



The Progress Report



Issue 13 · Spring 2012

How Equal is Opportunity Within Individual School Districts?

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Testing an Equity Measurement Tool: Stratford Shows The Way

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and expedited mobility are the means by which the district makes certain that inequity is kept to a minimum.

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If we succeed in gaining cooperation from two or more of these districts, we will consult with the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) about how to urge larger numbers of Connecticut districts to address equitable resource allocation. Possible future steps include development of a training module on resource equity for newly elected school board members and programs using Appleseed's measurement tool for Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) classes.

Travelers' Volunteers Showcase How 11 School Districts Tackle Bullying

With roughly 1/3 of Connecticut high school students reporting that they have been bullied, bullying is a sensitive subject in our public schools. Everyone acknowledges that when schools fail to prevent bullying, the educational impacts are significant and negative. Nevertheless, while many parents feel that more responsibility should rest with the schools to protect their children, school officials are often reluctant to assume responsibilities beyond their core educational role.

Connecticut ended the debate by passing a 2008 statute, "An Act Concerning School Learning Environment", which required every school district to develop and implement both a bullying policy and a prevention strategy, that the State Dept. of Education (SDE) develop model policies and that school personnel be trained in bullying prevention.

But the Governor's Prevention Partnership approached Connecticut Appleseed in 2010, told us that much remained to be done within many school (continued on page 2)

Mission Statement

Our Mission is to develop solutions for the causes, rather than the symptoms, of our state's social problems. We will deploy volunteer lawyers and other professionals to achieve systemic changes through legal and legislative advocacy, negotiation, education and other initiatives.



Connecticut Appleseed

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School Districts Tackle Bullying (Continued)

districts to comply with the new law, that SDE had neither resources nor mechanism to find out what works in districts to stop bullying and asked our help. We responded by recruiting a team of more than 20 pro bono attorneys from The Travelers Companies ("Travelers") to interview administrators, teachers and counselors from 11 major school districts - which the Governor's Prevention Partnership then helped us to train.

Sharing Practices that Reduce Bullying

By highlighting effective bullying policies and strategies, Connecticut Appleseed intends to accelerate and improve district compliance with the 2008 statute. Our Travelers team found that relatively safer schools have programmed a sensitivity to bullying right into their school culture, while simultaneously empowering each child to stand up for what is right. Techniques with myriad names - "RAMS" in Waterbury, "CLIMB" in Simsbury, "Make Your Day" in Stratford and "Best Buddies" in Regional School District 13 - strive to ensure the mutual respect that lies at the heart of a positive school climate.

After bullying has occurred, Rocky Hill, Bridgeport, West Hartford, Hartford and Hamden all report that they use some form of peer mediation. Unsurprisingly, because bullying often takes place during less structured time periods and where there is less supervision than in classrooms, we also found that involving all school personnel - from bus drivers and cafeteria staff to custodians - helps to

foster a positive school climate.

Report Out in February, 2012

In addition to supporting its pro bono team while conducting approximately 60 interviews with administrators, principals, teachers, guidance counselors and psychologists, Travelers generously stepped forward to cover the report's printing costs. Connecticut Appleseed Board member Michael D'Agostino, who chairs Hamden's Board of Education, has agreed to distribute our findings to both his peer Board chairs and the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS). As a result, we anticipate a positive response from the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) and school officials across the state that will be comparable to our "Keep Kids in School" report's success.

It's Not Over 'til It's Over

A Hartford Public Schools principal stated plainly that Connecticut's schools need more help because the legislation wrongly assumes that that once school administrators identify individuals and incidents, those incidents will not recur. That official cited a need for more concrete guidance and training on how to respond effectively to problem situations and students in order to prevent incidents. Understandably, until administrators and faculty are helped to develop more expertise related to bullying, they cannot be expected to know what to do.

Third Year of Pro Bono Legal Help to Hartford's Homeless

Thanks to volunteers from throughout the Hartford legal community, "Hartford HELP's" free weekly legal clinics at homeless shelters are continuing for a third year. Early each Tuesday morning since October, 2009, teams of volunteer lawyers and law students from UCONN Law School have helped individuals at either the Mercy Shelter on Main Street or the House of Bread on Chestnut Street. With volunteers attorneys already lined up through June, Connecticut Appleseed currently plans to provide Hartford HELP clinics at least through 2012.

