

Tuition Assistance Policy

Effective Date: Adopted 10/90; Revised 8/91, 12/94, 3/08, 8/10

§-I. PURPOSE To provide financial assistance to county employees seeking to further their education.

§-II. SCOPE All Full-time County Employees.

§-III. POLICY It is the policy of the County to develop a better educated and more highly skilled work force by providing financial assistance to its employees seeking to further their education in accordance with the guidelines established below.

§-IV. PROCEDURES

A. Eligibility requirements for financial assistance include the following:

1. Only full-time employees are eligible.
2. The employee must have completed a minimum of twelve (12) months of service with the County.
3. The employee must disclose any other eligibility for financial assistance and the County will consider financial assistance in addition to other available assistance not to exceed actual expenses.

B. Financial assistance will be provided only for courses of study which are directly related to the employee's present job or which will enhance the employee's potential for advancement to a position with the County which the individual has a reasonable expectation of achieving. It is intended for those employees seeking to obtain a degree. The committee will only consider undergraduate (associate and bachelor), masters, and Juris Doctorate degrees for approval. PHD and certificate programs will not be eligible.

C. In addition, courses or programs must be offered by accredited institutions of learning or agencies.

D. Courses which management specifically requests or directs an employee to take may not be funded under this policy. These courses are to be funded from the department's training budget.

E. Class attendance and completion of study assignments shall be accomplished outside of the employee's regular working hours. It is expected that educational activities will not interfere with the employee's work, and unsatisfactory job performance during enrollment may result in forfeiture of financial assistance and termination of employment.

F. An employee who is terminated during enrollment because of a reduction in force or elimination of the job, or who is unable to complete the course because of transfer within the County, shall be reimbursed for the full amount of the costs incurred up to the date of termination or transfer.

G. An employee who voluntarily leaves the County or is terminated for cause prior to completing a course shall not be reimbursed for the expenses associated with the course.

H. If the employee leaves the County voluntarily or is terminated for cause within 12 months of receiving a tuition reimbursement, the employee must repay the full amount reimbursed by the County for the preceding 12 months. If the employee's status changes to part-time within 12 months of being reimbursed for a course, the employee must repay the reimbursed amount. Procedures for repayment of funds are as follows:

1. Repayment of funds to the County will be deducted from the employee's final payroll checks that cover final earned wages and any leave payouts.
2. If the employee's final checks do not cover the total repayment amount, the employee must repay the remaining balance to Cobb County.
3. If the employee must repay any funds to Cobb County, a repayment schedule not to exceed six months will be approved by the Finance Department, the Tuition Committee Chairperson, and the employee's Department Manager or Elected Official.
4. Employees whose status changes to part-time within 12 months of being reimbursed will repay through payroll deductions approved by the Finance Department, not to exceed six months.

I. Records will be maintained by the Human Resources Department of all educational programs completed by each employee, as well as the amounts reimbursed.

J. To guarantee reimbursement of educational costs, requests for educational assistance must be approved prior to enrollment. Written requests shall be submitted to the Tuition Assistance Committee through the employee's supervisor and department head. The supervisor and the department head shall recommend either approval or disapproval of the request and forward the application to the Human Resources department. In recommending approval or disapproval, the supervisor and department head may consider such factors as the employee's record of performance, disciplinary history, attendance, whether the employee is in a working test period at the time of the request, and the needs of the department. The final decision shall be made by the Tuition Assistance Committee.

K. All applications for tuition assistance shall be submitted within deadlines established by the Tuition Assistance Committee. All classes are to begin in the date range for the term. The date ranges are as follows: Spring Term – December 1st to April 30th, Summer Term – May 1st to July 31st, Fall Term – August 1st – November 30th.

L. In determining whether or not to approve a request for financial assistance, supervisors, department heads and the Tuition Assistance Committee are directed to consider the following factors:

1. The nature and purpose of the course of study.
2. The benefits to be derived by the employee and the County; and
3. The level of responsibility and length of service of the employee.

M. Upon completion of the course, the employee shall submit to the Human Resources department a certified transcript of grades received and receipt for tuition incurred. The County will then reimburse the employee for tuition and any fees required by the school up to the term cap set by the committee (see section N). No more than two (2) classes are eligible for reimbursement per term. Applications will be classified as overdue and ineligible for reimbursement 30 days after completion of a course, if transcripts and grades have not been submitted.

N. A grade of "B" or better must be earned in order for the employee to be reimbursed by the County.

Reimbursements are calculated with a maximum term allowance per student decided by the committee based on the available budget and the number of students enrolled. Additionally, reimbursements will be subject to an annual cap also based on the available budget and the number of students enrolled. Each will be established at the beginning of each fiscal year. For example, the annual cap may be established at \$1250 per student. The maximum term allowance may be \$500.00 per student. Therefore, each student is eligible to receive \$500.00 per term up to the annual cap of \$1250.00. If the student is enrolled all three quarters, the student is eligible for \$500 for the first and second term and \$250.00 the third term. If the student only participates the second and third term, the student is eligible for \$500 for the second and third term; they have not met the annual cap.

The Tuition Assistance administrator will notify all participants of the term allowance and the annual cap upon approval of the application from the committee.

Should participation in the Tuition Reimbursement Program substantially change during the fiscal year, the Tuition Reimbursement Committee may need to adjust the reimbursement amounts to remain within the approved budget. Notice of any changes will be included in your approval letter for the term.

O. The Tuition Assistance Committee is composed of departmental representatives appointed by the County Manager. The Committee shall operate under the following procedures:

1. The final decision to approve/disapprove applications is made by the Committee.
2. The Committee has the responsibility for interpretation of the Tuition Assistance Policy.

P. The County makes no commitment that additional coursework or the completion of a degree will bring an employee either a job promotion or a salary increase beyond that to which the employee might otherwise be entitled.