

Position: Law Fellow (Summer 2019 or Fall 2019- Summer 2020)

Background on the Position

Reporting to the Senior Program Director and working closely with other members of the Empower team, you will play a key role in helping Empower Schools navigate legal challenges as it partners with communities, empowers educators, and serves students better.

Too often, discussions about the best way to ensure high-quality educational opportunity for all students quickly become debates about traditional district schools versus charter schools. For example, currently most school districts across the country rely on some form of top-down, one-size-fits-all management strategy for their schools and district efforts to empower school-level educators are often temporary, changing not because the strategy failed but because there is new district leadership or a desire to implement a new whole-district strategy. Yet discussions about how to change this reality and sustainably empower educators often lead people to think only of charter schools, restarting that contentious debate and forcing people to overly broad “anti-charter” or “pro-charter” positions.

There is another path, however, where educators have the freedom associated with charter schools but where teachers remain public employees in unions where applicable, and where the schools led by these educators are welcomed and fostered by partnering communities and not resisted. This third way would combine the best of districts, such as their commitment to universal service, with the best of charter schools, such as their focus on educator empowerment and energetic innovation.

Who We Are

Empower Schools is a Boston-based nonprofit that is leading the effort to develop new structures within school districts that durably give power to educators and thereby create better educational opportunity for students. We partner with communities to help them create Empowerment Zones, clusters of district schools where teachers and principals receive significant autonomy and are held accountable for using that autonomy effectively. As we do this work, we help build sustainable legal frameworks that will protect this autonomy as long as the schools are achieving good results for students and are operating within the bounds of their agreements with districts. That way, educators can remain assured that the outstanding district schools they are creating will have their independence protected and not have to change their strategy to meet one-size-fits-all mandates as long as they remain outstanding.

For example, Empower Schools partnered with the school district and teachers union in Springfield, Massachusetts to help launch the Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership ([link to article](#)). Empower helped facilitate a contract between the school district and a new, independent nonprofit through which the nonprofit was empowered to manage a subset of district schools. This contract frees schools from many district-wide policies, which allows educators at each school in the Empowerment Zone to make decisions about the school's calendar, schedule, structure, and curriculum, for example. As long as the Empowerment Zone is meeting the contract's performance targets, the effort will continue and educators will be confident they can make decisions about their school without having to implement any new one-size-fits-all directives that might come in the future.

Empower Schools has partnered with districts, teachers unions, state education agencies, and other key stakeholders to create Zones in Massachusetts, Colorado, and Texas, and is currently engaged in partnerships in several other states. Visit us at www.empowerschools.org.

How You'll Help

As our young nonprofit grows, we have significant legal needs. The responsibilities of the Fellow may include work within the following areas:

- Each state's education laws and policies are meaningfully different, and it is essential that we are able to analyze these legal frameworks to inform agreements between districts and locally created nonprofit Empowerment Zones. We need support as we expand to new states to ensure we fully understand laws and regulations and are able to craft strong contracts that work within each state's context, and then as we craft negotiation strategy and draft legal documents for new Zones
- New legislation has been introduced in Massachusetts that would facilitate the creation of similar Zones. What are the legal strengths and weaknesses of this legislation, and what might similar legislation look like in other states? Where would legislation help accelerate the ability for districts to form robust Zones?
- Zone schools operate as part of the district but also are part of a separate and unique structure. Creating a guide that clearly defines the legal obligations of a Zone nonprofit and a district will create a helpful resource for communities that are considering the Zone approach

Who You Are

- You are a current law school student looking for either a summer fellowship or a yearlong postgraduate fellowship.

Application

Empower Schools has not previously had summer legal fellows or yearlong legal fellows, but believes this opportunity is an excellent one for an innovative, creative law student who is eager to fight to improve educational opportunity for all students. If you are interested in learning more, please submit a brief statement of interest to Matt Matera (Yale Law School '11) at matthew@empowerschools.org.

We support equal opportunity and value building the diversity of our team as we grow. We seek individuals of all races, ethnicities, abilities, and creeds to support our organization's work and encourage applications from traditionally under-represented backgrounds.