

# Fact Sheet #1

## Standards

### What does NCLB say?

Academic standards are open and public statements about what *all students should know and be able to do in each state. A typical mathematics standard, for example, states that all students should be able to solve multi-step mathematics problems and explain their answers in writing.*

Since 1994 all states have been required to adopt challenging academic standards in the core academic areas of mathematics and reading/language arts, and make them available to the public. No Child Left Behind requires states to adopt standards in science by 2005–06.

Before statewide standards, expectations for learning varied greatly across schools and districts. Even within schools, different groups of students have traditionally been held to different standards. This has often worked to the disadvantage of low-income students and students of color.

With state standards, there are consistent goals for the knowledge and skills students should learn in school. Teaching styles and methods will vary, but the educational goals remain constant.

Now parents and community groups can know what students should know at the end of a grade, or at the end of a grade span – i.e., elementary, middle and high school.

### Why is this important?

We need standards for excellence and for fairness and equity. For too many poor and minority students, school has been like trying to bowl with a curtain in front of the pins. No one told students—or their parents—what they should be aiming at. Standards tear away the curtain and make the goals clear to everyone.

For example, if a child has a teacher who uses standards to ensure the curriculum and assignments are challenging and on grade-level, the child will probably learn up to grade level (or will be identified for additional assistance). Another child, with a teacher who does not teach to the standards, might not be taught up to grade level. Both children, however, could get an “A” on their report cards. Without standards and assessments linked to them there would be no way to know that the first child learned much more than the second.

Standards give us a way to know this because they tell us what the child is supposed to be taught. If a child falls behind, standards help teachers and parents to find that out and do something about it before too much time passes.

### What can I do?

Start by getting a copy of your state’s academic standards. You should be able to get them from your local school or district. State standards are also available on the internet.

Once you have the standards, read them. Sometimes it is easier to understand them with a group of people, but you can also do it on your own.

Then look at your children’s homework and class work and see how they are aligned to the standards. You can ask your child’s teacher, “What are the children supposed to be learning through this assignment?”

The Education Trust has developed a resource for helping parents use standards to judge the quality of their child’s assignment.<sup>1</sup>

It will not always be easy to understand how assignments relate to standards. But trying to do this is a good way to get involved in your child’s education.

<sup>1</sup>See the Education Trust’s brochure called “Does My Child’s Homework Meet High Standards?” available on the internet at [http://www.edtrust.org/main/main/homework\\_eng.asp](http://www.edtrust.org/main/main/homework_eng.asp).