To date, HELP attorneys have assisted well over 300 people on a single consultation, advice only and/or limited representation basis. Typically, HELP attorneys address the small, finite, more readily fixable causes of homelessness, but they occasionally provide

referrals to other lawyers when actual representation or more intensive legal work is needed. HELP clinics currently serve an average of 20 individuals per month, or roughly 5 individuals at each clinic.

HELP clinics have been most successful in helping individuals to obtain missing identification documents, apply for social security disability and clear up minor criminal matters that prevent a person from getting housing or applying for a job.

An additional broad category of assistance has been with housing issues such as landlord/tenant, Section 8 and liens/evictions.
(continued on page 3)



A Growing List of Volunteers

The Day Pitney, Brown Rudnick and Murtha Cullina law firms have been Hartford HELP's backbone, and each has provided volunteer teams for several different months. But HELP has also been fortunate to attract participation from a growing list of firms and bar associations, with the Reid and Riege, Bracewell & Giuliani and Axinn Veltrop & Harkrider firms also stepping forward in 2011 and 2012. In addition, we are gratified that the George W. Crawford Black Bar

Association, the Connecticut Bar Association's Young Lawyers Section, the Connecticut Hispanic Bar Association and retired U.S. Administrative Law Judge Joyce Krutick Craig have each taken responsibility for clinics during at least two months.

Connecticut Appleseed Plays Quarterback

In addition to recruiting local attorneys, Connecticut Appleseed coordinates their training, schedules the clinics, works with shelter staff to

alert them to the lawyers' capabilities and assesses the project's impact by gathering reports on the types of assistance our volunteers are asked to provide. We are immensely grateful for multi-year support from the Fund for Greater Hartford and the Melville Charitable Trust which has enabled us to staff these responsibilities.

Helping Districts to "Keep Kids in School"

In early 2011, Connecticut Appleseed released our report titled "Keep Kids in School: Improving School Discipline" which documented innovative disciplinary practices in 9 diverse school districts. Based on dozens of interviews with superintendents, principals and teachers, data from the Connecticut Department of Education on a broader sample of 19 districts and focus groups with both youth and parents, we reported our discovery that a highly structured in-school suspension environment can deter misbehavior better than can traditional discipline.

Response to Keep Kids in School was so positive that an anonymous donor stepped forward to pay to print and mail 2,500 copies – enough for each school board member, administrator and principal in the state. In addition, Appleseed Board member Michael D'Agostino (and Chair of the Hamden Board of Education) was invited to lead a Nov. 18, 2011 panel discussion on school discipline at an unusual joint annual meeting of the Connecticut Association of Boards of

Education and the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents.

Connecticut's Leadership

The more students are repeatedly disciplined out of school for violations like insubordination and truancy, the more likely they are to stay out of school and get into trouble with the law. Perhaps surprisingly, Connecticut has emerged as a leader in its recognition that some types of discipline can be counterproductive. Despite implementation delays following passage of a 2007 statute, Connecticut's public schools have been required since July 1, 2010 to discipline students for typical acts of child or adolescent misbehavior (e.g., insubordination and truancy) with in-school suspension alone.

"Keep Kids in School" (posted at www.ctappleseed.org under "What's New") identifies a large number of successful forms of discipline that are less likely to prompt the negative

outcomes associated with out-of-school suspension. Specifically, it documents that when certified teachers and behavioral specialists rotate into in-school suspension throughout the day to oversee regular coursework, maintain the "normal" academic pace and preclude socializing, the resulting intense discomfort among the disciplined students can motivate behavioral change.

Daunting Challenges Remain

Shifting emphasis from out-of-school suspension and expulsion toward in-school suspension for the vast majority of disciplinary infractions appears to be a justified and feasible strategy to reduce what is termed "the school to prison pipeline". Nevertheless, Connecticut's public schools must redouble their efforts to address this persistent fact: Black students are roughly four times as likely, and Hispanic students about twice as likely, to be expelled or receive an out-of-school suspension than are white students.

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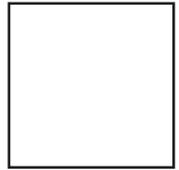
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A PART OF THE APPLESEED NETWORK

Appleseed, a non-partisan and non-profit organization, is a network of public interest law Centers working to identify and address injustices in their communities. Appleseed works to build a just society through education, legal advocacy, community activism and policy expertise, addressing root causes and producing practical solutions. As one of the nation's largest legal pro bono networks, Appleseed Centers work both independently and collectively, bringing their own experiences to create local solutions that are nationally relevant. We connect the top private practice lawyers, corporate counsel, law schools, civic leaders, and other professionals to tackle problems locally, at their root cause.

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