

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION
REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION

NO.: BHE 23-28

BOARD DATE: February 14, 2023

APPROVAL OF GUIDELINES FOR THE TOMORROW'S TEACHERS SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

MOVED: The Board of Higher Education hereby adopts the attached Guidelines for the Tomorrow's Teachers Scholarship Program.

VOTED:

Authority: M.G.L. c. 15A, § 19D as established by Ch. 126 Mass. Acts 2022, § 10; and Ch. 126 Mass. Acts 2022, § 2 (Line Item 7061-9805).

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Tomorrow's Teachers Scholarship Program Guidelines Background Information

Purpose

The Massachusetts FY23 Budget included a \$15 million appropriation for a teacher scholarship and loan repayment assistance program. The intent of this new funding is to eliminate teacher shortages faced by the Commonwealth, reduce the educational loan debt for currently employed teachers, and diversify the state's teaching profession.

Background

The wealth of information and studies on the teacher profession show that teacher shortages have been occurring across the country for many years. A series [recently published](#) by the Economic Policy Institute warns that the teacher shortage is real, large and growing, and perhaps worse than we know. This series points to data collected from states that details vacancies in certain subject areas, and more importantly, shows that fewer students are enrolling in teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities across the country. Similar to other states, Massachusetts is faced with shortages across geographical regions of the state and across disciplines such as STEM (Science Technology, Engineering and Math), English, and foreign languages. Although teachers in Massachusetts typically can expect a healthy job market, there continues to be a shortage of qualified teachers to meet the workforce demand.

The impact of this teacher shortage is that Massachusetts cannot ensure that every student will have an effective teacher and that every teacher has the opportunity to be effective. Since 2020, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has issued emergency licenses to help address the shortage issue. This process allows individuals more time to complete coursework to fully meet the licensing requirements. The high number of emergency licenses issued further points to the challenges of teacher shortages across the state. Thus, it is imperative that Massachusetts implement measures to incentivize and encourage more students to consider teaching as a profession. The FY23 \$15 million appropriation for a teacher education scholarship and loan repayment assistance initiative is a major step towards the Commonwealth's commitment to tackling the teacher shortage challenge.

Program Overview

Pursuant to M.G.L. c. 15A, § 19D (1-3), the Board of Higher Education (BHE) shall promulgate guidelines governing the Tomorrow's Teachers Scholarship Program. At a minimum, the guidelines must include:

1. Eligibility for the program, which shall be limited to qualified students (high school graduates, undergraduate students, and students enrolled in post-baccalaureate educator preparation programs) who: (i) agree to complete a qualified program (bachelor's degree or post-baccalaureate educator preparation program) at a public college or university, (ii) successfully complete the program and obtain appropriate teacher certification, and (iii) commit to teaching for 4 years at a public school;

2. An outreach plan to attract individuals from underrepresented populations to the education profession through the program, which shall diversify the educator workforce; and
3. Procedures for repayment of scholarship benefits by program recipients who do fail to complete the 4-year teaching commitment, designed not to disincentivize low-income student participation; and which consider the amount of scholarship benefits received, the recipient's current income if not working as a public school teacher, whether the recipient's position helps support or educate students otherwise, and the recipient's length of service as a public school teacher.

The Tomorrow's Teachers Scholarship Program guidelines have been developed to meet all requirements of the enabling legislation. It should be noted that while the budget language establishes the program as the Tomorrow's Educators Scholarship, Department of Higher Education (DHE) staff believe the revised title, "*Tomorrow's Teachers Scholarship*," clarifies, consistent with the legislative intent of the enabling legislation ("...to encourage students to teach in public schools..."), that the goal of this program is to achieve an increase of classroom teachers as opposed to other school administrators, such as counselors and administrators. The Tomorrow's Teachers Scholarship Program Guidelines (Attachment A) address the enabling legislation's requirements by:

- Providing qualified students with scholarships for tuition, fees and related educational expenses (room, board, books, transportation, miscellaneous, etc.), based on the institution's annual Cost of Attendance (COA) for a bachelor's degree or post-baccalaureate coursework leading to the certification required for employment at a public school at a public college or university at a public college or university;
- Requiring recipients to teach one year for each year of scholarship assistance received, up to four (4) years; and
- Outlining terms for repayment of all scholarship benefits received if the teaching obligation is not met, inclusive of conditions that consider individual income and related circumstances to avoid economic hardship.

The In furtherance of developing the required **outreach plan** to attract students from underrepresented populations to the education profession through this program, for the purpose of diversifying the teacher educator workforce, the DHE has secured the services of a Marketing and Communications vendor to assist with the development and implementation of a Strategic Outreach Plan that will facilitate its ability to reach the target population. Because this plan is not relevant specifically to the awarding of scholarship funds to qualified students, it is summarized below, rather than being outlined in the guidelines (Attachment A). The objectives of this plan include:

- Supporting public awareness through simple messaging
- Changing perception of teaching as a viable career
- Broadly publicize the Tomorrow's Teachers Scholarship and Loan Repayment Assistance program to maximize reach
- Differentiate the Tomorrow's Teachers Scholarship from other resources for teacher education students

The Outreach Plan is designed in alignment with priorities of the BHE's Strategic Plan for Racial Equity and will use Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure success. This work will be completed over the next six months to facilitate successful awarding of the scholarship and loan repayment assistance for the upcoming 2023-24 academic year.

