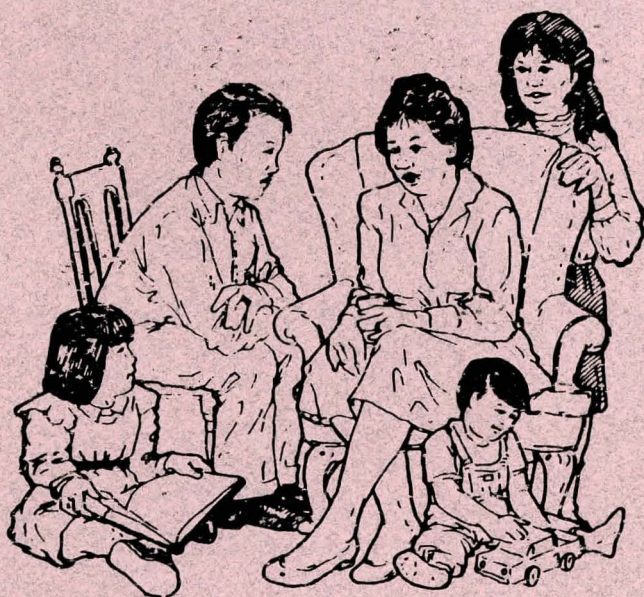


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**GUIDE TO IOWA SCHOOLS
FOR
PARENTS OF STUDENTS
LEARNING ENGLISH**



**Iowa Department of Education
1991**

Acknowledgements

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Dear Parent or Guardian:

This handbook was prepared to tell you about the educational system in Iowa. If you and your family are new to this country or to this state, you probably have questions about the schools here.

This handbook will try to answer your questions. The information in the guide is general, however, and meant to apply to all public Iowa schools. If you need information about a specific school, such as school hours or bus routes, you may call that school, the district office or ask for information from the sponsor or resettlement agency.

People who work in the schools expect parents to be involved in the education of their children. Try to learn about the educational system. Try to participate in the activities of the school. Try to help your children learn at home.

You and the school are partners in educating your children. Please use this handbook to learn about the schools in Iowa.

Sincerely,



Dan Chavez
Bureau of Instruction and Curriculum
Iowa Department of Education

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THE PARENT'S ROLE IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

1. The Parent's Role In Education

You, as parents, are very important in the education of your children. You are your children's first teachers. You teach your children many things before they even start to go to school.

The relationship between parents and schools is not the same in all countries and cultures. In the United States, schools want you to be involved in your children's education.

2. Helping Children At Home

There are many ways that you can help your children do well in school. It does not matter if you do not speak English. It is important that you help your children be as fluent in your native language as possible. Children need to talk with you about things they see and do. They need to ask questions and have their questions answered. They need to play and sing songs and listen to stories from you. It is a good thing to speak your own language with your children. They will also learn language from other members of your family and community. Your children will learn English more easily if they know their home language well.

Here are some suggestions for helping your children:

- Be sure your children have enough sleep and eat breakfast before going to school.
- Find a quiet place for your children to do their homework. Make sure that they have time to study.
- Teach your children to say their address and telephone number.
- If you know how to read, read books and stories to your children. It is important for your children to see you read in any language so they can understand what reading is.

- Schools may want you to listen to your children read at home or help them with their homework. You may be asked to play learning games, help with counting, telling time, and other things. If you can help with these things, it will help your children. If you have any questions, you can call your children's teachers, sponsors or the resettlement agency. American teachers like parents to ask questions about the school.
- Your children's teachers may ask you to come to school sometimes to help in the classroom or to show something about your culture. If you have the time to do this, it would be helpful for all students. Let the teacher know if you would be willing to do this. Your children will be proud of you.

If you participate in school activities with your children, you will understand your children's experiences in school better. You will be able to talk to your children more about things that happen in school.

3. Building Self-Esteem

You can help your children be more successful in school by building their self-esteem. Your children need to believe that they are capable. Here are some ways to make your child feel confident about his or her abilities:

- Let them know that you believe that they will succeed.
- Set realistic expectations.
- Work together to find solutions if they fail.
- Be patient and understanding.
- Encourage them to try.
- Give praise for success.
- Offer constructive criticism.
- Compare their progress to their own record instead of someone else's.
- Make time each day to discuss school work.

