

Law-Related Education

The newsletter of the Illinois State Bar Association's Committee on Law-Related Education

Chair's Column

BY RAQUEL G. MARTINEZ

THE ILLINOIS STATE BAR ASSOCIATION'S Standing Committee on Law-Related Education for the Public (LRE) has an exciting year planned for 2025-26! We are a dynamic group of 30 appointed and associate members who will be offering a variety of programs and services to lawyers and the public. Allow me to take this opportunity to explain how we are organized and what we hope to accomplish in the coming year.

The LRE has five Standing Subcommittees: Civics Education, Communications, Long-Range Planning, Membership and Mock Trials. They are further divided into Working Groups to accomplish all the goals that we have set for this year, and there are many!

Civics Education, chaired by the Hon.

Michael Chmiel of McHenry County, oversees the activities of the ISBA's Speakers Bureau. It identifies potential speakers in areas, subjects, and locations of need, empowering them to be willing lecturers and connects spokespersons to local organizations that are interested in hosting talks on a variety of legal topics. The Outreach Group works within the ISBA to promote, administer, and refine the "Lawyers in the Classroom," "Courtroom in the Classroom," and the "Courtroom in the Community" Programs. It works in conjunction with the Illinois Judges Association (IJA) by providing training, presentation materials, volunteer lists, publicity, and other assistance to maintain the effectiveness of

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Is Access to Literacy a Right?

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Is Access to Literacy a Right?

BY MADONNA T. LECHNER

ON SEPTEMBER 13, 2016, a complaint was filed in the Eastern District of Michigan against officials of the State of Michigan (State), including the Governor and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. The complaint was filed on behalf of students enrolled in an elementary, an elementary/secondary, and three secondary schools within the Detroit Public Schools (DPS). The

plaintiffs asserted that the State violated the students' right to equal protection under the 14th Amendment to the Constitution (42 U.S.C. § 1983). The plaintiffs held that, under the Constitution, the students had a fundamental right to a basic minimum education encompassing access to literacy. The plaintiffs alleged that the State denied the students a basic minimum education

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those programs. In addition to that, they explore the presentation of Continuing Legal Education (CLE) programs which involve civics topics that would be of interest to attorneys. They also work with the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), teachers' groups (such as the IL Council of Social Studies Teachers [ICCST] and the DuPage Valley Social Studies Conference), and with various other civics and legal organizations to coordinate activities relating to civics education. Additionally, the Civics Education Awards Group receives nominations and makes awards to ISBA Members and the public at large for their civics education activities.

The Communications Subcommittee, chaired by Nathan Davidson of Rock Island, is divided into four groups. The first is the Lesson Plans Work Group which has the goal of making a master list of all lesson plans on our website, review and update them as necessary, and remove old or outdated ones that may be available from other civics resources. The Newsletter Work Group plans to publish at least four editions this year. The Pamphlets Work Group intends to make a reference list of all LRE pamphlets and then update, remove, or revise them, as necessary. The fourth and final Work Group of this Standing Subcommittee is comprised of the Website folks who are responsible for maintaining the LRE Page on the ISBA Website (<https://www.isba.org/committees/lawrelatededucation>) and the [ILCIVICS.ORG](https://www.ilcivics.org) website, which is devoted to the public. Their goal is to test all links for functionality and accuracy this year, to review all posted materials to ensure that they are current, to link to partner organizations and activities, and to work with ISBA staff to publicize the ILCIVICS domain name.

The Long-Range Planning Subcommittee, chaired by Brittany Shaw of Chicago who is also Vice-Chair this year, reviews this year's plan and revises, rewrites, and adjusts it throughout the

year, so that there is a cohesive road map for the next year. The proposed changes are approved by the entire LRE, so it's a group effort. This unit also explores alternative funding sources, within ISBA guidelines, to minimize our programming costs (such as mock trials). The LRE engages in this exercise every year to ensure that we are meeting demands and making conscious decisions about the future.

The Membership Subcommittee, co-chaired by Mohini Lal of West Chicago and Hon. John O'Gara of Bellville, organizes activities that promote camaraderie among LRE members and identifies potential new members to be recommended to the incoming ISBA President for appointment to the LRE. They also maintain the waiting list of ISBA volunteers who express an interest in serving on the LRE. Yes, people do wait to become members of our committee.

The Mock Trial Subcommittee, chaired by Sarah Taylor of Carbondale, administers the [ISBA High School Mock Trial Invitational](#) with carefully chosen partners and sponsors (such as the Illinois Law-Related Education Resource Network [LEARN]). This year-long project includes the preparation of the problem, materials (such as the Trial Handbook and registration packets), providing the mock trial teacher training resources, devising the law test. It also includes managing the expenses of the program within the annual budget, with a goal toward increasing the number and geographic diversity of the schools participating in the competition, all while optimizing the use of technology in providing instruction and disseminating information to schools, volunteers, and parties. This program involves over 50 high schools from across the state, which are comprised of teams of ten. This single event easily includes over 800 participants, including the lawyers, paralegals and non-attorney volunteers and speakers, the number of teams, coaches, chaperones, and supportive family members. We are immensely proud that the number of

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participating schools has increased every year, and that the winner of the Illinois Invitational represents our state in the national competition. We are hoping to offer Illinois Supreme Court Courthouse tours to students again this year and are exploring the possibility of obtaining CLE credit for the lawyers who volunteer their time as judges and jurors. In the past, CLE credit had only been earned at college and law school level competitions. This year's High School Mock Trial Invitational will be taking place at Lincoln Land Community College on March 14 & 15, 2026, in Springfield, IL. Mock Trial materials can be found at <https://www.isba.org/teachers/mocktrial>.

