



# The Parent Role in Decision-Making about Returning to In-Person School: Program and Policy Level

As a parent or a family-led organization, you have important insights to share at the school, district, and state level in terms of decision-making about school reopening.

**The National Center for Parent Leadership, Advocacy, and Community Empowerment (National PLACE)**

is dedicated to strengthening parents' and family-led organizations' voices at decision-making tables at the individual, program, and policy level.

We hope this mini-guide provides you with the information you need to take an active, informed, and effective role in school, district and state systemic decision-making around school reopening.

Advocate  
for your  
Plan

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CONSULT  
WITH  
OTHERS

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BE  
INFORMED

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## At the systems level, become informed about:

- (a) your state's guidance or rules about school reopening, including whether they are leaving it to individual districts/schools to make decision about reopening, or are mandating reopening or not reopening; any special rules for children like yours (children with disabilities or special healthcare needs, for example); any provisions for parental choice among various options; and opportunities to provide input and/or feedback to inform state and/or district/school guidance or rules; and
- (b) your district's guidance or rules about school reopening, including any special rules for children like yours or the children of the families you serve; any provisions for parental choice among various options; and opportunities to provide input and/or feedback to inform their decisions.

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**THE MOST IMPORTANT FIRST STEP IS TO BECOME INFORMED**





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**At the STATE/DISTRICT/SCHOOL LEVEL, consult with**

(a) **parent organizations** such as the state and local Parent-Teacher Association, district Title I Parent Advisory Council, special education or bilingual parent advisory group, Parent Center(s) in your state or community, Family to Family Health Information Center, and others, who care about children like yours or the children of the families you serve;

(b) **advocacy groups** such as your state or local NAACP, La Raza, Parents for Public Schools, broad disability and/or specific disability organizations, and others, who advocate on behalf of children like yours or the children of the families you serve;

(c) **interested members** of your State or local school board/board of education; and

(e) **state, district and school officials**, among others.



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It is important to also consult with health experts and officials.

Check out the positions and recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics (national and your state chapter); public health officials at your state, county, or local level; the school nurses' association; and others.

**What are their perspectives?**

**What information do they have that might inform your thinking?**

**What information, concerns and recommendations do you have that might shape their thinking and actions?**

**What opportunities exist for you to work with them to influence school reopening decisions?**

Again, consider: What are their perspectives? What information do they have that might inform your thinking? What information, concerns and recommendations do you have that might shape their thinking and actions? What opportunities exist for you to work with them to influence school reopening decisions?







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## MAKE AND IMPLEMENT/ ADVOCATE FOR YOUR PLAN

### What considerations are important?

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**Be sure that you are aware of the full range of issues that must be addressed.**

To access a guide with important considerations at the systems level, including school operations, academic recovery, social-emotional and health supports, and remote learning and family engagement, **go to Key Questions to Ask Before School Reopens.**

[https://spanadvocacy.org/Quick\\_Guide\\_8.pdf](https://spanadvocacy.org/Quick_Guide_8.pdf) ENG.

[https://spanadvocacy.org/Quick\\_Guide\\_8\\_spa.pdf](https://spanadvocacy.org/Quick_Guide_8_spa.pdf) SPA.



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## MAKE AND IMPLEMENT/ ADVOCATE FOR YOUR PLAN



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### What should you be asking for, and of whom?

**At the state systems level**, work with other interested parents, parent organizations, and advocates to advocate for the policies, procedures and practices you think are important.

**At the state level**, advocate with the State Board of Education and state education agency leaders such as the Commissioner of Education or the Director of Special Education, Title I Education, Bilingual Education, etc. to adopt policies that make decisions about when schools reopen, how they reopen, and what protections must be in place when they reopen, based on the best possible public health advice.

**Advocate at this level for policies that ensure access to the highest possible education and support services for all students**, especially those who are most vulnerable, whether education will be provided in person or virtually.

**Advocate for meaningful parent options** to educate their medically fragile or at risk child at home, even if schools reopen in person.

**And advocate for meaningful family and family organization involvement in decisions on all of these issues.**



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### What should you be asking for, and of whom?

#### At the district and school level,

**Advocate for the policies, procedures and practices you think are important.** If districts and schools have flexibility about whether or not they return to in-person schooling, the circumstances under which they will do so, and what happens when they do,

**advocate with other parents and parent and advocacy organizations for decisions based on the best possible public health advice;** adoption and implementation of policies, practices and procedures that will maximize effective remote or in-person learning, especially for the students at greatest risk or who face the greatest achievement disparities;

**and for effective engagement of families and youth representative of the full school community in all decision-making.**

Key pressure points include your district Board of Education and Superintendent, school principal and health professionals, parent-teacher association, teacher's union or association, and other decision-makers and decision-influencers.



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### **What should you do if you are not satisfied with the answer(s)?**

**If you are not satisfied with the answers you receive or the decisions that are made, work with your partners to go up the chain of command!**

At the systems level, the chain of command typically goes from principal to superintendent to local Board of Education to State Education Superintendent or Commissioner to the State Board of Education.

You can also go to the Governor's office and to the State Legislature. Remember that there is power in numbers, and in stories!





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## More Resources,

The National Center for Parent Leadership, Advocacy, and Community Empowerment (National PLACE) has many resources, tip sheets, and tools you can use to power up your policy advocacy to support your efforts!

You can find resources available to all parents and family-led organizations at [www.parentsatthetable.org](http://www.parentsatthetable.org).

For example, find a training and resources on policy advocacy at <https://bit.ly/placeadvocacy>.

Remember that democracy is not a spectator sport; don't sit on the sidelines, get into the game, and use your power and the power of your partners to ensure that children, families, and family-led organizations are at the table in meaningful ways when school reopening decisions are being made.

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