

Smart Start FAQs

Please note: The answers to the following questions should be considered official answers regarding Smart Start. This information supersedes any previous information obtained from any source (e.g., email, phone conversations, bidder's conference).

1) Is this subsidy (grant) in addition to potential funding from the federal Preschool Development grant for PreK-4 classrooms?

Yes. The Smart Start grant is a separate funding opportunity for 3- and 4-year olds.

2) Are state or independent charter schools or Regional Educational Services Centers (RESCs) eligible to apply for a grant under Smart Start?

No. Only local and regional boards of education are able to apply for Smart Start funds. Charter schools and RESCs may partner with a local or regional board of education, but the applicant must be a local or regional board of education.

3) Is the Smart Start capital improvement grant a one-time award per classroom?

Yes.

4) If a RESC is working with more than one school district, is it possible to get capital improvement funding for a non-school building and can the RESC hire the certified teacher directly?

No. Smart Start staff must be employees of a local or regional board of education. Smart Start capital improvement funding can only be obtained for space within a public school building. Capital improvements in state-funded community-based programs may be able to apply for funding for capital improvements through the [Minor Capital Improvements grant](#) as funding becomes available.

5) If a magnet school is jointly run by a RESC and an LEA, must the application for a Smart Start classroom in that school be made by the LEA?

Yes. Only local or regional boards of education may apply for Smart Start funding and the Smart Start teacher MUST be employed by the local or regional board of education. RESCs may not apply for Smart Start funds.

6) Is Smart Start effectively going to end community childcare centers?

No. The goal of Smart Start is to provide preK for children in addition to those already being served by both school- and community-based providers. Smart Start is also an opportunity for public schools and community-based providers to work collaboratively to serve our state's young children.

7) Can the Smart Start Classroom(s) be in a space that is leased by the local or regional board of education?

Yes. Smart Start classrooms must be in a public school or property owned by the public school in order to qualify for capital improvements through the Smart Start grant. Smart Start classrooms may operate in spaces that are leased by a community program as part of the local or regional board of education's agreement with the community-based program; however, these spaces are not eligible for capital improvement bond funds through Smart Start. To qualify for capital improvements bond funds through Smart Start, classrooms must be in a public school building. Local or regional boards of education may collaborate with community-based programs with regard to space. When a Smart Start program(s) is co-located within a community-based program, the community program may be able to apply for capital improvements through the [Minor Capital Improvement grant](#) as funding becomes available.

8) Can a local or regional board of education open a Smart Start classroom in unused space at a community preK program?

Yes. However, Smart Start capital improvement funds are only available for classrooms located in public school buildings or other space owned by a local or regional board of education. Community programs may be able to

apply for capital improvements through the [Minor Capital Improvements grant](#) for community programs when funding becomes available.

9) Does the Smart Start grant program require coordinating with School Readiness Programs?

Yes. There is a requirement that the local School Readiness Council provide a letter of support as part of the application if the local or regional board of education is part of a competitive or priority School Readiness town/district.

10) If a local or regional board of education chooses to locate a Smart Start classroom in a community-based program, do the teachers and paraprofessionals need to meet with the board of education's hiring guidelines?

Yes. The teacher must be a SDE certified teacher and must be employed by the board of education. The classroom must be under the jurisdiction of a board of education and all staff must meet board of education requirements for employment in the role for which they were hired (e.g. paraprofessionals). A board of education may work collaboratively with a community program to staff a classroom as long as all Smart Start requirements are met.

11) Will all Smart Staff be required to have teacher certification?

No. All Smart Start classrooms must have an appropriately certified teacher employed by the local or regional board of education. The classroom will be considered a public school classroom and must be under the jurisdiction of the local or regional board of education. Not all staff (e.g. paraprofessionals) are required to be certified teachers, however, they must meet the local or regional board of education's criteria for employment for the role they are in.

12) Is there a requirement for the LEA to have a plan to provide services when school is not in session?

Yes. The Smart Start program requires that a local or regional board of education have a plan for children enrolled in Smart Start (school-day/school-year) for care for those children when school is not in session. The plan is a local one and there is no requirement that the staff in programs used or available for care when school is not in session be employees of the local or regional board of education.

13) Can an existing School Readiness classroom relocate to another school then be placed in a low-income area with Smart Start?

