

HOPE GED Grant Program

REGULATIONS – 400.

2017-2018 Award Year



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GSFC | Georgia Student
Finance Commission

2082 East Exchange Place
Tucker, Georgia 30084

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402. Program Overview.

The HOPE GED Grant Program provides recipients of General Education Development (GED) diplomas with a one-time award of \$500 toward the cost of their postsecondary education. The purpose of the HOPE GED Grant Program is to encourage Georgia's GED recipients to pursue education beyond the high school level at an Eligible Postsecondary Institution located in Georgia.

An eligible student must be seeking a Certificate, Diploma, or Undergraduate Degree from a Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) or University System of Georgia (USG) institution, or be seeking an Undergraduate Degree from a private Eligible Postsecondary Institution located in Georgia.

The HOPE GED Grant Program was created beginning with the 1993-1994 Award Year (State Fiscal Year 1994). 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, et seq.

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403. Definitions. (Electronic Link)

404. General Eligibility Requirements.

404.1. 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 first day of classes of the school term for which the HOPE GED Grant is sought.

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404.2. Georgia Residency.

1. A student attending a USG or TCSG institution who meets the Georgia Residency requirements of the Board of Regents (BOR) or State Board of TCSG at the time of successful GED test must also meet such Georgia Residency requirements for 12 consecutive months immediately prior to the first day of classes of the school term for which the HOPE GED Grant is sought.
2. A student who does not meet the Georgia Residency requirements of the BOR or State Board of TCSG at the time of successful GED test, must meet such Georgia Residency requirements for 24 consecutive months immediately prior to the first day of classes of the school term for which the HOPE GED Grant is sought.
3. A student attending a private Eligible Postsecondary Institution who meets the Georgia Residency requirements of the *Georgia Residency Requirements for State Programs at Private Institutions Regulations*, at the time of successful GED test must also meet such Georgia residency requirements for 12 consecutive months immediately prior to the first day of classes of the school term for which the HOPE GED Grant funds are sought.
4. A student who does not meet the Georgia Residency requirements of the *Georgia Residency Requirements for State Programs at Private Institutions Regulations* at the time of successful GED test must meet such Georgia Residency requirements for 24 consecutive months immediately prior to the first day of classes of the school term for which the HOPE GED Grant is sought.
5. Military Personnel, Military Spouses, or Dependent Children, shall be treated as a Georgia Resident for purposes of HOPE GED Grant eligibility if the military person is stationed in Georgia on active duty or lists Georgia as his or her home of record.

- a. If a USG or TCSG institution grants a Military Personnel Out-of-State Tuition Waiver, then such student meets the Georgia Residency requirements of the HOPE GED Grant.
- b. No other Out-of-State Tuition Waiver, other than for Military Personnel and their dependents, applies to students in the HOPE GED Program.

404.3. Enrollment Status.

1. A student is eligible for the HOPE GED Grant regardless of the number of credit hours for which he or she is Enrolled during a school term. Half-Time or Full-Time Enrollment is not a requirement.

404.4. Satisfactory Academic Progress.

1. A student is not required to meet the Eligible Postsecondary Institution's Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) policy in order to receive the HOPE GED Grant award.

404.5. Selective Service Registration.

1. A student must be in compliance with the United States Selective Service System requirements, where applicable, prior to the HOPE GED Grant application deadline (refer to *Section 407.2.*) in order to be eligible for HOPE GED Grant payment for such school term.

404.6. 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;
 - 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 GSFC.
4. A student's default status on a State of Georgia loan can be resolved by:
- 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.

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404.7. Georgia Drug-Free Act.

1. A student convicted of committing certain felony offenses involving marijuana, controlled substances, or dangerous drugs, may be ineligible for HOPE GED Grant payment from the date of conviction to the completion of the following school term, in accordance with the Georgia Drug-Free Postsecondary Education Act of 1990, O.C.G.A. §20-1-20, et seq.

404.8. Incarceration.

1. A student attending an Eligible Postsecondary Institution is ineligible for HOPE GED Grant payment while Incarcerated. Upon release from incarceration, such student may receive HOPE GED Grant payment if he or she is awarded a GED diploma while Incarcerated and he or she meets all other eligibility requirements (refer to *Section 405.3.1.a.*).

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405. Program Specific Eligibility Requirements.

405.1. GED after June 30, 1993.

1. In order for a student to be eligible to receive HOPE GED Grant payment, such student must be the recipient of a GED that was granted by TCSG after June 30, 1993.

405.2. Combined Paid-Hours Limit.

1. Receiving payment from the HOPE GED Grant Program does not impact the Combined Paid-Hours limit. Only the hours for which a student received payment from the Zell Miller Scholarship, HOPE Grant, HOPE Scholarship, or Accel Program (through FY2011), are included in the Combined Paid-Hours limit.

