

**HOPE High School
Equivalency
Examination Grant Program**

**REGULATIONS – 700.
2023 - 2024 Award Year**



Effective Date – July 1, 2023

GSFC | Georgia Student
Finance Commission

2082 East Exchange Place
Tucker, Georgia 30084

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702. Program Overview.

The purpose of the HOPE High School Equivalency Examination Grant Program is to provide Georgia residents with an award up to \$200 toward the exam fees for a state approved High School Equivalency Examination through the Technical College System of Georgia.

The HOPE High School Equivalency Examination Grant was created beginning with the 2022-2023 Award Year (State Fiscal Year 2023). The program is fully funded by the Georgia Lottery for Education and administered by the Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC), in accordance with the Official Code of Georgia Annotated (O.C.G.A.) §20-3-519.6.

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703. Definitions. (Electronic Link).

704. General Eligibility Requirements.

704.1. Citizenship.

1. A student must be a United States Citizen, born or naturalized, or an Eligible Non-Citizen according to the Federal Title IV Regulations, as of the date of sitting for a state approved High School Equivalency Examination offered by TCSG.

704.2. Georgia Residency.

1. A student who meets the Georgia Residency requirements of the State Board of TCSG as of the date of sitting for a state approved High School Equivalency Examination must also meet such Georgia Residency requirements for twelve (12) consecutive months immediately prior to the examination date.

704.3. Selective Service Registration.

1. A student must be in compliance with Georgia state law requirements of having registered with the United States Selective Service System requirements, in accordance with O.C.G.A. § 20-3-519.1(b).
2. Selective Service registration, by required males, should be completed prior to sitting for a state approved High School Equivalency Examination in order to be eligible for payment.
 - a. A late disbursement is permitted if the student meets Selective Service requirements any time during the fiscal year.
3. GSFC will maintain Selective Service registration or exemption status information for state aid program applicants/students. The registration status will be available to the postsecondary institution in which the student is enrolled in order for the institution to determine program eligibility.
 - a. The Institution may collect documentation supporting a student's registration status and submit to GSFC for consideration.
4. Male applicants required to register with the Selective Service System must have a registered or exemption status on file with GSFC to be eligible for state aid programs and for a disbursement invoice to be paid.

704.4 Defaulted Loan or Refund Due.

1. A student must not be in default on a Federal Title IV or State of Georgia educational loan or owe a refund due to an over-award on a Federal Title IV or State of Georgia student financial aid program, or in any other way be in violation of Federal Title IV Programs Regulations or State of Georgia student financial aid program regulations. A student must meet the requirements of this section at the time funds are disbursed by GSFC on behalf of the student.
2. A student's federal default status can be resolved in one of five ways:
 - a. Completing an acceptable rehabilitation plan; or
 - b. Having the loan repurchased by the original lender and the default status reversed; or
 - c. Consolidating the loan out of a default status; or
 - d. Receiving an approved Title IV debt settlement, to include a compromised settlement; or
 - e. Making monthly payments over a specified period agreed-upon with the lender of the Student's federal loan; each payment must be on time and voluntary to be in a satisfactory repayment plan.
3. A student's State of Georgia refund due status can be resolved by:
 - a. Paying the refund due to the Eligible Postsecondary Institution at which the over-award occurred. The Eligible Postsecondary Institution will then forward the payment to GSFC.
4. A student's default status on a State of Georgia loan can be resolved in one of two ways:
 - a. Paying off the defaulted loan in full; or
 - b. Completing an acceptable rehabilitation plan by making voluntary on time payments over a specified period agreed-upon with GSFA.
5. If such student has repaid the defaulted loan or refund due in full, or resolved the default status, then he or she may be eligible to receive state scholarship, grant or loan funds beginning with the school term in which repayment was made in full but not retroactively for previous school terms.

704.5. Georgia Drug-Free Act.

1. A student convicted of committing certain felony offenses involving marijuana, controlled substances, or dangerous drugs, within one term of sitting for a state approved High School Equivalency Examination is ineligible for an award, in accordance with the Georgia Drug-Free Postsecondary Education Act of 1990, O.C.G.A. §20-1-20, et seq.

704.6. Incarceration.

1. An Incarcerated person who sits for a state approved High School Equivalency Examination is ineligible for to receive a HOPE High School Equivalency Examination Grant award.

