

SECTION 5.8: TUITION REIMBURSEMENT PROGRAM

A. POLICY

Hamilton County provides eligible full-time employees reimbursement for tuition costs for an appropriate program of study related to their current position or a promoted position in their classification series at an accredited college or university. An employee will receive reimbursement based on the criteria outlined in this policy.

The tuition reimbursement program is a management prerogative and denial is not grievable. There is no appeal, but the applicant will be given written explanation of the reason(s) for denial upon request.

The annual approval of this program is based on the availability of funds and may be discontinued at any time. Employees will be informed of the availability of funds as application and approval for reimbursement is required prior to enrolling in a course of study.

B. RATIONALE

Hamilton County considers employees its most important resource and values professional growth, creativity, and leadership. The continuing education and training of employees related to their jobs serves to:

- provide incentive in employee recruitment and retention;
- enhance employee engagement and ability to perform current job responsibilities;
- qualify employees for promotional positions;
- facilitate succession planning; and
- ultimately improve delivery of services to the public

C. APPROPRIATE COURSE OF STUDY

To be eligible for the tuition reimbursement program, courses must be taken at a college, university, or joint vocational school accredited through either the "U.S. Department of Education" (www.ed.gov), "The Higher Learning Commission" (www.hlcommissions.org), or "Cognia" (www.cognia.org).

Course work must be in pursuit of an eligible employee's Associates, Bachelors, or Masters. The degree must enhance the employee's ability to perform their job responsibilities and/or increase the employee's advancement potential.

Hamilton County recognizes that students must take elective courses to earn a degree. In order to be approved for reimbursement under the program, elective courses must enhance the employee's ability to perform their current job responsibilities or be directly related to a current County function.

Requests for online courses (not degrees) will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Approval is required from the Department Head and Human Resources.

Effective: January 1, 2001

Revised: 10/11/02, 05/15/04, 08/01/05, 07/10/07, 05/19/22

D. COURSES AND EXPENSES THAT DO NOT QUALIFY

- Certification or accreditation courses, workshops, seminars, etc. (i.e., forklift) taken to meet job requirements but not taken towards the completion of a college degree
- Review courses taken in preparation for testing and exams
- College entrance and qualifying exams (i.e., SAT, ACT, GRE)
- Courses audited without college credit
- Courses re-taken because of loss of credit due to transfer unless the transfer occurs because the employee relocates at the request of the organization
- Equivalence exams; life experience credits
- Standardized tests to earn college credit by examination offered by the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) or other exams that waive a degree requirement
- Textbooks, tools, or other supplies
- Meals, lodging, and transportation
- Fees for parking, student activities, etc.
- Education involving sports, games, or hobbies

E. COST PER CREDIT HOUR

The cost per credit hour shall be calculated on the published in-state cost per credit hour of the University of Cincinnati for the academic year for which the employee is requesting reimbursement for the level of degree sought and shall not exceed seven (7) hours per semester. An employee attending a school with a higher cost per credit hour shall be responsible for the difference in cost per credit hour between the University of Cincinnati and the school they are attending. An employee choosing a school with a lower credit hour cost than the University of Cincinnati will be reimbursed on the basis of actual costs incurred.

F. ELIGIBILITY

An employee is considered eligible for tuition reimbursement when the following criteria are met:

- Full-time employment in a non-bargaining unit position, or in a bargaining unit position whose contract provides for this benefit.
- Successful completion of their initial probationary period.
- Not on any extended leave (excluding regular sick or vacation leave) while taking courses.
- Last annual performance review is "satisfactory" or higher. If an employee has not received an annual performance appraisal, any reimbursement will be held until the completion of the annual performance appraisal.
- Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory.
- Not currently subject to serious disciplinary action as determined by the individual Department.

Effective: January 1, 2001

Revised: 10/11/02, 05/15/04, 08/01/05, 07/10/07, 05/19/22

G. APPLICATION PROCESS

Employees must contact their immediate supervisor about tuition reimbursement and application process. A completed application must be submitted to their immediate supervisor and Department Head at least thirty (30) days prior to the first day of classes.

Applications are then forwarded to Human Resources for final approval/denial. Employees will be informed of the status of their application and availability of funds prior to the start of the course(s). No retroactive approval will be granted.

H. REIMBURSEMENT

1. The employee is responsible for the initial payment of all tuition.
2. Costs associated with the chosen course of study (i.e., books, supplies, lab fees, etc.) are not eligible for reimbursement.
3. Reimbursement is based on the employee's final grade as follows:
 - a. Grade A = 100%
 - b. Grade B or C = 90%
 - c. Pass = 75%
 - d. Grades below those noted above, no grade or incomplete = no reimbursement. An incomplete that is changed will be reimbursed based on the schedule above.
 - e. Audited classes are not reimbursable.
4. Pass/Fail classes taken as a requirement of a degree program will be reimbursed at 75% when a "Pass" grade is received.
5. Requests for reimbursement must be submitted within 90 days after completion of a class.
6. The maximum amount reimbursable to an employee under this program is \$5,250.00 per calendar year (the maximum amount allowed by the IRS before tax must be withheld).

I. REDUCTION OF BENEFIT

The amount of the reimbursement received will be reduced dollar for dollar by the amount of grants, scholarships and other financial aid or course discounts which are paid directly to the institution and which the employee does not have to pay back.

J. EMPLOYMENT COMMITMENT

The employee agrees to remain in full-time or part-time employment while pursuing the approved degree program. A change of employment status may affect the amount of reimbursement as previously described and participation in the tuition reimbursement program may be jeopardized.

The employee agrees to remain employed in a full or part-time capacity for 4160 hours (two full-time work years or four part-time work years at 50%) after the completion of the degree or final reimbursement, whichever is last.

Effective: January 1, 2001

Revised: 10/11/02, 05/15/04, 08/01/05, 07/10/07, 05/19/22

If the employee changes status or employment is terminated for any reason other than death or disability during the time the employee is completing the degree program or during the commitment period outlined above, Hamilton County reserves the right to deduct the amount owed from the employee's final payout of unused vacation and/or compensatory time, including in the case of retirement, eligible sick leave payout, or through other payback arrangements approved by Human Resources.

K. QUALITY ASSURANCE

1. The Human Resources Department and Program Administrator will submit to the Board of County Commissioners and the County Administrator a report detailing the annual and accumulated cost of this program, including the number of employees utilizing the program and the degree or program of study being sought.
2. A periodic review of the program shall also be conducted by the County Administrator's Office.
3. Based on the preceding reports and availability of funding the County Administrator will recommend continuation of this program.
4. Should there be any conflicts between this policy and the Tuition Reimbursement Plan Document, adopted by the Board of County Commissions on 12/19/2001 and amended from time to time, the provisions of the Plan document shall prevail.

Effective: January 1, 2001

Revised: 10/11/02, 05/15/04, 08/01/05, 07/10/07, 05/19/22