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| HARMONY PUBLIC SCHOOLS |
| GROW YOUR OWN TEACHER |
| EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM POLICY AND PROCEDURES |
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**Purpose of the Grow Your Own Teacher Program**

The Grow Your Own Teacher Educational Assistance Program (“the GYOT Program” or “Program”) is Harmony Public Schools’ (“HPS”) commitment to advancing knowledge of its students and graduates by encouraging students and graduates to pursue a career in education.

A Program objective is to allow eligible HPS students and graduates to obtain any undergraduate degree along with the attainment of a Texas teaching certificate. Program participants (“Participants”) will also gain positive work experience and will receive compensation through employment with HPS, as well as financial assistance with higher education tuition and related costs. Finally, Participants will have an opportunity for continued employment in a teaching position with HPS.

This is how the Program works:

**GYOT Program Overview**

The GYOT Program includes:

* Financial support through partial reimbursement of tuition and related expenses;
* Guidance on developing effective study habits;
* GYOT Program retreats and seminars;
* Individualized mentoring;
* Opportunities for improving communication skills and professionalism;
* Special workshops for the enhancement of teaching skills and an opportunity for a career in teaching with HPS and beyond;
* Training in successful goal setting and goal attainment techniques; and
* Work experience with and work compensation from HPS.

**Eligibility and Eligibility Maintenance Requirements**

The GYOT Program is only available to students enrolled in or having graduated from HPS. GYOT Program applicants are therefore urged to carefully consider the GYOT Program description, including eligibility and eligibility maintenance requirements, before completing the required application forms.

Applicants must meet each of the following eligibility criteria:

*Minimal Eligibility Requirements for Students Currently Enrolled in HPS (selected in Senior year, Fall semester)*

* Completion of junior and senior year of high school at HPS.
* Cumulative HPS GPA of 3.0 or higher throughout enrollment.

*Additional Competitive Eligibility Factors*

* Demonstrated aptitude for teaching.
* The applicant must demonstrate good character.
* Demonstrated effective verbal and written communication skills.

*Eligibility Maintenance*

* Minimal Eligibility Requirements and Additional Competitive Eligibility Factors must be maintained throughout the Program and will be reviewed for compliance during the Fall semester of Participant’s Senior year.

*Minimal Eligibility Requirements for Graduates of HPS*

* Completion of junior and senior year of high school at HPS.
* Cumulative HPS GPA of 3.0 or higher throughout enrollment.
* Cumulative GPA of 2.5 in any higher education courses completed.

*Additional Competitive Eligibility Factors*

* Demonstrated aptitude for teaching.
* The applicant must demonstrate good character.
* Demonstrated effective verbal and written communication skills.

*Eligibility Maintenance*

* Minimal Eligibility Requirements must be maintained throughout the Program. Eligibility may be monitored at any time.

**Required Forms**

Applicants must complete the following forms and documents and return them to [Cosmos Foundation Scholarship Committee; delivery options (e-mail, hand delivery or mail]:

*Required Forms for Students Currently Enrolled in HPS*

* GYOT Program Application Form.
* HPS transcript showing the applicant’s cumulative HPS GPA and attendance record.
* Two letters of recommendation from individuals having knowledge of the applicant’s character and academic ability.

*Required Forms for Graduates of HPS*

* GYOT Program Application Form.
* HPS transcript providing applicant’s cumulative HPS GPA and attendance record.
* Copy of applicant’s college or university transcript(s), if any, providing cumulative GPA for higher education courses.
* Two letters of recommendation from individuals having knowledge of the applicant’s character and academic ability.

Completed application packets must be received by Cosmos Foundation Scholarship Committee by **May 3, 201333**.Email address for GYOT application is GYOT@harmonytx.org. **Late or incomplete applications will not be considered.**

**Selection Process**

All properly completed and timely received applications will be reviewed. Applicants will be selected on the basis of Program qualifications, merit, and Program openings.

Selected applicants will be bound by the GYOT Program Governance Rules for Participation.

**GYOT Program Governance Rules for Participation**

Program Participants are expected to:

* Participate in GYOT Program activities offered. .
* Receive continuous positive recommendations from HPS teachers and administrators.
* Meet and continue to meet all requirements for employment with HPS, including but not limited to criminal background checks and positive employment references.
* Accept part-time employment with HPS (minimum 180 hours per semester) in a position designated by HPS while attending higher education classes.
* Be admitted and enrolled a minimum of 12 credit hours per semester in an undergraduate program leading to a standard Texas teaching certificate in an HPS-approved accredited college or university in the State of Texas.
* Maintain a cumulative GPA of 2.5 or higher in all undergraduate courses.
* Obtain an undergraduate degree in any major qualifying for a standard Texas teaching certificate within four years of beginning undergraduate courses under the GYOT Program.
* Teach full-time for HPS for two academic years following receipt of a standard/probationary Texas teaching certificate (“the Service Period”). Completion of the Service Period is the Program End Date.
* Submit proof of enrollment at a program leading to a standard Texas teaching certificate at the beginning of each semester.

