



SCHOOL JUSTICE PROJECT

Access to Justice. Access to Education.

2021 Metrics

Client Demographics

The average age of SJP clients when beginning representation is 19 years old. SJP clients are Black (97%) or Latinx (3%). 89% of clients identify as male and 11% 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 (30%), followed by clients experiencing homelessness (17%).

We have received over 300 referrals since opening doors and have represented 200 individual clients. Referrals come from a variety of sources, though the majority come from defense attorneys (30%) and clients and former clients (24%). About 10% of our cases come from judges, either through direct referrals or court appointments. Other referrals come from civil legal service providers, education attorneys, community-based organizations, and social workers.

Education and Employment

In 2021, 88% of SJP clients were enrolled in an education program, including 3 new clients who had dropped out of high school prior to working with SJP. 100% of clients released from incarceration in 2021 re-enrolled in school within 30 days of release.

83% of SJP clients were connected to an enrichment activity during their first year working with SJP, and 74% of SJP clients were connected to a social service during their first year working with SJP. Of those able, 56% of SJP clients were employed after working with SJP for a year.

Empowerment, Leadership, and Community

SJP's model aims to promote empowerment and self-advocacy. 88% 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. 96% of SJP clients demonstrated increased knowledge or understanding of education rights. 48% of clients began showing civic engagement via voter registration, community service participation, or initiation of efforts to obtain vital documents and city services.

Direct Representation Program

In 2021, SJP received 15 referrals and opened 11 new cases. SJP attorneys participated in 482 client-related meetings in 2021, including school meetings, meetings with agency personnel, and meetings with community-based providers.

SJP celebrated 5 client graduations in 2021. 60% of those graduates are now enrolled in college.

Justice and Court Outcomes

In 2021, SJP advocated for clients during 36 court hearings. SJP's education advocacy during sentencing and disposition hearings resulted in mitigation in 88% of cases.

Litigation

In 2021, 4 SJP clients were awarded compensatory education as a result of complaints that SJP filed. Those clients received extended eligibility to allow them more time to earn their high school diplomas, nearly 1,000 hours of tutoring and counseling services, funding for updated evaluations, and funding for transition services.

Systemic Advocacy and Policy Program

SJP continues to advocate for systems reforms to DC's education and criminal legal systems. In April 2021, SJP, along with co-counsel at Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Terris, Pravlik & Millian, LLP, filed a class action lawsuit in the U.S. District Court in the District of Columbia challenging the lack of special education during the pandemic to students at DC Jail. On June 16, 2021, the District Court judge found that DC was in violation of federal law and granted the plaintiff's motion for a preliminary injunction requiring the immediate commencement of direct education to students at the Jail.

SJP staff members testified twice in front of DC Council in 2021. Testimony supported legislation that would ensure that all cases involving children who are accused of criminal code violations begin in juvenile court. Testimony also supported legislation that would expand eligibility for services provided by the Department on Disability Services to include individuals with developmental disabilities.

SJP is part of a wide variety of 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, Students in the Care of DC COVID-19 Working Group, Students in the Care of DC Credits Working Group, DC Legal Services Consortium, DC Legal Aid Transformation Network (Quarterly), UNCF Education Roundtable, and Fair Budget Coalition. SJP attorneys serve as co-chairs for 5 of those coalitions or their subcommittees.

Community Outreach & Legal Trainings Program

During 2021, SJP staff conducted 6 legal trainings for attorneys, law students, and juvenile justice agency staff, reaching nearly 200 participants.