

# **Realizing Educational Achievement Can Happen Scholarship Program**

**REGULATIONS – 5200.**

**2025 - 2026 Award Year**



**Effective Date – July 1, 2025**

**GSFA** | Georgia Student  
Finance Authority

**2082 East Exchange Place  
Tucker, Georgia 30084**

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## **5202. Program Overview.**

Realizing Educational Achievement Can Happen (REACH) Program, launched as a pilot program during the 2011-2012 Academic Year, is a need-based youth development and scholarship program with specific financial, academic, and behavior eligibility requirements. The purpose of the REACH Program is to increase academic persistence and achievement of Georgia's middle and high school students and to increase college access and success for Georgia's low-income and underserved populations.

Participating School Systems nominate and select 7<sup>th</sup> grade students to participate in the program beginning in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The program encourages increased parental involvement and offers students the academic and social support of an Academic Coach and mentor. Upon graduation from high school, an eligible student attending an Eligible Postsecondary Institution may receive REACH scholarship funds to use toward any component of the Cost of Attendance.

The pilot program in which GSFA extended the benefits of the REACH program to REACH Connections Scholars, reaching students in the Georgia Foster Care system, concluded in FY 2020. Students were selected in conjunction with the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services.

Beginning with the 2024-2025 school year (FY 2025) the Participating School System's proportional share of the REACH Scholarship is \$1,000 per REACH Scholar. REACH Scholars will have 10 years from high school graduation to use their REACH Scholarship at an Eligible Postsecondary Institution. Academic eligibility at the postsecondary level will follow the HOPE Checkpoint calculations.

The program is subject to available funding and administered by the Georgia Student Finance Authority (GSFA), in accordance with the Official Code of Georgia Annotated (O.C.G.A.) § 23-3-495 et. seq.

## **5203. Definitions. (Electronic Link)**

## **5204. Participating School System Requirements.**

### **5204.1. REACH Application Procedures and Commitment.**

1. To participate in the REACH Program, Georgia public school systems must:
  - a. Execute and comply with the REACH Program Participation Agreement.
  - b. Submit to GSFA by the published deadline date, the Annual Scholar Allotment Form (ASAF) agreeing to the REACH financial and program requirements and approved number of students for the year.
  - c. Comply with the mentoring standards as set forth in the REACH Program Participation Agreement, regulations, and other communications from GSFA.
  - d. Identify a REACH Coordinator to manage the program for the Participating School System and provide required Scholar performance data through GAfutures High School Functions by the program deadlines established by GSFA.
  - e. Identify one or more Academic Coaches who will monitor REACH Scholars' academic performance, behavior, and attendance on a weekly basis and meet with each REACH Scholar a minimum of one time per month to develop and discuss education and career plans.
  - f. Plan and hold one signing ceremony in the Fall for selected REACH Scholars per school year.
  - g. Involve REACH Scholars, and their Parents, in extracurricular school events as appropriate (e.g., college campus tours, graduation ceremonies, future signing ceremonies, college and career planning events, etc.).
  - h. Comply with REACH and GSFA Branding Guidelines as established by GSFA.

### **5204.2. Number of REACH Scholars for Each Participating School System.**

1. Each Participating School System is designated a number of slots each school year to select students for the Georgia REACH program.
  - a. The number of slots for each Participating School System is based on available funding.
  - b. The maximum number of students the System may select is indicated on the Annual Scholar Allotment Form.
2. Participating School System may select fewer students than the number of slots available on the ASAF should the school system not be able to meet the full proportionate share or provide required services for the maximum number.

3. The School System must confirm the actual number of students to be select for the school year on the ASAF and submit to GSFA's REACH Program Office. Effective FY 2025, slots designated to a system in which a Scholar is not selected for the specific school year are forfeited.

#### **5204.3. REACH Scholar Selections.**

1. The Participating School System must establish a nomination and application process to identify and select REACH Scholars.
2. Selected students must meet the eligibility requirements pursuant to *Section 5205*.
3. Participating School Systems are to give preference during the selection to:
  - a. Students who have the potential to succeed at the postsecondary level;
  - b. Students who have less than a 3.0 cumulative GPA but have the potential to make A and B grades;
  - c. Students who are Future First-Generation College Students;
  - d. Students who have no disciplinary infractions during the two semesters or four quarters immediately preceding the final semester of the student's 7th grade year.
4. Participating School Systems must provide to GSFA each selected student's application information. The student, parent, and/or community shall not be notified of selection until GSFA has confirmed their REACH Scholar eligibility.
5. Participating School Systems must send to GSFA, the executed REACH Georgia Scholar Commitment no later than 30 days after the REACH Scholar's signing ceremony.

