

## Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation

Tuesday, September 27, 2022

### **DECISION ITEM G**

Tennessee Reconnect Grant Rules

### **Staff Recommendation**

(1) Adopt Chapter 1640-01-28 as Rulemaking Hearing Rules;  
(2) Authorize the Executive Director to make any necessary technical corrections to these rules including changes suggested by the Tennessee Attorney General.

### **Background**

Rules submitted for review include the following modifications:

1. Added, deleted, and revised definitions to be consistent with current terminology and practice
2. Added clarifying provisions to support expansion of eligibility to age 23 enacted by PC 1116
3. Added clarifying provision to address the application of terminating event limits in situations where a student has yet to receive a TN Reconnect award or changes their major after completing all credential requirements
4. Edited common administrative provisions, such as application deadlines, Leave of Absence, Refund Policy, Award Made in Error, and Appeal and Exception Process, to be consistent with other TSAC programs
5. Reworded and reorganized existing provisions to provide better clarity around existing concepts and practices, such as eligible program of study and exceptions to minimum required enrollment levels to be consistent with other TSAC programs

A public Rulemaking Hearing was held on September 16, 2022. No members of the public attended and no comments were submitted. No modifications have been made to the draft rules since the hearing.

These rules will be implemented following approval by the Tennessee Attorney General and subsequent filing with the Secretary of State.

### **Supporting Document**

*Rules of the Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation, Chapter 1640-01-28, Tennessee Reconnect Grant.*

**RULES  
OF  
TENNESSEE STUDENT ASSISTANCE CORPORATION**

**CHAPTER 1640-01-28  
TENNESSEE RECONNECT GRANT**

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**1640-01-28-.01 DEFINITIONS.**

- (1) Certificate: The term is defined in T.C.A. 49-4-902.
- (2) College Success Program: An approved suite of resources for pre-enrollment, enrollment, and retention support offered through the Navigate Reconnect program and eligible postsecondary institutions based on the goals and needs of individual adult students.
- (3) Continuous enrollment: The term is defined in T.C.A. 49-4-902.
- (4) Eligible postsecondary institution: The term is defined in T.C.A. § 49-4-708.
- (5) Eligible program of study: The term is defined in T.C.A. § 49-4-902.
- (6) FAFSA: The term is defined in T.C.A. § 49-4-902.
- (7) FAFSA verification: The process used by a postsecondary institution to verify the accuracy of information submitted on a student's FAFSA. For purposes of these rules, this process shall apply to verification documents required by the U.S. Department of Education regardless of how the student is selected.
- (8) Gift aid: The term is defined in T.C.A. § 49-4-708.
- (9) Immediate family member: Spouse, parents, grandparents, children, or siblings.
- (10) Navigate Reconnect Program: A THEC-based initiative focused on engaging adult learners and helping them enroll in a postsecondary institution and persist to graduation while providing institution-neutral advising and navigation support specifically to adults
- (11) Part-time: A measure of the level of enrollment or attendance of a "part-time student" under T.C.A. § 49-4-902.
- (12) Semester: The term is defined in T.C.A. § 49-4-902.
- (13) THEC: Tennessee Higher Education Commission
- (14) TSAC: Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation.

- (15) Tuition and mandatory fees: Tuition and mandatory fees required for the enrollment or attendance of students at eligible postsecondary institutions that are charged to all students and shall not include fees charged for the TN eCampus courses, online courses, specific programs of study, books, or supplies even if such fees are considered necessary for enrollment.

