

Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation

Wednesday, September 27th 2017

DECISION ITEM A

Proposed Rules, Tennessee Reconnect Grant

Staff Recommendation

(1) That the Tennessee Assistance Student Corporation adopt Rule 1640-1-28, Tennessee Reconnect Grant Program, as proposed rules.

(2) That the TSAC Board of Directors authorize the Executive Director to make any necessary technical corrections to these rules, including changes suggested by the Tennessee Attorney General.

Background

The proposed rule implements Public Acts of 2017, Chapter 448, the Tennessee Reconnect Grant.

These rules will be implemented following approval by the Tennessee Attorney General and subsequent filing with the Secretary of State.

Supporting Document

Rules of the Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation, Chapter 1640-1-28, Tennessee Reconnect Grant

**RULES
OF
TENNESSEE STUDENT ASSISTANCE CORPORATION**

**CHAPTER 1640-01-28
TENNESSEE RECONNECT GRANT**

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1640-01-28-.01 DEFINITIONS.

- (1) Certificate: A credential, other than a degree or diploma, the receipt of which indicates satisfactory completion of training in a program of study offered by an eligible postsecondary institution.
- (2) College Success Program: An approved suite of resources for pre-enrollment, enrollment, and retention support offered through the Tennessee Reconnect Communities and eligible postsecondary institutions based on the goals and needs of individual adult students.
- (3) Continuous Enrollment: The term is defined in T.C.A. § 49-4-902.
- (4) Cumulative Grade Point Average: The grade point average as calculated by the eligible postsecondary institution.
- (5) Degree: A two-year associate degree conferred on students by an eligible postsecondary institution.
- (6) Eligible Postsecondary Institution: The term is defined in T.C.A. § 49-4-708.
- (7) Eligible Program of Study: A federal Title IV-eligible curriculum of courses leading to a certificate or associate degree;
- (8) FAFSA: The term is defined in T.C.A. § 49-4-902.
- (9) FAFSA Verification: The process used by a postsecondary institution to verify the accuracy of information submitted on a student's FAFSA. For purposes of these rules, this process shall apply to verification documents required by the U.S. Department of Education regardless of how the student is selected.
- (10) Gift Aid: The term is defined in T.C.A. § 49-4-708.
- (11) Immediate Family Member: Spouse, parents, grandparents, children, or siblings.
- (12) Independent Student: A student who is classified as independent as determined by the FAFSA.
- (13) Part-time Student: The term is defined in T.C.A. § 49-4-902.

(Rule 1640-01-28-.01, continued)

- (14) Satisfactory Academic Progress: Progress in a course of study in accordance with the standards and practices used for Title IV programs by the eligible postsecondary institution at which the student is currently enrolled.
- (15) Semester: The term is defined in T.C.A. § 49-4-902.
- (16) Tennessee Reconnect Community: A locally-based collaborative designated by THEC which is focused on engaging adult learners and helping them enroll in a postsecondary institution and persist to graduation while providing community-based, institution-neutral advising and navigation support specifically to adults.
- (17) THEC: Tennessee Higher Education Commission
- (18) Title IV: The term is defined in T.C.A. § 49-4-902.
- (19) TSAC: Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation.
- (20) Tuition and Mandatory Fees: Tuition and mandatory fees required for the enrollment or attendance of students at eligible postsecondary institutions that are charged to all students, and shall not include fees charged for the TN eCampus courses, online courses, specific programs of study, books, or supplies even if such fees are considered necessary for enrollment.

Authority: T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-204, 49-4-708, 49-4-902, and 49-4-944.

1640-01-28-.02 SCHOLARSHIP AWARD AMOUNTS.

- (1) The Tennessee Reconnect Grant is intended to provide financial assistance to offset tuition and mandatory fees associated with pursuing a certificate or associate degree at an eligible postsecondary institution after all other gift aid has been credited to tuition and mandatory fees.
- (2) Award amounts for the program shall be determined in accordance with T.C.A. § 49-4-944 and shall be set in the General Appropriations Act.
- (3) All tuition discounts and waivers for which a student qualifies shall first be deducted from the student's tuition and mandatory fees before gift aid is credited.
- (4) All gift aid from sources other than the Tennessee Reconnect Grant shall be credited first to tuition and mandatory fees to reduce the student's Tennessee Reconnect Grant award. In any given semester, if all other gift aid exceeds tuition and mandatory fees then the student shall not be eligible for the Tennessee Reconnect Grant in that semester.
- (5) The receipt of a Tennessee Reconnect Grant is contingent upon admission to and enrollment in an eligible postsecondary institution. Qualifying for the Tennessee Reconnect Grant does not guarantee admission to an eligible postsecondary institution.

Authority: T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-204, and 49-4-944.

1640-01-28-.03 DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS.

- (1) TSAC shall create a certification roster for each institution. The roster shall contain students who have met all requirements for the Tennessee Reconnect Grant.

