELs in grades K–12 each year for English proficiency.
 - When testing academic achievement and English language proficiency, all states and school districts must provide appropriate accommodations on content (subject) tests and English language proficiency (ELP) assessments to students with disabilities and to ELs. States and school districts must provide an alternate (different) assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who cannot take the regular test, even with accommodations.
 - Schools must give ELs, including ELs with disabilities, equal opportunities to participate in all curricular and extracurricular activities. Curricular activities include courses required for graduation, specialized and advanced courses, and programs. Extracurricular activities include sports and activities, such as clubs and music.
 - Each state has laws that require school attendance for children of certain ages. The ages may be different in different states. For example, some states require children to attend school from age 6 through high school.
 - Parents have the right to know how their children are doing in school. Parents should be able to contact school staff for information related to their children. Schools often send progress reports home to parents and ask parents to attend at least one parent-teacher conference each year.

⁸⁴ A grievance procedure is an internal conflict resolution process that may address formal complaints by individuals. Developing, publicizing, and effectively implementing these procedures gives students and parents opportunities to address concerns at the local level. See <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/grievance.html>.

⁸⁵ Notices of nondiscrimination require that schools notify students, parents, and others that they do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, and age, and, if applicable, that they provide equal access to the Boy Scouts of America and other designated youth groups. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/nondisc.html>.

⁸⁶ Gifted education programs provide educational practices, procedures, and approaches for children who have been identified as gifted or talented. The main goals of these programs are generally enrichment and acceleration.

⁸⁷ The term “disability-related services” may refer either to special education and related services provided to children with disabilities who are eligible for services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and/or regular or special education and related aids and services provided to qualified students with disabilities under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. See Chapter 3 for more information on disability-related services for EL students with disabilities.

⁸⁸ See definitions in Resources.

⁸⁹ Tests may also be called assessments.

- Students have the right to be free from discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, and disability.⁹⁰

Suggested Questions to Ask School Staff

The following are sample, optional questions you may ask school staff to help your child be successful in school.

General Questions

1. How can I contact my child's teacher(s) and the school staff? Do teachers prefer emails, texts, or phone calls? Is there an interpreter who can help me?
2. Does the school have a calendar that shows important dates I should know about (like start and end dates of the school year, parent/teacher conferences, and back-to-school nights)?
3. How can I ask for an interpreter at school events? If I am working on the day of an event, can another family member attend? How do I tell the school that someone else is coming instead of me?
4. How can I get involved with the school? Can I volunteer at the school? Are there any groups or programs for families of ELs? Are there any groups or programs for immigrant families?

Expectations

1. How can I find out what my child is learning in school? How is the school helping my child learn English? What are the learning goals in my child's classes? What are the goals for learning English? Who can give us that information?
2. What are the rules about how often my child can miss school?
3. What do I need to know about grade and promotion (going to the next grade) rules at this school? Will I get a report card for my child? If not, is there an online system the school uses to share grades (such as a student information system)? How do I learn to use this system? How will my child be graded in content areas like math while he or she is learning English?
4. Are there homework rules for the whole school, or is homework up to my child's teacher(s)? How will I know if my child has homework and how well he or she is doing it?
5. What other activities should my child do besides homework to help him or her learn (math drills, reading, learning facts, visiting museums, strategy games, etc.)? What can we do to help with his or her learning?
6. Who can help us with planning for high school? How do we get advice and counseling about our options for classes? Who can talk to me about my child's goals and set goals for his or her coursework? Is there an interpreter who can help at this meeting? Which classes are required (needed) for graduation? How can I know that my child is taking the classes he or she needs to go to college?
7. How are transcripts from other countries used to decide grade level and course placement?
8. How do you help students set college and career goals? How do you involve families in these discussions?

⁹⁰ Educational institutions have a responsibility to protect every student's right to learn in a safe environment free from unlawful discrimination and to prevent unjust deprivations of that right. The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) enforces several federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination in programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance from the Department of Education. Discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin is prohibited by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (This includes discrimination based on a person's limited English proficiency or English learner status; and actual or perceived shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics, including membership in a religion that may be perceived to exhibit such characteristics (such as Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh individuals)); sex discrimination is prohibited by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; discrimination on the basis of disability is prohibited by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and age discrimination is prohibited by the Age Discrimination Act of 1975. OCR also has responsibilities under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which prohibits disability discrimination by public entities, whether or not they receive federal financial assistance.

Tests, Progress Reports, and Supports

1. How will I know if my child is doing well in the courses needed for promotion (going to the next grade) or graduation? If I have questions about my child's progress, whom can I speak with?
2. What services does the school offer to help my child learn English? How can I help my child learn English if I don't speak English well?
3. How often does the school send progress reports home?
4. What do I need to know about state tests? What tests will my child have to take and when are these tests given? What types of supports/accommodations can my child get when taking tests (for example, do they offer extended time or a bilingual dictionary)? If my child has an individualized education program (IEP) or is receiving Section 504 services, how can I know that the required supports are being given to my child?
5. Are any tests given in our home language? How can I help my child get ready for state tests? How will I know the results of these tests? Will you provide the results in a language I understand? Are state tests taken on a computer or by paper and pencil? How are the test results used?
6. How can I get help for my child with his or her classes? Does the school offer free or low-cost tutoring for my child? If yes, how do I get this tutoring for my child?
7. How can my child get help with his or her homework? Are there any websites or telephone hotlines that can help us?
8. If my child fails a class, what can he or she do?
9. How do I know if my child is on track to graduate? Which classes are needed for graduation with a regular high school diploma?
10. If my child is not able to meet the requirements to graduate with a regular high school diploma, can my child graduate with an alternative (different) high school diploma, certificate, or another credential? If yes, does the school or district offer an alternative high school diploma, certificate, or other credential? What does my child need to do to get it?
11. How can I know that my child is taking the classes he or she needs to go to a college or university? Who can help us with college planning, applications, and financial aid for college? If my child is undocumented, can he or she get help with college planning and financial aid?
12. Can my child enroll in dual enrollment courses to earn credits towards college or university?
13. My child wants to take career and technical education (CTE) courses. Who should my child and I speak with about this?

