Smart Schools Bond Act Updated FAQ

Updated June 9, 2022

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Please contact the Smart Schools Bond Act inbox at smartschools@nysed.gov with additional questions.

General Questions

Who is the primary contact at NYSED for questions?
A: Send an e-mail to smartschools@nysed.gov or call the Office of Educational Management at 518-474-5928.

Is there a maximum number of plans a district can submit?
A: No, districts can submit plans for funding until they have used their full allocation.

Can districts submit multiple Smart Schools Investment Plans (SSIPs) at once?
A: Yes, districts can submit SSIPs up to the available allocation. They can remain in the queue for review at the same time.

Are Charter Schools eligible for Smart Schools Bond Act (SSBA) funding?
A: No.

Is there a preferred vendor list?
A: No, districts can select their own vendors, as long as the pricing is consistent with OGS pricing.

When is the next Review Board Meeting?
A: There is not a set schedule. As soon as a Review Board Meeting has been scheduled, we update the website.

Is SSBA funding available on an annual basis?
A: No, SSBA funding was a one-time allocation for school districts and special education schools.

Can we be reimbursed for purchases made prior to approval of the SSIP?
A: No. **Expenditures made prior to approval from the Review Board are ineligible for reimbursement.** The only exception is architect and/or engineer fees that must start prior to the approval of an SSIP. Districts should note that in the event that the SSIP was not approvable and/or the district did not proceed with the SSIP, the district would not be reimbursed for those fees.

Will there be additional Smart Schools funds available in future years?
A: The SSBA program was funded by a one-time state capital bond authorized by statewide voters in 2014. Additional funds would only be allocated for Smart Schools upon additional voter approval. Exceptions have been made for both the $25 million allocated for nonpublics and the $5 million allocated for special education schools as a supplemental, one-time appropriations.

What is the time line for expending the money? Do the Smart School funds need to be encumbered in the first year?

A: For public districts, there is no deadline for the expenditures under the SSBA. Since these are one-time funds, districts are encouraged to take a thoughtful approach to their use. For technology projects, we would expect that the proposed uses will be aligned with the district's most recent Instructional Technology Plan, filed with the Office of Educational Design and Technology. The SSBA program developed for submitting SSIPs is designed to accept multiple submissions and amendments to implement multi-year or multi-phase plans. This is likely, particularly for projects that include different categories, such as classroom devices and longer-term construction projects. Districts should budget for the use of the funds in the year when they have approved SSIPs and plan to expend the funds.

Does the Investment Plan need to be reviewed by Attorneys?
A: This is a district-level decision. We would encourage the district to ensure that the Plan is consistent with the guidance—which was reviewed by MANY attorneys.

How do we learn more about becoming a vendor for this program?
A: To become a vendor for the program you would have to confer with schools directly and see if services are needed.

Completing the SSIP

What is the difference between an initial submission, supplemental submission or amended submission?
A: An initial submission is the first plan that the district submits towards their available allocation. Any plan submitted after the first is a supplemental submission. An amended submission is if you are revising information or budgets in an already approved plan.

Can we submit more than one SSIP at a time?
A: Yes, you can.

I want to revise a previously submitted plan. How can we get access to the plan again?
A: As long as the plan has not been approved, the district can send an e-mail to smartschools@nysed.gov and request that the plan be unsubmitted. (That means sent back to the district from our electronic Portal, so that revisions can be made.)   If the plan has already been approved, the district would have to file an amendment and have it approved.

How do I unsubmit a plan?
A: To unsubmit a plan, please e-mail smartschools@nysed.gov.

Are there any sample Investment Plans available to look at?
A: The Smart Schools website has approved SSIPs that can be viewed at http://p1232.nysed.gov/mgtserv/smart_schools/ApprovedSSIPs.htm. When reviewing

these plans, keep in mind that there have been some changes in requirements as the program has progressed, so some questions that are required now may not be included on earlier approved SSIPs.

What are the stakeholder engagement requirements?
A: Districts are required to have consultation with stakeholders in the planning process prior to submitting a Smart Schools Investment Plan (SSIP). As part of these steps, the district must:
1. Develop a preliminary SSIP to be approved by the Board of Education.
2. Post the preliminary SSIP to the website for a minimum of 30 days.
3. Board of Education must conduct a hearing to enable stakeholders to respond to the preliminary SSIP – this hearing can occur as part of a normal Board Meeting.
4. Prepare a final plan to be approved by the Board of Education.
5. Post the final plan to the website.

Regarding the SSIP Overview section, question #4: what do you mean by "engaged with those required stakeholders?" What would you consider appropriate engagement for each of the four stakeholder groups (parents, teachers, students, community members, nonpublic schools) listed?
A: The districts should reach out specifically to the nonpublic schools in their districts if they are budgeting funds for School Connectivity or Classroom Learning Technology to ensure their students' specific needs are met. They must also set aside time to consult with the other stakeholders regarding their SSIP. This can take place during a regularly scheduled public board meeting. In addition, the district must put information regarding their SSIP on their website and keep it posted for at least 30 days, so that stakeholders have time to comment and provide suggestions. The SSIP should remain posted to the website for the life of the Plan.

Do simple projects in High Tech Security or School Connectivity, such as replacing cameras or access points, require a project number?
A: Yes, any districts budgeting funds in School Connectivity, Pre-Kindergarten Classrooms, Transportable Classroom Units or High-Tech Security require a project number. Districts must submit an LOI and receive a project number from Facilities Planning before submitting the SSIP. For projects that do not require construction, going through walls or new cabling/wiring, the district will likely receive a streamlined project number.

What questions need to be completed in the SSIP?
A: Every question on the SSIP Overview must be answered. For each category in which the district plans to budget funds, the district must complete all questions in the appropriate category.

