

House Bill 562

By: Representatives Dickey of the 140th, Knight of the 130th, Pirkle of the 155th, and Nix of the 69th

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

1 To amend Article 7 of Chapter 3 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated,
2 relating to scholarships, loans, and grants for postsecondary education, so as to establish the
3 Realizing Educational Achievement Can Happen (REACH) Scholarship Program; to provide
4 for a short title; to provide for definitions; to provide for scholarship eligibility and
5 requirements; to provide for participation of local school systems; to provide for continuing
6 eligibility; to provide for funding; to provide for rules and regulations; to provide for related
7 matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

8 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

9 **SECTION 1.**

10 Article 7 of Chapter 3 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to
11 scholarships, loans, and grants for postsecondary education, is amended by adding a new part
12 to read as follows:

13 "Part 4

14 20-3-495.

15 This part shall be known and may be cited as the 'Realizing Educational Achievement Can
16 Happen (REACH) Scholarship Act.'

17 20-3-496.

18 As used in this part, the term:

19 (1) 'Realizing Educational Achievement Can Happen (REACH) Scholarship Program'
20 or 'scholarship program' means the needs-based mentoring and scholarship program
21 established pursuant to this part to provide promising students the support to graduate
22 from high school and achieve postsecondary educational success.

23 (2) 'REACH participating school system' means a local school system that meets the
24 requirements of Code Section 20-3-498.

25 (3) 'REACH scholar' means a student in a REACH participating school system who has
 26 been nominated and approved to participate in the scholarship program.

27 20-3-497.

28 (a) The Realizing Educational Achievement Can Happen (REACH) Scholarship Program
 29 is hereby established. The scholarship program shall provide scholarships and support to
 30 eligible students who meet the following requirements:

31 (1) Be a United States citizen or an eligible noncitizen for 12 consecutive months prior
 32 to the first day of classes of the spring term of the student's 7th grade school year;

33 (2) Be enrolled in a REACH participating school system;

34 (3) Qualify for the federal free or reduced lunch program;

35 (4) Not have had more than two in-school suspensions during the two semesters or four
 36 quarters immediately preceding the spring term of the student's seventh grade year;

37 (5) Not have any criminal or drug-related convictions;

38 (6) Not have more than five days of unexcused absences during any of the student's
 39 middle school calendar years;

40 (7) Have his or her parents or guardians complete and submit a release of information
 41 form, as part of the application process, authorizing the school to provide the authority
 42 information related to the student's participation in the program; and

43 (8) Demonstrate academic promise, as defined by the authority, taking into consideration
 44 grades, attendance, and behavior.

45 20-3-498.

46 Local school systems interested in becoming a REACH participating school system shall
 47 complete the REACH Scholarship Program application, and provide detailed descriptions
 48 of how program requirements will be met, including, but not limited to how the local
 49 school system will:

50 (1) Identify the REACH coordinator;

51 (2) Establish a mentor program or utilize an existing local program;

52 (3) Identify the academic coach to monitor REACH scholars' academics, behavior, and
 53 attendance, as well as their transition from middle school to high school; and

54 (4) Develop plans to engage the community and sustain the program financially and
 55 programmatically.

56 20-3-499.

57 (a) REACH participating school systems shall select each student for the program in the
 58 spring of the student's seventh grade year or in the fall of his or her eighth grade year, for

59 participation beginning in the eighth grade year. REACH participating school systems
 60 shall develop a rigorous application process to select REACH scholars, including but not
 61 limited to:

- 62 (1) Identifying all students eligible for federal free or reduced price lunch;
 63 (2) Nominating qualified students to apply. Nominations can be made by counselors,
 64 principals, superintendents, or any individual within the REACH participating school
 65 system who is able to identify students most in need of the REACH scholarship;
 66 (3) Requiring nominated students to complete the REACH student application, which
 67 includes an academic recommendation and a community recommendation;
 68 (4) Reviewing student packets, including the nomination form, proof of eligibility for
 69 federal free or reduced lunch, citizenship and residency requirements, and grade,
 70 attendance, and discipline reports; and
 71 (5) Interviewing all nominated students by a student selection committee established by
 72 the REACH participating school system.

73 (b) REACH participating school systems shall be eligible to designate the following
 74 number of REACH scholars:

- 75 (1) For school systems with five or more high schools, 12 REACH scholars; and
 76 (2) For school systems with less than five high schools, seven REACH scholars.

77 20-3-499.1.

78 (a) To maintain eligibility during middle school and high school, a REACH scholar shall:

79 (1)(A) Maintain a cumulative grade point average of at least 2.5 or better as calculated
 80 by the REACH participating school system, if the REACH scholar is in middle school;

81 or

82 (B) Maintain a secondary cumulative grade point average of at least 2.5 as calculated
 83 by the authority in the same manner as the high school grade point average for initial
 84 HOPE scholarship eligibility;

85 (2) Adhere to the REACH participating school system's stated attendance policy and
 86 attend classes regularly. A REACH scholar will be placed on probation for one semester
 87 after reaching five or more combined excused and unexcused absences in one semester.
 88 While on probation, the REACH scholar may be removed from the program if he or she
 89 has any additional unexcused absences or three or more excused absences;

90 (3) Adhere to the REACH participating school system's stated disciplinary policy. A
 91 REACH Scholar will be placed on probation for one semester if he or she receives more
 92 than one in-school suspension per semester or immediately upon an out-of-school
 93 suspension. While on probation, the REACH scholar may be removed from the program
 94 if he or she has an additional suspension;

95 (4) Remain drug and alcohol-free. A REACH scholar convicted of committing a felony
 96 or misdemeanor involving marijuana, controlled substances, or dangerous drugs, is
 97 immediately ineligible for further participation in the scholarship program. A REACH
 98 scholar who fails to comply with the REACH participating school system's drug and
 99 alcohol policies will be immediately ineligible for further participation in the scholarship
 100 program;

101 (5) Meet with his or her assigned REACH mentor a minimum of eight times per
 102 semester;

103 (6) Meet with his or her assigned REACH academic coach a minimum of four times per
 104 semester;

105 (7) Attend REACH program activities;

106 (8) Graduate from high school; and

107 (9) Enroll in a University System of Georgia or Technical College System of Georgia
 108 institution or an eligible private postsecondary educational institution.

109 (b) To maintain eligibility during college, a REACH scholar shall:

110 (1) Be enrolled full-time at an eligible postsecondary institution;

111 (2) Maintain a minimum 2.0 grade point average and satisfactory academic progress, as
 112 determined by the authority;

113 (3) Complete and submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) each year
 114 of college; and

115 (4) Not be in default on a federal or state educational loan or owe a refund to a federal
 116 or state student financial aid program.

117 20-3-499.2.

118 (a) Subject to available funding, the authority will provide \$10,000.00 for each REACH
 119 scholar for the first year of the REACH participating school system's participation in the
 120 scholarship program.

121 (b) Each year thereafter, the REACH participating school system will be responsible for
 122 providing a proportionate share of the scholarship. The REACH participating school
 123 system's proportionate share shall be based on the school system's designated tier in the
 124 Department of Community Affairs' job tax credit designation.

125 20-3-499.3.

126 The authority shall develop rules, guidelines, application forms, and application procedures
 127 necessary to implement the provisions of this part."

128

SECTION 2.

129 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.