**Authority:** T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-708, 49-4-902, 49-4-924, and 49-4-944.

#### **1640-01-28-.02 SCHOLARSHIP AWARD AMOUNTS.**

- (1) The Tennessee Reconnect Grant is intended to provide financial assistance to offset tuition and mandatory fees associated with pursuing a certificate or associate degree at an eligible postsecondary institution after all other gift aid has been credited to tuition and mandatory fees.
- (2) Award amounts for the program shall be determined in accordance with T.C.A. § 49-4-944 and shall be set in the General Appropriations Act.
- (3) All tuition discounts and waivers for which a student qualifies shall first be deducted from the student's tuition and mandatory fees before gift aid is credited.
- (4) All gift aid from sources other than the Tennessee Reconnect Grant shall be credited first to tuition and mandatory fees to reduce the student's Tennessee Reconnect Grant award. In any given semester, if all other gift aid exceeds tuition and mandatory fees then the student shall not be eligible for a Tennessee Reconnect Grant award in that semester.
- (5) The receipt of a Tennessee Reconnect Grant award is contingent upon admission to and enrollment in an eligible postsecondary institution. Qualifying for the Tennessee Reconnect Grant does not guarantee admission to an eligible postsecondary institution.

**Authority:** T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-924, and 49-4-944.

#### **1640-01-28-.03 DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS.**

- (1) TSAC shall create a certification roster for each institution. The roster shall contain students who have met all requirements to receive a Tennessee Reconnect Grant award.
- (2) The eligible postsecondary institution shall certify each student's eligibility for a financial award from the Tennessee Reconnect Grant program based on eligibility requirements established in these rules.
- (3) Once the eligible postsecondary institution has certified the student's eligibility for a financial award, the certification information shall be electronically transmitted to TSAC.
- (4) TSAC shall process a payment request directly to the eligible postsecondary institution on behalf of all Tennessee Reconnect Grant recipients who are eligible for a financial award. No funds shall be disbursed directly to the students or a Navigate Reconnect Program.

**Authority:** T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-924, and 49-4-944.

#### **1640-01-28-.04 APPLICATION PROCESS.**

- (1) Students shall complete the Tennessee Reconnect Grant application for the initial year of enrollment.

- (2) Students participating in the Tennessee Reconnect Grant shall file a FAFSA, or renewal FAFSA, in each year of program participation. The FAFSA must be submitted by mail or electronically as directed in the FAFSA instructions.
- (3) Deadlines for FAFSA filing and Tennessee Reconnect Grant applications will be published on TSAC's website. It is the responsibility of the student to submit the application and the FAFSA in a timely manner to ensure each is received by the published deadlines.
- (4) The TSAC Executive Director is authorized to modify published deadlines for well-documented extraordinary cause, where necessary to protect the public interest.

**Authority:** T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-924, and 49-4-944.

**1640-01-28-.05 ELIGIBILITY.**

- (1) To receive a Tennessee Reconnect Grant award, a student must:
  - (a) Meet the requirements of T.C.A. § 49-4-944;
  - (b) Timely submit all necessary documentation to allow the postsecondary institution to complete FAFSA verification. FAFSA verification shall be completed regardless of eligibility for federal or state grants;
  - (c) Maintain continuous enrollment and attend at least part-time, except in the following circumstances:
    1. The semester of graduation, if part-time enrollment is not required to complete the student's eligible program of study;
    2. When the student receives an approved leave of absence from part-time enrollment;
    3. In any semester in which the eligible postsecondary institution does not offer at least six (6) semester hours of coursework applicable to the student's eligible program of study;
    4. If the student's eligible program of study requires less than part-time enrollment for a semester; or
    5. A summer semester; and
  - (d) Participate in a College Success Program under the direction of THEC.
  - (e) A student who applies for a Tennessee Reconnect Grant and participates in a College Success Program is not subject to continuing eligibility requirements or terminating events until the first semester in which the student receives funding from a Tennessee Reconnect Grant.

**Authority:** T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-924, and 49-4-944.

**1640-01-28-.06 TERMINATING EVENTS.**

- (1) A student shall receive the Tennessee Reconnect Grant until reaching a terminating event as described in T.C.A. § 49-4-944.

- (2) A student reaches the terminating event of attaining an associate degree or certificate under T.C.A. § 49-4-944 in any semester in which the student completes all academic course requirements of the student's declared eligible program of study. Failure of the student to complete institutional requirements related to the process of conferring the associate degree or certificate, but unrelated to the completion of the required courses, will not allow the student to continue to be eligible for the scholarship in subsequent semesters.
- (3) Notwithstanding paragraph (2) above, a student may continue to receive a Tennessee Reconnect Grant for an associate degree or sequential certificate following completion of a certificate that directly leads to the associate degree program or sequential certificate.

