

Educational Equity Challenge Grant Act of 2026 Section by Section

The *Educational Equity Challenge Grant Act of 2026* creates an application-based grant program, administered by the Department of Education, to accelerate academic progress and support students' social, emotional, mental, behavioral, and physical health needs, including those associated with the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19).

Section 1: Designates the short title as the “Educational Equity Challenge Grant Act of 2026.”

Section 2: Educational Equity Challenge Grant Program

- a) **Definitions:** Defines “eligible entity” as a local education agency (LEA); a consortium of LEAs; a state educational agency (SEA); a partnership between a nonprofit organization, including an institution of higher education or early childhood education provider, and one or more LEAs; an educational service agency; or the Bureau of Indian Education. Defines each of these entities. Excludes for-profit entities from applying for grants.
- b) **Establishment of Program:** Instructs the Secretary of Education to award two types of grants:
 - 1) Evidence-based grants to adopt and implement evidence-based activities, strategies, and interventions to address academic, social-emotional, mental, behavioral, and physical health needs, including those associated with the COVID–19 pandemic, that meet the standard of evidence defined by Tiers 1-3 in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA); and
 - 2) Field- and educator-initiated grants to design or replicate and implement innovative proposals to address academic, social-emotional, mental, behavioral, and physical health needs, including those associated with the COVID–19 pandemic, which must meet the Tier 4 standard of evidence in ESEA (demonstrates a rationale supported by research) and will be evaluated for their efficacy.
- c) **Allocation of Funds:** Reserves up to 5% of funds for administrative costs and 5% of funds for the Bureau of Indian Education.

Requires 75% of remaining funds to go to evidence-based grants and 25% to field-initiated proposals.

Requires at least 25% of all grant funds to be awarded to rural areas and at least 50% of all grant funds to eligible entities serving low-income students. Grantees that serve rural, low-income students may count toward both minimum requirements.
- d) **Publication of Application:** Requires the Secretary to publish applications and post resources regarding identified evidence-based activities, strategies, and interventions on the Department’s website.
- e) **Application Requirements:** Requires eligible entities applying for grants to identify the inequities experienced by students with respect to academic, social-emotional, mental, behavioral, and physical health needs, including those associated with the COVID-19 pandemic;

the differential impact of these inequities on specific groups of students; the evidence-based strategies the applicant plans to use to address these inequities if applying for an evidence-based grant; how learning, social-emotional, school culture, or other targeted outcomes will be measured; how the entity will partner with teachers, stakeholders, and the broader community; how the proposed strategy will accelerate student learning, promote mastery of content, and expand student access to diverse and rigorous curricula; the mental and physical inequities experienced by school staff associated with or exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic; a proposed budget; and how field-initiated proposals will be evaluated.

- f) **Priority:** Instructs the Secretary to give priority to applicants serving disproportionately higher percentages of high-needs students, including low-income students, students of color, Native American students, homeless students, migrant students, students in foster care, English learners, students involved with the juvenile justice system, students with disabilities, and students disproportionately affected by the pandemic.
- g) **Uses of Funds:** Requires evidence-based grants to be used to implement interventions that meet the standards of evidence defined by Tiers 1-3 in Section 8101 of ESEA, which must include at least one of the following:
 - a. Administering high-quality, universally designed assessments to assess students' needs;
 - b. Supporting social-emotional learning;
 - c. Implementing school- and district-wide practices to support students holistically, such as mental health services, early intervention and prevention programs, and trauma-informed practices;
 - d. Implementing culturally and linguistically responsive practices;
 - e. Extending instructional time;
 - f. Implementing high-quality individual or small group tutoring;
 - g. Implementing and providing professional development on the use of rigorous, culturally and linguistically competent, universally designed, and well-rounded curriculum;
 - h. Recruiting, training, and supporting diverse educators; or
 - i. Implementing programs to promote school integration and diversity.

Field-initiated proposals must meet the Tier 4 standard of evidence in Section 8101 of ESEA (demonstrates a rationale supported by research), include family and educator input into their design and implementation, and be independently evaluated for efficacy.

- h) **Collective Bargaining:** Protects collective bargaining agreements.
- i) **Independent Evaluations:** Requires entities that receive field-initiated proposal grant awards to include an independent evaluation that is made broadly available to the public.
- j) **Reports:** Requires grantees to submit an annual report on how funds were used, their effect on student learning and well-being, how funds were distributed to schools serving high-needs students, and how federal funds were supplemented with state and local funds. Requires the Secretary to submit annual reports to Congress detailing how grants were awarded and available outcomes related to student learning and health.
- k) **Authorization of Appropriations:** Authorizes \$15 billion annually for FY 2027-29, \$10 billion annually for FY 2030-33, and \$5 billion annually for FY 2034-36.