



The Progress Report



Issue 3 · Spring 2005

Is the Federal "No Child Left Behind" Legislation Effective in Improving our Schools?

Connecticut Appleseed has joined a collaborative project (with other Appleseed Centers in Chicago, Georgia, Massachusetts, Texas, and Washington) to examine the impact that the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation is having in the classroom. These Centers recognized that NCLB is recalibrating public school system metrics, driving priorities and dictating spending throughout the education system. As a result, they set ambitious project goals that include identifying improvements that can be made at the federal, state and district levels and working with parents and local schools to ensure that parents are informed enough to help improve educational opportunities for their children.

State-specific research will evaluate how the assessment requirements and testing policies dictated by NCLB are impacting teaching and learning. Much of the research will be conducted and compiled, pro bono, by the national Holland & Knight law firm. Connecticut Appleseed Executive Director Bob Kettle and lawyers in Connecticut will assist attorneys in Holland & Knight's New York City office. In addition, Bob will help publicize the findings and share the compared experiences of the participating Appleseed Center localities.



A Focus on Improving Parental Involvement

Well-informed parents are critical both to improving the achievement of individual students and school systems. For too many low-income families and families of color, information barriers feed a sense of powerlessness and make it difficult for them to push their schools to improve. A second aspect of this project is therefore developing model school report cards and parent notification letters that will clearly convey key information to parents. For example, Title I schools that do not meet "adequate yearly progress" standards for two or more years face a series of escalating consequences:

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Our New Vice Chair: Dean Brad Saxton

Quinnipiac University School of Law Dean Brad Saxton is an extremely busy man. Charged with overseeing a growing law school, developing its Strategic Plan, building its endowment and boosting its accreditation scores, attracting top faculty members and satisfying students – you get the picture – he always tries to beg off from the latest request for his time. Applesseed is but one of his lucky clients clamoring for more of his good counsel.

When Applesseed's Executive Committee was wrestling with a draft Strategic Plan in late 2004, it resolved to include Brad in its extended series of conference calls because of his thoughtfulness. Somehow Brad found the extra hours. When Applesseed grappled with how it might contribute to the ethics crisis in state government, Brad promptly delivered Quinnipiac's ethics expert (Law Professor Steven Latham) to help us. When non-profit consultant John Wieser urged Marty to suggest a Vice Chair, Brad's name came immediately to mind.

Formerly a Professor of Law at the University of Wyoming, Brad is disarmingly earnest and down to earth. More often than not he is the Applesseed Board's voice of reason, regularly cautioning the Directors against overextending our agenda of projects. And he graciously hosts almost half of Applesseed's Board meetings, taking advantage of his beautiful law school's central-Connecticut location.

Which is not to say that Brad doesn't get excited. As creator and project manager of Applesseed's Elder Law project, he's been working hard to launch Senior Citizens Law Day for more than a year and a half. Forced to delay from 2004 to 2005 by Quinnipiac's strategic planning and accreditation cycles, he enthuses: "The goal of Senior Citizens Law Day is simply to offer older adults, their families and caregivers access to reliable information about the significant legal issues confronting them through a series of educational sessions. Our school is delighted to join Connecticut Applesseed in hosting this community service event, and we are all thrilled that Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro has agreed to be our keynote speaker. And Applesseed, in turn, will add immeasurably to the value of the program by taking it on the road to senior centers across the state".

Non-profits like Applesseed only gain their "authorization" by filling indisputable public needs.

We're fortunate that Brad has his finger on the public's pulse. In consulting with senior centers in municipalities like Norwalk and Stamford to gauge their interest in hosting a workshop based on Senior Citizens Law Day, no less than 100% expressed tremendous interest in doing so. As a result, we're confident that Senior Citizens Law Day fills an indisputable need and that the subsequent "roll-out" visits will find an eager audience.



June 25th Senior Citizens Day Launches Elder Law Project

In collaboration with the Quinnipiac University School of Law and the Elder Law Section of the Connecticut Bar Association, Connecticut Appleseed will sponsor a "Senior Citizens Law Day" symposium at Quinnipiac's Law School in Hamden, CT on June 25, 2005. By addressing the legal and financial issues that confront Connecticut's older adults of modest means, their families and caregivers, Law Day will assist seniors with assessing their needs and their future planning.

