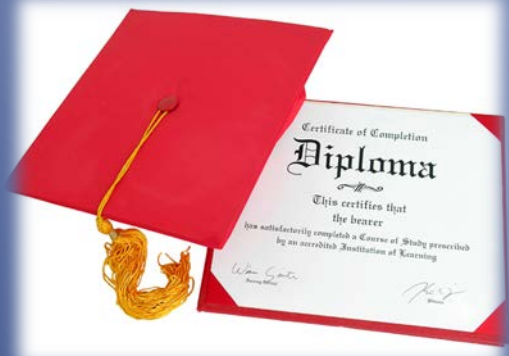


POARCH BAND OF CREEK INDIANS EDUCATION DEPARTMENT



G
R
A
D
U
A
T
I
O
N

EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS

MCGHEE – TULLIS TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

REVISED February, 2016

**"Education is the most powerful weapon
you can use to change the
world." Nelson Mandela**

The McGhee-Tullis Tuition Assistance Program provides opportunities for Tribal Members, young and old, to strive for a quality high school education, post-secondary degrees, and specialty certificates through the Tribe's financial assistance with tuitions, books, and other necessary expenses. This includes assistance for special-needs students. This Program offers encouragement for educational success by reducing historical and financial barriers to a higher education. The Program is a true investment in the Tribe's future as it challenges Tribal Members to learn new skills sets, develop a deeper level of critical thinking, and increase their awareness of social and Tribal responsibilities, thus inspiring engagement and participation in Tribal activities.

History of the Education Department Scholarship Programs

- February 22, 1987** The original Education Department Scholarship Trust Fund was created by Tribal Ordinance #87:0001. This trust was set up to provide small, competitive scholarships to Tribal Members. A scholarship committee was formed to review applications and award funds. The average award under this Program was \$500.00
- March 1, 2005** **Tribal Council Resolution 05-015 approved creation of the Program:**
The Tribal Council Resolution was passed approving the McGhee-Tullis Tuition Assistance Program Policy which was implemented by the Education Department to become effective for the 2005-2006 school year. This policy only applied to students under the age of 25.
- June 17, 2006** The Fred L. McGhee Memorial Scholarship program was implemented with a \$25,000.00 initial contribution to the Education Department by PCI Gaming. These awards were made to Tribal Members who were over the age of 25, and therefore, did not qualify for the McGhee-Tullis Tuition Assistance Program. These were competitive awards.
- July 7, 2007** The McGhee-Tullis Tuition Assistance Program was expanded to include student loan repayment, and the age limit was removed, allowing Tribal Members of all ages to access higher education. For the first time, program participants were able to purchase a computer with Program funds.
- July 28, 2008** The Fred L. McGhee Memorial Scholarship program was revised and began awarding funds to First Generation Indian Descent students on a competitive basis. \$25,000.00 was awarded during this year.
- 2009** The First Generation Indian Descent (FGID) Tuition Assistance Program was awarded \$85,500 for competitive distribution.
- 2010** The FGID Tuition Assistance Program was awarded \$97,500 for competitive distribution.
- 2011** The FGID Tuition Assistance Program began to accept applications year-round, and it became the first non-competitive Tribal scholarship for FGID students.
- May 17, 2012** **Tribal Council Resolution 2012-044 approved revisions:**
Limits on Post-Secondary Education Award Amounts for Tribal Members:
\$30,000.00 for Associates degree or certification program
\$50,000.00 for Bachelor's degree
\$75,000.00 for Master's degree
\$100,000.00 for Professional degree
- August 16, 2012** **Tribal Council Resolution 2012-079 approved revisions:**
The McGhee-Tullis Tuition Assistance Program was revised to remove the limit on monthly and yearly disbursements for Elementary and Secondary Education and Special Needs Students categories. The Academic Achievement Bonus policy was also revised to award the bonus upon graduation rather than end of semester, to require a GPA of 3.5 or higher, and to set bonus amounts based on degree levels.
- August 2013** **Proposed revisions to Tribal Council.**

April 2015

Tribal Council Resolution TCR 2015-039 approved revisions:

The McGhee-Tullis Tuition Assistance Program policy was revised to allow specialized tools on a reimbursement basis with documentation. The allowable amounts for certificate programs at schools that accept federal student aid was capped at \$10,000, and the amount for a school that does not accept federal student aid was capped at \$5,000. The eligibility section was revised to change age requirements for different programs and to require the student to submit an official transcript each year. The amount available for reimbursement for a computer was increased to \$1,000. A provision was added to inform the student of an ongoing obligation to provide updated information to the Education Department.

