

NOLPE provides a mechanism for disseminating unbiased information about current issues in school law.

# The National Organization on Legal Problems of Education: Serving the Profession

by Martha M. McCarthy

The National Organization on Legal Problems of Education (NOLPE) is a nonprofit, nonadvocacy organization that was established almost three decades ago to provide a vehicle for the dissemination of unbiased information about current issues in school law. Among those who played significant roles in championing the need for such an organization in the early 1950s were Edward Bolmeier, Lee Garber, Robert Hamilton, Madaline Remmlein, and Roger Shaw. The organization was officially launched at a school law conference in June 1954, at Duke University, where 57 charter members contributed one dollar each toward organizational expenses. Within six weeks, NOLPE had over 200 members.

The fact that NOLPE was organized the same year that the Supreme Court delivered its landmark decision in **Brown v. Board of Education** was not totally coincidental. The organization's founders correctly anticipated that the **Brown** ruling marked a new era of judicial intervention in the educational domain and that litigation and legislation would become increasingly significant in determining school policies and practices.

NOLPE's central purpose since its conception has been to improve education by promoting interest in and understanding of the legal framework within which schools operate and the rights of students, parents, school boards, and school employees. As NOLPE has grown over the years, its programs and services to attain this purpose have continually expanded. Currently NOLPE publishes

newsletters, serials, books, and monographs on a variety of school law topics; hosts an annual convention and regional seminars where school law problems are presented and discussed; provides a network for school attorneys and school law professors; and serves as a clearinghouse for information on educational law.

## Membership and Governance

Membership in NOLPE is open to all individuals and organizations with a special interest in educational law. Among its current 3,000 members are practicing attorneys, administrators and faculty members in schools of education and law schools, school board members, public and private school administrators and teachers, staff members of state and federal education agencies and professional associations, and libraries. NOLPE has members in every state in the United States as well as in Germany, Puerto Rico, Canada, Australia, Brazil, China, and Japan. One of NOLPE's major strengths lies in the diversity of its membership which facilitates bringing a variety of perspectives together to address complex educational law problems.

NOLPE is governed by a board of directors consisting of the president, immediate past president, president-elect, vice-president and nine directors. Officers are elected annually, and three board members are elected each year to serve three year terms. The Nominations Committee attempts to devise a slate of officers and board members reflecting the various role groups in NOLPE and broad geographic representation. The NOLPE board meets before and after the Annual Convention and often holds a midyear meeting.

The NOLPE executive director, who is appointed by the NOLPE Board, manages the operation of the organization as set forth in the constitution and by-laws. Marion McGhehey served in this role for two decades (from 1962 until his death in 1982), during which time NOLPE membership increased almost tenfold and the organization attained international stature in the field of school law. Tom Jones is now executive director and has played a key role in the implementation of several new services for NOLPE members. The NOLPE staff has been located in Topeka, Kansas (5401 Southwest Seventh Avenue, Topeka, Kansas 66606) since 1960.

## Programs and Publications

Each year NOLPE hosts several seminars which address current legal issues such as the federal rights of handicapped children and collective bargaining. The seminars, which are held in various geographical regions, are limited in enrollment to provide an opportunity for maximum participation and indepth exploration of specific legal topics. NOLPE also co-sponsors various school law conferences with other state and national professional associations.

NOLPE's Annual Convention provides a forum for the discussion of current school law problems with experts from all parts of the United States and foreign countries. Lawyers can receive continuing legal education credit for attending the convention as well as NOLPE regional seminars. The convention format stimulates dialogue among attorneys, professors, and practitioners and also provides an opportunity for specific role groups to meet and share ideas. For example, the NOLPE network of professors of school law meets to exchange teaching strategies and materials and share current research interests. The con-

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vention also includes a business meeting at which time the membership discusses future programs and activities and elects officers and board members.

NOLPE publications are invaluable in keeping the membership up-to-date on school law issues. Among NOLPE's regular publications are the following:

1. **NOLPE Notes** is a monthly newsletter containing brief summaries of reported and unreported cases, administrative decisions, legislative developments, and publications of interest. An insert with an update on the current Supreme Court docket is included in each issue.
2. **NOLPE School Law Reporter** is a monthly loose-leaf publication with cites and brief summaries of all reported state and federal school cases by topic. It also includes analyses of recent cases of particular interest.
3. **NOLPE Case Citations** is an index to current cases on a particular school law topic (e.g., search and seizure, home education) which is published five times a year.
4. **The Yearbook of School Law** is an annual publication in which the previous year's federal and state court decisions affecting public and private schools and higher education are analyzed.

5. **Convention Proceedings** is an annual publication composed of papers on timely school law topics that were presented at the NOLPE Convention.

In addition to the regular publications, NOLPE publishes other books and several monographs each year on topics such as student suspensions and expulsions, teacher evaluation, and discrimination in employment. Recently, a mini-monograph series was launched which is designed to offer practical legal guides in areas such as how to conduct a due process hearing.

NOLPE occupies a unique position in that it is the only national organization that focuses specifically on educational law concerns. As school law issues have become more numerous and complex, the organization has attempted to respond through its programs, services, and publications. Based on the results of a comprehensive needs assessment conducted by the board of directors in 1980-81, the **NOLPE School Law Journal** was discontinued, and the mini-monograph series and **Case Citations** were initiated. Both of the new publication ventures have been extremely successful. The NOLPE Board of Directors currently is engaged in developing long-range plans for the organization and is committed to keeping NOLPE responsive to its membership and at the forefront in the field of educational law.