

**COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA**  
**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS POLICY**

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**Purpose**

Riverside County recognizes the importance of an organizational culture that fosters the development of our workforces' knowledge, skills, and abilities to meet the ever-changing current and future needs of our communities. Retaining current employees is more cost-effective than recruiting and training new employees to perform the same job at the same level of competence. We know that continual education, training, and development can improve employee engagement, productivity, and help us attract and retain valued employees, which is a high priority for the County. In addition, educational support and student loan repayment benefits can boost the County's branding efforts, improve employee financial wellness, and can attract and retain desirable candidates for hard-to-fill positions requiring specific degrees, certifications, and/or licenses.

This policy provides departments and employees with two different methods for educational support.

- **Part A** - focuses on employee reimbursement for pre-approved costs associated with completion of an individual course, workshop, seminar, or professional exam or license fees, including renewals. These reimbursements are managed through the department and may require Executive Office and Human Resources approval.
- **Part B** - focuses on the concept of career pathing, which is concerned with satisfying the County's workforce planning needs and with meeting our employees' development needs over their entire career. The County's Educational Support Program, within Human Resources Learning and Organizational Development Division, is designed to integrate career-pathing concepts for the mutual benefit of the County and our employees. The multi-faceted services and support include career and educational counseling, tuition reimbursement, student loan repayment, the 20/20 Program, the Professional Student Internship Program, and college relations efforts. These reimbursement and repayment programs are managed through the Educational Support Program and require department participation criteria and approval.

**Policy**

**Part A**

**Reimbursement Through the Departments for Course, License, or Exam Fees**

It shall be the policy of the Board of Supervisors that an employee may be reimbursed the actual cost of tuition, registration fees, testing/exam fees, and/or professional license fees upon successful completion of a course offered by an institution of higher learning, training facility, or following attendance of a workshop, seminar or institute, providing that such training

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is designed to improve the employee's effectiveness in performing their currently-assigned duties.

Subject to the availability of funds, reimbursement for such training may be authorized as follows:

Section. 1. **DEPARTMENT HEAD APPROVAL**

- a. When the reimbursement expense is \$500.00 or less.
- b. With pre-approval, through department travel/training request procedures, prior to commencement of the course, exam, or obtaining a license or license renewal.
- c. When the cost of training, in any amount, is reimbursed from funds administered by state or federal agencies.

Section. 2. **HUMAN RESOURCES AND EXECUTIVE OFFICE APPROVAL**

- a. When the tuition or registration fee is more than \$500.00 (for all training except training referred to in Sec. 1.(C) above).
- b. Such approval shall be obtained prior to the commencement of the training.

**Part B**

**Reimbursement Through the Educational Support Program for Degrees and Certifications and Alternative Educational Support Programs and Services**

In addition to reimbursement for training required in an employee's current position, support for education will be provided through the County's Educational Support Program (ESP), as described herein:

Section. 1 **PURPOSE:**

To encourage and facilitate career pathing and development through a program whereby employees of the County are:

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- a. Reimbursed for the costs of textbooks, tuition, registration, and laboratory fees for courses required to obtain an undergraduate, graduate degree, doctoral, or certification in an approved career development plan; or
- b. Provided with educational loan repayment as a hiring or retention incentive; or
- c. Provided with a reduced work schedule while continuing to be paid as a full-time employee, to allow time to complete clinical or fieldwork requirements for a degree or certification within an approved career and educational program; or
- d. Provided with alternative support to achieve educational and training goals within an approved career and educational program.

Section. 2    **TEXTBOOK AND TUITION REIMBURSEMENT**

The County may provide up to one hundred percent (100%) reimbursement of tuition for approved career-related courses, for their degree coursework for each academic year, in accordance with the provisions of this program. [Annual reimbursement of expenses that exceed the annual limit permitted by Internal Revenue Code Section 127 will be treated as taxable income to the employee].

**Eligible Employees:**

For educational reimbursement, regular full-time employees who have completed their initial probationary period are eligible to apply. In addition, any temporary or Per Diem employee working in a nursing classification in any County agency/department who works a minimum of 520 hours in any fiscal year, may take advantage of the Educational Support Program. Temporary or Per Diem employees regularly scheduled to work less than 36 hours per week are eligible for a pro-rata level of reimbursement.

**Program Entry and Participation:**

Tuition reimbursement provides support while the employee completes coursework towards a degree or certification. The following procedures apply:

- a. Employees who wish to receive support or participate in the program will complete an application and may be evaluated to determine aptitudes and personal value orientations related to the chosen field.

