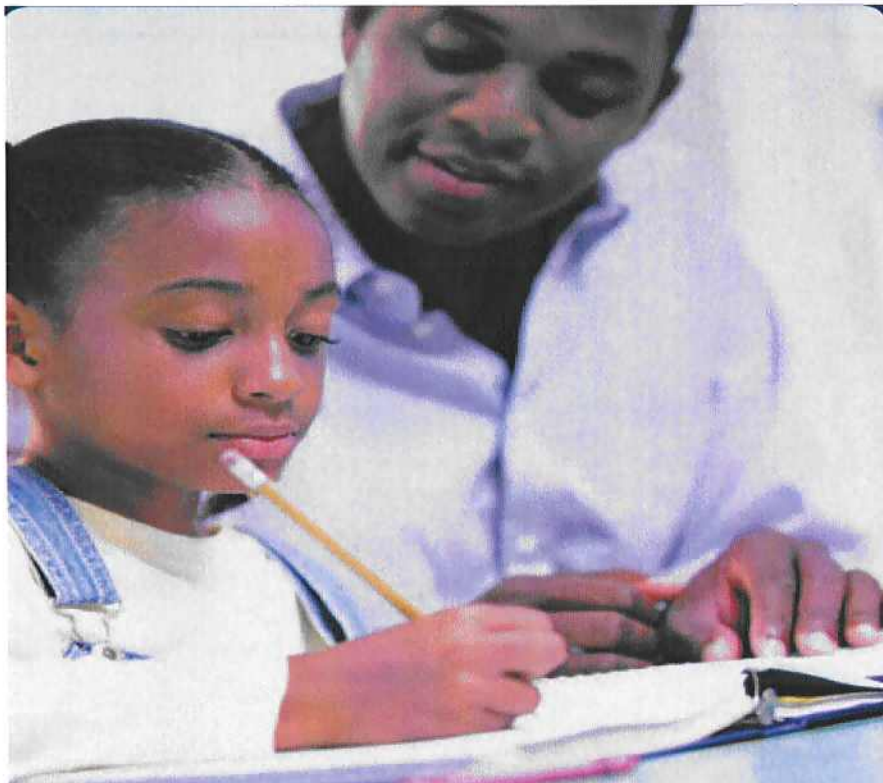


Parent Empowerment:
How to Make Sure Your Child Is Not Left Behind

**A Parent's Guide to Advocating for Equal
Educational Opportunities**



Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law



INTRODUCTION

The achievement gap is a national phenomenon where lower-income African American and Latino students, as a group, perform poorer academically and score lower on standardized tests compared to their other counterparts. The achievement gap is often the result of:

- 1) Lower quality teaching and curriculum
- 2) Lower levels of expectation for achievement
- 3) Less access to high quality learning activities and resources

“No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) is a federal law passed in 2002 that aims to close the national achievement gap. NCLB combines increases in federal support for public schools under an existing law referred to as “Title I” or “ESEA”, but with greater accountability for results. The law introduced new requirements that schools must meet in terms of student achievement, teacher quality, and parental choice.

Because of these new requirements and the higher expectations they set, NCLB has become the 900-pound gorilla sitting in every public school classroom. After five years of operation, many teachers and administrators are frustrated with these requirements, and the public has primarily heard criticism of NCLB without learning about the advantages.

For example, while the tests required by NCLB take time and effort, they also provide an important tool for parents to help monitor what is happening, or not happening, in their children’s schools. NCLB also provides parents and students:

- Free tutoring services
- The right to transfer to a higher-performing school in the district
- A voice in school improvement plans

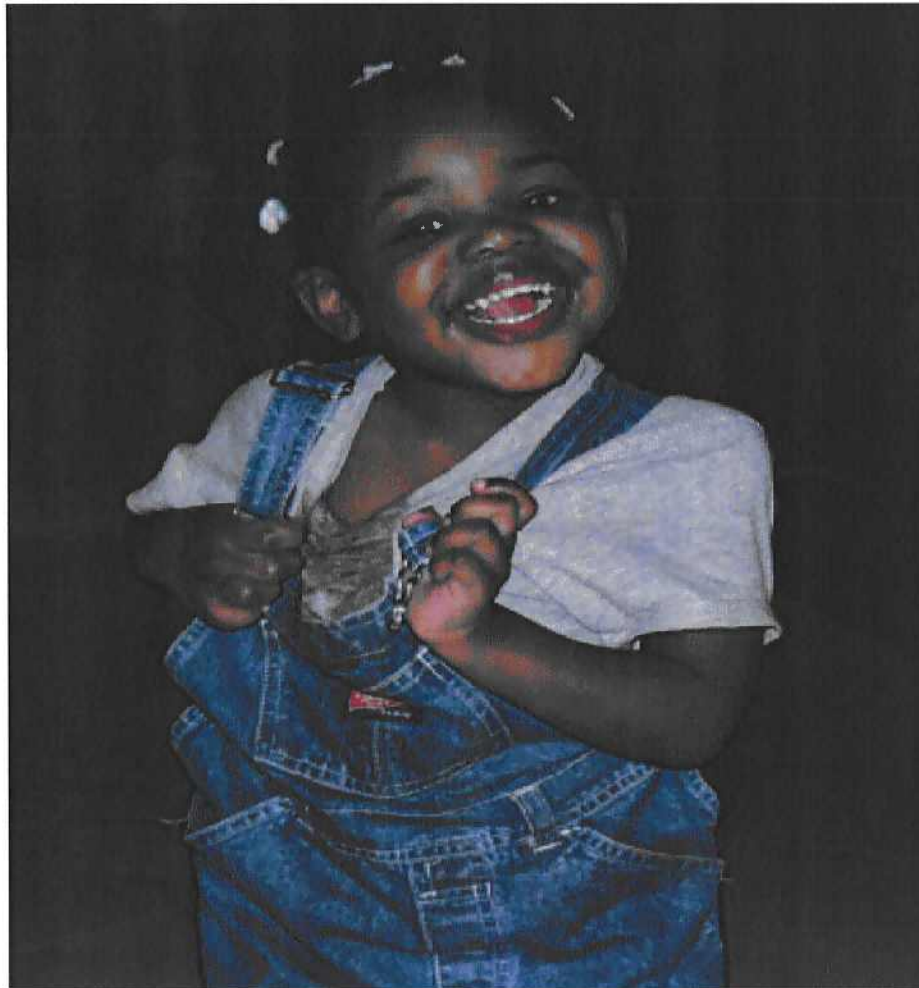
The information in this guidebook is designed to empower parents to take control of their children’s educational opportunities and to work to close the oversized achievement gap in the United States. Overall, this guidebook embraces two primary goals:

