



# P.A.C.E.

*Parents And Children for Equality*

## Bulletin



Number 6

The "Best Parent" is Both Parents

October 2000

### Nonresidential Parents' Involvement in Schools: Protecting Rights and Helping Children Succeed

*"An educational agency or institution shall give full rights under the Act to **either** parent unless the agency or institution has been provided with evidence that there is a court order, state Statute, or legally binding document relating to such matters as divorce, separation, or custody, that **specifically** revokes these rights."*

§99.4 Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (1974)

With these words, Federal law guarantees to each parent, regardless of residential status, the right of access to all school records of his or her children. Some nonresidential parents don't know that they do not have to rely on the other parent to stay informed about their child's school progress. Too often, though, nonresidential parents who are trying to stay informed about and involved in their children's education have difficulties getting their children's records. As a result, their involvement is limited. This has unfortunate consequences for many children.

A recent study of the U.S. Department of Education (National Center for Educational Statistics) describes the educational benefits that accrue for children when their nonresidential fathers are highly involved in their education. In comparison with children whose nonresidential fathers are not highly involved, children with highly involved fathers:

- are significantly more likely to receive 'A's in the sixth through twelfth grades;
- are significantly more likely to enjoy school in the first through twelfth grades;
- are significantly more likely to participate in extracurricular activities in first through fifth grades (Parents of older students were not asked this question.);
- are significantly less likely to repeat a grade in first through twelfth grades; and,
- are significantly less likely to be suspended or expelled in sixth through twelfth grade (Parents of younger students were not asked this question.).

The study found that the involvement of nonresidential fathers had significant benefits for children regardless of the level of school involvement of the residential mother.

Nonresidential parents, residential parents and school administrators must all be educated about the importance of both parents staying involved—or becoming involved—in their children's schools. At a time when our schools need all the help they can get educating our nation's children, it is a shame that this valuable resource is frequently neglected and sometime spurned by the schools themselves.

The problems caused by nonresidential fathers being discouraged from involvement in their children's schools are serious. Attorneys can help to solve these problems by talking with both residential and nonresidential parents

about the need for both parents to be involved with their children's schools. (PACE hereby grants permission for non-commercial, nonprofit reproduction of this *Bulletin* for attorneys and others to distribute to parents.)

When parents who are trying to be involved in their children's schools have difficulties with uncooperative schools, attorneys can help these parents get access to school records. Parents, regardless of their residential status, have a right under the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act to the following documents:

- report cards;
- enrollment forms;
- achievement tests;
- progress reports;
- field trip forms;
- incident reports;
- disciplinary reports;
- medical records;
- emergency notification cards; and,
- any other officially generated reports, including email.

PACE believes—and the U.S. Department of Education study shows—that nowhere is it more true than in the context of our children's education, that "The 'best parent' is *both* parents!"

#### On-Line Resources

##### U.S. Department of Education Study

[nces.ed.gov/pubs98/fathers/](http://nces.ed.gov/pubs98/fathers/)

##### Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act

[ed.gov/offices/OM/append.pdf](http://ed.gov/offices/OM/append.pdf)

—Don Hubin, *Bulletin* editor

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