**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 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 values each and every student and their families and helps to create environments where students are engaged in deeper learning, resulting in access to opportunities and experiences for all students. 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 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 provide access to, and participation in a high-quality education system for students, adult learners, and families, have uncovered several barriers to access for students, educators, and other beneficiaries of special education programming. These barriers include the following:

* 1. Limited availability of secondary transition programming for students who aged out of special education;
	2. In some instances, staffing shortages, as well as challenges with recruitment and retention of special education teachers and administrators may impact the quality of support available to students with disabilities;
	3. In some instances, challenges with coordination of services for students who are served by multiple state agencies and school districts, including students transitioning from secondary school, students experiencing homelessness, and students in foster care; and
	4. In some instances, delayed transitions from IDEA Part C to Part B services occur due to inconsistent implementation of early childhood education practices and under-developed age-appropriate social-emotional skills create barriers for some students entering kindergarten.
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. Massachusetts has appropriated ten (10) million dollars to be used for transition services for eligible students with disabilities who reached the age of 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 MassAbility (formerly the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission) and Department of Developmental Services (DDS), and with self-directed funds managed by a contracted vendor. The Department also works closely with the [Massachusetts Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative (MAICEI)](https://www.mass.edu/strategic/maicei.asp). Through this program, students with disabilities can attend institutions of higher education, with supports coordinated by the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (DHE). The Department works with a contracted vendor, the Federation for Children with Special Needs to provide information and training to students and families about transition planning.
	2. The Department recognizes that there are some challenges with recruiting and retaining qualified special education teachers and administrators. In part to address these challenges, the Department has developed Leadership Institutes. In 2024-2025, the Department offered Leadership Institutes for Early Childhood Coordinators, New Special Education Directors, Experienced Special Education Directors and Special Education Team Leaders. In the 2025-2026 school year, the Department plans to expand its Leadership Institutes to include Building Leaders/Principals to share information and research-based practices to support students with disabilities. The Department utilizes SEA and LEA data to develop professional development opportunities and technical assistance to support districts. The Department holds regular meetings for special education leaders across the state to support them by providing timely and thorough technical assistance. The Department also recognizes the complexity of information related to special education and has taken steps to make information more accessible and comprehensible for educators as well as families. The Department, in collaboration with the Federation for Children with Special Needs, which serves as the Parent Training and Information (PTI) center in Massachusetts, provides training for educators as well as families. 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 educators and families.
	3. To support students served by multiple agencies, the Department has developed systems to share information consistent with the applicable legal requirements, to clarify roles and responsibilities among service providers, and to coordinate service provision among the agencies that serve these students. Leadership from various state agencies serving students with disabilities meet regularly to discuss and collaborate on memoranda of understanding to improve data sharing and special education eligibility identification, potential 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.
	4. 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 school districts to improve the coordination of services supporting timely early childhood transition. Through this collaboration, schools and districts are provided with 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 also works with the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) and the Department of Public Health, the agencies that oversee 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. What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?
	1. 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 Federation for Children with Special Needs 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. DDS, MassAbility and the Federation for Children with Special Needs will continue to expand the available types and location of services offered. The Department will continue to collect and analyze data, monitor programming and progress, and make programmatic adjustments through the spring of 2027. During 2024-2025, the DHE offered 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 work with the program and share information regarding enrollment and services available to eligible youth. The Department will also continue to work with the Federation for Children with Special Needs throughout 2025-2026 to support the development trainings for families across the Commonwealth.
	2. During the 2025-2026 school year, the Department will continue to offer Leadership Institutes for educators. In 2025-2026 the Department will offer Leadership Institutes for Early Childhood Coordinators, Special Education Directors, and Special Education Team Leaders. In the 2025-2026 school year, the Department plans to expand its Leadership Institutes to include building leaders/principals to share information and research-based practices to support students with disabilities. The Department will also continue to work with the Federation for Children with Special Needs to develop and offer training and high quality professional development to educators and families.
	3. During the remainder of this and the next school year, the Department will continue to review and finalize necessary updates to existing data sharing agreements, regulations, guidance, and procedures to further strengthen access and improve outcomes for students with disabilities. The Department will also continue to provide technical assistance to school districts and state agencies that serve the same students, and continue to collaborate with leadership from other state agencies to participate in collaborative problem solving for complex cases.
	4. In 2024-2025, 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 will continue to offer and provide targeted professional development and training, practice-based coaching, and guidance throughout the remainder of 2024-2025 school year. During the 2025-2026 school year, practice-based coaching will continue with external, and district based coaching staff supported by the Pyramid Model.

**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.