February 2016

Tribal Council Resolution TCR 2016-__ approved revisions:

Age for special education assistance was lowered to 3 years old. References to Tribal Administrator were replaced with references to the Community Services Division Director. Limits for Bachelor's degree and higher were increased and treated as cumulative.

**POARCH BAND OF CREEK INDIANS
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT**

**McGhee–Tullis
Tuition Assistance Program**

**Revised: August 16, 2012
April, 2015
February, 2016**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section I.	Definitions	Page 5
Section II.	Eligibility	Page 6
	A. Student Eligibility	
	B. Application	
Section III.	Eligible Amounts and Distributions	Page 7
	A. Total Eligible Amount	
	B. Limitations	
	C. Eligible Expenses	
	D. Distribution	
	E. Refunds	
Section IV.	Continuing Obligations of Participating Students	Page 10
	A. Submission of Grades	
	B. Grade Point Average (GPA) Requirements	
	C. School Withdrawals	
	D. Reinstatements	
	E. Updated Information	
Section V.	Academic Achievement Bonus	Page 11
	A. Eligible Amounts	
Section VI.	Termination	Page 12
	A. Terminating Participation in the Program	
	B. Terminating the Program	
Section VII.	Policy Interpretations and Revisions	Page 12
	A. Interpretations	
	B. Revisions	
Section VIII.	Appeals	Page 13
Section IX.	Tax Consequences	Page 13

McGhee-Tullis Tuition Assistance Policy

Section I. Definitions

- A. Accredited means an institution whose standards met the essential requirements for academic excellence according to a recognized governing body for the state in which the educational institution is located, such as the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). There are many dubious institutions offering a variety of online or certification programs. If there is any doubt as to the legitimacy of a program or its accreditation, the Education Department will research it and render an opinion as to the validity and acceptance of the program under this policy. If it is determined that the program is not valid, no funds will be expended on the program.
- B. Certificate program means a program which does not culminate in a degree but allows the holder to practice jobs in certain fields. This does not include continuing education programs, conferences, workshops, or similar types of activities. Certificate programs are capped at a lifetime benefit of \$10,000.00.
- C. Living expenses means general expenses encountered by everyone, such as gas expenses, electric bills, etc. These expenses are not covered by this Program.
- D. Mandatory fees means those costs deemed not optional by the individual school. These may vary from school to school.
- E. Special Needs Student means students who have been diagnosed with medical, physical, mental, or developmental condition or disability and whose diagnosis adversely impacts his or her learning needs in a standard school curriculum.
- F. Specialized tools means mandatory items, such as netbooks, iPods, iPads, and special software, which are required according to the course syllabus for the class or program for which the student is registered. Specialized tools are allowed on a reimbursement basis only, and must be required as per the class syllabus. Proper documentation must be submitted in order to be reimbursed.
- G. Tribal Member means an enrolled member of the Poarch Band of Creek Indians.
- H. Tribe means the Poarch Band of Creek Indians.

Section II. Eligibility

A. Student Eligibility

The following students are eligible for this Program:

1. Tribal Members ages 4-18 who are enrolled in an accredited private school or are homeschooled under the auspices of a recognized umbrella organization.
2. Tribal Members attending a public high school for the gifted.
3. Tribal Members ages 3-21 who have special needs and are enrolled in an accredited educational institution.
4. Tribal Members ages 16 and older who are enrolled in an accredited college (including dual enrollment of high school students), vocational/technical school, or a certificate program and who are pursuing a certificate, associate's degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, or professional degree.
5. Tribal Members with outstanding student loan balances.

