



PHILADELPHIA  
1800 JFK Blvd., Suite 1900A  
Philadelphia, PA 19103  
T 215-238-6970  
F 215-772-3125

PITTSBURGH  
429 Fourth Ave., Suite 702  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219  
T 412-258-2120  
F 412-535-8225

## ABOUT THE EDUCATION LAW CENTER

The mission of the Education Law Center (ELC) is to ensure access to a quality public education for all children in Pennsylvania. We pursue this mission by advocating on behalf of the most underserved student populations – children in poverty, children of color, children with disabilities, children in the foster care and juvenile justice systems, English learners, LGBTQ and gender-nonconforming youth, children experiencing homelessness, and children at the intersection of these identities. ELC employs a broad range of strategies to accomplish this mission, including direct legal representation; impact litigation; educating parents, students, and advocates about students’ legal rights; training and support for community groups and child-serving professionals; publications that build understanding of education issues; and policy advocacy at the local, state, and federal levels.

ELC’s work is organized around three priority areas:

1. **Fighting for Fair School Funding.** Money matters in education, and research shows that children who attend well-resourced schools see a range of benefits, including higher academic achievement, deepened civic engagement, and increased economic attainment. Increases in funding to schools pay off for students, families, and communities. Yet Pennsylvania has the single largest gap in educational spending between high- and low-wealth districts of any state in the nation. The Education Law Center has long been a leading statewide advocate working to ensure that there is adequate funding to support education and that the funding is driven out to school districts in a fair way.
2. **Ensuring Equal Access.** ELC advocates for access to school and needed services on behalf of underserved students. For example, ELC challenges the denial of special education services for children with disabilities; the failure to address language barriers affecting immigrant students and English learners; the lack of services for children experiencing homelessness; the denial of education to children in residential placements; and the failure to support children who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or gender-nonconforming.
3. **Dismantling 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, disproportionately impacting students of color and students with disabilities. As a result, large numbers of youth are pushed out of school and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. ELC continues to be a national leader in the fight against exclusionary discipline, and we promote evidence-based prevention practices to improve school climate.

(February 2020)

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

## EDUCATION LAW CENTER: RECENT SUCCESSES

### **Fighting for Fair Education Funding**

- We made significant progress in our [fair funding lawsuit](#) in Commonwealth Court, which challenges Pennsylvania's school funding system as inadequate and inequitable. In the discovery phase of the case, we have deposed dozens of witnesses and produced tens of thousands of pages of documents. The tentative trial date is fall 2020.
- We produced two reports about the underfunding of services for students with disabilities in Pennsylvania, highlighting how to improve the formula for distributing state special education funding and how districts across the state are hurt by the continued failure of the state's education aid to keep pace with special education cost increases.
- We continue to work with PA Schools Work, a statewide campaign for fair and adequate school funding. Thirty groups have come together in this coalition. In 2019, our advocacy helped secure an unprecedented \$50 million boost in state special education funding.

### **Ensuring Equal Access**

- Culminating years of advocacy, the [Fostering Independence Through Education Act](#) was signed into law, providing tuition and fee waivers at Pennsylvania colleges and universities for youth who were in foster care at age 16 or older.
- Advocating for a Spanish-speaking student with a disability in Pittsburgh Public Schools who had been deprived of appropriate special education and English learner services, we won a commitment to new districtwide policies for evaluating English learners with disabilities and for engaging with limited-English-proficient families.
- We produced a new, 24-page parent guide to advocacy: "[What to Do When Your Child is Bullied or Harassed](#)."
- As part of our annual "[Back-to-School Guide](#)," we released new fact sheets on the rights of English learners and limited-English-proficient parents and on the rights of students experiencing homelessness.
- We trained hundreds of child-serving professionals, families, and students by providing rights-based information.
- We responded to more than 1,500 calls on our free Helpline. By providing information and referrals, legal consultation and advice, or extended legal representation, we help students and families address gaps in educational services, enrollment barriers, punitive school discipline, delays in special education eligibility evaluations, and more.

### **Dismantling the School to Prison Pipeline**

- Our 2013 U.S. Department of Justice [complaint](#) that triggered a federal civil rights investigation has led to new tools in Pennsylvania for addressing unfair treatment of students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities in disciplinary "alternative education for disruptive youth" programs. These include a new student complaint process, a presumed exit date of 45 days for all students, and protections to ensure that students are not discriminatorily placed in alternative programs.
- We jointly filed a [class action suit](#) challenging abuse and educational neglect at Glen Mills Schools, the nation's oldest reform school. In the face of damning news reports and legal pressure, the facility was shut down. A federal judge has ruled that our education claims can go forward. Other changes at the state and local levels will help implement community-based approaches for children now in residential institutions and ensure that the state is accountable for serving youth who are in placement.

[Ensuring that all of Pennsylvania's children have equal access to a quality public education.](#)