

The Williams Case

In 2000, a San Francisco middle-school student named Eliezer Williams noticed problems in his school. There were not enough textbooks for students. Classrooms were crowded. Toilets did not work. Bathrooms and other areas were unclean and had rodents. Many teachers were temporary employees.

Williams and his father thought the school lacked the basic educational resources for students' learning. Williams sued the State of California, arguing that schools without basic resources were almost always schools attended by poor and non-white students as well as English-language learners. Privileged students in most public schools, however, had all the basic resources they needed. This, argued Williams, showed unequal treatment under the law.

One-hundred other families joined Eliezer Williams in his lawsuit. When they sued the state, it was also the 46th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the landmark Supreme Court case ending segregated schools.

The governor of California negotiated (tried to reach agreement) with the students and their parents. Finally, in 2004, the students and their parents settled their case. The State of California reached an agreement with them.

The settlement set up ways for local governments to keep track of school conditions. It also gave \$1 billion to school districts to fix the problems. It created a way for parents and students to complain to education officials about new problems.

Activity: The Committee on Civil Rights

You are part of a committee of state lawmakers gathering facts for a new California civil rights law. The law's purpose is to strengthen civil rights in California.

Your committee should:

- a. Read the **The Williams Case**.
- b. Discuss the problem in the case study. (What unfairness or discrimination was happening? Why was it a problem?)
- c. Decide what the policy was in each case study. (Remember that policy is the official way of dealing with a problem.)
- d. Recommend what additional policies, if any, might be necessary to achieve equal protection for all under the law. If no recommendation is made, explain why not.
- e. Be prepared to report your recommendations and reasons for them.