

The Pennsylvania Parent Information and Resource Center (PA PIRC) serves two important roles:

- 1) providing parents with information about the range of programs and services available to them under the No Child Left Behind act of 2001 (NCLB) and
- 2) assisting schools in their work to engage family-school-community partnerships.

PA PIRC is pleased to provide you with the first PA PIRC quarterly newsletter. This newsletter is intended to provide useful information to parents, educators and administrators. Each issue will contain information about early childhood education, No Child Left Behind, Family-School-Community Partnerships, dates of upcoming events and other pertinent information. I encourage you to copy and share this newsletter with others and to visit our website www.center-school.org/pa-pirc for up-to-date information and resources.

Linda Dolan
PA PIRC Director

**Parents as Teachers (PAT)
in Pennsylvania**

Children are born to learn. Research has shown that at birth, children are already conditioned to respond to language and to communicate. They will turn their heads toward the sound of their mothers' voices. They will cry, make sounds and move their arms and legs to indicate discomfort, hunger and even loneliness. As parents talk to their children, read to them, imitate their coos and babbling, and respond to their communications, they are helping to build the connections in their children's brains needed for language development. Language development is the first step on the road to school readiness and learning to read.

The period from birth to school entrance is a critical time in children's development. This is a time when children are highly dependent upon their families for guiding their development and learning. But, babies don't come with directions. Where can parents go to learn about their children's development and how to support their children's learning in the early years?

Early childhood parenting education is one resource available to help families make the most

of children's early learning years. Free programs such as Parents as Teachers (PAT) and Parent-Child Home Program offer participating parents high-quality support designed to help them understand their children's developmental needs and their role in supporting their children's learning. Services include home visits by trained parent educators, informational group meetings, developmental screenings and informal/referral services. Today, there are approximately 90 PAT programs and 30 PCHP programs in Pennsylvania serving over 10,000 children and their parents annually.

PA PIRC supports these programs by providing technical assistance and training to program supervisors and staff. Technical assistance is designed to support the implementation of high quality programs. Training is available throughout the year, in a variety of locations. Training content ranges from basic requirements for delivering these programs to specialized content, such as working with teen parents, serving families of children with special needs, and understanding the importance of play.

For information about programs offered in your area or to learn more about how to implement a program in your community, contact the PA PIRC.

Success in School Begins with Reading

When children become good readers in the early grades, they are more likely to become better learners throughout their school years and beyond. Learning to read is hard work for children. Fortunately, research is available that suggests how to give each child a good start as they learn to read. There are several important skills that children need to develop as they become a reader. These include learning to:

- Use language in conversation
- Listen and respond to stories read aloud
- Recognize and name the letters of the alphabet
- Listen to the sounds of spoken language
- Connect sounds to letters to figure out the “code” of reading
- Read often so that reading words becomes easy
- Learn and use new words
- Understand what is read

Pre-school and kindergarten teachers prepare children to learn to read with some early skills. First, second and third grade teachers continue to build skills that children will use every day for the rest of their lives.

As a parent you can help by asking your child’s teacher what they are teaching and how your child is progressing with reading. You can also help your child learn to become a reader by providing time each day to read with your child. Learning to read takes a lot of practice.

From *Put Reading First: Helping Your Child Learn to Read*. For more information about how to support your child’s reading, you can call ED Pubs at 1-800-228-8813 or order copies by visiting the PA PIRC website at www.center-school.org/pa-pirc.



Learning to read takes a lot of practice.

You can help your child by reading with him each day.

Parent Teacher Relationships

As another school year begins it is important to revisit the importance of building a good relationship with your child’s teachers. Below are some tips for fostering open, ongoing communication between teachers and parents.

Teachers

- Early in the year let parents know how and when they can contact you as questions and concerns arise.
- Learn parents’ concerns and interests before parent conferences.
- Involve parents in your classroom activities. Let them know how they can be helpful with specific activities

Parents

- Early in the school year introduce yourself to the teacher and let them know the easiest way to get in touch with you.
- Be involved in the classroom in whatever way that work and family responsibilities will permit.
- Maintain regular contact with the teacher. You can contact the teacher when you have a question or concern.



No Child Left Behind

The purpose of this law is to ensure equal opportunity for all children to receive a high-quality education and for all students to reach proficiency on assessments.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has several requirements that include:

- holding schools accountable for **student achievement**;
- using programs that are **research-based**;
- hiring **highly qualified teachers**; and
- **involving parents** in their children’s learning.

The law holds schools accountable for results. Schools demonstrate that they are teaching all children the approved academic content standards through the use of standardized tests. In Pennsylvania these tests are called the PSSA (Pennsylvania System of School Assessment).