- 1) Inform parents about their rights under NCLB.
- 2) Educate parents on how to use the tools and resources available under NCLB to become effective advocates for their children.

LAWYERS' COMMITTEE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS UNDER LAW

The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law is a non-partisan, non-profit organization established in 1963 at the request of President John F. Kennedy to involve the private bar in providing legal services to address racial discrimination and to secure equal justice under law. The Lawyers' Committee's Education Project vigorously advocates for equal educational opportunities for minority and poor youth within the nation's public schools through legal and legislative advocacy and community education.

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What can parents do about the achievement gap?

- ❖ Step up and let school administrators and the state know that these kinds of achievement gaps in public schools are **UNACCEPTABLE**.
- ❖ Work with schools to support reforms and work with students to help them improve their learning.
- ❖ Monitor the progress of your child's education and hold schools accountable for the results.
- ❖ Use NCLB to your advantage.
- ❖ **Remember, KNOWLEDGE is POWER. The more information parents have about student performance in school, the better they can advocate for their children.**

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Basics

How does it work?

- States must develop high-quality and rigorous curricula for all students.
- States must test students to ensure they have learned skills in core subject areas (math, science, & reading).
- Every classroom must have a highly qualified teacher.
- Schools must provide choices and services to parents.

NCLB Subgroups and the Achievement Gap

- NCLB data shows parents the gap between subgroups, and tells parents whether or not schools are succeeding in closing the gaps.
- NCLB focuses attention on low-income students, students of color, English Language Learners, and students with disabilities and holds schools accountable for their performance results.
- Schools, school districts, and states can no longer use the scores of high-performing students to cover up failure to meet the needs of lower-performing students.

Annual Yearly Progress

Each state sets its own levels of student improvement in order to meet the goals of NCLB. These levels are known as Adequate Yearly Progress or "AYP". Ask your school or school district what AYP means in your state.

Failures / Sanctions

Schools face different NCLB requirements when they fail to make AYP and must offer students and parents certain services and options depending on their status.

| Doesn't make AYP for: | Status | NCLB Requirements | Student-Parent Entitlements |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|--|---|
| 2 years | In Need of Improvement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School must develop a two year plan explaining how it will improve. School must notify parents. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student may request to transfer to a higher performing school <u>within</u> the district. Lowest achieving students from low income families requesting transfers receive first priority. |
| 3 years | In Need of Improvement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Same as above | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low income students are eligible to receive Supplementary Educational Services (SES, i.e., free tutoring). |
| 4 years | Identified for Corrective Action | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School must replace staff, establish new curriculum, appoint outside experts to help restructure. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School must consult and send notice to parents before taking any corrective action. Students continue to have the right to transfer and receive SES. |
| 5 years | Failing School | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School district may close school and reopen it as a charter school, permit a private entity to operate school, or turn the school over to state control. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School district must continue to offer school choice and SES. Parents can voice their opinion to the school district and state regarding the type of restructuring preferred for the school. |

NCLB and Parent Involvement

A school district MUST develop parent involvement policies and set aside funds for parent involvement activities—at least 1 percent of its Title I, Part A funding if it receives more than \$500,000 from the federal government.

Under the law, parents with students in Title I schools have the right to tell the school how they would like the school to spend these funds.

Q: What is Title I?

A: A set of government programs to improve the learning of children from low-income families. States receive special funds from the federal government to give to school districts based on their numbers of low-income families—generally determined by the number of students eligible for free or reduced priced lunches. A school with around 40% or more of its students coming from low-income families qualifies as a Title I school.

What can parents do about parent involvement policies?

- ❖ Contact the superintendent's office and ask for a copy of the district's parental involvement policies.
- ❖ Think about how you ideally would like to be involved with the school and your child's education. *What are some ways you and the school can make your ideas happen?*
- ❖ Ask the superintendent's and the principal's offices the following questions:
 - How do you seek parent advice to improve my child's school?
 - How can I offer advice?
 - What are some challenges with parental involvement?
 - What types of parental activities **do** you offer? How can I participate?
 - How much funding is available for parental activities? How can I receive funding if I want to organize a parental activity?
- ❖ Contact and file a complaint through your state Department of Education if your school or school district is not following its parental involvement policies or NCLB parental involvement requirements.

An important part of parent involvement is reading your school district's policies and asking the school questions about information you do not understand.

