

**Rutgers Equity Alliance for Community Health (REACH)
Community Academic Grants Program
Proposal Narrative Template**

Principal Investigator (PI): Kristen Victorino, Ph.D., CCC-SLP

PI Chancellor Led Unit: RBHS

PI Affiliation (college/institute/department): SHP/Rehabilitation & Movement Sciences/Speech-Language Pathology Program

Project Title: Promoting equitable speech & language service provision for culturally and linguistically diverse students in the Newark Board of Education Schools

Background:

Please select which social determinant(s) of health your proposed work will address (choose all that apply):

Education Employment Food Access/Security Housing Population Health

Please select which community your work will be focused on (choose one):

Camden Newark New Brunswick

Please indicate which type of grant you are applying for (choose one):

Community Impact Grant Research Seed Grant *(please note: a limited number of Research Seed Grants will be awarded)*

Project goals and design:

Education is a critical social determinant of health. The Newark Board of Education (NBOE) serves 38,000 students between the ages of 3-21, in 65 schools. According to the district website (2021-22 data) students in the NBOE are diverse in race and ethnicity (38.8% Black, 51% Hispanic, and 8.4% White.) The district serves primarily low-income families, with 82.4% of the students qualifying for free or reduced price lunch. Of the 38,000 total students, 6,527 (17.2%) had Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), which are federally-mandated plans to ensure that students with disabilities have their individual needs met with appropriate special education and related services. According to the US Department of Education, the rate of students with IEPs nationally is approximately 15%; thus, the rate of classification for special education in Newark for 2021-22 was slightly higher than the national average. Speech-language pathology services are classified as related services in the schools; of students with IEPs in the NBOE, about 65% receive speech therapy services. In the past academic year (2022-23), the Office of Special Education (OSE) has reported an alarming increase in evaluations and classifications, with closer to 7,000 students now receiving special education services. This rise stresses a system already challenged

by staffing shortages. While the district currently employs 42 full-time speech-language specialists (SLSs), they also must use 38 contracted "vendor" SLSs in order to cover all services mandated on students' IEPs. It has been speculated that this upward trend in referrals and classifications is due at least in part to the role of COVID-related lockdowns and remote schooling during the previous two academic years (2020-21 and 2021-22). Research nationally indicates that students in the lowest income brackets were least likely to have access to quality, in-person preschool instruction during the pandemic (Barnett & Jung, 2021), which has led to limitations in school readiness and early literacy skills.

In addition to the problems created by pandemic-era education, research indicates that students who are considered culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD), i.e., students of color and those who are English language learners, are at risk of both over- and under-identification for special education services. (Morgan et al., 2015, 2017; Levey et al., 2020). This is due in large part to the use of biased standardized assessment measures and limited training for evaluation teams in culturally responsive assessment procedures. Over-identification for special education can limit exposure to a general education curriculum and can lead to increased dropout rates as students progress through the educational system. There is also a risk of under-identification, in that children with unidentified or unaddressed needs, particularly in the areas of language and literacy, are at risk for academic failure. Both trends contribute to what is known as a school-to-prison pipeline. Research has indicated that a majority of youth offenders have low language and literacy skills. For example, a recent meta-analysis showed that whereas the prevalence of developmental language disorders (DLD) in the general population is approximately 7-12 %, the prevalence in youth offenders is 60% (Chow et al., 2021). These risk factors are exacerbated when the intersectionalities among race, ethnicity, home language, and socioeconomic status are considered.

In recent years, more research has aimed to promote accurate identification of language disorders in linguistically diverse populations (e.g., Oetting, 2018). Given the importance of education as a SDOH, and the risks associated with both under- and over-identification of language and literacy disorders for children who are CLD, the rising referrals for child study team evaluations and subsequent IEP classifications in the NBOE pose a significant problem that can lead to adverse outcomes for CLD and low SES students who are already at a disadvantage in other SDOHs such as housing and food security. With this project, we propose that our RU team can partner with the NBOE in order to objectively define their current challenges in evaluation and service delivery, provide training and professional development for staff, and co-develop resources that will meet the needs of the diverse students in the district.

A partnership between the RU MS-SLP program and the NBOE was established in 2021, when the MS-SLP program enrolled its inaugural class. Ms. Ford (see team members below) has served on the Advisory Committee for the MS-SLP program, and NBOE is an externship site for the MS-SLP student clinicians. The Office of Special Education and the Related Services departments have previously engaged RU to provide professional development for their staff of SLSs, occupational therapists, and physical therapists. These early collaborations have built mutual trust and collaboration between the RU-

MSSLP Program and the NBOE-OSE, and now serve as a foundation for this proposal. We propose that this project and partnership between RU and NBOE can serve as a bridge from research to practice, thus positively impacting the community.

