

Education Law Association Announces Award for Landmark National Study Evaluating Secondary Principals' Knowledge of Basic Public School Law

DAYTON, Ohio, Oct. 21 2008 - The Education Law Association (ELA) will present its *Joseph C. Beckham Dissertation of the Year Award* at its 54th Annual Conference being held in San Antonio, TX, November 19-22, 2008. Top government officials and legal and educational scholars from across the country will convene for this event.

The *Joseph C. Beckham Dissertation Award* is presented annually and recognizes exemplary dissertations by doctoral students in the field of education law. To be considered, the dissertation must be conceptually clear and address an important problem; contain a comprehensive and relevant review of applicable literature; demonstrate a sound approach; present a cogent analysis of data; show significant results and discussion; and be written in a scholarly style with appropriate documentation.

This year's award goes to Howard J. Eberwein, III, Ed.D., Superintendent of the Pittsfield Public Schools, for his study entitled "Raising Legal Literacy in Public Schools, A Call For Principal Leadership: A National Study of Secondary School Principals' Knowledge of Public School Law." The dissertation was written at the University of Massachusetts Amherst School of Education and the research completed under the guidance of Professors Matt Militello and David Schimmel.

This national study's surprising results suggest that secondary principals lack basic knowledge of public school law, which directly impacts their faculty and students. This study analyzed (1) what secondary principals know about the rights of students and teachers, (2) how their school law knowledge affects their day-to-day decisions, (3) how often they feel threatened with litigation, (4) how they respond to those threats, and (5) what legal information and advice principals share with teachers.

Among the significant findings is that more than 40 percent of the respondents did not know the correct answer to many of the basic legal questions about student and teacher rights, many of which have been settled for more than a decade. Equally significant is that 85 percent of the principals said they would change their behavior if they knew the answers to the survey questions.

By learning what principals know and don't know about the rights of their students and teachers and how they disseminate this information, changes to policy and practice can be made to help principals become better informed and more effective law teachers of their staff. Dr. Eberwein has already begun to implement changes in his school district based on findings and implications of his study.

Established in 1954, the Education Law Association (ELA) is a national nonprofit 501(c)(3) member association located at the University of Dayton. ELA promotes interest in and understanding of the legal framework of education and the rights of students, parents, school administrators, school boards, and school employees in public and private K-12 educational institutions, as well as higher education.

For further information, visit www.educationlaw.org.

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