**Authority:** T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-924, and 49-4-944.

#### **1640-01-28-.07 PERSONAL OR MEDICAL LEAVE OF ABSENCE.**

- (1) A student may be granted a medical or personal leave of absence from continuous or part-time enrollment at an eligible postsecondary institution if all other applicable eligibility criteria are met. Each eligible postsecondary institution shall adopt procedures for considering student requests for leaves of absence. Allowable medical or personal reasons include, but are not limited to, illness of the student, illness or death of an immediate family member, pregnancy, extreme financial hardship of the student or student's immediate family, fulfillment of a religious commitment encouraged of members of that faith, part-time attendance at an eligible four-year postsecondary institution while waiting for admission to an eligible postsecondary program, fulfillment of required military service, a student's participation in an internship or co-op program that is required or encouraged as part of the academic program in which the student is enrolled, or other extraordinary circumstances beyond the student's control where attendance by the student creates a substantial hardship. In the event an institution denies a student's request for a medical or personal leave of absence, the student may appeal the decision in accordance with these rules.

**Authority:** T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-924, and 49-4-944.

#### **1640-01-28-.08 AWARD MADE IN ERROR.**

- (1) If a student receives a Tennessee Reconnect Grant award and it is later determined that the award or some portion of the award was made in error, the student or the postsecondary institution may be required to repay the amount awarded in error.
- (2) If TSAC determines that the error was through no fault of the student, the student will not be required to repay the amount of the payment made in error.
- (3) Repayment from the student will be required if TSAC determines that fraud was committed by, or the error was the fault of, the student. When repayment is required, the student may not receive additional student aid from TSAC until repayment is made.
- (4) Repayment from the eligible postsecondary institution will be required if TSAC determines that the error was the fault of the institution.

**Authority:** T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-924, and 49-4-944.

#### **1640-01-28-.09 REFUND POLICY.**

- (1) If a recipient of a Tennessee Reconnect Grant award fails to complete a semester for any reason, the eligible postsecondary institution shall apply its refund policy to determine whether a refund may be required and whether funds must be returned to TSAC. The eligible

postsecondary institution shall provide the student with a notice indicating the amount to be returned to the student and the amount to be refunded to TSAC. Additionally, the eligible postsecondary institution shall notify TSAC of the refund, which shall be noted on the student's record. The eligible postsecondary institution shall also be responsible for obtaining repayment from the student if necessary. The student shall be ineligible for student aid from TSAC until the refund is paid.

**Authority:** *T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-924, and 49-4-944.*

**1640-01-28-.10 APPEAL AND EXCEPTION PROCESS.**

- (1) Each eligible postsecondary institution shall use its existing Institutional Review Panel (IRP) for purposes of reviewing and rendering decisions regarding appeals for the Tennessee Reconnect Grant. The IRP shall use the same procedures and timelines as those that currently exist for the review of Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship (TELS) appeals as outlined in Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. 1640-01-19.
- (2) TSAC shall use the existing TSAC Appeals Panel to consider appeals and render decisions for those students who appeal a decision made by the IRP and for appeals made directly to TSAC. The same guidelines shall exist for appeals of the Tennessee Reconnect Grant as those that are currently in place for TELS as outlined in Tenn. Comp. R & Regs.1640-01-19. A decision of the TSAC Appeals Panel made on the merits of the appeal is the final administrative remedy available to the student.

**Authority:** *T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-924, and 49-4-944.*

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**1640-01-28-.01 DEFINITIONS.**

