

Smart Scholars Early College High School (ECHS) - Cohort 2 RFP Questions and Answers

1. Can students be charged tuition for the college courses?

No. Students enrolled in a Smart Scholars Early College High School should not be required to pay for tuition, fees or textbooks. State law prohibits public school students from being charged for tuition as part of their high school program.

2. Is tuition paid from the grant to colleges for high school students in dual enrollment college courses considered to be a “contracted service” and part of subcontracted expenditures subject to the 25% cap?

No. Services provided by any identified partners (LEAs and/or IHEs) are not subject to the 25% limitation. Only services provided by collaborators such as community-based organizations (CBOs) and local businesses will be subject to the 25% limitation.

3. Can a BOCES serve as a fiscal agent for ECHS?

No. A BOCES may participate as a collaborator with an ECHS partnership; however, the fiscal agents and primary partners can only be an institution of higher education (IHE), a public school district or a charter public school.

4. Can a coalition of schools and partner organizations form a regional ECHS?

Yes, provided that the lead and partner agencies are institutions of higher education (IHEs) and school districts or charter public schools. Other organizations or businesses may participate in the grant program as collaborators.

5. If a New York City public school wished to apply, would the application have to come from the NYC Department of Education or could it come from the school?

An individual school cannot be a lead applicant for this grant. An institution of higher education (IHE) or the school district, in this case, the NYC Department of Education, would have to submit the grant as the lead agency.

6. Can students already enrolled in a college's Federal TRIO Upward Bound and Liberty Partnership Programs participate in this grant program, should a grant be awarded to the college?

If the students are enrolled in the grant program's target school(s), yes. TRIO programs may serve as components of the student support services provided for a Smart Scholars ECHS.

7. If a college wants to partner with two schools in different districts, should they submit two separate proposals?

This would depend in part on whether the school districts are located in different regions among the Regents Higher Education Regions. Since funding availability is dependent upon the Region in which the school is located, it may be necessary to submit separate applications.

8. The proposal states applicants should submit a FS-10 form for the initial project period AND the first year of implementation. Does this mean that two (2) FS-10 forms should be submitted?

Yes, applicants should submit two (2) FS-10 forms: one for the five-month planning phase, and one for the first year of implementation. Also note that on the Cost per Student Data form (Attachment 1), the Total Project Costs will be the sum of totals for the two FS-10 forms.

9. Can non-public schools apply for or otherwise participate in this grant program?

No, the schools participating in this grant program must be public schools or charter public schools.

10. Our high school is "In Good Standing"; however, we have a significant Native American population who under utilize the opportunity to pursue college after completing high school. The announcement for the grant opportunity states that "preference" will be given to "high needs schools". What is truly the likelihood that a school not on the list could be a recipient?

We cannot give a direct answer to this question. As you've noted, high needs schools will receive priority consideration. The make up of the applicant pool and the strength of your case for serving your target population will also play determining roles for the successful funding of your application.

11. I have been researching grant opportunities for a high needs public high school that was on a SINI list (approximately 2 years ago) but has since been removed. Should the district submit a proposal for the Smart Scholars ECHS program, or is SED primarily interested in awarding funding to schools that are currently Schools in Improvement Status (SIIS), Persistently Lowest Achieving Schools (PLAS), and Schools under Registration Review (SURR)?

As you have noted, priority funding will be given to proposals that target schools currently classified as "high needs schools". The make up of the applicant pool and the strength of your case for serving your target population will play determining roles for the successful funding of your application.

12. Can an existing ECHS write a new grant or expand an existing one, as long as they are willing to become a demonstration project?

The RFP states: "The fiscal agent of the existing program is eligible to respond to this RFP. However, grant applications must propose new or expanded levels of service, **including but not limited to**, the development of demonstration sites that communicate best practices, or an expansion in the number of students served. Furthermore, this RFP allows these schools to collaborate with community-based organizations and local businesses as applicable." (emphasis added)

Becoming a demonstration site is one possible way that you could propose a new or expanded level of service. You may think of others; you just can't ask for more money for the same current project.