#### **5204.4. Participating School System Financial Commitment.**

1. Effective FY 2025 (2024-2025 school year) the Participating School Systems are responsible for the proportionate share of \$1,000 for each REACH Scholar selected.
2. The Participating School System must raise private funds for the proportionate share. Funds cannot be obtained from any federal, state, or local government resource.
3. GSFA shall provide the remaining \$9,000 of the scholarship for each selected REACH Scholar.
4. The Participating School System shall transfer to GSFA the full proportionate share of \$1,000 per scholarship within ten days of receipt of such funds and made payable to GSFA's designated qualified 501(c)(3).

- a. Transfer of funds shall be remitted to GSFA no later than the Fall signing ceremony for a new cohort of 8th grade REACH Scholars.

#### **5204.5. Participating School System Reporting Requirements.**

1. Participating School Systems must submit, through GAfutures High School Functions as it pertains to each REACH Scholar, the following:
  - a. Eight grade, academic, attendance and behavioral data;
  - b. Ninth through Twelfth grade attendance and behavioral data;
  - c. Ninth through eleventh grade underclass transcripts;
  - d. Senior verified preliminary and final transcripts;
  - e. Year-end verification status;
  - f. Immediately notify REACH staff when any event occurs which might deem the Scholar ineligible to continue as a REACH Scholar.
2. Submit mid-year checkpoint no later than February 15 and end of year checkpoint, no later than June 30 reports to GSFA providing academic, attendance and behavioral data about each REACH Scholar and all mentoring and academic coaching activities through GAfutures High School Functions.
3. Failure to submit timely reports will prohibit the selection of future REACH Scholars; as well as the distribution of scholarship funds to postsecondary institutions for existing scholars.

#### **5204.6. Participating School Systems Records Retention Requirements.**

1. Documentation contained within an individual student file or record which supports the original determination of a student's eligibility must be retained by the Participating School System and available for review by GSFA on the School System's campus or district office.
  - a. School Systems are 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.
  - b. Such documentation may include, but is not limited to, REACH applications, attendance and behavioral records, academic transcripts, proof of Free and Reduced Price School Meals eligibility and copies of permanent resident alien cards.
  - c. Documentation regarding a student's eligibility is not limited to files, records, and other information received and maintained by the School System's district office.
  - d. Documentation supporting a student's eligibility that is received and maintained by the School System's district or central office, or other administrative operations must be available to GSFA for the purpose of Compliance Reviews.



#### **5204.7. Length of Retention.**

1. A Participating School System shall maintain accurate records, documents and other evidence concerning REACH Scholars, including, but not limited to, individual student files for whichever is longer:
  - a. Three years after the REACH Scholar exits the participating school system or graduates high school; 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 GSFA.

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## **5205. Student Eligibility Requirements.**

### **5205.1. General Requirements.**

1. At the time of selection, including replacement selection, students must be rising or current eighth graders.
2. A student must be a United States Citizen, born or naturalized, or an Eligible Non-Citizen according to the Federal Title IV Regulations, for 12 consecutive months prior to the first day of classes of the Spring semester of the student's seventh grade school year.
3. A student must be enrolled in a REACH Participating School System.
4. A student must qualify for the Federal Free or Reduced Lunch Program or has been a victim of human trafficking.

### **5205.2. Attendance.**

1. A student's attendance record must demonstrate the student's adherence to the established policies and procedures of the local board of education and not have more than five days of unexcused absences during the calendar year.
2. Any student deemed Truant is ineligible for the REACH Program.
3. Participating School Systems may establish and require REACH Scholars to adhere to more rigorous attendance requirements for the purpose of REACH Program eligibility.

### **5205.3. Discipline and Behavior Requirements.**

1. A student must not have more than two in-school suspensions during the two semesters or four quarters immediately preceding the spring term of the student's seventh grade year.
2. A student must not have any criminal or drug-related convictions.
3. Participating School Systems may establish and require REACH Scholars to adhere to more rigorous discipline eligibility requirements for the purpose of REACH Program eligibility.

### **5205.4. Authorization for Release of Information.**

1. A student's Parent must complete and submit a release of information form, as part of the application process, authorizing the school to provide the REACH Program information related to the student's educational records, participation in the program, and use of the REACH Scholar's immediate family's likeness for non-profit purposes.

### **5205.5. REACH Scholar Transfers and Replacements.**

1. The Participating School System must notify GSFA when a REACH Scholar transfers to any other a school system or a nonpublic school.
2. If a REACH Scholar transfers to another Participating School System, the receiving Participating School System is required to provide the same services to the transferring REACH Scholar as other REACH Scholars are provided. The \$1,000 provided by the original Participating School System transfers with the transferred REACH Scholar.
3. If a REACH Scholar transfers to a non-participating school system, or a nonpublic high school, the student is no longer eligible for the REACH Program. The Participating School System may nominate and select a replacement REACH Scholar. Replacement Scholars are selected through the same process set forth in section 5204.3.
4. The Participating School System may nominate and select a replacement REACH Scholar for the current cohort year due to the death of a Scholar while in high school. Replacement Scholars are selected through the same process set forth in section 5204.3.
5. Replacement REACH Scholars are not allowed, and the proportionate share shall be forfeited to GSFA, if:
  - a. A REACH Scholar student does not qualify to graduate high school as a REACH Scholar.
  - b. A REACH Scholar student chooses to attend an ineligible college or university.
  - c. A REACH Scholar fails to enroll in an Eligible Postsecondary Institution and utilize their scholarship within the eligibility length ten (10) years after the date of his or her high school graduation.
  - d. A REACH Scholar does not utilize all their REACH scholarship funds for any reason set forth in section 5207.6.