4. Communication Between Home and School

The school should tell parents about school programs and their children's progress. The school sends many types of information to parents such as report cards, calendars of the school year, field trip permission slips, notes, information about special events and educational programs. It is important for you to pay attention to school notices. You are expected to respond to some information from school. You may have to sign a form to give an approval for your child to do something at school, or you may be asked to help your child study at home.

Ask the school, sponsor, or resettlement agency for translation help if you need it.

5. Parent-Teacher Conferences

Most schools have "parent-teacher conferences" during the school year. At the conferences teachers talk to you about how your children are doing in school. The teachers will explain the things your children do well and also tell you if your children have any problems. You should ask questions about your children and ask what you can do to help.

Your children will usually bring notes home that ask you to choose times for parent-teacher conferences. If you cannot attend a conference at the time written in the note, call the school and try to reschedule the conference for another time. If you need an interpreter at the conference, tell the school, sponsor, and resettlement agency. It is important that you attend parent-teacher conferences. Remember that schools want you to ask questions anytime, not just at conferences or meetings.

If any of your children have a serious behavior problem, the school will have a meeting with you. The school wants to make sure that you know your children's problem and the actions the school will take to help solve this problem.

6. Visiting the School

Many schools have an "open house" at the beginning of the school year. You will receive information about this event. This is a time for teachers, parents, and children to get to know each other and for the families to visit the schools and see the classrooms. Teachers also tell parents about school programs and what children need to bring to school. The school also wants parents to visit their children's classes, or visit with the principal and teachers about the children's progress at any time.

If you want to visit your children's schools anytime during the school year, call the school to make an appointment. If you cannot make a visit, you can talk to teachers or the principal on the telephone.

7. Making Decisions About Schools

Parents are involved in the decision-making process of the school. You can attend meetings of the Parent Teacher Organization and join various school committees. These groups do such things as earn extra money for school equipment, develop school plans, and help make school policies.

You can also write or call local school board members or attend board meetings to talk about your concerns about the school.

8. Volunteer Services

Schools sometimes need volunteers to help with school activities. You might be asked to accompany your child's class on field trips, help in projects such as cooking in a homemaking class, or organizing an international day. Sometimes the school needs a parent or community person to come and talk to the students about their country, their culture, or their job.

SAMPLE IMMUNIZATION LETTER

Dear _____:

For school attendance, the Iowa Immunization Law requires that you furnish the school immunization information. The minimum requirements for kindergarten attendance are:

1. Must have received at least one dose of DPT vaccine.
2. Must have received at least one dose of polio vaccine.
3. Must have received measles and rubella vaccines after 15 months of age or older.

The Iowa Immunization Law requires you to furnish the complete date (month, day, and year) and the name of the physician or clinic. Failure to do so by _____ will result in your kindergarten child being denied continued attendance in school.

It is not necessary to come to the school. Please call the school office if you have immunization information and/or questions.

It is not necessary to have a physician's signature on your child's immunization certificate.

School health personnel are authorized to sign provisional and completed immunization certificates.

Sincerely,

Health Services Program

Principal

School

Attachment: Iowa Immunization Requirements

GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL

1. Registration

Iowa law requires all children between the ages of 7 and 16 years to attend school. Children may begin school when they are 5 years old. They may remain in school until they are 21 years old.

You must enroll your children in school. Call the district or school office to make an appointment to register your children. Bring your children with you when you register. They may need to take some tests at that time.

Documents

You should bring several documents with you for registration. Bring an official document to show your children's date of birth, such as a birth certificate, I-94 card, or permanent resident alien card (green card). Also bring any records that you have of past education. For example, bring school records from your country, school records from other U.S. schools, or school documents from the refugee camps, if you have them.

Immunizations

Students should have a health record to show their medical history and immunizations. In Iowa your children must be immunized against diseases before they can enroll in school: measles, rubella, diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, and polio. You need to have an immunization record from your doctor, clinic, or the Health Department to show that your children have been immunized.

Forms

There are several forms you need to fill out when you register your child. These may include:

- a. A registration form to enroll the student in school
- b. A Home Language Survey which indicates the language(s) normally used by family members in the home
- c. An emergency referral card which tells the name of a relative or friend to contact if your child gets ill at school or has an accident
- d. An application form for free or low-priced lunch

2. Transportation

If you live close to the school, your children will be expected to walk to school.