Yes. Location of Smart Start and School Readiness programs is a local decision. Smart Start funds must be used to serve additional preK children over and above the number currently enrolled in the local or regional board of education's existing preK programs.

14) Has transportation been considered when evaluating unmet need?

No. The OEC will not be evaluating transportation needs. Transportation may factor into unmet need concerns within a community and should be addressed in the Smart Start application by the local or regional board of education applying for Smart Start funding. The \$5000 per child of operating funding may be used for transportation.

15) If a community is not on the list of high-need communities, is there a process for applying for that status?

Yes. Any community not listed as having an unmet need may apply for Smart Start funding, but they are required as part of their application to provide a detailed methodology regarding their self-determination of unmet need, as well as extensive data to support their self-determination. The data used to support the self-determination of unmet need are at the discretion of the local or regional board of education. All data should be current.

16) Will a local or regional board of education that does not need funds for a capital improvement grant be precluded from applying for operational funding through Smart Start?

No. Operating funds will be available for the 2015-2016 academic year.

17) Can a local or regional board of education apply for one Smart Start classroom this year and an additional classroom next year?

Yes. Pending availability of funds, programs may apply to add additional Smart Start classrooms throughout the duration of the grant program.

18) Can the Smart Start capital improvement funds be used to purchase space for preschool?

No. Capital Improvement funds may NOT be used to purchase space. Capital Improvement funds may only be used to improve/reconfigure existing space within a public school building or property owned by the local or regional board of education.

19) Will the \$5,000/child cover the full cost of running a Smart Start classroom?

No. The intent of Smart Start operating expense funding is not to cover the full cost of a preK program. It will be necessary for the local or regional board of education to support the Smart Start classroom(s) financially to meet the total cost of education and care.

20) If the local or regional board of education collaborates with a community-based provider, does the requirement to become NAEYC accredited within three years apply?

Yes. ALL Smart Start classrooms MUST be either NAEYC accredited, willing and able to become accredited within 3 years of the Smart Start award, or be Head Start approved.

21) Does NAEYC Accreditation need to be obtained for all of the preschool classrooms in a building where Smart Start funding is used?

Yes. [NAEYC Accreditation](#) is required for all of the preschool components in the building where Smart Start funds will be utilized.

It is NAEYC's policy that "a group can only be excluded from a program's NAEYC Accreditation if it is part of a separate program that has a separate public identity. A program pursuing NAEYC Accreditation must notify NAEYC of all separate programs that operate within its facility and be able to demonstrate a separate budget, administration, license and/or other criteria." The OEC expects Smart Start funding used to establish or expand preschool in a building and will achieve accreditation through a collaborative process by engaging all preschool stakeholders.

It is possible that an existing classroom operating under another funding stream such as School Readiness or Head Start may already operate in the building where Smart Start classroom will be located, and that classroom or program may already meet the state's requirement for Head Start Approval or NAEYC Accreditation. In these cases, the Smart Start funding may allow expansion of this program to include additional classrooms and the classrooms will be incorporated under the existing Head Start approval or NAEYC Accreditation. It is the program's responsibility to adhere to NAEYC's and Head Start's requirements regarding any programmatic changes.

If the existing state-funded program is not already meeting the accreditation requirement, the three-year timeline for achieving of NAEYC accreditation applies based on the earliest funding date at the program. Smart Start funding does not 'reset the clock' to a new 3-year timeframe.

If Smart Start funds are utilized to expand in a building where a preschool special education program exists, the OEC recognizes that this program may have a public identity separate from other programs operating in the building. While it is not required that the preschool special education program achieve NAEYC Accreditation in collaboration with the Smart Start funded classroom(s), the OEC strongly encourages programs to use this funding as an opportunity to ensure a high-quality and developmentally appropriate program for all board of education early childhood programs.

22) Will preference be given to those programs that are already NAEYC accredited?

No.

23) If a local or regional board of education currently has a pre-K program and is awarded the Smart Start grant and expands to another classroom, does that Smart Start classroom need to be NAEYC accredited?

Yes. The Smart Start classroom MUST be NAEYC accredited, able to become NAEYC accredited within three years, or be Head Start approved. There may be accreditation implications for non-Smart Start classrooms co-located with Smart Start classrooms. NAEYC accreditation guidelines should be reviewed. Accreditation support for Smart Start will be available through the [Accreditation Facilitation Project \(AFP\)](#) and may need to include non-Smart Start preK classrooms.