## **5206. Continuing Eligibility During Middle School and High School.**

### **5206.1. General Requirements.**

1. A REACH Scholar must be enrolled as a full-time student in a Participating School System.
2. If a REACH Scholar's family experiences a change in financial circumstances and/or if the REACH Scholar is adopted or placed with a foster family and no longer qualifies for the Free or Reduced Lunch Program, he or she will remain an eligible REACH Scholar as long as other program requirements are met.
3. A Reach Scholar shall attend all scheduled REACH Program events, activities, programs, and meetings.
4. A REACH Scholar must graduate from high school with a Calculated HOPE Grade Point Average of at least 2.50 as calculated by GSFA.
  - a. If a REACH Scholar graduates with an Accelerated Career Diploma and a final Calculated HOPE GPA cannot be calculated, the final high school GPA calculated by the Participating School System must be at least 2.50.

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### **5206.2. Academic Requirements.**

1. An 8<sup>th</sup> grade REACH Scholar must maintain a Cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA) of at least 2.5 or better as calculated by the Participating School System.
  - a. An 8<sup>th</sup> grade REACH Scholar will be placed on probation for one academic year if the student's GPA falls below 2.5 Cumulative Grade Point Average.
  - b. The 8<sup>th</sup> grade REACH Scholar may be removed from the REACH program if the student is unable to earn a Cumulative Grade Point Average of 2.5 or higher by the next Scholar academic checkpoint.
1. A high school REACH Scholar must maintain a high school Calculated HOPE GPA of at least 2.5 as calculated by GSFA in the same manner as the high school grade point average for initial HOPE Scholarship eligibility.
  - a. A high school REACH Scholar will be placed on probation for one academic year if the student's GPA falls below a 2.5 high school Calculated HOPE GPA.
  - b. The REACH Scholar may be removed from the program if he/she is unable to return his/her Grade Point Average to 2.5 or higher by the end of the probation period.

- c. Participating School Systems must transmit each senior (12<sup>th</sup> grade) REACH Scholar's transcript data to GSFA through the HOPE GPA Preliminary Report process, no later than February 15 and at the end of the academic year no later than June 30.
  - d. Participating School Systems must transmit each underclass (9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> grade) REACH Scholar's transcript data to GSFA through the HOPE GPA Underclass Progress Report process at the end of the academic year no later than June 30.
  - e. Participating School Systems must submit eighth grade REACH Scholars' GPA data through GAFutures High School Functions.
2. While on probation, it is recommended that the Participating School System offer additional support services, if at all possible, to 8<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade REACH Scholar. Additional services may include, but are not limited to:
- a. Additional academic coaching sessions;
  - b. An assigned academic tutor for the subject(s) of concern;
  - c. A scheduled meeting with the REACH Scholar; REACH coordinator, the Scholar's teacher(s) and the Academic Coach to determine the best course of action moving forward; notifying the parent/guardian.

### **5206.3. Attendance Requirements.**

1. REACH Scholars must adhere to the Participating School System's stated attendance policy and attend classes regularly. A REACH Scholar will be placed on probation for one academic year after reaching five or more combined excused and/or unexcused absences in one semester. While on probation, the REACH scholar may be removed from the program if he or she has any additional unexcused absences or three or more excused absences. While on probation, it is recommended that the Participating School System, if at all possible, offer additional support services. Additional services may include, but are not limited to:
- a. A meeting with the REACH coordinator and school counselor to discuss attendance barriers, community resources and a course of action moving forward;
  - b. Notifying the parent/guardian of attendance concerns;
  - c. Providing the REACH Scholar and parent/guardian with community resources if needed.

