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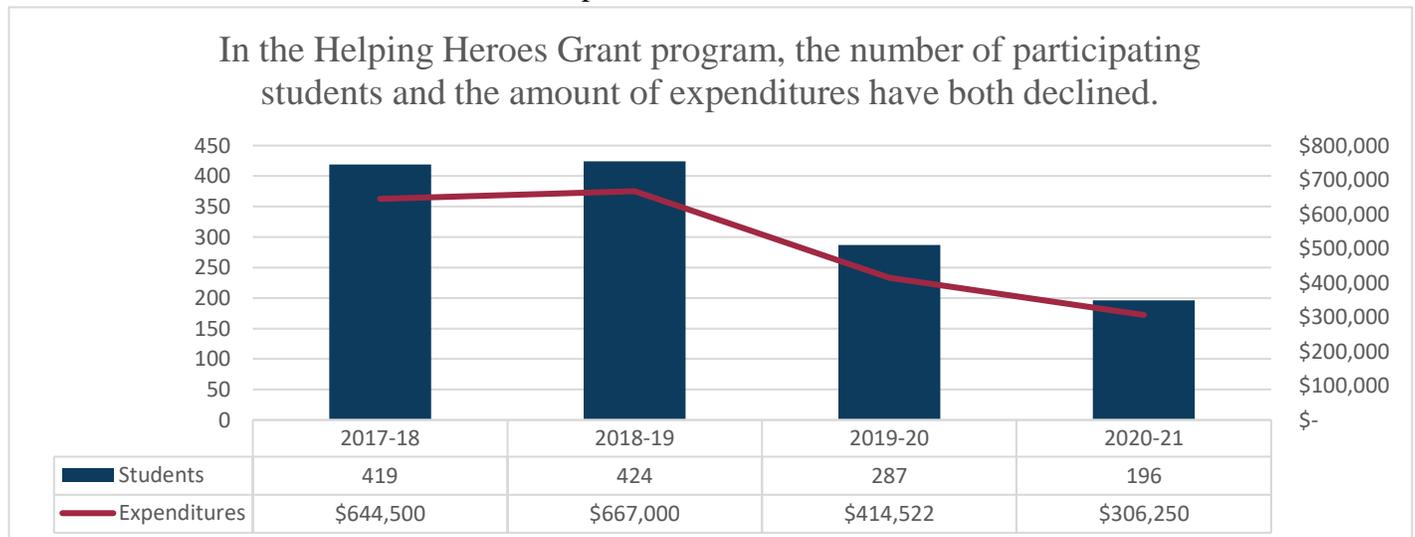
May 25, 2022

Comptroller’s Office Evaluates Helping Heroes Grants Supporting Veterans’ Education

The Tennessee Comptroller’s Office of Research and Education Accountability (OREA) has completed an evaluation of a program providing awards of financial aid to armed services veterans to attend institutions of higher education in Tennessee. This report represents the Comptroller’s third review of Helping Heroes Grants and focuses on the last four years of the program’s operation from 2017 to 2021.

Helping Heroes Grants are funded through the state’s lottery scholarship program and are administered by the Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation. Grant awards are either \$500 per semester for part-time students or \$1,000 per semester for full-time students. More than eight out of 10 Helping Heroes Grant recipients who are pursuing a bachelor’s degree graduate within six years of enrolling in a public four-year institution. Close to half of grant recipients who pursue an associate degree or certificate graduate within three years of enrolling in a two-year institution. In academic year 2017-18, the number of degrees and certificates earned by Helping Heroes grant recipients was 222. In 2020-21, however, the number of awards had dropped to 143, a reduction of almost 36 percent.

Between 2017-18 and 2020-21 there was an average of 332 students per year with average annual expenditures of \$508,068, however the number of participating students and the amount of grant expenditures have both declined since 2018-19. There were 419 grant recipients in academic year 2017-18 compared to 196 for 2020-21, a decrease of more than 53 percent.



Source: Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation Board Report.

20 years removed from 9/11 and over a decade since peak levels of members of the armed services in the combat theaters of the Middle East, there are fewer qualifying veterans in the pool for potential grants. With

fewer service members engaged in qualifying military activities, the number of Helping Heroes Grants has decreased.

The Comptroller's Office has included policy options for consideration by the General Assembly in its report. These include encouraging greater public awareness of Helping Heroes Grants as well as amending state law concerning the value of the grant and the possible use of these grants at Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs).

To read the report, please visit the Comptroller's website at: tncot.cc/orea.

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