

**NOTICE TO ALL APPLICANTS:
EQUITY FOR STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, AND OTHER PROGRAM
BENEFICIARIES**

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) ([20 U.S.C. 1228a](#)) applies to applicants for grant awards under this program.

ALL APPLICANTS FOR NEW GRANT AWARDS MUST INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IN THEIR APPLICATIONS TO ADDRESS THIS PROVISION IN ORDER TO RECEIVE FUNDING UNDER THIS PROGRAM.

Please respond to the following requests for information:

1. Describe how your entity's existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.

The Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) Division of Elementary and Secondary Education-Office of Special Education (DESE-OSE) is committed to ensuring that students with disabilities have access to high-quality core instruction, with the supports they need, to close the achievement gap and provide greater post-secondary outcomes. Our mission is that every student will demonstrate that they are actively literate, critical thinkers, and community engaged.

2. Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?

There is a belief system among many educators across the state that segregating students with disabilities from core instruction with non-disabled peers will be beneficial, which creates a special education delivery model that supplants general education instruction. Some general education teachers do not feel confident or competent to educate students with disabilities, and many feel that educating students with disabilities within general education is harmful to students without disabilities.

Additional barriers that may impede equitable access include the disproportionate identification of certain races for any or a specific disability category, and discipline practices in some districts disproportionately remove black students from instruction.

Evaluation practices, beginning with the pre-referral process and intervention through identification, are not equitable across the state leading to overidentification of certain student populations as students with disabilities.

3. Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?

The DESE-OSE has implemented training across the state at local schools, districts, and regional educational cooperatives around the *Why* and *How* of inclusive education. These

trainings highlight the negative impact of segregating students with disabilities from their non-disabled peers during core instruction. Research shows that this practice will not improve educational and post-secondary outcomes. The training informs and encourages participants on how to build an inclusive mindset and implement inclusive practices into their educational system. In addition, our state technical assistance team (Arkansas Collaborative Consultants) supports the implementation of High Leverage Practices and Universal Design for Learning by providing professional learning to build capacity at the regional and local level.

The DESE-OSE began addressing the issues around disproportionality in 2020 and will continue to provide training through 2024 to address trends around dispute and disproportionality. Additional training in collaboration with monitoring, dispute resolution, fiscal, and behavioral support units of the DESE-OSE to address trends observed in discipline and dispute will be provided beginning in the summer of 2024.

The DESE-OSE also utilizes discretionary grants to support Behavior Support Specialists (BSS) across the state. The BSS team works to build capacity at the local level around school wide, classroom level and student specific research-based behavior practices to improve student access and outcomes.

The DESE-OSE has identified the evaluation process as a current barrier. The DESE-OSE will continue to partner with technical assistance providers to assist LEAs in appropriate evaluation practices, starting with the pre-referral process through determination. The DESE-OSE is partnering with local stakeholders in an Educational Examiner/School Psychology stakeholder group to ensure that higher education programs provide appropriate preparation for future professionals in those fields and assist in developing professional learning activities to build the capacity of current practitioners.

The DESE-OSE will continue to support LEAs that have been identified for significant disproportionality using professional development and technical assistance in root cause analysis, intervention determination, and the allowable use of required set-aside funds. The DESE-OSE has begun to assist LEAs in reviewing CCEIS profiles prior to being identified for significant disproportionality. This allows LEAs to begin the root-cause analysis prior to the third year of disproportionality and identification of significant disproportionality.

Special education rules are in review to streamline and eliminate barriers IEP teams may face in documenting services for students as they consider general education as the primary service location.

4. What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

The DESE-OSE analyzes multiple data sources throughout the year to assist in determining how to direct funds in alignment with the current state level activities and to develop technical assistance to address specific trends in the data. These activities are designed to address current barriers and prevent future barriers from impacting students with disabilities in accessing a free and appropriate public education. All state level activities that are funded through the DESE-OSE have performance measures that are aligned to

improve the state's SPP/APR. Below are the SPP/APR indicators that are used to measure the annual progress made in overcoming the state's identified barriers.

DESE-OSE will utilize APR Indicators 3A, 3B, 3D, 5A, and 17 targets as milestones to measure the impact of inclusive practices projects across the state in regard to addressing identified barriers around equitable access for students with disabilities to core instruction.

DESE-OSE will utilize APR Indicator 1A and 1B target rates to ensure that students with disabilities graduate with a regular high school diploma at an appropriate rate.

DESE-OSE will utilize APR Indicator 4 targets to track progress around equitable discipline policies and procedures at the local level to prevent the disproportionate removal of students.

Addressing barriers in education is a constantly evolving process. The DESE-OSE will continue to monitor available data, seek feedback, and work with stakeholders to identify new barriers and address existing barriers impacting students with disabilities in accessing a free and appropriate public education.

Notes:

1. Applicants are not required to have mission statements or policies that align with equity in order to submit an application.
2. Applicants may identify any barriers that may impede equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity, including, but not limited to, barriers based on economic disadvantage, gender, race, ethnicity, color, national origin, disability, age, language, migrant status, rural status, homeless status or housing insecurity, pregnancy, parenting, or caregiving status, and sexual orientation.
3. Applicants may have already included some or all of this required information in the narrative sections of their applications or their State Plans. In responding to this requirement, for each question, applicants may provide a cross-reference to the section(s) and page number(s) in their applications or State Plans that includes the information responsive to that question on this form or may restate that information on this form.

Paperwork Burden Statement

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless such collection displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 1894-0005. Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 3 hours per response, including time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering, and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. The obligation to respond to this collection is required to obtain or retain a benefit. If you have any comments concerning the accuracy of the time estimate or suggestions for improving this individual collection, send your comments to ICDocketMgr@ed.gov and reference OMB Control Number 1894-0005. All other comments or concerns regarding the status of your individual form may be addressed to either (a) the person listed in the FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT section in the competition Notice Inviting Applications, or (b) your assigned program officer.