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**No Child Left Behind  
Part 2: End of the Line  
TRANSCRIPT**

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JIM LEHRER: Now, the second story in our series on the No Child Left Behind law. Tonight is on what some failing schools in San Diego are doing to meet the law's standards. Once again, the reporter is the NewsHour's special correspondent for education, John Merrow.

COMMUNITY ACTIVIST: You cannot kill our momentum. You cannot stop or kill our spirit. And you will not stop our determination.

JOHN MERROW, Special Correspondent for Education: January 7, 2005, a school board meeting in San Diego, California.

COMMUNITY ACTIVIST: We will clean the house you refuse to clean.

JOHN MERROW: These impassioned parents were fighting to fix their children's schools, schools that were not only failing, but had been allowed to keep failing year after year after year. Schools like Keiller Middle School, where in 2004 Patricia Ladd took over as principal.

PATRICIA LADD: My first day here, I thought, "Oh, my goodness, what am I in for?" At any point in time, I would see 20 to 100 students just roaming the campus, many stories of setting fires in the bathrooms, destroying property, a campus of chaos.

JOHN MERROW: Violence also plagued Gompers Middle School just a few miles away, where in 2004 Vincent Riveroll took over as principal.

VINCENT RIVEROLL, Principal: I remember meeting my first student who came up to me and said, "Why are you wearing a suit? It's just going to get ripped when you break up a fight."

JOHN MERROW: At both schools, more than half the teachers were leaving every year. Many of those who stayed, says Gompers teacher Tracy Johnston, had simply stopped caring.

TRACY JOHNSTON, Teacher: They had been doing the same thing for 35 years. They didn't like our kids; they liked the paychecks.

JOHN MERROW: What it all added up to was students who weren't learning. On California's state proficiency tests, three-quarters of the students at Gompers and Keiller were consistently failing.

The federal law called No Child Left Behind says that, after five straight years of failing test scores, schools have to make major changes in the way they're run. It's a process the law calls "restructuring." The law spells out restructuring options that include taking control of the school away from its local school district. At most of the 1,300 schools nationwide that have had to restructure so far, that hasn't happened.

RALLY SPEAKER: I'd like to thank the board of directors for being here today...

JOHN MERROW: But in San Diego, the frustrated parents, teachers, and principals at Gompers and Keiller saw the radical restructuring options of No Child Left Behind as a golden opportunity...

RALLY SPEAKER: Open the gates of wisdom! Congratulations.

JOHN MERROW: ... that they used to turn their schools around. They were supported by a reform-minded and controversial superintendent, Alan Bersin.

ALAN BERSIN, Former Superintendent, San Diego City Schools: It was an opportunity to start a process from the bottom up, to say, if you give the facts to parents and to the community, and you create a genuine process of involvement and education, that perhaps people would make a decision that, in fact, their needed to be more dramatic change than ordinarily is the case. And that's what happened.

Restructure in September 2004

JOHN MERROW: The federal law called No Child Left Behind was intended to shake things up, to force people to fix failing schools. In San Diego, at Gompers and Keiller, that is precisely what happened. But the way that the school system has reacted to what these two schools have done is raising questions in San Diego. Is the system more committed to the students' interests or its own?

Flashback to September 2004. Keiller had just been forced to restructure under No Child Left Behind. Gompers had just been forced to restructure, too. To figure out just how to do that, the principals at both schools put together teams of teachers and parents.

PATRICIA LADD: We gathered together what we called a workgroup, and we started talking about a dream school. What are the qualities of a dream school?

JOHN MERROW: They decided that, more than anything else, they needed a staff of highly committed teachers, but the union contract with the San Diego School District made it hard for principals to hire the teachers they wanted.

VINCENT RIVEROLL: Case in point, when I was staffing the school as a first-year principal here, I interviewed a candidate. I decided not to hire that candidate. Two days later, based on seniority, that teacher was at my staff development without me knowing it and said to me, "I was assigned here anyway."

JOHN MERROW: Union seniority rights also made it easy for good teachers to leave a school after just a few years.

ALAN BERSIN: You could not build a foundation for teaching and learning when you turn over your teachers every year.

JOHN MERROW: Superintendent Bersin asked the teachers union to grant a waiver of some of its rights, but the union didn't give it to him. To many parents at Gompers and Keiller, like Michelle Evans, that was the last straw.

MICHELLE EVANS, Parent: We needed something radical. You know how they have cancer surgery? You have to have radical -- something radical needed to happen.

JOHN MERROW: The radical step that the working groups chose would enable them to break away from the San Diego School District and thereby free themselves from its union contract. They would convert their schools to what are called public charter schools, schools that run independently from the school board under the provisions of a contract called a charter.

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER: A charter is not necessarily the answer.

JOHN MERROW: But there would be hurdles to clear to get the necessary approval from the San Diego school board. Supporters would have to collect hundreds of parent signatures.

MICHELLE EVANS: It took us four hours a day for four months to do this.

JOHN MERROW: And even collect the signatures of a majority of teachers, the very people who would lose their union rights if the schools went charter. But the charter supporters cleared that hurdle, too.

