



OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

Tiffany Ward
Director

MEMORANDUM

April 28, 2022

To: Jennifer Bryant, Director
Office of Management and Budget

cc: Gabe Albornoz, President
County Council

From: Tiffany Ward, Director
Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice

Re: Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) for Supplemental Appropriation (SA) #22-77
ARPA IDEA Part B1 Grant and SA#22-78 ARPA IDEA Part B2 Grant

- I. **FINDING:** The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ)'s finding is inconclusive. ORESJ determined that while Supplemental Appropriations #22-77 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B1 Grant and #22-78 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) IDEA Part B2 Grant make important investments in special education instruction and supportive services, there's little evidence to conclude that these investments will advance racial equity and social justice. While bolstering instructional capacity is a key input for addressing disparities in student opportunities and outcomes, without a clear link to structures, policies, or practices it is difficult to anticipate whether the investments will have their intended impacts.
- II. **BACKGROUND:** Supplemental Appropriations (SA) #22-77 and #22-78 relate to County's utilization of American Rescue Plan Act funding for the enhancement and expansion of special education programming for pre-k students and students attending the Montgomery Virtual Academy. The purpose of SA #22-77 is to provide funding for special education teachers, a transition support teacher, a psychologist, and a paraeducator position in the Montgomery Virtual Academy; a total of 65 FTEs. The purpose of SA #22-78 is to provide

funding for professional learning and coaching of classrooms staff working with three-and-four-year-old students with disabilities; a total of 4 FTEs.

To assess the extent to which these two supplemental appropriations are likely to advance racial equity and social justice in the County, ORESJ looked at racial and other inequities shaping disparate outcomes for Pre-K to 12 students with disabilities and the extent to which the funding provided under these supplemental appropriations is likely to reduce those disparities.

ORESJ assessed available information about both supplemental appropriations, and has provided specific analysis for each, however, to provide a larger framing about the issues impacting outcomes of students with disabilities, ORESJ suggests reviewing a REIA it conducted in November 2021, of SA #22-24. While this REIA focused on high-quality early childhood inclusion of students with disabilities under IDEA, the structural inequities are likely similar to those affecting K-12 students with disabilities. The REIA described the importance of and barriers to high-quality early childhood education and found that while the Supplemental Appropriation was likely to advance equity for pre-kindergarten students with disabilities and their families, limitations in the data made it difficult for ORESJ to determine to what extent this supplemental would also advance racial equity. As the core issues in SA#22-77 and 78 are like those outlined in SA#22-24, ORESJ suggests that those interested in understanding the potential racial equity impacts SA#22-77 and 78, do so by first reviewing the REIA for SA#22-24.

Analysis of SA#22-77:

Supplemental Appropriation #22-77 makes a sizable investment in targeted resources for elementary-level students with disabilities attending the Montgomery Virtual Academy, with 65 FTE designated specifically for special education instruction and supports. While this certainly has the potential to bolster instructional capacity, limitations in available data make it difficult for ORESJ's to assess potential impacts. Necessary information includes:

- How many students with disabilities are enrolled in Montgomery Virtual Academy and from what base schools?
- What is the demographic and service group breakdown of students enrolled in Montgomery Virtual Academy?
- What are the Evidence of Learning measures for students enrolled in the Montgomery Virtual Academy and/or what other measures are used to determine student success?
- How many special education teachers are currently working with Montgomery Virtual Academy?
- What is known about the specific barriers impacting students with disabilities in the virtual setting?

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- How does this investment, additional teachers, address structural barriers affecting students with disabilities in the virtual setting? What policies or practices will be used to overcome these barriers and/or change the systems creating them?

Responses to these questions would help ORESJ gain a better understanding of which students are likely to benefit from the investment, how the students will be impacted, and whether those impacts will address any known gaps in measures of student success for students with disabilities, particularly students of color with disabilities.

