
2024

ANNUAL REPORT



Introduction

The Mission

School Law Equity Project will provide high-quality legal advocacy and representation to students and families with limited financial resources, in special education disputes with public schools to secure their rights to effective special education services free from discrimination under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. The availability of these services without cost is extremely limited and prevents equal access to full enforcement of these important rights. Navigating the laws, rules and procedures to enforce special education and non-discrimination rights is complicated and requires expert advocacy and assistance to effectively secure those rights and level the field for students and families in disputes with public schools that have easy access to publicly funded legal representation.

The Vision

Every student and family deserves access to high-quality legal representation in education law matters regardless of their resources to correct violations of important civil rights that can affect life-changing results. Our goal is to help change individual student educational outcomes and improve legal protections for all students with disabilities at the state and federal levels.



What We Accomplished in 2024

For 2024 our focus was to refresh and rebuild. While SLEP has existed for many years, it has largely been underdeveloped and under-funded. The past year has been spent mostly on renewing efforts to seek funding to expand our important work into more under-served communities, as we consistently hear stories of students whose legal rights have been violated but whose families cannot access legal representation to correct them. We have been working on an all new website design with easier access for donors to give to the organization, our organization's logo is getting a face-lift, and strategies for making a bigger impact in both Minnesota and Wisconsin have begun to roll out.

Even with limited funding available, SLEP was able to take on four student matters and provide them with the legal consultation and advice they needed to address and resolve problems. In all, this saved the families a total of \$7,150.00 in attorney's fees and those four families received the help they needed, when they needed it.

In November of 2024, SLEP's Board of Directors was reconfigured, our Articles of Incorporation were expanded, our Bylaws were ratified, and we renewed our commitment to funding and expanding our work. The Board elected Amy J. Goetz as President and Director, and Sherri Dimke as Treasurer. We renewed our non-profit status with the State of Minnesota and are excited about what the future holds.

Programs and Services

Consultation and Advice



After reviewing any relevant documents provided by the parents, our attorneys will conduct any necessary legal research pertaining to the issues identified in order to prepare to provide initial consultation and advice. Consultation and advice allows the attorneys to gain additional facts on each specific situation, meet with the family and student, inform the family of their rights and other legal issues they may not have recognized, and discuss their options going forward to address and resolve their concerns. Consultation and advice is the most cost-effective way for the attorneys to review a case and its specifics, and for the family to receive sound legal assistance and understand their options to proceed without having to retain an attorney to engage in legal action.

Attorney Representation



When a consultation and advice is completed, our attorneys are able to assess each potential legal matter and advise families if further action is necessary and advisable to resolve their concerns. In some cases, retaining an attorney to assist families with the complicated process of filing complaints and going to hearings is the best course of action. The nature of and timelines for representation vary widely, depending on the individual situation. Our attorneys have had some matters resolve in only a matter of weeks with informal dispute resolution work, while other matters have required litigation over a number of years. Because each case is so different, having an experienced attorney who thoroughly understands the laws and processes and what steps to take is critical for resolution in the best interest of the student.

Ongoing Consultation



While not every matter requires intervention and active participation from an attorney, some families need ongoing legal advice and consultation about which steps to take and how to best advocate for their child. In these matters, our attorneys act to help to understand the law as it applies to each concern and the best options to consider in advocating for the right result. This assistance can help families learn to become better advocates without litigation on an as-needed basis. Our organization also assists with informal dispute resolution efforts such as conciliation conference, mediation, and negotiated settlements to achieve resolution to their concerns.

Leadership and Governance

**An open letter from
President and Director
Amy J. Goetz**

“I am passionate about making sure all students with disabilities receive the education they deserve”



School Law Equity Project

Ensuring Educational Equity

Amy J. Goetz
President and Director

Sherri Dimke
Treasurer

Catherine Reisman
Board Member

Selene Almazan
Board Member

January 28, 2025

Dear Reader:

Thank you for taking an interest in our organization. In the past year my staff and I have been working hard on development and outreach for this organization. Although we have been in existence for approximately ten years, we have decided that now is the time to seek to expand funding for this important work as so many families have the need for effective legal advocacy and representation who cannot afford to retain private counsel, and for whom publicly-funded counsel are stretched beyond their capacities. We see the need for this every day, while working in our private firm, School Law Center. We receive calls from families who need our help, but are not able to afford to pay for legal representation on their own. When we are unable to help those families, we know their needs often go unmet.