- (1) Certificate: [The term is defined in T.C.A. 49-4-902](#)~~A credential, other than a degree or diploma, the receipt of which indicates satisfactory completion of training in a program of study offered by an eligible postsecondary institution.~~
- (2) College Success Program: An approved suite of resources for pre-enrollment, enrollment, and retention support offered through the ~~Tennessee Reconnect Communities~~[Navigate Reconnect program](#) and eligible postsecondary institutions based on the goals and needs of individual adult students.
- (3) Continuous ~~e~~Enrollment: The term is defined in T.C.A. 49-4-902.
- ~~(4) Cumulative Grade Point Average: The grade point average as calculated by the eligible postsecondary institution.~~
- ~~(5) Degree: A two-year associate degree conferred on students by an eligible postsecondary institution.~~
- ~~(4)~~(6) Eligible ~~p~~Postsecondary ~~i~~nstitution: The term is defined in T.C.A. § 49-4-708.
- ~~(5)~~(7) Eligible ~~p~~Program of ~~s~~tudy: ~~A federal Title IV-eligible curriculum of courses leading to a certificate or associate degree;~~[The term is defined in T.C.A. § 49-4-902.](#)
- ~~(6)~~(8) FAFSA: The term is defined in T.C.A. § 49-4-902.
- ~~(7)~~(9) FAFSA ~~v~~erification: The process used by a postsecondary institution to verify the accuracy of information submitted on a student's FAFSA. For purposes of these rules, this process shall apply to verification documents required by the U.S. Department of Education regardless of how the student is selected.
- ~~(8)~~(10) Gift ~~a~~id: The term is defined in T.C.A. § 49-4-708.
- ~~(9)~~(11) Immediate ~~f~~amily ~~m~~ember: Spouse, parents, grandparents, children, or siblings.
- ~~(12) Independent Student: A student who is classified as independent as determined by the FAFSA.~~

(10) Navigate Reconnect Program: A THEC-based initiative focused on engaging adult learners and helping them enroll in a postsecondary institution and persist to graduation while providing institution-neutral advising and navigation support specifically to adults

~~(11)(13) Part-time Student: A measure of the level of enrollment or attendance of a “part-time student” under~~ The term is defined in T.C.A. § 49-4-902.

~~(14) Satisfactory Academic Progress: Progress in a course of study in accordance with the standards and practices used for Title IV programs by the eligible postsecondary institution at which the student is currently enrolled.~~

(12)(15) Semester: The term is defined in T.C.A. § 49-4-902.

~~(16) Tennessee Reconnect Community: A locally-based collaborative designated by THEC which is focused on engaging adult learners and helping them enroll in a postsecondary institution and persist to graduation while providing community-based, institution-neutral advising and navigation support specifically to adults.~~

(13)(17) THEC: Tennessee Higher Education Commission

~~(18) Title IV: The term is defined in T.C.A. § 49-4-902.~~

(14)(19) TSAC: Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation.

(15)(20) Tuition and ~~M~~andatory ~~F~~ees: Tuition and mandatory fees required for the enrollment or attendance of students at eligible postsecondary institutions that are charged to all students, and shall not include fees charged for the TN eCampus courses, online courses, specific programs of study, books, or supplies even if such fees are considered necessary for enrollment.

**Authority:** T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-708, 49-4-902, 49-4-924, and 49-4-944.

#### **1640-01-28-.02 SCHOLARSHIP AWARD AMOUNTS.**

- (1) The Tennessee Reconnect Grant is intended to provide financial assistance to offset tuition and mandatory fees associated with pursuing a certificate or associate degree at an eligible postsecondary institution after all other gift aid has been credited to tuition and mandatory fees.
- (2) Award amounts for the program shall be determined in accordance with T.C.A. § 49-4-944 and shall be set in the General Appropriations Act.
- (3) All tuition discounts and waivers for which a student qualifies shall first be deducted from the student's tuition and mandatory fees before gift aid is credited.
- (4) All gift aid from sources other than the Tennessee Reconnect Grant shall be credited first to tuition and mandatory fees to reduce the student's Tennessee Reconnect Grant award. In any given semester, if all other gift aid exceeds tuition and mandatory fees then the student shall not be eligible for ~~a~~the Tennessee Reconnect Grant award in that semester.
- (5) The receipt of a Tennessee Reconnect Grant award is contingent upon admission to and enrollment in an eligible postsecondary institution. Qualifying for the Tennessee Reconnect Grant does not guarantee admission to an eligible postsecondary institution.

