

# Preface

*“Amid the growing din of debate over No Child Left Behind (NCLB), we seldom hear the public’s voice. Indeed, the general public remains largely unaware of these sweeping reforms and their implications for schools. In light of the tremendous challenge posed by NCLB and the ongoing public support that will undoubtedly be needed to accomplish the Act’s ambitious goals, it only makes sense to bring the public into this conversation.”*

—Bryan Goodwin, *Digging Deeper: Where Does the Public Stand on Standards-Based Education?*, 2003

This book is written not just for parents and teachers but also for every stakeholder in the quality and success of education. That includes all of us because the success of the generations to come affects our neighborhoods, our pensions, our economy, our rights, and our very quality of life. When education fails, neighborhoods become crime-infested places run by bullies rather than thinkers. The middle class (the essence of a democracy) shrinks as more and more of its citizens join the ranks of the poor. The costs in terms of reeducation, welfare, mortality rates, infant deaths, prisons, and other rehabilitation facilities are enormous. Not to mention the cost to any country in terms of wasted brainpower that could have made a difference.

## viii What Every Parent Should Know About Schools

It is my goal that anyone interested in education can pick up this book and read it easily without having to wade through the usual education jargon. Where education terminology is necessary, I have included a glossary of terms at the back of this book. I have also included a comprehensive list of questions to ask as you make informed decisions about not only your child but also all of the children of the next generation.

Chapter 1 is a brief explanation of the events that have led to sweeping reforms in education, such as No Child Left Behind, and to the public's demand for measures to determine the state of education. The purpose of this chapter is to help the reader place the news headlines surrounding the controversial issues of standards and high stakes testing into perspective. These issues have been more than 50 years in the making and are still much in debate.

Chapter 2 examines the reasons why standards are good for education when applied appropriately. Well-written standards that are systemically taught and tested appropriately can help provide a level playing field for all students, regardless of background. Standards also give us, as parents, assurances that no matter where we live, our children will have a quality education. They also provide the first doorway for closing the gap in achievement among the poor.

Chapter 3 explains why standards are of no value unless they are taught and tested appropriately. I provide a simple explanation of what is meant by alignment and why it is necessary. I also discuss ways that parents can be sure that alignment is being used in their child's school and on state tests.

Chapter 4 provides a collection of checklists and questionnaires to assist parents and other stakeholders as they examine their state standards and how they are used at the local level.

Chapter 5 provides examples of activities that parents can use to help their children prepare for high stakes tests. A typical benchmark is provided with step-by-step directions for how parents might use that information at home with their own children.

I have provided a glossary of terms that may not be familiar to you as you read this book, particularly if you are not in the education field. Every profession has its own jargon, and I have attempted to keep that jargon to a minimum within this book. However, some use of education terms is necessary.

It is my hope that, through this book, we can begin to have dialogue about how to make standards work for our children and how we can better prepare our kids for the future. It is my belief that if all of us who have a stake in education begin to work hand-in-hand instead of resorting to finger-pointing, education—and the success of our children—can be extraordinary.