**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](https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2020-title20/html/USCODE-2020-title20-chap31-subchapII-part2-sec1228a.htm)) 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 [educational vision](https://www.doe.mass.edu/commissioner/vision/) and strategic objectives of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) are anchored in a commitment to high-quality teaching and learning for elementary and secondary students and adult learners. The Department works with educators in schools, districts, and other organizations to promote teaching and learning that is antiracist, inclusive, multilingual, and multicultural. The Department values each and every student and their families and helps to create affirming environments where students have a sense of belonging and are engaged in deeper learning, resulting in equitable access to opportunities and experiences for all students, particularly those historically resilient and underserved.

To implement its vision and objectives, the Department utilizes the state performance plan and annual performance report (SPP/APR) as well as the state systemic improvement plan (SSIP) to provide districts with support for continuous improvement and result-based accountability that is specifically designed to improve outcomes for students with disabilities, through equitable access to and participation in a high-quality education system.

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

The Department’s efforts to continuously improve and ensure equitable access to, and participation in a high-quality education system for students, adult learners, and families, have uncovered several barriers to equitable access for students, educators, and other beneficiaries of special education programming. These barriers include the following:

* 1. Delayed transitions from IDEA Part C to Part B services due to inconsistent early childhood education practices and under-developed age-appropriate social-emotional skills creates barriers for some students entering kindergarten;
	2. Limited availability of secondary transition programming for students who aged out of special education during and since the COVID-19 pandemic;
	3. Limited access to special education related information and resources for historically resilient or underserved families supporting students with disabilities; and
	4. Inconsistent coordination of services for students who are served by multiple state agencies and local school districts, including students transitioning from secondary school, students in institutional and correctional settings, students experiencing homelessness and migration, and students in foster care.
1. 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?
	1. The Department continues to improve the transition from IDEA Part C to IDEA Part B services for young children by collaborating with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Early Intervention Division to provide intensive support to early intervention (EI) programs and districts to improve the coordination of services supporting timely early childhood transition. Through this collaboration, schools and districts are provided technical assistance to improve systems that support the social and emotional development of young children and their readiness for kindergarten. Additionally, targeted assistance is provided to identified districts to help them conduct root cause analyses to identify barriers and improvement strategies. Technical assistance includes offering office hours for districts and creating a community of practice that focuses on timely evaluation, eligibility determination, and implementing IEP services for preschool children by their third birthday (Indicator 12.)Evidence-based strategies related to the implementation of the Pyramid Model provides solution-focused direct consultation and coaching designed to improve early childhood outcomes for preschool-aged children with disabilities. The Department works closely with the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC), the agency that oversees community childcare and early intervention programs, to increase and improve the opportunities for preschool students with disabilities to learn in their natural inclusive environments. More information on this initiative can be found in the SSIP.
	2. The Commonwealth has appropriated ten (10) million dollars for transition services for IDEA eligible students with disabilities who reached age 22 between March 10, 2020 and September 1, 2023. The Department collaborates with state agencies that provide adult services to individuals with disabilities to expand their current programmatic offerings related to transitioning from secondary school. Programmatic offerings including vocational rehabilitation services, job training and coaching, self-advocacy skill development, and independent living skills training are provided by the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB), Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC), and Department of Developmental Services (DDS). In addition, eligible individuals can participate in the [Massachusetts Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative (MAICEI)](https://www.mass.edu/strategic/maicei.asp) at five institutions of higher education, coordinated by the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (DHE).
	3. The Department recognizes the complexity of information related to special education and has taken steps to make information more accessible and comprehensible for all families, including those who do not speak English as their primary language. The Department, in collaboration with the Federation for Children with Special Needs (FCSN), which serves as the Parent Training and Information (PTI) center in Massachusetts, holds virtual sessions on the State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report indicators and other special education related topics, such as evaluation and eligibility, IEP development, and transition services, with simultaneous interpretations in multiple languages. These languages include American Sign Language, Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Vietnamese, and Chinese, which besides English are the most commonly used languages in the state. The Department regularly updates the state’s SPP/APR indicator webpages that now include user-friendly Quick Reference Guides (QRGs) and PowerPoints that were developed specifically for families. These materials and all other special education print materials are available in Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Vietnamese, and Chinese. Additionally, the Department works with the FCSN to develop and share resources with families in multiple languages. The FCSN established cultural brokers who are available to families in community settings. In collaboration with the Department, the FCSN hosts an annual conference for families, advocates, and providers that accommodates more that 900 participants including real-time translation of presentations and individual presentations presented in multiple languages. The conference provides participants with current trends, research-based practices, and resources related to special education in Massachusetts.
	4. To support students served by multiple agencies, the Department has developed systems to share information consistent with legal safeguards, to clarify roles and responsibilities among service providers, and to coordinate service provision among the agencies that serve these students. Leadership at agencies serving students meet regularly to discuss and collaborate on memorandum of understandings to improve data sharing and special education eligibility identification, updates to regulations and the issuance of guidance for school districts, strategies to provide technical assistance and targeted support, and development of systems that promote collaborative problem solving for complex cases.
2. What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?
	1. In 2023-2024, the Department has collaborated with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Early Intervention Division to provide intensive support to early intervention (EI) programs and districts to improve the coordination of services supporting timely evaluation, eligibility determination, IEP development, and overall early childhood transition. The Department continues to offer and provide targeted professional development and training, practice-based equity coaching, and guidance through the remainder of the 2023-2024 school year. Professional development includes training on evidence-based practices addressing inclusion for young learners, the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT), the use of the Behavioral Incident Report System (BIRs), strategies for improving the social emotional development of young learners, and how to improve positive social-emotional outcomes for preschool students (indicator 7). During the 2024-2025 school year, practice-based equity coaching will continue with external, and district based coaching staff supported by the Pyramid Model. The Department also released new guidance related to the implementation of indicator 7.
	2. The Massachusetts Legislature appropriated funding to support transition services for eligible students with disabilities who reached age 22 between March 10, 2020 and September 1, 2023. The CSN will continue to direct inquiring families to the appropriate state agency offering additional transition services until funds are dispersed or through 2027, whichever comes first. The DDS, MCB, and MRC will continue to expand the available types and location of services offered a. During 2024-2025, DHE) is offering expanded services at institutions of higher education through the [Massachusetts Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative (MAICEI)](https://www.mass.edu/strategic/maicei.asp). The Department will continue to collect and analyze data, monitor programming and progress, and make programmatic adjustments through the spring of 2027.
	3. The Department regularly creates print material for families and will continue to translate materials into the top five (5) languages for the state in addition to English. The Department will also continue to offer virtual and in-person information sessions to families on special education related topics. The Department will create and maintain narrated versions of each indicator PowerPoint available on FCSN’s YouTube page. The Department will also maintain original and translated QRGs and PowerPoints that summarize each of the SPP/APR indicators for families to include the most recently available data as soon as the summer and fall 2024. The Department will also conduct training for interpreters on special education related topics, including IEP meetings, during the 2024-2025 school year.
	4. During the remainder of this and next school year, the Department will continue to finalize necessary updates to existing data sharing agreements, regulations, guidance, and procedures to further strengthen equitable access and improve outcomes for students with disabilities. The Department will also provide technical assistance to school districts and state agencies simultaneously serving the same student, monitor education programs in institutional and correctional settings, ensure accountability, and continue to collaborate with leadership from other state agencies to participate in collaborative problem solving for complex cases.

**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.