HIGH SCHOOL GUIDANCE MEMO

HIGH SCHOOL ACADEMIC YEAR:	**2026-2027**
TOPIC:	**OHIO GOVERNOR'S MERIT SCHOLARSHIP (GMS)**
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Overview

Each year, 35-40% of Ohio's highest achieving high school graduates attend college or university in another state. Approximately 66% of all U.S. college students stay to work in the state from which they graduate, and in Ohio that number is closer to 70%. Ohio has demonstrated significant success, recently, in attracting and retaining businesses. It is paramount that Ohio also competes to attract and retain a well-educated workforce.

Under the leadership of Governor DeWine and the Ohio Legislature, Ohio established the Governor's Merit Scholarship (GMS) program. The objectives of the GMS are to:

- Reduce financial barriers preventing Ohio's top high school graduates from pursuing higher education;
- Recognize the impressive scholastic achievement of Ohio's top graduates; and
- Incentivize Ohio's high achieving high school students to attend an institution of higher education (IHE) in Ohio.

The GMS provides up to $5,000 per year for up to four years in financial assistance to high school graduates who are identified as being in the top 5% of their class. GMS funds are applied against the student's cost of attendance (COA) and are refundable to the student, if applicable.

Process for Eligibility Determination

Notification of Number of Scholarships per School

The Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) will provide each public and participating chartered nonpublic high school with the number of students who are eligible for the GMS from that high school through use of a secure application portal: https://admission.ohio.gov. Each year, ODHE will email all eligible districts with a notification that the GMS portal is open and accepting nominations. This notification will be sent to the Superintendent of each public school district and the Head of School or Principal at each chartered nonpublic school. The Superintendent/Head of School can provide additional staff members with GMS portal access by logging in and designating them as a GMS Admin. **This must be completed each year for security purposes.**

ODHE will determine the number of eligible students in public high schools based on the number of students enrolled and in the third year of the graduation cohort as of the end of the school year. For chartered, nonpublic schools, ODHE will determine the number of eligible students based on the number of students enrolled at the end of the 11th grade. ODHE will receive this enrollment data from the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (DEW).

Each high school is to nominate the top 5% of their students based on the determination instructions below. Additional student eligibility will be determined at the college or university.

Determination of Top 5%

Public school districts and participating nonpublic high schools shall determine which students fall within the top 5% of their class. Determination of a student's membership within the top 5% of the class shall be based upon student grade point average (GPA) at the end of their junior year and calculated in compliance with state law (ORC 3365.04(E)) and guidelines established by the Chancellor for the purpose of implementing the GMS program. If a district or high school has an official policy for determining class rank that is compliant with state law, but not consistent with the Chancellor's guidelines under the GMS program, the district or school is permitted to follow its established policy for determining a student's membership within the top 5% of the class.

Each school shall receive only the number of GMS awards communicated. In such cases where ranking by GPA results in a tie, the school or district will determine which student(s) receive an offer of GMS. The district or school is encouraged to consider one or more factors beyond GPA to break such ties. These factors may include (but are not limited to):

- Established district or school policy;
- Scores on standardized college entrance examinations (e.g.: ACT, SAT);
- GPA for core or college-preparatory coursework;
- Involvement and leadership in extracurricular activities; and
- Financial need.

Do NOT consider a student's stated or unstated post-graduation plans (e.g.: attending an out-of-state college, joining the military, going to a trade school, etc.) when submitting nominees. The top students should be nominated for the GMS regardless of what their current post-graduation plans are. One of the goals of the GMS is to influence a student's post-graduation decision with the hope of encouraging them to enroll at a college or university in Ohio. Students MUST be allowed to make this choice.

Each public and participating nonpublic high school will report to ODHE the identity of the students who qualify for a GMS utilizing the secure GMS portal (https://admission.ohio.gov) **by October 1 each year.** However, due to the revision of the online portal, this year's nomination deadline will be extended to **October 16.**

*Receipt of the GMS is contingent upon meeting **all** eligibility requirements which will be determined at the college or university. If it is determined that a student does not meet all eligibility requirements, the GMS will be rescinded.*

Success Academies

As noted above, ODHE will provide the number of GMS awards available at each high school within the district. This list may include high schools within the district which have been designed primarily to support and assist students in need of academic intervention ("success academies"). Due to the nature of success academies, the top students may not be appropriate to nominate for the GMS.

For purposes of the GMS nominations from success academies, students nominated should have a GPA reasonably commensurate with the other GMS nominees from your district. If your district is in this situation, it is at the discretion of the district administration to determine whether a student(s) should be nominated. It is acceptable for a district to forego the nomination of success academy students altogether if their academic qualifications are not commensurate with other GMS nominees from the district.

Early Graduates

Students who are expected to graduate early may be considered for the GMS. Membership of the top 5% for this group of students shall be based on their GPA/class rank from the previous academic year. It is recommended for districts to create a policy indicating how these early graduates will be ranked against their peers. Please note, no additional GMS nominations will be made available to high schools based upon early graduates.

Transferring School Districts

A student who moves from one Ohio school district to another is considered part of their new school's graduating class. The student's move will not change the student count reported to the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce via EMIS as that number is determined at the end of the junior year. The student's candidacy for the Governor's Merit Scholarship should be considered by their new school using the policies and procedures for determining the top 5% of the graduating class. If a student transfers from one Ohio school district to another after receiving an offer of GMS, that offer remains valid despite the change in school districts.