**Authority:** T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-924, and 49-4-944.



**1640-01-28-.03 DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS.**

- (1) TSAC shall create a certification roster for each institution. The roster shall contain students who have met all requirements ~~to receive afor the~~ Tennessee Reconnect Grant ~~award~~.
- (2) The eligible postsecondary institution shall certify each student's eligibility for a financial award from the Tennessee Reconnect Grant program based on ~~continuing~~ eligibility requirements established in these rules. ~~The award amount reported certified to TSAC shall be the amount of tuition and mandatory fees remaining after other gift aid has first been applied to the student's tuition and mandatory fees. All tuition waivers and discounts for which a student qualifies shall first be deducted from the student's tuition and mandatory fees before gift aid is credited.~~
- (3) Once the eligible postsecondary institution has certified the student's eligibility for a financial award, the certification information shall be electronically transmitted to TSAC.
- (4) TSAC shall process a payment request directly to the eligible postsecondary institution on behalf of all Tennessee Reconnect Grant recipients who are eligible for a financial award. No funds shall be disbursed directly to the students or a ~~Tennessee Reconnect Community~~Navigate Reconnect Program.

**Authority:** T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-924, and 49-4-944.

**1640-01-28-.04 APPLICATION PROCESS.**

- (1) Students shall complete the Tennessee Reconnect Grant application for the initial year of enrollment.
- ~~(2)~~(4) Students participating in the Tennessee Reconnect Grant shall file a FAFSA, or renewal FAFSA, in each year of program participation. The FAFSA must be submitted by mail or electronically as directed in the FAFSA instructions. ~~Students shall file the FAFSA or renewal FAFSA according to the following deadlines:~~
  - ~~(a) No later than September 1 for fall enrollment, or~~
  - ~~(b) No later than February 1 for spring and summer enrollment.~~
- ~~(2)~~ ~~Students shall complete the Tennessee Reconnect Grant application for each the initial year of enrollment.~~
- (3) Deadlines for FAFSA filing and Tennessee Reconnect Grant applications will be published on TSAC's website. It is the responsibility of the student to submit the application and the FAFSA in a timely manner to ensure each is received by the published deadlines.
- (4) The TSAC Executive Director is authorized to modify published deadlines for well-documented extraordinary cause, where necessary to protect the public interest.

**Authority:** T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-924, and 49-4-944.

**1640-01-28-.05 ELIGIBILITY.**

- (1) To receive a Tennessee Reconnect Grant award, a student must~~Students meeting initial and continuing eligibility requirements shall:~~
  - (a) Meet the requirements of T.C.A. § 49-4-944;

- (b) Timely submit all necessary documentation to allow the postsecondary institution to complete FAFSA verification. FAFSA verification shall be completed regardless of eligibility for federal or state grants;
- (c) Maintain continuous Enrollment and attend at least ~~part-time~~part-time, in each semester of the program. A student may enroll less than part time in except in the following circumstances:
1. The semester of graduation, if part-time enrollment is not required to complete the student's eligible program of study; when not required by the program of study, and for semesters in which the student receives an approved leave of absence; and
  2. When the student receives an approved leave of absence from part-time enrollment;
  3. In any semester in which the eligible postsecondary institution does not offer at least six (6) semester hours of coursework applicable to the student's eligible program of study;
  4. If the student's eligible program of study requires less than part-time enrollment for a semester; or
  5. A summer semester; and
- (d) Participate in a College Success Program under the direction of THEC ~~and a Tennessee Reconnect Community.~~
- (e) A student who applies for a Tennessee Reconnect Grant and participates in a College Success Program is not subject to continuing eligibility requirements or terminating events until the first semester in which the student receives funding from a Tennessee Reconnect Grant.

**Authority:** T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-924, and 49-4-944.

#### **1640-01-28-.06 TERMINATING EVENTS.**

- (1) A student shall receive the Tennessee Reconnect Grant until reaching a terminating event as described in T.C.A. § 49-4-944.
- (2) A student reaches the terminating event of attaining an associate degree or certificate under T.C.A. § 49-4-944 in any semester in which the student completes all academic course requirements of the student's declared eligible program of study. Failure of the student to complete institutional requirements related to the process of conferring the associate degree or certificate, but unrelated to the completion of the required courses, will not allow the student to continue to be eligible for the scholarship in subsequent semesters.
- (3)(2) Notwithstanding paragraph (2) above, A student may continue to receive a Tennessee Reconnect Grant for an associate degree or sequential certificate following completion of a certificate ~~which~~that directly leads to the associate degree program or sequential certificate.

