

GEPA (General Education Provisions Act), Section 427

All applicants for new awards must include information in their applications to address GEPA in order to receive funding under this program. GEPA requires a description of the steps the applicant proposes to take to ensure equitable access to, and participation in, its federally assisted programs for students, teachers, and other program beneficiaries with special needs. For a state-formula grant program, a state needs to provide this description only for projects or activities that it carries out with funds reserved for state-level uses. In addition, local school districts or other eligible applicants that apply to the state for funding need to provide this description in their applications to the state for funding. The State would be responsible for ensuring that the school district or other local entity has submitted a sufficient section 427 to the State.

In accordance with Section 427 of the Department of Education's General Provision Act (GEPA), ISBE ensures 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 offered pursuant to *NCLB*.

For state-level activities as well as all other activities supported by federal assistance under this application, ISBE will fully enforce all federal and state laws and regulations designed to ensure equitable access to all program beneficiaries and to overcome barriers to equitable participation. ISBE will take all steps necessary, whether by required notices, complaint procedures, appointment of liaisons, outreach activities, pursuit of conforming state legislation, or otherwise, to achieve these goals.

Illinois serves an increasingly diverse student population. Students who are Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander or Native American made up 39.9% of the student enrollment in 2001. The state has identified schools in which students are succeeding in spite of high poverty and other risk factors. Illinois minority students are making greater improvement on the ACT (a nationally recognized college entrance exam that is part of the state's assessment for eleventh-graders) than minority students elsewhere in the nation, and a recent ISBE analysis of reading achievement by Illinois' Hispanic students showed improvement in reading achievement across the grades.

At the state level, numerous elements of this state application would be applicable:

- Over 124 languages are represented in Illinois. Of these, 53 languages have more than 100 such speakers, adding up to more than 347,000 such students. Illinois provides bilingual services for these students according to state law and will offer the option of federal funds to LEAs for this purpose, pursuant to the description of Title III funds in Part III of this application.
- The local application process allows expenditures for schoolwide programs to be shown on the budget for each program. This process eliminates the need for fund transfers (see Appendix XX, the application for Titles I, II, IV and V funding for 2002-03) by reflecting what is actually to happen and with what funding source. This process allows for minimal barriers in funding programs.
- At the Math Summit in November 2001, a key recommendation was to address equity. It recommended that the state develop "lighthouse for at-risk students," and high-quality early learning opportunities, and focus on lower performing students. Activities are commencing in this area.
- Illinois is also aware of the digital inequity within the state. As outlined in the state application regarding Title II Part D funds, all children will have access to contemporary, robust technology and

communications networks during and outside the school day and will be able to use such technology access effectively and efficiently regardless of the student's race, ethnicity, gender, family income, geographic location, or disability.

- Information from the disaggregated groups identified as part of the AYP process is valuable in targeting resources where needed. As schools and districts in the System of Support develop their School Improvement Plans pursuant to the state rubric, resource allocation and targeting are critical components. The disaggregated groups in Illinois are
 - Five racial/ethnic groups -- Native American, White, Black, Hispanic non-white, and Asian;
 - Students having limited English proficiency;
 - Students with disabilities; and
 - Low-income students.
- There will be coordination with other federal programs as applicable. The ISBE consultant for the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act has been an active member of the ISBE *NCLB* team. The same applies to staff responsible for the Perkins Act and IDEA. The homeless education program was aligned within the Titles I, II, IV and V application that was distributed to LEAs for 2002-03.
- Illinois' student assessment system is accountable for all students. Whether students take the ISAT, PSAE, IAA or IMAGE component of the state assessment system as outlined in Part II of this application, all student needs are addressed.
 - Students may take the ISAT or PSAE with accommodations.
 - The Illinois Alternate Assessment (IAA), a portfolio-based assessment of students with disabilities whose participation in other state assessments would be inappropriate even with accommodations, was implemented for the first time in 2000-2001.
 - With the introduction of these assessments and improvements to the Illinois Measure of Annual Growth in English (IMAGE), which is administered to students with limited English proficiency, the achievement of all Illinois students is being measured against the Illinois Learning Standards. New federal requirements will result in increased testing in reading and math by the 2005-2006 school year.
- Documents are translated, at the state or local level; into other languages as needed (e.g., the parental notification for families of children receiving services as English Language Learners).
- All workshops and conferences sponsored by the ISBE are located in accessible facilities. The State Board of Education meets almost monthly, always in accessible facilities. Its meeting notices always carry a clause regarding accessibility for individuals with disabilities.

At the local level, each LEA signs assurances regarding equitable access to and participation in federally assisted programs as part of its overall assurances (see Appendix J for the Titles I, II, IV and V application and instructions).