

CHAPTER 26

AN ACT concerning financial aid for county college students and supplementing chapter 71B of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes.

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

C.18A:71B-111 Definitions relative to financial aid for county college students.

1. As used in this act:

“Annual adjusted gross income” means:

a. for a dependent student, the annual adjusted gross income of the student’s parent or legal guardian, as reported on the student’s Free Application for Federal Student Aid or other financial aid form; and

b. for an independent student, the annual adjusted gross income of the student and, if applicable, the spouse of the student, as reported on the student’s Free Application for Federal Student Aid or other financial aid form.

“Approved educational fees” means general education fees, registration fees, facility fees, technology fees, laboratory fees, student service and activity fees, and program and course fees, including fees associated with coursework in nursing, culinary, and other career and technical education programs as determined by the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority in consultation with the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education , subject to the limit of funds appropriated or otherwise made available for the program.

“Authority” means the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority established pursuant to N.J.S.18A:71A-3.

“Out-of-county college” means a county college that is outside of a student’s county of residence.

“Program” means the Community College Opportunity Grant Program created pursuant to section 2 of this act.

“Three plus one degree program” means a baccalaureate degree program created pursuant to section 1 of P.L.2018, c.144 (C.18A:3B-78).

C.18A:71B-112 Community College Opportunity Grant Program.

2. There is hereby created the Community College Opportunity Grant Program. The purpose of the program shall be to provide financial aid grants to eligible county college students, to cover the costs of tuition and approved educational fees that are not already covered by any other State, federal, and institutional need-based grants or merit scholarships and to provide county colleges with Student Success Incentive funding for outreach and student success initiatives. The financial aid grants distributed to eligible students under the program shall be administered by the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority, while the Student Success Incentive funding distributed to county colleges under the program shall be administered by the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education.

C.18A:71B-113 Eligibility for financial aid grant.

3. a. To be eligible to receive a financial aid grant under the Community College Opportunity Grant Program, a student shall:

(1) be a legal resident of the State in accordance with the provisions of N.J.S.18A:71B-2 or be eligible for student financial aid pursuant to P.L.2018, c.12 (C.18A:71B-2.1);

(2) be enrolled in at least six credits at a county college established pursuant to chapter 64A of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes;

(3) (a) be enrolled at the county college that serves the student's county of residence; or

(b) be enrolled at an out-of-county college, in which case the student, if otherwise eligible, shall receive a grant under the program to cover the remaining costs of tuition and approved educational fees, charged at the in-district rate for the county college at which the student is enrolled, provided that the amount of a grant provided to a student under this subparagraph does not exceed the amount of tuition and approved educational fees actually charged to the student;

(4) not have an annual adjusted gross income that is negative;

(5) have an annual adjusted gross income between \$0 and \$65,000, except that the authority, in consultation with the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education and the New Jersey Council of County Colleges, may annually establish maximum annual adjusted gross income eligibility limits of no less than \$65,000;

(6) have applied for all other available forms of State, federal, and institutional need-based grants and merit scholarships and, in accordance with annually established deadline dates, have completed and submitted a Free Application for Federal Student Aid, other financial aid form, or, as applicable, a State financial aid form as required by the authority pursuant to subsection b. of section 1 of P.L.2018, c.12 (C.18A:71B-2.1);

(7) not owe a refund on a grant or scholarship previously received from a State or federal program through any institution or be in default on any loan made under any State or federal student loan program at any institution, unless the student makes arrangements with the authority to repay the debt; and

(8) be in good academic standing and meet the minimum standards for academic performance and satisfactory academic progress as defined by the county college which the student is attending.