In conclusion, the LRE has many offerings that benefit the public, and its members provide these services for free.

We hope that you will take advantage of these opportunities and enjoy these programs as much as we do. ■

Raquel G. (Rocky) Martinez is a retired attorney residing in Culver, Indiana. She earned a JD from The John Marshall Law School in 1986 (graduated on the Super Bowl Sunday when Da Bears won), a BA from University of Illinois at Chicago in 1982, and an AA from Morton College in 1979. She was admitted to practice in Illinois and the Northern District of Illinois in 1986, and to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1999. Her areas of concentration included administrative, government (such as the Freedom of Information and Open Meetings Acts), consumer protection, higher education, and civil litigation. Ms. Martinez has been an active ISBA member since 1986 and served as chair of the following Standing Committees and Sections: Women and Minority Participation, Administrative Law, Government Lawyers, Membership/Bar Services and Activities, Education Law, Law-Related Education for the Public (with two terms as chair), and was the CLE Coordinator for the Senior Lawyers.

Additionally, she served two terms on the General Assembly.

In her previous lives she has held titles such as Assistant State's Attorney for Cook County, Assistant Attorney General for Illinois, and Deputy General Counsel for the Illinois Student Assistance Commission. Raquel published a chapter in an IICLE handbook on administrative hearings and wrote for the Illinois Bar Journal as well as several ISBA newsletters. Ms. Martinez has been a speaker and/or moderator for many panels and seminars. Raquel served on numerous community boards and organizations (e.g., United Way, Planned Parenthood, etc.) and remains active in several entities that promote civics, community service, and education (e.g., the Morton College Foundation for over 30 years).

Rocky retired early to care for a sick family member and lives on the family farm in rural Indiana with her husband, Eric, two dogs, and two cats. She "sharpens the sword" through her ISBA activities and maintains her creativity through her cottage crafting business called "Rocky's Paper Scissors."

ILLINOIS STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

Elections



The 2026 ISBA Election is now underway with races for Third Vice-President (candidate must be from Cook County), 5 seats on the Board of Governors, and 19 seats on the Cook County Assembly. Nominating Petitions may be created and signed electronically until January 9. Candidates must meet the minimum signature requirements to be certified for the ballot.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE

Self-Nominate

Interested in serving in ISBA leadership? Nominate yourself by creating a nominating petition today! Consider running and take part in shaping the future of the Association.

Support Candidates

Take part in the ISBA election process and support your fellow members who are running for a seat by signing petitions.

January 9, 2026 at 4:30 p.m. - Petitions are closed

March 2, 2026 - Member dues must be paid to be eligible to vote in ISBA elections

Voting begins March 31st and ends April 30th at 4:30 p.m.

The results of the elections will be announced no later than May 6, 2026



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ISBA.ORG/ELECTION/PETITIONS

Is Access to Literacy a Right?

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by denying them access to literacy. They maintained that the students did not receive access to literacy comparable to that of other public school students in the State. The plaintiffs' argument was that the State had supervisory authority over the Michigan public school system, and that every other school (or almost every other school) in the system was given resources needed to provide access to literacy, but the named students' schools were not.

The schools in which the students were enrolled served predominantly low-income minority students. The schools fell within the most poorly performing five percent of schools in the State. The plaintiffs characterized the schools as functionally incapable of delivering access to literacy. The plaintiffs recounted poor conditions within the students' classrooms, including unqualified teachers, insufficient

books and materials, and physical danger.

According to the plaintiffs, in June 2016, Michigan adopted legislation that allowed non-certificated, non-endorsed teachers to work in the DPS. The plaintiffs asserted that nowhere else in the State were public school students taught by teachers who lacked appropriate State-mandated credentials and qualifications. The plaintiffs observed that the five schools at issue lacked teaching staff qualified to bring students to literacy. They noted that the students' classes were covered by non-certificated paraprofessionals, substitutes, or misassigned teachers who lacked expertise or knowledge in developing literacy. The plaintiffs continued that the schools failed to use adequate curricula that could impart literacy. They explained that teachers received no support or training in literacy education and lacked

access to curricular materials, such as lesson plans, pacing guides and teachers' editions of textbooks.