Award

The GMS award is up to $5,000 each academic year, contingent upon adequacy of appropriation. In such cases where the total of awards exceeds the appropriation for a given year, awards may be reduced. Notification of reduced awards will occur as soon as is practicable to ensure that students have the information when making decisions about which institution of higher education (IHE) to attend. The GMS is applicable to eligible expenses included within the qualifying IHE's published cost of attendance (COA) and may be refundable to the student.

Award Notification

To ensure that students are informed of their offer of a GMS award with enough time to decide where to apply to college, ODHE intends to notify students of the award offer by email no later than November 1 (of the student's senior year). Notifications will be sent to students via a letter from the Governor. **It is important that the email address indicated within the GMS portal is a valid email address that is regularly accessed by the student and typed in accurately as this is the primary means of communication between the student and ODHE.** *PLEASE NOTE:* The student's personal e-mail address is preferred. If the student does not have a personal email that they regularly check, the student's parent/legal guardian's e-mail may be used. While you should not inform students that you are requesting personal email addresses because they are *receiving* the Governor's Merit Scholarship, you are permitted to let them know they are being *considered* so that they understand the importance of providing a valid email.

After ODHE sends GMS award notifications, each high school or district administrator **must inform** all GMS nominees of their scholarship offer. A form letter will be provided by ODHE for this purpose and should be shared with the student nominees from your district as soon as possible after November 1.

District/High School administrators should also ensure nominees have received the award email and that each student is aware of the instructions and deadlines associated with accepting the GMS. To the extent allowable by law, administrators should ensure the parents/legal guardians of students nominated for the GMS are also aware of the scholarship and the acceptance deadlines. **Regular and consistent contact between the high school and the student should continue throughout the acceptance period.** This will provide an adequate amount of time and information for any necessary updates to student contact information.

The GMS portal will remain open for view-only access to high school GMS Administrators after October 1. Administrators should log in regularly to view the acceptance status of the district's nominees. Once an award offer is

made, the offer remains valid even if the student changes high schools provided the student continues to meet all eligibility requirements.

Award Acceptance

Students must **proactively accept the award**. Students must inform ODHE of their acceptance of a GMS award and their intended IHE of enrollment via the secure online portal (https://admission.ohio.gov) by May 15.

Any awards not accepted by May 15 will be rescinded.

Students who receive an award letter will not have that award rescinded except as follows:

- The student does not accept the award by May 15.
- The student was improperly nominated as identified by the school district.
- The student moves out of state.
- The student does not enroll at a qualifying IHE within two years of their high school graduation.
- The student enrolls at an IHE that does not qualify for participation in the GMS program.
- The student does not graduate on time (within one year of the point of eligibility determination).
    - Note: Students who face extenuating circumstances may appeal this requirement.
- The student fails to meet qualifications for scholarship renewal.

Statement of Commitment

Ohio Revised Code Section 3333.1210 requires recipients of the Governor's Merit Scholarship to sign a statement of commitment to reside in the state for three years following the student's graduation from an Ohio college or university. When accepting the GMS, students will be required to type in their name and check a box that states the following:

"The goal of the Governor's Merit Scholarship is to keep high-achieving high school graduates in the state of Ohio to pursue higher education and contribute to Ohio's expanding economic opportunities. By entering my name below and accepting the Governor's Merit Scholarship, I commit, with good faith intent, to residing in Ohio for three years immediately following my graduation from an institution of higher education in this state."

Please explain to students that **this statement of commitment is NOT BINDING** and there are no legal or financial consequences if they ultimately choose to move out-of-state after graduation.

Disbursement

Full-time and part-time students will receive the full award amount, divided evenly by 2 semesters or 3 quarters depending on the academic calendar used by the college or university being attended.

Scholarship Renewal

High school students may have questions regarding the Governor's Merit Scholarship. You may direct them to our website: https://highered.ohio.gov/students/pay-for-college/ohio-grants-scholarships/gms/gms. Renewal requirements are as follows:

The Governor's Merit Scholarship is automatically renewed each year for up to four years as long as the following requirements are met:

- Maintain at least a 3.0 cumulative GPA
- Complete at least 20 credits throughout the academic year

- Demonstrate appropriate progress toward earning a degree

If any of these requirements are not met, students can submit an appeal to the Financial Aid Office at their college or university for renewal consideration. The college or university Financial Aid Office can be contacted directly for details on what documentation may be needed to appeal. If an appeal is submitted, the determination made by the IHE is final and not subject to appeal to ODHE.

***NEW* Verification of the Top 5%**

Starting in academic year 2026-2027, the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) will be conducting verification of the selection processes of participating high schools with regards to the top 5% of class rankings, as it relates to the Governor's Merit Scholarship (GMS) eligibility requirement.

High schools will be selected at random for audit and will be required to attest that they have followed their official policy, as well as provide their policy along with any supporting documentation requested by ODHE, to be submitted at the time of nomination. Failure of a selected school to provide the required documentation will result in a delay in the nomination process.

GMS Administrators should direct any questions to the Governor's Merit Scholarship Program Manager, Michelle Anderson, (614) 752-9199 or MeritScholarship@highered.ohio.gov.