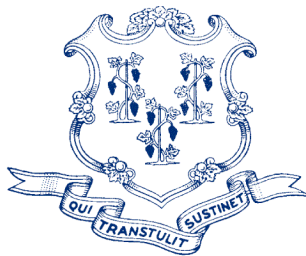


**SENATOR DONALD E. WILLIAMS, JR.**

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## **State of Connecticut**

**SENATE**

*29th District*

October 27, 2014

Dear Educator:

I am writing to make sure you are aware of an important new opportunity to increase student achievement for your students in your public school district.

During the 2014 legislative session the Legislature authorized Smart Start, a new program to expand pre-K education to help better prepare students for success. Smart Start focuses on our public schools by offering a new, stable funding mechanism for both capital improvements and operating expenses for pre-K programs in our public schools.

Smart Start has dedicated funding of \$100 million in operating funds over the next 10 years, and districts will be approved for five-year periods so they can rely on these funds for future budgeting. In addition, the legislature authorized \$105 million in bonding for capital improvements—renovating excess classrooms or other school/municipal space for pre-K.

Teachers, administrators and researchers agree that quality pre-K is one of the best ways to help students succeed and increase their academic performance.

All towns are eligible to apply for Smart Start funding. The goal is to serve unmet need—those children who are not now receiving pre-K education. Smart Start gives towns flexibility to be creative, to take advantage of unused space due to decreased enrollment, and helps integrate students into the public school system. There is no mandate to participate, and there is no mandatory local funding match.

### **Questions and Answers:**

Who can apply? *Any public school district may apply.*

How will districts be selected? *Districts will be selected by the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) on the merits of the proposal; a demonstration of unmet need is an important criterion that the OEC must consider.*

What are the requirements? *Applicants must build additional capacity for pre-K in traditional public school settings with certified public school teachers; funding cannot supplant existing programs.*

How do we determine unmet need? *Smart Start requires applicant districts to demonstrate unmet need for pre-K through data collection about actual preschool experience of students. Additionally, the OEC is partnering with the Connecticut Health and Educational Facilities Authority (CHEFA) to conduct a study of unmet need in Connecticut that will be completed by the end of October.*

When will applications be available? *An RFP will be available in November. It has been completed and is being reviewed. A bidder's conference will be held on November 3, 2014 from 9:00 to 11:30 AM in Room 307 A/B of the State Office Building located at 165 Capitol Avenue in Hartford. The conference will also be live streamed in Conference Room 3 at The Connecticut State Department of Education Middletown offices located at 25 Industrial Park Rd. Applications are due back December 19 by 4 p.m.*

When will funds be available? *Capital Improvement grants are available for the 2015 Fiscal Year so that improvements can be made for the 2015-16 school year. Operating grants will be available for the 2015-16 school year.*

For more information on the Smart Start program, please contact Andrea Brinnel, 860-713-6771, [andrea.brinnel@ct.gov](mailto:andrea.brinnel@ct.gov) or visit the web page at [www.ct.gov/oec/smartstart](http://www.ct.gov/oec/smartstart), or contact my state senate office.

Thank you!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Donald E. Williams, Jr." with a large, stylized initial "D" at the beginning.

Donald E. Williams, Jr.  
Senate President Pro Tempore

# SMART START FAQ



## What is Smart Start?

A competitive grant program administered by the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) that creates a financial partnership with towns that choose to offer pre-K as an option for families. It builds additional capacity for pre-K in traditional public school settings with certified public school teachers.

## Who is eligible for the program?

Public school districts may apply for funding under the program.

## When can districts apply?

An RFP will be available in November, 2014. The RFP has been completed and is currently being reviewed. There will be a bidders' conference on November 3, from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. at the State Education Resource Center (SERC) in Middletown. Applications are due back December 19 by 4:00 p.m.

## What resources are available?

Smart Start provides capital grants up to \$75,000 per classroom. Towns can use these funds to renovate or reconfigure existing space into preschool classrooms.

The program also provides operating funds in the amount of \$5,000 per student up to \$75,000 per classroom (with a maximum of \$300,000 per district) for the expansion or creation of new preschool programs in our public schools.

## What are the requirements?

Applicants must build additional capacity for pre-K in traditional public school settings with certified public school teachers; funding cannot supplant existing programs.

## How do we determine unmet need?

Smart Start requires applicant districts to demonstrate unmet need for pre-K through data collection about actual preschool experience of students. Additionally, the OEC is partnering with the Connecticut Health and Educational Facilities Authority (CHEFA) to conduct a study of unmet need in Connecticut that will be completed by the end of October. The OEC will make final determination on unmet need.





## **What is the source of this funding?**

- Capital grants will be funded by state bonding beginning in FY15.
- Operating grants will be funded by the use of the Tobacco Settlement Fund beginning in FY16.

## **How can towns rely on the continuation of this money?**

Smart Start grants will be authorized for five years with possible renewal for another five years—assuming quality and outcomes—giving towns the confidence that the Smart Start grants will be funded for the duration of each five-year grant cycle.



## **Does it create a mandate on municipalities?**

No. Municipalities are not required to offer pre-K programming. Rather, this funding encourages public school districts that wish to apply to build capacity to address unmet need for pre-K in their communities. The initiative does not dictate a specific type of programming; these decisions are left to the towns based upon their particular needs and current resources.

## **How is quality maintained?**

Programs must obtain NAEYC accreditation within three years of receiving funding.



## **Is the format of programs dictated by OEC?**

No, creativity is encouraged. Districts have the flexibility to determine the program design that best meets their community needs and offers the best value.

## **Are there required matching funds from the town?**

While it is assumed that the Smart Start grant will not cover all costs, there are no required matching funds.

## **Why public schools?**



- They provide a quality pre-K experience with certified teachers.
- 83 percent of all Connecticut school districts have declining grades 1–12 enrollment (declining enrollment may increase available classroom space for pre-K).
- It is less expensive to renovate existing classroom space to create capacity than it is to build new, which has been the model to date.
- We know we are currently serving over 16,000 children in public pre-K settings.