With respect to the physical condition of the schools, the plaintiffs stated that the students' classrooms were decrepit and unsafe, unable to satisfy minimal State health and safety standards. The City of Detroit admitted that, during the 2015-16 academic year, no DPS school building was in compliance with city health and safety codes. The plaintiffs documented that classroom temperatures in the five schools reached 110 degrees in the summer and remained below freezing during the winter. Moreover, mice, cockroaches, and other vermin regularly inhabited the students' classrooms. The drinking water at some of the students' schools was contaminated.

The plaintiffs concluded that the unfavorable conditions described above



Illinois State Bar Association High School Mock Trial Invitational

March 14-15
Lincoln Land Community College
Springfield, IL

The 2026 ISBA High School Mock Trial Invitational will be held on Saturday, March 14, and Sunday, March 15, 2026, at Lincoln Land Community College in Springfield.

Judges, lawyers, paralegals, law students, and other legal professionals are needed to act as presiding judges, jurors/evaluators, and bailiffs for each trial. You do not have to be a litigator to volunteer! Deadline to sign up is February 2, 2026.

isba.org/teachers/mocktrial



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denied the students an opportunity to gain literacy. Ninety percent of the students in the subject schools were unable to meet State proficiency standards in literacy. Low single-digit percentages of students were rated as proficient or above in English, compared to a State average in the mid-to-high forties. The plaintiffs noted that students in the schools struggled to write proper paragraphs or even complete sentences. At the elementary schools, the Plaintiffs charged that many third-grade students had a vocabulary of only a couple hundred words, were still learning handwriting, and could not sound out

letters. Consequently, the plaintiffs sought affirmative injunctive relief to improve the conditions in the students' schools.

On April 23, 2020, the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan confirmed that the identified students had a fundamental right to a basic minimum education. *Gary B. v. Gretchen Whitmer*, No. 18-1855 (6th Cir. 2020). The Court emphasized that education is essential to every interaction between a citizen and government. The Court specified that such a basic minimum education would provide the students with access to a foundational level of literacy. The Court acknowledged that the students had been harmed by

being relegated to a school system that did not provide even a plausible chance to attain literacy. The Court declared that the injured students were entitled to remedial action. Consequently, the Court remanded the complaint for further proceedings. The case eventually settled. The State of Michigan agreed to provide \$280,000 to the seven students, \$2.7 million to DPS for literacy programs, and \$94.4 million for efforts to improve literacy in the DPS over a longer period. ■

Madonna T. Lechner is a Former Investigator and Team Leader with the U. S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, in Chicago, IL.



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Law Practices **FOR SALE**

Looking to take down your shingle and move into the next phase of your life?

The ISBA has launched a new Law Practices for Sale service where sellers can post for-sale practices or firms, and buyers can browse listings and get connected with sellers. The service is available to all lawyers—rural or urban, boutique or general, solo practice or firm.

Listings for ISBA members cost \$200 and will remain available for viewing on the ISBA website for three months. Additional months can be purchased for \$50 per month. For non-ISBA members, listings cost \$300 for three months, with additional months costing \$50 per month.

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Champions

Champions

Dear Future Champions,

At least twice a year at ISBA Annual and Mid-Year Meetings, we are pitched by colleagues and the Illinois Bar Foundation to become a “Champion.” But what is a Champion really, and what’s in it for us?

A **champion**, by definition, is a person who fights or argues for a cause or on behalf of someone else. As lawyers, we have the unique opportunity to make a positive impact on society by upholding justice and advocating for those in need. We have the power to shape laws, defend the innocent, and ensure fair resolution of disputes. By definition, *we are champions*, for our clients, our legal system and for our communities, but through the statewide reach of the Illinois Bar Foundation, we have the opportunity to increase our impact even more.

The **Champions of the Illinois Bar Foundation** were established more than 40 years ago and are comprised of a distinguished group of attorney and non-attorney Foundation supporters who believe in the value of justice and philanthropy. By committing to a pledge payable over ten years, Champions help create sustainable long-term funding support for more than 50,000 individuals and their families each year statewide. These funds make a direct difference for our colleagues and their families when they struggle with life-changing illness or injury through the support of the IBF’s Warren Lupel Lawyers Care Fund, or when our neighbors seek low or no-cost legal aid services to help them stay in their homes, obtain guardianship of a loved one or an order of protection from an abuser, or better understand their rights and responsibilities as workers and citizens in Illinois.

Champions pledges:

- Start as low as \$100 per year, or less than \$9 per month
- Are 100% tax deductible
- Can be paid for with your ISBA Meeting reimbursement
- Can be restricted to an appellate district of your choice to help support your neighbors in need.

Champions receive:

- Special recognition at ISBA Annual & Midyear Meetings
- Champions badges that can be displayed on your website or email signature
- Recognition on the IBF website, social media and publications such as the *Chicago Daily Law Bulletin*, *Illinois Lawyer Now*, and the *Illinois Bar Journal*.

So while you may already be a champion in your profession, join me in helping to make Illinois an even better place by becoming a Champion of the Illinois Bar Foundation today. To secure your pledge, use this QR code or contact Jessie Reeves at jreeves@illinoisbarfoundation.org.

Sincerely,

Jessica Durkin
Champions Chair
Illinois Bar Foundation