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- b. Where appropriate, participants in the Educational Support Program will be interviewed and receive career development resources outlining the jobs to which they are most suited, availability of such jobs within the County organization, and requirements for job eligibility.
- c. A counselor will assess which jobs would be the best fit for the employee and counsel them on how to achieve education, training, or experiential requirements for specific jobs. If educational funding is being requested and available through funding sources, this plan will then be formalized in a proposed Individual Career Development Plan (CDP).
- d. The sponsoring agency/department(s) and the Human Resources Department will review the applicants and their proposed plan for eligibility prior to admittance to the program. Only those meeting all eligibility requirements will be admitted, and placement will be on a first-come, first-served basis.
- e. Participating employees will be responsible for participating in periodic counseling sessions to monitor progress in meeting the goals of their personal Career Development Plan.
- f. Participating employees must maintain a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.5 to remain eligible for any reimbursement assistance. Failure to meet the minimum GPA will be cause for immediate removal from the program.

**Courses Eligible:**

The following criteria will be used in determining eligibility for reimbursement:

- a. Undergraduate and graduate-level coursework is eligible for reimbursement only if courses are required to obtain a degree, , certificate, or other qualification approved through the Educational Support Program.
- b. Courses must be satisfactorily completed. A grade of "C" or its equivalent is required for reimbursement of undergraduate coursework. A grade of "B" or its equivalent is required for reimbursement of graduate level coursework.
- c. Courses must be offered by a regionally accredited educational institution that has been approved by the Human Resources Director or designee unless exceptions are made for specific vocational training.

**Courses Not Eligible:**

- a. Those which are not listed on an approved Career Development Plan.
- b. Those which duplicate training the employee has already received.

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- c. Those which are not offered through a regionally accredited educational institution that has been approved by the Human Resources Director or designee, unless exceptions are made for specific vocational training.

Section. 3 **EDUCATIONAL LOAN REPAYMENT**

The County may provide up to \$5,250 in loan repayment annually to employees hired for, and working in, approved positions to help repay student loans incurred for difficult-to-recruit or retain positions..

**Eligible Employees:**

Nursing, Baccalaureate, Juris Doctorate and Master's degree graduates, employed in a full-time regular position that has been designated as difficult to recruit or retain, for educational purposes. Approval by the hiring agency/department and the Human Resources Department is required.

**Program Entry and Participation:**

Regular full-time employees hired into an eligible difficult-to-recruit or retain position within a participating department must complete a Request for Loan Repayment Packet to be provided by their department coordinator.

**Hiring Incentive:**

The County may pay an amount up to the amount of the employee's monthly payment on a student loan as an incentive to join the County workforce, and the monthly nature of the payment would serve as a retention incentive as well. Any reimbursement amount that is provided for loans made prior to employment are considered taxable by the Internal Revenue Code Section 127.

**Retention Incentive:**

For current County employees with outstanding student loans, this benefit may be available as a retention incentive as long as the eligible participant continues working in the identified difficult-to-recruit or retain position and as long as the position is classified as such.

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Eligibility:

Maximum Benefit – The benefit is limited to \$5,250 per year and is paid per pay period (24 annually).

If any assistance paid to an employee pursuant to this Policy does not meet the requirements set forth under Internal Revenue Code section 127 of the Internal Revenue Code, the County shall treat any such payments as taxable income to the employee. Reimbursement for loans for education received prior to employment will be treated as taxable income to County employees. Repayment of qualifying loans will include only those incurred for education received concurrent with County employment, will continue to be reported as non-taxable benefits.

Section. 4     20/20 WORK-SCHOOL PROGRAM

The 20/20 Program consists of an agreement that the County will provide paid release time for up to three years while the employee attends school full-time which requires fieldwork or clinical hours for degree completion, and continues working at the County for a minimum of 20 hours per week while attending school. In exchange, the employee signs an agreement requiring them to remain in County service for a minimum of one year, or prorated portion thereof, in exchange for each year of support provided to them while completing their approved degree, licensing, or certification program. The service agreement will begin after completion of their educational program.

Eligible Employees:

Regular full-time employees who have completed their initial probationary period and who are currently working in the department that is offering the 20/20 Program, in addition to any department specific eligibility requirements outlined in participating departments' 20/20 Program guidelines.

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Program Entry and Participation:

Interested employees are required to complete the department specific application process. Application periods and deadlines vary by participating department. Approvals are awarded on an annual basis based on departmental need, spaces available, funding, and ongoing work and school performance. The department will be able to use companion positions or temporary employees through TAP to backfill those in the 20/20 program, if needed.

Section. 5 OTHER FAST-TRACK EDUCATION OPTIONS

Other fast-track programs in partnership with accredited colleges, including, but not limited to, focused degree or certification programs held on-site at County and local community facilities, tuition and application fee discounts for County employees, work-study programs, and fieldwork/clinical placements, will be developed within the Educational Support Program where possible. Participation in one of these programs may involve a 20/20 schedule, payment of eligible expenses, or another combination of monetary support and schedule accommodation, as determined by the Human Resources Director with the school and sponsoring departments.