The PSSA’s are administered to children in grades 3 – 8 and grade 11 in reading, writing, math and science. Parents, teachers and school administrators are notified of the scores.

Student scores are broken into four categories:

- **Advanced** (superior academic performance; indicates in-depth understanding of the standards).
- **Proficient** (satisfactory academic performance; demonstrates a solid understanding of the standards)
- **Basic** (marginal academic performance; demonstrates partial understanding of standards)
- **Below Basic** (inadequate academic performance; demonstrates little understanding of the standards)

2007-2008 PSSA and PASA Testing Calendar	
Math, Reading, and Writing	
October 22 – November 2, 2007	PSSA 12 th Grade Retest
Writing	
February 11 – 22, 2008	PSSA 5 th , 8 th , & 11 th Grades
Math and Reading	
March 31 – April 11, 2008	PSSA 3 rd , 4 th , 5 th , 6 th , 7 th , 8 th , & 11 th Grades
February 18 – March 28, 2008	PASA (Alternate) Assessment
Science	
April 28 - May 9, 2008	PSSA 4 th , 8 th , & 11 th Grades
May 1 - May 31, 2008	PASA (Alternate) Assessment

NCLB (continued)

Schools are evaluated through the measurement of **Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)** towards meeting the goal of all children being proficient in academic content standards by the year 2014.

Pennsylvania set a targeted percentage of children who should reach proficient levels for each year until 2014. The PSSA scores for all students in the school (or district) and sub-groups of students, school attendance rates, graduation rates, teacher quality and school safety are all a part of AYP.

Schools and districts must produce report cards that demonstrate this progress. Your school should provide its report card to you. You can also access any school or district report card at www.paayp.com. You will notice on the report card the percentage of students who scored in each of the four PSSA levels. You will also see the distinction between all students and sub-groups (poor and minority students, special education students and English Language Learners). NCLB requires schools to close the achievement gap that exists for these students---to bring all students to high performance levels. There are rewards for schools that meet or exceed AYP and sanctions for schools that do not.

NCLB requires schools to offer public school choice to families whose children are in “schools in need of improvement” or those that are determined to be “persistently dangerous or unsafe”. It also requires schools to offer **Supplemental Education Services** (tutoring in reading and math) to the students with the greatest need.

Schools must use programs, practices and teaching methods that have been proven to work through sound scientific research. Schools must demonstrate that there are **highly qualified (certified) teachers** in each classroom. Parents are notified by the school when their children are being taught by individuals who do not meet the requirements to be considered highly qualified.

A key provision of NCLB is its emphasis on active family involvement with their children’s learning as well as with the education system. Title I regulations of NCLB define how federal funds can be used to help low-achieving students increase their level of achievement and involve parents. The Title I regulations of the law define parent involvement as “the participation of parents in regular, two-way and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities”. NCLB allows for states and school districts to use federal education funds to address academic needs identified in their schools.



The Pennsylvania Parent Information and Resource Center (PA PIRC) recognizes that school staff and families can work together to improve student achievement and encourage students to reach high levels of success.

Community-based and faith-based organizations can also make meaningful contributions through collaborative partnerships with families and schools. PA PIRC is committed to:

- Increasing parents’ understanding of NCLB.
- Improving and expanding programs for parents of preschool children.
- Enhancing parent and community engagement with schools.
- Coordinating and disseminating information about student achievement, best practices for parents and teachers, and training opportunities.

To learn more...

Go to the PA PIRC website:
www.center-school.org/pa-pirc

Pennsylvania Department of Education’s website:
www.pde.state.pa.us and click on the K-12 tab.

You will find many topics of interest about NCLB in Pennsylvania.

Enrolling your child in school or transferring to another district

In Pennsylvania children are expected to attend school. “School-aged” is defined as the period of a child’s life from the earliest admission age to a school district’s kindergarten program until graduation from high school or the end of the school term in which a student reaches the age of 21 years, whichever comes first.



When **enrolling a child in school** for the first time, or when enrolling your child in a new school district you must provide:

- Children’s birth certificates
- Records of immunizations – (parents can obtain these from their physician, clinic or school they are leaving)
- Proof of residency (items such as a lease with parent/legal guardians and children listed; driver’s license, recent tax receipt, signed sales agreement)

If **transferring from another school** you will also need the following:

- Report card or transfer card
- Name and address of prior school
- If appropriate: most recent IEP, agency letter of Placement, or Court Order (Proof of Guardianship)



Save the Dates

PA PIRC Regional Workshops

January 16-17	Central PA
February 28-29, 2008	Southeastern PA
March 12-13, 2008	Northeastern PA
April 16-17, 2008	Northwestern PA

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