13. Can you share the different options schools and colleges have used to make it possible for students to accumulate the minimum college credit requirements of the grant?

A significant strategy for achieving this goal is for students to take dual credit courses, i.e. courses that simultaneously earn college credits and meet high school graduation requirements. Providing rigorous instruction at each grade level and the academic supports needed to have your students achieve college readiness as early as possible is critical. Researching current ECHS programs can provide you with additional ideas.

14. If a school wants to open the Early College Program up to its current class (we currently have a 9 – 11 high school and will be a 9 – 12 next 2011-2012 school year) how will the college credit requirements work?

We generally encourage partnerships to start their program with a ninth grade class and add a grade level each year, to allow time for the students to develop college readiness and to accumulate their college credits. It is possible, however, to start the program with mixed grade levels. In such cases, we would expect upper classmen to earn fewer college credits initially, but that you would build the program so that within the next three years students graduating from your ECHS would be able to earn at least the minimum 20 college credits required in this grant program.

15. Is there an expected minimum of students that need to be serviced in each annual COHORT (not the entire four year group)? I ask because component 2 of the Proposal Narrative Elements says "serving no more than 100 students per grade level with these grant funds,"... And in the sample MOU, the 4th paragraph (or the 2nd paragraph on page 48) says

“ECHS will have an enrollment of...while adding a cohort of approximately 100 students entering into grade 9 annually.” This seems to imply that your target cohort per grade is 100 annually, although the annual grant amounts do not seem to support this number.

We have used 100 as the model number of students per grade level because it is fairly basic to the research conducted in developing the Smart Scholars ECHS program that is envisioned. It is quite imperative that the number of students remains fairly small, since research shows that it is small classes that work. Although the RFP states 100 students per year, we have not provided a specific minimum. Smaller programs are also encouraged. Your RFP would be crafted accordingly, most likely with a lesser overall budget request than if the proposal were identified with a large urban high school with greater numbers of high needs students. The maximum award of \$450,000 is comparable to maximum awards for the first cohort of Smart Scholars partnerships that support class sizes of approximately 100 students; therefore, we believe the funding is adequate.

16. How will high performing schools with high need students be considered?

A proposal that will serve high performing schools will not be eligible for the bonus points high needs schools will receive. The proposal would need to clearly identify the high need population to be served, explain why this group is currently being underserved in a high performing school, and develop a strong case for how these deficiencies would be addressed. Proposals will be awarded up to five (5) points for providing a recruitment plan that targets high need students.

17. Item 3 on page 23 of the RFP indicates that a MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) or LOI (Letter of Intent) should define the roles of each partner. Does this mean we should not use the Sample MOU but instead custom design one - or can we use the sample document and then describe the program in the narrative? If designing our own MOU is necessary, do we need to provide the identical information in the actual narrative?

The sample MOU was provided to give applicants an idea of what an MOU might look like. You should custom design your MOU. Note that draft or “in-development” MOUs or Letters of Intent will be acceptable at the proposal stage. Your proposal narrative should provide a descriptive summary of each partner’s roles. The level of development of your MOU or LOI should dictate the amount of detail that you need to provide in the narrative, with less detail required in the narrative when a detailed MOU is provided.

18. We are confused about the exact definition of CTE (Career and Technical Education): the Career focus appears that it can be met by career counseling, and Technical Education can be met through the foundation provided by STEM subjects. Can you help clarify these terms?

There is a difference between CTE and providing career counseling combined with STEM. A CTE curriculum will prepare students to be “college- and career-ready” by equipping them with:

- *core academic skills* and the ability to apply those skills to concrete situations in order to function in the workplace and in routine daily activities,
- *employability skills* (such as critical thinking and workplace ethics) that are essential in any career area, and
- *job-specific, technical skills* related to a specific career pathway

You can find more detailed information about the structure of CTE programs in New York State at <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/cte/>.

