

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.