If you do not live close to the school that your children will attend, your children will ride a school bus to school. After your children are registered, the school will send you information about transportation. You will need to know the number of the bus, and the place and time for your children to get on and off the bus. All public school buses are free. It is important that your child be at the bus stop on time. Your child might feel better if you'd walk with him or her to the bus for the first few days of school.

3. Supplies

In the public schools, students may be asked to pay a fee for use of books and equipment. They use the books from the school and must return them in good condition at the end of the school year.

Students usually bring their own pens and pencils, paper and notebooks. Teachers will tell the students about the things they need.

4. Clothing

Students in Iowa do not wear uniforms in public schools. Boys usually wear shirts or sweaters and pants or jeans. Girls wear slacks, jeans or skirts, blouses and sweaters. Some schools have special rules about clothes. Students must always wear shoes. All children will need tennis shoes, and secondary school students will need to have special clothes for physical education classes. These classes will include boys and girls.

Winter in Iowa is usually very cold. Students must wear warm clothes to school. All children must have mittens or gloves, a winter coat or jacket, a hat and boots. If you do not have these things, ask your sponsor, resettlement agency or someone at the school to help you get them. It is dangerous to send children to school without warm clothing in the winter.

5. Kindergarten

Children who are 5 years old on or before September 15 go to kindergarten. Kindergarten is usually for one half day. In the spring, schools have meetings to tell parents and their children about kindergarten for the next school year and to begin registering the children. Sometimes the children are given tests to check their hearing or their vision.

6. Safety

Children should be taught safety rules. The school will teach your child about safe play and behavior at school and on the bus. You can help your children to be safe by teaching them not to talk to strangers or accept candy or rides from people they do not know. They should alert you and school officials if a stranger tries to convince them to go with them. You should tell them that you will call their teacher if they are to go home with someone else.

THE SCHOOL DAY

1. Hours

The school day is usually six and a half hours long. You will need to contact your child's school to find out what time classes begin and what time the classes end.

If your children need care before or after school hours, ask someone such as the school, sponsor or resettlement agency to help you find day care.

Some schools have a "latch key" program for young students whose parents work. If your children come home from school before you get home from work, they could go to a "latch key" program. They would stay there until you get home from work. Call your child's school, sponsor, or resettlement agency to find out about this program.

2. Meals

Students usually stay at school for lunch. Your children can buy lunch at the school for a low price. If you are not earning a large salary, your child may be able to receive lunch free. The school will ask you to fill out a form if you want your children to have free lunch.

Some schools serve a free or low-priced breakfast and a mid-morning snack.

Children may also bring their lunch from home. Food should not have to be kept cold to prevent spoiling or have to be heated before eating.

3. Attendance

Students are expected to come to school on time every day. It

is important that they do not arrive more than 15 minutes early because the school doors may be locked. If your children come to school late, they should bring a note from home that tells why they are late.

If your children are sick, they should stay home from school until they get well. Whenever your children stay home from school, call the school and tell the secretary why your children are not in school. When the children return to school after being absent, they should bring a note that tells why they were absent. (There are sample notes at the end of this guide to show you what you should do.)

If the weather is very, very cold, or if there is a big snowstorm, it is possible that the school will close and there will be no school buses. School closing are announced on the radio and TV early in the morning. Do not send your children to school on very cold or snowy days until you listen to the radio or TV. It is very dangerous for children to stand outside waiting for a bus or to walk to school on very cold days in Iowa. Your school will usually send rules about school closings home with your child at the beginning of the school year.

4. Illness

If your children get sick or hurt while they are at school, there is usually a nurse at the school to take care of the problem. You must give the school a telephone number where you or another adult can be reached in case there is an emergency.

Children should bring medicine to the school nurse before the school day begins. School nurses cannot give medicine to your children unless they have a doctor's prescription and a note or medication form from home.

5. Moving

If you plan to move to a different address at anytime during the year, tell someone as soon as possible at your children's school

when you are leaving and where you are going. (There is a note at the end of this book to show what to do.)