#### **5206.4. Discipline and Behavior Requirements.**

1. REACH Scholars, eighth through twelfth grade, must adhere to the Participating School System's stated disciplinary policy. A REACH Scholar will be placed on probation for one academic year if he/she receives more than one in-school suspension per semester or immediately upon an out-of-school suspension. While on probation, the REACH scholar may be removed from the program if he or she has an additional suspension. While on probation, it is recommended that the Participating School System, if at all possible, offer additional support services. Additional services may include, but are not limited to:
  - a. A meeting with the REACH Scholar, the REACH coordinator, and the school counselor/discipline office to discuss behavior and best course of action moving forward;
  - b. Notifying the parent/guardian of the behavior concerns;
  - c. Ongoing access to the school counselor/discipline office to learn more about conflict management and healthy relationships.
2. A REACH Scholar must meet the Participating School System's drug and alcohol use policies.
  - a. A REACH Scholar who fails to comply with the Participating School System's drug and alcohol policies will be immediately ineligible for further participation in the REACH Program.
3. A REACH Scholar convicted of committing a felony or misdemeanor involving marijuana, controlled substances, and/or dangerous drugs, is immediately ineligible for further participation in the REACH Program

#### **5206.5. Mentoring and Academic Coaching Requirements.**

1. A REACH Scholar shall meet with his or her assigned REACH mentor a minimum of eight times per semester.
2. A REACH Scholar shall meet with his or her assigned REACH Academic Coach a minimum of four times per semester.

#### **5206.6. Failure to Meet Eligibility Requirements.**

1. Unless specifically stated otherwise in these regulations, REACH Scholars are subject to adverse consequences up to, and including, termination from program participation, as determined appropriate by the Participating School System or REACH/GSFA for failure to maintain the eligibility requirements of the REACH Program.

## **5207. Postsecondary Requirements.**

### **5207.1. Citizenship Requirements.**

1. A REACH Scholar must continue to meet United States Citizen, born or naturalized, or Eligible Non-Citizen requirements while Enrolled at an Eligible Postsecondary Institution.

### **5207.2. 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 the program application deadline in order to be eligible for payment for such school term.
  - 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/recipients. 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.

### **5207.3. Default and 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 GSFA 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;
  - b. Having the loan repurchased by the original lender and the default status reversed;
  - c. Consolidating the loan out of a default status;

- 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 GSFA.
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. Complete 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.

#### **5207.4. Enrollment Requirements.**

- 1. A REACH Scholar must be Enrolled Full-Time at an Eligible Postsecondary Institution in a Matriculated status leading to a Certificate, Diploma, or Degree.
- 2. A REACH Scholar must be Enrolled Full-Time, through the last day of the Eligible Postsecondary Institution's drop/add period to be eligible to receive REACH scholarship funds.
- 3. A REACH Scholar Enrolled in an eligible program of study or major that requires a cohort schedule with required courses taken in sequence, may be Enrolled less than Full Time (12 Hours). The student must be Enrolled in the required courses according to the cohort schedule.

#### **5207.5. Maintaining Academic Eligibility.**

- 1. The academic eligibility requirement while attending college, follows the Georgia HOPE Scholarship and Grant calculation rules for the Checkpoints and GPA Calculations.



2. A REACH Scholar must maintain a minimum postsecondary Calculated HOPE GPA of at least 2.00 at the end of each Hourly Checkpoint and End of Spring Checkpoint in order to continue eligibility.
  - a. The postsecondary Calculated HOPE GPA includes coursework taken at or accepted as transfer credit by any Eligible Postsecondary Institution.
  - b. The postsecondary Calculated HOPE GPA from CHECS, is based upon the student's credential level, shall be utilized to determine a REACH Scholar's continued eligibility.
    - i. For students enrolled in degree coursework, the Scholarship CHECS calculation record shall be utilized to confirm academic eligibility.
    - ii. For students enrolled in certificate/diploma coursework, the Grant CHECS calculation record shall be utilized to confirm academic eligibility.
    - iii. A student who changes their credential level following the end of a Spring term may maintain academic eligibility. The Scholar must meet the minimum 2.0 postsecondary Calculated HOPE GPA at the end of the next Spring term.
3. A REACH Scholar who fails to maintain a minimum 2.00 postsecondary Calculated HOPE GPA or higher at an Hourly Checkpoint or the end of each Spring Checkpoint is no longer eligible to continue receiving funds from the REACH program.
  - a. A REACH Scholar may regain eligibility, if the Scholar has earned a 2.00 or higher postsecondary Calculated HOPE GPA at the next Hourly Checkpoint.
  - b. A student who loses REACH Scholarship eligibility does not extend the Scholar's length of eligibility.
  - c. After two losses, the REACH Scholar is no longer eligible for the REACH program funds. A student must have been receiving REACH Scholarship in order for it to be considered a loss.
4. A REACH Scholar must maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) as defined and certified by his or her Eligible Postsecondary Institution.
  - a. For state aid programs, Eligible Postsecondary Institutions may establish an appeal process for students with dual-enrollment credit hours that fail to meet the quantitative standard (pace) for degree completion, generally identified as 150 percent of the published length of the program.
  - b. The appeal should consider attempted hours toward the program in which the student is enrolled, satisfactory qualitative (grade-based) standards, and the student's satisfactory pace in pursuit of completing the program with and without the dual enrollment credits. Eligible Postsecondary Institutions have sole discretion and responsibility for evaluation and approval of any such appeals.

