Signed amid controversy in 2001, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law shook up the nation's public education system. Schools were now held accountable for student achievement; if students continually failed to meet minimum test scores, schools were placed on probation.

Classroom instruction methods were changed, too, with increased focus placed on 'teaching to the test', taking away from more in-depth instruction. Several years have now gone by, giving analysts enough time to assess how the law, if at all, impacts student performance. According to the Civil Rights Project, NCLB isn't working. At least not for minority high school students.

The study looked test scores for three groups of students. From 1999 to 2004, elementary school younger black students made big gains in their standardized test scores. In 1999, the black-white gap in math scores for nine year old students was 28 points. Black students in that age group closed the racial gap in math scores by nearly 50 percent just five years later while black 13 year olds increased their math score 11 points over the same five year period. Black 17 year olds, however, only increased their score 2 points.

While the improvements made by younger students should be celebrated, the continued gap between minority and white high school students must not be ignored. Graduation rates in black and Latino communities still lag behind those of whites and, in urban areas, the dropout rates for students of color are astoundingly high. More important than meeting the standards of NCLB should be preparing these high schools students for life outside of the classroom. Individuals with a high school diploma will earn more money over their life time than someone without one and are less likely to live in poverty. The job market is increasingly competitive; high school dropouts have few options for employment.

Instead of solely focusing on test scores, the nation's education system needs to diversify the way it helps students learn. Programs that teach "outside of the box" must be developed. Dr. Dan Mote, the president of the University of Maryland, once commented that supplemental education – extracurricular programs that encourage students to read and solve problems – play a key role in high school student learning and achievement. Currently, American schools produce test takers, not critical thinkers or life-long learners. Supplemental programs are one way to help develop more well-rounded students.

Provisions designed to close the minority achievement gap in high schools should be added to the NCLB act. Additionally, it should be mandated that schools across the nation either introduce or increase supplemental education offerings. A revamped NCLB should also designate other ways to measure student success; solely focusing on test scores is not an accurate way to gauge whether or not a student has learned.

Part of our job as a nation is to ensure all of our children receive the best possible education we can provide. Since NCLB sets the standard by which all schools are measured, we must work to ensure it takes into account the learning gap between minority and white high school and creates a plan for addressing it.