6. Solving Problems

Students are expected to obey their teachers and to get along with other students. If your children have problems at school, there are people who can help. Many schools have social workers, counselors or psychologists who can help students and their families solve problems that are related to the school. In some schools there is a bilingual person who speaks your language.

If your children have problems on the school bus, in the school building, or on the school playground, call the school, your sponsor or the resettlement agency and tell someone about it.



THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM

Children in Iowa attend school from kindergarten until grade 12. Usually, school districts separate children by age. Some school buildings may be called elementary schools, middle schools, junior high schools, or senior high schools.

1. Elementary Schools

Elementary schools usually include kindergarten and grades 1 through 6. Some elementary schools may include grades 7 and 8. In most elementary schools, there are about 25 children assigned to a classroom with one teacher. Usually the students are in the same grade and stay together during the school year. In grades 1 through 6, the time in school is spent on the following subjects:

- English - Language Arts
- Reading and Writing
- Math and Science
- Art and Music
- Social Studies
- Physical Education and Health
- Human Growth and Development
- Traffic Safety

Children also can use the school library and can often learn how to use computers.

Additional Programs

English as a Second Language (ESL) and Bilingual Education

If a child's first language is not English, that child can receive English instruction in an ESL classroom. Some schools also have bilingual staff members who can help students with school work by providing explanation in the native language of the students.

Chapter 1

Children who need extra help in learning to read or do math can often go to a special program called Chapter 1. This program lets children work in small groups with a special teacher for a part of each day to improve their reading and math skills.

Special Education

Special Education is a program for students who have special learning problems. These students may have a problem hearing, seeing, walking, or talking, or they might have other learning problems. Special teachers work with these children individually or in very small groups to help them learn.

If you want to know more about special education, ask your school district for information. Request an interpreter if necessary.

Gifted and Talented

Some students have special talents and abilities. These students are sometimes in Gifted and Talented or Extended Learning Programs and can be in special classes that let them do more difficult and creative work.

2. Secondary Schools

Secondary schools usually include:

- Junior high school (grades 7, 8)
- Senior high school (grades 9, 10, 11, and 12)

(Some districts may have middle schools which may include grades 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8.)

At the middle school or junior high level, the following subjects are taught:

- English - Language Arts
- Math
- Science
- Social Studies

- Health
- Music
- Physical Education
- Human Growth and Development
- Art

Students may also be able to study a foreign language, typing, technology education, computer skills, or other subject areas. If a student needs to have ESL or Special Education classes, those classes can also be part of the daily schedule.

Middle school or junior high school students usually have six different classes during the day. They might have several different teachers, and often move to different rooms for their classes. Classes usually last from 45 to 60 minutes per day.

Senior high schools may be organized to include grades 9, 10, 11, and 12. In order to graduate, students must take classes in the following subject areas:

- English/Language Arts
- Social Studies
- Mathematics
- Science
- Physical Education
- Health

Students can also take classes in foreign languages, fine arts, computers and technology, vocational education, and other subjects of their choice. Senior high school guidance counselors and teachers also help students make decisions about careers, vocational education and college.

There are ESL and Special Education classes for students who need them. In many schools there are Bilingual Education classes as well.

Graduation Requirements

Most schools require students to earn approximately 40 credits to graduate. Students must receive passing grades in their classes to earn credit. Grades are usually assigned as follows:

- A = very good work
 - B = good work
 - C = average work
 - D = below average work
 - F = failure to pass the course
- (A-D are passing grades)

Credits can usually be transferred from one school to another school. If your children change schools, their credits should count towards graduation from the new school. Sometimes the students may be asked to take a test.

Some school districts require all students to take "competency tests" before they are allowed to graduate. These tests show that the students have learned the things the school wants them to know.

Students in some districts who do not meet the requirements of graduation may receive a certificate that shows they have attended the classes, but not completed requirements. This certificate does not have the same value as a high school diploma. It cannot be used for entering college or in any situation where a high school diploma is needed.

Senior high schools have guidance counselors to help students plan their classes and make decisions about their futures. If your child is having problems with scheduling classes, or with course credit, he or she should talk to the school guidance counselor.

3. Testing

Schools will test your children for many different reasons. They will take tests to determine their language ability and to see if they have learned what has been taught in their class. Grades may be based, in part, on the test scores.

