

Rural Pathway Excellence Partnership

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Program-Related Questions

1. What is the R-PEP program?

Answer - The [Rural Pathway Excellence Partnerships \(R-PEP\)](#) program, grounded in [Texas Education Code \(TEC\), §29.912](#) and [§48.118](#), incentivizes rural school districts to partner with neighboring school districts to increase access to high-quality post-secondary pathways for rural students. Through multi-district collaboration, students will benefit from expanded opportunities to succeed in school and life while promoting economic development in rural areas.

R-PEP was created through House Bill (HB) 2209, 88th Regular Legislative Session, following the success of the Rural Schools Innovation Zone (RSIZ), an initiative for rural students in South Texas. The RSIZ - a collaborative partnership originally consisting of a locally created nonprofit coordinating organization and three districts: Brooks County ISD, Freer ISD, and Premont ISD - shared a vision of expanding opportunities for students in the region to have access to high-wage and high-demand career opportunities.

2. What is a Rural Pathway?

Answer – An R-PEP Pathway is a program of study or endorsement that aligns with regional labor market projections for high-wage, high-demand careers with advancement opportunities. These Rural Pathways incorporate college and career advising, offer a continuum of work-based learning experiences, and follow TEA approved CTE programs of study and/or Texas College and Career Readiness School Models (CCRSM), including Pathways in Technical Early College High School (P-TECH) and Early College High School (ECHS).

3. How long does the funding last?

Answer – Legislature determines funding each biennium (every two years) through the legislative process. The legislature must approve an appropriation in the budget to provide funding for this program. Pending that approval, once designated as an R-PEP, a renewal process must be completed every 3 years to determine continued funding eligibility.

4. Where can I access the statute and rules?

Answer – The R-PEP statute may be found in [TEC, §29.912](#), and Commissioner rules governing R-PEP may be found in [19 TAC Chapter §102.1021, Rural Pathway Excellence Partnership Program](#). The statutory funding authority for R-PEP is found in [TEC, §48.118](#).

5. I’m interested in participating in an R-PEP. How do I find partnering districts?

Answer - R-PEPs start with conversations among like-minded district leaders who meet the initial enrollment and distance requirements. During these conversations, share and discuss R-PEP resources and consider possibilities of what each district might have to offer and if the program is something that would be a good fit for the students and the district.

6. I have found some districts who are interested in partnering. How do we find a coordinating entity?

Answer - Finding a coordinating entity begins with researching and meeting with potential entities and then determining based on likelihood of success and capacity to meet requirements. Per TEC,

§29.912(c)(2)(C), eligible entities are defined in TEC, Section 12.101(a), as the following: (1) an institution of higher education as defined under Section [61.003](#); (2) a private or independent institution of higher education as defined under Section [61.003](#); (3) an organization that is exempt from taxation under Section 501(c)(3), Internal Revenue Code of 1986 (26 U.S.C. Section 501(c)(3)); or (4) a governmental entity.

7. How long does the planning process take when preparing to apply?

Answer – Establishing a timeline for R-PEP planning depends on the partnership and its progress in the process. Before the application process can begin, several milestones must be met including the following: partnering districts identified, coordinating entity secured, Rural Pathways researched and identified, and performance agreements created. There are also coordinating entity training modules offered by TEA; please contact R-PEP@tea.texas.gov for more information.

Eligibility Questions

1. What are the basic eligibility requirements?

Answer – To receive the R-PEP designation, the initial requirements are that the district has fewer than 1,600 students in average daily attendance and that the partnering districts are within one hundred miles of one another. Additionally, the partnership must enter into a performance agreement with an approved coordinating entity.

2. Can charter schools participate in R-PEPs?

Answer – No, per statute [TEC, §29.912](#), charter schools are not eligible to participate in R-PEPs.

3. Can P-TECH and/or ECHS campuses participate?

Answer – Yes, P-TECH and ECHS campuses can participate in R-PEPs.

