

***What happened to... No Child Left Behind?***

This past year my husband and I were helping a child in Foster Care for a period of time. When we took her into our home last year, she was 16 year's old and in the 10th grade. After about a week, we started noticing she couldn't tell time, count change or set a table. We made the decision to tutor her privately as it would have been her third school in one year and we could tell that she hadn't been doing well with traditional schooling. After a month of intensive home schooling, with an accomplished professional teacher, we learned that things were worse than we had anticipated. Her math scores were around the 2nd grade level and her reading around the 4th grade level. She was particularly challenged with spelling and writing.

That is when I started researching options for testing to try to get her the help she needed. When I asked her case worker for her school information, her academic records couldn't be found. When we finally did get the records, FCAT test scores were missing, and her last battery of tests were given when she was in kindergarten. Even after we uncovered this her case worker didn't seem to be concerned. I pushed hard with the help of my teacher friend and asked for testing to determine her processing skills, we asked for the Wechsler Intelligence Test, the Woodcock Johnson Test and others.

Finally, we went to her Guardian ad Litem and he was able to get a court order. With that hurdle behind us, she was allowed to take the tests but the results were not good. There were major gaps identified in her learning, memory and profound weaknesses in Arithmetic and Writing.

There is no doubt in my mind that this child was passed on from grade to grade with no help or tutoring. When I researched the No Child Left Behind Law or NCLB as it is called, it talks about providing a quality education for all. NCLB operates on four principles;

- Holding schools accountable
- Giving States and Districts flexibility in how they spend money
- Using scientific research to guide classroom practice
- Involving parents or guardians about choices regarding their child's education

Further research from the Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education, described the different diploma's students can get in order to accommodate children with Learning Disabilities. I read on, because that was what we were dealing with. I was shocked to find out about the variety of Diplomas. The list is below;

- The Standard Diploma
- The Option 1 & 2 Special Diploma
- The Certificate of Completion
- The Certificate of Completion for College Eligible Placement
- The Special Certificate of Completion ( if you don't meet any of the standards outlined for the others)
- The GED, if you miss all or some of the above requirements

Diplomas offer a variety of combinations including; grades and GPA requirements, time in classes, passing the Sunshine State Standards, scoring at least a passing mark on the 9th or 10th grade FCAT or a multitude of combinations. If you achieve some of these

benchmarks, you get one of these diploma's or certificates. So what does it all mean? At the risk of getting some nasty emails from teachers...it seems we are willing to lower our standards just to get kids out of school.

Unfortunately, after reading all the criteria for the different diploma's, our foster child was so far behind that in her case, even the lowest standards hadn't been met. The situation we were dealing with was ; no passing ESE grades, not having work experience, no passing FCAT scores from even the 7th grade, unable to reach the lowest benchmark on the participatory scale for the special diploma, only 3 credits toward her 24 needed to graduate. And oh by the way, if she were to take the GED, she would need to have a 9th grade level competency in Language, Science and Math along with writing an essay, which she clearly isn't capable of doing.

At the end of the day, I guess the State must have missed this one...I wonder how many others? However, I did see a safety net in the fine print, they are willing to keep kids in school with special learning needs until they are 22. Maybe she can catch up in the next five years!

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