Some tests that your child will take are "standardized" which

means that many children will take the same test, and it will be given the same way. Some standardized tests measure your child's progress compared to the other children who took the test. Other tests show whether your child can do a specific task.

Tests help to give you and the teachers information about what skills and knowledge your children have and where they need more help. Some tests may help the teachers decide if your children should participate in special classes. Tests are only one measure of your child's progress.

4. Extracurricular Activities

Students can participate in many activities at school that are not part of the regular curriculum. These activities usually take place after the school day is over.

Most secondary schools have sports teams for both boys and girls. Students might play football, baseball, volleyball, hockey, basketball, tennis, or soccer. They could also be on teams for swimming, gymnastics, track, or skiing. Sports give students a time for physical exercise and an opportunity to learn teamwork and to meet other students.

Schools also have organizations that give students an opportunity to develop special interests and have new experiences. There are musical groups, language or theater clubs, and many other activities for students to enjoy. These activities are a good opportunity for your children to speak English. They can also make friends with students their own age.

PEOPLE WHO WORK IN THE SCHOOLS

Principal	Every school has a principal who is the leader of the school. The principal is responsible for all of the things that happen at the school.
Assistant Principal	Large schools often have an assistant principal who assists the principal in directing the activities of the school.
Classroom Teacher	Each class of students has a teacher who is responsible for teaching a certain subject or several subjects.
Special Teacher	Some teachers work in special areas of the curriculum. A school might have a special teacher for: Reading Special Education ESL Bilingual Education Chapter 1
Teaching Assistant/ Aide/ Associate	Some teachers have assistants who help them in the classroom. Sometimes the assistants have special skills, such as speaking more than one language.
Guidance Counselor	Many schools have counselors who help the students choose and schedule their classes. The counselors also help students make decisions about the future - where to go to college, how to get a job, what kind of jobs are available.
School Psychol- ogist	Some schools have a school psychologist who tests students, provides counseling, and talks with teachers and parents about problems that students might have.

Social Worker

A school social worker visits families of students to help them with problems. This person also works with social agencies in the community to coordinate services.

**Librarian/
Media
Specialist**

All schools have libraries where students can go to read books and study. The people who work in the libraries help the students find the right book and often read to the children.

Nurse

When students are sick or get hurt, they can go to the school nurse who will help them. The nurse has an office where children can lie down until they feel better.

Secretary

Secretaries work in the school office. They answer the telephone, help visitors, and do all the record keeping for the school.

Custodian

The custodians keep buildings clean. In the winter they make sure that the school is warm.

Cook

The cooks prepare the food for the students each day and serve it to the students.



THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM-ORGANIZATION

1. Local School Organization

The school divisions in Iowa are called school districts. Most of them have the same boundaries as a city or town. Some include more than one town. The director of a school district is the superintendent. The superintendent is chosen by the school board which is a group of people elected by the people who live in the school district. The school board hires the superintendent and makes general decisions about money and policies. The superintendent carries out the school board's decisions and manages the administration of the school district every day.

The number of schools in a school district depends on how many children of school age live in that district. Some school districts have very few schools and some school districts have many. Children usually attend a school in the district in which they live. Sometimes students can choose to attend a specific school within a school district. Sometimes they can choose to attend a different district. Ask your local school about these choices.

The director of a school is called a principal. The principal makes decisions about an individual school and is the director of the teachers in that school.

