

LEGAL UPDATES

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U.S. Department of Education Announces Significant Magnet School Funding Opportunity

On February 22, 2022, the U.S. Department of Education (the Department) issued a notice inviting applications for fiscal year 2022 for the Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP). Local educational agencies (LEAs) or consortia of LEAs that are implementing a voluntary or court-ordered desegregation plan are eligible to apply for assistance. Applicants will engage in a competitive application process to receive this funding. The application deadlines are included below.

What is MSAP?

The MSAP provides grants to LEAs to operate magnet schools under required or voluntary desegregation plans. Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the MSAP provides financial assistance to eligible school districts to:

Eliminate, reduce or prevent minority group isolation in schools with substantial numbers of minority students, including assisting to achieve voluntary desegregation in public schools;

Develop, implement and expand magnet schools' programs to assist LEAs in achieving systemic reform;

Develop and expand innovative educational practices that promote diversity and school choice;

Offer courses to help students attain tangible and marketable skills;

Improve the capacity of LEAs to continue operating magnet schools at a high level; and
Ensure students enrolled in magnet school programs have equitable access to high quality education.

What is the competition?

The Department wants applicants to focus on assisting school districts in desegregating schools by utilizing magnet schools. The application will require applicants to develop a magnet school project and show how they intend to align those projects with their existing desegregation plans. Accordingly, applicants must provide context and a summary of the goals of their desegregation plan and lay out how the funding will assist in achieving the district's goals that relate to eliminating, reducing and preventing minority group isolation in schools.

The Department encourages applicants to propose high quality projects that provide unique educational opportunities, as well as bring students together from different racial backgrounds. The Department is particularly interested in and will give priority to applications that do the following:

Connect projects to broader school and district plans for increasing access to high quality instruction given by diverse educators.

Establish whole-school magnet programs that ensure all students can participate in the special curriculum and meet the challenging content standards.

Propose to coordinate with relevant government entities, including housing and transportation authorities.

Priorities of the competition

The competition also includes the following six competitive preference priorities:

1. Need for assistance
2. New or revised magnet school projects and strength of evidence to support proposed projects
3. Selection of students
4. Increasing racial integration and socioeconomic diversity
5. Inter-district and regional approaches
6. Supporting a diverse educator workforce and professional growth to strengthen student learning

The competition also includes the following two invitational priorities:

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1. Whole-school magnet programs
2. Coordination across agencies and organizations

What is the award?

The MSAP will provide \$135 million in awards. The Department estimates that the individual awards will range from \$1 million to \$3.5 million per project.

Important dates and deadlines

The Department will hold webinars to provide information on the application process to interested applicants. Information regarding the webinars and the application packet are available on the MSAP website. The Department has also announced the following deadlines:

Deadline for Notice of Intent to Apply: March 24, 2022

Deadline for Submitting Application: April 25, 2022

Deadline for Intergovernmental Review: July 7, 2022

What this means to you

School districts that have a desegregation plan in place should consider applying for an MSAP grant.

In addition, school districts who are considering or in the process of developing a voluntary desegregation plan should work to finalize their plans so that they are eligible to apply for the MSAP grant.

Contact us

If your district is in either of these situations and is interested in possibly applying for an MSAP grant, please contact John Borkowski, Aleks Rushing, Mackenzie Conway or your Husch Blackwell attorney with any questions you may have.