B. Application

1. For each Tribal Member wishing to take part in this Program, an application for assistance must be filed with the Tribal Education Department. Applications are available at the Education Department and may be printed from the Tribe's website, www.pci-nsn.gov. Upon request applications may be faxed or mailed.
2. This program will operate on a continuous cycle. Applications will be accepted at any time during the year as long as funding is available.
3. A new application must be filed annually in order to ensure that the Education Department has updated contact information. An official transcript must also be submitted at least annually. Both are due to the Education Department in December of each year.
4. *Waiver.* Along with each application filed for tuition assistance, the parent/guardian of the student or the adult student must sign a waiver allowing the Tribe to obtain information regarding the student's:
 - a. Academic progress, including all grades received;
 - b. Financial account; and/or
 - c. Behavior and/or disciplinary problems.

5. *Special Needs.* If the student is applying for assistance based on special educational needs, written documentation of the nature of the student's disability must be provided. This documentation must be obtained from a licensed practitioner specializing in psychiatry or psychology, or from another qualified individual working in private practice or under the direction of the local board of education.

For students applying for assistance with special educational needs:

- a. Student must be at least 3 years of age and meet the criteria for special needs in order to access industry recognized intervention services.
- b. All services under this heading must be approved by the Education Director and Community Services Division Director.

Section III. Eligible Amounts and Distributions

A. Total Eligible Amount

Each Tribal Member who participates in this Program will have access to a total of \$100,000.00 for eligible expenses as identified herein, subject to the limitations contained in this Section.

B. Limitations

1. *Allotment Based Upon Educational Level*

There shall be limits to the total funds that may be accessed by the student, based on the educational level and type of degree that the Tribal Member is working towards or has earned. Thus, the following sub-limits shall apply:

- a. \$10,000.00 limit on certificate programs not culminating in a degree and which DO NOT participate in the Federal Student Aid program.
- b. \$20,000.00 limit on certificate programs not culminating in a degree, but are offered through a program participating in the Federal Student Aid program.
- c. \$20,000.00 limit for Elementary and Secondary Education or for residential placement of a special needs student.
- d. \$40,000.00 limit for an Associate's degree.
- e. \$80,000.00 limit for a Bachelor's degree.

f. \$100,000.00 limit for a Master's degree and higher.

These limits are cumulative for a grand total of \$100,000.

2. If the Tribal Member has earned a particular degree but has not spent all of his or her limit for that degree level, the Tribal Member may petition the Education Department to use the remainder of his or her limit for the degree level to pursue another degree. For example, if a Tribal Member earns a Master's degree and has spent \$50,000.00 of his or her allotment, then the Tribal Member may use the remaining \$25,000.00 to earn a certification, an Associate's degree, another Bachelor's degree, or another Master's degree. In approving this second degree, the Education Department shall take into consideration the Tribal Member's prior academic performance and the likelihood that the Tribal Member will be able to complete the second degree.
3. If the Tribal Member has earned an Associate's degree from a vocational school, and the Tribal Member desires to earn a second Associate's degree from a vocational school, then the Tribal Member may petition the Education Department to increase his or her limit to \$50,000.00. In approving this increase, the Education Department shall take into consideration the Tribal Member's prior academic performance and the likelihood that the Tribal Member will be able to complete the second degree.
4. For a loan to be repaid, the Tribal Member must complete the degree that the loan was used to finance. If a Tribal Member did not complete a degree but completed an equivalent or higher educational level after the date of the loan, then the Tribal Member's loans may be repaid. Student loans must not be in default for a period of one year prior to the Tribe making a payment.

C. Eligible Expenses

The following expenses are eligible for payment:

1. Tuition, books, and mandatory fees for elementary and secondary students enrolled in an accredited private school or as part of a homeschool program under the auspices of a recognized umbrella organization.
2. Assistive learning devices or other educational materials for special needs students as recommended by the student's teacher or the practitioner making the special needs diagnosis.
3. Residential care for special needs students if the student has been placed in the custody of the Tribe's Family Services Department (or such other similar government agency) by virtue of a Court Order and is enrolled in such a facility.