Are there any tips on completing the SSIP?

A: Yes, please see the "Common Issues in the Review of Smart Schools Investment Plans" document on our [website](#).

Can we ask someone to review our SSIP before we submit it?
A: Yes, send an e-mail to smartschools@nysed.gov and someone will give the plan a quick review before you submit. Please keep in mind, this does not mean that the plan will not require revisions during the review process moving forward.

Some fields auto-populate in the new SSIP. Can I change these?
A: If you believe that there is a discrepancy with what has auto-populated on your SSIP, please send an e-mail to smartschools@nysed.gov to have the issue looked into.

Is it required to list a specific brand and model number for equipment we are putting according to the SSIP language? Does it also require quantity, per unit cost and total cost?
A: It is required to list the quantity, per unit cost and total cost of each requested item. Specific makes and models are not required.

Can the expenditures we include in the SSIP be estimates?
A: Yes, absolutely. We understand that prices, models and needs change. If there are significant changes to an approved plan, the district can file an amendment.

Do we have access to the technology plan that we submitted?
A: Yes, they are available on the NYSED Office of Educational Design and Technology website: http://www.p12.nysed.gov/technology/

Once we have submitted an SSIP, can we make revisions?
A: Yes, if changes come up, send an e-mail to smartschools@nysed.gov. Our office can unsubmit the plan to allow revisions. As long as you resubmit in a timely fashion and are not altering the plan substantially, the plan should remain in the same place in the queue for review.

I am trying to access the Smart Schools Application but am having trouble finding the link. When I am logged into the business portal there is no link for that application. Is there any other way to get the application online?
A: If you are unable to find the link for the application, your Superintendent did not grant you access to the Business Portal. Superintendents have automated access granted to the survey. Superintendents also have the ability to entitle access to other users within the district. Information on entitling users is available on our website here: http://www.p12.nysed.gov/seddas/guides/monitoring-vendor-performance-system-mini-guide.pdf

I am attempting to certify the recent SSBA re-submission through the portal and there doesn't seem to be a choice to certify, only save and continue, could you please offer some guidance?
A: Only the Superintendent can certify and submit the application.

Are shipping costs eligible expenses?
A: Yes, for items delivered directly to the district. Shipping costs for vendors are not eligible.

Where can I find the balance that our district has remaining in SSBA funds to start a supplemental SSIP?
A: The claiming system, located in the Business Portal, tracks the original approved allocation, funds approved and funds reimbursed to date.

SSIP Processing

Are applications in the queue based on their initial submission date or are they processed/approved based on when their completed correct application is received?
A: All plans in the queue are reviewed in order of first submittal; however, amendments are prioritized to expedite ongoing approved projects.

What is the time line for approval?
A: This will depend on the local planning, public participation and school board approval process, the types of projects and the time they are submitted to the Department. Some projects will take more SED internal review, particularly major construction projects. Once each Plan is approved by the external Smart Schools Review Board, districts will be notified that they may begin making expenditures and submitting for reimbursement.

What is the review process after a district submits a Smart Schools Investment Plan to SED?
A: When a district submits a Smart Schools Investment Plan, it automatically goes into Initial Review, which is a review process focusing on the completion of the Plan, level of detail provided and confirmation of stakeholder engagement, as well as meeting the nonpublic loan requirements. Once the plan moves past Initial Review, it goes to Program Area Review, where the Office of Facilities Planning, Office of Educational Technology and/or Office of Early Learning review the Plan to ensure the information provided is consistent with the requirements of their program areas. After receiving Program Area approval, the SSIP moves to an Expenditure Review, which focuses on ensuring that all calculations are correct, expenditures are all allowable and prices for the expenditures are reasonable.

How can I check the status for my SSIP?
A: There is a file on the SSBA website which updates the status of each plan and is updated frequently.

Why is our district not included on the status update posted to the website?
A: Any plans that are not included on the status updated are currently in an unsubmitted status, which means that it has either (a) never been submitted to date or (b) was unsubmitted for revisions.

Our SSIP has been in Expenditure Review for a long time. How soon can we expect approval?
A: Due to the large amount of applications received and the requirements for districts to include line items in the SSIP, Expenditure Review can take more time than the other stages in the review process. During Expenditure Review, each plan has to have every line item reviewed, compared to OGS pricing, confirmed eligible or removed and then all calculations checked. As soon as the plan is reviewed in Expenditure Review, the contact on the plan will be contacted with any comments, questions and/or revisions required.

If an SSIP is unsubmitted, does that mean that we lose our place in the queue for review?
A: No. Unsubmissions are part of the review process and how the plan is prepared to reach an approvable state. If your plan has been unsubmitted requesting revisions, please look throughout the plan for any comments and address them, then resubmit the plan in a timely fashion. As long as the plan is not significantly altered (other than requested revisions) and the plan is resubmitted timely, the plan will remain in its place in the queue and prepare for the next review process.

What happens if prices increase or decrease before we receive approval?
A: Contact smartschools@nysed.gov and let us know. We can unsubmit the plan to allow for revisions.

We received notice that our plans were unsubmitted due to an error. Should there be an indicator of where the problem is?
A: There should be an "X" next to the category that has an error on the top left corner of the Overview page in the navigation panel. Click on the marked category to see comments regarding specific errors needed to be corrected prior to resubmission.

My status indicated that we are in Resubmission. Prior to last revision we were in expenditure review, why has this changed?
A: You are still in expenditure review, but your application got unsubmitted to correct errors. Now that you have resubmitted your application, corrections will be reviewed once again by expenditure review.

