FINANCIAL AID GUIDANCE MEMO

REFERENCE:	**FA 26-017**
TOPIC:	**COMMERCIAL TRUCK DRIVER (CDL) STUDENT AID PROGRAM**
AUTHOR:	**REBECCA JONES, PROGRAM MANAGER** **OFFICE OF FINANCIAL AID**
DATE:	**21 JAN 2026**
RELEVANT STATUTE:	**OHIO REVISED CODE, SECTIONS 3333.125**

Following is important information for the Commercial Truck Driver (CDL) Student Aid program which is included in the guidance memos provided at https://highered.ohio.gov/educators/financial-aid/sgs-guidance-memos.

Program Description

The CDL Student Aid Program is meant to promote and encourage job growth for Ohio's commercial drivers through educational training in programs related to employment opportunities. Funds awarded to eligible institutions through a competitive application process will be disbursed in the form of grants and loans to students who enroll in approved CDL training programs at those institutions.

Qualified Institutions

The CDL Student Aid program can be used at the following schools with eligible commercial driver training programs:

- A commercial driver training school certified by the director of public safety as holding a license issued pursuant to section 4508.03 or 4508.09 of the Revised Code, rules adopted under either of those sections, and other necessary standards and procedures as determined by the director.
- A program exempted from licensure by the director of public safety under section 4508.07 of the Revised Code but approved to be a commercial driver training school by the chancellor and the director for purposes of the student aid program at any of the following:
  - A state institution of higher education, as defined in section 3345.011 of the Revised Code.
  - A career college or school in this state that holds a certificate of registration from the state board of career colleges and schools under Chapter 3332. of the Revised Code.
  - A private, nonprofit institution in this state that holds a certificate of authorization pursuant to Chapter 1713. Of the Revised Code.
  - A private institution that is exempt from regulation under Chapter 3332. Of the Revised Code as prescribed in section 3333.046 of the Revised Code, if the program has a certificate of authorization pursuant to Chapter 1713. Of the Revised Code.

- A career-technical center, joint vocational school district, comprehensive career-technical center, or compact career-technical center offering adult training.

Student Eligibility

For a student to be eligible for the CDL Student Aid program, they must:

- Be enrolled in an eligible commercial driver training program at a participating school.
- Be an Ohio resident according to the Ohio Student Residency Administrative Rule, found at: http://codes.ohio.gov/oac/3333-1-10/.
- Pass a drug test prior to starting the commercial driver training program at their school.
- Have had 3 or less moving violations in the past two consecutive years.
- Have not plead guilty to or been convicted of operating a vehicle under the influence of alcohol or a drug of abuse under section 4511.19 of the Revised Code in the past twelve months.
- Meet any additional eligibility criteria established under rules adopted by the chancellor.
- Be registered for Selective Service under section 3345.32 of the Ohio Revised Code.

Prior Enrollment Requirements

Prior to a student enrolling in a CDL program, the interested student must meet with a financial aid advisor at the school to review eligibility and the terms of the program.

The following must be provided to the student prior to enrollment:

- Information that the total amount of a grant and a loan award shall not exceed the cost of tuition and related expenses for an eligible school's CDL program.
- Information that the awards for the student will be 50% grant and 50% loan, which may be forgiven if employment requirements are met.
- Counseling on employment and loan repayment requirements.
- Information that the student must electronically sign a promissory note with the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) for the loan portion.
- A blank copy of the promissory note and application, which contains the Statement of Student Rights and Responsibilities for the student to review prior to receiving the email with the information on how to sign the promissory note.

CDL Student Awards and Utilization

The CDL Student Aid program is a 50% grant and 50% loan combination. The loan portion of the award has the potential to be forgiven if awardee receives their CDL license and obtains employment in the state of Ohio within 60 days of program completion and remains employed for 12 months following program completion. The employment must be utilizing the same license type that awardee went to school to receive.

The grant and loan combination may not exceed the cost of tuition and related expenses. The program may not issue any refunds to the student through the combination of other funds. Allowable expenses include tuition and related expenses, which all shall be reflected on the eligible student's tuition bill.

