



To: Campus Financial Aid Administrators

From: Meghan Flores
Minnesota Office of Higher Education
Manager, State Financial Aid Programs

Subject: **Reminder: COVID-19 Unit Restoration for State Financial Aid Programs and Process for Students with no History of Grant Receipt**

Date: April 22, 2021 **updated June 9, 2021**

Overview

Under Article 2, Section 13 of Minnesota Laws 2020 Regular Session, Chapter 71, the Minnesota legislature has granted temporary and limited authority to modify and waive portions of statutes and rules that affect our state financial aid programs. The authority under the section referenced above expires the later of December 31, 2020, or 60 days after the end of a peacetime public health emergency declared before December 31, 2020. **Currently, the COVID-19 Peacetime Emergency has been extended through June 14, 2021. This moves the expiration of the authority out to August 13, 2021.**

Unit Restoration

Students who withdraw from enrollment during the peacetime public health emergency known as COVID-19 may be eligible to have grant eligibility from the term of withdrawal reinstated for State Grant, Postsecondary Child Care Grant and Indian Scholarship programs. Similar to the full withdraw due to medical reasons while under the care of a physician that impacted a student's ability to complete the term, the documentation needs to be collected and reviewed by the Office of Higher Education (OHE) in order for units to be restored.

Unit restoration may be requested for students who **completely withdraw due to the impact of COVID-19 for terms that were in progress as of 3/13/2020 or for terms that began after 3/13/2020**, through terms in progress on **August 13, 2021**. *OHE only has the authority to restore units as long as the limited and temporary authority is in place from the legislature.* This means that OHE can only process and approve requests while our temporary authority is in effect. We encourage you to leverage technology to run lists of full withdraws during the scope of the authority and to collaborate with other departments on campus, such as the Registrar's or Retention Offices, to identify potentially eligible students.

Aid Administrator Steps to Request Individual Documented COVID-19 Unit Restoration

1. School determines if term of full withdrawal was within the scope of the COVID-19 State Financial Aid Guidance. If yes, the school then collects a student statement explaining how the full withdrawal was connected to COVID-19 and disrupted the student's studies to the point of full withdrawal. Supplemental documentation from a third party may be included, but is not required.
2. School sends student statement along with a transcript (school copy is fine) via secure email to Nancy.A.Johnson@state.mn.us and indicates which program(s) the restoration is for (State Grant, Child Care Grant, Indian Scholarship). OHE will review the transcript to ensure the withdrawal falls within the scope.
3. OHE will review the student statement and transcript; the statement must state the reason for withdrawal and how it was related to the global pandemic known as COVID-19.
4. If the statement and transcript warrant the unit restoration, OHE staff will remove units from our internal database(s); once this is complete, school administrators will see the resulting change via the SG Student Web Access Screen.

Note: Due to the widespread impact of COVID-19, the reasons for withdrawal will be broad and are not restricted to the student or a student's family member being ill from the virus. Reasons may include, but are not limited to: job loss, lay off, furlough or reduction of hours for student or parent(s), loss of childcare, needing to work additional hours to support self or family, inability to match class hours with work hours/childcare availability, illness of student or family member, homelessness or housing insecurity, transportation challenges because of COVID-19, etc.

The process outline above is what should be used to request grant eligibility restoration for students who qualify for state aid via the MN Dream Act.

Students Who Have No Grant Units Paid on OHE Database

As you know, OHE tracks past history of State Grant units paid. When a student does not have a record of State Grant units paid in OHE's State Grant database, there are no units to restore under this provision. However, OHE will still review requests for students in this situation. If the request is approved, the school will receive written guidance to exclude the term requested from the student's unit count when the institution completes the Limit on Postsecondary Attendance review. This will also apply to requests for the Child Care Grant program. Reinstatement of grant eligibility for Indian Scholarship will be notated in the MISP database. For the Child Care Grant and State Grant programs, school administrators will be advised to retain a copy of the approval in the student's electronic or paper file in case it is requested during a state financial aid program review. In the event that the student may later transfers to another school, administrators should also provide the approval directly to the student.

NEW: Additional Option for Aid Administrator to Request COVID-19 Grant Eligibility Restoration

If a school has chosen to apply the R2T4 waiver provision, where the school nor the student have to return funds because the student had a full withdrawal related to COVID-19, the school does not need to follow the process outlined above under *Aid Administrator Steps to Request COVID-19 Unit Restoration*. Instead, the school can follow the process outlined below:

1. Open the Excel template *Unit Restoration Request When School Applied R2T4 Covid-19 Waiver*
2. Save as, adding the institution name and FAFSA code to the document name.
3. Fill in the requested information: Last name, first name, DOB, last 4 of SSN, Aid Year, Term, Program(s) for which the school is requesting the eligibility restoration. Note there is a separate tab for 2019-2020 and 2020-2021.
4. Send the spreadsheet via secure email to Nancy.A.Johnson@state.mn.us
5. For 2019-2020 requests:
 - OHE staff will remove units from our internal database for State Grant and make note of extended eligibility for MISP; once this is complete, school administrators will see a notation via the SG Student Web Access Screen or in the MISP database.
 - The school should make a corresponding note in the school's database that the units can be excluded from the school's unit count.
 - For Child Care Grant, the unit count is currently only maintained by program administrators on campus. The school should make a note in the school's database that the units can be excluded from the student's unit count for Child Care Grant.
6. For 2020-2021 requests:
 - OHE staff will note the extended eligibility in our internal database for MISP; once this is complete, school administrators will see a notation via the MISP database.
 - Due to the way records are overlaid every time a new DDS batch comes in, we cannot make the changes to the student records for State Grant for 2020-2021 until a school has closed out the program for the year. This is true for requests made via the *Unit Restoration Request When School Applied R2T4 Covid-19 Waiver* and also for individual requests made via the original guidance issued 4/22/2021. To overcome this timing/technology challenge, the date of request from the school will serve as the date of determination for program eligibility restoration. OHE staff will do the processing on the backend once the school has closed out for the year.
 - For Child Care Grant, the unit count is currently only maintained by program administrators on campus. The school should make a note in the school's database that the units can be excluded from the student's unit count for Child Care Grant.

Note: Schools do not need to also include unit restoration information on the year-end COVID-19 Required Reporting for 20-21 State FA Programs_TEMPLATE. OHE can use the information on the *Unit Restoration Request When School Applied R2T4 Covid-19 Waiver* and individual documented requests in order to quantify the impact of this benefit for students.