

Appleseed This Week

Spotlight: Edwin Darden

Project Director Assumes Leadership Role in ELA

December 4, 2008 - Join us in congratulating **Edwin Darden**, education policy director at **Appleseed's national office**, on his election to the vice presidency of the Education Law Association's board of directors. Darden, an ELA board member for the past three years, will serve as vice president in 2009, followed by consecutive one-year terms as president-elect and president.

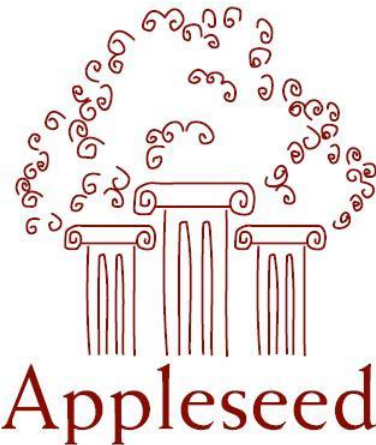
At the ELA's 2008 annual conference in mid-November, Darden also distinguished himself in a session titled "Keeping It Practical: Tackling Everyday

Legal Problems Involving Religion in Schools." As a specialist in First Amendment issues, particularly those relating to the free speech and religion clauses, Darden discussed a number of cases pertaining to the contentious intersection of public education and religious practice.

Among the legal questions discussed by the panel were whether a student or teacher can be released from class to pray; if a student can incorporate religious beliefs into a class assignment; and whether religious speech can be treated differently from other speech, and under what circumstances.

Darden's presentation and comments drew special praise from Dr. Terry Rowles of the Arizona School Boards Association. Of course, given his contributions to Appleseed, it should be little surprise that Darden's expertise drew attention at conference for which the theme was "Relevance and Reform: Building A Bridge Between Theory and Practice."

Currently, Darden is leading three primary educational projects at the national office: improving parental involvement under the No Child Left behind Act; examining the effect of teacher and principal contracts on school performance; and promoting equity of resources within a single district. The third project, according to Darden, is of particular import, as the pattern of unequal distribution of resources among poor and affluent neighborhoods within a single district is acute and repeated in urban, suburban, and occasionally even rural districts throughout the United States.



“Pointing out the consequences and the inequitable outcomes will allow policy decision makers to be more intentional about how to spread talent, curriculum development, facilities renovation, and other opportunities to all areas of the district, rather than reacting to the political advocacy of savvy parents who understand how to work the system,” he said.

On the horizon are possible projects related to examining the education received by English language learners under the No Child Left Behind Act, as well as devising a strategy to break the school-to-prison pipeline.

In addition to his duties at Appleseed and with the ELA, Darden serves as a contributing editor and school law columnist for the *American School Board Journal*. He also recently accepted invitations to sit on the Public Education Network Board of Directors’ Individual Constituency Building Committee and to give a presentation at the National PTA’s national conference.

Appleseed is proud to have as part of its team such an influential contributor to education law. More information about Darden’s projects can be viewed at:
<http://www.appleseednetwork.org/CurrentProjects/Education/tabid/80/Default.aspx>

For more information on Appleseed, visit www.appleseednetwork.org. To support the work of Appleseed, donate [here](#).

Appleseed, a nonprofit network of 16 public interest justice centers in the United States and Mexico, uncovers and corrects social injustices through legal, legislative and market-based structural reform. Appleseed Centers bring together volunteers from the law, business and academic professions to devise long-term solutions to problems in such areas as education, financial access and health care. For more information, visit: www.appleseednetwork.org.