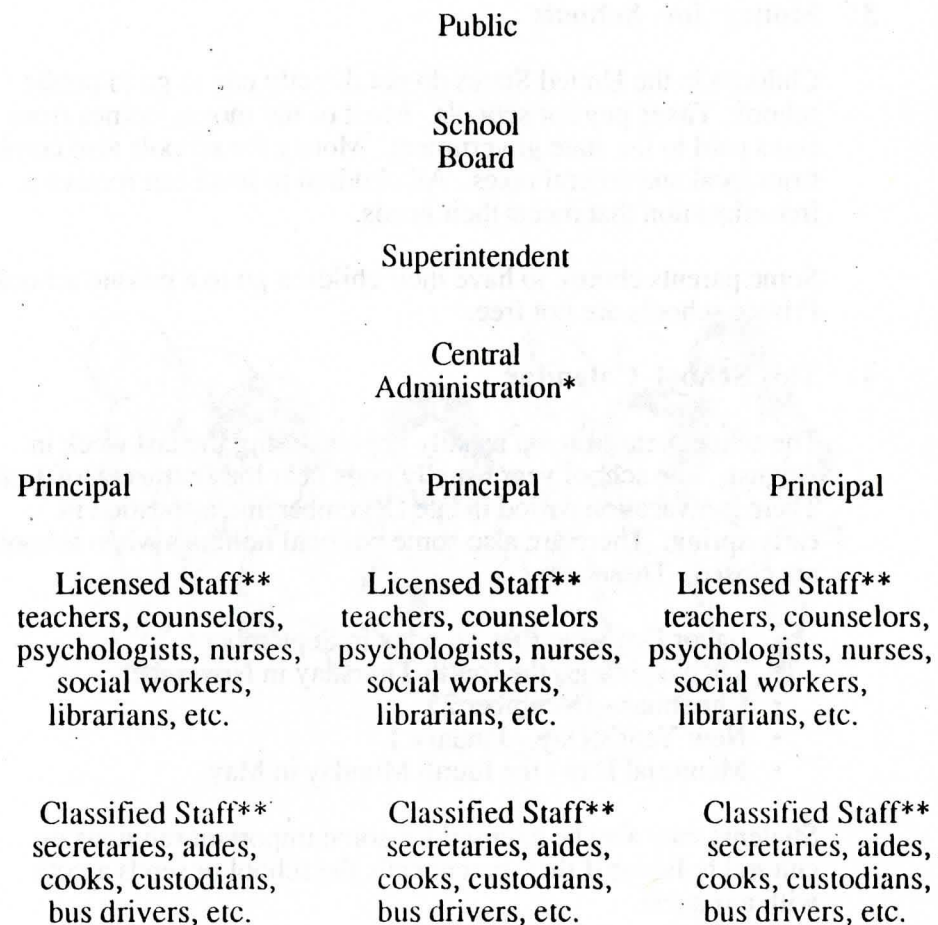
In every school district there is an organization of parents. They have meetings to discuss things in the schools and to give their opinions to the principal. The opinions of parents are very important in deciding what happens in a school. The parent organizations sometimes organize projects to help earn extra money to buy things for the school.

2. Education Laws

The federal government and the state government have laws about education. These laws are to make sure that all children have the opportunity for a good education. The local school district has rules which help to carry out the federal and state laws.



AN ORGANIZATIONAL CHART OF A SCHOOL DISTRICT



* The number of people who work in central administration may vary and the names of their jobs may also vary.

** The number of licensed and classified staff may vary depending on the size of the district.

Most of the decisions about schools are made by elected local school boards. The school board can decide which teachers to hire and which textbooks to use. They can make decisions about curriculum and building new schools.

3. Money for Schools

Children in the United States do not directly pay to go to public school. Taxes pay for schools. Most of the money comes from taxes paid to the state government. Money for schools also comes from local and federal taxes. All children in Iowa can receive a free education that meets their needs.

Some parents choose to have their children go to a private school. Private schools are not free.

4. The School Calendar

The school year in Iowa usually begins during the last week in August. The school year usually ends near the first week of June. There is a vacation period in late December and a vacation in early spring. There are also some national holidays when schools are closed. These are:

- Labor Day - the first Monday in September
- Thanksgiving - the fourth Thursday in November
- Christmas - December 25
- New Year's Day - January 1
- Memorial Day - the fourth Monday in May

Students may also be excused for some important religious or cultural holidays if their parent calls the school or sends a note with a request.

The schools also close for parent-teacher conferences and for teacher education days. Your children will bring home information to tell you when these days are.

Summer vacation is during the months of June, July and August.

Many schools have summer school during this time for students to take extra classes or to make up credit that they missed.



ADULT EDUCATION

People in Iowa think that education is a life-long process. In Iowa, there are many learning opportunities for adults. You can study during the day or in the evening. Some programs even have volunteers to help students in their homes. Many classes are free. Other classes cost money to attend.

Some choices are:

Adult Basic Education (ABE) - for basic skills such as reading, math, English as a Second Language (ESL) and GED.

