



Governor's Merit Scholarship

Overview

Each year, 35-40% of Ohio's highest achieving high school graduates attend college or university in another state. Approximately 66% of all U.S. college students stay to work in the state from which they graduate, and in Ohio that number is closer to 70%. Ohio has demonstrated significant success, recently, in attracting and retaining businesses. It is paramount that Ohio also competes to attract and retain a well-educated workforce.

Under the leadership of Governor DeWine and the Ohio Legislature, Ohio recently established the Governor's Merit Scholarship (GMS) program, funded at \$20 million for the first year of the program. The objectives of the GMS are to:

- Reduce financial barriers preventing Ohio's top high school graduates from pursuing higher education;
- Recognize the impressive scholastic achievement of Ohio's top graduates; and
- Incentivize Ohio's high achieving high school students to attend an institution of higher education (IHE) in Ohio.

The GMS provides up to \$5,000/year in financial assistance to high school seniors who are identified as graduating in the top 5% of their class. GMS funds are applied against the student's [cost of attendance \(CoA\)](#) and are refundable to the student, if applicable.

Student Eligibility

Student eligibility requirements are as follows:

- The student is a resident of the State of Ohio, according to Ohio Residency Rule 3333-1-10.
- The student has registered for selective service as required by federal and state law, if applicable.
- The student is enrolled in a public or chartered nonpublic high school and determined to be in the top 5% of their class as described below.
- The student is homeschooled or attends a dropout recovery high school and is determined to be within the top 5% of applicants as described below.
- The student is a junior on track for graduation (as determined by the student's high school) at the point of eligibility determination.
- The student graduates from high school on time (within one year of the point of eligibility determination).
 - » *Note: Students who face extenuating circumstances may appeal this requirement (e.g.: major illness that delays on-time graduation, etc.).*
- The student is enrolling at a qualifying institution of higher education (IHE), as specified by law.

Qualifying Institutions of Higher Education

Qualifying IHEs are defined as one of the following:

- A state institution of higher education, as defined in section 3345.011 of the Revised Code;
- A private nonprofit institution of higher education that holds a certificate of authorization pursuant to Chapter 1713. of the Revised Code.

A qualifying IHE shall not make changes to scholarship or financial aid programs offered by that institution that have the goal or net effect of shifting the cost burden of those programs to the GMS program. Qualifying institutions of higher education that enroll students receiving the GMS shall maintain the same level of merit-based financial aid that the institution provided in the most recent academic year in the aggregate to all students or on a per-student basis.

Qualifying IHEs will be responsible for verifying student enrollment per the institution's usual census date and student qualification for scholarship renewal.

Process for Eligibility Determination

Notification of Number of Scholarships per School: The Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) will provide each public and participating chartered nonpublic high school with the number of students who are eligible for the GMS from that high school through use of a secure application portal: meritscholarship.ohio.gov.

ODHE will determine the number of eligible students in public school districts based on the number of students enrolled and in the third year of the graduation cohort as of the end of the school year. For chartered, nonpublic schools, ODHE will determine the number of eligible students based on the number of students enrolled at the end of the 11th grade. ODHE will receive this data from the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (DEW). Unless data are available at the individual high school level, the number of eligible students will be computed per district. In such cases where a district has more than one high school, that district will divide those GMS-eligible students among the district's high schools proportionally to the population of eligible students in each high school.

ODHE will communicate the number of scholarships per school by July 1 each year.

- *Note: For the class of 2024, notification of the number of scholarships per school is expected to occur by early December.*

Determination of Top 5%: Public school districts and participating nonpublic high schools shall determine which students fall within the top 5% of their class. Determination of a student's membership within the top 5% of the class shall be based upon student grade point average (GPA) at the end of their junior year, and calculated in compliance with state law (ORC 3365.04(E)) and guidelines established by the Chancellor for the purpose of implementing the GMS program. If a district or high school has an official policy for determining class rank that is compliant with state law, but not consistent with the Chancellor's guidelines under the GMS program, the district or school is permitted to follow its established policy for determining a student's membership within the top 5% of the class.

Each school shall receive only the number of GMS awards communicated. In such cases where ranking by GPA results in a tie, the school or district will determine which student(s) receive an offer of GMS. The district or school is encouraged to consider one or more factors beyond GPA to break such ties. These factors may include (but are not limited to):

- Established district or school policy;
- Scores on standardized college entrance examinations (e.g.: ACT, SAT);
- GPA for core or college-preparatory coursework;
- Involvement and leadership in extracurricular activities; and
- Financial need.

