

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 Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) is committed to equity and, as an organization, we have a collective responsibility to fulfil the proposed projects and activities through an equity-focused lens.

Advancing equity and access in education for students with disabilities in Connecticut remain top priorities. Intentional partnerships are forged with our sister agencies, regional and state educational centers, educators, and families to ensure that all students have equitable access to our proposed activities regardless of gender, race, color, disability status, primary language, housing stability, or income status.

We understand the need for a differentiated approach to ensure equitable opportunities and to maintain high expectations for our student populations who are most disproportionately affected by barriers to learning. This differentiated approach occurs across all aspects of our General Monitoring and Supervision systems.

The State Board of Education's ("the Board") comprehensive plan for education "Every Student Prepared for Learning, Life and Work Beyond School" supports the concept that all students, regardless of their life circumstance, deserve an excellent education that helps them reach high standards of performance and successfully prepares them for lifelong learning and their future career. The Board's promise to students is to:

- Ensure equitable access to education,
- Ensuring safe and healthy learning environments,
- Elevating Connecticut's Curriculum framework,
- Creating opportunities for students to explore multiple career pathway options.

Connecticut also remains committed to ongoing efforts related to our previous Equity Plan titled, "Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators." We continue this work by:

- Strengthening the Preparation, Support, and Development of Principals.

- Strengthening Preparation and Support for Teachers
- Supporting Cultural Consciousness and Competence
- Assessing current Working Conditions
- Examining Effective Use of Per Pupil Expenditures
- Working to address Specific Teaching Shortage Areas

Connecticut is also committed to high quality curricula regardless of the student's zip code. Our state took legislative action with the passing of Public Act 21-02, which requires the CSDE to develop, for the first time, age-appropriate and rigorous model curricula to supplement existing local curricula. Model curricula development is done through collaboration with the State Education Resource Center, subject matter experts, district officials, educators, and additional stakeholders. With this implementation, Connecticut will become one of the "open education resource" states in the nation.

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

During times of crisis, such as the recent onset of the pandemic, the CSDE demonstrated a continued commitment and focus on equity. Our plan relies on the use of statewide data to inform state and local learning strategies, a commitment to targeting investments to address the needs of students disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and providing supports and guidance for local school district plans. Connecticut has led its pandemic response with students and equity at the center.

The CSDE's General Monitoring and Supervision system is designed to increase outcomes for students with disabilities by ensuring that eligible students with disabilities are provided with a free appropriate public education. We also work collaboratively with our Parent Training and Information Center to ensure that parents are informed and have access to resources to prepare them to be meaningful members of the IEP Team process. Language differences can serve as a barrier to equitable access and participation of an increasingly diverse student population.

Connecticut is not immune to the current staffing shortages facing our nation. Recent survey data demonstrate that the highest percentage of vacancies in our local schools include certified and non-certified special education positions.

Connecticut has high rates of activity within our dispute resolution system. Parents and stakeholders access our Formal Complaints, Mediation, and Due Process structures on a consistent basis. The CSDE understands the challenges in ensuring that parents are informed of their rights and protections and school districts are informed about their responsibilities under Federal and State special education laws. Additionally, the CSDE works to ensure that family's geographical location, socio-economic status, or cultural differences do not serve as barriers to access the dispute resolution system.

Student engagement, specially designed instruction, and access to highly qualified educators provide an important foundation for students' educational success. Students with disabilities have higher rates of chronic absenteeism, truancy, and lack of engagement in their education. The disruption to their continuity of instruction and access to FAPE serve as a barrier to improved outcomes for 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?

Crisis Response:

The state released an equity-focused needs assessment tool for LEAs and is encouraging LEAs to continue use of existing assessments or conduct new needs assessments. To address the lingering effects of the pandemic, the CSDE is engaged in a continuous process of progress monitoring of recovery efforts.



The CSDE has worked to ensure our local school districts understand their responsibilities related to recovery and to provide resources to accelerate learning to support those efforts. We have also established a unique partnership with our institutions of higher education, University of Connecticut (UConn) and Yale University, to engage in research and data analysis of our K-12 recovery investments. This investment in this partnership is a strong signal to communities that we are committed to studying and evaluating our K-12 recovery investments and publicly

reporting findings, so educators, leaders, parents and communities understand how recovery funds were used in their schools.

IEP Quality/Parents as meaningful members of the IEP Team:

The CSDE has partnered with external vendors to provide supports across the state to ensure equity is addressed and monitored, such as allocating funds through a transparent grant process (electronic grant management system or eGMS) in a timely manner, in order for LEAs to fund programming that is impactful to their populations. The CSDE also launched a new IEP and data system called the Connecticut Special Education Data System (CT-SEDS). The IEP was redesigned to improve the accessibility of the document for both parents and educators and the system was designed to generate higher quality IEPs that are adaptive to the student's individualized needs. The system also includes a Parent Portal where parents can access process-generated documents including the IEP in the parent's native language.