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5705. Program Specific Eligibility Requirements.

1. In order for a student to be eligible to receive a HOPE High School Equivalency Examination Grant payment, such student must:
 - a. Complete subject area pre-testing in preparation for a state approved High School Equivalency Examination as designated by TCSG; and
 - b. Must sit for a state approved exam offered by TCSG utilizing an issued voucher.

705.1. Disqualifying Factors.

1. A student is ineligible for payment if he or she received a high school diploma, or equivalent, or completed a home study program prior to sitting for a state approved High School Equivalency Examination offered through TCSG.
2. A student is ineligible for payment if he or she has earned a college Degree, or the equivalent, including from a foreign institution as indicated by the foreign academic transcript and/or foreign academic transcript translation.
3. A student is ineligible for payment if he or she began seeking a college Degree or received HOPE Scholarship payment prior to sitting for a state approved High School Equivalency Examination.

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706. Student Application Requirements.

1. A student must complete TCSG's designated application for the High School Equivalency Examination Grant program.
2. A student must complete the precertification through the state approved High School Equivalency Examination site and obtain a voucher for the exam fee.

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707. Award Amount.

707.1. Award Amount.

1. The award amount is equal to the actual cost of a state approved High School Equivalency Examination fee up to a lifetime maximum of \$200.
 - a. A student may sit for one or more examination parts.
 - b. TCSG may submit an invoice(s) on the student's behalf, during the award year.
2. A student's award amount funds must be fully applied to the cost of a state approved High School Equivalency Examination fee approved through TCSG.

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708. Invoicing Requirements.

708.1. Submission of Invoices.

1. TCSG may submit invoices to GSFC following the administration of state approved High School Equivalency Examinations for eligible students.
2. Invoices must be submitted electronically with the approved invoice file provided by GSFC. Each invoice submitted by TCSG must include required eligible student's information, applicable to the program.
 - a. GSFC will provide an invoice results and error file for each invoice file received.
3. In the event invoices are submitted to GSFC by TCSG after the Invoicing Deadline Date for a fiscal year, GSFC may issue a notice of failure to meet the Invoicing Deadline Date and the invoices may not be honored.
4. Prior to the beginning of any award year and no later than June 30 of each year, GSFC shall establish and publish the Invoicing Deadline Dates for the upcoming Award Year.

708.2. Payment of Invoices.

1. Funds are paid to TCSG by electronic transfer of funds on behalf of eligible students upon submission to GSFC of a HOPE High School Equivalency Examination Grant invoice.

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709. Reconciliation Requirements.

709.1. Fiscal Year End Reconciliation.

1. TCSG must conduct the Fiscal Year End Reconciliation consisting of an official acknowledgement by an authorized official, the accuracy of each invoice submitted with respect to the student's eligibility, when applicable to the program.
 - a. Reconciliation certification forms must be completed and submitted by July 15, immediately following the completion of the Fiscal Year for each State Program.
 - b. Return to GSFC any funds not utilized according to the Fiscal Year End Reconciliation by August 15 after the beginning of the new Fiscal Year.
 - c. GSFC will not issue any state scholarship or grant funds for the upcoming award year until the previous Fiscal Year End Reconciliation process is complete.
 - d. TCSG must have a procedure in place to ensure that the grant funds do not go to an unintended third party (i.e., state, postsecondary institution).
2. TCSG must report, by electronic file (SFTP), to GSFC all students who have earned a state approved HSE diploma during the fiscal year. TCSG may submit a single file or multiple files throughout the year.

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710. Records Retention Requirements.

710.1. Length of Retention.

1. TCSG shall maintain accurate records, books, documents, and other evidence concerning the HOPE High School Equivalency Examination Grant Program, including, but not limited to individual student files or records for whichever is longer:
 - a. Three years after the Award Year in which the aid was awarded; or
 - b. For such other period as required by an applicable statute, rule, or regulation; or
 - c. Such other time as requested in writing by GSFC.

