



# MOUNTAIN BROOK FIRE DEPARTMENT

POLICY NO. 106.06

VOLUME: 1

SUBJECT: Education Incentive

SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: 11/7/2018 - revised

Chris J. Mullins, Fire Chief

**SCOPE AND PURPOSE:** Formal education is one of the core values of the Mountain Brook Fire Department. The department places a high value on the education of its members realizing that well educated employees are critical to the future success of the organization. Each year the department budgets for formal education courses including the provision of all books for those members wishing to attend college. Additionally, the department budgets for pay incentives which are rewarded to those members completing their studies and graduating with an approved Fire/EMS service or management related degree.

In today's educational environment, there are a plethora of degrees available. Obviously many of these degrees are not associated with, or related to, making an employee a better firefighter, paramedic or manager in either field. Some of the degrees could possibly be pertinent if a prerequisite of fire science or being a paramedic applied. The purpose of this policy is to lend some guidance to those personnel wishing to further their educational life by giving definition to the process.

## **POLICY:**

**Tuition Reimbursement:** If an employee selects a private institution of higher learning rather than a state school, the employee will only be reimbursed for the costs that would have been paid to the state school (this is usually based on UAB rates).

Any course of study must be approved by the Fire Chief or the Safety/Training Officer.

The Safety/Training Officer shall keep a current waiting list of those waiting on Tuition Reimbursement. When the firefighter is notified by the Safety/Training Officer, they shall send in the department request form. The Safety/Training Officer shall then appropriate the funds among those approved for reimbursement by sending each their approval amount. This process will take place each year before the start of the budget year (October 1).

Reimbursement will be made upon receipt of the necessary evidence that the course has been completed and that the cost for the course/books has been previously paid by the employee. Personnel with scholarships, government assistance (GI Bill) or other means for tuition payment shall utilize these venues and not participate in the City program.

The department's leave time policy will apply to those employees attending college classes.

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Employees must use regular leave time or swap time to attend classes during their tour of duty.

Studies should preferably lead to an associate degree, bachelor's degree or paramedic license (JCPB definition). However, in accordance with JCPB and City policy, 64 semester hours or 96 quarter hours of relevant course work will qualify a person to receive a 5% educational pay incentive. Graduate studies will be available only to those holding the rank of Lieutenant and above will be reviewed on a case by case basis. Prerequisites may be required for certain degrees based on the curriculum content of the degree being sought.

**\*Paramedic Training:** Chief Mullins has given permission for Paramedic Training "On Duty" if staffing is allowed.

Tuition reimbursement will be granted on the following basis:

<u>Completed Course Grade</u>	<u>% of Reimbursement</u>
A	100%
B	100%
C	100%
D	0%
F	0%
Incomplete/Drop	0%

**Course of Study Guidance:** An employee setting direction to further his/her education within the system established generally has two objectives in mind: to become a more well-rounded person through education and to increase wage earnings. The administrative perspective for employees furthering their education parallels that of the employee but additionally it is viewed as an investment. It is an investment in the individual and an investment in the future of the department. Since the program is an investment in the truest sense of the word, a return on the investment is expected; therefore, the curriculum for a course of study should have some direct connection to the provision of fire and emergency medical services. This can be directly related to the work itself or the management of services.

If a bachelor's course of study is **absolutely connected** to the provision of public sector services, then no prerequisite is required and the employee can receive 10% pay incentives. Examples of such programs are: BS degree at Athens University - Public Safety Administration, BS degree at Columbia Southern University - Occupational Safety and Health/Fire Science, and BS degree at UAB - Allied

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Health. Some examples of where a prerequisite would be required is for a general business degree, general management degree, accounting degree, general education, Computer Science, and Psychology (not all inclusive). In these examples, an associate degree in Fire Science or a certificate and/or associate degree in Paramedical Services would be needed to help make the connection to the department's mission. Bachelor degrees such as Marine Biology, Criminal Justice, Divinity, Political Science (not all inclusive) do not have a direct connection to the fire department's mission and therefore will not be considered for reimbursement or wage incentives even if an Associate's degree in Fire Science or Paramedical Services is held.

**Master's Degrees:** Master's degrees that are mission related (Management, Emergency Management, Allied Health, Public Administration, etc.) are now included within the premium pay system for positions designated by the City Manager. Receiving tuition reimbursement for a Master's degree will be available for those of Lieutenant's rank or higher in the organization. However, if a Firefighter or Apparatus Operator has a Bachelor's degree that does not meet the qualifications for compensation, but has earned a Master's degree that does meet the qualifications, then the Master's degree can be used to supplant the Bachelor's degree and will be compensable.

**Premium Code Assignment:** There is a maximum allowed of 15% premium codes above normal salaries. The top priority for premium code assignment will be job functions first and then educational premium codes. For example, an assigned paramedic will get 10% premium codes as the first priority and then get additional earned educational premium codes added until reaching the 15% maximum.

**Budget:** The Education Incentive Program is based on the availability of funds through the budgeting process and on JCPB policy. No future guarantees are expressed other than those that exist under established JCPB policy.

**Requirements:** All approved tuition reimbursement employees shall be required to take a minimum of three pre-graduate classes (Associate's or Bachelor's) or two graduate classes (Master's) per budget year (October 1<sup>st</sup> thru September 30<sup>th</sup>). If that requirement is not met, the employee will be placed on "tuition probation" which would mean the employee must take the required minimum classes the following year. If the minimum classes are not met the following year, the employee will be moved to the bottom of the tuition reimbursement list.