

Mary Ann Handley Award Eligibility

By: Jessica Callahan, Associate Analyst
August 22, 2024 | 2024-R-0138

Issue

What eligibility requirements must students meet to receive the Mary Ann Handley Award, which gives high school graduates and certain transition school students the opportunity to attend a Connecticut community college (“CT State”) debt-free?

This report updates OLR Report [2019-R-0318](#).

Summary

Students must meet various requirements to be eligible to receive the [Mary Ann Handley Award](#) and must continue to meet these eligibility requirements to receive these awards in subsequent semesters. These requirements relate to (1) enrollment status, (2) in-state student classification, (3) academic progress during enrollment, and (4) financial need. There are specific provisions on eligibility for students returning to school after an administratively approved medical or personal leave or a military leave.

Within available appropriations, the [Mary Ann Handley Award](#) (formerly the Pledge to Advance CT (PACT) program) provides eligible students with the opportunity to attend CT State debt-free ([CGS § 10a-174](#), as amended by [PA 24-81](#), § 75). The award (1) covers the unpaid portion of tuition and required fees established by the Board of Regents minus the student’s financial aid (i.e., scholarships; grants; and federal, state, and institutional aid awarded to the student other than loans) or (2) provides a minimum \$500 grant for full-time students or \$300 grant for part-time students, whichever is greater. Awards under this program apply to the first 72 credit hours earned by a community college student enrolled in a program leading to a degree or certificate.

Program Eligibility Requirements

Enrollment Status

Previously, eligibility for an award was limited only to students who graduated from a public or private high school prior to enrollment at a community college in a program leading to a degree or certificate. (This includes homeschooled students or those with a GED.) However, legislation enacted in 2024 expanded eligibility to also include students in a transition program who:

1. have not graduated from high school,
2. are enrolled in a transition program under their individualized education program, and
3. enroll in at least one course at a regional community-technical college ([PA 24-81](#)).

Award recipients must enroll in CT State as a full- or part-time student taking at least six credits per semester. For a student with a documented learning disability, “full-time enrollment” means the maximum number of credit hours feasible for the student to attempt in a semester as determined by his or her academic advisor.

In-State Student Classification

Only in-state students are eligible to receive the Mary Ann Handley Award. By law, with limited exceptions, eligibility for in-state classification is based on an applicant’s “true, fixed, and permanent home” and the place where he or she intends to remain and return to after leaving ([CGS §§ 10a-28 & 10a-29](#)).

Academic Progress

Students enrolled in the program must make satisfactory academic progress to maintain eligibility. “Satisfactory academic progress” typically refers to academic performance that allows the student to maintain enrollment in his or her degree or certificate program.

Financial Need

Students must also complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and accept all available financial aid that is not in the form of a federal, state, or private loan.

JC:co