



Education Law Center

## IMPROVING ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION IN PENNSYLVANIA

*To apply for this fellowship, please go to the Stoneleigh website and complete the individual application. Send the completed application to ELC. **Contact:** Len Rieser, Executive Director, (215) 238-6970, ext. 307, [lrieser@elc-pa.org](mailto:lrieser@elc-pa.org)*

**Organization and mission.** Education Law Center (ELC) is a legal advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all of Pennsylvania’s children have access to a quality public education. We focus on poor children, children with special needs, children in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, children experiencing homelessness, and others who are often deprived of equal educational opportunity. Our strategies include research, publications, training, media work, support to grass-roots groups and coalitions, policy advocacy at the local and state levels, and legal counseling and representation. More information on ELC is found at [www.elc-pa.org](http://www.elc-pa.org).

**Project description.** About fifteen years ago, Pennsylvania established a system of “alternative schools for disruptive students,” i.e., students who display behavior problems in school. The program has ballooned to the point that, if all of the children in alternative schools belonged to one school district, the district would be the third largest in the state. Yet, as ELC documented in a [report](#) on the legal aspects of alternative education, Pennsylvania has done little to ensure that alternative schools provide quality instruction. Instead, these schools have been allowed to fly almost completely “beneath the radar.” The majority are unmonitored and unaccountable to the public—and in some cases, it appears, providing grossly inadequate services. It also appears that children of color and children with disabilities are significantly overrepresented in some alternative education programs.

Two years ago, in response to pressure from ELC, the state began to collect school-by-school data on demographics, services and achievement in alternative schools. We envision a project in which the Emerging Leader Fellow would (i) review and analyze these data; (ii) supplement the data through contacts with alternative education providers, students, families, and professionals (probation officers, advocates, and others); (iii) visit selected alternative education programs; and (iv) develop and, to the extent possible, begin implementation of strategies for addressing identified problems within the alternative education program, including recommendations to local school districts, the PA Department of Education and the General Assembly, as well as possible complaints and other legal action.

**Qualifications.** The ideal candidate for this project will have a law degree as well as experience in education, although persons with a background in only one of these areas will be considered. We envision close collaboration between the fellow and other ELC personnel with expertise in school discipline and climate, special education, juvenile justice, and related matters.