



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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ORGANIZATION	EdLaw Project

Update 1: I am working for the EdLaw Project in Boston this summer, and I am already confident that this internship will hone my skills and values as a legal advocate. Starting out, I had quite a bit of training to do. Through video and in-person instruction sessions, I learned how to dissect an Individualized Education Program and what to look for in a Manifestation Determination Review. Education law is not a standard component of the legal curriculum, so this was all new information to me.

I also observed our organization's intake process where parents and social workers reach out to us, we call back to collect information, we determine if they are eligible for our services and how we can help them, and then our follow-up with the client. I am really looking forward to doing the intake calls myself!

The EdLaw Project is housed through the Committee for Public Counsel Services. I have been going into the downtown and Roxbury offices, and I have found that this is an excellent way to meet other bright attorneys with a passion for social justice, whether they focus on public defense, child and family law, or some other specialty.

Update 2: Over the past few weeks, I have been getting more involved with research projects. For the most part, I have been answering particular but challenging legal questions. For example, one of my supervisors was interested in the interaction between the statute of limitations and compensatory education remedies under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). After doing some research, my understanding is that this is an open question with an interesting circuit split. The IDEA does not specifically state a limit to the amount of compensatory education parents can ask for but says that parents must file a complaint within two years of the dates they knew or should have known of the school district's



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violation. I found a compelling Fordham Urban Law Journal article by Jennifer Rosen Valverde that criticizes the Third Circuit's jurisprudence on this question. I am hoping that the EdLaw project gets the opportunity to argue that the statute of limitations does not affect remedies. In my opinion, it does not make sense for the statute of limitations to limit compensatory education claims, especially in cases where the parent didn't know about a school district's continuous failure to provide services.

I have also begun doing my own intake calls. The purpose of these calls is to gather information from parents and social workers who call our hotline seeking legal assistance so that our attorneys can determine if they are eligible for our services or if there is any other help we can provide. Admittedly, these have been a bit challenging. To successfully complete an intake, I need to gather both basic background information and details regarding often stressful situations at school. I am working on being thorough and measured while also being understanding.

Update 3: Now that I'm a few weeks into my internship, I am feeling really involved with the team at the EdLaw Project and able to be quite helpful. I have built up some confidence doing our client intakes, and I am handling at least a couple of these per week. I am able to take notes while engaging the caller in conversation, navigate sensitive topics, and ask the required followup questions. I have been enjoying doing the intakes because they are an opportunity for me to do direct services work. Additionally, talking through the intakes with the attorneys has been a great way for me to get a sense of how experienced professionals issue spot and understand our priorities as a public interest law firm.

I have been juggling two document review projects these past few weeks as well. For the document reviews, I have been looking through student and school records to figure out the cause and extent of underlying issues. By doing this work, I have been building important organizational skills. Document reviews can be quite time consuming, so I am glad to be entrusted to do such work and save the attorneys' time.

We had a summer holiday party this week and it was so much fun! I am truly thankful to have the opportunity to work such a passionate and bright team.

Update 4: This month, the EdLaw Project had an appellate hearing in federal court. Earlier this year, the MA Board of Special Education Appeals found that the long-term suspension of our client was unlawful. The school district appealed to the district of Massachusetts. In preparation for the appeal, I observed the judge in court and provided our attorneys with notes about the judge's style.



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I also got the opportunity to attend the hearing itself. The two issues were (1) mootness and (2) merits. The attorneys representing the student argued the matter is moot because the school year and suspension have ended, and the student has completed middle school altogether. The attorneys representing the school argued the matter is not moot because they have structured their Manifestation Determination Review guidelines around the decision in this matter.

I am already reflecting on the summer and noticing the vast array of procedural questions and hurdles that attorneys have to be mindful of when practicing education law. I am grateful to have this opportunity to work and learn alongside the EdLaw Project team because I am learning how to be an effective advocate in real life. I am learning that I have to be passionate about the merits-based questions while keeping in mind the fact that many cases in practice are decided on procedural questions.

Update 5: Having completed my summer internship with the EdLaw Project, I have been reflecting on my internship experience as well as my fellowship experience with EJA. Through the EdLaw Project, I had the opportunity to assist talented attorneys as we defended the right to education in Massachusetts. Working through the comprehensive training materials, I learned about Individualized Education Plans, Manifestation Determination Reviews, school stability issues, as well as communicating with families dealing with crises. I found all of this material new and enriching, as I have not had the opportunity to take Education Law as a course at BU Law. I find Education Law questions fascinating; because children are considered some of the most vulnerable classes of persons affected by the law, questions such as balancing the right to education with the safety of schools are often quite complex.

As the summer progressed, I started covering the intake lines for the EdLaw Project. Our intake process usually involved a parent or social worker leaving a voicemail or filling out an online form request, followed by the director of the EdLaw Project quickly reviewing the request and passing it along to an intern, and then the intern calling the parent or social worker for further detailed information. The detailed information is ultimately used to determine the kinds of referrals or direct services we can provide to the person calling in. I absolutely loved having the opportunity to do these intake calls. As a law student, I have found that I have limited opportunities to directly talk to clients. This was an excellent way to talk to many clients and build my skills as an interpersonal advocate while also providing direct help. I also found these calls challenging at first, because every caller is so different in terms of their legal challenges and communication style. In practice, I found that I had to be quite knowledgeable about Education Law as a field in order to ask the right questions. Importantly, I found talking to clients enriching rather than exhausting, and this revelation has been helpful guidance as I search for post-graduate jobs.



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Throughout the summer, I was also involved in several research projects. Some of these projects had a quick turnaround as they involved clients with active matters. For example, an attorney I was working under wanted to know whether and how the IDEA's statute of limitations interacts with demands for compensatory education. For another case, an attorney wanted to know the procedural differences between Declaratory Judgements and Administrative Appeals in the context of education matters. Furthermore, I assisted attorneys as they filed Public Records Requests from the Department of Secondary Education and attended court for a case that was appealed to federal district court.

The EdLaw Project did an excellent job of exposing me to the variety of hats the education lawyers wear. I learned that effective advocacy involves not only legal work, but also strong interpersonal skills, punctuality, and resilience. I was constantly inspired by my coworkers, and left with a feeling that I could have a happy career doing public interest work in Massachusetts. I would be thrilled to find my way back to the EdLaw Project in the future. I am incredibly thankful to EJA for the fellowship, as it helped make this summer internship accessible to me.