405.3. Expiration of Eligibility.

1. The GED voucher expires 24 consecutive months immediately following the date the GED diploma is awarded to the student.
 - a. If a student is awarded a GED diploma while Incarcerated, the 24 consecutive months will begin on the date of release from incarceration. Future periods of incarceration do not extend the 24 month expiration date.
2. A student may receive payment after the expiration date, if the student was Enrolled in the next term prior to the GED voucher's expiration date.

405.4. Other Disqualifying Factors.

1. A student is ineligible for HOPE GED Grant payment if he or she began seeking a college Degree or received HOPE Scholarship payment prior to earning a GED diploma.
2. A student is ineligible for HOPE GED Grant payment if he or she received a high school diploma prior to earning a GED diploma.

405.5. In Combination with HOPE Grant and Zell Miller Grant.

1. A student, who meets all eligibility requirements of both the HOPE GED Grant and the HOPE Grant or Zell Miller Grant, is eligible to receive full payment from both programs for the same school term.

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405.6. In Combination with HOPE Scholarship.

1. A HOPE GED recipient who meets HOPE Scholarship eligibility requirements at the First-Tier may receive payment from both the HOPE Scholarship and HOPE GED program.
2. A student, who received HOPE GED Grant payment, and is later eligible to enter the HOPE Scholarship Program, is eligible to receive the \$500 HOPE GED Grant payment.

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406. Eligible and Ineligible Coursework.

406.1. Learning Support Coursework.

1. A student who Enrolls in Learning Support coursework is eligible for HOPE GED Grant payment for the school term in which he or she is Enrolled in such coursework.

406.2. Distance Learning Coursework.

1. A student participating in Distance Learning coursework is eligible to receive HOPE GED Grant payment if all other eligibility requirements are met. The institution offering the Distance Learning coursework must be an Eligible Postsecondary Institution.

406.3. Joint and Dual Credit Enrollment Coursework.

1. A student seeking a high school diploma who is simultaneously Enrolled at an Eligible Postsecondary Institution as a Joint Enrollment or Dual Credit Enrollment student is ineligible to receive HOPE GED Grant payment.

406.4. Exemption by Examination Coursework.

1. A student is ineligible to receive HOPE GED Grant payment for coursework that was exempted or given credit by examination, testing, training, or experience.

406.5. Transient Coursework.

1. A student is ineligible for HOPE GED Grant payment as a Transient student.

406.6. Study Away Coursework.

1. A student is ineligible to receive HOPE GED Grant payment for Study Away coursework.

406.7. Continuing Education and Audit Coursework.

1. A student is ineligible to receive HOPE GED Grant payment for coursework classified by his or her Eligible Postsecondary Institution as Continuing Education or Audit coursework.

406.8. Total Withdrawal from Coursework.

1. A student is ineligible for HOPE GED Grant payment for coursework from which he or she totally withdrew if, as a result, such coursework does not appear on the student's academic transcript as a "W" or any other code or identification for such a withdrawal (refer to *Section 410.1.*).

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407. Student Application Requirements.

407.1. Application Forms.

1. In order to be considered for a HOPE GED Grant, a student must complete one of the following application forms:
 - a. GSFAPPS; or
 - b. Current year FAFSA.
2. In addition to one of these two applications, 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 HOPE GED Grant eligibility.
3. Once a student has submitted a GSFAPPS, and it has been accepted on GSFC's system as a valid application, it will remain on GSFC's system as a valid application for 84 consecutive months following the application's approval date.
 - a. The student's application will remain valid during the 84-month period, regardless of whether or not an Eligible Postsecondary Institution submits a HOPE invoice to GSFC on behalf of the student during the 84-month period. Upon conclusion of the 84-month period, the student's application will expire.
 - b. Once an application has expired, the student will be required to submit a new application in order for a HOPE invoice to be processed for the student by GSFC.
 - c. If during the original application's 84-month period, the student submits to GSFC a new application for HOPE, or an application for a program other than HOPE, both applications will remain valid for 84 consecutive months following the most recent application's approval date.
 - d. The above stipulations apply to all GSFAPPS accepted as valid applications on GSFC's system, including such applications that were submitted and accepted prior to the 2008-2009 Award Year.

407.2. Application Deadline Date.

1. A student must file a GSFAPPS or FAFSA on or before the last day of the 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. Supplemental

documentation required by the Eligible Postsecondary Institution or GSFC to support or verify a student's application information may be submitted after the deadline without jeopardizing the student's eligibility.

407.3. Application for Subsequent Years.

1. The HOPE GED Grant is non-renewable.

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408. Award Requirements.