4. Do all the districts have to have less than 1,600 students to receive funding?

Answer – In order to receive funding, all R-PEP partnering districts must each have fewer than 1,600 students.

5. Do all the districts have to be within one hundred miles of each other to receive funding?

Answer – Yes, all R-PEP partnering districts must be within one hundred miles of one another to receive funding.

6. For the less than 1,600 student enrollment requirement, does that include Early Childhood and PreK numbers?

Answer – Enrollment is determined as reported to the Texas Education Agency (TEA), based on eligibility and hours requirements, for both Early Childhood and PreK numbers.

7. Is there a cap on the number of R-PEPs that can be approved?

Answer – Currently, there is a \$5 million cap for R-PEP funding.

8. Does R-PEP eligibility depend on the academic performance level of the school or district?

Answer – While R-PEP eligibility is not dependent on the academic performance level of the school or district, the partnership is expected to develop and monitor performance goals and metrics related, in part, to an increase CCMR outcomes.

Application Process & Monitoring Questions

1. When is the application cycle?

Answer – The application process cycle begins in February of each year with application documents due in March.

2. What are the application process requirements?

Answer – Coordinating entities must attend a designated R-PEP training(s) as well as submit a letter of intent specifying TEA approved programs of study, the career clusters they are associated with, and proposed Rural Pathways for each district before the application process begins. The application consists of a completed application form including the following: partnering district information, performance agreements approved and signed by each partnering district board, executive summary, narrative related to the structure and organization of the partnership, narrative related to proposed Rural Pathways, proposed budget, and assurances/acknowledgements.

3. Who must approve the performance agreement?

Answer – Each partnering district board must approve and sign the performance agreement prior to applying for designation through TEA.

4. Do members of the Board of Directors have to be listed at the time of application?

Answer – Yes, Board of Directors must be listed at the time of application representing each partnering district as well as representatives from regional higher education and workforce organizations.

5. How long does the application review process last?

Answer – Once application documents are received, TEA has 60 days to request more information/clarification and make designation notifications.

6. What does the monitoring process look like confirming that districts are complying with R-PEP requirements during implementation and beyond?

Answer – In order to qualify for ongoing benefits following initial eligibility validation or approval, the eligible partnership campus will regularly submit all information requests deemed necessary by TEA staff and continuously meet all requirements.

7. Can I renew the R-PEP designation?

Answer – Yes, renewal packets must be submitted to TEA every 3 years to determine continued eligibility for R-PEP allocations.

Funding Questions

1. How are R-PEPs funded?

Answer – R-PEP ([TEC §29.912](#)) provides two additional incentives to designated districts: additional weighted ADA and the R-PEP Outcomes Bonus. The Additional ADA allotment is based on contact hours in eligible Rural Pathway courses and utilizes a weighted multiplier, differentiated between economically disadvantaged and non-economically disadvantaged students. Districts report contact hours through PEIMS. 80% of the R-PEP funding districts receive must be controlled by the Coordinating Entity, per [TEC, §29.912](#). The coordinating entity then funds the eligible partnership pathways based on the R-PEP Performance Agreement.

2. Do campuses get to keep their CTE monies that are separate from the R-PEP allocation?

Answer – CTE funding generated by non-R-PEP pathways does not need to be distributed to the Coordinating Entity. 80% of CTE monies associated with the R-PEP pathways are distributed to the partnership.

3. Who employs the R-PEP teacher(s)?

Answer – Either the district or the partnership can employ the teacher, whichever best fits the needs of the partnership.

4. Is there an Outcomes Bonus for R-PEP?

Answer – More information regarding the R-PEP Outcomes Bonus will be available during the 2024-2025 school year.

5. Are R-PEPs eligible for the CCMR outcomes bonus in addition to the R-PEP outcomes bonus?

Answer – Yes, the CCMR outcomes bonus and the R-PEP outcomes bonus are two separate bonuses. More information regarding the R-PEP outcomes bonus will be available at a future date.