A school may combine grant funds with other programs, such as Aspire Grant funds, to make the CDL program more affordable for students and expand access to more students.

Certification

Schools will create a student record within the Higher Education Information (HEI) system to request payment. The school will need to enter the student's information, which includes name, social security number, date of birth, address, phone number, e-mail address, driver's license number and expiration date, proposal number, license type, expected program start date, expected program completion date, and payment amount into the HEI system. The payment request will generate a promissory note from ODHE to be sent to the student's e-mail. Once signed by the student, a payment will be made to the school. If the student does not sign the promissory note, the payment request will be denied.

Student's records may be entered into the HEI system after completing their enrollment and must be entered by the last day of the session. The HEI system will automatically determine the 25% date to populate the promissory note email to the student. **Please note that if a school chooses to advance the funds to the student prior to this timeframe, funds from ODHE will only be sent to the school after the promissory note is signed.**

HEI System Access

The HEI system can be found at https://hei.ohioghighered.org. A staff member at each participating school must be assigned as the CDL Data Reporter to manage this program in HEI. New users will need to complete an HEI Authorization Form, which can be found here: https://highered.ohio.gov/data-reports/hei-system/hei-resources. Completed forms should be e-mailed to heiuser-admin@highered.ohio.gov.

Posting of Funds

In alignment with federal policy, the school should apply the funds requested as soon as administratively feasible, but no later than five business days after the date the school received those funds. CDL funds must be applied to the student's cost of tuition and related expenses and are not to be refunded to the student.

Refunds

If a student disenrolls or withdraws from an eligible CDL program prior to completing 25% of the program, the student is not eligible for the CDL Student Aid. If a student withdraws after completing at least 25% of the program, the amount of the CDL Student Aid that needs to be refunded will be determined by the refund schedule of the school. Schools must submit a funds return request by sending an email to the CDL Program Manager at CDL@highered.ohio.gov. In the refund email, schools will need to provide the student(s) name, proposal number, and payment amount to be refunded. The partial refund amount will be entered into the student's account, and an email will be sent to the student and school confirming the adjustment. The student is still responsible for the loan portion of the adjusted award.

If no further disbursements will be made for the academic year or if the return is for the previous year, a refund check must be submitted to ODHE within 30 days of submitting the refund file in HEI. If the

refund check is not submitted within 30 days, interest may begin to accrue at 1%. If after 45 days the refund check is still not submitted, the amount owed plus interest and any additional fees may be turned over to the Ohio Attorney General's office for collection.

Refund checks can be made out to the Ohio Department of Higher Education attached with a copy of the refund manifest and mailed to:

Ohio Department of Higher Education
ATTN: Commercial Truck Driver Student Aid Program
Office of Financial Aid, 7th Floor
25 South Front Street
Columbus, OH 43215-4183

Reporting

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

Selective Service

Ohio Revised Code (ORC) section 3333.393 requires compliance with the selective service law for a student to be eligible for the CDL scholarship. ORC 3345.32 Student Noncompliance with Selective Service can be found here: https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-3345.32.

As such, ODHE still requires that students comply with selective service registration before funds are requested for the term, and documentation maintained as part of the audit process. If a student falls into one of the exceptions according to ORC for selective service, the documentation for this exception must be provided to ODHE in the case of an audit. For birthdays that fall after the FAFSA filing and before a term start date, an institution is required to check registration prior to requesting any state aid for a term after the 18th birthday. If Ohio legislation is changed, ODHE will inform the campuses.

Financial Aid Audits

The Ohio Revised Code authorizes the Chancellor to conduct financial aid audits of state-supported colleges and universities, proprietary, and non-profit private colleges and universities. All Ohio institutions with financial aid errors based on their prior year audit results will automatically be audited in an upcoming calendar year. Additional institutions may be audited by random selection to maintain our goal of auditing a set number of institutions yearly. Every institution will be audited *at least* once every three years.

Financial aid personnel should direct any questions to the Commercial Truck Driver Student Aid Program Manager, Rebecca Jones, 614.752.9474, CDL@highered.ohio.gov.