

K-12 EDUCATION

Updated Federal Guidance Would Assist Title I Schools in Meeting Parent and Family Engagement Requirements

Why GAO Did This Study

Students do better and stay longer in school when families are engaged, according to research.

GAO was asked to study parent and family engagement in Title I schools. This report examines (1) the extent to which Title I schools made required parent and family engagement information available on their websites, (2) how parent and family engagement compares between Title I and non-Title I schools, and (3) the extent to which Education's guidance addresses Title I requirements for parent and family engagement.

GAO reviewed school and district websites for a nationally generalizable sample of Title I schools; analyzed Education's most recent data on parents' views of family engagement (school year 2018–19); and reviewed relevant federal laws and documents on Title I oversight. GAO interviewed Education officials and state and local officials from Nebraska, Nevada, and Tennessee. GAO selected schools and districts in these states for a mix of Title I program type, school type, and locale.

What GAO Recommends

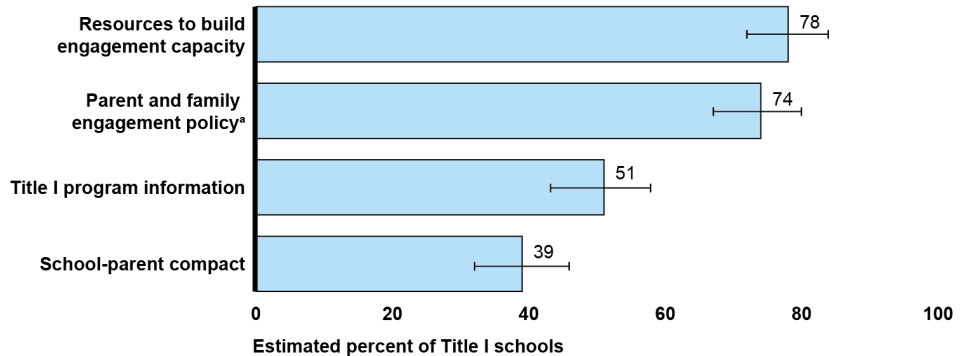
GAO recommends that Education update its guidance on Title I parent and family engagement to reflect requirements under current law. Education agreed with our recommendation.

View [GAO-24-106143](#). For more information, contact Jacqueline M. Nowicki at (202) 512-7215 or nowickij@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

GAO estimates that, nationwide, the information Title I schools most commonly posted online regarding parent and family engagement involved policies and resources for building engagement capacity (see figure). These schools, which generally have high percentages of students from low-income families, are required to conduct certain parent and family engagement activities under Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended.

Extent Title I Schools Posted Parent and Family Engagement Information on Their Websites
Required information



Source: GAO review of a nationally representative sample of Title I schools and their corresponding district websites. | GAO-24-106143

^aFindings for parent and family engagement policies include both district and school level policies. Note: The percentages have a margin of error within plus or minus 7 percentage points at a 95 percent level of confidence. Title I requires these policies be made available to the local community. While it does not explicitly require that the policies be posted online, websites are important venues for engaging and informing the public, including families of children attending school.

GAO found little difference in the ways that parents from Title I and non-Title I schools participate in and receive information from their schools and their overall satisfaction with those schools, according to Education's data. For example, parents from both types of schools reported similar attendance at general school meetings and events, such as open houses and sporting events.

To help with implementation of Title I's parent and family engagement requirements, states, schools, and districts can refer to Education's guidance, which was issued in 2004. GAO's review of the decades-old guidance found outdated information about the law as well as missing information about current requirements. For example, the guidance does not specify that districts must prioritize high-need schools when distributing funds for parent and family engagement activities, as required by law. Further, Education's monitoring efforts in 2022 cited Nebraska for not ensuring its districts did this. Education officials acknowledged some misalignment between the guidance and the current law, but said they had no plans to update it and that most of it still applies to current law. State officials GAO interviewed in monitored states said that the guidance's outdated references are confusing. Absent updated guidance, states, districts, and schools may continue to rely on obsolete information to guide their parent and family engagement efforts.