Is it possible to update our SSIP when it is in Review Board status?
A: This will need to be determined on a case by case basis. Extremely large SSIPs will need to be amended following Review Board approval. It may be possible for districts to

update their SSIPs if they only require minor changes. To see if your application can be updated, please e-mail smartschools@nysed.gov.

Our SSIP is listed as a status of "Review Board." Can I start spending money?
A: No, a status of "Review Board" means that the staff of the other two statutory members of the Review Board (NYS Division of Budget and SUNY Chancellor) are currently reviewing the plan. Although most plans are approvable by the time NYSED forwards them to the staff of the other members of the Review Board, those teams can and do request that districts make revisions to their plans before the plan is submitted to the Board itself for final approval. Once the plan is approved at a Review Board Meeting, the district will be notified via e-mail and the list of approved districts will be updated on our website. Approved applications will enter the reimbursement process, where schools can submit claims for required technology. The reimbursement request could be rejected if it contains errors or requires more information, which could both extend the reimbursement process. **Expenditures made prior to approval from the Review Board will be ineligible for reimbursement.**

How will the district know when its plan has been approved?
A: Districts will receive notification from the Smart Schools inbox, as well as an automated e-mail notifying the district of approval after a Smart Schools Review Board Meeting. Copies of approved plans are posted to the SSBA website.

Amendments

What is the amendment process?
A: The amendment process has the same review process as the original SSIP. We have found that amendments can usually be approved at a faster rate, if the application is not too complex and is free of errors.

How do I file an amendment?
A: Instructions on filing an amendment are available on the SSBA website here: http://www.p12.nysed.gov/mgtserv/smart_schools/SSIPAmendmentDirections_revised.pptx

Can the SSIP be modified after approval?
A: Plans that have been approved by the SSBA Review Board would need to be resubmitted as an amendment and may be subject to additional review by SED and the Review Board. The degree of change that the amendment represents would be a factor in the amount of review and the time it takes. (See "Directions on filing an amendment to an approved SSIP" on the Smart Schools website for specific guidance).

The prices of devices in my plan have changed since approval. What do I do?
A: Districts have flexibility in claiming after approval, so long as the items being claimed are consistent with what was approved. If the prices or quantities of a device have changes since approval, the district can adjust the quantity to stay within the approved

budget without requiring an amendment. If the district needs additional funds for a specific expenditure, the district would have to file an amendment to request the approval of additional funds and/or transfer of funds from another category.

My amendment will not submit and I'm getting an e-mail notification that the proposed budget exceeds the allocation. What am I doing wrong?
A: The budget for your amendment is incorrect. Please see "Directions on filing an amendment to an approved SSIP" on the Smart Schools website and look closely at slides 10-12. The budgets for an amendment should show the changes to the approved plan, not redo the budget.

Where can I find the form to submit an amendment?
A: Amendments are one choice in the Overview page, after Initial and Supplemental Submission. Select "Amended Submission" and continue entering incremental data. Please follow the directions on the "Directions on filing an amendment to an approved SSIP" PowerPoint on our website.

I am trying to submit the amendment, however when I submit it the application goes back into the inbox. Can you please advise?
A: If your amendment returns to the inbox after submission, the application failed initial checks. You should have received an email from Smart Schools explaining the errors within the application. If you did not receive an e-mail explaining the error, please e-mail smartschools@nysed.gov for assistance.

Can I complete an amendment to remove what was not purchased, without adding in what I could purchase? I am wondering if you can complete an amendment to get the money back and then decide later what to purchase, or leave it the way it is?
A: Yes, removing expenditures without replacing them is completely fine and encouraged. SSIP funds should be completed in a thoughtful manner and districts should be thinking long-term with this one-time allocation.

We need to amend our initial SSIP to reflect amount expended and reimbursed which were less than budgeted. It does not appear that I'm able to amend the SSIP. Is that because I was not the original contact person who submitted the SSIP?
A: If there is a new person filing an amendment the Superintendent must grant them access to the Business Portal.

Inclusion of Nonpublic Schools
How do I find the 2014-15 enrollment for nonpublic schools within my district?
A: The Smart Schools website has a file called "2014-15 Nonpublic District of Attendance Enrollment Record," which should be used to determine the nonpublic

enrollment for 2014-15. These numbers are automatically populated in the new SSIP format.

What if the 2014-15 nonpublic is incorrect, a school has closed/moved or a school is declining participation in SSBA?
A: If a nonpublic school declines participation in SSBA, the district should retain a copy of the written declination for audit purposes. The district will select "Yes, but they are declining participation" on the Overview. If a school has closed/moved or the nonpublic enrollment on the SSIP is incorrect, the district should contact smartschools@nysed.gov to have the issue looked into and potentially corrected.

What if a nonpublic school opened in the district since the 2014-15 enrollments?
A: The enrollment for the school would not be included in the calculation, but their enrollment would be included in the distribution of nonpublic funds.

If a nonpublic school declined participation in one of the district's plans, can they participate in a future plan?
A: Yes, nonpublic schools should be contacted for each individual SSIP submission. If there are funds being spent in School Connectivity and/or Classroom Learning Technology, the nonpublic can participate.

How have the nonpublic loans changed in the new guidance and new SSIP?
A: Nonpublic schools are now entitled to a share of the funds the district budgets in all of Classroom Learning Technology and some items in School Connectivity. The new SSIP separates the School Connectivity expenditures to assist the district in determining what counts towards the nonpublic loans. There is also a new Nonpublic Loan category that will appear for districts with nonpublic schools, which automatically pulls the totals in each category to calculate the total owed to the nonpublic schools by the district.