6. Can funds be used for post-graduates to support educational pursuits after high school graduation?

Answer – No, R-PEP funds must be utilized to support students in grades 9-12.

Rural Pathways

1. What should be utilized for the workforce data source?

Answer – [Local Workforce Development Area \(LWDA\) Labor Market Information and Resources](#) should be utilized as the data source when determining partnerships pathways.

2. Who controls the Rural Pathways? Can a district control any part of the Pathways if agreed upon in advance?

Answer – The coordinating entity has authority over Rural Pathways and Pathway budgets as determined by [TEC §29.912](#).

3. What if there is a change in the approved career clusters or programs of study at the state level?

Answer – It is the responsibility of the Partnership to ensure the program of study courses and industry-based certifications they offer are accurate and up to date. Timelines and updates can be found on [TEA's Career and Technical Education website](#).

4. Are all CTE pathways within a district R-PEP eligible?

Answer – Pathways must be aligned with TEA approved Career Clusters and Programs of Study per [TEC 29.912](#) and reflect regional high-wage and high-demand career opportunities as determined by [Local Workforce Development Area \(LWDA\) Labor Market Information and Resources](#).

5. Are summer courses eligible?

Answer – Summer courses are not eligible for R-PEP funding.

6. Who gets the CTE credit?

Answer – For designated R-PEP Pathways, the home campus of the student receives the CTE credit, including the CCMR credit, CCMR Outcomes Bonus, as well as all CCMR related funding including CTE funding and IBC reimbursement.

Coordinating Entity

1. Who can be a Coordinating Entity for a R-PEP?

Answer – Per TEC, Sec. 29.912(c), a coordinating entity: 1) has or will have at the time students are served under the partnership the capacity to effectively coordinate the partnership; 2) has entered into a performance agreement approved by the board of trustees of each partnering school district that confers on the coordinating entity the same authority with respect to pathways offered under the partnership provided to an entity that contracts to operate a district campus under Section [11.174](#); 3) is an eligible entity as defined by Section [12.101\(a\)](#); and 4) has on the entity's governing board as either voting or ex officio members, or has on an advisory body, representatives of each partnering school district and members of regional higher education and workforce organizations. Eligible entities are defined in [TEC, Section 12.101\(a\)](#) as the following: (1) an institution of higher education as defined under Section [61.003](#); (2) a private or independent institution of higher education as defined under Section [61.003](#); (3) an organization that is exempt from taxation under Section 501(c)(3), Internal Revenue Code of 1986 (26 U.S.C. Section 501(c)(3)); or (4) a governmental entity.

2. Are there trainings available for coordinating entities?

Answer – Yes, training modules are available for potential coordinating entities. Information related to training opportunities is available at [Rural Pathway Excellence Partnerships \(R-PEP\)](#).

3. How does TRS eligibility work? When does the eligibility begin, and how do R-PEPs sign up with TRS?

Answer – Employees of a coordinating entity are eligible for membership in and benefits from TRS if the employee is specified in [TEC, §29.912](#). More information can be found regarding enrollment information can be found [here](#).

4. Are there any requirements around training for R-PEP boards?

Answer – There are no additional requirements around training for R-PEP boards outside of legally required training, including open meetings act, the public information act, and other public board requirements.

5. Are there any requirements regarding the makeup of the R-PEP board?

Answer – There must be a representative of each partnering school district as well as members of regional higher education and workforce organizations, as specified in [TEC, §29.912](#).

6. How does an existing partnership expand to add new districts or remove districts?

Answer – Existing partnerships interested in expanding to add new districts or modifying to remove districts must complete the expansion/modification application process, including a letter of intent. For more information, please visit [R-PEP](#) or contact R-PEP@tea.texas.gov.

7. How can an existing R-PEP make changes to Rural Pathways?

Answer – Existing partnerships interested in adding, modifying, or removing Rural Pathways must complete the expansion/modification application process, including a letter of intent. For more information, please visit [R-PEP](#) or contact R-PEP@tea.texas.gov.