MSDE Announces $3 Million Investment in the Reducing Overidentification in Special Education (ROSE) Grant Program Aimed at Addressing Disproportionate Special Education Identification for Historically Underserved Students

The Maryland State Department of Education Launches Grant Funding to Tackle Disproportionate Special Education Classification as Part of ESSER III Fund Distribution and Pandemic Recovery Strategies

BALTIMORE, MD (August 10, 2023) –Today, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) announced the recipients of the Reducing Overidentification in Special Education (ROSE) grant. The ROSE grant is a rigorous competitive opportunity that taps into the American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Relief Funds (ESSER III).

This initiative specifically addresses the overidentification of students, particularly those from historically underserved communities, as possessing intellectual and/or emotional disabilities. These overidentifications, exacerbated by the unique challenges of the pandemic, emphasize an urgent need to address and alleviate the pandemic's profound consequences on student learning. Quality general education *is* quality special education and ROSE seeds the creation and scaling of local education agency (LEA) early identification and tiered intervention strategies for students. These strategies coupled with the critical interrogation of explicit and implicit biases will drive the difficult but necessary change needed to ensure students are not disproportionately identified by race, sex, gender, home language, and income status.

"The ROSE grant exemplifies Maryland's commitment to a future where education is both equitable and exceptional. We must confront and dismantle the ingrained biases that have historically impeded the promise of true educational inclusivity," remarked State Board of Education President Clarence Crawford. "Our shared vision for Maryland's students is about laying the groundwork for a system where every student's needs are recognized and met with precision. With this grant opportunity, we are taking a step towards a more equitable future for

all of Maryland's children. "By committing a total of $3 million to this crucial program, MSDE intends to aid three LEAs in their efforts to overhaul and fine-tune the student identification mechanisms within Maryland's education infrastructure."

"The challenge we face is not simply one of overidentification. At its core, it's about ensuring that every child in Maryland has access to a learning environment that recognizes their unique potential and provides them the right support. We cannot afford to let biases, whether implicit or explicit, continue to guide our education system. Every child deserves accurate recognition, fair support, and an equal opportunity for success," said State Superintendent of Schools, Mohammed Choudhury, "As I said when introducing this program, to care about special education means to care about being certain in who and for what children become eligible for special education services. Anything less is an abdication of our responsibility as policymakers, advocates, educators, and humans. Let us hold ourselves accountable for the trajectories on which we place our children."

Dr. Peggy Pugh, chief academic officer for Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) shared, "We are excited to be the recipients of this grant award that will help continue the work of ensuring students of color and emergent multilingual learners are receiving appropriate educational opportunities and are not overidentified as students with disabilities. The work that we do through the ROSE grant is extremely important. As the largest and most diverse district in Maryland, we are committed to ensuring that each of our students are provided equitable academic opportunities that are appropriate to their specific needs and that will enable them to be college, career, and community ready."

The awarded LEAs will collaborate closely with nationally recognized leaders for the implementation of this program.

Maryland's unwavering dedication to reforming and optimizing special education is exemplified by the ambitious objectives set forth by our awardees. Montgomery County Public Schools, representing a student body of over 160,000, is embarking on a pioneering initiative, with a goal to diminish the percentage of Emergent Multilingual Hispanic/Latino students being initially identified with an intellectual disability by at least 10% by September 2024. Calvert County Public Schools will reduce its gap in students identified for special education services by at least 50% for African American students in grades Kindergarten through grade 5 and reduce the gap in African American students with disabilities suspended inside and outside of school by 100%. Together, these monumental endeavors signify a potential transformative shift in Maryland's special education landscape, affecting tens of thousands of students.

This pursuit of excellence and equity is championed by the following grant awardees:

Calvert County Public Schools - $934,665
Calvert County Public Schools (CCPS) will utilize the ROSE grant to aggressively tackle disparities in special education identifications, aiming for a 50% reduction for African American students in K-5 by June 2024. Key strategies include revamping the pre-referral process to decrease special education referrals by half, launching professional development to mitigate staff implicit biases, and narrowing the academic proficiency gap for African American students. Additionally, a rigorous mathematics professional development initiative will be rolled out for K-2 educators. Concurrently, CCPS plans to reduce the gap in African American students with disabilities suspended inside and outside of school by 100%.

Montgomery County Public Schools - $1,000,000
Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is dedicated to significantly reducing the disproportionate identification of Emergent Multilingual Hispanic/Latino (EMH/L) students as having intellectual disabilities. Targeting a decrease from 67.9% to 57.9% by September 2024, MCPS commits to ongoing yearly reductions aiming for a long-term benchmark of just 10% by the end of SY 2027-2028. As part of their holistic approach, MCPS will design a comprehensive multi-tiered systems for support (MTSS) process guide by September 2024, addressing areas like cultural relevancy, differentiating language acquisition from potential educational disabilities, trauma's role in the identification process, and evidence-based interventions such as restorative justice. This guide aims to mitigate overidentification across all EMLs and lessen out-of-school suspensions for various racial/ethnic groups. Additionally, a cross-office team will champion this endeavor, working closely with selected schools, facilitating professional learning, and ensuring the guide's components are actualized. Lastly, MCPS plans to launch a system-wide MTSS data management system by September 2024, aligning with their MTSS Process Guide, to ensure actionable insights and seamless operations.

Prince George's County Public Schools - $1,000,000
Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) commits to narrowing the disparity in special education service identifications, targeting a 7.5% reduction for African American students labeled with an emotional disability. With a focus on 14 specific schools, staff will intensify their use of tier 2 and tier 3 intervention strategies, aiming to benefit over 15% of their student population, as evidenced by Response to Intervention Online Tracking. Students involved in grant-backed activities at these schools are anticipated to showcase improved self-management skills, corroborated by pre- and post-social-emotional learning (SEL) assessment data. Furthermore, parents engaged in grant-endorsed training sessions are expected to gain enhanced knowledge and aptitude in applying intervention techniques, supporting their children's learning, with progress measured using pre- and post-training surveys.

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