



## Education Consumers Foundation

### Reversing American Decline: Steps You Can Take

Education Consumers Foundation  
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Reducing the stream of young adults who are unprepared for college, the workplace, or informed citizenship is the key to bending the curve in a positive direction. It is an attainable aim that depends on local citizens to take action and show what can be done. There are Americans everywhere who will get fired up when they see your results on the scoreboard.

Spurring your local school board to act on early reading is the primary aim. Here are some suggestions:

1. Don't assume you know how your local schools are doing because you have visited the school or heard from friends. Schooling that everyone thinks is great sometimes isn't and vice versa. Look at the scores by visiting the ECF website [www.education-consumers.org/national.htm](http://www.education-consumers.org/national.htm) or other objective source.

2. Message your findings to friends and associates. Encourage them to look for themselves. They may be shocked or pleasantly surprised, but at least they will know the facts.

3. If there is a school in your community that is doing an outstanding job relative to similar schools, consider taking some kind of action that would draw attention to its excellent scores. Write a letter to the principal with a copy to the superintendent and school board or make a donation to the pencil fund in the school's name. The educators who are doing a good job deserve the recognition and school quality benefits by the public knowing that there are differences between schools. The annual awards given to Tennessee's best schools by the Education Consumers Foundation proved to be well received and effective in raising public awareness of Tennessee's value-added accountability system: [www.education-consumers.org/tnproject/vaaa.htm](http://www.education-consumers.org/tnproject/vaaa.htm).



*Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam presents an award to Elisa Luna, principal of Inskip Elementary during ECF's Value-Added Achievement Awards ceremony in 2011.*

4. Send a letter to your local school board. Compliment the successful schools and ask what steps are being taken to improve outcomes at the others. Good teachers and good schools

often labor in obscurity because everyone worries about embarrassing the poor ones. Click here for a model letter: [www.education-consumers.org/RADletter.pdf](http://www.education-consumers.org/RADletter.pdf). Send a copy to local media outlets. No one wants to embarrass anyone, but think about what these children will face without the ability to read.

5. Ask candidates for school board about how they would address the early reading problem in low performing schools. If there is a candidate forum, send the candidates and the event sponsor a chart showing the local data. Ask the sponsor to hand it out to the event audience.

6. Network with concerned citizens around country through the Education Consumers ClearingHouse: [www.education-consumers.com/ecc\\_about\\_memberships.php](http://www.education-consumers.com/ecc_about_memberships.php). School boards and educators frequently have plans to improve school outcomes that are wholly unsupported by evidence. For example, teachers may be given additional training or a new curriculum is adopted but there is no real accountability for the outcome because the results can't be known for years. Typically, such programs last until the funding runs out—at which time the results are excused and some other plan is devised.

A good way to get a second opinion about your school district's policies and plans for improvement is to post a question to the Education Consumers ClearingHouse. The ClearingHouse is a subscriber-supported online forum that provides parents, taxpayers, and their elected representatives a place to consider education issues from a consumer standpoint. Instead of having to simply trust the recommendation of district officials or their hired consultant, you can enquire with parents, educators, officials, professors, and other concerned citizens who may have had the same question and found some useful answers. The ClearingHouse has been online since 1995, so its searchable archive contains a wealth of consumer-friendly information about education policies and practices.

7. Pool your knowledge and ability to influence local school quality by forming an Education Consumers Association (ECA). An ECA is like a PTA but dedicated exclusively to the interests of education's local consumers. Just as educators have local and state associations (often unions) dedicated exclusively to educator interests, ECAs are local organizations dedicated to the interests of consumers. Individuals who are both consumers and providers of education may join but membership requires that they wear their consumer's cap in all matters pertaining to ECA affairs.

ECAs can perform a number of valuable roles such as gathering and disseminating local school performance data, providing the local school board with a list of needs, concerns, and priorities—as seen from a consumer perspective—or preparing a list of result-oriented recommendations for board consideration.

Visit [www.education-consumers.com/ecc\\_eca.php](http://www.education-consumers.com/ecc_eca.php) for more about Education Consumer Associations.