### **5207.6. Eligibility Limits.**

1. A REACH Scholar's eligibility will end following whichever occurs first:
  - a. A REACH Scholar has lost REACH Scholarship at two Checkpoints; or
  - b. A REACH Scholar has earned a Baccalaureate Degree from any postsecondary institution; or
  - c. A REACH Scholar as received their lifetime award maximum of \$10,000; or
  - d. A REACH Scholar reached their Ten-Year Expiration Date.

### **5207.7. Drug Free Act.**

1. A REACH Scholar convicted of committing certain felony offenses involving marijuana, controlled substances, or dangerous drugs, may be ineligible for REACH Scholarship award funds starting on the day of conviction, in accordance with the Georgia Drug-Free Postsecondary Education Act of 1990, O.C.G.A. §20-1-20, et., seq. REACH Scholars will not be allowed to regain eligibility for the REACH scholarship.

### **5207.8. Incarceration.**

1. A REACH Scholar is ineligible to participate in or receive funding from the REACH Program if Incarcerated. REACH funding will cease at the time a REACH Scholar is incarcerated and the REACH Scholar is immediately ineligible to further participate in the REACH Program. Any unused funds will be returned to GSFA.

### **5207.9. Eligible Coursework.**

1. A REACH Scholar who Enrolls in Learning Support (remedial) coursework is eligible for REACH payment.
2. A REACH Scholar participating in Distance Learning coursework is eligible to receive REACH payment.
3. A REACH Scholar is eligible to receive REACH funds as a Transient student. Both the Home Institution and the Host Institution must be Eligible Postsecondary Institutions. The Home Institution must approve Transient status to the Host Institution.
  - a. The REACH Scholar must be Enrolled Full-Time, either through a combination of the two institutions or at the Host institution.
  - b. The Home Institution is responsible for verifying the enrollment of the student at the Host Institution.
  - c. The Home Institution awards REACH funds based on the total hours of enrollment.

- i. Disbursement is made to the Home Institution.
  - d. Upon the REACH Scholar's return to the Home Institution, the Host Institution must provide information necessary for the Home Institution to determine continued REACH eligibility.
  - e. The Home Institution is liable for any return of funds required during the term the REACH Scholar was Transient.
4. A REACH Scholar Enrolled in an Eligible Postsecondary Institution may qualify for REACH funds while participating in a Study Away program.
- a. The REACH Scholars must be enrolled Full-Time through the approved Study Away program.
  - b. The Home Institution must have a written agreement with the institution (foreign or non-Eligible Postsecondary Institution) or a single written arrangement with a study-abroad organization to represent an agreement between the Home Institution and the institution at which a student is participating in a Study Away program.
  - c. The REACH Scholar's Home Institution must approve the Study Away program for credit toward the REACH Scholar's program of study requirements prior to the REACH Scholar's departure.
  - d. The REACH award must be the amount the student would normally receive at the Home Institution for an equal number of credit hours attempted.
  - e. The Home Institution must maintain documentation of the student's actual tuition charges for the Study Away program at the Host Institution.
  - f. At the time of disbursement, a current enrollment verification for the student from the Host Institution indicating the courses and number of hours must be on file with the Home Institution.
  - g. The REACH payment must take place through the Home Institution.
  - h. The Eligible Postsecondary Institution must have on file the student's written or electronic permission to have any specific fees withheld from the REACH disbursement.
  - i. If the student is participating in a Study Away program administered by another Eligible Postsecondary Institution, the Transient student process described in *Section 5207.12.3.* of these regulations must be followed.
5. A REACH Scholar is ineligible to use REACH funds for coursework classified by his or her Eligible Postsecondary Institution as Continuing Education or Audit Coursework.

## **5207.10. Student Application Requirements.**

1. A REACH Scholar is required to complete the following application form:
  - a. Current year Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
    - i. A REACH Scholar must complete and submit a new FAFSA each Award Year.
2. In addition, an Eligible Postsecondary Institution may require students to complete the institution's application for student financial aid or other forms to provide supplemental information for the purpose of determining other scholarship or grant eligibility.
3. The FAFSA must be completed on or before the last day of the Eligible Postsecondary Institution's school term (semester or quarter) or the student's withdrawal date, whichever occurs first, in order to be paid for that school term.
  - a. The last day of the school term is the last day of classes or exams for the Eligible Postsecondary Institution, whichever occurs later.
  - b. Supplemental documentation required by the Eligible Postsecondary Institution or GSFA to support or verify a student's application information may be submitted after the deadline without jeopardizing the student's eligibility.

## **5208. Award Requirements.**

### **5208.1. Award Requirements.**

1. REACH scholarship awards may be applied towards the REACH Scholar's Cost of Attendance as determined by the Eligible Postsecondary Institution in which the student is Enrolled.
2. The Eligible Postsecondary Institution should first apply REACH funds prior to the student accepting federal, institutional, or private loans for which the student may have applied.

