



**RAPPAPORT CENTER**  
FOR LAW AND PUBLIC POLICY

**BOSTON COLLEGE | LAW**

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– Kristen Rosa

## **Kristen Rosa: Public Education's Promise**

Kristen Rosa has taught English and psychology to high schoolers on the Rosebud Reservation on Sicangu Lakota land in South Dakota, and she's crunched numbers to plug educational cracks for transfer schools in New York City.

She's had her life transformed as a 16-year-old delegate coming to terms with her identity in the Boston Center for Community and Justice Leadership Initiative, and she's helped to transform young lives as a staff member in that very program, since acquired by the YWCA.

She's been both a student and a teacher, and this summer had a front row seat to the inner-workings of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) as a Rappaport Fellow.

Which is all to say that the second-year, dual-degree student at Boston College Law is familiar with both the intimate reward of helping a student succeed, and the less personal but wider-ranging reward of designing systems to help many students succeed. The greatest of those rewards?

Well, she's still figuring that out.

"I'm glad I've got two more years to explore," she said.

It's the exploration, Kristen says, of "zooming in" to direct services vs. "zooming out" to policy-level work. After a career and education full of both, the 30-year-old had thought she was leaning toward a focus on zooming in, and in fact was looking forward to her juvenile rights advocacy class at B.C. this fall in hopes of further narrowing that target.

Then along came her Rappaport Fellowship at DESE, "and that kind of threw a wrench into my plans," she said.

It's a good wrench, though. In addition to the pandemic-specific issue of updating regulations to allow for remote learning, her work at DESE considered broader policy issues as well. It left her to consider the inequities found in public schools today, and her opportunity to help find a remedy.

Such as providing schools the flexibility to build systems that serve students of all learning abilities and styles. Such as making special education programs genuinely useful beyond mere adherence to regulations. Such as addressing the fact that students with IEPs are graduating at a disproportionately lower rate, and the fact that Black students are disproportionately funneled toward school resource officers rather than school psychologists.

"This is cheesy, but the most patriotic I have ever felt is considering the promise of public education, and the most angry I get is seeing the ways it has failed," Kristen said. "So when I talk about how I want to make it better, how I want to serve students and their families and their communities, that cannot be done unless I am working in a way that corrects those inequities."

She said she'll continue to lean on the vast Rappaport network in aiming toward that goal.

"The exciting part," she said, "is that there are a number of doors open."



– Dave Cummings  
davecumings1967@gmail.com