

# GEAR UP 2017 Application Frequently Asked Questions



## **Eligibility: Free and Reduced Lunch, College Going Rate**

**My school district uses the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) to serve all students lunch at no cost. What does this mean for my GEAR UP eligibility?**

Federal statute mandates that all GEAR UP schools serve a student population with 50% or more students receiving Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL). Per the USDA Food and Nutrition website, CEP is a non-pricing meal service option that allows the nation's highest poverty schools and districts to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students.

Schools that use CEP are eligible to apply. You will be asked to submit your individual school's FRL data and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission will verify your information with the Tennessee Department of Education's data. If your data indicates that you are above 50% FRL and the TNDOE data shows a rate lower than 50%, we will reach back out to your school for more information.

**Our high school's FRL rate is above 50%, but our feeder middle school rate is less than 50%. How does this impact our eligibility?**

Within a GEAR UP Collaborative application, each school must meet the 50% or more FRL requirement. In this case, the feeder middle school would not meet this requirement and would be ineligible for GEAR UP.

**I know my school is near the 50% FRL rate, but I'm not sure what the TN DOE has on file for my school and FRL. Is there a way I can check this information?**

Yes. Please email us at [THEC.proposals@tn.gov](mailto:THEC.proposals@tn.gov) with the schools that you would like FRL data for and we will respond with the TN DOE data we have on file.

**Our high school has an FRL rate above 50% but is not listed on the eligible schools Attachment C of the Request for Proposals. Why is that?**

Attachment C provides a list of traditional high schools who serve 9th through 12th grade students and who have a college-going rate that is less than the state average, as determined THEC's data. College-going rates are determined using a three year average. The statewide average is 60.33%.

If your school does not appear on the Attachment C list, our data indicates that your school has a college-going rate at or above the state average. In this case, your school would not be eligible to join GEAR UP, and we commend you on the work you've done to meet or exceed the state's college-going rate. If you believe there has been an error and your school has a college-going rate below the state average, please email [THEC.proposals@tn.gov](mailto:THEC.proposals@tn.gov) and we will follow up.

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## **Eligibility: Cohort Numbers, College Access Programs**

**I work at a small school. Is there a minimum number of cohort (Class of 2023) or senior students a school must serve in order to apply for GEAR UP?**

No, there is no minimum number of cohort students a school must serve in order to be eligible. Smaller high schools are welcome to apply, and can apply in one of two ways:

- 1) A high school may apply on their own with a feeder middle school and community partners.
- 2) A high school may join with another, larger high school in their district that also meets the GEAR UP eligibility requirements for Free and Reduced Lunch and college-going rate. This is allowable so long as the number of senior students does not exceed 400 students. If the combined total number of senior students that the two high schools would serve exceeds 400 students, two separate applications should be submitted.

**I work at a large school and my senior class will be more than 400 students? Does that mean I cannot apply to join GEAR UP?**

No, just as there is no minimum number of students for a single school, there is also no maximum number of students a school must serve in order to be eligible. If your school anticipates 400 or more senior students, THEC asks that you apply in your own application rather than partnering with another high school in your district.

**My school is a current GEAR UP TN grantee. Can I apply to be a part of this GEAR UP grant as well?**

Yes. So long as your school meets the Free and Reduced Lunch and college-going rate requirements, you are eligible to apply. If selected, THEC will work with you and your partners to ensure no duplication of services occurs.

Schools that will have an active GEAR UP partnership grant (a GEAR UP grant not administered by THEC but awarded directly from the US DOE) in Fall 2018 are not eligible to apply for the GEAR UP TN grant.

**My school has an Advise TN advisor but we meet the Free and Reduced Lunch rate and college-going rate requirements. Can we apply for GEAR UP TN?**

If your school meets the Free and Reduced Lunch and college-going rate requirements, you are eligible to apply for GEAR UP TN. If selected, your school would become a GEAR UP TN school and would no longer be a part of Advise TN.

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## **Application: Page Count, Performance Measures, Match**

**I am preparing my application and have several letters of support to include. Do these letters count towards my 15 page limit?**

No, letters of support do not count towards the 15 page limit of your GEAR UP application. Similarly, the cover page with signatures does not count towards the 15 page limits. The 15 page limit includes Sections B and C of the GEAR UP Application. We ask that applications adhere to the application guidelines of 1" margins and no less than 11-point font. In order to ensure readability, please do not condense the font or size of the GEAR UP TN Commitments table or the school data tables.

Applications should be submitted as a PDF to [THEC.proposals@tn.gov](mailto:THEC.proposals@tn.gov) by 4:00 pm CST (5:00 PM EST) on Friday, February 23, 2018. Incomplete proposals will not be considered.

**The application asks for my high school's average ACT score. I'm not sure which score to include and I want to know if ACT scores are a part of eligibility. Will I be penalized if my average ACT score is higher or lower than other schools who submit applications?**

No. We are asking for ACT scores to gain more context and understanding of your school. If selected, these ACT scores will help THEC assist your school with setting goals and benchmarks for your work. Performance measures like ACT are not intended to be punitive and you will not be penalized in the application process based on your school's ACT average.

**GEAR UP sounds like a program that could benefit my students, but my team is nervous about the match requirement. What is match and what are some examples of how we could provide match for our GEAR UP grant?**

"Match" is a general term that refers to items donated to the project using non-grant funds, regardless of who paid for them. In the case of GEAR UP TN grants, it means the non-federal share of program costs. If your organization purchased the goods or services but did not request reimbursement from the grant, then the generic term "match" applies.

THEC has created a [document](#) that reviews match and provides examples of how current GEAR UP schools have met their match requirements. THEC is also committed to providing technical assistance throughout the GEAR UP TN grant to ensure each community has the resources and support needed to meet the match requirement.

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## **Implementation: Grant Awards, Site Coordinators, Timelines**

**How much will my school be awarded if we receive a GEAR UP grant? Is our grant award calculated based on the number of 2018-2019 high school seniors or number of Class of 2023 cohort students?**

Grants will be awarded on an annual basis and all awards will include a fixed award amount of \$65,000, with additional funds based on the number of cohort students the Collaborative anticipates serving. THEC anticipates awarding Collaboratives an average of \$250 per student in additional funding beyond the fixed award amount. The additional per student award amount will vary depending on the number of students in the Collaborative cohort (i.e., smaller schools may receive more funds per student to accommodate fixed costs associated with implementing the project).

THEC anticipates annual awards to total between \$80,000 and \$200,000. Final award amounts will be calculated based on the number of students served and the overall availability of funding. Annual award amounts may be adjusted based on fluctuations in the number of students a Collaborative serves.

**The request for proposals specifies that site coordinators must be 11 month employees. What will site coordinators do during the summer when school is not in session? What does the timeline look like for bringing our site coordinator on board?**

During summer 2018, we anticipate hosting professional development for all site coordinators with in-person training in mid-June and the national NCCEP Conference in Washington, DC in mid-July. These professional development opportunities will allow your site coordinators to prepare for a successful school year and better understand the scope of the GEAR UP program.

In subsequent summers, site coordinators will engage in important summer transition work that will assist graduating seniors with successfully enrolling in and beginning college. Site coordinators will also work with cohort students each summer through summer programming.

**Does my site coordinator need to be a licensed teacher or school counselor?**

No, site coordinators do not need any specific licensure. However, many successful GEAR UP site coordinators have had a teaching or counseling background. The site coordinator must be approved by THEC.