Lastly, the Loan Repayment Assistance component of this initiative is being developed and implemented independent of the scholarship component, as it is designed to serve currently employed teachers who are no longer enrolled in college. The Loan Repayment Assistance will require development of a structured plan with eligibility criteria, as stipulated in the enabling legislation. Staff will keep the Board informed on the status and long-term outcomes of the Loan Repayment Assistance component as it is implemented.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Board approve the guidelines (Attachment A), which will facilitate the completion of tasks required to implement the scholarship program.

Tomorrow's Teachers Scholarship Program (TTSP)

Background:

The Tomorrow's Teachers Scholarship Program is purposed to attract and encourage a diverse population of qualified high school and currently enrolled college students to teach in the Massachusetts public school system. The scholarship is designed to provide financial assistance for tuition, fees, and related educational costs, as calculated by the institution in the Cost of Attendance (COA), for a bachelor's degree or post-baccalaureate coursework at an eligible public institution of higher education in the Commonwealth, that meets the certification requirements for employment at a Massachusetts public elementary or secondary school. This program is subject to appropriation.

Eligible Institution:

A 4-year public institution within the public system of higher education under Section 5 of Chapter 15A of the General Laws.

Eligible Program:

Any undergraduate degree program or post-baccalaureate coursework in an approved educator preparation program at a 4-year public institution within the public system of higher education under Section 5 of Chapter 15A of the General Laws.

Eligible Student:

To be eligible for the Tomorrow's Teachers Scholarship Program, an applicant must:

- Be a permanent legal resident of Massachusetts for at least 12 months (1 year) prior to the start of the academic year and remain a permanent resident to maintain eligibility
- Be a U.S. Citizen or non-citizen eligible under Title IV regulations
- Annually complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for consideration of scholarship funds
- Not be in default on any federal or state Student Loans for attendance at any institution, or owe a refund for any previous state financial aid program
- Has not earned prior baccalaureate degree, or the equivalent, except for those pursuing or intending to pursue post-baccalaureate course work in an approved educator preparation program at a Massachusetts 4-year public institution of higher education
- Enroll, as a matriculated student, in an undergraduate or post baccalaureate degree program, full-time (minimum of 12 credits, or the equivalent), unless otherwise agreed upon, in an approved course of study that meets the licensure requirements for employment at a Massachusetts public elementary or secondary school
- Meet satisfactory academic progress (SAP) according to the institution's requirements.

Scholarship Conditions and Recipient Responsibilities:

- Complete the scholarship application and sign a promissory note, annually, for continuation of scholarship funds.
- Provide an official transcript at the conclusion of each academic year to confirm continued eligibility requirements for program of study and progress towards degree completion. Incoming first-year students are required to submit a declaration of their major from the institution's registrar's office.
- Sign a scholarship agreement to "obtain the appropriate certification in accordance with section 38G of chapter 71" and "commit to teaching for 4 years in a school district, as defined in section 2 of chapter 70, in the commonwealth." Failure to complete the required 4-year teaching service will result in a repayment of funds as defined in the agreement.
- Become employed as a teacher of record, within 12 months of degree completion or the completion of post-baccalaureate course work in an approved educator preparation program
- Annually provide proof of employment to document fulfillment of the service obligation
- Acknowledge that this scholarship is considered repayment through service and in absence of fulfilling that commitment, the scholarship reverts to a loan that must be repaid by the scholarship recipient, per the terms of the Scholarship Promissory Note.
- Acknowledge the set forth repayment through service schedule, that one year of teaching will forgive one year of scholarship.

Award Value:

Subject to appropriation, the academic year award amount for eligible applicants under this program shall not exceed \$25,000 per student, as determined annually by the Department of Higher Education. The scholarship may be used to cover educational expenses included in the COA, as calculated by the institution. This may include, but is not limited to, tuition, fees, room and board, books and supplies, transportation, childcare, and personal expenses, for a bachelor's degree program or post-baccalaureate coursework.

Students at the undergraduate level may receive scholarship funds for up to a maximum of 4 years, 8 semesters (120 credits). An additional year of scholarship assistance may be awarded based on extenuating circumstances, with an approval of a written appeal.

Students pursuing post baccalaureate coursework may receive scholarship funds for up to a maximum of 3 semesters.

Award Disbursement:

Each participating institution must certify that the recipient is eligible in accordance with guidelines established for the Tomorrow's Teachers Scholarship Program and verify that the student is enrolled in an approved educator preparation program. Additionally, disbursement of awards will not be made until the student's signed promissory note has been received and approved.

Forfeiture of Scholarship Award:

Recipients of the Tomorrow's Teachers Scholarship Program who fail to complete their teaching obligation, are required to repay all scholarship funds, as outlined in the promissory note.

Participation Agreements:

All institutions receiving funds under the Tomorrow's Teachers Scholarship Program for eligible recipients must have an active Massachusetts State Financial Aid Participation Agreement on file with the Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA).

Audit Requirements:

- a) It shall be the responsibility of each college and university to maintain documentation of a recipient student's eligibility for the Tomorrow's Teachers Scholarship Program.
- b) The Commissioner shall require each campus to furnish annually to the Board of Higher Education a report detailing specific information regarding recipients of the Tomorrow's Teachers Scholarship Program. OSFA will coordinate specification and procedures for this report.
- c) All financial books, records and documents pertaining to this program shall, at all times, be open to inspection, review, and audit by the Commissioner, the State Auditor or their authorized representatives who shall have access to the premises wherever such books, records, and documents are located. The institution shall retain such financial books, records, and documents for seven years. An institution may retain such records for a period of five years if approval is received from the Records Conservation Board in accordance with General Laws, Chapter 30, Section 42.