

# Education News

## Is Education The New Civil Rights Battleground?

by Elvis Oxley

(NAPSA)—Over the years, the issue of equal access to education has been the focal point of many civil rights confrontations.

This should come as no surprise. Access to quality education, regardless of a student's race, will always be a critical element of any attempt to build a society where the opportunity of individuals to prosper is based on the "content of their character" rather than the "color of their skin."

Through legislation, such as the No Child Left Behind Act, bold efforts are being made to move this new civil rights agenda forward by pressing for a number of educational reforms that reflect the interests of the African-American and Latino communities—such as increasing parental choice, demanding accountability from administrators and using market measures to evaluate the performance of teachers and schools.

In their article "Closing The Racial Gap In Education," Abigail and Stephan Thernstrom argue that too many inner-city school districts shortchange young people with union contracts that protect incompetent teachers and smother innovation.

These districts, they contend, are ignoring the threat to our nation's future and social cohesion posed by the inability of many poor young minorities to compete successfully in school and in the workplace.

For example, at age 17, the typical black or Hispanic student is scoring well less than at least 80 percent of his or her white classmates.



The Thernstroms also make the point that the schools they admire most, in cities such as Chicago and Philadelphia, are charter schools that probably would not exist if not for the Bush administration's leadership.

Thanks to its efforts, parents can now select from schools such as these and others, when trying to give their child the best education possible.

America is best served when legislators and educators are willing to address race-related issues such as the gap in academic achievement. The enormous data supporting this divide, such as those presented in the Thernstroms' paper, should deeply concern all Americans—and stimulate serious debate over educational reform.

*Elvis Oxley is the Executive Director of The Ripon Society. Founded on the values of Abraham Lincoln and Teddy Roosevelt, Ripon promotes innovation, equality of opportunity, personal responsibility and smaller government.*

To learn more about Ripon or to download a copy of "Closing The Racial Gap In Education," visit [www.riponsoc.org](http://www.riponsoc.org).