Staffing Shortages:

The CSDE has engaged in a multifaceted approach to attract, prepare, and retain special education and related services professionals across our state. One specific strategy resulted in the launch of a new special education specific employment opportunity website called Connecticut Special Education Employment System (CSEES). This resource is provided to our schools and districts at no cost. Within the system, school districts can post their certified and noncertified vacancies and utilize social media platforms to reach prospective educators across the country.

Dispute Resolution:

The CSDE is working with a variety of stakeholders including our State Advisory Council for Special Education to prioritize and identify proactive alternatives to the dispute resolution system. Additionally, we are engaged in a process of reviewing our parent information and resources for accessibility, readability, and reliable impact. The goal of the alternative processes is to ensure equitable access to successful solutions to make sustainable supports across Connecticut.

Student Engagement:

Improving and sustaining good attendance requires the active engagement of district and school-based leaders and administrators along with a clear articulation of roles and responsibilities. Successful strategies include forming district and school attendance teams, analyzing data, identifying trends and factors contributing to chronic absence, and implementing a multi-tiered approach to reducing chronic absence. The CSDE acknowledges the importance of the use of technology as a tool in supporting student engagement in their learning and is committed to ensuring access for all students.

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

Crisis/Recovery/Sustaining Response:

- FFY22/FY23 IDEA Part B Sec 611/619 **(9-30-24)**
- FFY22/FY23 ESSER III Activities through the BSE **(12-30-24)**
- FFY23/FY24 IDEA Part B Sec 611/619 **(9-30-25)**
- FFY24/FY25 IDEA Part B Sec 611/619 **(9-30-26)**
- Local Audit Summaries **(Ongoing)**
- Fiscal Risk Rubric/Monitoring **(January 1-December 30/Annually)**
- Review and Analysis of formal Complaints related to Recovery **(Monthly)**
- Differentiated Monitoring System/Fiscal Review Team **(Monthly)**
- Differentiated Discretionary LEA Stipend Opportunities **(Based upon the number of the IEPs/size of the LEA - Spring 2025)**

IEP Quality/Parents as meaningful members of the IEP Team:

- Train 10,000 Educators in IEP Quality Modules with fidelity. **(2024)**
- Train Parent Leaders in Train/Trainer Model (IEP Quality Training for Parents).
- Provide Regional IEP Quality Sessions for Parents. **(2024)**
- Explore existing capacity in state for IEP Interpreters.
- Partner with intuitions of higher education to develop a training program for interpreters in special education. **(2024)**
- Provide regional support to LEAs to expand access to IEP Team interpreters (with special education content knowledge). **(2024/2025)**

Staffing Shortages:

- 120,000 “hits/month” candidate views (online traffic) **(2024)**
- Training and Informational Session for LEAs, Approved Private Special Education Programs, Charter Schools, Magnet Schools. **(2024/2025)**
- Provide specific social media campaigns for large urban centers to attract educators (in-state/out-of-state) **(2024/2025)**

Dispute Resolution:

- Explore the following alternatives to formal dispute resolution with stakeholders: **(2024)**
 - Effective Conversations
 - BSE Call Center
 - IEP Facilitation
 - Expanded Mediation
 - Student-led IEP Team Meetings
- Prioritize options for Connecticut and identify actionable steps for implementation. **(2024)**

- Implement pilot/action plan **(2024/2025)**
- Review effectiveness/Evaluate/Expand statewide **(2025)**

Student Engagement:

- Design Assistive Technology (AT) Regional/State-wide Web-based Hub to support districts with resources, training, and technical assistance.
 - Develop Website **(2024/2025)**
 - Provide Regional/State-wide Support **(2024)**.
- Continue to support LEAs by providing membership to AT vendor with access to training, resources, AT Library, and AT evaluations. **(Cohort Model/Annually)**
- CSDE provides resources for improving student attendance and shares resources from our national partners: **(Annually)**
 - Reducing Chronic Absence in Connecticut Schools: A Prevention and Intervention Guide for Schools and Districts, CSDE **(Annually)**
 - Attendance Works Self-assessment Tools (district and schools), Attendance Works **(Annually)**
 - Attendance Playbook and Implementation Guide, FutureEd and Attendance Works **(Annually)**
- EdSight provides districts, schools, families, and communities access to yearly and monthly attendance data. Annual Chronic Absence Data and Trends, EdSight - Chronic Absenteeism and Monthly Attendance Reports, Supporting Student Participation Dashboard. **(Annually)**
- CSDE has partnered with Attendance Works and EdAdvance with Connecticut's year-long Attendance Awareness Campaign. Messaging materials are available, in multiple languages, for Connecticut districts and schools to use in their own campaigns. The resources include banners, parent handouts, posters, and coloring pages. **(Annually)**
- Multiple Disciplinary Communities of Practices to Address Student Engagement: **(2024-25)**
- Annual Attendance & Engagement Symposium **(Annually)**
- Establish the *CT Home Visiting Hub* provides training, technical assistance and support to districts **(2024/2025)**

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.