

Georgia's Hope Program

Georgia's lottery-funded Hope program has been the envy of many states since its inception in 1993. The success of the program has helped over 2.1 million Georgia students attend post-secondary institutions at our many public universities and technical colleges. In addition, 80,000 4-year olds have been given a head start in their learning through the pre-k program. Another part of the program has helped us keep our schools a little more up-to-date in the field of technology. But the Hope program is in need to financial reform. Because of a downturn in funds from the lottery, the program is facing a structural deficit. There are ways of making these changes so that the burden of the cuts does not hurt those who need the help with pre-K and post-secondary education that the Hope program gives them.

One facet of the program which many people are not even aware of is the Hope Grant. With the Hope Grant any Georgia resident can attend one of our excellent Technical Colleges with tuition and books paid for by the Hope Grant. There is no high school Grade Point Average requirement and it doesn't matter what year you graduated from high school. You can attend the technical college until you finish the program you are in (with a limit to the number of courses you can take). You must pass the classes you take to obtain your diploma or certificate, but there is not a GPA requirement once you are in a program. You do not have to go full-time, so someone who is working can go part-time and continue to work. Because of this program, our technical colleges are now ranked in the top 10 in the nation. And we are educating a work force for the jobs that are available in Georgia and throughout the country.

The proposed changes to the Hope program concerning the Hope Grant will severely damage the effectiveness of this program. We need to encourage the citizens of Georgia who are trying to re-train for new jobs to remain at the technical colleges until they finish. The new proposal would require the students in the technical college to maintain a 3.0 gpa or he/she would lose tuition through the Hope Grant. This means that a student would possibly not be able to finish the program. Take for instance someone who had been a machinist for 15 years and then lost his job. Because so many of these types of manufacturing jobs have been shipped overseas, this person could not find another job. So he/she began a program at one of our Technical Colleges in auto mechanics. Luckily we can't outsource fixing cars and trucks! So this person makes a 2.8 the first semester after being out of school for 15 years! He's out of the Hope Grant and in order to continue must come up with the tuition money. He could apply for the Pell Grant, but that would take months. Because he can't find a job he doesn't have the money for tuition. So he is out of the technical program and will join the ranks of the not only unemployed but also untrained!

This is just one more example of cuts in education that are not well thought out. This and the 18% cuts in elementary and secondary education and the 26% cuts in

post-secondary education the past three years are just one more example of the assault on public education in Georgia. A recent poll showed that the majority of the citizens of this country would prefer to pay more taxes to save education. This adjustment in the Hope Grant (and the changes in the pre-K program along with cuts in federal funded head start programs, which I haven't even discussed) will be disastrous to our economy and to the education of our citizens. As conservative columnist David Brooks says "This period of austerity will be a blessing if it spurs an effectiveness revolution. It will be a disaster if the cutting is done politically or mindlessly. Unfortunately, that's often how it is being done now." And that is how it is being done in Georgia. There has been little thought to the **future** of education after all of these cuts. Please contact your state senators and representatives to ask them to save the pre-K program and the Hope Grant and stop the drastic cuts in education.