

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 Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) is committed to providing equitable access and equitable participation in Federally-assisted programs for students, teachers, and other program beneficiaries with special needs. When planning, Pennsylvania considers six types of possible barriers that could impede equitable access or participation: gender, race, national origin, color, disability, or age.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act has three distinct requirements around equity: Disproportionate Representation (State Performance Plan (SPP) Indicators 9 and 10), Significant Discrepancy (SPP Indicators 4A and 4B), and Significant Disproportionality. The Bureau of Special Education (BSE) identifies, monitors, and verifies that each local educational agency (LEA) is correctly implementing the specific regulatory requirements. In addition, under Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), LEAs have been identified by the PDE for *School Improvement* due to poor performance and poor graduation rates of students with disabilities. Many of these LEAs have also been identified by the BSE as a State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) learning site due to poor graduation rates of students with disabilities. Many of these LEAs have also been identified with Significant Discrepancy, Disproportionate Representation and Significant Disproportionality. All of these designations signify and require improvement activities that are supported and monitored by distinctly different divisions of PDE. These efforts are shared and coordinated in order to avoid redundancy and support improvement. Stakeholder input suggests creating professional learning communities around best practices for addressing suspensions and expulsions of students with disabilities. Further, ensure that the IEP team works to identify and address gaps in educational programming and encourage schools to adopt a child-centered approach to addressing discrepancies. Similar collaboration and activities around the evaluation and identifications of students with disabilities may lead to culturally responsive evaluation practices.

From the onset, the Governor's office has led a call to action around a platform of equity, inclusion, and belonging across all communities. In Pennsylvania, equity has been defined as "every student having access to the educational resources and rigor they need at the right moment in their education across race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, family background and/or family income". To help foster inclusive communities, legislation was introduced to mandate the inclusion of the political, economic, and social contributions of individuals with disabilities in Pennsylvania's K-12 curriculum. Teaching our

children about influential individuals with disabilities, such as Harriet Tubman, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Stephen Hawking, and Michael J. Fox, we can demonstrate the profound, positive impact that individuals with disabilities have had on our society and work to create a more tolerant and inclusive world. Under that charge and as a means to continually mitigate barriers, legislation was signed for the Disability Inclusive Curriculum as part of the education code for Pennsylvania. The ceremonial bill signing at the Capitol, regarding the Disability Inclusive Curriculum Legislation (HB 1642), was held on Tuesday, September 20, 2022. The revisions to the school code were spearheaded by Disability Equality Education and Representative Hohenstein. It creates a pilot program related to instruction on the contributions by people with disabilities that will be implemented during the 2023-2024 school year.

As a means to address the staffing shortages in Pennsylvania, BSE has partnered with the Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research, Calder American Institutes for Research to study the impact of the implementation of targeted projects to attract, prepare, and retain special education personnel based on the region of the state, socio-economic status of the LEA, and the race and gender of PK-12 special education teacher candidates. One of the targeted projects, The Developing Future Special Educators Grant, is designed to inspire the next generation of special educators. Over the next two years, the outcomes of the Developing Future Special Educators Grant include:

- The establishment or expansion of experiential learning opportunities aligned to special education career pathways with purposeful recruitment and marketing to future special educators.
- The support of current educators in advancing future special educators' knowledge and understanding of the varied opportunities within the field of special education and how to address the social-emotional, behavioral, and/or learning of students with disabilities.
- The increased interest of secondary/postsecondary students in pursuing a career as a special educator by providing experiential learning that supports the success of students with disabilities.
- The PA mentoring project builds connections with other special education personnel across Pennsylvania to share ideas, engage in problem-solving, and learning from one another.

Additional information regarding Pennsylvania's Attract, Prepare, Retain (APR) efforts can be found on the [APR Repository](#).

Intermediate Units conduct annual needs assessments to collect data on personnel development needs. This information is used by the Training and Consultation (TaC) system to provide technical assistance to school districts in facilitating, implementing, and designing professional development activities targeted to specific regional needs, including personnel shortages.

Supports provided by TaCs include:

- Supporting local LEA administrators on academic and behavioral initiatives that address students at risk, and implementation of school-wide systems of support.
- Supporting LEAs in finding/creating programs to meet the needs of low incidence populations.
- Engaging in school/community/parent partnership efforts.
- Collaborating in data collection, maintenance, and evaluation.
- Planning, developing, and implementing training activities.

- Collecting data on trainings, consultative efforts, projects, and initiatives to analyze and summarize effectiveness of services for LEAs.

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

Staffing shortages remain a challenge throughout the Commonwealth. Teachers, administrators, and school staff need additional support in order to meet the requirements of IDEA.

Understaffed schools make family engagement and connections difficult due to lack of time and resources. Families are working multiple jobs to make ends meet which further exacerbates school/family connections.

The provisions of *Child Find* often and in particular, in large urban school districts, fall short in meeting the federally required timelines due to shortages in qualified personnel to conduct initial evaluations.

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?

Pennsylvania is currently addressing staffing shortages through the APR Initiative and continues to meet with the Steering Committee and the Core Team members regularly to add resources and supports to the Repository. Pennsylvania has also provided grant opportunities for LEAs and higher education to partner in addressing staffing shortages.

BSE and the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN) work to provide training in specific areas of need and provide coaching and professional development to new and seasoned special educators.

In response to family engagement concerns as it relates to Pennsylvania's State Systemic Improvement Plan, BSE embedded family engagement as a coherent improvement strategy within the implementation framework of action planning/decision-making to improve graduation rates.

As a means to address shortages of qualified school psychologists, the PDE/BSE has recently announced paid internships for out of state graduate students.

State Improvement Plan Indicator data are collected, analyzed, and evaluated regularly to identify specific needs related to meeting the requirements of IDEA and addressing barriers to equitable access and participation in education. Data also serves to inform practices and determine technical assistance and professional development activities annually.

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

The APR Initiative began in 2021 and is expected to continue and grow over the next five years.

SPP Indicator specific data and Cyclical Monitoring data are reviewed annually and are the basis of BSE initiatives and training plans.

PaTTAN training and technical assistance and BSE Advisor monitoring and support occur continuously and as needed.

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

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