



OFFICE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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TO: CSTEP and STEP Directors and Administrators

FROM: Anael Alston, Assistant Commissioner *Anael Alston*
Office of Access, Equity, and Community Engagement Services

SUBJECT: STEP and CSTEP Eligibility

DATE: July 8, 2025

The purpose of this memo is to provide interim guidance as it relates to student eligibility in the 2025-2030 grant cycle for STEP and CSTEP initiatives.

As many of you are aware, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) is currently engaged in active litigation concerning the eligibility criteria for participation in the Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP). The litigation challenges certain aspects of our longstanding eligibility guidelines related to student race and ethnicity.

While NYSED remains committed to defending the STEP and CSTEP programs and their historic mission to increase access and opportunity for historically underrepresented students in the scientific, technical, and health-related professions, we recognize the need to provide clarity and support to the field during this period of legal uncertainty.

Updated Guidance on STEP and CSTEP Student Eligibility

Effective immediately and until further notice, STEP and CSTEP grantees may determine student eligibility without regard to historically underrepresented minority status, race, or ethnicity. Instead, grantees are encouraged to base eligibility decisions solely on indicators of economic disadvantage, in alignment with applicable state and federal guidelines.

Implications for Current STEP/CSTEP Programs

- Recruitment, selection, and enrollment of new students may proceed using economic-based eligibility criteria only.

- Collection or use of race, ethnicity, or minority status data is not required for eligibility purposes. However, data reporting should continue in a disaggregated format, in accordance with Board of Regents policy.
- Current program participants remain eligible, and services to these students should continue without disruption.

Next Steps

NYSED will continue to vigorously defend the mission and intent of STEP and CSTEP in court. We are also evaluating our policies and procedures in light of recent legal developments to ensure continued compliance and sustainability.

We will keep you informed of any changes to program guidance as the litigation progresses. If you have questions or concerns, please reach out to your NYSED program officers.

Thank you for your ongoing leadership and commitment to supporting students across New York State. Together, we will continue to expand opportunity, foster excellence, and ensure that every student has a pathway to success in the STEM and licensed professions.