

Q1: Describe how your entity's existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.

North Carolina (NC) has committed to aligning its systems of statewide, district, and school improvement efforts across multiple strategic plans. Specifically, the Leandro Comprehensive Remedial Plan, the North Carolina State Board Strategic Plan, Operation Polaris, and the Office of Exceptional Children's (OEC) Strategic Plans are reviewed and updated frequently in order to ensure students with disabilities have equitable access to high quality instruction.

The OEC Strategic Plan is attached. However, specific activities related to the most salient goals are highlighted below.

Goal 1: Eliminate Opportunity Gaps by 2026

The OEC has initiated specific steps to decrease practices resulting in significant disproportionality. First, the OEC engaged in internal professional learning facilitated through the use of *Solving Disproportionality and Achieving Equity: A Leader's Guide to Using Data to Change Hearts and Minds* by Dr. Edward Fergus. Through this study, OEC Leadership engaged in reflective practice to ensure staff established processes for identifying disproportionality across General Supervision responsibilities and when paired with system-level coaching practices, added an educational equity lens to the technical assistance provided to NC's public school units (PSU).

Second, the OEC conducted an extensive review of Indicator 4/9/10 data through partnered technical assistance regarding policies, practices, and procedures with local leadership teams and will be conducting targeted co-monitoring activities for specific practices (i.e., manifestation determination reviews, eligibility determinations, etc.).

Lastly, the OEC has leveraged its SiMR focus (4th grade reading for students with disabilities of color) in partnership with the NCDPI Office of Early Learning and the required NC legislation for the development of district literacy plans to incorporate the local data analysis for students with disabilities in comparison to performance in reading by students without disabilities to address performance gaps by race. The OEC has also provided universal and targeted technical assistance to PSUs regarding root cause analysis and the use of these data to inform local district and school improvement activities.

Q2: Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?

At the present, the Office of Exceptional Children is studying variability in opportunities to learn (OTL) as a component of a root cause analysis aimed at identifying and mitigating barriers to equitable access to curriculum, instruction, and environment. Through the development of real-time dynamic data dashboards, the OEC is able to elucidate the relationship between variation in opportunity and variation in important student outcomes (e.g., literacy skills). Notably, through various data sources, the OEC and public school units are analyzing opportunities to learn (OTL) as they relate to: chronic absenteeism, disciplinary removals, category and setting in special education, access to high-quality, licensed teachers, access to technology, and access to schools demonstrating growth.. Primary barriers that are being investigated include systemic issues with state and local policies, practices, and procedures that intersect with each of these opportunities to learn.

Q3: 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?

Student Attendance

- Targeted Technical Assistance specifically leveraging SiMR root cause analysis in local self-assessments as it intersects with disciplinary removals and chronic absenteeism related to high mobility and long-COVID impacts
- Leveraging MTSS to problem-solve schoolwide social emotional needs as a long term impact of COVID on students, staff, and their families
- The current student data management system in NC, the Every Child Accountability Tracking System (ECATS) includes an Early Warning System (EWS) to gather among other things, chronic absenteeism and will directly impact student access and growth.

Discipline Practices

- Targeted Technical Assistance regarding removals, in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and conducting manifestation determination reviews
- Monitoring: Indicator 4b - practices when conducting manifestation determination reviews; review of modified day and Home/Hospital placements if related to behavior as a significant factor in the IEP
- Proposed Policies (Rules) - Statewide definition of Functional Behavior Analysis and Behavior Intervention Plan

Category and Setting in Special Education

- Indicators 9 and 10 review of policy, practice, and procedures

High Quality Teachers

- Recruitment and Retention efforts in collaboration with [CEEDAR Center]
- Student Teaching Stipend Project (providing a stipend for student teachers who sign an attestation to become licensed and teach in North Carolina)
- Recruitment and Retention activities directed to both teachers and related service providers and include support to pre-service teachers as well as those already in a classroom (e.g., TAs to Teachers, Tuition Reimbursement, Troops to Teachers, etc.)

Q4: What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

In FY2023-24:

- Implement fully combined program and fiscal monitoring activities. This will provide a clear connection to the use of federal funds to support student improvement and achievement.
- For PSUs who are identified as having significant disproportionality, teams from the OEC will conduct individual meetings to assist them in the review of policies, practices and procedures for Indicators 4,9 & 10. Root causes will be identified and support will be given to the PSU as they develop an appropriate plan of action to address the disproportionality areas.
- SiMR plans of actions will be reviewed and intensive technical support will be provided to those PSUs who fall below the threshold of <25% proficient in 4th grade reading.
- CCEIS and CEIS plans will be reviewed through an educational equity lens, as the OEC regional teams support PSUs in developing and implementing actions to eliminate

significant disproportionality, including the review of policies, practices and procedures at the local level.