

An Open Letter to President Bush, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings and Members of the United States Congress on the Reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)

Today, there are millions of American children stuck in failing public schools.

These schools are categorized by the federal government as “In Need of Improvement” because they have not made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two or more consecutive years. This fall, more than 10,000 schools are in this category. Among these schools, over 2,000 have required improvement for five or more years and need to restructure.

Imagine if *your* child was in a failing school for *five years*—nearly half of his or her K-12 education?

During the negotiations for initial passage of *No Child Left Behind* six years ago, meaningful parental choice was an early casualty. In its place was the offer of “public school choice” for children in failing schools. Sadly, less than one percent of eligible children have been able to exercise public school choice under NCLB, despite repeated polls demonstrating high levels of parental support for, and interest in, school choice. Instead, the truth is that many school districts have actively worked to thwart access to public school choice, and there has been little meaningful enforcement of this provision at the local, state, or federal levels.

Far too many low-income children in Title I schools are suffering, year after year, in academically dysfunctional schools, and they have few, if any, viable options for realizing the same educational opportunity afforded to their higher-income peers. In effect, these children are being penalized because of their low-income status.

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This crisis hurts African-American and Hispanic children the worst and is one of the primary reasons that the achievement gap in America’s public schools persists. It is disgraceful that our nation tolerates this injustice.

We ask: are you willing to go beyond what is deemed “acceptable” by the education establishment and act now to help these children obtain a quality education?

The spirit of *No Child Left Behind* is that every child—regardless of income, race, or ability—deserves a quality education. We support and embrace that vision. To make it a reality, however, Congress must include meaningful and effective parental choice that provides an immediate path to a better education. NCLB made a well-meaning, but insufficient, step in this direction, and it has been a promise unfulfilled for far too many disadvantaged children.

We firmly believe that every low-income child in a restructuring school should be given a promise scholarship to attend a public or private school of their parents’ choosing. This should happen immediately as a matter of social justice. Additionally, we believe that Congress should authorize and appropriate funds for national opportunity scholarships, where local non-profits could apply for federal grants that would provide scholarships to low-income children in schools that have failed for three consecutive years.

Please do not continue to deny America’s poorest children their right to a quality education. **We urge you to include meaningful and effective parental choice as you work to reauthorize *No Child Left Behind*.**

Advocates for School Choice, Charles R. Hokanson, Jr., President
American Legislative Exchange Council, Lori Roman, Executive Director
Center for Education Reform, Jeanne Allen, President
Commonwealth Foundation (PA), Nathan Benefield, Director of Policy Research
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