How is the nonpublic loan calculated?
A: The nonpublic loans are calculated by taking the total the district is budgeting for loanable devices in School Connectivity and/or all of the budgeted funds in Classroom Learning Technology, then dividing by the total 2014-15 enrollment of public and nonpublic districts combined. The nonpublic schools are entitled to an equal share up to $250 per pupil, which will be added on top of those totals. Detailed instructions for computing this calculation are located on the SSIP application.

What expenditures are eligible for nonpublic schools?
A: Any device deemed "loanable" for the purpose of the program, including, but not limited to –
- Computer Servers
- Storage Devices
- Routers/Gateway Appliances

- Firewalls/Security Devices
- Switches
- Wireless Access Points and Attached Antennae
- Controllers
- Modules
- Transceivers
- Power supply devices, connectors, terminals and power cords purchased specifically for an SSBA device included in the current application.
- Interactive Whiteboards
- Desktop, Laptop or Tablet Computers and associated charging carts/stations
- 3D printers, robotics, projectors, machinery

Can the nonpublic school still participate if the district is not spending <u>any</u> funds in School Connectivity or Classroom Learning Technology?
A: No.

If the district amends a previously approved plan and decreased expenditures on loanable devices, does the nonpublic share decrease?
A: No, once the plan is approved, nonpublic loans cannot decrease.

Does the nonpublic school have to get the same items that the district is requesting?
A: No, nonpublic schools can request any devices that are considered portable in the Smart Schools Bond Act Guidance. This includes, but is not limited to, interactive whiteboards, desktop computers, laptop computers, tablets, robotics equipment, projectors, 3D printers, servers, access points, switches, etc.

The SSBA guidance lists several technologies as being "classroom technologies" such as interactive whiteboards. Interactive whiteboards are typically an installed technology and are not easily "loanable." Considering this example, can you clarify which specific types of technologies will have to be loaned to nonpublic schools upon request?
A: Interactive whiteboards are listed as a device in the statute. You can loan them. You don't need to pay for installation or removal.

If the district is purchasing the devices for the nonpublic school, is the district required to install? Can the nonpublic funds be used for installation?
A: No, the district is not responsible for installation of the devices being requested by the nonpublic school. SSBA funds for the nonpublic loan program cannot be used to cover the cost of installation.

If a district has a nonpublic school within the boundary and ten in-district students go the school, which has a total population of 150 students, is the

district responsible to provide Smart School money for the 10 students, or for the school population of 150?
A: All of the nonpublic students attending schools within the school district boundary.150.

What does the technical support for nonpublic school really mean? Providing a computer, or sending someone to the nonpublic school for computer repair?
A: Similar to the Computer Hardware Loan Program, the lending school district would retain ownership of the devices and responsibility for maintenance and repair.

Regarding the "loaning" of equipment to nonpublic schools as required under the Classroom Technology and School Connectivity categories of the SSBA, why are nonpublic schools not required to demonstrate that they have the network infrastructure to support any additional equipment they receive from the bond act? The nonpublic schools in our district are not equipped to utilize the roughly $100K worth of equipment they are entitled to under the rules of the SSBA.
A: The State does not have the authority to require such capital investments of nonpublic schools. The SSBA statute only required the sharing of educational technology purchases. Device loans are allowable up to $250/student, but the total loan amount depends upon the district's budget for classroom devices and loanable School Connectivity equipment. A district that does not plan any expenditures in these areas need not loan any amounts to the nonpublic schools. However, if the public school district budgets for educational technology in its SSIP, it must provide loans of devices with the nonpublic schools located within its boundaries, up to the $250/child maximum. For example, if a school district budgets $100,000 for devices and/or transportable School Connectivity items, and it has 1800 students who attend the public school and 200 students that attend a local nonpublic school, it would need to loan the nonpublic school $10,000 worth of eligible items. $100,000/(1800+200) = $100,000/2000 = $50/child * 200 nonpublic school pupils = $10,000 in loaned devices.

If we're using the funds to start a 1:1 program how are we supposed to loan equipment? What does loaning mean exactly? Does loaning really mean "giving" them equipment up to the $250 per pupil limit with the expectation that they will just be keeping it?
A: No, the school district retains ownership of the equipment. Generally speaking, you should follow the same approach you would use for the lending of hardware purchased with State Aid.

Our district happens to be in a unique location where there are a large number of nonpublic students located within our district boundaries when compared to our district population. Given this fact, if we choose to purchase classroom technology with a portion of our SSBA funds, the $250 per private student threshold will result in our district having to set aside the majority of our purchase for potential loan to the nonpublic schools. Is there any relief for

schools like ours, or any additional guidance that may help to mitigate this particular situation?
A: This is an opportunity for us to reiterate an important piece of guidance—the nonpublic loan amount language in the statute allows for loans UP TO $250/nonpublic school child. The actual amount is to be calculated based on the amount of the SSBA funds that are budgeted for devices. If you have a Smart Schools allocation of $1 million and you're planning to spend $200,000 on devices—the nonpublics get a share of the $200,000 equal to their share of the total number of children attending school in your district. If you have 900 kids and the nonpublics have 100, the per student allocation is $200.

$25 Million Supplemental Nonpublic Loans

What is the $25M supplemental program?
A: As part of the 2017-2018 Budget, there was a supplemental $25 million appropriation for districts which have plans that were submitted or approved prior to 4/15/17, have nonpublic schools and budgeted money in the School Connectivity category. These plans were reviewed and the newly eligible loanable expenditures under School Connectivity were identified by staff of the Review Board members. The supplemental per-pupil and total nonpublic loan amount under the $25 million was then calculated by district. These totals are posted on the Smart Schools website.

How much money does my district receive?
A: There is a document on the Smart Schools website called "[Eligible districts' additional per-pupil and total allocation amount for the $25M supplemental nonpublic loan program](#)", which details the per-pupil and total nonpublic loan for each district that meets the criteria to fall under the $25 million with an approved plan.

