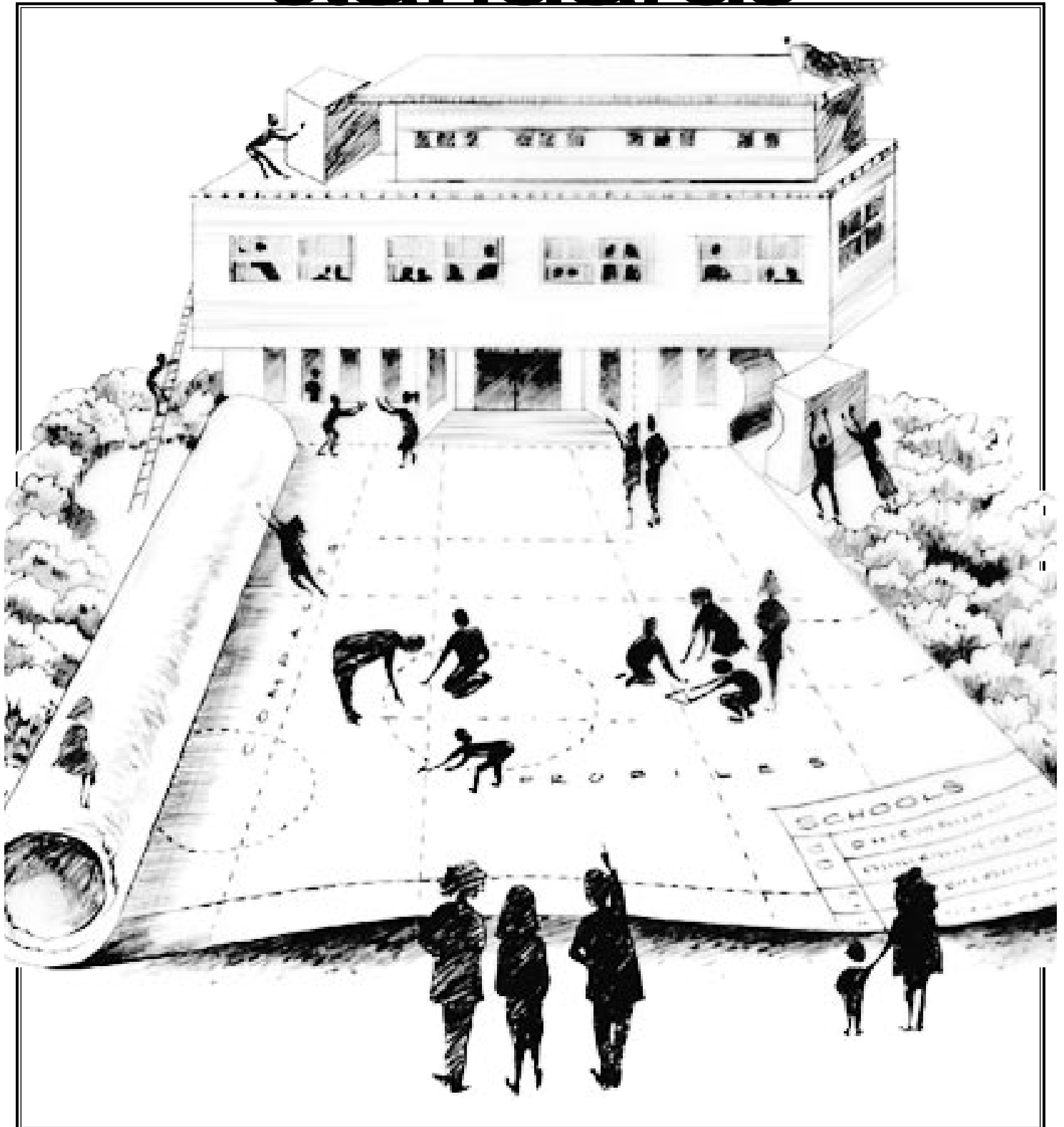


Parents ask about
standards



STANDARDS: A REQUIREMENT OF TITLE I, IMPROVING AMERICA'S SCHOOLS ACT OF 1994

Parents ask about standards

What are standards?

For more on
Title I, read
the brochure
*Parents Ask
About Title I*

Standards describe what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. Every school that receives *Title I* money must have standards. (Title I is a Federal aid program that provides extra educational services for children who are behind in school.) Standards are set by the school district and by the state. This is a new requirement, so for many schools the standards are still being developed.

How do standards describe what students should know and be able to do?

There are two kinds of standards. First, there are *content standards*. Content standards say what students are supposed to learn in different subjects. For example, a content standard for first graders in the subject of “communication” may say:

Each student will develop awareness of the conventions of written and spoken language.

The second kind of standards are *performance standards*. Performance standards say how well students have learned what they are supposed to learn. For example, a performance standard for the content standard above might say:

Each student will recognize and write the letters of the alphabet.

Your school may use other terms instead of *content standards* to describe what students are expected to learn. It may use *courses of study*, *essential skills*, *curriculum framework*, *learning outcome*, *common core of knowledge* or something else. These terms all mean about the same thing.

Your school also may use special terms to describe how it measures student achievement of the *performance standards*. It may use *standardized tests*, *alternative assessment methods*, *student portfolios*, or some other terms.

Finally, your school may use special terms to describe the degree to which students meet the performance standards. For example, your school may use

the terms *basic*, *novice*, *proficient*, and *mastery*. Students performing at a *basic* level are just beginning to learn the skills expected of them for their grade level. Students performing at a *novice* level are gaining the skills. Students performing at a *proficient* level can perform the skills most of the time. And, students performing at a *mastery* level have completely gained, or mastered, the skills.

