

**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.**

Maine's Part B program is deeply committed to providing high quality, inclusive education to students with identified disabilities. With the support of Maine Department of Education, the Office of Special Services has changed its name to OSSIE (Office of Special Services and Inclusive Education). The Maine DOE continues its commitment to providing high-quality instruction to students with disabilities and variable learning needs with a focus on inclusive classroom instructional practices and settings. Effectively including a diverse spectrum of students with disabilities, learning and cultural variability in the general education classroom requires teachers and school administrators to further develop an understanding of the individual strengths and needs of each student, not just those students with disabilities. Access to general education curriculum and participation in school is a foundation for equity in our state. To this end, the Maine DOE and the OSSIE Team will partner with school administrative units (SAUs) and other stakeholders to provide technical assistance and professional development designed to increase educational opportunities for all students. Further, there will be targeted collaboration with other Department initiatives that support equitable opportunities for children and young adults in Maine.

Maine is compliant with federal regulations established to prevent discriminatory practices, including the following:

1. The State has established and maintains an advisory panel for the purpose of providing policy guidance with respect to special education. State Part B Annual State Application: FFY 2023 Section II - 4 OMB No. 1820-0030/Expiration Date – 01-31-2026 and related services for children with disabilities in the State as found in 20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(21)(A)-(D); 34 CFR §§300.167-300.169.
2. The State educational agency examines data, including data disaggregated by race and ethnicity, to determine if significant discrepancies are occurring in the rate of long-term suspensions and expulsions of children with disabilities in accordance with 20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(22)(A)-(B); 34 CFR §300.170.
3. The State has in effect, consistent with the purposes of the IDEA and with section 618(d) of the Act, policies and procedures designed to prevent the inappropriate overidentification or disproportionate representation by race and ethnicity of children as children with disabilities, including children with disabilities with a particular impairment described in 34 CFR §300.8. (20 U.S.C 1412(a)(24); 34 CFR §300.173)

Maine recently changed certification requirements to require educators in the state to participate in a minimum of three semester hours in diversity-centered content related to today's classroom (e.g., culturally responsive teaching, multicultural education, intercultural education, second language acquisition or world language teaching methods). There is also a requirement to complete an approved course for teaching students with exceptionalities in the regular classroom.

In response to staffing shortages, Maine DOE developed an initiative known as [#TeachMaine](#). There are four prongs to the plan including a workforce diversification goal. Building an educator workforce that reflects the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of the student population has been shown to have positive impacts on student achievement.<sup>1</sup> Teacher identities matter to students' education. Research has shown that matching teacher racial identity with student identity can improve academic achievement, high school graduation rates, and college enrollment rates.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, all students who have had teachers of diverse race or cultural background are better prepared for success in a global world.<sup>3</sup>

The diversification of Maine's educator workforce is a top priority for the Maine DOE. The Department recently hired a Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) to lead internal and external DEI initiatives and professional learning. Additionally, Maine will build on the work of the [New England Secondary School Consortium](#)'s (NESSC) Diversifying the Educator Workforce Task Force, of which Maine DOE was an active contributor, as well as Portland Public Schools (PPS) initiatives. Both organizations have generated reports with recommendations for the recruitment and retention of diverse educators (NESSC's report: [Increasing the Racial, Ethnic, and Linguistic Diversity of the Educator Workforce: A Call to Action for Leaders](#). PPS's report: [Educators of Color Insights Full Report: What Will It Take For Educators of Color to Thrive in PPS?](#))

In accordance with Section 427 of the Department of Education's General Provision Act (GEPA), the Maine Department of Education and all participating School Administrative Units (SAUs) review existing policies and procedures to ensure that every aspect of the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds application and reopening plans fully aligns with the requirements of Section 427. This review of the Maine Department of Education and the SAU policies occurs prior to the beginning of any approved projects. Upon completion of the reviews steps will be taken, as needed, to revise, modify, or develop new policies and procedures for complete alignment and compliance with Section 427 to ensure equal access and participation to all persons regardless of their race, color, ethnicity, religion, national origin, gender, age, citizenship status, or disability to the programs and services provided by the federally funded ARP ESSER federal emergency grant.

The ARP ESSER application is focused on supporting SAUs to safely reopen and sustain the safe operation of schools and address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on underrepresented student subgroups, including each major racial and ethnic group, children from low-income families, children with disabilities, English learners, gender, migrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and children and youth in foster care.