(Rule 1640-01-28-.03, continued)

- (2) The eligible postsecondary institution shall certify each student's eligibility for a financial award from the Tennessee Reconnect program based on continuing eligibility requirements established in these rules. The award amount reported to TSAC shall be the amount of tuition and mandatory fees remaining after other gift aid has first been applied to the student's tuition and mandatory fees. All tuition waivers and discounts for which a student qualifies shall first be deducted from the student's tuition and mandatory fees before gift aid is credited.
- (3) Once the eligible postsecondary institution has certified the student's eligibility for a financial award, the certification information shall be electronically transmitted to TSAC.
- (4) TSAC shall process a payment request directly to the eligible postsecondary institution on behalf of all Tennessee Reconnect Grant recipients who are eligible for a financial award. No funds shall be disbursed directly to the students or a Tennessee Reconnect Community.

Authority: T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-204, and 49-4-944.

1640-01-28-.04 APPLICATION PROCESS.

- (1) Students participating in the Tennessee Reconnect Grant shall file a FAFSA, or renewal FAFSA, in each year of program participation. The FAFSA must be submitted by mail or electronically as directed in the FAFSA instructions. Students shall file the FAFSA or renewal FAFSA according to the following deadlines:
 - (a) No later than September 1 for fall enrollment, or
 - (b) No later than February 1 for spring and summer enrollment.
- (2) Students shall complete the Tennessee Reconnect Grant application for each year of enrollment.

Authority: T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-204, and 49-4-944.

1640-01-28-.05 ELIGIBILITY.

- (1) Students meeting initial and continuing eligibility requirements shall:
 - (a) Meet the requirements of T.C.A. § 49-4-944;
 - (b) Timely submit all necessary documentation to allow the postsecondary institution to complete FAFSA verification. FAFSA verification shall be completed regardless of eligibility for federal or state grants;
 - (c) Enroll and attend at least part time in each semester of the program. A student may enroll less than part time in the semester of graduation if part-time enrollment is not required to complete the program of study, when not required by the program of study, and for semesters in which the student receives an approved leave of absence; and
 - (d) Participate in a College Success Program under the direction of THEC and a Tennessee Reconnect Community.

1640-01-28-.06 TERMINATING EVENTS.

- (1) A student shall receive the Tennessee Reconnect Grant until reaching a terminating event as described in T.C.A. § 49-4-944.
- (2) A student may continue to receive a Tennessee Reconnect Grant for an associate degree or sequential certificate following completion of a certificate which directly leads to the associate degree program or sequential certificate.

Authority: T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-204, and 49-4-944.

1640-01-28-.07 PERSONAL OR MEDICAL LEAVE OF ABSENCE.

- (1) A student may be granted a medical or personal leave of absence from continuous or part-time enrollment at an eligible postsecondary institution as long as all other applicable eligibility criteria are met. Allowable medical or personal reasons may include illness of the student; illness or death of an immediate family member; extreme financial hardship of the student or student's immediate family; fulfillment of required military service; or other extraordinary circumstances beyond the student's control where attendance by the student creates a substantial hardship. In the event an institution denies a student's request for a medical or personal leave of absence, the student may appeal the decision in accordance with these rules.

Authority: T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-204, and 49-4-944.

1640-01-28-.08 AWARD MADE IN ERROR.

- (1) Repayment from the student shall not be required if TSAC determines that the error was through no fault of the student.
- (2) Repayment from the student shall be required if TSAC determines that fraud was committed or the error was due to the fault of the student. When repayment is required, the student may not receive additional student aid from TSAC until repayment is made.
- (3) Repayment from the eligible postsecondary institution will be required if TSAC determines that the error was due to the fault of the institution.

Authority: T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-204, and 49-4-944.

1640-01-28-.09 REFUND POLICY.

- (1) If a recipient of the Tennessee Reconnect Grant fails to complete a semester for any reason, the eligible postsecondary institution shall apply its refund policy to determine whether a refund may be required. The eligible postsecondary institution shall provide the student with a notice indicating the amount to be returned to the student. The eligible postsecondary institution shall notify TSAC of the refund. The eligible postsecondary institution shall also be responsible for obtaining repayment from the student. The student shall be ineligible for student aid from TSAC until the refund is paid.

Authority: T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-204, and 49-4-944.

1640-01-28-.10 APPEAL AND EXCEPTION PROCESS.

(Rule 1640-01-28-.10, continued)

- (1) Each eligible postsecondary institution shall use their existing Institutional Review Panel (IRP) for purposes of reviewing and rendering decisions regarding appeals for the Tennessee Reconnect Grant. The IRP shall use the same procedures and timelines as those that currently exist for the review of Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship (TELS) appeals as outlined in Tenn. Comp. R. & Reg. 1640-01-19.
- (2) TSAC shall use the existing TELS Appeals Panel to consider appeals and render decisions for those students who appeal a decision made by the IRP and for appeals made directly to TSAC. The same guidelines shall exist for appeals of the Tennessee Reconnect Grant as those that are currently in place for TELS as outlined in Tenn. Comp. R & Reg. 1640-01-19.

Authority: *T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-204, 49-4-924, and 49-4-944.*