



# Bulletin

Parents Learning About Children's Education

A service for all parents of kids in Massachusetts' public schools



## Success in school starts 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 now available that suggests how to give each child a good start in reading.

Becoming a reader involves the development of important skills, including learning to:

- **use** language in conversation
- **listen** and respond to stories read aloud
- **recognize** and name the letters of the alphabet

## Make reading a part of every day...

**Share conversations with your child over meal times and other times you are together. Children learn words more easily when they hear them spoken often.** Introduce new and interesting words at every opportunity.

**Read together every day.** Spend time talking about stories, pictures, and words.

- **listen** to the sounds of spoken language
- **connect** sounds to letters to figure out the "code" of reading
- **read** often so that recognizing words becomes easy and automatic
- **learn** and **use** new words
- **understand** what is read

Preschool and kindergarten teachers set the stage for your child to learn to read with some critical early skills. First, second, and third grade teachers then take up the task of building the skills that children will use every day for the rest of their lives. As a parent, you can help by understanding what teachers are teaching and by asking questions about your child's progress and the classroom reading program.

You can also help your children become readers. Learning to read takes practice, more practice than during the school day.

From *Put Reading First: Helping Your Child Learn to Read*. For more information about how to support your child's reading program at home, call ED Pubs at 1-800-228-8813 and ask to be sent free copies of *Put Reading First: Helping Your Child Learn to Read*, *Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read*, and *A Child Becomes a Reader*.

**Be your child's best advocate.** Keep informed about your child's progress in reading and ask the teacher about ways you can help.

**Be a reader and a writer.** Children learn habits from the people around them.

**Visit the library often.** Story times, computers, homework help, and other exciting activities await the entire family.

## How to Read to Children of All Ages

Children learn through repetition. Telling the same stories and singing the same songs over and over may seem boring to you, but not to children. When you repeat a story, children are learning about the meaning of words and how words tell a story. The way you read to children makes a difference. Read stories in a way that encourages children to participate. Follow these tips to make reading more enjoyable.

- Select books that reflect a child's own experiences, such as books about daily life, family members, or animals.
- Expose children to books they can touch.
- Encourage children to choose the book(s) you read.
- Read books that have rhyme, rhythm, or repetition, because the sound of language is especially important to infants who cannot yet focus on pictures.
- Use different voices for different characters or emotions.
- Ask questions about pictures or characters in the book. Have children describe what they see.
- Have children tell you what they think will happen next in the story.

From *Read to Children: Open Young Minds*, a publication of the National Governor's Association



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## Parents' PLACE

is a Parent Information and Resource Center (PIRC) funded by the U.S. Department of Education to help parents and educators advance children's success in school. For more information, call toll-free 877-471-0980.

## No Child Left Behind: Measuring Adequate Yearly Progress

The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* requires “adequate yearly progress,” the minimum level of improvement school districts and schools must achieve every year. In technical terms, adequate yearly progress (AYP) refers to the growth rate in the percentage of students who achieve the state’s definition of academic proficiency. Each state will set the AYP gains every school must meet to reach 100 percent proficiency at the end of 12 years.

Under *No Child Left Behind*, “adequate yearly progress” measures are steps toward our nation’s bipartisan goal of closing the achievement gap and ensuring that every child is proficient in math and reading by the school year 2013–14.

By testing every child, parents and teachers will know the academic achievement of each group of students and can work together to ensure that no child will be left behind. This is why test scores will be broken out into the following sub-groups: **economic background, race and ethnicity, English proficiency and disability.**

Defining adequate yearly progress ensures that every school improves every year so that every child—regardless of race, parent’s income or family background—learns and excels. Tracking this progress yearly will help recognize great schools making great strides in teaching all children. And by following AYP gains at schools where children are not learning, parents and education officials will know which schools need to improve.

In order to publicize this information, parents will receive annual report cards on the following:

- comparison of students at basic, proficient and advanced levels of academic achievement,
- graduation rates,
- professional qualifications of teachers,
- percentages of students not tested,
- and identification of schools in need of improvement.

The information that comes from measuring the yearly progress of schools is also the basis to give parents new options and choices for helping their children when they fall behind.