Students with disabilities, especially if they are a family of color or have limited financial means, are often the most affected by unfair treatment within the public school system. Those families tend to need the most help and are the least able to access it. Our firm focuses on not only advocating for those families, but also on helping parents understand their legal rights, how to navigate the special education system, and how to optimize their own abilities to be the best advocates for their children in the future. This ensures that even after our firm is no longer involved, those children continue to have a knowledgeable advocate in their corner.

As a mother of children with disabilities myself, I know how difficult and overwhelming it can be to navigate the special education system and be an advocate. I have focused my career on this area of the law because I am passionate about making sure all students with disabilities receive the education they deserve because education is critical in setting a course for life-long success.

When we help families better understand what each student needs to be successful, and we are able to advocate for appropriate services and supports for that specific student, we see a remarkable change in how that student approaches their own education and their plans for the future. My staff and I feel a personal connection to every client's case we take on, and we know we wouldn't be able to offer our much-needed services, free of charge, to the qualifying families who contact School Law Equity Project without contributions from others.

From the bottom of our hearts, my staff and I thank you for helping us pursue our mission by donating when you can and by sharing our mission when you can't.

Sincerely,
School Law Equity Project

Amy J. Goetz
Attorney At Law
President and Director



Our Impact

School Law Equity Project aims to help students get the support they need in school, to stay in school and be successful in school and after graduation. Individual need for support in the school environment often goes beyond reading, writing, and arithmetic. School Law Equity Project can help families to identify the specific needs of their child and guide them through the process of advocating to meet those those needs in the school setting.

Students and their families learn what their rights are and they learn about advocacy skills to protect and advance their rights. We help families improve educational outcomes and fulfill the promise of special education - to help students with disabilities live and work as independently as possible after school.

When a student is unfairly disciplined and excluded from school, our organization works to ensure they are instead restored to special education programs that teach them needed academic, social, emotional and behavior skills as the law requires. Part of this process includes evaluating the programs they previously received and tailoring new and improved services to fit that student's unique needs. Students who have missed critical learning skills because of exclusion or a lack of meaningful progress in their previous programs receive services designed to make up for educational losses.

We have worked with students who have been bullied and/or harassed to be sure they are protected and those conditions are corrected, including responding to the effects of past bullying and harassment.

Each case we take on is unique and our help has lasting affects on the students and their families. We have seen first hand how positively impacting a student's educational environment helps students and families make improvements in other areas of their life. We sincerely believe that sound legal advocacy and positive outcomes that improve the special education for individual students also improves the schools for other students and their families.

Financial Performance



Maximizing Donations

Increased donations enable us to cover rising costs, assist more families in need of our services, and improve community outreach. Additional funding allows our organization to pay for services that allow us to upgrade our website, including an easier way for the community to make donations to expand our focus on research and applications for grants, and increase our capacity to serve more families in need of legal assistance.

Improvements behind the scenes in our case management and workflows means maximizing funding on a per client basis, to allow funds to go further and help more people. Funding we receive pays for excellent legal advocacy and representation of students and families with a small portion used to cover the costs of administration operations.

We have worked hard throughout 2024 to improve our business operations and our workflows. This has been our focus as we head into 2025 because minimizing business costs allows us to focus our funding where it makes the biggest difference - helping the families who need us. As we head into the new year we are intent on expanding the availability of our meaningful work ensuring students receive the legal advocacy they need to be successful in school.

Future Plans

2025 will bring some exciting upgrades and changes to SLEP! Our new and refreshed logo will roll out with the updated website early in 2025. We are also launching our upgraded donation site, which will be attached to the website. This will allow donors of all kinds to easily make contributions to our efforts to help the greatest numbers of students and families in need.

With all the behind the scenes work completed our attorneys and staff will have the ability to focus more time on directly helping the families who need us. Our goal for 2025 is to be able to take on one to three cases per month that are fully funded by SLEP. We plan to do this by increasing SLEP funding with more donations from our community and work writing grant requests.

Reach Out

School Law Equity Project hires the experienced and well-qualified attorneys and staff at School Law Center to provide legal assistance and representation to qualifying families.

To get in touch with the managing staff at School Law Center please contact us at:

Address: 520 Fifth Street South Stillwater, MN 55082

Phone: (651) 222-6288

Website: www.schoollawequity.org