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER: You did it.

Sweeping changes at Gompers

JOHN MERROW: And on March 1, 2005, the San Diego school board finally gave its OK. At Gompers, Vincent Riveroll and his team have made sweeping changes. Every student here is now required to wear a uniform.

LISA YOUNG, Teacher: Look on the charts that we made yesterday...

JOHN MERROW: Of the 50 teachers who worked here before the conversion, 44 were replaced. One of the six who stayed is Lisa Young.

LISA YOUNG: Every single teacher and staff member that you see on this campus wants to be here and decided to be here and is very motivated.

JOHN MERROW: Attendance is up. Suspensions have plummeted. Over at Keiller, a similar transformation has been taking place.

TEACHER: We're going to walk to class, and we'll get started on the test this morning, all right? You guys ready for this?

STUDENTS: Yes!

JOHN MERROW: No longer bound by district regulations, Keiller's teachers say they can now tailor what to do in the classroom to better meet their students' needs.

STACEY ROTH, Teacher: Can anybody make a prediction of what you think is going to happen next in this text?

JOHN MERROW: Stacey Roth teaches eighth grade humanities, which combines English and social studies. She uses current events in some of her classes, like the controversy over radio host Don Imus.

STACEY ROTH: We read several articles with differing points of view, and then I had them write NBC to tell them whether they thought Imus should be fired or not.

JOHN MERROW: But wait a minute, that's not part of some state curriculum. What about...

STACEY ROTH: It's writing a business letter. It's reading text and thinking about it critically and then writing a business letter. It's all in the eighth grade standards. It's the way you use them to encourage kids to write to a specific audience so that their voice can be heard.

Hostility from public school system

JOHN MERROW: Keiller is especially proud that its student test scores have gone up enough to satisfy the requirements of No Child Left Behind. Yet, despite their success, the charter school principals and their supporters feel that the public

school system has been hostile.

In 2005, the school board fired Superintendent Alan Bersin. His replacement, Dr. Carl Cohn, is an advocate of keeping schools within the system. Superintendent Cohn declined our request for an interview.

Is the district playing fair with you?

PATRICIA LADD: No, they're not.

JOHN MERROW: Patricia Ladd has a simple explanation for the school system's attitude.

PATRICIA LADD: It's about money. It's about money. Enrollment's dropping throughout the city. The district is losing millions of dollars, millions of dollars.

JOHN MERROW: How much does San Diego Unified School District lose every time a kid signs up for Keiller or another charter?

PATRICIA LADD: Approximately \$6,000 per child.

JOHN MERROW: Between Keiller and Gompers, that adds up to an almost \$8 million loss every year. Ladd points to a letter the school district sent that steers families in the Keiller neighborhood to a district middle school called Bell. Bell had more than four times as many suspensions as Keiller and lower test scores. The letter was signed by San Diego's deputy superintendent, Dr. Geno Flores.

GENO FLORES, Deputy Superintendent, San Diego City Schools: We as a school system are required to offer a place for their students to attend; in other words, we cannot require a parent to go to a charter school. Parents can choose to go there on their own.

JOHN MERROW: Is Bell a better school than Keiller?

GENO FLORES: For any student, every student? I mean, I think those are the kinds of choices that we're asking parents to make, which is, which school would you like for your child to attend?

PATRICIA LADD: Here in red is Keiller, and here is Gompers Charter Middle School, and here...

Drawing from charter schools

JOHN MERROW: The school district recently announced a plan that could draw even more students away from the charter schools. The district is going to expand seven elementary schools that are close to Gompers and Keiller to include the

sixth, seventh, and eighth grades.

The seven schools you're converting are all clustered right around the charter schools. Is that a coincidence?

GENO FLORES: Is it a coincidence? We are providing opportunities for parents to make decisions.

JOHN MERROW: Former Superintendent Bersin says he's not surprised by what the district is doing.

ALAN BERSIN: The point of charter schools is to compete and to force regular districts to compete with charter schools. The competition is now here. You shouldn't expect your competitor to treat you with kid gloves, so go out there and compete.

TEACHER: OK, very good. So, now, what is our next step? Let's take a look at...

JOHN MERROW: This coming school year, because of No Child Left Behind, at least 1,000 more schools across the country may have to restructure.

TEACHER: Who remembers that word from yesterday, profitable, and can tell me...

ALAN BERSIN: Gompers and Keiller establishes that this is not rocket science. You begin to see parents and teachers taking action in the way that we constantly talk about. Let the teachers and the parents decide. Most people who say that really don't expect parents and teachers to take charge, but discontent is a terrific engine for social justice. And that's what's happened here.

JOHN MERROW: This summer, the principals of Gompers and Keiller, along with teachers and parents, are going out in the community, spreading the word about their schools, and working hard to recruit new students.

JIM LEHRER: Tomorrow night, John will look at how some of the nation's best teachers are responding to No Child Left Behind. You can watch last night's report and learn more about the No Child Left Behind law on our Web site, as always, at [PBS.org](http://PBS.org).