The document containing your school's standards should define any special terms that are used. You also may want to ask school staff to explain them to you.

How do schools use standards?

Schools use standards in many different ways:

- Standards set goals and a plan of action for meeting those goals. Therefore schools use the standards to guide decisions on what and how to teach students. Standards make it more likely that all school activities — spending decisions, the lesson plans, the teaching methods, and the measurement of performance — are designed with the same goals in mind.
- By having standards, schools send the message that *all* students are expected to gain certain knowledge and skills. Standards mean that schools will not expect less of some students and more of others.
- Standards help teachers focus on teaching a specific body of knowledge and skills. This helps them make decisions on how to use classroom time.
- Standards help coordinate what is taught in the different classrooms. All classes in a grade cover the same material, and each grade builds on the skills and knowledge learned the previous year.
- Standards help the school select teaching materials such as textbooks so there is a match between what is taught and what students are expected to learn.

For more about compacts and profiles, read the brochures *Parents Ask About Compacts* and *Parents Ask About School Profiles*

- ❑ Standards help schools and parents determine what they each can do to help students achieve. They are used to develop the school *compact*, which is the written statement of what schools and parents are each supposed to do to help students achieve.
- ❑ Standards provide a way to measure student progress. They are used in the *school profile*, the report card on the school.

How does the Title I program use standards?

Any school that receives Title I money must have standards for its students. And, it must use the same standards for all students, both those served by Title I programs and all others in the school.

There is a good reason for this requirement. Research shows that when educators and parents have high expectations of students, the students are more likely to succeed. The purpose of Title I programs is to help students who are behind in school. Instead of expecting less of these students, Title I expects them to achieve just as much as everyone else. This means that Title I programs must be designed to give students the help they need to reach the same high standards that are set for everyone else.

Each school (with parent input) can choose how to use Title I money in order to best meet the needs of students who need help. For example, your school may decide to add after-school programs or to train parents so they can better help their children with homework.

Whatever schools decide to do, they must make sure it helps students who are behind to meet the same standards that are expected of all other students.

Who sets the standards?

Many states have content and performance standards in some subject areas that school districts are required to use. If the state doesn't set standards, districts make the decisions. Usually both the state and the school district are involved

in setting the standards for your school. Some states and school districts also involve parents in this process.

In some subject areas, such as math and science, there are national standards that have been created by groups of educators and experts. These national standards were developed because of concerns that American students weren't learning as much as children in other countries. States and school districts may choose to use these national standards as guidelines, but they are not required to do so.

What can I do to see that standards are met in my child's school?

- Ask questions to help you understand what standards are being used in your school and how your child's teacher is working to help students achieve them.
- Talk with the teacher about what the school is doing to help your child meet the standards.
- Join the committee that sets standards. If standards have been set, study them and give your comments to the school staff that make decisions on how standards will be met.
- Read your school profile to understand how well your school is meeting the standards.
- Read your school compact to learn what your responsibilities are for helping your child meet the standards.

What else do I need to know?

Every school district has its own standards. Here are some questions you might want to ask to learn more about your school's standards:

Ask about developing the standards

Does the school have standards? If not, when will the standards be available?

Who's in charge of developing standards for our school?

What is the process for setting standards?

How are parents involved in that process?

What state standards are required?
Are any national standards being used?
What subject areas have specific standards?
What part can I play in setting the standards?

Ask about interpreting the standards

How do I get a copy of the standards?
What special terms will I need to know to understand the standards?
What other information do I need to make sense of the standards?
Who can help me understand the standards?
Does the school have workshops to help parents understand the standards?
How do I know if these standards are high enough?
Will the school's standards prepare my child for a good job and for college?
How do our standards compare to the standards of other districts?
If I don't agree with the standards, what can I do?

Ask about how your school uses the standards

Who makes decisions about what is taught and how it is taught in this school?
How do the textbooks and lessons relate to the standards?
How will standards be used in conferences I have with my child's teacher?
How can I make sure my child receives instruction that helps him or her reach the standards?
How does the school measure my child's performance?
How does testing relate to the standards?
How often will my child be tested?
How will testing results be reported to me?
How are the standards used to develop the school compact?
How are the standards used to develop the school profile?
What can I do if I think the Title I program isn't doing the right thing to help my child meet the standards?

Who can answer these questions?

Your child's teacher can answer many of them. Or you can ask:

- The school principal
- The Title I director in the school
- The superintendent of schools
- Members of the school board
- Members of the parent-teacher organization
- The parent coordinator
- Staff members at the parent resource center
- Other parents



Other
brochures
in this
series
available
from your
school

Parents Ask About Title I

Parents Ask About Parent Involvement Policies

Parents Ask About Compacts

Parents Ask About School Profiles

**The following are some sections from
“IMPROVING AMERICA’S SCHOOLS ACT OF 1994”
that relate to standards**

**Title I: Amendments to the Elementary and
Secondary Education Act of 1965**

“Sec. 1118. Parental Involvement

“(e) Building Capacity for Involvement.-

To ensure effective involvement of parents and to support a partnership among the school, parents, and the community to improve student achievement, each school and local educational agency-

“(1) shall provide assistance to participating parents in such areas as understanding the National Education Goals, the State’s content standards and State student performance standards, the provisions of section 1111 (b) (8), State and local assessments, the requirements of this part, and how to monitor a child’s progress and work with educators to improve the performance of their children as well as information on how parents can participate in decisions relating to the education of their children;”