

## What is the parents' role in Looking at Schools?

Parents, you have a right to visit your children's school and to sit in on classrooms. This right is detailed in federal and state law.

The law gives parents this right because of your important role as advocates for your children. You need be able to see for yourself whether your child is receiving a high-quality education.

### Why look at schools and classrooms?

*You can see if the school is*

- ★safe      ★orderly      ★clean
- ★welcoming of children, parents, and the community



*You can find out*

- ✎ **what** students are learning  
(*quality of content coverage*)
- ✎ **how well** students are learning  
(*quality of educational practices*)

*You can use this information to*

- ✓ improve the ways you help your child at home
- ✓ more effectively communicate with your child's teachers
- ✓ join with other parents to support and improve the school
- ✓ provide useful input into school internal review and school improvement planning
- ✓ decide how to vote in the LSC election

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# PURE TIP SHEET

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### How to visit schools and classrooms

#### Prepare for your visit

- ◆ Get some training in Looking at Schools (call PURE- 312/491-9101).
- ◆ Try to set aside most of a day for your visit.
- ◆ Notify the school principal of the date you would like to visit; this way you will be sure not to go on a testing day or at other times when visits can be inconvenient.
- ◆ Tell the principal which classrooms you'd like to visit so that teachers will expect you.
- ◆ Ask the principal for the best way to find out which learning standards or other curriculum goals are being covered in the sessions you observe.

#### On the day of the visit

- Be respectful of the school's need to get students safely into the building, take attendance, collect lunch money, etc. at the beginning of the school day.
- Coordinate your schedule with the school schedule; avoid moving from room to room during a class period.
- Be respectful of the teacher and the students.
- Notice and praise the good work you see.



*NEVER criticize a teacher or a student during your visit.*

*You are not there to judge or evaluate them.*

- Use good judgment in talking to the teacher, realizing that his first responsibility is to the students, not to your questions. The best time to ask a brief question or two is usually after the class is over and after she has talked to any student that needs to speak to her.
- Take a little time to ask the students how they felt about the lesson they just had.
- Thank the teacher and the class when you leave.

#### After your visit

- ▶ If possible, stop in to the school office to thank the principal for his cooperation.
- ▶ Sit in a quiet place and write down your initial response to the visit, some notes about what you saw, and what further questions you have about the school.
- ▶ Plan a second visit. It's important to see a school and a classroom on more than one day.
- ▶ Plan to visit other schools; call PURE for help.

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### What to look for in schools and classrooms



#### In the school, is there evidence that ...

- ✧ there is order and organization?
- ✧ hallways, washrooms, lunchrooms, and classrooms are clean?
- ✧ parents and others are welcomed?
- ✧ students and staff are respectful to each other?
- ✧ the staff seems to know every student by name?

*Is student work displayed prominently?*

*Is the school bright and cheerful?*

*Is information about local school council meetings posted in a prominent spot?*

#### In classrooms, is there evidence that...

- ✎ students are interested in what they are studying?
- ✎ most classroom activities involve students doing things?
- ✎ students have equal opportunities to participate?
- ✎ students feel safe enough emotionally to make a mistake without too much stress?
- ✎ students are allowed a full range of expression including speech, writing, drawing, poetry, music, dance, drama, movement, and visual arts?
- ✎ students have time to reflect on what has been discussed or presented?
- ✎ students are encouraged to interact and socialize with each other?
- ✎ students work collaboratively with others?



*Are classrooms, and the school as a whole, democratic?*