



OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE


Marc Elrich
County Executive

Tiffany Ward
Director and Chief Equity Officer

MEMORANDUM

November 22, 2023

To: Jennifer Bryant, Director
Office of Management and Budget

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

Re: Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) Supplemental Appropriation (SA) #24-28
FY24 Operating Budget, Montgomery County Public Schools, Stronger Connections
Grant (\$3,000,000)

- I. **FINDING:** The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) finds that *Supplemental Appropriations #24-28 Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), Stronger Connections Grant* has the potential to advance racial equity and social justice in Montgomery County as it provides resources to provide all students with safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments. However, more specificity is needed on the schools identified as most impacted to determine if the program will advance equitable outcomes for low-income children, students of color, and their families, specifically the Caregivers on Duty program. Therefore, ORESJ's finding is inconclusive.
- II. **BACKGROUND:** The appropriation will provide funding for evidence-based activities to prevent and respond to bullying, violence, and hate impacting school communities in Montgomery County Public Schools. The increase in funding is available due to state funds for improving the wellness and safety of students. The grant activities will focus on cyber safety, combatting hate, and engaging parents/caregivers for positive youth development. The goal of the funding is to address and reduce disparities and foster stronger relationships with students, families, and the community. The funds will be used for contractual services, materials and to support five new positions.

In June 2022, Congress passed the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, which authorized funding for the Stronger Connections Grant (SCG) program. The purpose outlined in the SCG is to increase the capacity of State Education Agencies (SEA) and the identified High Need Local Education Agencies (LEA) to:

- Provide ALL students with safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments.
- Increase students' sense of belonging with culturally and linguistically responsive practices where students are surrounded by trusting and caring adults committed to building strong relationships.
- Build connections that will make students less likely to bring weapons to school and more likely to report the presence of weapons in school and
- Support students with overcoming challenging and traumatic experiences through nurturing learning environments that provide a sense of emotional and physical safety.¹

SEAs were instructed to consider the following criteria for establishing high-need LEAs:

- A high number or percentage of students living in poverty (e.g., at least 40 %).
- A high student-to-mental health professional ratio.
- High rates of chronic absenteeism, exclusionary discipline, referrals to the juvenile justice system, bullying/harassment, community and school violence, or substance abuse; or

Where students recently experienced a natural disaster or traumatic event. The State has an expanded definition of a High-Need LEA, which MCPS met qualifications for.²

III. **ANALYSIS:** ORESJ has written previously on the topics of mental health and school safety, specifically on programs targeting BIPOC and low-income children. Our full analysis can be found in the following.

1) REIA #23-19 Youth Harm Initiative

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/23-19.pdf>

¹ <https://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Pages/OFPOS/GAC/StrongerConnectionFY23/index.aspx>

² The MSDE's definition of a High Need LEA comes from a combination of sources, both the 20 U.S. Code § 1021 (10) and Social Vulnerability Index as specified by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which is a similar format as reflected in the GAO's Report to Congress in January 2022. Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) when determining whether a population or LEA, in this instance, is a high need. Developed by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the SVI uses data collected by the U.S. Census on 15 different social factors and groups them into four distinct themes: 1) socioeconomic status, 2) household composition, 3) race/ethnicity/language, and 4) housing/transportation. The MSDE has determined that a High Need LEA has socially vulnerable groups—including children who are low income (has a minimum of 10,000 children with 20% or more from low-income families), minorities, English learners, or living with disabilities, from rural communities, has high teacher turnover, a high percentage of teachers not teaching in the academic subject areas or grade levels in which the teachers were trained to teach; a high percentage of teachers have emergency, provisional or temporary certification or licensure and has high need schools.

2) REIA #24-2 Summer and After School Youth Safety Program

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/24-2.pdf>

The school system plans to support three activities that will impact all students in grades K-12. These activities were designed within the framework of the MCPS Strategic Plan. The first two focus areas include cyber safety and combatting hate, which will include district-wide training, as well as student, family, and community engagement. The third activity, Caregivers on Duty, will target students in the most impacted high schools. These schools were identified for participation by the Office of the Chief Medical Officer. The Corps of Caregiver Volunteers will be onsite each day and are trained to be mentors to positive youth development and improve the school climate and well-being of students.

Information on the methodology for identifying schools or the schools that were identified as most impacted was not available for analysis. However, the school system states, “Grant activities will promote racial equity and social justice by looking 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.”

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