CITY OF JOPLIN
COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM

ITEM
Council Bill 2025-545 – Approving updates to the Education Assistance Program Section of the Employee Handbook

MEETING DATE
November 3, 2025

ORIGINATING DEPT
Finance

ATTACHMENTS
CB 2025-545 Ordinance

REVIEWED BY
Department Head: Leslie Haase; Human Resources Director: Michelle Ducre; City Attorney: Peter Edwards; City Manager: Nick Edwards

SUMMARY
This Council Bill updates the Education Assistance Program in the Employee Handbook.

BACKGROUND
In 2023, the City Council adopted a new Employee Handbook. The revision of the entire Employee Handbook was an extensive and collaborative project that spanned many months. The collaboration on this project included management team, employees and representatives from the union groups led by Human Resources with Segal, as the consultant.

It was discussed when the policy was adopted that some changes would likely need to be made after it was put in place and used. Some revisions are needed to the policy to further clarify and match how the process actually works. City Council reviewed the proposed changes to the Education Assistance Program section of the Employee Handbook during the fiscal year 2026 budget work sessions and this item incorporates those proposed updates.

The revised Education Assistance Program will be effective on December 1, 2025.

FUNDING SOURCE
This item does not change the budget.

RECOMMENDATION
Staff recommends this council bill be approved on first reading.

COUNCIL BILL NO. 2025-545 ORDINANCE NO.

AN ORDINANCE repealing the Education Assistance Program Section of the revised Rules and Regulations (Employee Handbook) and enacting in lieu thereof a new Education Assistance Program Section of the revised Rules and Regulations (Employee Handbook) of the City of Joplin; and, setting a date when this Ordinance shall become effective.

WHEREAS, the City Council reviewed the Education Assistance Program language during the fiscal year 2026 budget work sessions; and,

WHEREAS, the Council of the City of Joplin desires to update the Education Assistance Program language to increase fees to meet the reasonable expenditures of this function.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED by the Council of the City of Joplin, Missouri, as follows:

Section 1. That the Education Assistance Program Section of the revised Rules and Regulations (Employee Handbook) be repealed and a new Education Assistance Program Section of the revised Rules and Regulations (Employee Handbook) of the City of Joplin be enacted in lieu thereof to read as follows:

"Employee Handbook

Education Assistance Program

Purpose

The City of Joplin is committed to the career development of our employees to enhance the ability for advancement opportunities in the organization. Through this program, the City offers educational assistance to regular full-time employees pursuing studies through accredited institutions for higher learning and/or trade schools. An annual pool of funds for this program is adopted in the budget and approved by the City Council. The course(s) or degree being sought must relate directly to the employee's career development within the City of Joplin. Participation in this program shall be solely on the employee's own time.

Eligibility

To be eligible for education assistance, employees must:

- Have completed one year of service at the City of Joplin;
- Be actively working at the City during the school/course semester;
- Perform satisfactorily in their job role (performance evaluation score of 3.0 or higher);

- Provide a completed and approved application signed by the Department Head;
- Achieve a passing grade (pass in a pass/fail program or grade C or higher);

Eligibility for reimbursement will cease for any classes/courses that are not completed by the employee's last date of employment with the City.

Covered Expenses

The City will reimburse tuition in an amount not to exceed the current in-state undergraduate tuition fees charged by Missouri Southern State University. Based on available funding, education assistance per eligible employee may not exceed $5,000 annually. Covered expenses include:

- Tuition and up to 50% of the cost of books
- All required courses and electives for a degree program directly related to the employee's career development

Master's classes will not be considered for reimbursement unless (1) there are available budget dollars after reimbursement for any undergraduate applications and (2) it is required for the career development of that employee.

Ineligible Expenses

College, graduate school and post graduate degree preparation courses and fees related to college entrance (ex. SAT, ACT, GRE, MCAT, LSAT…) are not covered under this policy. Industry training, professional development and continuing education classes are not covered under this policy, but instead fall within departmental budgets.

Application Procedures

Eligible employees who wish to apply for education assistance are required to:

1. Complete the education assistance form and meet with their supervisor and/or Department Head to obtain written approval from the Department Head prior to enrolling in courses.
2. Employees must provide a copy of the course description from the school, the degree being sought for elective classes (if applicable), the cost of tuition and books, and the proposed start and completion date.
3. Any classes starting and ending between August 1 and December 31 are considered Fall classes. Any classes starting and ending between January 1 and May 31 are considered Spring classes. Any classes starting and ending between June 1 to July 31 are considered Summer classes.

4. Late applications will not be accepted. Applications are due as follows:
    - Fall classes by July 1
    - Spring classes by December 1
    - Summer classes by May 1

The Department Head must sign the form to indicate approval, then send it with supporting documents to Human Resources prior to the start of the class/course.

Reimbursement Procedures (grade C or above or Pass prorated up to the maximum of $5,000 annually)

Employees approved for education assistance will be notified, in writing, by Human Resources. To receive reimbursement, the employee must provide the following to Human Resources:

- An official transcript of successful course completion (pass, or grade C or higher); and
- Proof of payment for tuition and books (Note: The City will only reimburse expenses not covered by other educational benefits, such as grants, scholarships, military education assistance)

*Should an employee **not** receive a passing grade of C or higher, or pass in pass/fail coursework, they will **not** be eligible for reimbursement under this program.*

All employees that complete these requirements will be placed in a pool for reimbursement on a pro-rata basis of the total amount being requested to the total amount of education assistance budget available. This will ensure that all employees eligible for this benefit will receive some reimbursement up to the maximum allowable annual allotment.

Once the applications are submitted, the Finance Department will calculate the maximum eligible amount of reimbursement for each employee for that semester, which will be included in the approval notification from Human Resources. The approval notification will be sent by July 20 for Fall classes, by December 20 for Spring classes and by May 20 for summer classes. The maximum eligible amount may increase if any approved employees do not complete the reimbursement procedure requirements. However, the maximum eligible amount will not decrease.

Tuition Repayment

An employee who receives education assistance must complete at least two (2) years of service with the City after satisfactory completion of the last course taken. Employees who leave employment within 2 years of course completion must repay the City of Joplin on a pro-rata basis based on one-twenty-fourth per month. The employee must meet with finance to develop a written and signed repayment agreement."

Section 2. That the City Manager of the City of Joplin, Missouri, is hereby authorized to adopt and implement the revised Rules and Regulations for and on behalf of the City of Joplin.

Section 3. That this ordinance shall become effective on December 1, 2025.

PASSED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF JOPLIN, MISSOURI, this _____ day of _____, 2025.

_____
Keenan T. Cortez, Sr., Mayor

ATTEST:

_____
Holly Nagy, City Clerk

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

_____
Peter C. Edwards, City Attorney