The first aim of this project will be to conduct a systematic examination of evaluation trends in the NBOE via a chart and records review. De-identified data will be collected regarding demographic characteristics of the students, reasons for referral, standardized tests and other methods used for assessment, and eligibility decisions. Secondly, stakeholders in the NBOE community will be engaged through focus group interactions. We will host eight focus group meetings of up to 8 participants each, with groups to include general and special education teachers, SLSs (two full-time, one vendor group), other related professionals (i.e., OT/PT), and two groups of parents from the community (one to be facilitated by a Spanish-language interpreter). The meetings will be recorded, transcribed, and analyzed qualitatively using a directed and iterative content analysis approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) by two coders per transcript, using NVivo software. IRB approvals from both RU and NBOE will be obtained prior to any recruitment or data collection. The RU IRB review type recommendation tool has indicated that both the chart review and focus groups would be considered minimal-risk, non-interventional studies that would be eligible for expedited or exempt reviews. By conducting this two-part needs assessment, challenges and barriers will be operationalized. Following the comprehensive needs assessment, and in partnership with our project collaborators, we will aim to address immediate district needs by providing professional development and training to staff, and co-developing a multicultural resource library that will include culturally and linguistically appropriate tools for more accurate identification of language and literacy disorders, as well as inclusive books and curricular materials as informed by our findings. Finally, we will aim to empower select SLSs by offering a pilot training program in culturally-responsive service delivery and peer leadership, thus ensuring the sustainability of the recommended practices.

Project team:

The project team will include the PI (Victorino), along with two other MS-SLP Program faculty members: Celeste Domsch, PhD., CCC-SLP, Program Director, and Stephanie Hubbell, MS, CCC-SLP, Director of Clinical Education. All RU faculty members have experience with school-based service delivery as well as cultural and linguistic diversity. Drs. Victorino and Domsch are teacher-scholars who have focused on child language disorders throughout their careers. Dr. Victorino teaches the "Clinical Methods" course in the MS-SLP program that emphasizes culturally responsive diagnostic and treatment methods. Dr. Domsch teaches the course, "Speech Language Pathology in Diverse School Settings". Ms. Hubbell has served as a liaison between the NBOE and our student clinicians, and as such, is familiar with the district. Our community partners in the Newark Public Schools include Nicole Ford, M.S., CCC-

SLP, Supervisor of Related Services for the Office of Special Education, (OSE) and Adriana DeGiovanni, M.S., Director of the Initial Evaluation Center for the OSE. Both have extensive knowledge about their respective fields as well as many years of combined experience in the Newark schools. The development of this project proposal was collaborative and very much driven by community needs. Given the previously mentioned concerns about a recent rise in referrals, evaluations, and classifications for special education, it was agreed that the REACH funding opportunity could have a significant impact on the district. The implementation of the project will be a shared experience in which barriers are jointly identified and solutions are co-developed.

Impact

In the short term, this project will provide the district with needed resources in order to objectively define their challenges in service delivery, to explore community feedback on a deeper level, and to develop training models and materials that can be used to modify their current practices to better meet the needs of their culturally and linguistically diverse students. In the long term, better systems and strategies for identification of language and literacy needs for students in Newark will mitigate the risk factors of over- and under-identification for special education services. As such, we aim to improve outcomes for those students at the greatest risk of academic failure.

Outcomes of this project will be measured in several ways. First, trends in initial evaluations, identified via chart review, will be quantified and explored statistically. Secondly, results of focus group conversations will be analyzed qualitatively in order to identify themes within and across stakeholder groups. Thirdly, the effectiveness of professional development workshops will be measured with anonymous participant surveys. Community-engaged scholarship endeavors to bridge the gap between the academy and the "real world." In the field of speech-language pathology, there have recently been movements towards both community-based participatory research methods (e.g., Holt & Asagbra, 2021) as well as towards implementation science (Douglas et al, 2015; Davidson et al., 2022). This project includes aspects of both. As such, the project will not only benefit the educational and socioeconomic outcomes in the Newark community, but its outcomes may also be disseminated via scholarly outlets. It is likely that the products of this work will include a model that can be employed by other diverse urban school districts. We anticipate that this work will be of interest to professional associations, scholarly publications, and future external funders.

Communications

Communication between RU and NBOE partners will be frequent and intentional. Notices about focus group opportunities will be disseminated to the community stakeholders with the partner's support. For example, teachers, SLSs, and contracted clinicians will be notified of both focus groups and

professional development workshops by our partners in the OSE. Parents of children who have recently been evaluated for special education services will also be contacted through the district.

