

Board of County Commissioners

Escambia County, Florida

Title: Tuition Reimbursement Policy – Section II, C.24
Date Adopted: September 18, 2003
Effective Date: October 1, 2015, as amended
Reference:
Policy Amended: August 16, 2007, November 18, 2010 (effective 10/01/10), August 20, 2015

I. PURPOSE

To establish a policy for the Escambia County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) to administer a program of Tuition Reimbursement, adhering to the provisions of Florida Statutes Chapter 112.063, Reimbursement of County Employees for Educational Expenses and Internal Revenue Code 127, Educational Assistance Programs.

II. SCOPE

This policy applies to regular full-time employees who have reached their one-year anniversary of continuous service for the BCC as a regular full-time employee before the start date of course work. Participation in the Tuition Reimbursement Program is strictly voluntarily for the employee. The Tuition Reimbursement Program is a benefit for which employees may apply and is not a condition of employment, right or entitlement. Conflicts which may arise in the application of this policy will be resolved by the County Administrator, or designee.

The Tuition Reimbursement Program is defined as a qualified educational assistance program that is administered by the Human Resources Department. The Program is designed to reimburse employees for job-related college credited courses as provided in Internal Revenue Code (IRC) 127 related to employees current positions or in preparation for future opportunities available in the BCC.

III. POLICY STATEMENT

The BCC encourages its employees to enhance their effectiveness through education and training, to develop their skills and knowledge, and to improve their ability to carry out their assigned duties and to prepare for other opportunities within county operations. This policy will provide employees with reimbursement of tuition costs and eligible fees for approved classes from an approved institution provided they achieve a passing grade of “C” or higher for undergraduate courses and “B” or higher for graduate courses.

IV. GUIDELINES

A. Approved Institutions

Any vocational or technical center, community college, junior college, state college or

university accredited and recognized by the U. S. Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Education that provide college credit classes. Other state approved institutions may be approved.

B. Approved Courses

1. The course will enhance the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the employee for their current position or another position within the BCC.
2. The course is required in the curriculum of a pre-approved degree or program which is a requirement for the employee's current or other BCC position. Such a degree program must have been approved by the Department Director.
3. College classes that are academic courses/degrees from an accredited community college, state college, college, or university via traditional classroom, video-based, distance learning, web-based, e-learning instruction are eligible for approval provided they are approved by the Department Director and Human Resources.
4. The Board of County Commissioners is not intending to fund all college degree programs, but rather those courses, which directly benefit the County and to the extent permitted by this policy.

C. Third Party Agreement

The employee may request payment in advance to be made to the educational institution provided the employee signs a repayment agreement in the event they fail to receive a passing grade or they separate from employment with the BCC prior to completing the course.

V. LIMITATIONS

- A. In accordance with Florida Statute, Chapter 112.063(3) an employee shall not be permitted to utilize any space, personnel, equipment, or supplies of the office by which he/she is employed in the process of fulfilling any of the requirements imposed by the coursework for which he/she is being reimbursed.
- B. Classes shall be scheduled for off-duty hours unless prior approval is obtained from the Division Manager or Department Director. Employees pursuing coursework during duty hours will be placed on Annual Leave, Paid Time Off Leave, MOB, or Leave Without Pay.
- C. At any level of the approval process, the course reimbursement request may be denied if the employee has been suspended for disciplinary purposes, within six (6) months prior to the date of application. Furthermore, if a suspension occurs during the course, reimbursement support will be withdrawn immediately and the employee promptly notified.
- D. Books, travel or other materials required by the course will not be approved for reimbursement.
- E. Tuition reimbursement applies to costs based on Florida residency. Additional costs will not be reimbursed.
- F. No course or class will be approved more than once if the course or class is being repeated due to a substandard grade on the previous attempt.

- G. All forms and information submitted by the employee to secure tuition reimbursement must be true and accurate. Any misrepresentation contained on the form may be grounds for disciplinary action up to and including termination.

VI. REIMBURSEMENT

- A. The BCC reserves the right to place limitations on or temporarily suspend the Tuition Reimbursement Program based on any factor which adversely affects the availability of funds. A suspension of funding will not stop payment for classes already approved for reimbursement once classes have begun, although the percent of reimbursement may be reduced.
- B. The total maximum reimbursement amount for undergraduate or graduate courses will be limited to \$2,400 per fiscal year for each employee.
- C. Reimbursement will only occur after successful completion of course work unless prepayment is authorized pursuant to this policy.

VII. THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

- A. The approval of a course for reimbursement in no way obligates the Board of County Commissioners to grant time off to participate in that course. While it is the Board of County Commissioners intent to encourage employees to take advantage of available educational opportunities and to accommodate them to the greatest extent possible, there may be occasions upon which the job will assume priority over classes (i.e., schedule changes, storm recovery operations or other mandatory overtime).
- B. The Human Resources Director is authorized to disapprove any reimbursement based on budgetary restraints or qualifications under the provisions of this policy.