



EDUCATION LAW CENTER

STRATEGIC PLAN
2014-2017



INTRODUCTION

The Education Law Center (ELC) is the only legal advocacy organization in Pennsylvania whose mission is to ensure that all of Pennsylvania's children, including poor children, children with disabilities, English language learners, children in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, children experiencing homelessness, and other vulnerable students have equal access to quality public schools.

We pursue this mission through a strategic combination of legal advocacy, policy advocacy, media work, parent and community training and empowerment, public education, partnering with grassroots groups, and coalition-building.



ELC'S VISION

- All children in Pennsylvania have access to quality public educational services and to the full range of educational opportunities that are available to their peers;
- State laws and state and local policies are fair, are aimed at ensuring equal access to quality schools, and reduce disparities based on race and poverty;
- State and local officials and policymakers comply with these laws and policies;
- Families have a voice in their children's education, have the tools to resolve problems that their children experience in school, and can advocate for improvements in local and state education policy and law; and
- Community organizations and grassroots advocates are supported in their efforts to improve public education.

ELC is the only statewide legal group whose sole mission is to ensure that every child has equal access to a quality education.

HOW WE WORK

While there are other legal groups that represent vulnerable children, ELC is the only statewide legal group — and one of the few in the nation — whose sole mission is to ensure that every child has equal access to a quality education. Likewise, although there are other education advocacy groups that have similar objectives, none bring the unique talents, skills, and abilities that our highly trained lawyers bring to the table.

ELC attorneys represent individual clients in strategically chosen cases and file impact litigation (often class-action lawsuits) designed to improve educational outcomes for children. In addition to these traditional legal strategies, ELC also uses other advocacy tools, such as policy and data analysis, legislative and regulatory advocacy, training and technical assistance to education and social service professionals, research support for community and parent groups, coalition-building, and extensive media outreach.

ELC is collaborative. The organization cultivates close relationships with a network of public education advocates — individuals, other legal organizations, and broad-based coalitions — throughout the state and country. These collaborations strengthen ELC's work, expand the message, and ultimately enable the organization to more successfully develop litigation strategies that have a deep and broad impact on the rights of schoolchildren.



PRIORITY AREAS

ELC's work is organized around three Priority Areas:

Fighting for Fair School Funding

1

There is no doubt that money matters in education, and that children attending well-resourced schools perform better on achievement tests. Yet public schools in Pennsylvania with a high percentage of children living in poverty spend an annual average of \$3,000 less per student compared to wealthy school districts, resulting in a funding gap of \$75,000 per classroom of 25 students. The Education Law Center has long been a leading statewide advocate for adequate and equitable state funding, and it will increase its emphasis in this area over the next three years.

Ensuring Equal Access

2

ELC works to ensure that all children have access to educational services and programs they need to succeed. Equal access issues have historically been a large part of ELC's work. Some examples are unfair residency rules that impact children experiencing homelessness, refusals to include children with disabilities in the regular school program, the failure to address language barriers affecting immigrant students and English language learners, and the denial of education to children in residential placements. With the rapid rise of charter schools, access issues — mainly illegal enrollment barriers — are an important part of ELC's current work.

3

Stopping the School-to-Prison Pipeline

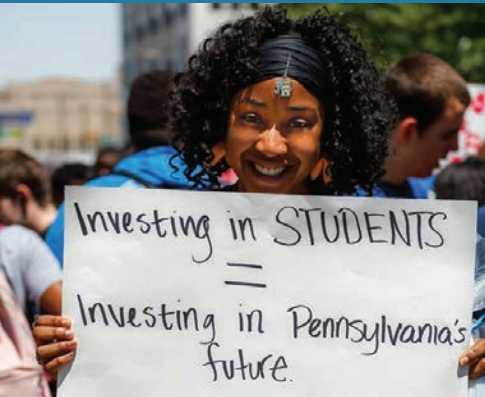
Zero-tolerance policies, aggressive policing in schools, and other extreme school discipline practices lead to high rates of suspensions, expulsions, and arrests of students. As a result, large numbers of youth are pushed out of school and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. These policies and practices also fuel systemic inequalities and disparate educational outcomes based on race, gender, perceived sexual orientation, disability status, and other categories. ELC has long been a national leader in the fight against exclusionary discipline practices, and it will continue to focus on this critical area.

