

NJ STARS Fact Sheet for 2026 High School Graduates

The New Jersey Student Tuition Assistance Reward Scholarship (NJ STARS) Program is an initiative created by the State of New Jersey that provides New Jersey's highest achieving students with free tuition at their home county college.

NJ STARS Benefits

The NJ STARS award covers the cost of tuition **only**, less any State and/or Federal grants and scholarships, for up to five semesters. The award covers up to 18 credit hours of tuition only per semester. Students are responsible for the cost of fees, books and other applicable educational expenses. **Funding for NJ STARS awards is dependent upon annual State appropriations.**

Your college will determine your final NJ STARS award. Contact the financial aid office at the school you attend or plan to attend to learn more about your benefits.

Student Eligibility

- New Jersey residents, who rank in the top 15.0% of their class at the end of **either** junior or senior year of high school are potentially eligible for the NJ STARS Program. Students must also complete a rigorous high school course of study. (**Note:** All courses of study are considered "rigorous" for 2026 high school graduates.) **Note: When calculating whether a student ranks within the top 15.0% of their class, HESAA applies a hard cut-off at exactly 15.0%, without rounding.**
- The New Jersey Council of County Colleges has determined that students who are in the top 15.0% of their high school class are ready for college-level coursework. **NJ STARS does not cover costs for remedial coursework.**
- All students must enroll in a full-time course of study no later than the fifth semester following high school graduation.
- Students must enroll full-time in a degree program at their home county college, unless the student demonstrates that the home county college does not offer the desired program of study or the program is oversubscribed for at least one year.
- Except in limited situations defined by statute, students must take a minimum of 12 college-level credits per semester. NJ STARS covers up to 18 college-level credits per semester.
- Students must meet residency requirements that can be found at:
<https://www.hesaa.org/Pages/TAG.aspx>
- Students must apply for all forms of State and Federal need-based grants and merit scholarships and submit any requested documentation to complete and verify application data within established State deadlines.

- Students must be U.S. citizens, eligible non-citizens or eligible to file the New Jersey Alternative Financial Aid Application and live in New Jersey for a minimum of twelve consecutive months prior to high school graduation.

Application Process

- Apply for admission to your home county college.
- Meet all admission and application requirements established by the county college.
- File the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or the New Jersey Alternative Financial Aid Application annually within established State deadlines.
- After filing your application, log into [NJFAMS](#) to review and complete your State grant record.

2026-2027 HESAA Deadlines:

To Access the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), click [here](#).

For NJ Dreamers to complete the NJ Alternative Financial Aid Application, click [here](#).

2025-2026 TAG recipients - Renewal applicants ----- **April 15, 2026**

All other applicants - Non-renewal applicants for Fall 2026 and Spring 2027 ---- **September 15, 2026**

All other applicants - Non-renewal applicants for Spring 2027 semester only --- **February 15, 2027**

- Meet the NJ State deadlines below for completing State grant record in NJFAMS (State tasks, verification, corrections, reevaluations, adding a college, etc.):
<https://www.hesaa.org/Pages/StateDeadlinesNextAY.aspx>

Complete State Record in NJFAMS

All applicants - Fall 2026 and Spring 2027 ----- **October 1, 2026**
Spring 2027 only ----- **March 1, 2027**

- County colleges notify students of NJ STARS eligibility.

Renewal Eligibility

- File the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or New Jersey Alternative Financial Aid Application annually within established State deadlines.
- Students must attain a minimum cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or higher at the start of the third semester of enrollment at the county college to remain an NJ STAR. Summer courses are included in determining the GPA.

- Students must maintain **continuous** full-time enrollment unless on a medical leave, approved by the county college, due to the illness of the student, a member of the student's immediate family, or a family emergency. Students can attend part-time due to illness or the death of a parent or spouse. The only other exception to continuous full-time enrollment applies to NJ STARS students called to partial or full mobilization for State or Federal active duty as a member of the National Guard or a Reserve component of the Armed Forces of the United States.
- Students may take less than 12 credits in their final semester if the county college determines that the student needs less than 12 credits in that semester to complete the degree program.
- Students enrolled in a nursing or engineering program that regularly requires six semesters to complete may retain NJ STARS II eligibility. However, NJ STARS will not cover the cost of the sixth semester.
- Students may receive the scholarship for up to five semesters. Currently, NJ STARS resources **are not** available to cover any summer payments. (This means that students will not receive NJ STARS awards for any summer courses.)

Three Plus One Degree Program

A four-year institution of higher education and a county college may partner to establish a three plus one degree program for a baccalaureate degree in such majors as the institutions of higher education may determine.

- A student who is otherwise eligible to receive an NJ STARS and/or NJ STARS II scholarship and who is participating in a three plus one degree program shall be eligible to receive an NJ STARS scholarship for the first three academic years of the three plus one degree program, and shall be eligible to receive an NJ STARS II scholarship for the fourth academic year of the three plus one degree program.
- Students must reach out to their **home** county college financial aid office for more details.

NJ STARS II Program

- NJ STARS recipients who earn an associate degree from a county college with a cumulative GPA of 3.25 or higher, have a family income (taxable and untaxed income) less than \$250,000, **and** meet all other program eligibility requirements may be eligible to receive an NJ STARS II award to transfer to a New Jersey TAG participating college or university to earn a baccalaureate degree.

Additional Information

Contact the financial aid office at your home county college for additional information.