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<sup>1</sup> Redding, C. (2019). *A teacher like me: A review of the effect of student-teacher racial/ethnic matching on teacher perceptions of students and student academic and behavioral outcomes*. *Review of Educational Research* 89(4), 499-535.

<sup>2</sup> Dee, 2004; Easton-Brooks, 2019; Gershenson, 2018

<sup>3</sup> Page, 2007; Phillips, 2014.

Professional development, technical assistance and any programming will be offered for all participants and every effort will be made to eliminate barriers to their participating, such as translating written materials from English to another language, or Braille. Specialized electronic equipment and other needed accommodations will also be made available for those who request it.

The State has a comprehensive Affirmative Action Plan (AAP) committed to creating a workforce that reflects the diversity of qualified individuals in the labor market. It is the policy of the state to recruit, hire, train, and promote persons in all job titles, without regard to race, color, sex, national origin, age, religion, marital status, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, or other extraneous consideration not directly and substantively related to merit or performance. Employment decisions and personnel actions, including, but not limited to compensation, benefits, promotion, demotion, layoff/recall, transfer, termination, and training are based on the principle of ensuring equal employment opportunity and affirmative action.

All the written materials used within Maine's Part B program have been translated into the top eight primary languages spoken by families in Part B including Arabic, Khmer, Mandarin, French, Portuguese, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese. Additionally, we have a [Special Education Terminology](#) informational document translated in the above languages on the family and student resource pages of our [OSSIE website](#).

**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 the biggest barrier to equitable access of students, educators, and administrators. Understaffed schools make it challenging to meet the requirements of IDEA. Analysis of child find data has identified that challenges to timely evaluation may impede equitable access to Part B programs. Challenges to timely evaluation include ongoing and significant staff shortages in all areas, turnover in special education staff and related services providers, reduced availability of school psychologists to complete evaluations, and limited resources in more rural areas of Maine.

The provisions of Child Find often falls short in meeting the federally required timelines due to shortages in qualified personnel to conduct initial evaluations. A dearth of school psychologists is one of the biggest barriers to a timely response to a referral to special education.

School psychologists collaborate with students, families, educational professionals, and community partners to improve learning, behavior, and mental health for school-aged children and adolescents. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) advocates for a ratio of one school psychologist for every 500 students to ensure high quality, comprehensive services (2020). Within the state of Maine, the ratio of school psychologists to students exceeds 1:1500, which means that many school administrative units (SAUs) experience challenges securing sufficient personnel to support students' school psychological service needs (Erin Frazier, Maine Department of Education, personal communication, January 15, 2021).

Due to these shortages, school psychologists in Maine face high evaluation caseloads and have limited time to allocate to the provision of mental and behavioral health services and systems-level supports. The Maine Revised Statutes (20-A §13022) define the scope of services for credentialed school psychologists in accordance with the NASP Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services shown in Figure 1 (NASP Practice Model; 2020). This model highlights school psychologists' preparedness to help schools improve academic achievement, promote positive behavior and mental health, create safe and supportive school environments, strengthen family-school partnerships, improve

school-wide assessment and accountability practices, and advance equitable practices for diverse populations.

**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?**

To support a robust and highly trained educational workforce, Maine developed the #TeachMaine initiative. This work is the result of contributions from education stakeholders throughout Maine, who provided feedback via multiple channels, including regional think tanks, focus groups, surveys, organizational meetings, and informal conversations. Additionally, the Department convened an Educator Talent Committee, a core group of internal and external stakeholders, to share their experiences, look at research and trends, and to make recommendations on how to address Maine's educator shortage.

From this work, four major themes emerged: Recruitment and Retention Efforts; Diversify Educator Workforce Efforts; Support Educator Development, Growth, and Leadership; and Elevate Educators and the Education Profession. Within each theme, there are recommended strategies and action steps. These strategies are based on models from Maine that can be expanded, and models from other states that can be adapted.

Maine Special Educator Engagement, Development & Supports (Maine SEEDS) is aligned with the Maine Educator Workforce Strategic Plan (#TeachMaine). The mission of SEEDS is to elevate, expand, engage, and empower Maine special educators to equitably meet the academic, social emotional and behavioral needs of each learner. Special educators include all professionals that support learners with IEPs. This includes teachers, ed techs, administrators, related service providers and support staff.