Section. 6 ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT OPTIONS

Other support options are available to assist departments and employees with time constraints associated with working full-time and completing an educational program. All alternative support options require approval from the requesting employee's department head or designee, the Human Resources Director or designee, and/or other stakeholders. Approvals are dependent upon department's budget, business needs, and other factors depending upon the support option.

a. Professional Readiness Opportunities (PRO) Program

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Administered by the Human Resources Learning and Organizational Development division, this program option may provide the opportunity to obtain work experience, in an area outside of an employee's normal roles and responsibilities, to assist with obtaining clinical or fieldwork experience required for an educational program and/or an employee's professional development.

b. Leave of Absence for non-medical reasons

Administered by the Human Resources Disability Access Office and Leave Management, this option may allow employees an approved leave of absence from work to complete educational requirements, such as fieldwork or clinicals. Less than 480 hours requires department approval, while a request for 480 hours or more requires department and Human Resources approval.

c. Voluntary Furlough

Administered by each county department, this option may allow employees an approved request to voluntarily furlough to complete educational requirements, such as fieldwork or clinicals.

Section 7

COSTS NOT COVERED

In terms of both time and money, the following costs are not covered by the Educational Support Program:

- a. The employee's own time, compensatory time, vacation time, or annual leave approved in advance by the agency/department head to complete educational requirements. Agency/department heads/managers are encouraged to adjust schedules whenever possible to allow employees to attend classes only offered during regular work hours, including offering flextime hours. The 20/20 program and certain fast-track programs are exceptions to this general rule.
- b. Neither transportation nor mileage reimbursement are provided for by this program.
- c. Parking fees, meals, lodging, and other costs not specifically covered in this program will not be paid by the County.



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- d. Costs for which reimbursement is received from other sources and does not require payback by the employee (including, but not limited to, scholarships, grants, GI Bill, etc.) are not reimbursable from the County. Reimbursements provided through this program will be considered the secondary pay source, and the Employee will only be eligible for Reimbursement for the difference between the amount received from the other funding sources and the actual eligible expense.
- e. Conventions, seminars, workshops, and conferences, not qualifying as a required degree-related course, are not covered by this reimbursement program in Section B. (See page 1, Section A).

Section. 8 **EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION**

The Human Resources Director will implement and administer this program and will have the authority to administratively interpret its provisions. Approval of the Human Resources Department and participating Department Head or designee are required for all Educational Support Programs involving financial assistance. The Human Resources Director may develop such forms and additional procedures which are deemed necessary to accomplish the intent of this Educational Support Program. Any or all sections of this program may be amended or discontinued at any time.

Section. 9 **MANAGEMENT/EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION CONDITIONS**

In an effort to reasonably accommodate management and the participating employees, the following conditions will apply:

- a. The employee is responsible for performing current job assignments in addition to participating in the program. A minimum of an overall "Successful", or the equivalent, on the most recent performance evaluation is required in order to participate in the program, in addition to having no current/active documented performance or behavioral issues. Participants are not exempt from normal disciplinary action should work performance become unsatisfactory.
- b. The agency/department will determine reasonable flextime hours to meet both the agency/department and employee needs. Employees may be permitted to change their regular work hours if this practice does not negatively impact the agency/department's ability to accomplish work objectives.

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- c. If a 20/20 Program participant leaves County employment for any reason, except as set forth in Section 9f herein, before satisfying the requirements of Section 9c herein, the employee will reimburse the County for that prorated portion of the program expenditures that the employee did not exonerate through continued County employment using one of the following options: (1) lump sum payment of balance due; or (2) monthly payments of balance due which include interest at the legal rate as determined by the Human Resources Director. The County will pursue collections, including filing a claim in Small Claims Court, if necessary, to recoup amounts owed.
- d. If the employee does not complete the entire degree, licensing or certificate program for the 20/20 Program, the employee will not be required to reimburse the County for any program expenditures so long as the employee remains in County service for the same length of time as required under Section 9d to satisfy the program obligations.
- e. If a reduction in force or permanent disability which prevents the employee from gainful employment occurs, resulting in the loss of County employment, or if death occurs, the participant is not obligated to reimburse program expenses.
- f. Upon completion of the approved degree, license, or certification, the Educational Support Program is available to provide the participant with resources on County recruitment practices and available positions for which the employee may now qualify.

**Reference:**

Minute Order 3.13 of 11/01/83  
Minute Order 3.21 of 03/08/83  
Minute Order 3.16 of 09/24/85  
Minute Order 3.18 of 04/25/06  
Minute Order 3.43 of 08/29/06  
Minute Order 3.9 of 03/17/09  
Minute Order 3.36 of 12/14/10  
Minute Order 3.27 of 01/09/24