4. Mandatory fees and on-campus housing for students attending a public high school for the gifted (either academically or artistically).
5. Tuition, books, mandatory fees, specialized tools as required by the course syllabus, and on-campus housing (including meal tickets) for students enrolled in an accredited post-secondary institution.
6. All eligible students enrolled in an accredited post-secondary institution may receive up to \$1,000 for a computer, printer, and word processing software. Students may receive one replacement computer four (4) years after receiving the initial computer, but only if they are still enrolled in school. All computers and related equipment must be purchased by the student and will be reimbursed by the Education Department. Original receipts are required.
7. Once the student has graduated, he/she is eligible for repayment of loans for tuition, books, and mandatory fees while enrolled in an accredited post-secondary institution. There shall be no repayment of loans for living expenses.

D. Distribution

1. All funds are paid directly to the accredited educational institution, with the exception of reimbursements. Reimbursements meeting all requirements of the Education Department may be paid directly to the student.
2. All loans shall be repaid to the lending institution. Individuals shall not be repaid. Loans shall be repaid in one lump sum disbursement, up to the student's total eligibility limit.
3. Reimbursements are allowed for eligible expenses paid by the student or parent/guardian through a reputable source, as long as appropriate receipts and other necessary documentation can be provided to the Education Department. Students may not be reimbursed for any expenses that were paid prior to their entering the Program or that were purchased from an individual or a business that cannot be verified as legitimate. Receipts for reimbursement may only be submitted when the accumulated total is more than \$150.00. Receipts for lesser amounts should be held by the student until the \$150.00 amount has accrued or until the end of the semester for which the item was purchased.

E. Refunds

If there is a refund of money paid to the student following his/her withdrawal from a class or school, then it is the responsibility of the student to ensure that the refunded money is returned to the Education Department immediately. Failure to adhere to this policy will result in the denial of future tuition payments until such time as the account issues are cleared up by the student. Questions regarding refunds received from student loans or Pell grants should be addressed to the financial aid office at the school.

Section IV. Continuing Obligations of Participating Students

A. Submission of Grades

Students in this Program shall submit grades from the previous semester prior to the beginning of the next semester. An OFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT is required annually in order for the student to remain in the program and is due each year in December. Tuition will not be paid for the following semester until the official transcript for the previous year is received.

B. Grade Point Average (GPA) Requirements

Students in the Program must also maintain at least a 2.0 (or its equivalent) cumulative GPA for each academic year. If a student fails to meet this requirement, he or she will be placed on academic probation by Education Department for one semester. If the student should fail to achieve at least a 2.0 GPA a second time during a semester, the student will be ineligible for the Program for a period of one (1) year. In order to be reinstated in the program, the student must first obtain a GPA of at least 2.0.

C. School Withdrawals

1. *Notification.* Students in this Program who withdraw from a Post-Secondary class must notify the Education Department in writing immediately. (This notice does not have to be given if all the student is doing is dropping or adding classes.) The notification must include the reason(s) why they are withdrawing. An email to the Department is sufficient notification. Copies of all paperwork submitted to the school or given to the student by the school must be sent to the Education Department within ten (10) business days of notifying the Education Department.
2. Withdrawing from two (2) classes shall result in the student being placed on probation by the Education Department. (Again, this does not include dropping or adding classes.) If the student should withdraw from a third class, then he/she shall be ineligible for this program for a semester/quarter unless the student can demonstrate to the Education Department that withdrawal was based on exceptional circumstances. Withdrawing from a fourth class shall result in the student being ineligible for this program for a period of two (2) years unless the student can demonstrate to the Education Department that withdrawal was based on exceptional circumstances. Exceptional circumstances shall include, but not be limited to: serious, debilitating illness; a serious, debilitating illness of an immediate family member; and/or death of an immediate family member. Once ineligible for the program, the student must petition the Education Department for reinstatement to the Program.

D. Reinstatements

In making the decision about reinstatements required under this Section, the Education Department shall take into consideration whether the Tribal Member is likely to fail to follow program requirements in the future, whether the Tribal Member will be able to complete the degree within the allotted amount of financial assistance, and whether the Tribal Member continued to pursue his or her educational and career goals even though ineligible for the Program.

E. Updated Information

The Tribal Member is responsible for keeping the Education Department apprised of changes to his or her information.

