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# It takes a parent to raise a successful student

By Rebecca Lightsey

TEXAS APPLESEED

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The statewide No Child Left Behind Parental Involvement Conference in Corpus Christi this week will focus a spotlight on the crucial role parents play in determining their child's success in school. This concept is at the heart of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which requires parents be informed as to how their child and their child's school are performing so they can be true partners in education.

Yet, a report recently released by Appleseed, a national public interest law center, found that the 18 targeted school districts in six states — including Texas — do not universally embrace parental involvement as a key strategy for improving academic performance. And, it comes as no surprise that low-income and non-English speaking families have the most difficulty interacting with their child's school.

Why, five years after the passage of NCLB, is parental involvement still a major challenge confronting our schools?

There are a number of reasons:

- \* School districts have difficulty defining clear and meaningful benchmarks by which to evaluate the success of parent-involvement efforts.
- \* NCLB-mandated standardized testing and teacher quality standards put incredible pressure on school districts, leaving little or no time to make parental involvement a top priority.
- \* More training is needed on the best ways to effectively engage parents — particularly parents of our most vulnerable students, those who are low-income or lack English language skills.

The Appleseed report, "It Takes a Parent: Transforming Education in the Wake of the No Child Left Behind Act," offers a number of recommendations to address this challenge, including:

- \* Creating parent resource centers to help parents become effective advocates for their child's education.
- \* Employing translators to interpret for non-English-speaking parents at school meetings.
- \* Offering workshops for parents in their own language to inform them of their rights as parents, and updating them on important topics such as student testing, graduation requirements, and how parents can

support student learning.

Schools that successfully involve parents often engage in nontraditional outreach — scheduling school gatherings in community settings at times when working parents are free to attend. They also deliver important school information to parents in a variety of formats, including bilingual television, the Internet and print.


The Appleseed report is a ?call to action? for states, districts and schools to make it a priority to engage parents as important allies in the hard work to improve academic performance for all students. We strongly encourage state officials and school districts across Texas to implement creative parent involvement programs that work — recognizing that it takes a parent to ensure success in the classroom.

Lightsey is executive director of Texas Appleseed, a nonprofit, nonpartisan public interest law center.

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