Community Education - for social, recreational and vocational skills such as sports, computers, car repair, and languages.

At-Risk State Funded Grant Programs - help develop parenting skills and move a family towards self-sufficiency.

Community Colleges - for training in job skill areas such as electronics and computer and for developing academic skills leading to a 2-year degree.

Universities - for developing academic and professional skills which may lead to a 4-year degree.

Community Organizations - for classes in cultural orientation, ESL, and citizenship.

Volunteer Programs - for tutoring help in ESL, reading, and math.

If you want information about these classes, call your local community college, your child's school or the school district office. Ask for a schedule of classes. You can also call a special telephone number, (515) 281-3640 to ask about adult education programs in your area.

APPENDIX

If you need to send a note to your school, you can write the note using one of the samples in English on the following pages as a guide.

You should include the necessary information in your note.

Here is an example which uses the first sample on the next page: Your son, Bounmy, has an appointment with the dentist at 1:30 p.m. on February 3, 1991. School is usually over around 3:00. He needs to leave school at 1:00 in order to be on time. You need to write a note to his teacher, Mrs. Johnson, so that he can leave school early. You look at the form "Note to Excuse Child Early" and using it as a guide, you write the following note:

Dear Mrs. Johnson:

Please excuse our son, Bounmy, from school early on February 3 at 1:00. He has an appointment to see the dentist.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Ly Somsanith

Boun Somsanith
February 3, 1991

Note to Excuse Child Early

Dear _____:(Teacher's Name)

Please excuse my son/daughter _____ (child's name)
from

school early on _____ (date) at _____ (time).

He/she has an appointment to see
the doctor.
the dentist
the counselor
the case worker

Thank you.

Sincerely,

(sign your name here
and put the date below it)

Note Explaining Child's Absence

Dear _____:(Teacher's Name)

My son/daughter _____ (child's name) was absent on

_____ (date) because he/she was sick
went to the doctor
went to the dentist
had a cold
had a sore throat
had a stomach ache

Sincerely,

(sign your name here
and put the date below it)

Note to Inform About Moving

Dear _____:(Teacher's Name)

We will move to a new home on _____ (date). Please let
me know if my son/daughter _____ (child's name) will
go to a different school.. Our new address is:
_____.

Sincerely,

(sign your name here
and put the date below it)

Note to the School About Being Late

Dear _____:(Teacher's Name)

My son/daughter _____, (child's name) is late
today because he/she missed the bus.

overslept.
went to the doctor.
went to the dentist.
was sick.

Sincerely,

(sign your name here
and put the date below it)

Note to Make An Appointment to See the Teacher or Counselor

Dear _____:(Teacher's Name)

I would like to make an appointment to talk to you about my son/daughter _____(child's name). Please call me at _____(phone number) so we can plan a time to meet.
Thank you.

Sincerely,

(sign your name here and
put the date below it)

Note to Inform of Child's Bus Change

Dear _____:(Teacher's Name)

My son/daughter _____(child's name) will not take the regular bus home today.

He/she will go home with a friend.

We will pick him/her up.

He/she will stay after school and go home on the late bus.

Sincerely,

(sign your name here
and put the date below it)

Phone Call to the School

Parent: Hello, my name is _____
My son/daughter's name is _____
He/she is in the _____ grade
His/her teacher is _____
He/she cannot go to school today because he/she:
is sick
is going to the doctor
is going to the dentist

SAMPLE IMMUNIZATION LETTER

Dear _____:

For school attendance, the Iowa Immunization Law requires that you furnish the school immunization information. The minimum requirements for kindergarten attendance are:

1. Must have received at least one dose of DPT vaccine.
2. Must have received at least one dose of polio vaccine.
3. Must have received measles and rubella vaccines after 15 months of age or older.

The Iowa Immunization Law requires you to furnish the complete date (month, day, and year) and the name of the physician or clinic. Failure to do so by _____ will result in your kindergarten child being denied continued attendance in school.

It is not necessary to come to the school. Please call the school office if you have immunization information and/or questions.

It is not necessary to have a physician's signature on your child's immunization certificate.

School health personnel are authorized to sign provisional and completed immunization certificates.

Sincerely,

Health Services Program

Principal

School

Attachment: Iowa Immunization Requirements

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