

# I HAVE A QUESTION...

## What Parents and Caregivers Can Ask and Do to Help Children Thrive at School

A PARENT CHECKLIST



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# INTRODUCTION

As a parent or caregiver, you have a key role in your child's education—you can help bridge your child's transition from home to school, and give him or her the best chance at success in learning and in life. While your child's education begins at home, this tool provides you with a set of questions to ask, and important issues to consider when approaching your child's teachers, principals and counselors about his or her development. As a parent or caregiver, it can be hard to know how to support your child's learning, but asking your child's educators the right questions is a good place to start.

## Key Questions to Ask at Your Child's School

To find out if your child is getting an education that will prepare him or her for success, consider asking the following questions related to five areas of school performance:

- ✔ **Quality:** *Is my child getting a great education?*
  - How will you keep me informed about how my child is doing on a regular basis? How can we work together if my child falls behind?
  - Is my child on grade level, and on track to be ready for college and a career? How do I know?
- ✔ **Safe and Healthy:** *Is my child safe and cared for at school?*
  - What programs are in place to ensure that the school is a safe, nurturing and positive environment? What are the discipline and bullying policies at the school?
  - Are the meals and snacks provided healthy? How much time is there for recess and/or exercise?
- ✔ **Ready for Success:** *Will my child be prepared to succeed in whatever comes next?*
  - How will you measure my child's progress and ability in subjects including reading, math, science, the arts, social and emotional development, and other activities?
  - How much time will my child spend preparing for and taking state and district tests? How will my child's teacher and I know how to use the results to help my child make progress?
- ✔ **Great Teachers:** *Is my child engaged and learning every day?*
  - How do I know my child's teachers are effective?
  - How much time do teachers get to collaborate with one another?
  - What kind of professional development is available to teachers here?
- ✔ **Equity and Fairness:** *Does my child, and every child at my child's school or program, have the opportunity to succeed and be treated fairly?*
  - How does the school make sure that all students are treated fairly? (For example, are there any differences in suspension/expulsion rates by race or gender?)
  - Does the school offer all students access to the classes they need to prepare them for success, including English language learners and students with special needs (for example, Algebra I and II, gifted and talented classes, science labs, AP or IB classes, art, music)?



This resource was developed by



## What's Next?

### What do I do if my child is not getting educated according to the known high standards for his or her grade level and in view of his or her future?

- ✓ Keep asking questions of the teacher, principal, other parents and education experts, including questions about your school choices.
- ✓ Find other parents who have the same concerns and work together toward improving the conditions.
- ✓ Talk to the counselor, school advisory group, PTA, parent liaison or other school or program staff. They may share your concerns or be able to help you.
- ✓ Bring your concerns to the school district office, chancellor or superintendent.
- ✓ Attend public meetings and school board meetings, and tell your story.
- ✓ Consult the resources provided at the end of this guide.

### Advice from teachers: Here are some ways teachers suggest parents can help support their child's success in school.\*

- ✓ Set high expectations for your child.
- ✓ Make sure your child is in school every day and on time. Attendance matters!
- ✓ Work collaboratively with your child's teachers and talk to them about goals and expectations for your child.
- ✓ Talk to your child each day about what he or she is doing in school and discuss what he or she learned.
- ✓ Encourage your child to complete assignments, and see that she or he finishes them.
- ✓ Attend parent-teacher conferences.
- ✓ Participate in family engagement and volunteer opportunities.

## Resources to Help You Help Your Child

- ✓ For age-appropriate guides to supplement this checklist, visit
  - <http://www.ed.gov/family-and-community-engagement>
- ✓ For information on how your school compares to other schools, visit
  - <http://www.greatschools.org>
- ✓ To meet other parents and caregivers in your school, and for information on academic standards and assessments, join your local school-based parent organization and visit
  - <http://www.pta.org>

- ✓ If your child is behind or needs extra help, seek out reading and other academic assistance at libraries, neighborhood churches, academic sororities and fraternities, organizations such as your local National Urban League, 100 Black Men, YMCA and YWCA, Mocha Moms, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and area high school and college students who serve as tutors and mentors.
- ✓ If your child is being bullied or having issues with discipline, visit
  - <http://www.stopbullying.gov> and <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/index.html>
- ✓ For information about exercise and nutrition, visit
  - [www.nutrition.gov](http://www.nutrition.gov)
- ✓ If your child has a delay or disability, check out the Parent Training and Information Centers at
  - <http://www.parentcenterhub.org>
- ✓ If English is not your home language, visit
  - <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/index.html>
- ✓ For information about early childhood education, visit
  - <http://www.ed.gov/early-learning>
- ✓ For information about supporting the education of children and youths experiencing homelessness, visit
  - <http://center.serve.org/nchel/index.php>
- ✓ Before applying to college, get information about federal financial aid for students at [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov) and about college resources at
  - [www.StudentAid.gov](http://www.StudentAid.gov).
- ✓ If you and your child face homelessness, visit
  - <http://homeless.samhsa.gov/>

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