A county college shall not impose additional eligibility requirements for the program, other than the requirements set forth in this subsection.

b. A grant under the program may be renewed for a student who:

(1) annually completes and submits a Free Application for Federal Student Aid, other financial aid form, or, as applicable, a State financial aid form as required by the authority pursuant to subsection b. of section 1 of P.L.2018, c.12 (C.18A:71B-2.1);

(2) meets the standards for academic performance and satisfactory academic progress, as defined by the county college which the student is attending, to determine eligibility for federal student aid programs under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 or, in the semester immediately prior to receiving an award, attains a minimum level of academic success as determined by the authority; and

(3) maintains all eligibility requirements established pursuant to subsection a. of this section.

c. (1) A student shall be eligible for a grant under the program for up to five semesters, unless the student is enrolled in a program regularly requiring at least six semesters for completion, in which case the authority shall permit up to six semesters of eligibility.

(2) A student enrolled in a three plus one degree program shall be eligible for a grant under the program for up to six semesters.

(3) Semesters for which a student is enrolled in at least six credits but less than 12 credits shall be counted as one-half of a full-time semester.

d. A student may be eligible for a grant under the program during a fall or spring semester in an academic year.

e. If a student, the student's family, or a county college deems that the authority made an unfair determination of eligibility, an appeal may be filed with the authority within 60 days of initial notification of eligibility or ineligibility.

f. The county college which a student attends shall notify the student of the student's eligibility for the program and the amount of the grant.

C.18A:71B-114 Amount of grant distributed.

4. a. A grant distributed to an eligible student under the Community College Opportunity Grant Program shall cover the remaining cost of tuition and approved educational fees, which is not covered by State, federal, or any other need-based grant or merit scholarship, for up to 18 credits in any semester. The full amount of State, federal, and institutional need-based grant or merit scholarships received by an eligible student shall be applied to the amount of tuition and approved educational fees charged to an eligible student. The remaining balance of tuition and approved educational fees shall be covered by a grant under the program.

b. A full award under the program to a student at a county college shall be equal to the student's full cost of approved tuition and approved educational fees, subject to the prior application of all other State, federal, and institutional need-based grants and merit scholarships against those costs, for up to 18 credits in any semester, for an eligible student for a full-time semester in an associate's degree, certificate, or three plus one degree program. For an eligible student enrolled in at least six credits but less than 12 credits in an associate's degree, certificate, or three plus one degree program, a grant under the program shall be pro-rated from the full-time approved tuition and approved educational fees based on the number of credits for which that student is enrolled.

c. The authority shall, for each county college, annually establish a maximum individual grant amount awarded under the program. The maximum individual grant amount for each county college shall not increase by more than three percent over the prior year.

C.18A:71B-115 Annual appropriation.

5. a. The Legislature shall annually appropriate to the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education such funds as may be necessary for Student Success Incentive funding to provide capacity-building grants to each county college to support the goals of the Community College Opportunity Grant Program. The Secretary of Higher Education shall distribute funding made available pursuant to this section to county colleges for outreach, recruitment, and promoting the success of county college students. The secretary shall establish the purposes for which a county college may use a grant received pursuant to this section, which shall include, but not be limited to:

- (1) establishing mentorship programs;
 - (2) hosting events to assist students and families in completing financial aid applications;
- and
- (3) addressing students' material hardships, such as lack of access to food, medical care, housing, child care, and transportation.

b. The secretary shall distribute the funding made available pursuant to this section. The secretary may retain up to five percent of the funding for grant administration activities designed to increase the effectiveness of the program. Fifty percent of the remaining appropriation shall be distributed equally among all of the county colleges, while the other fifty percent of the remaining appropriation shall be distributed based on the total number of students at each county college who received awards under the program during the previous academic year.

C.18A:71B-116 Rules, regulations.

6. The authority shall adopt in accordance with the "Administrative Procedure Act," P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.), rules and regulations as may be necessary to implement the provisions of sections 1 through 4 of this act. The Office of the Secretary of Higher Education shall adopt in accordance with the "Administrative Procedure Act," P.L.1968, c.410

(C.52:14B-1 et seq.), rules and regulations as may be necessary to implement the provisions of section 5 of this act.

7. This act shall take effect immediately and shall first apply to the first full academic year following the date of enactment.

Approved February 26, 2021.