What if I submitted my plan after 4/15/17?
A: Districts that submit an SSIP on or after 4/15/2017 will NOT have access to the Supplemental Loan Program funds. Instead, districts with eligible items budgeted in the School Connectivity category will now include them in a separate Nonpublic Loan Calculator in that category, in addition to those funds spent in Classroom Learning Technology.

What if I amend the previously approved plan and decrease or increase the amount spent in School Connectivity?
A: Districts amending plans can decrease the amount that they spend in certain categories, but they cannot reduce the total nonpublic loan amount. If the district is increasing the total spent in School Connectivity, the district will be responsible for including the nonpublic school(s) in the amendment of the plan and use their existing allocation to complete the nonpublic loan requests. This will be automatically calculated in the new SSIP form.

What expenditures can nonpublic schools request through the $25M supplemental program?

A: Nonpublic schools can request any items considered to be transportable in the School Connectivity and Classroom Learning Technology category, including, but not limited to:

- Computer Servers
- Storage Devices
- Routers/Gateway Appliances
- Firewalls/Security Devices
- Switches
- Wireless Access Points and Attached Antennae
- Controllers
- Modules
- Transceivers
- Power supply devices, connectors, terminals and power cords purchased specifically for an SSBA device included in the current application.
- Interactive Whiteboards
- Desktop, Laptop or Tablet Computers and associated charging carts/stations
- 3D printers, robotics, projectors, machinery

If there is a question of whether an item is eligible, please send an e-mail to the SSBA inbox at smartschools@nysed.gov to request confirmation of eligibility. Since these expenditures are not being approved prior to claiming for reimbursement, we highly recommend confirming that items are eligible before making any purchases.

Are there any expenditures that are definitely not eligible?

A: Yes. In addition to the usual prohibition of using State funds for construction for a nonpublic school, districts cannot use SSBA funds to pay for a nonpublic school's installation or configuration costs, software, licenses, cabling or other professional services as they are considered normal operating costs or capital expenditures, depending on the item.

Do I need to complete an SSIP to make requests for the nonpublic expenditures through the $25M supplemental program?

A: No, eligible districts do not need to file any additional requests. The total loan amount will become available in a new section of the reimbursement claiming system, labeled "Supplemental $25 Million NonPublic Loan" where the district will file for reimbursement after making purchases of eligible items for the nonpublic school loans.

Are there any other administrative steps required prior to accessing these additional funds?

A: Yes. There is a simple form ($25m Supplemental Nonpublic Certification) on the Business Portal that the Superintendent must certify prior to filing for reimbursement of

these funds. This form documents that the district has contacted each nonpublic school within the district to inform them of the availability of these additional funds, along with a confirmation of each school's intent to participate or not.

My district fits the criteria for the $25M supplemental program, why I do not see it on the list?
A: If your district does not show up on the list, then it is possible that your district (a)met the $250 per-pupil maximum on other plans or (b) your plan that meets the criteria has not been approved.

Capital Projects and the SED Facilities Planning Office

How do we know which projects require a review by the Office of Facilities Management and/or an architectural review?
A: District Plans that include long-term capital projects, such as connectivity infrastructure investments in the school building, pre-kindergarten expansion space, replacement of portable classrooms, and high-tech security measures, must contact the Office of Facilities Management for an initial review. Some projects, or parts of projects, under the School Connectivity, Prekindergarten Classrooms or High-Tech Security categories may be eligible for a streamlined review if they do not involve wiring or construction. Community Connectivity or Classroom Educational projects do not need to be reviewed by the Office of Facilities Management.

How do we go about applying for initial review and a project number from the Office of Facilities Planning?
A: There is guidance on the Facilities Planning process on that Office's website: http://www.p12.nysed.gov/facplan/SmartSchoolsBondAct.html

I saw some guidance stating that infrastructure projects are considered Capital projects, but also some further notes about Capital project procedures, like voter approval, not being necessary if the District is not issuing capital debt.
A: Capital projects financed solely with SSBA funds are not subject to voter approval, as the state's voters have already approved the issuance of the State SSBA bonds for these purposes. However, if the district must use debt financing for any part of the project or if the Smart Schools Bond Act funds are used to fund a portion of a larger project, local voters in districts outside the Big 5 School Districts must approve the use of debt financing for the non-Smart Schools portion of the costs.

If something has been previously approved as part of a non-SSBA capital project and then the District decides to pull it from the project and use Smart Schools Bond Act money, does it need to go through the Facilities Planning approval process again?
A: No. But we would want to assign it a project number that indicates that it will be using Smart Schools funds for a portion of the costs – this is critical to the Building aid

calculations. That means that you WILL need to contact the Office of Facilities Planning so that your project number can be adjusted.

Do the Districts need to submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) if they are spending Smart funds on Classroom Learning Technology or a Community Connectivity Project?
A: Generally, no, unless the Classroom Learning Technology or Community Connectivity Project is part of a larger project that does require the submission of an LOI to the Office of Facilities Planning and a Building Permit. No LOI is needed for a standalone equipment purchase of Classroom Learning Technology or a Community Connectivity Project.

Can we include Engineering and Architectural Fees in the Professional Services section of the High Tech and School Connectivity SSIP?
A: Yes.

Financial Issues

If a district's voters approved a $15 million capital construction project and you identify items to be paid with Smart Schools Bond Act money is that in addition to the 15 million that the voters approved?
A: Voters approved $15 million in debt. Smart Schools expenditures don't need this approval, so SSBA-eligible pieces are separate from the $15 million.