24) Will support for principals to better understand the NAEYC accreditation process and best practice for high-quality early childhood programs be available?

Yes. NAEYC accreditation support will be available through the [Accreditation Facilitation Project](#). Additional information and professional learning opportunities regarding NAEYC accreditation are available through the State Education Resource Center (SERC). The CT Association of Schools (CAS) is planning sessions around the competencies required to be an effective early childhood leader (PreK-grade 3). Evidence Guides for PreK-2nd Grade teacher evaluation will be available through the Department of Education's Talent Office this winter.

25) Is eligibility for the Care4Kids (C4K) family subsidy for Smart Start different than for School Readiness programs and state funded Child Day Care Centers (CDCs)?

Yes. School Readiness programs are exempt from the C4K requirement that providers shall not charge or report charges for Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) participants at a rate that is higher than the rate charged to a comparable family not participating in the CCAP Program. The exemption extends to children attending state-supported Child Day Care center or School Readiness program funded under Connecticut General Statutes Sections 8-210(b), 10-16p(8)(c), or 10-16p(8)(d). This exemption does NOT extend to the Smart Start classrooms. For additional information contact the C4K information line at 888-214-KIDS(5437).

26) If you are already a C4K provider, does the family have to go directly to the United Way to access C4Ks?

In most instances, yes. The OEC contracts with the United Way of CT to administer the C4K child care subsidy program. Families apply for C4K through the United Way. If your community already has a centralized assistance program to help families with the C4K application process Smart Start families can use it.

27) If the Smart Start classroom will be part of a Head Start program, can they charge a fee for those children in the Smart Start classroom?

No. Head Start does not allow parent fees to be charged. If a Head Start program has questions about this they should contact their Head Start Program Specialist through.

28) Can Smart Start classroom include children funded through other sources (e.g. Head Start, School Readiness)?

Yes. A local or regional board of education is able to apply for funds for up to 15 children in a Smart Start classroom but may enroll up to 18 children in the classroom. The status of the additional 3 children is a local decision. If a hybrid model with Head Start is being considered the Office of the Administration for Children & Families (ACF) Region I Head Start Program Specialist should be consulted to confirm that what they are proposing meets all federal Head Start requirements.

29) Will there be a process to ensure that Smart Start funds are being utilized for the population intended?

Yes. Local or regional boards of education are subject to monitoring by the OEC, which may include review of enrollment status of low income, DLL and children with IEPs. By September 2015 the OEC will have in place an early childhood information system (ECIS). All children enrolled in SMART START will be included in the ECIS, which will then allow the OEC to know exactly which children are enrolled and basic demographic information for each child and family.

30) Is the CD-ROM required as part of the RFP also due on 12/19/14?

Yes. The electronic submission, CD-ROM and original signatures are all due to the OEC by 4:30 on December 19' 2014 (regardless of postmark).

Mailing Address: Andrea Brinnel, Smart Start Manager CT Office of Early Childhood PO Box 2219 Hartford, CT 06145-2219	Delivery Address: CT Office of Early Childhood 165 Capitol Avenue, G-17 Hartford, CT 06106 oecc@ct.gov
--	--

31) How will the funds for Smart Start be awarded? The Smart Start grants will be a drawdown in the electronic prepayment grant system.

32) If a Smart Start classroom is co-located with another preK program must the teacher hold SDE certification and be paid on the board of education's K-12 pay scale? Yes. All classrooms funded through Smart Start require teachers to hold appropriate Department of Education certification (see p.5 of the Smart Start RFP for a list of certifications) and be an employee of the local or regional board of education. Smart Start teachers must be paid on the same pay scale as the local or regional board of education's k-12 teachers. Teachers in other classrooms are not subject to Smart Start certification requirements and are subject to the requirements of their funding source (e.g. Head Start, School Readiness).

33) If a program decides to collaborate with a Head Start program and incorporates Head Start standards, does that also mean that that they would not be required to pursue NAEYC accreditation?
Maybe. A Smart Start program must be NAEYC accredited or Head Start approved. Some Head Start programs choose to maintain NAEYC accreditation in addition to Head Start approval. Local or regional boards of education that are considering collaborations with Head Start should make sure that they receive guidance from the Office of the Administration for Children & Families (ACF) Region I Head Start Program Specialist.

