



For Immediate Release

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Four CEC Members Receive 2023 Racial Justice Grants

Arlington, Va. - The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is pleased to announce the awardees for the 2023 CEC Racial Justice Grant: Donna Heim, Sunaina Shenoy, Milsha Reid, and Kathryn Meyer.

New for 2023, the Racial Justice Grant encourages and supports work focused on addressing the issues related to the ongoing racial disparities in educational experiences, opportunities, and outcomes for individuals with disabilities from minoritized racial groups. Grants up to \$1,000 are awarded to these four CEC members for initiatives engaging practitioners, children/youth, families, or other stakeholders in support of students with disabilities from minoritized racial groups.

This year's grantees represent schools across the U.S. and cover work from translation support for school districts to training the next generation of special education teachers on inclusion and centering disability in history and culture across generations and classrooms. Each recipient will provide an update on the progress of the program, and those that are successful will be shared as models for others in the future.

Breaking Down Language Barriers

Donna Heim, special education parent liaison, Crowley Independent School District

In education, it is essential for families of all races and ethnicities to have access to, and be invited to fully participate in, their child's education. This project will facilitate communication between those who do not speak or understand English, and those who do not speak or understand the language of the family. Crowley ISD Special Services Department and the Regional Day School Program for the Deaf presently serve 372 students with disabilities whose parents speak diverse languages including Spanish, Vietnamese, Arabic, Burmese, Urdu, Somali, Nepali and Farsi.

"Navigating our education system, and in particular our special education processes, can be challenging for any parent, but especially when there is a language barrier." said Donna Heim. "We must do all we can to help parents know they are welcomed, heard, seen, and empowered to work together towards accomplishing shared educational goals for their children."

The funds will be used for portable translation equipment that allows for more simultaneous discussion. They will measure overall family involvement and attendance, as well as feedback from families, teachers, and students about its effectiveness, and all hope to see more engagement and inclusion.

Implementing Multi-Tiered Language Curriculum for Native American Students

Sunaina Shenoy, Assistant Professor, Department of Special Education, University of New Mexico



Dr. Shenoy's grant focuses on reading and will support a charter school that primarily serves Native American students. Shenoy will pilot a reading outcomes program for the K-2 grades. The partners for this grant include teachers, special educators, and educational diagnosticians.

"This project is focused on improving reading outcomes and reducing risk for dyslexia for students from Native American backgrounds." Said Shenoy, "We are targeting a diverse and under-served population with the goal of improving reading outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities."

The project will support approximately 50 elementary students, 6 grade-level teachers and educational assistants, 1 special educator and 1 educational diagnostician at the school.

Beyond With Books

Milsha Reid, PhD, Assistant Professor of Special Education, Education Department, Carlow University

Dr. Reid's grant will support the next generation of special education professionals.

Reid will run a pilot project, Beyond with Books, to provide support to pre-service teachers attending Carlow University. The pre-service teachers will be provided a professional learning space and are charged to deeply engage in robust discussions and texts regarding racism, whiteness, ableism, gender, and culture.

"Given, the racial disparities in special education it is critical that pre-service teachers have a space to wrestle with the permeance of institutionalized racism in policies and practices impacting students living at the intersection of race and disability." Said Reid.

Integrating Disability History & Disabled Identities in K-12 Curricula

Kathryn Meyer, 3rd year Ph.D. student, Boston University

Meyer's grant will explore integrating disability and disabled history into a first-grade classroom in a Tier-1 school. The school primarily serves Latinx students and families, many of whom are bilingual and multilingual.

Meyer and the teacher will co-plan and co-teach instruction foregrounding disability as an identity, history, and community to be celebrated and honored in schools. Funds for this project will support the translation of materials in students' and families' home language.

"Disabled people have increasingly called for K-12 educators to integrate past and present disability history into instructional content (Mueller & Beneke, 2022; Thompson, 2020)." wrote Meyer in her application. "Answering this call, while centering the ways that ableism works in tandem with other systems of oppression (Annamma et al., 2013), we propose to meaningfully integrate disability history into the curricula of one first-grade classroom."

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is the largest international professional organization dedicated to high-quality education that is inclusive and equitable for individuals with disabilities. Learn more about CEC at <https://exceptionalchildren.org/>.