710.2. Documentation.

1. Documentation contained within an individual student's file or record, which supports the original determination of a student's eligibility, must be retained by TCSG and available for review by GSFC for at least three years after the most recent Award Year for which the student received HOPE High School Equivalency Examination Grant funds (refer to *Section 712.*).
2. TCSG is permitted to maintain these documents in an imaged media format. The imaged media format must be capable of reproducing an accurate, legible, and complete copy of the original document.
 - a. Such documentation may include, but is not limited to, copies of permanent student alien cards, Georgia state income tax returns, student financial aid applications, or academic transcripts from previous institutions.
 - i. Documentation regarding a student's eligibility is not limited to files, records, and other information received and maintained by TCSG. Documentation must be made available to GSFC for the purpose of Compliance Reviews.
3. It is TCSG's responsibility to resolve any inconsistencies or conflicting information within a student's records, prior to awarding or disbursing funds to the student.

710.3. Extended Retention.

1. TCSG may be required to retain student records involved in a Compliance Review Audit or investigation for more than the three-year retention period set forth in *Section (Documentation above)*. If the three-year retention period expires before the issue in question is resolved, TCSG must continue to retain all associated records until a resolution is reached.

711. Administrative Reviews and Exceptions.

711.1. Administrative Reviews.

1. The HOPE High School Equivalency Examination Grant Program Regulations are applied to each student considered for such funds by appropriate officials of TCSG and by the administrative staff of GSFC.
2. If a student believes a HOPE High School Equivalency Examination Grant rule, policy, or regulation was incorrectly applied in his or her case, the student has the right to file a request for an Administrative Review with GSFC.
3. In order for an Administrative Review to be considered, the student must submit a written request for an Administrative Review to GSFC's office within forty-five (45) calendar days of receiving notice of denial from TCSG or GSFC. If additional information is requested from the student, it must be provided within the time frame specified by GSFC.
 - a. GSFC will review the case and determine whether the rule or regulation was applied correctly and notify the student and TCSG of the determination.
 - b. GSFC decides a case based only on documentation provided, rather than a personal presentation.

711.2. Exceptions.

1. Requests for Exceptions to the HOPE High School Equivalency Examination Grant Regulations cannot be considered, reviewed, or granted under any circumstances.

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712. Compliance Reviews.

712.1. Compliance Review Policy.

1. GSFC may conduct Compliance Reviews of TCSG regarding the HOPE High School Equivalency Examination Grant Program in order to assess administration of the program and compliance with the program's regulations. Such Compliance Reviews may be conducted no less frequently than once every three years in accordance with GSFC's *Compliance Review Process and Procedures* document, which is available at gsfc.georgia.gov, under *Information for School Compliance*.

712.2. Compliance Review Process.

1. GSFC selects a sampling of HOPE High School Equivalency Examination Grant students, for the Award Year under review, and TCSG files and records for the sample are examined to assure compliance. Records which document and support a student's eligibility must be available for review at TCSG (refer to *Section 710*).
 - a. GSFC will exclude Residency determinations as they relate to *Section 704.2.1*, made for HOPE High School Equivalency Examination Grant students, in the selected sample granted TCSG has submitted a signed certification to GSFC's Compliance Department by the President that:
 - i. TCSG is in compliance with its policies and procedures in the determination and the administration of the financial aid award process relative to Residency requirements; and
 - ii. The Residency determinations have been fairly and consistently applied with respect to all students for a HOPE High School Equivalency Examination Grant award.
 - b. Such certification must be submitted annually to the Compliance Department of GSFC in the format required by GSFC.
 - i. Failure to provide such certification will result in a review of Residency determinations made for HOPE High School Equivalency Examination Grant students in the selected sample.

712.3. Agency Repayment.

1. In the event it is determined that TCSG knowingly or through error certified an ineligible student to be eligible for an award, the amount of such grant shall be refunded by TCSG to GSFC.

2. GSFC may suspend TCSG from receiving future payments if it fails to timely refund any monies deemed due based on the Compliance Review.
3. Any person who knowingly makes or furnishes any false statement or misrepresentation, or who accepts such statement or misrepresentation knowing it to be false, for the purpose of enabling an ineligible student to wrongfully obtain an award shall be guilty of a misdemeanor.
4. If evidence not available at the time of awarding indicates that a student should not have received payment, then all future awards for that student must be canceled.
 - a. TCSG is held harmless by GSFC, if a student's file is adequately documented with available evidence and it is determined by GSFC that TCSG was not at fault.
5. If GSFC determines that the student's file is not adequately documented, TCSG may be solely responsible for the repayment.

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