34) If the local or regional board of education has a pre-k teacher as part of their union contract with a separate pay grade, must their pay be changed?
Yes. Teachers for Smart Start MUST be paid on the same scale as their K-12 colleagues.

35) Since Smart Start classrooms require the inclusion of special education students which of the listed teacher certifications meet the requirements for special education?
Teachers holding 065, 112, and 113, teacher certifications are required for classrooms in which a child's Individual Education Program (IEP) requires special education instruction.

36) Is the Early Childhood Teacher Credential (ECTC) included as an acceptable certification?
No. Teachers in the Smart Start classroom MUST hold the appropriate State Department of Education certification. The Early Childhood Teacher Credential (ECTC) is not acceptable in lieu of SDE teacher certification for Smart Start teachers.

37) Given the difficulty in locating appropriately certified teachers, are there any certification programs set up for elementary certified teachers to get the additional certification (cross endorsement)?
Yes. There is a wide range of acceptable certifications for Smart Start teachers (112, 113, 001, 002, 003, 008, & 065). Currently, those holding elementary certification may only obtain a cross endorsement through an approved program. Individual candidates for cross-endorsement should be evaluated by an institute of higher education to determine what requirements must be met.

For example, currently approved programs offering the #113 endorsement or cross-endorsement are listed below:

Institution	Endorsement Area
Mitchell College	ECE #113 (Undergrad only)
ECSU	ECE #113 (Undergrad/Grad)
SCSU	ECE #113 (Undergrad/Grad)
University of Hartford	ECE #113 (Undergrad/Grad)
University of Saint Joseph	ECE #113 (Grad Only)

For additional information about certification and cross-endorsements contact the State Department of Education, Bureau of Educator Standards and Certification at teacher.cert@ct.gov

38) Is there a requirement for special education students to be part of Smart Start classrooms?

Yes. The same proportion of children requiring special education services in the local or regional board of education is required in a Smart Start classroom (e.g. If the local or regional board of education has 6% of the population identified as special education, then the Smart Start classroom must have 6% of the children requiring special education. In a classroom of 15 to 18 that equals 1 child with an IEP).

39) Will there be monitoring required as part of the Smart Start grant? What about on the local level?

Yes. Local and regional boards of education receiving Smart Start funds will be required to report to the OEC annually regarding the status and operations of the Smart Start classroom(s). The OEC reserves the right to monitor Smart Start programs (e.g. desk audits, fiscal reviews, on-site visits) as it would for any other state-funded program. Local level monitoring will be at local discretion.

40) Where can I find resources that may be useful for my local or regional board of education as I respond to the Smart Start RFP?

211 Child Care Capacity Availability Enrollment Survey 2013 – this gives a snapshot of available care. It addresses and adjusts for the difference between what the licensed number of slots are compared to what is made available.

<http://www.211childcare.org/reports/capacity/>

<http://www.211childcare.org/reports/2-1-1-child-care-affordability-availability-report-2013/>

This above link is to the 211 Child Care search engine for child care. Towns can view on a map where the facilities are located. They can also isolate accredited programs to further refine the map results. This will help identify if there are pockets in individual towns that have limited facilities. You can drill down to the street level with this tool.

<http://search.211childcare.org/>

Another resource applicants can utilize that can address how grantees will assist families with their child care needs outside of the Smart Start school-day and school-year is through 211 Child Care.

<http://www.211childcare.org/parents/>

41) Is a regional board of education able to apply for Smart Start if all of the towns that comprise the region do not demonstrate an unmet need per the CHEFA report?

Yes. A regional board of education is able to locate Smart Start classrooms in a community that has a demonstrated need (per the CHEFA report). If the regional board of education is proposing to locate a Smart Start classroom in a community NOT demonstrating an unmet need (per the CHEFA report) they are required as part of their application to provide a detailed methodology regarding their self-determination of unmet need for this

community, as well as extensive data to support their self-determination. The data used to support the self-determination of unmet need are at the discretion of the regional board of education. All data should be current.

42) Is there a residency requirement for children attending Smart Start programs?

Yes. Children enrolled in a Smart Start preK must be a resident of the town that administers the Smart Start program. Open choice students are not able to enroll in Smart Start due to the residency requirement.