Analysis of SA#22-78:

ORESJ noted two parts of Supplemental Appropriation #22-78 with the potential to positively affect the outcomes of pre-k students with disabilities. However, an absence of detail about these areas prevents ORESJ from comprehensively assessing their impact. First, information accompanying SA#22-78 refers to how this funding creates an opportunity for systemic change. Racial equity best practices call us to change policies, practices, systems and structures to drive equitable outcomes¹, so this reference is strength. However, it's unclear (based on available information) to what extent this funding will enable the type of systemic changes necessary to drive greater inclusion and success of Pre-K students with disabilities. The Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center offers a guide called Considerations for Implementing Systemic Change² that helps decisionmakers understand the kinds of questions to ask when developing and implementing a systems-change initiative. While it's possible many of the factors outlined in the guide have been considered, it's unclear (based on available information) whether questions like:

- Does the plan address activities to reduce organizational barriers and strengthen system capacity, such as policy, procedures, funding, organizational structures etc.?
- Are data and information being collected in a timely manner on how well things are going?
- Are data and feedback from the early users being used to quickly make any adjustments or changes system structures?
- What plans do you have to ensure long-term sustainability?

For the systemic change described in this supplemental request, some of the considerations might be:

- How will additional staff hired using ARPA funding be supported (addressing organizational or institutional barriers)?

¹ Race Forward. "What is Racial Equity?". Available at: <https://www.raceforward.org/about/what-is-racial-equity-key-concepts>

² Lynda Pletcher & Joicey Hurth. The Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center. Considerations for Implementing Systemic Change. April 6, 2015. Available at: https://ectacenter.org/~pdfs/pubs/ecta-considerations_for_implementing.pdf

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- What data is or will be collected to understand how the capacities of classroom teachers are being strengthened to address barriers to inclusion? How are those strengthened capacities affecting academic, functional, and behavioral outcomes of Pre-K students with disabilities?
- How will the expertise and coaching be institutionalized and sustained if the funding source changes or goes away? Relatedly, what steps will be taken to ensure the continuity, evaluation, and possible expansion of service?

The second area where this Supplemental Appropriation has the potential to address disparities in outcomes for Pre-K students with disabilities is with its outlined approach for promoting racial equity and social justice:

“...the grant will promote racial equity and social justice by working with staff to look through the lens of equity and culturally responsive practices, resulting in perspectives, instruction, and interventions that promote equal access to learning and success for all students”³.

There is evidence from the Board of Education of Montgomery County Policy statement on Nondiscrimination, Equity, and Cultural Proficiency ⁴ and MCPS Equity Accountability Model of a commitment to understanding and eliminating gaps in student access, opportunity and success. However, there’s an absence of detail in this request (and more generally) related to the structures, policies, or data that will ensure this commitment is realized in the early childhood special education setting. For example, the Evidence of Learning (EOL) performance measures for students with disabilities are available for a sample school, but there don’t appear to be kindergarten readiness measures for the Pre-K environment. Also, available data does not make it possible to look at the important intersection of disability and race for Pre-K students.

So, while bolstering instructional capacity through this supplemental request is likely to benefit Pre-K students with disabilities and their families, there isn’t enough information to explain how this targeted resource will be delivered in a way that strengthens kindergarten readiness among students with disabilities, addresses racial disparities in kindergarten readiness, nor how this resource will be sustained should the funding source change.

cc: Ken Hartman, Director, Office of Strategic Partnerships, Office of the County Executive
Monifa McKnight, Superintendent, Montgomery County Public Schools

³ Office of the Superintendent of Schools Montgomery County Public Schools. Memorandum. February 24, 2022.

⁴Policy Board of Education of Montgomery County. Nondiscrimination, Equity, and Cultural Proficiency. Available at: <https://ww2.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/policy/pdf/policy%20aca,%20nondiscrimination,%20equity,%20and%20cultural%20proficiency%20updated.pdf>