Sustainability

By providing this funding and support, RU will be adding value and commitment to the already cooperative relationship between the MS-SLP program and the NBOE. Results of this project will be shared with stakeholders during subsequent professional development workshops and/or written reports to be disseminated to participants. We anticipate that this project will continue past the initial period of funding with more targeted trainings for evaluators and treating teachers and SLSs, and that additional funding might help to expand the resources available to the district for culturally responsive and community engaged educational/therapeutic practices. We posit that by encouraging peer leadership and providing incentive for participating, the project will eventually be self-sustaining from within the ranks of the NBOE. It is likely that this model could be replicated across other urban NJ districts, including Camden, New Brunswick, Elizabeth, and Paterson. The PI (Victorino) and the lead partner in the NBOE (Ford) both have strong ties to the New Jersey Speech-Language and Hearing Association, and we believe that the annual conference in April 2024 would be an excellent venue for presenting the initial results of this work and encouraging similar school districts to join in or replicate our efforts. Sources of future funding could include subsequent cycles of REACH funding, or external funding via the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE), US Department of Education Institute of Educational Sciences (IES), or the National Education Association (NEA) Urban Grants program.

Timeline/Milestones

July – Aug 2023: Prepare/Submit IRB applications (RU & NBOE); develop chart review protocol; plan focus group protocols and schedule first professional development workshop; hire student assistant.

Sept – Dec 2023: Conduct chart review/data collection and analyze trends; conduct focus group meetings among stakeholders over 8 weeks; transcription service to transcribe meetings; host first professional development session for OSE staff on culturally/linguistically responsive evaluations.

Jan – April 2024: Analyze focus group transcriptions; based on results of all analyses, identify areas of greatest need and impact; co-develop resource toolbox/library; host second professional development event; host training for SLSs interested in leadership and culturally responsive service provision; prepare and submit application for next cycle of REACH funding or external grants.

April 2024: Members of team to present at NJSHA and/or NBASLH (National Black Association for Speech-Language & Hearing) Conventions (pending acceptances).

May 2024: Final analysis of all data, planning for next stage of implementation.

Subject: Rutgers eIRB: IRB Approval Issued for Study # Pro2023001495 by Kristen Victorino
Date: Wednesday, September 20, 2023 at 2:03:32 PM Eastern Daylight Time
From: eIRB@research.rutgers.edu
To: kristen.victorino@rutgers.edu
CC: dr571@rutgers.edu



**Human Research
Protection Program
(HRPP)
Institutional Review Board
(IRB)**
335 George Street
Suite 3100, 3rd Floor.
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Phone: 732-235-9806



DHHS Federal Wide Assurance Identifier: FWA00003913

IRB Chair Persons: Dr. Richard Drachtman & Dr. Jonathan McCoy

IRB Director: Swapnali Chaudhari

Effective Date: 9/20/2023

Approval Date: 9/20/2023

Expiration Date: 9/19/2025

eIRB Notice of Approval for Initial Submission # Pro2023001495

STUDY PROFILE

Study ID: Pro2023001495

Title: Promoting equitable speech & language service provision for culturally and linguistically diverse students in the Newark Board of Education schools through a Rutgers Equity Alliance for Community Health (REACH) community-academic partnership

Principal Investigator:	Kristen Victorino	Study Coordinator:	Kristen Victorino
Co-Investigator(s):	Celeste Domsch Stephanie Hubbell	Other Study Staff:	Julie Martell

Sponsor:	Department Funded	Approval Cycle:	24 Months
-----------------	-------------------	------------------------	-----------

Risk Determination:	Minimal Risk
----------------------------	--------------

Review Type:	Expedited	Expedited Category:	(5) (6) (7)
---------------------	-----------	----------------------------	-------------------

Subjects:	64	Records:	200
------------------	----	-----------------	-----

CURRENT SUBMISSION STATUS

Submission Type:	Research Protocol/Study	Submission Status:	Approved
-------------------------	-------------------------	---------------------------	----------

Approval Date:	9/20/2023	Expiration Date:	9/19/2025
-----------------------	-----------	-------------------------	-----------

Vulnerable Population Codes:	
Children	No Children As Subjects
Pregnant Women	No Pregnant Women as Subjects
Prisoners	No Prisoners As Subjects

Protocol:	Victorino_Protocol_v3_clean_9.13.23 Focus Group Screening Focus Group Guide Chart Review Data Extraction	Consent:	Consent-Spanish.pdf Victorino_REACH_consent_v2.pdf	Other
------------------	---	-----------------	---	--------------

