

§ 115C-269.31. Teacher Assistant Tuition Reimbursement Grant Program.

(a) Purpose. – The Department of Public Instruction shall establish the Teacher Assistant Tuition Reimbursement Grant Program (Program). The purpose of the Program is to provide tuition assistance to part-time or full-time teacher assistants working in local school administrative units to pursue a college degree that will result in teacher licensure.

(b) Applications; Grant Priority. – Local school administrative units may apply to participate in the Program pursuant to a process to be established by the Department of Public Instruction. The application shall identify current and ongoing needs for licensed teachers and the expected number of eligible teacher assistants that would participate in the Program. In evaluating applications, the Department shall prioritize local school administrative units according to the following order:

- (1) Local school administrative units that received funds under the Teacher Assistant Tuition Reimbursement Pilot Program established in Section 8.29 of S.L. 2016-94, as amended by Section 7.20 of S.L. 2017-57, Section 6(m) of S.L. 2017-189, and Section 7.21 of S.L. 2018-5.
- (2) Local school administrative units located, in whole or in part, in a county with at least one local school administrative unit that received low-wealth supplemental funding in the previous fiscal year.
- (3) All other local school administrative units.

(c) Award of Funds. – To the extent funds are made available for the Program, a local school administrative unit receiving funds under the Program shall provide a teacher assistant participating in the program an award of up to four thousand six hundred dollars (\$4,600) per academic year per teacher assistant, up to four academic years to defray the costs of tuition and fees at an educator preparation program at an institution of higher education while employed in the local school administrative unit as a teacher assistant.

(d) Additional Criteria. – The following additional criteria shall apply under the Program:

- (1) Tuition assistance awards granted under the Program may be provided for part-time or full-time coursework.
- (2) A local board of education may grant a teacher assistant academic leave to pursue coursework that may only be taken during working hours.
- (3) A teacher assistant shall fulfill the student teaching requirements of an educator preparation program by working as a teacher assistant at his or her employing local school administrative unit.
- (4) A teacher assistant shall continue to receive salary and benefits while student teaching in the local school administrative unit as provided for teacher assistants in G.S. 115C-269.30(c).

(e) Selection of Teacher Assistants. – The Department shall establish criteria for initial and continuing eligibility to participate in the Program. The Department shall adopt standards to ensure that only qualified, potential recipients receive an award of funds for tuition and fees under the Program. The standards shall include satisfactory academic progress toward achieving teacher licensure. Local school administrative units receiving grants pursuant to the Program shall select teacher assistants to receive funds under the Program and prioritize teacher assistants who received an award in the prior academic year and who are making satisfactory academic progress towards achieving teacher licensure. The Department of Public Instruction shall set criteria for the application and selection of teacher assistants to receive tuition assistance awards that includes at least the following:

- (1) The teacher assistant shall be employed by the local board of education in the local school administrative unit.
- (2) The teacher assistant shall be enrolled or provide a statement of intent to enroll in an accredited institution of higher education in North Carolina with an

educator preparation program approved by the State Board of Education to pursue teacher licensure.

- (3) The teacher assistant qualifies as a resident for tuition purposes under the criteria set forth in G.S. 116-143.1 and in accordance with the coordinated and centralized residency determination process administered by the Authority [State Education Assistance Authority].

(f) Endorsement of Tuition Assistance Awards for Recipients. – Each local board of education participating in the Program shall enter into a memorandum of understanding with the institution of higher education in which an award recipient under the Program is enrolled that includes procedures for at least the following:

- (1) Remittance of the award from the local board of education to the institution of higher education.
- (2) Endorsement of the funds awarded to the recipient to the institution of higher education for deposit into the account of the institution.
- (3) Return of a pro rata share of funds to the local board of education in the event a recipient (i) withdraws from the institution of higher education prior to the end of a term or (ii) the recipient's employment with the local board of education is terminated. The return of funds shall be consistent with procedures used by the institution under federal Title IV programs.

(g) Local Report. – No later than September 1 of each school year following at least six months of participation in the Program for that year, local boards of education participating in the Program shall report at least the following information to the Department of Public Instruction:

- (1) The number and amount of funds in tuition assistance awards provided to teacher assistants.
- (2) The number of teacher assistant recipients who achieved teacher licensure, including the period of time from the issue of an initial tuition assistance award to the time of achieving licensure.
- (3) The number of recipients who remained employed in the local school administrative unit after achieving teacher licensure.

(h) State Report. – No later than December 1, 2024, and annually thereafter for each year funds are awarded pursuant to the Program, the Department of Public Instruction shall aggregate the information provided pursuant to subsection (g) of this section and report that information to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee. (2023-134, s. 7.44(a).)