

Dear Colleague:

As we embark on a new school year, I am pleased to report that hundreds of thousands of college students have identified themselves as potentially eligible to receive Academic Competitiveness Grants (ACGs) for the 2007-2008 academic year. Colleges and universities are awarding these grants to first- and second-year students who have successfully completed a rigorous secondary school program of study and are eligible for a Federal Pell Grant.

The purpose of this letter is to explain the Department's plan for implementing the ACG program for the 2008-2009 academic year and to provide guidance to States on submitting, by November 1, 2007, new or revised rigorous secondary school programs of study for the 2008-2009 academic year. If your State is not submitting new or revised programs, removing any currently recognized programs, or clarifying State Scholars Initiative (SSI) program requirements, you do not need to submit anything to the Department, as your State's currently recognized programs will carry over to the 2008-2009 academic year.

In Secretary Spellings's May 2, 2006, letter to Chief State School Officers (<http://www.ed.gov/policy/highered/guid/secletter/060502.html>), she recognized four options for rigorous secondary school programs of study by which students in every state can qualify for an ACG. Those options are:

1. State Advanced or Honors high school diploma;
2. State Scholars Initiative programs;
3. A set of courses similar to those of the State Scholars Initiative; and
4. Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses and test scores.

In that letter, the Secretary also invited states to submit additional rigorous secondary school programs of study for recognition for the 2006-2007 academic year. We were very pleased with the thoughtful and timely responses we received from States.

In order to make the process of updating State programs and recognizing new ones for the 2008-2009 academic year efficient, the Secretary will continue to recognize your State's 2007-2008 academic year programs, as presented in Attachment A, for the 2008-2009 academic year unless we hear otherwise from you. If your State plans to submit new or revised rigorous secondary school program(s) of study (or remove one or more of your 2007-2008 recognized programs), you must submit your request to the Department no later than November 1, 2007. To expedite the review process, we suggest that you

provide the information outlined in Attachment B for every new or revised program you are submitting for the 2008-2009 academic year, even if you have previously submitted information to the Department about that program.

Also, if your State's currently recognized rigorous programs, as indicated on Attachment A, include a State Scholars Initiative (SSI) program that is recognized by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), please provide to the Department the official name of your State's SSI program and details on the requirements for its successful completion by students.

As you consider strengthening your State's currently recognized rigorous secondary school programs, keep in mind that a student who graduated from high school in 2005, 2006 or 2007 will still be eligible for an ACG under the currently recognized programs. In other words, revised requirements for a program recognized by the Secretary for the 2008-2009 academic year will apply to students graduating from high school in 2008.

We have started the negotiated rulemaking process by which we hope to establish a framework for States to designate more rigorous programs of study for the 2008-2009 academic year and beyond. It is by holding our students to high standards and rewarding them for meeting those standards that we will better prepare them to succeed in higher education and lead in the global economy.

To reiterate, your State must submit any additional or revised secondary school programs for recognition as rigorous programs of study for the 2008-2009 academic year as well as note any removals of currently recognized programs to the Department by November 1, 2007. If your State is not submitting new or revised programs, removing any currently recognized programs, or clarifying State Scholars Initiative (SSI) program requirements, you do not need to submit anything to the Department, as your State's currently recognized programs will carry over to the 2008-2009 academic year.

We look forward to continuing to work with you to effectively implement the ACG program. Please feel free to contact us by emailing ACGrants@ed.gov if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Kerri Briggs
Acting Assistant Secretary

cc: State Higher Education Executive Officer
Governor

Attachments

Paperwork Burden Statement

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless such collection displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 1845-0078. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 5 hours per response, including the time to review instructions, search existing data resources, gather the data needed, and complete and review the information collection. **If you have any comments concerning the accuracy of the time estimate(s) or suggestions for improving this form, please write to:** U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C. 20202-4651. **If you have comments or concerns regarding the status of your individual submission of this form, write directly to:** Sophia McArdle, Office of Postsecondary Education, U.S. Department of Education, 1990 K St., N.W., Room 8019, Washington, D.C. 20006.