Breakout sessions and panel discussions on legal aspects of the topics below will be complemented by a set of easy-to-read handout materials:

- Advance Directives - Health Care Proxies - Living Wills
- Wills - Trusts
- Health Care, including Long-Term Care and Prescription Drug Costs
- Housing
- Consumer Fraud

Objective Information on Legal Rights, Entitlements and Services

The decision to feature end-of-life issues of course responds in part to recent public debate around the Schiavo case. Information will be provided about Advance Directives (written documents laying out the specific types of medical care a person wants or does not want if they are in a coma or have a terminal illness) and designation of an agent to ensure that such directive is followed.

But more generally, seniors and their families all too often do not have access to reliable and objective information regarding legal options, choices available to them, and choices they need to at least consider making. Senior Citizens Law Day will try to fill that need.

Anticipation Among Senior Centers

Distributing this information as widely as possible within the state is without doubt the most important aspect of this project. As a result, we will roll out a distilled version of the workshops to senior centers. We will be planning from the outset how best to modify, tailor and abbreviate the Senior

Citizens Law Day's content for presentation and discussion at centers where seniors live and congregate throughout the state.

We consulted with several senior centers to determine their interest in hosting a workshop based on an abbreviated or "short form" version of Senior Citizens Law Day. The response was tremendously positive, with centers in Stamford, Norwalk and Fairfield expressing a strong desire to host a workshop. Executive Director Bob Kettle commented: "If the senior center directors with whom I've spoken are a good indication, these roll-out sessions will be warmly received throughout the state".

Support for the Project

A \$2,000 grant received for this project from the Day, Berry & Howard Foundation will be used to support Senior Citizens Law Day itself (e.g., lunches, copying and printing). Bob recently filed a pre-application with the Fairfield County Community Foundation to fund senior center visits in southwestern Connecticut and began enlisting pro bono Elder Law specialists from law firms who might join him during those visits.

Board of Directors Vote to Create New Board of Advisors

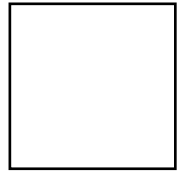
With continued expansion of the Board of Directors from 15 to 19 members at year-end 2004, the Directors formalized their decision to create a separate Board of Advisors. As envisioned in our Strategic Plan, its members will primarily include distinguished lawyers from large law firms or corporations based in Connecticut. At the same time, membership is not exclusively reserved for attorneys. Ms. Debra Valentine, Vice President, Secretary and Associate General Counsel for United Technologies Corp., will join with current Board of Director Bob Fiondella to serve

on the new Board of Advisors. Board Chair Martin Budd commented, "We intend that the Board of Advisors will be a smaller body, perhaps including but 3 or 4 members in its initial phase, with no more than 10 members in its ultimate form".

Members of the Board of Advisors will be asked to lend their prestige to open doors that will advance Appleseed's projects, as well as to introduce Appleseed's Board members to potential donors. Since Appleseed is trying to harness the state's legal talent and use it to benefit the

disadvantaged, we will also ask Advisors for their counsel on how to build sustaining support for Appleseed within Connecticut's legal community.

Added Executive Director Bob Kettle: "Appleseed is an excellent vehicle through which the state's law firms can channel their pro bono energies and express their concern for the broader community. We expect individual members of the Board of Advisors will lend greater credibility to Appleseed's advocacy efforts as well as help us build a broader base of support throughout the state."



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.

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these include a requirement to provide supplemental educational services to eligible students and to offer broader choice among public schools. A key premise of this project is that better communication will help parents take advantage of such options.

Litigation over an Unfunded Mandate

Connecticut has unsuccessfully lobbied federal education bureaucrats that our state's existing testing program (Connecticut Mastery Tests in Grades 4, 6 and 8 plus the Connecticut Academic Performance Test in Grade 10) is sufficient to track progress. But controversy over the

3-year old NCLB legislation took a new turn on April 6. Attorney General Blumenthal announced that the state will sue the federal government, arguing that it has provided but \$70 million of the \$112 million required for Connecticut to expand its testing program in accord with the law. Connecticut's Education Commissioner Betty Sternberg claims the additional testing won't tell state educators anything they don't already know.

Facing Up to Large Achievement Gaps

Yet intransigent achievement gaps between minority and white pupils – just the reason this federal legislation was enacted – require

that Connecticut must move expeditiously to reduce inequity in education. Sixty-four percent of white fourth graders met the state's goals in reading in 2004, compared to 25% of black fourth graders and 24% of similar Hispanic students. While this represents a slight improvement from 2000, the size of our state's "achievement gap" remains glaring. In 2003, the gap between average scores among the state's white and black fourth graders was the third highest in the U.S.

A wealthy state like Connecticut can do better. Appleseed is hoping that insightful and constructive findings from this project will help our state better confront and reduce inequity in educational achievement and opportunity.