A key factor associated with academic success and dropout prevention is parent involvement. In order to help parents and students succeed in school, Cooperative Extension offers the Together for a Better Education program. The program brings together partners from high schools, local colleges, families of 9-12th grade students, college-age mentors, local nonprofits and UNCE staff. The program consists of six sessions held in English and Spanish in various locations across Las Vegas. This fact sheet provides an overview of Session 6: Advocating for your Children’s Educational Rights.

Advocacy
Advocacy assumes people have rights, and those rights are enforceable; advocacy works when focused on something specific; advocacy is mainly concerned with rights and benefits to which someone or some community is already entitled; and policy advocacy is concerned with ensuring that institutions work the way they should (Amidei, 2002). Parents can be effective advocates for the best education for their children by becoming informed about their rights and being proactive and assertive in communicating with school personnel, administrators and policy makers.

Principles of Advocacy
- Know and understand your rights and responsibilities.
- Ask questions whenever you need clarification. Repeat a question until it is understood.
- Keep copies of all communication regarding your children’s education. Request copies of all records and documents.
- Remember, you are an equal partner in your children’s education.
- Let people know that you intend to resolve issues.
- Learn all you can about your children’s needs, strengths, weaknesses and/or disabilities.
- Know what resources are available and use them.
- Know who the key people are. Find the right person with whom to talk and try all avenues.
- Praise and thank people when appropriate.
Educational Rights
The United States Constitution, federal laws, state laws and local laws give parents and children certain educational rights. Below is a partial list of rights guaranteed to all students in kindergarten to 12th grade (this is not a comprehensive list nor should these be interpreted solely on this information):

English Language Learners (ELL)
"No state shall deny equal educational opportunity to an individual on account of his or her race, color, sex, or national origin, by the failure of an educational agency to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional programs."
-- Excerpt from United States Code 1703

The United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has the responsibility for enforcing Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin in programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance. Title VI assures that students with limited English skills can receive equal opportunity to a quality education. Thus, Title VI protects those students whose English language skills are limited to the point that they cannot participate in, or benefit from, regular or special education school instructional programs.

During the late 1960s, OCR became aware that many school districts around the country made little or no provision for the education of students who were unable to understand English. In an attempt to resolve this problem, the former Department of Heath, Education and Welfare issued a memorandum to clarify Title VI requirements concerning the responsibility of school districts to provide equal education opportunity to ELLs.

Privacy
- Parents and students have a right to inspect and review the student’s education records maintained by the school.
- Parents and students have a right to request that school records they believe to be inaccurate or misleading be corrected.
- Generally, schools must have written permission from parents and students to release information from a student’s educational records.

Children with Disabilities
The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal law designed to protect the rights of students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Justice, 2005):
- Children with disabilities, ages 3 through 21, are entitled to a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment, pursuant to an individualized education program (IEP).

Gender
Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 protects people from discrimination based on sex in education programs or activities which receive federal financial assistance. Title IX states that, “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal assistance.”

- Admissions
- Housing and facilities
- Access to courses and educational activities
Career guidance and counseling services
Student financial aid
Student health and insurance benefits
Scholastic intercollegiate, club or intramural athletics
Physical education
Based on marital or parental status pregnancy

Military schools, religious schools and other nonpublic schools are generally exempt, unless they receive federal funding.

**Immigrant Status**
In the United States, students in kindergarten to 12th grade have the right to a free public education regardless of race, nationality, native language and gender or immigration status without the fear of discrimination or deportation.

**Advocate**
The right to an education is recognized as a human right; however, not all students receive the same education. Parents must take initiative to ensure quality education for their children. Parents can become educational advocates and leaders by being informed, being involved, asking questions, seeking additional resources and taking action by understanding and exercising their rights.

http://ncfamilies.com/juntos

To learn more about this topic and the “Together for a Better Education” Program, contact: Nora Luna at (702) 940-5420 or lunan@unce.unr.edu

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Juntos father and daughter graduates with Nora Luna, Instructor

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