### **5208.2. Award Amounts.**

1. The following REACH Scholarship award limits apply during Enrollment at an Eligible Postsecondary Institution:
  - a. A maximum Academic Year award amount of \$2,500.
  - b. A maximum semester or quarter award of \$1,250 per semester or \$834 per quarter.
  - c. A lifetime maximum limit award of \$10,000.
2. REACH Scholars awarded less than the maximum amount per semester or quarter may receive the remaining funds for an additional term not to exceed the maximum per term award amount.
3. Upon receipt of a REACH scholarship payment from GSFA, the Eligible Postsecondary Institution shall credit the funds to the eligible student's account and deliver any remaining funds directly to the eligible student, not to exceed the REACH Scholar's Cost of Attendance.

### **5208.3. Student Notification of Award.**

1. An Eligible Postsecondary Institution must notify each REACH Scholarship recipient of the amount of REACH funds he or she is awarded for the Award Year and identify such funds as a REACH Scholarship award.
2. A student who wishes to decline a REACH Scholarship award must do so actively. The Eligible Postsecondary Institution must maintain a record of the student's notification to the Eligible Postsecondary Institution that he or she is declining the award and notify GSFA of the student's decision.
  - a. A student's decision to decline the REACH Scholarship award becomes final and irrevocable on the last day of the term for which the REACH Scholarship award was made.

## **5209. College HOPE Eligibility Calculation Service (CHECS) Reporting Requirements.**

### **5209.1. CHECS.**

1. All Eligible Postsecondary Institutions must utilize the College HOPE Eligibility Calculation Service (CHECS) eligibility determinations for academic eligibility of the postsecondary Calculated HOPE GPA regarding future REACH award determinations and disbursements.
  - a. CHECS calculation records are subject to change and may not have the complete academic transcript data. Calculations are dependent upon Eligible Postsecondary Institutions submitting accurate and complete transcript data.
  - b. Eligible Postsecondary Institutions are required to report cases of incomplete or conflicting academic information and should not award based on data identified as conflicting or incomplete.
2. Eligible Postsecondary Institutions are required to obtain academic transcripts from institutions a student has attended previously with certificate, diploma, or degree level coursework or coursework accepted for degree credit.
3. All Eligible Postsecondary Institutions must timely submit through CHECS student transcript data records for REACH Scholars for the purpose of tracking enrollment and academic performance.
4. The Eligible Postsecondary Institution must submit, for the ending term, transcript data records that result in CHECS calculations prior to the upcoming term invoices being paid.
  - a. An invoice submitted and paid for a student that is later found to be academically ineligible due to updated transcript data records submitted in CHECS will be classified as academically ineligible. The disbursed funds for an academically ineligible invoice must be returned to GSFC or the invoice must be canceled.
5. Academic transcript data must be submitted regardless of any unpaid balance owed to the Postsecondary Institution.
6. Invoices for any term may be held in a pending status until transcript data records for the preceding term are submitted and CHECS calculations are processed.

## **5210. Invoicing Requirements.**

### **5210.1. Submission of Invoices.**

1. Eligible Postsecondary Institutions may submit REACH Scholarship invoices to GSFA as early as 15 calendar days prior to the first day of classes for the school term.
2. Invoices must be submitted through GSFA's online invoicing system, in GAfutures Postsecondary Functions, processed and approved by GSFA by the Invoicing Deadline Date as established by GSFA. Each invoice submitted by the Eligible Postsecondary Institution must include Enrolled-Hours, Paid-Hours, Learning Support and the student's program of study information, when applicable to the program.
3. Eligible Postsecondary Institutions may submit a written request to GSFA for a REACH award invoice approval for less than Full-time enrollment (12 Hours) for an eligible Scholar Enrolled in an approved program of study or major that requires a cohort schedule with required courses taken in sequence. The student must be enrolled in the required courses as prescribed by the cohort.
4. In the event invoices are submitted to GSFA by Eligible Postsecondary Institutions after the Invoicing Deadline Date for a school term, GSFA may issue a notice of failure to meet the Invoicing Deadline Date to the President and/or governing body of the Eligible Postsecondary Institution and the invoices may not be honored.
5. Prior to the beginning of any award year and no later than June 30 of each year GSFA shall establish and publish the Invoicing Deadline Dates for each school term for the upcoming Award Year.
6. Invoices submitted after the Invoicing Deadline Date may be honored or paid if the failure to meet the date was because of:
  - a. The need for supplemental documentation required by the Eligible Postsecondary Institution or GSFA to support or verify a student's eligibility; or
  - b. Late grades, late completions, grade changes; or
  - c. Other adjustments made to the student's official academic transcript that resulted in a change in eligibility, and the student met all other eligibility requirements prior to the deadline.
7. The President of GSFA has sole discretion in the determination of invoice deadlines and extensions. The decision of the President of GSFA shall be final.