19. As an institution located in a rural area, we are concerned about the definition of “near” in the Smart Scholars RFP [regarding the school’s proximity to the partner IHE], since on page 25 of the webinar presentation the word “must” is used. We already have our own early college program for the last eight years but it is the same distance as going from Albany to Poughkeepsie. In our region, these distances are indeed our “nearest neighbors”. Also, the next required element [on page 26 of the webinar slides], support structures requires “access”. We have

built in access so that the high school students can be physically present on our campus and engage with the resources of the school but transportation issues and time issues make it infrequent. And certainly access to our "writing centers, artistic and sports facilities and activities" would be extremely difficult. We try to compensate by "going to them" and working via virtual means but obviously if the scoring rubric requires "near", then a rural school district and rural IHE may have a severe disadvantage in the scoring. Since applying is not a trivial exercise for a small school, I am concerned that we have a serious impediment in the scoring rubric.

The readers of proposals submitted from rural regions will take into account the challenges of distance and access presented by such locations, and consider how the partners propose to address these challenges. The scoring rubric will not directly penalize such applicants. It will be the applicant's responsibility to show how the above challenges will be addressed. Also note that your proposal will be rated with others within your region.

20. If an LEA and its proposed ECHS partners have agreed to target approx. 100 rising 9th graders beginning September 2011, and continue to serve this particular cohort throughout 12th grade (which would be beyond the life of the grant), can the Partnership add a new cohort of 9th graders each subsequent year of the grant.

Yes, we are anticipating that an ECHS that starts with just the 9th grade will add a grade level (a new 9th grade) each year.

21. We currently offer many college credit bearing courses during the school day either through our Community College or through SUNY. They are offered during the regular school day and fit into our students' schedules. Students who pay the discounted tuition earn the college credit. If they do not, they earn the high school credit only. Are we doing what you are asking for or is this a separate program?

Early college high schools are designed to give students traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary education an opportunity to earn significant college credit (e.g., 20 to 60 credits) while in high school. The students are provided with a curriculum and an extensive support structure that ensures they will have college-ready skills to take the college level courses that are an integral part of the students' curriculum. The students are not charged tuition for these credit-bearing college courses.

22. I have a few questions regarding the application instructions. First, I was reviewing a copy of the RFP I downloaded back on December 8 when it first came out. On page 20 - Application Cover Page - the instructions said "Submit...by January 14, 2011." I know the due date is January 28. I went back to the website today and noted that page 20 has been corrected to reflect the January 28 date. Were any other pages changed since December 8, when I first downloaded the document? I want to make sure that I have the most up-to-date version of the RFP.

No, there were no other corrections or changes made to the RFP, you may keep your copy - just replace p. 20. Thanks for checking, and we apologize for the confusion.

Also regarding the cover page, should partnership applicants be submitting multiple Application Cover Pages, one for each member of the partnership - correct?

Yes, this is correct.

Does the RFP have to be in your office on January 28 or can it be mailed/postmarked on it's way to your office?

It should be postmarked no later than January 28. If it's hand-delivered it should be in the office by January 28. NOTE: The proposals are to be submitted to the Contract Administration Unit of NYSED, not to the Office of Higher Education or the Smart Scholars office.

Page 14 of the Application Instructions states under Type of Applicant and Special Population: Please check the applicable box to denote the type of applicant. Also, check the appropriate box that applies to the special

population to be served. Where do these check boxes appear? I do not see any "check boxes" on the Application Cover Page that refer to "type of applicant" or "special population."

The instructions note (in parentheses) to check these boxes if applicable. These items are not applicable; therefore, there are no boxes to be checked.

On page 21, the Application Checklist, the third check box refers to "Assurances" - is this referring to Appendix A and Appendix A-1G (pages 27 - 36)? Are these pages to be returned with the RFP?

Assurances are dependent on the type of funding, which was being finalized at the time the RFP was issued. We do not have any assurance forms at this time, but the resulting grant contracts will include the proper assurance forms.