

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 District of Columbia's Early Intervention Program (DC EIP) is housed at the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). The mission of OSSE as DC's state education agency is to set high standards, build educator and system capacity to meet those standards, expand educational opportunities for all learners with a focus on those underserved, and hold everyone accountable for results.

Early intervention services in the District are provided following the Natural Learning Environment Practices (NLEP) framework, which includes delivering services in the child's natural environment where he/she spends most of their time and where they feel most comfortable.

DC EIP has implemented practices and policies that address barriers to access by language, income, and geography in order to ensure equitable access for all eligible DC residents DC EIP either provides early interventionists that speak the language of the family or interpreters that facilitate the communication with the families. Program documents are available in all seven languages required by the [District's Language Access Act](#) and child specific documents, such as the Individualized Family Service Plan (ISFP), are translated upon parent request.

Part C early intervention services are provided at no charge to families. Other than local and federal funding, the only additional funding source that DC has incorporated into its Part C system is public insurance (Medicaid), which covers 56% of DC children. DC does not access private insurance or implement family fees. DC EIP policies have eliminated any financial barriers in order to allow all families in the District to participate in the program.

Lastly, DC EIP has incorporated in all agreements for service provision requirements that each Contractor provide services proportionally in all Wards of the District and be in-network with all Medicaid Managed Care Organizations (MCO). This ensures that families have access to all providers that deliver early intervention services regardless of where they live or what MCO coverage they have.

To ensure that these policies and practices are resulting in equitable participation, DC EIP regularly reviews data on referrals, evaluations completed, program participation and other key indicators by child/family race, Ward, and Medicaid participation status, and uses this data to inform strategies to enhance outreach or address potential barriers to participation by populations that may be underrepresented.

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

Economic disadvantage, housing insecurity and geography are barriers that impede equitable access in the District. Historically, families who reside in Wards 5,7 and 8 of the District have the lowest engagement rates for eligibility determination and participation in services compare to the other Wards. This is due to families experiencing housing instability in these wards, lack of trust in public programs and perceived stigma in receiving special education services among other factors.

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?

DC EIP continues to work through a variety of strategies to increase evaluation completion rates and program participation for children in Wards 5, 7 and 8. OSSE's long effort to have a physical location for its Strong Start program in Wards 7 or 8 came to fruition, and a new location in Ward 7 was delivered in Dec. 2020. Strong Start now has a presence in the community and initial family interviews and evaluations can be conducted at the Pennsylvania Avenue location upon request, reducing barriers for families who do not want to conduct evaluations in a home context due to housing insecurity or lack of trust in public programs. In FY23, Strong Start will offer parent workshops and playgroups. These activities will allow the program to engage with the community in Wards 7 and 8 to build public awareness, familiarity and trust in these communities to increase the rate that evaluations are completed in these Wards.

In FY23, to further address identified barriers, Strong Start will pilot a new process for families that decide not to engage with the program. The Intake Coordinator will contact a family after the case has been closed by a service coordinator prior to conducting an evaluation to determine eligibility. This process will allow Strong Start to learn why families decline to participate in the program, which will help DC EIP better target communication and messaging for new families, as well as gain potential ideas for parent workshops that may be attractive to families.

Strong Start's implementation of the primary service provider and teaming approach, a recognized best practice for early intervention, has significantly increased collaboration among all team members. Using this approach, families are matched with a lead early interventionist who serves as the primary provider on a child's team. Case managers from the Medicaid Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) and Strong Start service coordinators (SCs) work closely together to follow up with referred families that have an MCO assigned and have a record of unsuccessful engagement attempts to participate in the program. DC EIP plans to hold professional development opportunities that will bring early interventionists, SCs and MCO case managers together to further increase collaboration.

After a two-year hiatus due to the public health emergency mandates, DC EIP was able to secure a new agreement with DC Public Libraries (DCPL) to bring back community playgroups, which are equitably accessible to all DC families. In FY22, planning and communication was completed by partnering with DCPL leadership staff on identifying specific library branches that had a demand for this type of program. In addition, the new agreement allows for flexibility in scheduling, as well as the ability to provide "Pop-Up" playgroups and other various outreach events at local branches. Moving forward, this will strengthen the partnership between two DC

Government agencies serving infants/toddlers and allow for more timely scheduling of future events as community needs arise.

4. What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?
Offer parent workshops and playgroups at the Penn Ave. location – by Dec. 2023
Pilot a new process to contact families who decide not to engage with Strong Start to conduct the eligibility evaluation – by Dec. 2023
Conduct joint professional development workshops – by July 2023
Expansion of community playgroups at DCPL locations – by Mar. 2024

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.