Can revenue anticipation notes be utilized to short term fund project cost until reimbursement is received?
A: You can use RANs, but bond proceeds cannot support the interest costs for those RANs.

Can districts purchase equipment using any kind of deferred payment plan?
A: Yes, as long as the district has an irrevocable ownership of the equipment and there are no interest expenses submitted for reimbursement.

Are the Smart Schools related expenses exempt from the tax cap?
A: Yes. Districts should not include SSBA-funded expenditures in their Tax Cap calculations.

Can Smart Schools funds be used to cover the district portion of e-Rate projects (as long as the projects deal with infrastructure, etc.?)
A: Yes. When submitting an Investment Plan, the district should identify the plan to use e-Rate and include the e-Rate percentage in the responses.

If a district is applying for both E-rate category 2 funding and SSBA funding and the district submits their SSBA application and then gets approved for category 2

E-rate funding, would they need to modify and resubmit their SSBA application for the lesser?

A: If a district receives E-rate funding after getting SSIP approval, the district must complete an amendment in order to remove the SSBA funds that are being replaced by E-rate funding.

Can bond monies be spent to conduct disaster prep and fund redundant Internet connections?

A: The answer to this question is "Yes" for redundant Internet connections. No to disaster prep if that is training and drills, which are a normal operating expense of a school district and cannot be supported through tax exempt bonds. Please contact the Smart Schools office if you have further questions on this.

How will SSBA funds be accounted for? In the General Fund, Special Aid Fund or Capital Fund?

A: School districts will be required to separately identify these funds within their current financial accounting framework. The school district annual financial reporting document, the ST-3, has been updated with a capital revenue code, H3297 – State Sources, Other (SSBA).

School districts will be required to separately identify these expenditures within their current financial accounting framework. Existing Schedule G3 Capital Projects Fund codes should be used. Districts should create new account codes by adding 'SSBA' or a specific 4-digit code to the end of the expenditure's account code to distinguish SSBA from the rest of the Capital Fund's account code.

Can the district use Reserve Funds to purchase the SSBA approved expenditures and repay that money when reimbursement is received?

A: Yes, but the district must have the Board of Education pass a resolution authorizing release of the Reserve Fund first.

When should the district recognize revenue from SSBA?

A: Smart Schools is a reimbursement program, therefore the liability isn't created until the district has been approved and spent the money on their approved expenditures.

Can we use our employees for installation? If so, can we use SSBA funds to pay for them?

A: Yes, you can use employees. You can use SSBA funds to pay them only if they are working overtime.

BOCES Involvement

Can school districts and BOCES work together or as a consortium to make purchases using the smart school bond money?

A: We encourage BOCES to coordinate purchases to help districts take advantage of volume discounts. BOCES service costs are not eligible for reimbursement under Smart Schools.

Can districts avail themselves of BOCES/Regional Information Center Installment Purchasing Programs that are already established?
A: Districts need to take full ownership of items to be eligible for Smart Schools reimbursement. Lease programs are not eligible.

If we go through BOCES for any projects, will the 10% fee be allowed as part of the costs in the bond?
A: No, BOCES are not eligible for any direct payments with SSBA funds. Any fees should be handled through existing BOCES-District processes and agreements.

Can Smart Schools bond monies be used to pay for equipment procured through a local BOCES or Regional Information Center?
A: Smart Schools funds can be used by a district to pay for the devices procured by a BOCES through a shared purchasing agreement. However, the district must take full ownership of the eligible devices. Administrative, lease or interest costs are not allowed to be supported with SSBA funds.

Can districts pay BOCES for installation costs?
A: Yes.

School Connectivity
Many schools will not meet the 100mb per 1000 student requirement for Smart School funding. How would a district apply for a waiver?
A: Information about the application for the Connectivity Speed Waiver are available on the Smart Schools website. A waiver will consider financial hardship, a lack of broadband providers that can provide the services or there is a limited demand due to a very small or large student body with multiple buildings, which would be eligible for an oversubscription adjustment. Waivers should be submitted before submitting a Smart Schools Investment Plan.

If a district has less than 1000 students is it still required to have the minimum e-rate recommendation or will they be allowed to use the formula to set their individual minimum? (Bandwidth per student x number of students)
A: Yes, you should use a proportionate standard for schools (not districts, necessarily) that have less than 1000 students.

Is burstable bandwidth allowed or does it have to be dedicated bandwidth available at all times?

A: Yes, but it is necessary to put the infrastructure in place to ensure that your capacity meets the threshold, even if you do not subscribe to that level of service. It must be specifically codified in a service contract with a provider and be guaranteed to be available to all students and devices as needed, particularly during periods of high demand, such as computer-based testing (CBT) periods.

What is the bandwidth requirement if districts have multiple pipes coming into the district? Are the minimums created in totality of what is available into the district or per connection?
A: Totality.

Can we use Smart Schools funds for cabling (cat6)?
A: Yes.

Do districts have to provide money to businesses in order to increase internet access for students who may participate in job sharing?
A: No.

For districts that have students in rural areas, does the Smart School money mean it can be used to build towers in order to provide Internet access to those homes?
A: Towers for connectivity outside of school boundaries would fall under the Community Connectivity category for funding. These projects may only be performed on municipal or non-profit property. Please consult with your SED reviewer in Office of Facilities Planning to design such projects.

Are generators eligible for reimbursement?
A: Only if they are primarily meant to provide back-up power to essential educational technology or building security systems.

Are Marquees (outdoor) eligible for reimbursement?
A: Marquees are not considered an allowable expenditure under the Smart Schools Bond Act.

