

As a parent, here are **12** things you should know about and expect from your schools ... and yourself:

1

Your involvement matters — a lot. Research shows that students with involved parents are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, enroll in higher-level programs, be promoted and earn credits, attend school regularly, have better social skills, and graduate and go on to college.

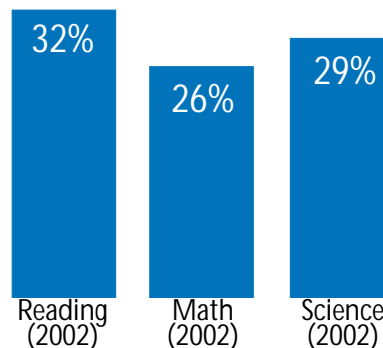
2

You can be involved in many ways. You can be involved as a **teacher** — establishing a learning environment at home for the whole family. You can be a **supporter** of education — volunteering at school and taking part in school activities that promote education. You can be an **advocate** for your own child and for all children — pressing state and local leaders for better programs and higher achievement. And you can be a **decisionmaker** — taking part in decisions about programs and staffing.

3

Children need you. American students are not doing as well in school as they should be. Less than one-third of American students are doing well in reading, writing, math, science and other important subjects, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, “the nation’s report card.” Worse, the scores of African American, Hispanic and low-income students are much lower. This is both morally wrong and economically short-sighted. Neither our democracy nor economy can thrive with this level of low achievement.

Percentage of fourth graders proficient



Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress

4

Schools need you. Public opinion polls show that parents, elected officials and educators alike agree that the lack of parent involvement is the key challenge facing schools. Teachers and principals are desperate for parents like you to be more involved. Helping your child at home, volunteering in classrooms, attending parent-teacher meetings, serving on school committees — all help is needed.

5

You should be told clearly what the learning standards are in each grade.

Parents and students alike need to know at the start of the school year what is being taught in English, math, science, social studies and other subjects in each grade. And they need to be told how that learning will be tested so they can understand how to help their children do their best. You should have access to standards guides like the one on the right.

Science

All students are expected to meet science standards in several areas, including Earth and space science, life science, physical science, research, and inquiry.

How you can help

- ▶ Play ball. Talk with your child about how his or her arm pushes the ball up into the air — and gravity pulls it down.
- ▶ Watch the rain with your child. Talk about how water evaporates into the air and collects in clouds.
- ▶ Ask your child to name some of the technologies he or she used today, from plumbing and heating to television and battery-powered toys.
- ▶ Read along with your child about whatever he or she finds exciting — dinosaurs, cars or people who live in other parts of the world.

For example,
by the end of first grade, your child should be able to:

- ▶ Understand that living things and food, water, air and a good environment is scarce.
- ▶ Work with another child to solve a problem.
- ▶ Compare the ways different plants and animals grow and develop.
- ▶ Know the difference between rocks and minerals.
- ▶ Understand that rocks, minerals and soil can be classified by their color, texture and size.
- ▶ Group plants and animals according to what they look like, such as those having wide leaves or webbed feet.
- ▶ Use a scale to weigh himself or herself.
- ▶ Understand that a substance, such as water, can be in a gas form or mixed with something else, such as flour, to create a new substance.
- ▶ Know that force is one object pushing or pulling on another.

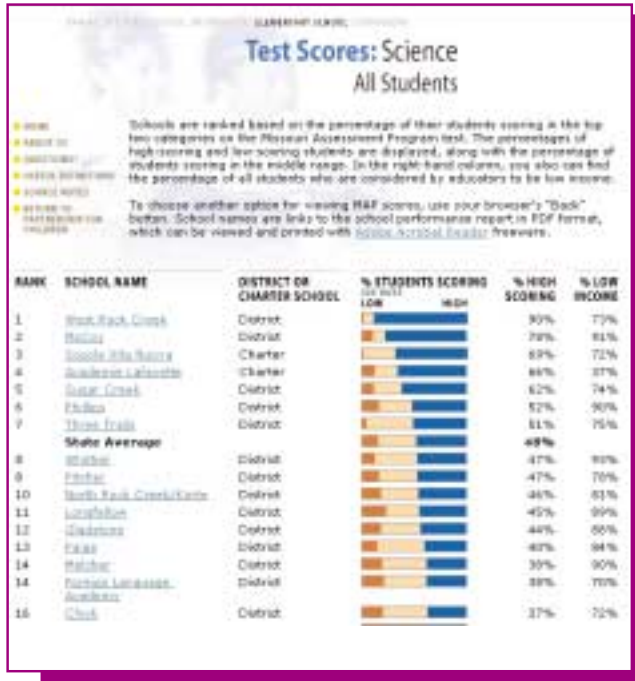
6

You should be told about the school's behavior standards.

Students need to feel safe in order to learn. Parents should know what the school's safety and discipline standards are, how trouble-makers are handled, and what the school is doing to promote an environment of respect and responsibility.

7

You should be told clearly how your child's school is doing. School districts now are required to publish parent-friendly report cards every year that show how students are performing in reading and math, attendance rates, graduation rates, and whether all student groups are making good progress. As in the example below, you should be able to see at a glance how your school compares.



8

Middle and high school parents should be told what it will take for your child to apply for college. Middle school is not too early to begin learning what kind of courses your child should be taking if he or she wants to leave high school ready for college. For instance, many educators say all students should take algebra by eighth grade and should have at least three years of math and science in high school.

9

You should know your options. With the federal No Child Left Behind law, students in low-income public schools that fail to meet learning goals for two years in a row now have a chance to transfer to a better school. Plus,

if your child's school still needs improvement after three years, you can request extra tutoring services. Also, as of January 2003, 36 states have charter schools, which provide alternative approaches to learning.

10

You should be able to get answers to your important questions. How do I know that my child is safe? What is my child expected to know and be able to do in reading, writing, math and other subjects? How is this learning measured? What will the school do to help if my child is behind? What can I do to help? Whether in person, on the phone or on the Internet, your school should be willing to share the answers to these important questions.

11

You should be treated with respect. Parents and other taxpayers may not be the educational experts. But you are the owners of the schools. The educators are hired to work for you and your children, not the other way around. You have the right to be treated as a fully equal partner in your child's education.

12

You're more likely to get what you want for your child if you work with other parents. If you are in a school that is **not** parent-friendly, administrators might perceive you as a

fruitcake or a member of a powerful organization, depending on how many allies you have.

Collaboration Counts

If you think that you alone cannot do much to improve your school, you are probably right. But if you collaborate with other parents and organizations, you can make a difference. There is strength and power in numbers.

1 parent = A fruitcake

2 parents = A fruitcake and a friend

3 parents = Troublemakers

5 parents = "Let's have a meeting"

10 parents = "We'd better listen"

25 parents = "Our dear friends"

50 parents = A powerful organization

Parents are **powerful**.
Parents with
knowledge and skills
are even **more powerful ...**
and are **making a**
difference all over
the country.

At Parent Leadership Associates, we believe that knowledgeable, engaged parents improve student achievement. Students win, educators win, communities win. We offer a wide range of materials, workshops and strategic advice to parent groups, community organizations, housing coops, faith-based groups, business leaders, elected officials and educators who are committed to ensuring that all American children, no matter what their background, get the kind of education they'll need to lead good lives.

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