

# **STATE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM (STEP) RULES AND REGULATIONS**

## **RULE 1 – ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE**

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- I. The Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE) shall administer the State Teacher Education Program (STEP), hereafter known as STEP, within the policies set by the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board. All formal communications shall be addressed to or signed by the Director of the Arkansas Department of Higher Education or his/her designee.
- II. When functioning under Act 1215 of 2009, and any subsequent legislation, ADHE shall follow provisions of the Administrative Procedures Act.

## **RULE 2 - ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA**

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- I. Eligibility Criteria
  - A. Applicants must be bona fide Arkansas residents, as defined by the Arkansas Department of Higher Education, for at least twelve (12) months prior to the application deadline.
  - B. Applicants must be a citizen of the United States or a lawful permanent resident.
  - C. Applicant must have graduated from a teacher education program after April 2004.
  - D. Applicant must have outstanding federal student loans.
  - E. Applicant must hold a valid Arkansas teacher's license.
  - F. Applicants must teach full-time at a public school district in Arkansas during the award year and meet one of the additional criteria:
    - a. Teach in a subject area with a teacher shortage, as identified by the Arkansas Department of Higher Education in consultation with the Arkansas Department of Education; or
    - b. Teach in a geographic area with a teacher shortage, as identified by the Arkansas Department of Higher Education in consultation with the Arkansas Department of Education;

## II. Continued Eligibility

Recipients shall re-apply for the STEP program annually and continue to meet the eligibility criteria set forth above. A recipient may receive an annual award for a maximum of three (3) years.

### **RULE 3 – SELECTION PROCESS**

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#### I. Applications

##### A. Solicitation of Applicants

1. Program information will be mailed to the following:
  - a. K-12 school administrators and other interested personnel,
  - b. Colleges/Schools/Departments of Education,
  - c. Financial Aid Directors/Officers,
  - d. Other college campus personnel, such as advisors, etc. who express an interest in disseminating information to prospective applicants,
  - e. Information is also available upon request from the Arkansas Department of Higher Education.
2. The Arkansas Department of Higher Education staff will disseminate program information through workshops, meetings, press releases, the Departmental newsletter, and other means deemed appropriate.

B. An online application will be available at the ADHE's website. The application deadline shall be stated on the application form each year. The ADHE shall have the authority to extend the deadline as needed to ensure a quality applicant pool so long as sufficient public notice is provided.

C. Upon receipt by ADHE, applications are reviewed to ensure that all pertinent data is included. Each applicant will receive confirmation of the receipt and completeness of the application. For those whose application is either incomplete or ineligible, a notification will be made identifying the reason for incompleteness or ineligibility. The applicant will then have the opportunity to provide the missing information or correct any inaccurate information. Before an applicant can be considered for an award, the corrected/missing information must be received by the ADHE by the deadline indicated in the Incomplete/Ineligible Notice.

## II. Selection and Notification of Recipients

- A. The ADHE shall review applicants and select recipients based on the eligibility criteria for the State Teacher Education Program (STEP).
- B. Selected recipients will receive award notices stating their eligibility for the program and the conditions of their award.

## III. Ranking of Applicants

Priority for STEP Repayment grants is as follows:

1. First priority is Arkansas teachers teaching in both subject and geographic shortage areas.
2. Second priority is Arkansas teachers teaching in subject shortage areas.
3. Third priority is Arkansas teachers teaching in geographic shortage areas.

## III. Disbursement of Award

The award will be disbursed in one (1) disbursement to the federal student loan holder indicated by the applicant. If the award amount is larger than the outstanding loan balance, the award amount will be reduced to the amount of the loan balance.

### **RULE 4 - LIMITATIONS OF LOAN REPAYMENT**

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#### I. The State Teacher Education Program (STEP) shall be used to provide:

- A. A loan repayment for federal student loans in the amount of three thousand dollars (\$3,000) per year for each year a licensed teacher, who graduated from a teacher education program after April 2004, teaches in a public school located in a geographical area of the state designated as having a critical shortage of teachers OR in a subject matter area designated as having a critical shortage of teachers. Total term of federal student loan repayment shall not exceed three years.
- B. An additional loan repayment for federal student loans in the amount of one thousand dollars (\$1,000) per year for each year a licensed minority teacher, who graduated from a teacher education program after April 2004, teaches in a public school located in a geographical area of the state designated as having a critical shortage of teachers and/or in a subject matter area designated as having a critical shortage

of teachers in Arkansas. Total term of federal student loan repayment shall not exceed three years.

For guidance purposes, the terms African-American, Hispanic, Asian-American, and Native-American are based on the Race/Ethnic classifications utilized by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) as follows:

- i. African-American = Black/Non-Hispanic: a person having origins in any other black racial groups of Africa
- ii. Hispanic: a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Central or South American or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.
- iii. Asian-American = Asian or Pacific Islander: a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast

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#### **RULE 5 - RECIPIENT'S RESPONSIBILITY**

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I. Recipient's Responsibility

It is the recipient's responsibility to notify the Arkansas Department of Higher Education of any change in status within 21 days. This will include:

Change in name;

Change in residence;

Failure to notify the Arkansas Department of Higher Education of a change in status will affect future eligibility or collection status.

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#### **RULE 6 - PROGRAM DEFINITIONS**

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The following definitions are used in the State Teacher Education Program:

Arkansas Resident

to be considered an Arkansas resident by ADHE, an applicant must be an Arkansas resident for twelve (12) months prior to the application deadline for the financial aid program. Further, the recipient may be asked to provide evidence of a permanent connection with the State of Arkansas. ADHE will look to one or more of

the following to determine residency in those cases:

- (A) Valid Arkansas Driver's License;
- (B) Proof of payment for Arkansas personal and/or real taxes for previous year;
- (C) Proof of Arkansas vehicle registration;
- (D) Proof of Arkansas voter registration; and
- (E) Other forms of proof of Arkansas residency.

Award Year

The award year begins on July 1 of one calendar year, and extends to June 30 of the next calendar year.

Geographical Areas of the State Designated as Having Critical Shortages of Teachers

Any Arkansas school district designated by the Arkansas Department of Higher Education as having critical teacher shortages.

Lawful Permanent Resident

An individual who can provide documentation from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) that he or she is in the U.S. for other than a temporary purpose with the intention of becoming a citizen or permanent resident. Valid documentation is an I-551, I-151, I-181, I-94, or passport stamped with the notation "Processed for I-551, Temporary Evidence of Lawful Admission for Permanent Residence". A completed Form G-641 can also be used to document permanent resident status.

Subject Matter Designated as Critical Needs in the State of Arkansas

Annually the Arkansas Department of Education certifies subject matter shortage areas based upon the results of surveys obtained from school districts in the state of Arkansas.

Teach on a Full-time Basis

Teach the same number of hours required of teachers who have full-time contracts, as determined by the institution or agency in which an individual is teaching, for a minimum of one academic term, as defined by the institution or agency in which an individual is teaching.

Teacher Education Program

A program of study that has been completed at a college or university and results in the receipt of an initial Arkansas teaching license or an additional licensure area to an existing Arkansas teaching license.

U.S. Citizen

The term "U.S. citizen" includes persons born or who have become naturalized citizens of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and Trust Territory- Palau. The term "national" includes citizens of American Samoa or Swain's Island.