Community Connectivity

Our district is considering establishing a community technology hub in our closed elementary or in the local public library. My understanding is that technology purchases for that type of setting is an allowable and reimbursable expense. If that is the case, do we have to meet the connectivity requirement in that location?
A: A Community Connectivity Project should increase connectivity and access at such facilities. Meeting the FCC minimum speed standard of 100 Mbps per 1,000 students is not required. If the building is still owned by the school district, construction work in that

building must be approved by the Office of Facilities Planning at NYSED. You should contact that office for more information.

Regarding the Community Connectivity section, question #5: who is eligible to be a partner for Community Connectivity Broadband Projects?
A: For-profit entities, non-profit entities or local governments are eligible as long as the project takes place in a municipally owned building. Non-profit facilities will need to be approved by the Office of Facilities Planning.

Classroom Learning Technology

Are mounted interactive whiteboards considered end user devices which we will have to provide to nonpublic schools in the District or are they considered a facility upgrade?
A: Interactive whiteboards are an allowable expenditure only under the Classroom Educational Technology category. If the nonpublic school does not request use of the interactive whiteboards for their SSBA loan program, you would need to provide them with their requested equipment of an equal value, up to the $250 per pupil cap. We encourage all districts to work closely with their nonpublic schools to best meet the technology needs of those students, consistent with the SSBA statute. If you provide the whiteboards, you do not need to support the costs of the associated wiring installation. That would be the responsibility of the nonpublic school.

Can we include Data Plan service charges for devices we would like to add to our SSIP? If so, for how many years can we prepay and include in our SSIP?
A: No. Service charges for devices are not eligible expenditures.

Can we purchase warranties for technology that we are purchasing using Smart Schools Bond Act funds?
A: Yes, certain warranties that are considered repair and replace would be eligible.

Are licenses/software allowable?
A: Yes, some are. Please see our "SSBA Hardware, Software, License and Fees Policy" on our website.

Would protective cases for purchased iPads be eligible?
A: Yes, as long as the district was purchasing the associated devices in the SSIP.

Are 3D printers, CNC machines or other STEAM Room devices allowable under SSBA?
A: Yes!

There is a question in the Classroom Learning Technology category, requiring districts to contact a SUNY/CUNY teacher preparation program to request advice

on innovative uses and best practices at the intersection of pedagogy and educational technology. What SUNY/CUNY school should the district contact and what information is requested on the SSIP?
A: Districts should contact the SUNY/CUNY teacher preparation program that supplies the largest number of the district's new teachers. There is a list of these schools and contact information on the Smart Schools website and within the SSIP, itself. If the district does not have new teachers from SUNY/CUNY school, they should contact the SUNY/CUNY school which has a teacher preparation program closest to their location. This requirement was established to encourage districts to form relationships with the SUNY/CUNY schools, so that they can work collaboratively to ensure that the district's students are benefitting from the implementation of best practices regarding educational technology.

Can districts collaborate with higher education schools that are not SUNY/CUNY?
A: Districts must collaborate with SUNY/CUNY schools; however, they can also collaborate with other schools in addition to the SUNY/CUNY.

Would access points be devices or capital infrastructure?
A: Access points must be included under the School Connectivity category. Districts should consult with Facilities Planning regarding whether the purchase of the devices requires streamlined project number or standard project number, based off their specific circumstances. NYSED has determined that access point devices may be loaned to nonpublic schools, if they request them.

Please confirm that interactive whiteboards and projectors are devices.
A: Yes, they are.

Can installation charges be included under Classroom Learning Technology?
A: No, all installation of devices should be moved to School Connectivity.

Can projectors be replaced before end-of-life?
A: Yes.

Can SSBA funds be used on software or applications for the technology being purchased?
A: Smart Schools funds may only reimburse the cost of an actual device or hardware and the licenses or core operating software or extended replacement warranties needed to enable the hardware to operate and to directly support the intended educational purpose(s) of the SSBA plan. Please refer to:
http://www.p12.nysed.gov/mgtserv/documents/SSBA_Hardware_SoftwarePolicy.pdf

Are Chrome Management licenses considered an eligible expenditure?
A: Yes.

Modernization of facilities to accommodate Pre-K and replace classroom trailers

What level of detail is required for the expenditure in the Pre-Kindergarten and Replace Transportable Classroom categories?
A: Districts should have a breakdown of their expenditures that includes an estimated budget for each applicable area including general trades, plumbing, HVAC, electrical, furniture and any other applicable anticipated expenses. We understand that these are estimates and the totals will change. The amendment process will be available for districts that have changes to their expenditures.

High-Tech Security

Can the Smart Schools Bond Act be used for installation of new telephone system such as the Voice Over IP (VOIP) for schools that currently have conventional systems? The VOIP system would require infrastructure improvements, i.e. wiring and switches that are considered allowable expenditures for expansion of the network connectivity.
A: If the VOIP is being provided to improve student and teacher safety by providing a VOIP device in every classroom and integrating the devices with emergency communication systems, it is eligible under the Smart Schools Bond Act. If the VOIP is being provided to serve as the backbone for high speed broadband or wireless internet connectivity, the wiring/servers/etc. are eligible. The phones (except as noted above) would not be. If the purpose of the VOIP is simply to replace an existing telephone system, the costs would not be eligible for Smart School Bond Act funding.

Can the funds be used to support a disaster recovery plan?
A: The development of a disaster plan is a service – for which bond funds cannot be used. However, if a disaster plan calls for high tech security investments – bond funds may be used to support the costs of the high tech security investments.

Is a unified telecom system, phones coupled with security, an allowable expense?
A: Yes.

If a district wants to use SSBA funding for a new phone system that can integrate with a security system would the new phone system qualify for SSBA funding?
A: A new phone system is only eligible if it integrates with a school's security system. The phone system must be included under the High-Tech Security category of the SSIP for approval.