## **5210.2. Payment of Invoices.**

1. REACH Scholarship funds are paid to Eligible Postsecondary Institutions by electronic transfer of funds on behalf of eligible students each school term, upon submission to GSFA of a REACH Scholarship invoice.
2. Upon receipt of REACH Scholarship payments from GSFA, the Eligible Postsecondary Institution must credit the amount of payment on behalf of an eligible student to the student's account.

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## **5211. Return of Funds Requirements.**

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### **5211.1. Calculation of Return of Funds.**

1. A student is ineligible for the REACH Scholarship funds for coursework from which he or she totally withdrew, and the coursework does not appear on the student's academic transcript as a "W" or any other code or type of identification for such a withdrawal.
  - a. If the Eligible Postsecondary Institution received the disbursement prior to a student's total withdrawal, in which the coursework does not appear on the student's academic transcript, then the Institution must cancel or return the award.
2. If a student officially withdraws, drops out, drops hours, is expelled, or otherwise fails to complete a period of Enrollment and the coursework is included on the student's academic transcript, the Institution must determine if a return of funds is necessary based on the Institution's refund policy. The award or a portion of the award may need to be returned to GSFA.
  - a. The Eligible Postsecondary Institution must determine if the award or portion of the award exceeds the adjusted Cost of Attendance after their refund policy is applied. The award or portion of the award that exceeds the adjusted Cost of Attendance must be returned to GSFA within forty-five (45) calendar days of the determination.
  - b. The remainder of the award amount is retained by the Eligible Postsecondary Institution to cover any Cost of Attendance at the Eligible Postsecondary Institution.

### **5211.2. Emergency Military Duty.**

1. A student who is a member of the United States Armed Forces, National Guard, or Military Reserve Forces receiving funds from the REACH Program who is called to emergency military duty during a school term that is already in progress should not have his or her REACH Scholarship eligibility negatively impacted.
2. If the Eligible Postsecondary Institution the student attends allows the student to totally withdraw and receive a grade such as "WM" for "military withdrawal" or the Eligible Postsecondary Institution totally removes all grades for that term and corresponding credit hours from the student's records, the Eligible Postsecondary Institution should return the full amount of the REACH Scholarship award to GSFA.
3. This regulation may also be applied to students who are not members of the military but are otherwise unusually and detrimentally affected by the emergency activation of members of the United States Armed Forces, as determined by the president of the Eligible Postsecondary Institution that such student is attending.

## **5212. Reconciliation Requirements.**

### **5212.1. Term Reconciliation.**

1. Eligible Postsecondary Institutions must conduct a Term Reconciliation by the end of each term. A Term Reconciliation consists of an official acknowledgement by an authorized school official, through Postsecondary Functions that the number of students submitted for payment, total invoiced, the number of invoices paid, and total disbursed by GSFA to the Eligible Postsecondary Institution, according to Postsecondary Functions, is accurate on that date.
  - a. GSFA will not issue any state scholarship or grant funds for the following term until the Term Reconciliation is complete.
  - b. Funds are not returned to GSFA as part of the Term Reconciliation process.

### **5212.2. Fiscal Year End Reconciliation.**

1. Eligible Postsecondary Institutions must conduct the Fiscal Year End Reconciliation consisting of an official acknowledgement by an authorized school official, through Postsecondary Functions verifying, student by student, the accuracy of each invoice submitted by the Eligible Postsecondary Institution with respect to the student's Enrolled-Hours, Paid-Hours, Learning Support, and program of study information, when applicable to the program.
  - a. Reconciliation certification forms must be completed and submitted electronically, through Postsecondary Functions by July 15, immediately following the completion of the Fiscal Year for each State Program.
  - b. Return to GSFA any funds not utilized according to the Fiscal Year End Reconciliation by August 15 after the beginning of the new Fiscal Year.
  - c. GSFA will not issue any state scholarship or grant funds for the Fall term until the previous Fiscal Year End Reconciliation process is complete.
  - d. The Eligible Postsecondary Institution must have a procedure in place to ensure that the state scholarship and grant funds do not go to an unintended third party (i.e., state, postsecondary institution).

## **5213. Postsecondary Institution Records Retention Requirements.**

### **5213.1. Length of Retention.**

1. An Eligible Postsecondary Institution shall maintain accurate records, books, documents and other evidence concerning the REACH Scholarship Program, including, but not limited to, individual student files 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 GSFA.