Tips for Families

- Your help is important for your child’s school success. Have high expectations; ask your child about school; check your child’s homework and school progress; talk about academic and career goals with your child and the school; talk to the school about which courses your child needs to take to meet those goals.
- You can also encourage a love of learning through your home language. Read with your child in your home language. Practice storytelling to develop language and critical-thinking skills.
- State departments of education and school district websites have information about state tests. Schools may have an “assessment coordinator.” This is a staff member who will talk about state tests with parents.
- Depending on the state’s rules, the school may send test results to parents. Parents may ask a teacher or counselor to explain test results and what the results mean for their child. Ask for an interpreter, if needed. In some districts or schools, school staff can give test results in your home language.
- School calendars are often available from the school office. Calendars are often published on the school’s website. You can ask your school to translate calendars into your home language.
- School attendance is important for your child. Poor attendance often leads to lower grades and slower progress.
- Many schools have an online parent portal. Parent portals may have information about school rules, classroom goals, assignments, and student progress.
- Schools help students make up for failed classes. Ask about summer school courses, online classes, and credit recovery programs.
- State Department of Education websites, school websites, and guidance counselors should be able to provide you with information about graduation requirements in your state.

Resources

Elementary School

ESSA Advocacy Toolkit. National Center for Learning Disabilities. https://www.nclد.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/ESSA_Understood_Final_Monday_030617.pdf

Growth Mindset: Parents can access the Mindset Kit website to learn about a growth mindset and why it’s important for children. The website offers examples of ways parents may support their children in gaining a growth mindset. <https://www.mindsetkit.org/mentalidad-de-crecimiento-padres>. ***This resource is available in English and Spanish.***

Illinois Early Learning Tip Sheets are easy-to-read, one-page resources on a variety of topics. These may be of interest to parents and teachers of young children. ***All tip sheets are available in English, Spanish, and Polish. Selected tip sheets are available in Korean, Chinese, Arabic, and French.*** <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/resources/tipsheets/>

Minnesota Humanities Center provides reading tips for families of young children, ***available in English, Spanish, Arabic, French, Vietnamese, Amharic, Bosnian, Burmese, Chinese, Farsi, Green Hmong, White Hmong, Japanese, Hindi, Lao, Mende, Nuer, Oromo, Romanian, Russian, Somali, Tibetan, Urdu, and Tigrinya.*** <http://humanitieslearning.org/resource/index.cfm?act=1&TagID=0&CatID=0&SearchText=tips%20for%20reading%20with%20children&SortBy=1&mediatype=0&lurl=1>

The **National Parent Teacher Association (PTA)** includes millions of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business and community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and the promotion of family engagement in schools. Its website has resources on supporting college and career readiness for your child. <https://www.pta.org/home/family-resources>. ***This resource is available in English and Spanish.***

Teachers and Families of Dual Language Learners (DLLs): Partners from the Start. This webpage has information for families and teachers about how to help students with dual languages. <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/blogs/dll/partners/>. ***This resource is available in English and Spanish.***

Telemundo has **education tips and videos** for Spanish-speaking families and students. <https://www.telemundo.com/el-poder-en-ti/tu-educacion>. ***This resource is available in Spanish.***

Middle/High School

The EducationQuest Foundation website provides free **college planning resources** in English and Spanish. <https://www.educationquest.org/resources/spanish-resources/>. ***This resource is available in English and Spanish.***

The Hispanic Scholarship Fund website has helpful resources, from **how to prepare for college**, to interviewing tips, and scholarship information. <https://www.hsf.net/preparing-for-college>. ***This resource is available in English and Spanish.***

The University of Chicago provides an information sheet for parents of students entering **high school**. The sheet explains what is important for student success in high school and beyond. <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/2018-10/5124whatmatters-parentspanish.pdf>. ***This resource is available in English and Spanish.***

Postsecondary Education

Federal Student Aid is an office of the United States Department of Education that provides information about applying for financial aid for students who plan to attend career schools, colleges, and universities. The website offers resources and guidance for students in families for applying, receiving, and repaying college loans. <https://studentaid.gov/>. ***This resource is available in English and Spanish.***

The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators offers a “Tip Sheet for Undocumented Students.” It answers questions about paying for postsecondary education (e.g., professional certification, community college, university, graduate school). https://www.nasfaa.org/uploads/documents/Tip_Sheet_for_Undocumented_Students_2017.pdf

U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR). (2015). *Dear Colleague Letter: English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf>. This Dear Colleague letter reminds states, school districts, and schools of their obligations under federal law to ensure that English learner students have equal access to a high-quality education and the opportunity to achieve their full academic potential. More information about OCR, including how to file a complaint, can be found at <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html>. ***This resource is available in numerous languages, including Spanish, Korean, Arabic, Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese.***

This document contains examples and resource materials that are provided for the user’s convenience. The inclusion of any material is not intended to reflect its importance, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed, or products or services offered. These materials may contain the views and recommendations of various subject matter experts as well as hypertext links, contact addresses, and websites to information created and maintained by other public and private organizations. The opinions expressed in any of these materials do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. The U.S. Department of Education does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of any outside information included in these materials. Mentions of specific programs or products in these examples are designed to provide a clearer understanding and are not meant as endorsements.