MAJOR THREE-YEAR GOALS

ELC has set major goals in each priority area for the next three years. Those goals are continually revised to ensure that the organization is being responsive to the needs of its constituency and to the ever-changing conditions on the ground.

Goals in Priority Area One: Fighting for Fair School Funding.

Fighting for Fair School Funding



**94% of
school districts in
Pennsylvania are
operating with
inadequate
funding.**

- 1 Ensure that Pennsylvania adopts and maintains a new system of public education funding that recognizes that educating each and every child is an imperative that has positive social and economic benefits for the Commonwealth and its communities.
- 2 The new system must be based on the real costs necessary to ensure that all public school students are able to meet state academic standards, are prepared for post-secondary success, and become productive, knowledgeable, and engaged citizens.
- 3 Ensure the adoption of a funding formula that uses accurate school district and community data and includes weights and factors including poverty, English proficiency, disability, and other objective measures that impact the costs of education.
- 4 Ensure that the new system is transparent, sustainable, and long-range and is supported with sufficient, stable, broad-based, and equitable resources.

Ensuring Equal Access



Nationally, only one third of students in foster care receive a high school diploma in four years and only three percent graduate from a four-year college.

Goals in Priority Area Two: Ensuring Equal Access

- 1** End discriminatory barriers to enrollment in all public schools for children with disabilities, English language learners, children experiencing homelessness, and other vulnerable groups.
- 2** Increase school stability for abused and neglected children and for children who are experiencing homelessness.
- 3** Ensure that English language learners are receiving adequate English as a Second Language supports and services and that their parents (especially those of children with disabilities) receive adequate translations of important documents and have access to interpreters for meetings with school officials.
- 4** Ensure that the Keystone Exams and other graduation requirements are not disparately impacting at-risk children.
- 5** Expand access to quality early education programs for young children in foster care, those who are homeless, and other at-risk groups, and ensure that eligible children receive early intervention services to enable them to be ready to start school.



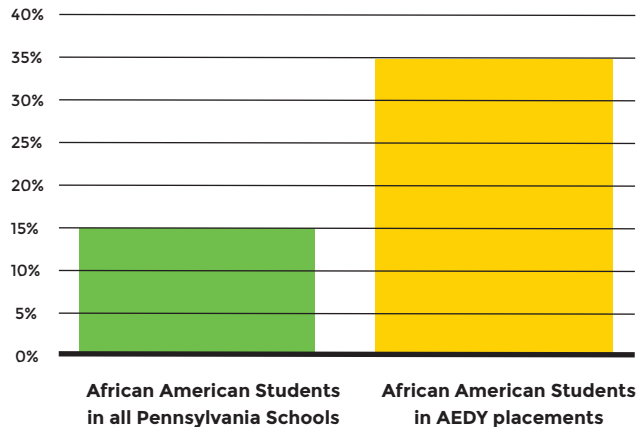
Stopping the School-to-Prison Pipeline

African American students comprise only 15 percent of Pennsylvania public school students, yet in 2010-11 they comprised 35 percent of the students placed into alternative education programs.

Goals in Priority Area Three: Stopping the School-to-Prison Pipeline

- 1 Reduce exclusionary discipline practices in both regular and charter schools. These include suspensions, expulsions, transfers to disciplinary alternative schools, and school-based arrests.
- 2 Reduce the disparate impact of exclusionary discipline practices on children of color and children with disabilities.
- 3 Increase the number of school districts that implement school-wide positive behavior supports and restorative justice practices.

2010-11 Statewide Disparate Impact on African American Students in Alternative Education for Disruptive Youth (AEDY)



IN SUMMARY

ELC lawyers continue to advocate, in many ways every day, for a quality public education for all of Pennsylvania's students, especially the most vulnerable.

We do that work with the help of our colleagues, parents, students, and our network of supporters.

Ensuring that all of
Pennsylvania's children
have equal access
to a quality
public education.



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