**Authority:** T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-924, and 49-4-944.

#### **1640-01-28-.07 PERSONAL OR MEDICAL LEAVE OF ABSENCE.**

- (1) A student may be granted a medical or personal leave of absence from continuous or part-time enrollment at an eligible postsecondary institution ~~as long as if~~ all other applicable eligibility criteria are met. Each eligible postsecondary institution shall adopt procedures for considering student requests for leaves of absence. Allowable medical or personal reasons ~~may include, but are not limited to,~~ illness of the student; illness or death of an immediate family member; pregnancy; extreme financial hardship of the student or student's immediate family; fulfillment of a religious commitment encouraged of members of that faith, part-time attendance at an eligible four-year postsecondary institution while waiting for admission to an eligible postsecondary program, fulfillment of required military service; a student's participation in an internship or co-op program that is required or encouraged as part of the academic program in which the student is enrolled, or other extraordinary circumstances beyond the student's control where attendance by the student creates a substantial hardship. In the event an institution denies a student's request for a medical or personal leave of absence, the student may appeal the decision in accordance with these rules.

**Authority:** T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-924, and 49-4-944.

#### 1640-01-28-.08 AWARD MADE IN ERROR.

- (1) If a student receives a Tennessee Reconnect Grant award and it is later determined that the award or some portion of the award was made in error, the student or the postsecondary institution may be required to repay the amount awarded in error.
- ~~(2)~~(1) ~~Repayment from the student shall not be required if~~ TSAC determines that the error was through no fault of the student, the student will not be required to repay the amount of the payment made in error.
- ~~(3)~~(2) Repayment from the student ~~will~~shall be required if TSAC determines that fraud was committed by, or the error was ~~due to~~ the fault of, the student. When repayment is required, the student may not receive additional student aid from TSAC until repayment is made.
- ~~(4)~~(3) Repayment from the eligible postsecondary institution will be required if TSAC determines that the error was ~~due to~~ the fault of the institution.

**Authority:** T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-924, and 49-4-944.

#### 1640-01-28-.09 REFUND POLICY.

- (1) If a recipient of ~~the~~ Tennessee Reconnect Grant award fails to complete a semester for any reason, the eligible postsecondary institution shall apply its refund policy to determine whether a refund may be required and whether funds must be returned to TSAC. The eligible postsecondary institution shall provide the student with a notice indicating the amount to be returned to the student and the amount to be refunded to TSAC. ~~Additionally,~~ the eligible postsecondary institution shall notify TSAC of the refund, which shall be noted on the student's record. The eligible postsecondary institution shall also be responsible for obtaining repayment from the student if necessary. The student shall be ineligible for student aid from TSAC until the refund is paid.

**Authority:** T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-924, and 49-4-944.

#### 1640-01-28-.10 APPEAL AND EXCEPTION PROCESS.

- (1) Each eligible postsecondary institution shall use ~~its~~their existing Institutional Review Panel (IRP) for purposes of reviewing and rendering decisions regarding appeals for the Tennessee Reconnect Grant. The IRP shall use the same procedures and timelines as those that

currently exist for the review of Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship (TELS) appeals as outlined in Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. 1640-01-19.

- (2) TSAC shall use the existing ~~TELS~~-TSAC Appeals Panel to consider appeals and render decisions for those students who appeal a decision made by the IRP and for appeals made directly to TSAC. The same guidelines shall exist for appeals of the Tennessee Reconnect Grant as those that are currently in place for TELS as outlined in Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. 1640-01-19. [A decision of the TSAC Appeals Panel made on the merits of the appeal is the final administrative remedy available to the student.](#)

**Authority:** T.C.A. §§ 49-4-201, 49-4-924, and 49-4-944.