



SCHOOL JUSTICE PROJECT

Access to Justice. Access to Education.

2019 Metrics

Client Demographics

The average age of SJP clients when beginning representation is 19.18 years old. SJP clients are Black (98%) or Latinx (2%), and 68% of clients identify as male and 32% identify as female. 100% of clients are eligible for free legal representation, thus meeting the court indigency requirements. Ward 8 has the largest SJP client representation (33%), followed by clients experiencing homelessness (17%). About 25% of clients are from Wards 7 and 5.

We have received nearly 300 referrals since opening doors and have represented approximately 165 individual clients. Referrals come from a variety of sources, though the majority come from defense attorneys (32%), clients and former clients (23%), or civil legal service providers (11%). Other referrals come from education attorneys, community-based organizations, social workers, and judicial court-appointments.

Education and Employment

In 2019, 97% of SJP clients were enrolled in an education program, including 13 new clients who had dropped out of high school prior to working with SJP. 80% of clients released from incarceration in 2019 re-enrolled in school within 60 days of release.

In 2019, SJP attorneys added 18 lost credits and 36 lost hours of community service to clients' transcripts.

73% of SJP clients demonstrated increased knowledge of post-secondary education options and planning. Of those able, 58% of SJP clients were employed after working with SJP for a year. 81% of SJP clients were connected to a social service during their first year working with SJP.

Empowerment, Leadership, and Community

SJP's model aims to promote empowerment and self-advocacy. 89% of SJP clients reported increased empowerment, as measured by self-expressions of feeling comfortable speaking at meetings and initiating ways for their individual voice to be heard. Clients also demonstrated increased initiative, undertaking major tasks such as securing vital documents, enrolling in school, or touring programs without an attorney for the first time. 90% of SJP clients demonstrated increased knowledge or understanding of education rights. 57% of clients began showing civic engagement via voter registration, community service participation, or initiation of efforts to obtain vital documents and city services.

Justice and Court Outcomes

SJP's education advocacy during sentencing and disposition hearings has resulted in mitigation in 90% of cases. Similarly, SJP successfully used education arguments to secure release to the community or to keep clients in the community in 73% of hearings where detention was at issue.

Direct Representation Program

SJP attorneys attended 553 client-related meetings in 2019, including school meetings, meetings with agency personnel, and meetings with community-based providers, and attended 144 court hearings. In 2019, SJP received 60 referrals and opened 36 new cases.

In 2019, SJP secured compensatory education for 4 clients through due process hearings and informal advocacy. SJP clients received \$10,000 in tuition for post-secondary education, nearly 300 hours of tutoring and mentoring, laptop computers, and funding for transportation to and from school and services.

Systemic Advocacy and Policy Program

As part of SJP's Systemic Advocacy and Policy program, SJP's Director of Programs, Senior Staff Attorney, and Supervising Attorney testified 11 times for DC Council. Testimony included recommendations for how DC's juvenile justice and education agencies could improve their support of SJP's client population and suggestions for proposed changes to special education law. Testimony also provided support for pending legislation including the creation of a court appointment panel for students in criminal court and the Second Look Amendment Act of 2019.

SJP continued advocating to secure funding in the 2020 fiscal year budget for The Students in the Care of DC Coordinating Committee Act, which passed at the end of 2018. The Act was funded. The Coordinating Committee will be the first standing cross-sector body focused on improving education for court-involved students in DC.

SJP is part of 10 coalitions or collaboratives: Thrive Under 25, Every Student Every Day, Youth Justice Project, Special Education Attorney Roundtable, Special Education Advocacy Coalition, Secondary Transition Community of Practice, Interagency Council on Homelessness, DC Family Court Training Committee, DC Superior Court's Juvenile Justice Subcommittee of the Court Education Work Group, and UNCF Education Roundtable. SJP attorneys serve as co-chairs for 4 of those coalitions, including the Juvenile Justice Subcommittee of the Court Education Work Group. This year, SJP partnered with Development Global Solutions to provide data and research support to the Subcommittee. This partnership culminated in a report that has helped the Subcommittee and stakeholders better understand the size and scope of the barriers facing court-involved students with disabilities.

Community Outreach & Legal Trainings Program

During 2019, SJP staff conducted 12 legal trainings to approximately 265 individuals including: DC Superior Court judges, students at George Washington and Georgetown Universities, juvenile justice agency staff, practitioners in Kentucky, Public Charter School Board members, and other attorneys.