From *The Achiever*, Nov. 11, 2002, Vol. 1, No. 4. *The Achiever* is published by the Office of Intergovernmental and Interagency Affairs, U.S. Department of Education.



## Parents’ PLACE Workshops

### WORKSHOPS FOR FAMILIES

(Available in English, Spanish, and Portuguese)

#### Parents Are Powerful: A workshop to promote family involvement in education

A workshop for families and community members interested in getting more involved, but unsure where or how to begin. This workshop discusses:

- Research on the importance of family involvement and its benefits for kids and schools
- Brief overview of standards-based education reform, including MCAS
- How to determine whether or not your child is getting a quality education
- Strategies for supporting your children’s success and advocating for quality education

#### How to Help Your Child Learn in 500 Words or Less: “Parents are Powerful in American Schools” for English Language Learners

This workshop for beginning English language learners covers the information in Parents are Powerful in American Schools using an English vocabulary of 500 words or less. The workshop covers the information in Parents are Powerful (described above) as well as information on the American school system (enrollment, the grading system, report cards, standards-based education) and the rights of students with limited English proficiency.

#### Families and Schools Together: How families can partner with schools to ensure that children receive a high quality education

This workshop is for parents and community members who are already involved in their schools and are looking for additional ways to impact their children’s learning and achievement. This workshop explains:

- Standards-based education, including curriculum frameworks, instructional strategies, and learning styles
- Standardized tests, including MCAS
- Your role as partner with the school in ensuring your child’s success.

#### MCAS: High stakes and high standards for students and schools

This workshop explains MCAS, the statewide testing system, and what lies ahead in the immediate future. Parents who want to supplement the school’s efforts to help their children reach the state standards would benefit from this workshop. Specifically, this workshop covers:

- Brief history and purpose of MCAS
- Explanation of the MCAS test and its implementation
- MCAS sample questions and responses
- Supports and resources available for helping students improve their performance.

#### What Families and Schools Can Do to Prevent Violence

This workshop is for parents, school professionals, and community members who want to learn the principles of safe schools and effective violence prevention. This workshop covers:

- Current research on school violence and school safety

- Characteristics of safe and responsive schools
- Warning signs of bullying and violence
- Strategies for what parents, teachers, and students can do to prevent violence.

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR SCHOOLS (Available in English)

#### Creating Family-Friendly Schools

This workshop for teachers, administrators, and staff discusses ways to increase effective interactions between schools and families. Key elements of the workshop include:

- Identifying characteristics of family-friendly schools
- Developing strategies to support family involvement
- Developing a school profile on family-friendly practices
- Achieving better understanding of diverse cultures.

#### Opening the Door to Family-Friendly Schools: Building Partnerships with Families through the Front Office

This workshop emphasizes the influential role front office school personnel play in interactions with parents, administration, teachers, and other school staff. This workshop helps them:

- Recognize they are an important link to greater parent involvement
- Understand the need for a “customer service” approach in schools
- Identify effective communication styles and skills
- Define family-friendly practices.

#### Outreach to Families from Diverse Communities

This workshop provides information about the values, cultures, and languages of families from diverse backgrounds and how these impact outreach efforts. Assessment tools and strategies will be shared that will help participants develop an outreach plan for their communities. Topics covered include:

- Elements of culture
- Cross-cultural communication
- Nonverbal communication
- Working with speakers of English as a second language
- The needs of immigrant families

#### Informing Parents in 500 Words or Less: Using Basic English to Adapt Your Materials for Families Who Are English Language Learners

This workshop presents a new strategy for reaching and informing parents who have limited English proficiency about their role in the educational process. It shows how to convey educational information using a vocabulary of 500 essential words, typical of those used in a basic English as a Second Language (ESL) course. The workshop uses Parents’ PLACE’s workshop “Parents are Powerful in American Schools” as an example of how materials can be modified without compromising the message. Participants have an opportunity to convert an educational concept into language accessible to limited English families.

#### What Families and Schools Can Do to Prevent School Violence

(see description under Workshops for Families).

**To schedule a workshop, please call Rosie Hunter at Parents’ PLACE at 877-471-0980, Ext. 142.**