408.1. Award Amount.

1. The amount of a HOPE GED Grant payment is a one-time, non-renewable award of \$500.
2. A student's HOPE GED Grant funds may be applied to any of his or her Cost of Attendance (COA) charges. If a student's COA budget cannot absorb the full \$500 award, the remaining HOPE GED Grant funds for the recipient may be carried forward to the following school term.

408.2. Awards Per School Term.

1. The HOPE GED Grant is available to students for the standard school terms of Summer, Fall, and Spring semesters or Summer, Fall, Winter, and Spring quarters.
 - a. An Eligible Postsecondary Institution may combine mini-terms or modules to form the equivalent of a standard semester or quarter.
 - b. An Eligible Postsecondary Institution may offer Non-Standard Terms or Non-Terms, in which courses or modules are taken consecutively to form the equivalent of a standard semester or quarter.

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409. Invoicing Requirements.

409.1. Submission of Invoices.

1. Eligible Postsecondary Institutions may submit HOPE GED Grant invoices to GSFC as early as 15 calendar days prior to the first day of classes for the school term.
2. Invoices must be submitted, through GSFC's online invoicing system, Scholarship Up-to-date Records for Electronic Reporting (SURFER), processed, and approved by GSFC by the Invoicing Deadline Date as established by GSFC. Each invoice submitted by the Eligible Postsecondary Institution must include Enrolled-Hours, Paid-Hours, and the student's program of study information, when applicable to the program.
 - a. In the event invoices are submitted to GSFC by Eligible Postsecondary Institutions after the Invoicing Deadline Date for a school term, GSFC 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.
3. 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 Date for each school term for the upcoming Award Year.
4. An Invoice may be honored or paid after the Invoicing Deadline Date if the failure to meet the date was due to:
 - a. The need for supplemental documentation required by the Eligible Postsecondary Institution or GSFC to support or verify a student's eligibility;
 - 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.
5. The President of GSFC has sole discretion in the determination of invoice deadlines and extensions. The decision of the President of GSFC shall be final.

409.2. Payment of Invoices.

1. HOPE GED Grant funds are paid to Eligible Postsecondary Institutions by electronic transfer of funds on behalf of eligible students each school term upon submission to GSFC of a HOPE GED Grant invoice.

409.3. Cost of Attendance.

1. Upon receipt of HOPE GED Grant payment for a student from GSFC, the Eligible Postsecondary Institution must credit the amount of payment on behalf of an eligible student to the student's account and it may be applied to any of his or her COA charges.
2. HOPE GED Grant funds for a recipient may be carried forward to the following school term, if the student's COA budget cannot absorb the full \$500 award.
3. The Eligible Postsecondary Institution should only invoice GSFC for the exact amount the student is eligible to receive for the school term.

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410. Refund Requirements.

410.1. Calculation of Refunds.

1. If the student officially withdraws, drops out, drops hours, is expelled, or otherwise fails to complete a period of Enrollment, and is entitled to a refund, a portion of such refund may need to be returned to the HOPE GED Grant fund.
 - a. A student is ineligible for HOPE GED Grant funds for coursework from which he or she totally withdrew if, as a result, such coursework does not appear on the student's academic transcript as a "W" or any other code or identification for such a withdrawal.
 - b. If the Eligible Postsecondary Institution invoiced GSFC prior to the student's total withdrawal, then the Eligible Postsecondary Institution must cancel the student's HOPE GED Grant award for that term, through SURFER.
2. If applicable, the Eligible Postsecondary Institution must first apply the Federal Title IV Programs return of funds policy for any federal aid the student may have received.
 - a. To determine the refund due to the HOPE GED Grant Program, the Eligible Postsecondary Institution must then apply the Eligible Postsecondary Institution's refund policy, which may or may not be identical to the Federal Title IV Programs return of funds policy, to the student's HOPE GED Grant award amount.
3. The Eligible Postsecondary Institution must determine the amount of the refund due back to the HOPE GED Grant Program. The amount of the HOPE GED Grant award not determined to be owed back to the HOPE GED Grant Program is retained by the Eligible Postsecondary Institution to cover the institution's cost for the portion of the school term that the student was enrolled.
 - a. The Eligible Postsecondary Institution must adjust the student's invoice in SURFER to the new award amount remaining after the refund is calculated within forty-five (45) calendar days of the determination.
 - b. If the Eligible Postsecondary Institution has sufficient funds on hand to return to GSFC the refund owed to the HOPE GED Grant Program, it should return the funds within forty-five (45) calendar days of the refund determination.
 - i. The Eligible Postsecondary Institution would then collect the refund amount from the student.
 - ii. The student should not be reported with a refund due status to GSFC since the funds have been repaid to GSFC.

4. If the Eligible Postsecondary Institution does not have sufficient funds on hand to return to GSFC the refund owed to the HOPE GED Grant Program, the student is considered to have a refund due to GSFC and the Eligible Postsecondary Institution must report the student to GSFC with a refund due status.

