



NC Science and Engineering Fair (NCSEF) **Frequently Asked Questions**

What is the NCSEF?

NCSEF is an annual STEM research competition for three divisions of students, Elementary (Grades 3-5), Junior (Grades 6-8) and Senior (Grades 6-12). Since 2002, the NCSEF has been the North Carolina affiliate to the prestigious [Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair \(ISEF\)](#) (Grades 9-12) and its [Thermo Fisher Scientific Junior Innovators Challenge](#) (Grades 6-8).

Who coordinates the NCSEF?

Sponsored by the nonprofit [NC Science Fair Foundation](#), the state [NCSEF](#) is comprised of [10 Regional Fairs](#) representing all 100 counties of North Carolina. Students first compete at their local school and/or school district competition and then a select number advance to their assigned Regional Fair (based on their county). Please visit the [Regional Fairs](#) to identify your county's Regional Fair Director and the date, location, registration deadline, and online registration details to participate.

Can any NC student participate in NCSEF?

Students in grades 3-12, who are residents of NC and enrolled in either a traditional public school, public charter school, private or religious school, or a homeschool are eligible to compete as long as they meet all of the competition requirements. Students first compete at their local and/or school system competition, then advance to their Regional Fair, and finally the top regional projects are advanced to the State NCSEF competition.

How many students can participate in a research project?

Each project can have 1, 2, or 3 students. Schools and school districts should contact their [Regional Fair Director](#) to determine the numbers of projects from a school or school system that are allowed to participate at the Regional Fair.

If I am a teacher or parent who is interested in supporting a student(s) through the research process, how can I learn more?

Teachers and parents can learn about supporting students through the research and competition process by exploring the [Teacher Information](#) and [Student Information](#) resources on the [NCSEF website](#). This link offers a suggested monthly timeline for [Guiding A Student Research or Engineering Project](#).

How does a student qualify to participate in the Regional and State NCSEF?

Students advance to their [Regional Fair](#) by one of three pathways:

Pathway 1: District Fair - if a student's school system or district has a Fair, the district's top projects are selected within the **Elementary (Grades 3-5)**, **Junior (Grades 6-8)**, and **Senior (Grades 9-12)** Divisions and respective Categories to register for their designated Regional Fair as district winners.

Pathway 2: School Fair But No District Fair - if a student's school system or district does not have a Fair, but an individual school has a Fair, then the school should contact their [Regional Fair Director](#) to get the number of school-based projects allowed to advance and register to compete in the Regional Fair based on both Divisions and Categories.

Pathway 3: Individual Students without a District or a School Fair - Interested students and/or teachers whose school or school system does not have a Fair, must contact their [Regional Fair Director](#) on how to participate and register as an individual student or 2 or 3 person team.

Can a student register for the State Science and Engineering Fair (NCSEF) without competing in a regional competition?

No. Students must compete in the designated Regional Fair and then be promoted from their Regional Fair to the State Science and Engineering Fair. [Region 9 is the statewide Virtual Regional Fair](#) and a student with prior written approval from their designated Regional Fair Director may register for Region 9 if they are unable to participate in their Regional Fair.

What does a student need in order to participate in a Regional Fair?

- Please begin by reviewing the [Before You Start A Project](#) within [How To Do A Project](#).
- Additional information is also on the [Student Information pages](#).
- An original, grade appropriate research project selected through one of the three pathways above
- Complete the Regional Fair registration process and submit all registration and project materials by the regional fair deadline
- The project must follow the safety and research rules and guidelines

- Learn how to create a [research tri-fold poster board](#) that summarizes their research and meets all [Safety and Display guidelines](#). This is what the judges will see when they interview the student at the Fair.

What are the research categories?

Elementary Division Categories (Grades 3-5)

- Biological Sciences
- Physics and Math
- Chemistry
- Earth and Environmental Sciences
- Engineering and Technology

Junior (Grades 6-8) and Senior (Grades 9-12) Categories

- Biological Science A (Animal, Plant, Microbiology, Behavioral & Social Sciences)
- Biological Science B (Cellular, Biomedical/Health, Translational Medical)
- Chemistry
- Earth/Environmental Science
- Physics
- Mathematics, Statistics, and Data Science
- Engineering
- Technology

Where can I learn more about the general rules for safety and student research?

NCSEF is the state affiliate to the [Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair \(ISEF\)](#) and abides by all the safety and research requirements of ISEF. [The ISEF rules and forms](#) are here. The [ISEF FAQ of Rules](#) is located here. [NCSEF General Rules](#) provides an overview of the student safety requirements and rules for safe research.

What do I do if I need financial assistance to compete in the State Science and Engineering Fair (NCSEF)?

Thanks to our [business sponsors](#) and [individual donors](#), the [NC Science Fair Foundation](#) offers limited financial assistance to families that have a financial barrier to attending the State NCSEF competition. To apply for financial assistance, please contact your Regional Director for more information.

How does a student participate in the Regeneron ISEF and Thermo Fisher Scientific Junior Innovators Challenge??

Both the [Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair \(ISEF\)](#) (Grades 9-12) and the [Thermo Fisher Scientific Junior Innovators Challenge](#) (Grades 6-8) are the Senior and Junior Grand Awards for the NCSEF. Up to 12 Senior Division projects can be selected for ISEF and the top 10% of the Junior Division projects are nominated to advance to the TFS/JIC. The [NC Science Fair Foundation](#) covers registration, travel,

and meal expenses for all students nominated to compete in ISEF. Thermo Fisher Scientific covers the costs for the finalists to travel to Washington, DC.

What if I have additional questions?

If you would like to speak to a [Regional Fair Director](#), please contact them directly at the email address listed for your home county in the Regional Fair listing or contact the State NCSEF Fair Director, Dr. Tom Williams, at director@ncsciencefair.org.