



# New Jersey State Grants & Scholarships: Supporting Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic

To support students and families as they deal with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their academic pursuits and their financial security, the New Jersey Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA) has implemented new State laws and adjusted administrative policies for HESAA's college financial aid grants and scholarships.

## Lifetime Payment Eligibility Limits

HESAA will exclude the spring 2020 semester from a student's lifetime eligibility limits for all State financial aid programs if the student was unable to successfully complete the semester due to the public health state of emergency, as provided under a new law signed by the Governor in May 2020 (P.L. 2020, c. 31). Each New Jersey institution of higher education has until February 1, 2021 to notify HESAA that a student did not complete the spring 2020 term for reasons related to the public health emergency.

## Institutional Refund Policies

If a student received a financial aid award disbursement for spring 2020 but, due to the public health state of emergency, withdrew from the institution or reduced his or her credits to below full-time (or in the case of a part-time tuition aid grant, reduced his or her credits to below half-time), the institution will not be required to refund that student's State aid awards to HESAA, pursuant to P.L. 2020, c. 31.

## NJ STARS and NJ STARS II

To remain eligible for the merit-based New Jersey Student Tuition Assistance Reward Scholarship programs (NJ STARS and NJ STARS II), students must maintain minimum grade point averages (GPAs) in college. In light of the academic disruption in the spring 2020 semester and the potential impact on students' GPAs of some spring classes' conversion to pass/fail grading, P.L. 2020, c.31 offers special assistance to students who participated in NJ STARS and NJ STARS II programs in Academic Year 2019-2020, to enable them to continue to receive scholarships in future years:

- **NJ STARS:** Instead of being required to earn a GPA of 3.0 by the start of the third semester of enrollment, first-year NJ STARS students who were enrolled in a county college for Academic Year 2019-20 can remain eligible for the NJ STARS scholarship as long as they achieve a cumulative GPA of 3.0 by the start of their fourth semester of enrollment.
- **NJ STARS II:** Students who enrolled in a county college in Academic Year 2019-2020 for their second year of NJ STARS participation will now qualify for NJ STARS II if they graduate with a GPA of 3.0 or higher.

- **NJ STARS II:** Instead of being required to earn a GPA of 3.25 by the end of their second semester at a four-year institution to remain eligible for NJ STARS II funding, students participating in the NJ STARS II program in Academic Year 2019-2020 now have until the end of their third semester of enrollment to achieve a GPA of 3.25 or higher to remain eligible for future NJ STARS II awards.

### **Financial Aid Renewal Deadline Extended to June 1**

In April, Governor Murphy announced HESAA's extension of the deadline for current college students to renew their application for State financial aid in the upcoming academic year. Instead of the regular April 15 deadline for renewal students to complete their annual Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), in recognition of the impact of New Jersey's public health emergency the deadline was extended to **June 1, 2020** for both FAFSA completion and NJ Dreamers who want to renew their State financial aid for Academic Year 2020-21.

Complete the FAFSA here: [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov)

NJ Dreamers apply here: <https://www.hesaa.org/Pages/NJAlternativeApplication.aspx>

### **Law Enforcement Memorial Scholarship (LEOM) and Survivor Tuition Benefits (STB) programs**

The Law Enforcement Memorial Scholarship benefits dependent children of New Jersey law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty. LEOM awards cover up to four years of the cost of college attendance, less other scholarships, grants, benefits, and other State financial aid. The Survivor Tuition Benefits scholarship benefits eligible children and surviving spouses of New Jersey firefighters, emergency service workers, and law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty. The award provides students with free tuition at any public or private institution of higher education in New Jersey. STB awards cannot exceed the highest tuition charged at a New Jersey public institution.

To support the dependents and spouses of law enforcement officers and other first responders who are on the front lines of New Jersey's efforts to address the pandemic emergency, HESAA determined that the definition of death "in the line of duty" will include those who lose their lives to COVID-19 that they contracted while serving the public. As a result, the dependents and spouses of those who lost their lives to the COVID-19 disease after becoming infected by the virus in the line of duty will qualify for the Law Enforcement Memorial Scholarship and Survivors Tuition Benefits programs.

Separately, HESAA has implemented a law enacted earlier this year, which eliminated the time limit on Survivor Tuition Benefits for spouses. Originally, the tuition benefit expired eight years after the spouse's death. Under the new law, there is no deadline and these surviving spouses can pursue postsecondary education when it is right for them. For the details of the recent Survivor Tuition Benefits legislation, please click here:

[https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2018/Bills/PL19/378\\_.PDF](https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2018/Bills/PL19/378_.PDF)

### **Revised Income Due to Unemployment: Impact on State Aid Eligibility**

HESAA recognizes that students and their family's financial circumstances may have changed as a result of the COVID-19 emergency and the subsequent impact on the economy. During the public health emergency, HESAA has suspended its usual 10-week waiting period for students to have their family income re-evaluated due to unemployment. Students applying for need-based financial aid for Academic Year 2020-2021 may request a re-evaluation due to financial changes more recent than the 2018 "prior prior year" income reported on the FAFSA or NJ Alternative Financial Aid Application. To request a "change in circumstances" income re-evaluation, students should contact the financial aid office at the higher education institution they attend or at which they plan to enroll.

### **Community College Opportunity Grant (CCOG) policy adjustments**

Taking into account developments related to the pandemic, HESAA adjusted two policies for the Community College Opportunity Grant program. Given expansion of online instruction in spring 2020, HESAA expanded the definition of "approved educational fees" covered by CCOG awards to include online fees charged to county college students. HESAA also clarified that county college students' CCOG awards will not be reduced due to any emergency grants they receive that were funded by the federal Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act enacted in March 2020.

To learn how HESAA is supporting NJCLASS family loan borrowers, click [here](#).