Maine DOE is providing intensive support to close Corrective Action Plans associated with timely evaluations. Maine DOE provides Zoom meetings, recordings of a CAP-Specific training, and provides on-site visits to provide support and technical assistance. Additional on-site visits are conducted to provide direct staff training and support.

USM and the Maine Department of Education (DOE) are committed to identifying and removing barriers to the preparation of school psychologists to address critical shortages and increase the quality and range of psychological services available to the school-aged population. To this end, USM's school psychology program is collaborating with the Maine DOE to secure special projects funding to support school psychology internships. The primary goal of this project is to expand the number of high quality internship programs within the state in order to produce credentialed school psychologists who possess the competencies needed to provide effective and comprehensive school psychology services within the state of Maine.

The benefits of this project will be significant. Participating SAUs and their students would benefit directly from the services offered by interns, who are expected to complete 20-30 psychoeducational evaluations; provide direct evidence-based services to students; and offer systems-level consultation to strengthen the capacity of schools to support learning for all students. USM and its students also would benefit. USM students would gain access to high-quality, funded training experiences, and the program will benefit from the capacity to recruit larger numbers of diverse students and increase enrollment. Lastly, long-term benefits to the state of Maine will include (a) reducing the ratio of students to school psychologists and thereby providing timelier, more comprehensive school psychology services and (b)

increasing the capacity of current and future school psychologists to provide effective supervision and therefore support the continued growth of the profession.

This year, The Department of Educational and School Psychology at the University of Southern Maine has been awarded a 5-year, \$1.6 million grant sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Elementary and Secondary Education to help increase the number of school psychologists in rural areas of the state.

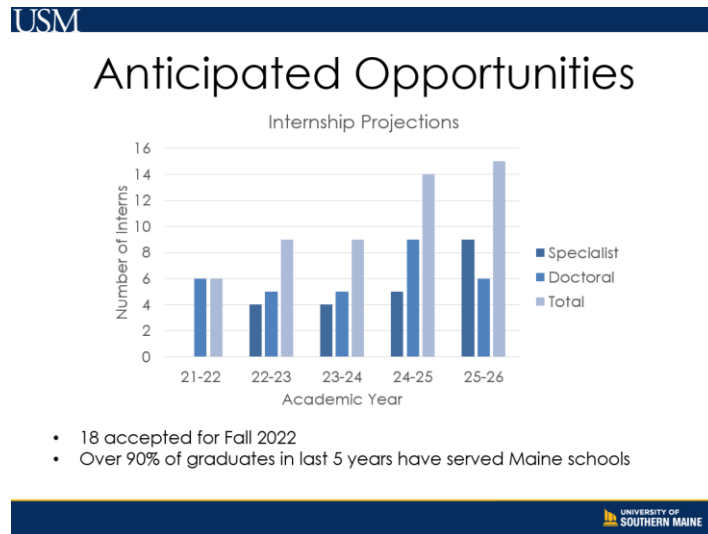
The project, Maine School Psychology: Collaborative Affiliations in Rural Education (Maine School Psychology CAREs), also aims to increase the number of credentialed school psychologists who reflect the diverse backgrounds of students within those communities.

In 2021, Maine was awarded a State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG). The proposed Maine SDPG is part of a comprehensive effort to improve instruction, support rigorous academic standards for students, and improve school climate. The grant aligns with the Maine SSIP focusing on math achievement and provides a strong foundation for the sustainable improvement of the focus areas. Additionally, the grant has a focus on PBIS in order to increase inclusive opportunities for all learners.

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

The timeline to support the barriers to staffing shortages is ongoing. The Maine DOE is working to acquire and analyze data around staffing patterns to further refine efforts to hire and retain high quality educators.

Maine’s collaboration with the University of Southern Maine is currently designed to span 5 years. Anticipated opportunities are posted below:



The program has increased in capacity and the Maine DOE is in frequent communication with participants and program directors to understand the impact across the state.

The new grant award to expand USMs school psychology program to rural areas is designed to provide 22 applicants in several areas across the state to acquire these credentials over 4 years. Through the development of this program expansion, the Maine DOE will continue to support equitable access to resources in some of our most underserved regions.

Maine's SPDG grant began in 2021 and will span 5 years. There is significant data collection and collaboration with stakeholders to maintain effectiveness and sustainability of the initiatives.

**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](mailto: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.