

Landmark Pro Bono Suit Spurs Innovative Trauma Programming

Professionals

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Together with Public Counsel, in 2015, Irell & Manella LLP filed a pro bono first-of-its-kind federal class action against the Compton School District on behalf of students who are victims of trauma. The suit sought to compel the district to incorporate proven practices that address the barriers to learning caused by trauma, in the same way public schools have adapted to help students who experience physical or other barriers to learning. Irell and Public Counsel defeated Compton's motion to dismiss by convincing the district court that trauma should be a recognized disability under federal anti-discrimination statutes.

After overcoming the initial skepticism of the school district and community leaders, the parties began to work together and collaborated to develop Compton Unified School District's Wellness Initiative, a multi-pronged program designed to address the academic, social emotional, attendance and behavioral needs of students. This innovative program has proven to be an enormous success for the community, producing concrete results for students in everything from academic performance to substantive class behavioral changes, prompting dismissal of the case in 2021.

The Irell team included Morgan Chu and Ian Washburn.