Section V. Academic Achievement Bonus

Depending upon the Tribe's finances, post-secondary students are eligible to receive an academic achievement bonus upon graduation if the student maintains a 3.5 or higher (on a 4.0 scale) cumulative GPA. The student must have been enrolled in the McGhee-Tullis Tuition Assistance Program for the period in which they are claiming the award and must request the award within 6 months of graduating.

A. Eligible Amount

1. *Associate's Degree.* A student graduating with an associate's degree and a cumulative GPA of 3.5 or higher will be awarded an academic achievement bonus of \$2,000.00.
2. *Bachelor's Degree.* A student graduating with a bachelor's degree and a cumulative GPA of 3.5 or higher will be awarded an academic achievement bonus of \$4,000.00, unless the student received an academic achievement bonus for receiving his or her associate's degree. If the student received an academic achievement bonus for receiving his or her associate's degree, the student will be awarded an academic achievement bonus of \$2,000.00.
3. *Master's Degree.* A student graduating with a master's degree and a cumulative GPA of 3.5 or higher will be awarded an academic achievement bonus of \$2,000.00.
4. *Professional Degrees.* Due to the variations in the duration of the professional degree programs, the academic achievement bonus will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

- B. Upon submitting grades at graduation, the student shall also submit a written request for his or her academic achievement bonus.

- C. Cash awards shall be paid only upon graduation.
- D. The academic achievement bonus cannot be guaranteed due to possible changes in the Tribe's finances.

Section VI. Termination

A. Terminating Participation in the Program

A Tribal Member may be terminated from this Program by a majority vote of the Tribal Council. Cases which might be considered for a declaration of ineligibility include, but are not limited to the following: extreme violence against students or faculty, bringing weapons or illegal substances onto campus, or repeated academic failure. Once terminated from the Program, only the Tribal Council may restore eligibility.

B. Terminating the Program

This Program is designed to be self-perpetuating. In the event that the funding source should end and no replacement funding source(s) can be located, this Program may be terminated by a vote of the Poarch Band of Creek Indians Tribal Council.

Section VII. Policy Interpretations and Revisions

A. Interpretations

When processing an application under this Program, the Education Director may encounter ambiguities in the language of the policy. If so, the Education Director shall present the question and his/her proposed interpretation to the Education Advisory Committee within two (2) working days of the question being raised. The Education Advisory Committee shall then issue its concurrence or non-concurrence with the Education Director's interpretation no later than three (3) working days after receiving the question. If the Education Advisory Committee issues a non-concurrence, then the Education Director shall immediately submit the question, the Education Director's proposed response, and the Education Advisory Committee's non-concurrence to the Tribal Administrator, who shall no later than two (2) working days after submission, issue the final interpretation.

B. Revisions

This policy shall be reviewed at least annually to determine effectiveness and the need for revisions. Requests for changes to this policy must be submitted through the Education Department, Education Advisory Committee, and the Education Legislative Committee. No changes may be implemented without the approval of the Tribal Council.

Section VIII. Appeals

Any Tribal Member who disagrees with any decision made by the Education Department under this Program shall file a written request for reconsideration with the Tribal Administrator. If the Tribal Administrator was involved in the final decision under subsection VII, A. above, then the Tribal Administrator shall forward the appeal to the Executive Employees. The Tribal Administrator or Executive Employees shall issue a final decision no later than five (5) working days after the Tribal Administrator received the request.

Section IX. Tax Consequences

Payments made under this policy may be considered taxable by the IRS. Tribal Members are strongly advised to seek the advice of an attorney and/or accountant regarding these payments. The Tribe is in no way responsible for any decisions regarding the reporting of these payments to the IRS and does not bear any responsibility for any fines, penalties, court costs, or attorney's fees that the Tribal Member may ultimately bear.

NOTES

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions about this McGhee-Tullis Tuition Assistance Program, please contact the Education Department at the address, phone number, or email address listed below.

POARCH BAND OF CREEK INDIANS

Education Department
5811 Jack Springs Road
Atmore, AL 36502
(251) 368-9136 Ext. 2241
sfisher@pci-nsn.gov