Main doors are indicated as priority review. Are classroom door lock systems eligible?

A: May depend on the details – discuss with your project manager in the Office of Facilities Planning.

If a district were to invest in security, are interior classroom doors covered?
A: No, unless they are an integral part of an automated lockdown system.

I am trying to find out if securing spaces and hardening doors is covered under Smart Schools. Where can I find the information on your website?
A: For a detailed description of items covered under Smart Schools, visit the Smart Schools website and view the file titled "SSBA Eligible Costs by Category, Subcategory and Item." If an item is not listed, please email smartschools@nysed.gov for more information.

Is facial recognition software allowable under SSBA?
A: The Review Board is not currently approving plans that include facial recognition technology or other similar self-learning analytic software. Prior to approval, all districts with any expenditures in High-Tech Security are required to submit an updated Statement of Assurances and confirmation that there is no facial recognition or similar technology included in the plan.

Reimbursement System

My district has received Smart Bond approval. Where can I find information on the reimbursement request process?
A: To find information on the reimbursement request process, please visit the Smart Schools website and refer to the Guidance and FAQs PDFs under "Latest Information."

Can we be reimbursed for purchases made prior to approval of the SSIP?
A: No. **Expenditures made prior to approval from the Review Board are ineligible for reimbursement.** The only exception is architect and/or engineer fees that must start prior to the approval of an SSIP. Districts should note that in the event that the SSIP was not approvable and/or the district did not proceed with the SSIP, the district would not be reimbursed for those fees.

How do you access the reimbursement system?
A: The reimbursement system is available in the SED Business Portal under SSBA Reimbursement in your applications. The Superintendent has access automatically and can assign rights to other staff members to work on the claim.

Do I need to submit invoices?
A: All submissions for reimbursement are completed in the online reimbursement system. Districts will be asked to list the description, quantities and costs of items they purchased. Districts are strongly advised to keep all documentation of expenditures

including receipts and invoices, on hand for audit purposes. These documents do not need to be submitted to SED.

Why can't I access the reimbursement system?
A: The Superintendent must assign rights to staff who need access to the reimbursement system.

Why does my total approved budget not match my district's assigned allocation?
A: The total available budget is only the total amount, as amended, which your SSIP was approved for by the SSBA Review Board. The allocation assigned to your district can differ from the amount, if you submitted an SSIP for only a portion of your total allocation.

I'm trying to complete a claim within an approved category, but the field is grey and will not allow me to enter any digits. How do I add my claim?
A: You must click on the "Show Plan Details" button and then add an item. This will add a line to include the specific item in which you are requesting reimbursement.

Some categories in the reimbursement system are grey and will not allow me to add claims. Why can't I access these to enter data?
A: Districts can only submit claims for the categories in which they had an approved Smart Schools Investment Plan. If a category is grey and will not allow you to enter data, the district did not have an approved budget within that category.

Under the Total Paid or Claimed to Date column, there is a percentage under my current claim. What does this percentage mean?
A: This is identifying the percentage of your approved budget that has been paid or claimed to date, including the current claim in process.

Since my approval, the price of proposed technology has decreased. Can I order additional devices up to my approved budget?
A: Yes. Districts can adjust the quantity of items that they are purchasing to accommodate changes in pricing between what approved and the final pricing of expenditures after approval, as long as the items are consistent with the approved plan. Districts cannot submit a claim over their approved budget, however.

How do I change my approved SSIP, so that I can file for reimbursement of items that have been modified or changed since my approval?
A: You must submit an amendment to the SSIP in the Business Portal. The amendment must be approved before you can file a claim in the reimbursement system. Please refer to the guidance on the Smart Schools website: http://www.p12.nysed.gov/mgtserv/smart_schools/home.html.

Do I have to claim for the entire approved budget at once?

A: No, districts can submit multiple claims, up until they have reached their approved budget. However, you cannot submit a new claim, until the claim before it was approved.

There is no button to submit my claim. How do I submit?
A: Only the Superintendent will have the submit button.

My claim status is on "HOLD." What does this mean?
A: A status of "HOLD" means that the claim was submitted successfully and pending review.

What is the typical time frame for reimbursement to occur?
A: A timeframe for reimbursement to occur can vary depending on the complexity of an application. The reimbursement process can be extended if a proposal contains errors or more details are needed. At this time, there are significant delays to final reimbursement as a result of the pandemic.

My reimbursement claim was rejected. How do I find out why?
A: There should be a note in red at the top of the rejected claim explaining the reason for the rejection. If you have additional questions, send an e-mail to ssbareimbursement@nysed.gov.

My claims were rejected. It says, "greater than current available budget." Should I move some expenses or request to amend my budget?
A: If claims are rejected, you must complete an amended SSIP in order to correct the budget. The amendment must be approved before you can file a claim in the reimbursement system.

The cost of certain line items exceeds the amount approved, will we have to submit an amendment prior to requesting payment? What are our options?
A: This depends. If there are enough budgeted funds in the category, there is some flexibility. However, if the cost of a line item would exceed the available category funds, an amendment must be completed in order to increase the budget.

I am trying to submit our first claim and have two options for project numbers even though only one phase has been approved. Can you please tell me which project number I should be using or what document I should look on to determine which project number should be used?
A: You should be using the project number that was approved in your SSIP that the expenditures were made under.

I submitted an original claim which was approved and I would like to submit an additional claim, however when I go into the SSBA reimbursement tab, and click on my original claim it is not allowing me to add a line.

A: Once a claim has been approved, you must start a new claim for additional reimbursement. You will not be able to submit another claim, however, until the previous claim has been processed. You will receive e-mail notifications at each of these steps.