

September 2026

www.GaAppleseed.org

Planted in a New Spot

Every seed needs the right spot to grow. Thanks to Board Member Raj Nichani, ours is a temporary home in the King Plow Arts Center, with room for our team and our work to grow.

Help Us Grow Here

Our new space has the essentials, but a few additions will transform it into a place where we can host partners and volunteers, and welcome families. Shop our **wish list** to send what we need straight to our door.

We're also looking for gently used office furniture:

- 6-8 office chairs
- 4 desks
- 2-3 round tables with chairs

Contact **Liz McDaniel** with donations.



Thanks for Helping Us Transplant

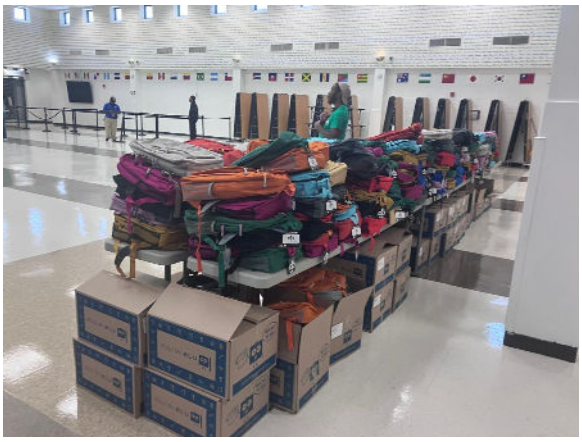
A special thank-you to Gio and Luis, volunteers from Lambda Theta Phi Latin Fraternity – Gamma Pi Chapter at Georgia State University, who lent some much-needed muscle to help us move!

New Mailing Address:
Georgia Appleseed
PO Box #672292
Marietta, GA 30006

Showing Up is a Big Part of the Work

In August, at a back-to-school fair in Chatham County hosted by Migrant Equity, Fatima Santillan spent most of a Saturday at a folding table talking with parents in Spanish about school. Fatima talked with parents about IEPs and supports for kids with disabilities, school discipline, and other school concerns. Nearly 300 families came through that event. Georgia Appleseed was the only organization there offering legal information in their language. Fatima writes about that day, and about the referral partnership with the Grow Initiative that came out of it, in her recent post, **Making Advocacy Accessible**.





We didn't show up empty-handed.
Six law firms donated an incredible **717 school-supply items** for families this back-to-school season.

A special thank-you to:
Bloom Parham
Bondurant Mixson & Elmore
Clyde & Co.
Hall Booth Smith
McDermott Will & Schulte
Troutman Pepper Locke

What We're Working On

Keeping Kids in School: A Healthier Response to Vaping



In some Georgia school districts, a student caught vaping for the first time risks a full year's suspension. Even in districts where the suspensions are shorter, a student comes back to class after the suspension with the same nicotine or THC habit and a large gap in instruction.

Parents and educators we talk with agree that vaping is a health problem for teenagers. But families do not have clear information about the laws, the school policies, and the cessation resources that would help their child quit and stay in school.

Over the summer, Darlene and Policy Staff Attorney Mary Kathryn Velazquez met with families, the Georgia Department of Education, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, the American Lung Association, and Georgia PTA to understand what prevention and cessation programs actually exist for students and where the gaps are. Darlene joined a Georgia PTA webinar with the American Lung Association to make the case for treating vaping as a health matter first.

On September 25, Mary Kathryn will present what we have learned to the Georgia House Blue-Ribbon Study Committee on Youth Exposure to Kratom and Retail Available

Substances, meeting in Athens. Our recommendation to the committee is simple: keep the student in school, and connect the student to help.

Partner Spotlight: Georgia Bar Foundation

Longstanding Support to Reach More Students

When the Georgia Bar Foundation first began funding our FAIR Project, FAIR served one group of children: students in foster care who were facing school tribunals. The Foundation's support, renewed year after year, is what let us build FAIR into something broader. Today FAIR helps any Georgia student facing a long-term suspension or expulsion, an enrollment denial, or a dispute over special education services. Last year that meant students in more than 70 counties received our help, many of them rural counties where no lawyer practices school law. We are grateful to the Georgia Bar Foundation for staying with this work long enough to see what it could become.

FAIR Spotlight:

75% Increase in Special Education Referrals

FAIR
Fairness Advocacy Individualized Representation
FACTOID

75%

That's the 2026 school year increase in special education referrals to FAIR from 2025.

The FAIR Project's phone rang more often last year than the year before--referrals were up 30 percent. And requests for help with special education rose 75 percent. Most came from parents and caregivers who had found us on their own (Google and ChatGPT), which tells us that families are looking for this help and not finding it elsewhere.

Many of the calls fit into a troubling pattern. The school sends a child with a disability home early, day after day, because the school says it cannot manage his behavior.

Our attorneys and advocates coach families through their rights, special education evaluations, IEP and 504 meetings, and school hearings that decide whether a child's conduct was connected to a disability.

If you know a K-12 student or a caregiver who needs this kind of help, **refer them here**.

Fresh Picks:

Georgia Appleseed in the Headlines



Georgia Appleseed in the Chronicle of Philanthropy

How can a small nonprofit team use AI to work more effectively without giving up the expertise and judgment that matter most?

Georgia Appleseed was recently **featured in the Chronicle of Philanthropy** for a few of the many ways our team uses AI to support grant writing, donor engagement, and internal operations — while keeping staff firmly in control of the final work. **Read more here about our approach to AI.** Want to learn more? Check out Michael's LinkedIn newsletter, **Field Notes on AI.**

Mary Kathryn Velazquez Awarded Education Policy Fellowship

Congratulations to Georgia Appleseed Policy Staff Attorney Mary Kathryn Velazquez! Mary Kathryn is a 2026–27 Georgia Education Policy Fellowship, part of a select program run by the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education.

The fellowship brings together education leaders from across Georgia to deepen their understanding of state education policy and strengthen their impact.



Support Us

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20 YEARS GEORGIA APPLESEED ESTABLISHED 2005 Center for Law & Justice

Your donation grows our impact and supports children across Georgia. Connecting with you helps us build our community of advocates and amplify our mission to advance justice statewide. View our video library on **YouTube,** and follow us on **Instagram**, **LinkedIn** and **FaceBook**.

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