

High Quality Curriculum

What does NCLB say?

Standards set up an educational destination, but how students get to the destination is equally important. No Child Left Behind insists that all children should be taught up to the same standards. They need good teachers, challenging courses and rigorous assignments—that is, the work they do in class or for homework.

Why is this important?

Students can only learn what they are taught and can do no better than the work they are assigned.

Standards tell us what students should know and be able to do at every grade level. And it is the curriculum and assignments that provide the foundation for learning and building skills. What classes are students enrolled in? What materials—textbooks, reading methods, etc.—are being used? Are their assignments designed to help them meet state standards?

A sad fact about American education is that students are often sorted, often at a very early age. Some children are given challenging classes and are expected to reach high levels of achievement. Others are expected to learn only the most basic and most rudimentary skills, and are assigned to low-level classes. This is sometimes called “tracking.”

All children should be taught a college readiness curriculum in core academic classes. In today’s and tomorrow’s economy, ready for work and ready for college mean the same thing: ready for life.¹ Courses traditionally thought of as “college prep” are essential in today’s workplace, where most jobs that pay a family-supporting wage demand high skills and the ability to continue learning on the job. A challenging curriculum is the only way to ensure that all students are prepared to pursue their ambitions after high school graduation.

What can I do?

Look at the materials your children are being taught with, and the classes they are taking.

- In elementary school, make sure the materials used in your child’s classes are appropriate for their grade level. Are some children, for example, reading “below grade level?” If so, ask what the teachers are doing to make sure they catch up.
- In middle and high school, look at what classes your child is taking. Get to know your child’s guidance counselors from the very beginning, and make sure that the classes your child is taking prepares him/her to be successful in a challenging curriculum.
- Learn about the courses required for college and for different jobs and careers. Make sure your children are in courses that adequately prepare them to pursue their dreams.

¹For more information about the importance of a core curriculum, read “A New Core Curriculum For All,” (Thinking K-16, Winter 2003) available at www.edtrust.org.