



These Researchers Reviewed Hiring Notices for School Board Attorneys. What They Found Might Surprise You.



We are a litigious nation living in a litigious age. Schools are no exception. So many lawsuits have been filed against the Trump administration that scholars have created [projects](#) to keep track. That's on top of routine and ongoing legal work such as ensuring the district is properly serving students with disabilities, navigating human resources challenges, and reviewing contracts with vendors.

Yet when it comes to insights about the attorneys carrying out this work, limited research exists, according to a [recent article](#) by NEPC Fellow [Maria M. Lewis](#) of Penn State University, [Saira Abbas Qureshi](#), also of Penn State, and [Gabriella Achampong](#) of Harvard Law School. In fact, the researchers had to look to 20- and 30-year-old studies to find research on the job descriptions and duties of school district attorneys.

In their effort to help fill this gap, the article's authors conducted a qualitative review of job ads posted online in 2024. The article is published

in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Education Human Resources*.

What they found gives reason for pause. Despite the highly specialized nature of many issues related to education law, most ads did not require applicants to have experience or knowledge relevant to this field.

“The emphasis on broad legal skills and experience seemed to indicate a preference for versatility over specialized knowledge in the field of education,” they wrote. The ads also prioritized relationship-building and communication skills.

Despite prominent recent political efforts to stamp out social justice, anti-racist approaches, and diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in schools, only a small handful of ads mentioned expertise in the legalities of these topics. “Our findings show narrow recruitment efforts that fail to account for the complexity of the issues that school districts are currently facing, at least as priorities are reflected within job announcements,” the article explains. “This is particularly important within a context wherein educational institutions are facing political pressure to engage in unnecessarily restrictive interpretations of the law that undermine DEI commitments.”

The researchers conclude by recommending that school districts rethink hiring qualifications for attorneys:

[W]e encourage school districts to treat general experience and knowledge of the law as a given and instead focus on required supplemental qualifications, such as: someone who has deep knowledge of education law; is committed to critical reflection; values the richness of interdisciplinary collaboration; possesses strong listening and communication skills; works to challenge power dynamics; has a deep understanding of the organizational structures and functions of education (experience or background in education); can demonstrate their commitment to DEI; understands the political pressures that school districts are facing; is committed to resisting the urge to give in to repressive legalism; and is committed to supporting the mission, vision, and values of the district.

NEPC Resources on Legal Issues

This newsletter is made possible in part by support provided by the Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice: <http://www.greatlakescenter.org>

The National Education Policy Center (NEPC), a university research center housed at the University of Colorado Boulder School of Education, sponsors research, produces policy briefs, and publishes expert third-party reviews of think tank reports. NEPC publications are written in accessible language and are intended for a broad audience that includes academic experts, policymakers, the media, and the general public. Our mission is to provide high-quality information in support of democratic deliberation about education policy. We are guided by the belief that the democratic governance of public education is strengthened when policies are based on sound evidence and support a multiracial society that is inclusive, kind, and just. Visit us at: <http://nepc.colorado.edu>