* **Retrospective Chart Review:** If applicable, records may be accessed to review information dating:

From: 07/01/2022 **To:** 06/30/2023

* **Study Performance Sites:**

ALL APPROVED INVESTIGATOR(S) MUST COMPLY WITH THE FOLLOWING:

1. Conduct the research in accordance with the protocol, applicable laws and regulations, and the principles of research ethics as set forth in the Belmont Report.
2. **Continuing Review:** Approval is valid until the protocol expiration date shown above. To avoid lapses in approval, submit a continuation application at least eight weeks before the study expiration date.
3. **Expiration of IRB Approval:** If IRB approval expires, effective the date of expiration and until the continuing review approval is issued: **All research activities must stop unless the IRB finds that it is in the best interest of individual subjects to continue. (This determination shall be based on a separate written request from the PI to the IRB.) No new subjects may be enrolled and no samples/charts/surveys may be collected, reviewed, and/or analyzed.**
4. **Amendments/Modifications/Revisions:** If you wish to change any aspect of this study, including but not limited to, study procedures, consent form(s), investigators, advertisements, the protocol document, investigator drug brochure, or accrual goals, you are required to obtain IRB review and approval prior to implementation of these changes unless necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects.
5. **Unanticipated Problems:** Unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or others must be reported to the IRB Office (45 CFR 46, 21 CFR 312, 812) as required, in the appropriate time as specified in the attachment online at: <https://research.rutgers.edu/researcher-support/research-compliance/human-subjects-protection-program-irbs/hspg-guidance-topics>
6. **Protocol Deviations and Violations:** Deviations from/violations of the approved study protocol must be reported to the IRB Office (45 CFR 46, 21 CFR 312, 812) as required, in the appropriate time as specified in the attachment online at: <https://research.rutgers.edu/researcher-support/research-compliance/human-subjects-protection-program-irbs/hspg-guidance-topics>
7. **Consent/Assent:** The IRB has reviewed and approved the consent and/or assent process, waiver and/or alteration described in this protocol as required by 45 CFR 46 and 21 CFR 50, 56, (if FDA regulated research). Only the versions of the documents included in the approved process may be used to document informed consent and/or assent of study subjects; each subject must receive a copy of the approved form(s); and a copy of each signed form must be filed in a secure place in the subject's medical/patient/research record.
8. **Completion of Study:** Notify the IRB when your study has been stopped for any reason. Neither study closure by the sponsor or the investigator removes the obligation for submission of timely continuing review application or final report.
9. The Investigator(s) did not participate in the review, discussion, or vote of this protocol.
10. **eCOI:** This IRB approval does not infer other approvals which may be required before this study can begin, such as those provided by the Rutgers Conflict of Interest Committee. If your disclosure requires a management plan with any request to change research document/s (such as consent document/s), then please submit the revised document/s via modification to the IRB for review.

CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE: This email communication may contain private, confidential, or legally privileged information intended for the sole use of the designated and/or duly authorized recipients(s). If you are not the intended recipient or have received this email in error, please notify the sender immediately by email and permanently delete all copies of this email including all attachments without reading them. If you are the intended recipient, secure the contents in a manner that conforms to all applicable state and/or federal requirements related to privacy and confidentiality of such information.

Study.PI Name:
Study.Co-Investigators:

Quinn, Carol

Subject: FW: Meeting re: budget/invoicing

From: Kristen Victorino <kv359@shp.rutgers.edu>
Sent: Monday, January 29, 2024 11:54 AM
To: Quinn, Carol <cquinn@NPS.K12.NJ.US>; Ford, Nicole <NFord@NPS.K12.NJ.US>
Subject: [EXTERNAL EMAIL] Re: Meeting re: budget/invoicing

Hi Carol,

The total grant award was for just under 50K. The amount budgeted to the district is below. There is some flexibility within those numbers depending on specific needs identified throughout the chart review and focus group analyses that are currently ongoing. But this should give you a general idea. I have been instructed that we will set up a PO in the total amount and then the district will invoice as needed against the total amount. Veronica will be able to describe that process in more detail next week. At this point we are just trying to get the account set up. Hope this helps!

Kristen Victorino, Ph.D., CCC-SLP
Associate Professor
Speech-Language Pathology Program
Department of Rehabilitation and Movement Sciences
School of Health Professions
65 Bergen St., Suite 720
Newark, NJ 07107
T: 973-972-8979 F: 973-972-3717
Pronouns: she/her