410.2. Collection of Refunds.

1. A borrower in default or who owes a refund may be subject to garnishment of their pay, loss of a professional license, offset of lottery winnings, and/or offset of a state tax refund. GSFC will notify the borrower that they are in default and GSFC intends to proceed with any of the remedies listed in this subsection. The borrower will be given 60 days from the date of the notification to make the loan current or to put in place a satisfactory payment plan.

410.3. Emergency Military Duty.

1. A student who is a member of the United States Armed Services, National Guard, or Armed Forces Reserve receiving funds from the HOPE GED Grant Program who is called to emergency military duty during a school term that is already in progress should not have his or her HOPE GED Grant 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 HOPE GED Grant award to the HOPE account.
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 military, as determined by the President of the Eligible Postsecondary Institution that such student is attending.

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411. Reconciliation Requirements.

411.1. Term-Reconciliation.

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

411.2. Fiscal Year End Reconciliation.

1. In addition to the Term-Reconciliations, the Eligible Postsecondary Institution must conduct the Fiscal Year End Reconciliation through SURFER.
 - a. The Eligible Postsecondary Institution must conduct a complete student-by-student Fiscal Year End Reconciliation with GSFC that includes:
 - i. Submission of a reconciliation certification form by July 15, immediately following the completion of the Fiscal Year for each State Program; and
 - ii. 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.
 - b. GSFC will not issue any state scholarship or grant funds for the Fall term until the previous Fiscal Year End Reconciliation process is complete.
 - c. 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).

412. Records Retention Requirements.

412.1. Length of Retention.

1. An Eligible Postsecondary Institution shall maintain accurate records, books, documents and other evidence concerning the HOPE GED Grant 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 GSFC.

412.2. 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 the Eligible Postsecondary Institution and available for review by GSFC on the Eligible Postsecondary Institution's campus, located within the State of Georgia, for at least three years after the most recent Award Year for which the student received HOPE GED Grant funds (refer to *Section 414*).
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, 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 the Eligible Postsecondary Institution.
 - ii. Documentation supporting a student's eligibility that is received and maintained by the Eligible Postsecondary Institution's admissions office, registrar's office, business office, or other administrative operations of the institution, must be available to GSFC 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 HOPE funds to the student.

412.3. 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 412.1*. 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 a resolution is reached.

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413. Administrative Reviews and Exceptions.

413.1. Administrative Reviews.

1. The HOPE GED Grant Program Regulations are applied to each student considered for such funds by appropriate officials of Eligible Postsecondary Institutions and by the administrative staff of GSFC.
2. If a student believes a HOPE GED 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 45 calendar days of receiving notice of denial from the Eligible Postsecondary Institution 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 Eligible Postsecondary Institution of the determination.
 - b. GSFC decides a case based only on documentation provided, rather than a personal presentation.

413.2. Exceptions.

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

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414. Compliance Reviews.

414.1. Compliance Review Policy.

1. GSFC shall conduct Compliance Reviews of Eligible Postsecondary Institutions participating in the HOPE GED Grant 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 GSFC's *Compliance Review Process and Procedures* document, which is available on *gsfc.org*, under *Information for School Compliance*.

414.2. Compliance Review Process.

1. GSFC selects a sampling of the Eligible Postsecondary Institution's HOPE GED Grant 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 Eligible Postsecondary Institution (refer to *Section 412*).
 - a. GSFC will exclude Residency determinations as they relate to *Section 404.2.1*, and SAP determinations made for HOPE GED Grant recipients, in the selected sample of any USG or TCSG institution that has submitted a signed certification to GSFC'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 requirements and SAP; and
 - ii. The Residency and SAP determinations have been fairly and consistently applied with respect to all students receiving the HOPE GED 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 and SAP determinations made for HOPE GED Grant recipients in the selected sample.

414.3. 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 HOPE GED Grant, the amount of such grant shall be refunded by the Eligible Postsecondary Institution to GSFC.
2. GSFC may suspend an Eligible Postsecondary Institution from receiving HOPE 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 HOPE GED Grant 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 HOPE GED Grant payment, then all future HOPE awards for that student must be canceled.
 - a. The Eligible Postsecondary Institution is held harmless by GSFC, if a student's file is adequately documented with available evidence and it is determined by GSFC that the Eligible Postsecondary Institution was not at fault.
 - b. Evidence is considered unavailable at the time of awarding if it was 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 GSFC of a refund due to GSFC.
6. The student will be ineligible to receive additional state aid from GSFC until the repayment is paid in full, in accordance with *Section 410.2*.
7. If GSFC determines that the student's file is not adequately documented, the Eligible Postsecondary Institution may be solely responsible for the repayment.

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