Each public and participating nonpublic high school will report to ODHE the identity of the students who qualify for a GMS utilizing the secure application portal (meritscholarship.ohio.gov) by August 1 each year.

- *Note: For the class of 2024, communication of the identity of qualifying students is expected to occur by early January.*

Homeschool and Dropout Recovery High School Students Application Process: Homeschooled students and students enrolled in a dropout recovery high school may qualify for the GMS by completing a college admissions test (ACT or SAT) and submitting an application to ODHE via the secure online application portal (meritscholarship.ohio.gov). The portal will open for applications in June (between the student's junior and senior year) and close by the end of August. Homeschooled and dropout recovery high school students must meet all relevant student eligibility criteria.

- *Note: For the class of 2024, the portal is expected to be open for applications in December and will close on April 30.*

The top 5% of all eligible homeschooled applicants will be identified as qualifying for a GMS. Homeschooled students will need to upload the letter from the superintendent of their school district excusing them from compulsory attendance as part of the application process. The student's family should have received this at the beginning of the current school year. Applicants are subject to guidelines established by the Chancellor to confirm the college readiness of awardees.

The top 5% of all eligible applicants from dropout recovery high schools will be identified as qualifying for a GMS. Applicants must be verified as attending a dropout recovery school and being on track for graduation after the spring term by the student's high school. Applicants are subject to guidelines established by the Chancellor to confirm the college readiness of awardees.

Award

The GMS award is up to \$5,000 each academic year, contingent upon adequacy of appropriation. In such cases where the total of awards exceeds the appropriation for a given year, awards may be reduced. Notification of reduced awards will occur as soon as is practicable in order to ensure that students have the information when making decisions about which institution of higher education (IHE) to attend. The GMS is applicable to eligible expenses included within the qualifying IHE's published cost of attendance and may be refundable to the student.

The GMS award is renewable for up to the equivalent of four years of full-time instruction at a qualifying IHE. Renewal eligibility is based upon a student meeting satisfactory academic progress, which is defined as maintaining a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or above, completing a minimum of 20 credit hours/year, and demonstrating appropriate progress toward earning a degree.

To ensure that students are informed of their offer of a GMS award with enough time to decide where to apply to college, both the student's high school or school district and ODHE will notify students (and their parents) of the award offer through email and/or USPS no later than September 1 (after the student's junior year). A form letter from the Governor's office will be provided for this purpose. ODHE will similarly notify qualifying homeschooled and dropout recovery school students.

- *Note: For the class of 2024, award offers are expected to be communicated by February 1 for public and chartered nonpublic high school students and by May 15 for homeschooled and dropout recovery high school students.*

Once an award offer is made, the offer remains valid even if the student changes high schools provided the student continues to meet all eligibility requirements.

Students must proactively accept the award. Students shall inform ODHE of their acceptance of a GMS award and their intended IHE of enrollment via the secure online portal (meritscholarship.ohio.gov) by April 30 for full consideration. Any awards accepted after April 30 may be reduced depending on the projected sufficiency of remaining appropriation. Any awards not accepted by July 1 shall be rescinded.

- *Note: For the class of 2024, homeschooled and dropout recovery high school students may accept awards up to June 1 for full consideration.*

Students who have accepted a GMS offer must be enrolled at a qualifying IHE within two years of their high school graduation (e.g.: a student may take one "gap year" prior to enrollment) or the offer will be rescinded. Accepted awards must be fully spent (including all renewals) within six years of initial acceptance. Awardees who transfer from an initial qualifying IHE to a different qualifying IHE may continue to receive and renew their GMS award.

Students who receive an award letter shall not have that award rescinded except as follows:

- The student does not accept the award by July 1.
- The student moves out of state.
- The student does not enroll at a qualifying IHE within two years of their high school graduation.
- The student enrolls at an IHE that does not qualify for participation in the GMS program.
- The student does not graduate on time (within one year of the point of eligibility determination).
 - » *Note: Students who face extenuating circumstances may appeal this requirement.*
- The student fails to meet qualifications for scholarship renewal.

Disbursement

IHEs will receive notification of enrollees receiving the GMS via an SSID match process through an eligibility report via ODHE's Higher Education Information (HEI) system. This process will be similar to the process used for the Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG).

Institutions will submit a payment request each term in HEI that verifies the student's enrollment status and GPA (a first-year student's GPA can be entered as 000).

Awards will be paid to IHEs pro-rata by term and enrollment status (full-time/part-time).

Reporting

Qualifying institutions receiving GMS funds agree to provide additional data on GMS participants (e.g.: enrollment, credit hours, student demographic information, degree completions) for required reports as requested by ODHE.

Please address questions to meritscholarship@highered.ohio.gov.