**Maximum Educational Assistance Benefit**

The maximum financial assistance provided under the GYOT Program is [$2,500] per academic year. [$1250 per semester]

**Reimbursement Process**

HPS will provide financial assistance for expenses and costs related to tuition, course fees, required textbooks, supplies, and equipment necessary for a GYOT Program participant to obtain an undergraduate degree. Reimbursable courses must be for credit hours; no financial assistance will be provided for “pass/fail” or similar courses.

HPS will not provide financial assistance for expenses and costs related to application fees, parking permits, non-resident fees, installment plan fees, meals, lodging, transportation, or tools or supplies that may be retained by Participant after obtaining an undergraduate degree. HPS also will not provide financial assistance for courses involving sports, games, or hobbies, unless the courses are required as part of Participant’s degree program.

**HPS will not provide financial assistance for expenses and costs incurred prior to an individual’s participation in the GYOT Program. HPS also will not provide financial assistance for a course in which Participant does not earn a passing grade of at least 70%.**

Financial assistance reimbursements will be issued at the end of each semester. To receive reimbursement, Participants must submit the following forms and information:

* Completed Reimbursement Request Form.
* Original fee statements and a receipt showing payments made to Participant’s college or university.
* Original receipts for required textbooks, supplies and/or equipment, with Participant’s name, social security number, and related course number attached.
* Transcript from Participant’s college or university showing the courses completed and Participant’s cumulative GPA.

All paperwork required for reimbursement following the Fall semester must be received by **the first Friday in February**, and all paperwork for reimbursement following the Spring semester must be received by **the last Friday in August.** Absent extenuating circumstances approved by the GYOT Program Committee, financial assistance will not be provided if required information is not timely submitted.

Approval for financial assistance is generally limited to one undergraduate degree per Participant. Financial assistance for any additional degree requires prior approval from Cosmos Foundation Scholarship Committee.

Financial assistance is generally not provided if Participant retakes a course. Some courses involving research or extended study may be repeated, if advance arrangements are made through Cosmos Foundation Scholarship Committee.

**Work Schedule Limitations**

Except for during Participants’ student teaching requirement, Participants must work part-time for HPS while completing their college education. Participants are encouraged to schedule their course schedule in a manner that does not interfere with their work responsibilities. Unless specific approval of both Participant’s supervisor and the Cosmos Foundation Scholarship Committee is obtained in advance, Participant may not enroll in a course during scheduled working hours. Participants must adhere to all HPS employment policies and procedures, including but not limited to absence from work.

**Tax Implications**

Internal Revenue Code Section 127 provides an exemption of up to $5,250 in a tax (calendar) year for courses reimbursed through employer educational assistance programs. Any amount of the benefit in excess of the $5,250 exclusion is considered taxable income. Once the receipt of benefits over the $5,250 exclusion is determined, appropriate tax withholdings will be made and the amount added to the participant’s gross wages.

Due to nearly continuous changes in the tax laws, participants may wish to consult with a tax advisor regarding the potential tax implications of participating in the GYOT Program.

**Prohibited Payments**

The GYOT Program prohibits payments to those in the highly compensated group when such payments violate the discrimination clause set forth in the Internal Revenue Code section 127(b)(2).

**Return of Financial Assistance Upon Program Default**

Participants who fail to maintain Program eligibility through the Program End Date or who leave the Program prior to the Program End Date for any reason other than involuntary separation will be considered to have failed to complete the Service Period and thus to have defaulted under Program requirements. In such event, Program reimbursements to Participants shall be considered a loan to Participants, and all financial benefits provided for tuition or related cost reimbursements shall be repaid according to the following schedule:

* The full amount of the GYOT Program award must be repaid if Participant does not complete his or her undergraduate degree or standard Texas teacher certification within four years or if Participant fails to teach for HPS after becoming degreed.
* Three-fourths (3/4) of the GYOT Program award must be repaid if Participant becomes degreed/certified and teaches less than one complete academic year with HPS.
* One-half (1/2) of the GYOT Program award must be repaid if Participant becomes degreed/certified and teaches one complete academic year with HPS.
* One-fourth (1/4) of the GYOT Program award must be repaid if Participant becomes degreed/certified and teaches more than one but less than two complete academic years with HPS.

**Non-Contractual Nature of the Program**

**Neither selection into the GYOT Program nor execution of the GYOT Program Governance Rules for Participation nor the offer of employment constitute a contract between HPS and Participant. Participants employed by HPS are employed “at-will” and nothing in the Program is intended to nor should be construed as an offer of continued employment.**

**Program Amendment or Termination**

HPS intends to continue the GYOT Program indefinitely; however, HPS reserves the right in its discretion to amend, suspend, or terminate the Program, or Participant’s enrollment in the Program and/or employment with HPS, at any time.