### **5213.2. Documentation.**

1. Documentation contained within an individual student file or record which supports the original determination of a student's eligibility must be retained by the Eligible Postsecondary Institution and available for review by GSFA on the Eligible Postsecondary Institution's campus in Georgia, for at least three calendar years after the most recent Award Year for which the student received REACH funds (refer to *Section 5215*).
2. Eligible Postsecondary Institutions are 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 resident alien cards, Georgia state income tax returns, student financial aid applications and academic transcripts from previous institutions.
  - b. Documentation regarding a student's eligibility is not limited to files, records, and other information received and maintained by the Eligible Postsecondary Institution's financial aid office.
  - c. Documentation supporting a student's eligibility that is received and maintained by the Eligible Postsecondary Institution's admissions office, registrar's office, business office, and other administrative operations must be available to GSFA for the purpose of Compliance Reviews.
3. It is the Eligible Postsecondary Institution's responsibility to resolve any inconsistencies or conflicting information within a student's records, prior to awarding or disbursing REACH funds to the student.

### **5213.3. Extended Retention.**

1. An Eligible Postsecondary Institution 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 5213.1*. If the three-year retention period expires before the issue in question is resolved, the Eligible Postsecondary Institution must continue to retain all associated records until resolution is reached.

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## **5214. Administrative Reviews and Exceptions.**

### **5214.1. Administrative Reviews.**

1. The REACH Program Regulations are applied to each student considered for REACH scholarship funds by appropriate officials.
2. If an 8th grade or high school REACH Scholar believes a REACH Program rule or regulation was incorrectly applied in his or her case, the REACH Scholar must seek resolution from the Participating School System. The 8<sup>th</sup> grade or high school student may request an Administrative Review of the Participating School System's decision.
3. If a postsecondary REACH Scholar believes a REACH Program rule or regulation was incorrectly applied in his or her case, the REACH Scholar must seek resolution from the Eligible Postsecondary Institution. The postsecondary REACH Scholar may request an Administrative Review of the Eligible Postsecondary Institution's decision.
4. In order for an Administrative Review to be considered, the REACH Scholar must submit a written request for an Administrative Review to GSFA office within 45 calendar days of receiving notice of a decision of the Participating School System or Eligible Postsecondary Institution. If additional information is requested from the Scholar, it must be provided within the time frame specified by GSFA. GSFA decides a case based only on documentation provided rather than a personal presentation.

### **5214.2. Exceptions.**

1. Requests for Exceptions to the REACH Program Regulations cannot be considered, reviewed, or granted under any circumstances.

## **5215. Compliance Reviews.**

### **5215.1 Compliance Review Policy.**

1. GSFA may conduct Compliance Reviews of Participating School Systems and Eligible Postsecondary Institutions participating in the REACH Scholarship Program in order to assess institutional administration of the program and compliance with the program's regulations. Such Compliance Reviews shall be conducted no less frequently than once every three years in accordance with GSFA's *Compliance Review Process and Procedures* document, which is available at [gsfc.georgia.gov](http://gsfc.georgia.gov), under *Information for School Compliance*.

### **5215.2. Compliance Review Process.**

1. GSFA selects a sampling of the Eligible Postsecondary Institution's REACH Scholarship recipients, for the Award Year under review, and the Eligible Postsecondary Institution's 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 the Georgia campus of the postsecondary institution.
  - a. GSFA will exclude Residency determinations for REACH Scholarship recipients, as they relate to *Section 5205.1.* and SAP determinations, in the selected sample for any USG or TCSG institution, that has submitted a signed certification to GSFA's Compliance Department by the President of the Eligible Postsecondary Institution that:
    - i. The Eligible Postsecondary Institution is in compliance with its policies and procedures in the determination and the administration of the financial aid award process relative to Residency and SAP requirements; and
    - ii. The Residency and SAP determinations have been fairly and consistently applied with respect to all students receiving the REACH awards.
  - b. Such certification must be submitted annually to GSFA's Compliance Department in the format required by GSFA.
    - i. Failure to provide such certification will result in a review of Residency determinations and SAP determinations made for REACH Scholarship recipients in the selected sample.

### **5215.3. Institutional Repayment.**

1. In the event it is determined that an Eligible Postsecondary Institution knowingly or through error certified an ineligible student to be eligible for REACH Scholarship, the amount of such scholarship shall be refunded by the Eligible Postsecondary Institution to GSFA.
2. GSFA may suspend an Eligible Postsecondary Institution from receiving REACH Scholarship 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 a REACH Scholarship 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 the REACH Scholarship payment, then all future REACH Scholarship awards for that student must be canceled.
  - a. The Eligible Postsecondary Institution is held harmless by GSFA, if the student's file is adequately documented with available evidence and it is determined by GSFA that the Eligible Postsecondary Institution was not at fault.
  - b. Evidence is considered unavailable at the time of awarding if it is not available in the student's institutional files (i.e., financial aid, admissions, registrar, etc.).
5. The Eligible Postsecondary Institution must notify the student and GSFA of a refund due to GSFA.
6. The student will be ineligible to receive additional state aid from GSFA until the repayment is paid in full, in accordance with *Section 5211.2*.
7. If GSFA determines the student's file is not adequately documented, then the Eligible Postsecondary Institution may be solely responsible for the repayment.