

Florida Choice Scholarships

# UNIQUE ABILITIES SCHOLARSHIP FAMILY HANDBOOK

(FES-UA)





## Welcome

This handbook is designed to help you navigate the Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities program. Inside, you will find in-depth guidance, from applying for the scholarship to using it in accordance with the law.

If you need assistance along the way, our team is ready to help. The Step Up For Students Customer Engagement Center is available Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. EST to support families with any questions or concerns:



[Inquiry Form](#)

Send us a question or message online



(877) 735-7837

Speak directly with a team member



[Live Chat](#)

Click the red “Chat with Us” tab on the right-hand side of our website



Click on any line within the Table of Contents to go directly to the section.

**Contents**

Welcome 1

Scholarship Overview 7

About Step Up For Students 7

    Our Work ..... 7

    Our Mission ..... 7

Eligibility Requirements 7

Applying For A Scholarship 8

    Timeline ..... 8

    Creating Your EMA Account..... 9

    Entering Your Information..... 9

    Uploading Required Documentation..... 10

        Qualifying Unique Ability..... 10

        Proof of Residency for Active-Duty Military Families..... 11

        Military Living in Florida ..... 11

        Military Moving into Florida ..... 11

        Military Moving out of or Living out of Florida ..... 12

        Adoption Status ..... 12

        Active-Duty Military Status ..... 13

        Law Enforcement Officer Status..... 13

        Foster Status or Out of Home Care..... 13

    Submitting Your Application..... 13

Eligibility Notification 13

    Award Prioritization..... 13

    Application Deadlines ..... 14

How To Accept The Scholarship 14

*Effective January 2026*



Timeline .....	14
Process .....	14
Award Notification .....	15
Capacity Limitation .....	15
Capacity Exceptions .....	15
Enrollment Requirements After Being Awarded .....	16
Full-Time Equivalent Crosscheck .....	16
Public School Enrollment Prohibition .....	17
Voluntary Prekindergarten Enrollment .....	18
How To Get Your Scholarship Funds .....	18
Students In Private School .....	18
Direct Billing in EMA .....	19
2025–2026 School Year Enrollment and Funding Schedule .....	19
Option to Pay Out of Pocket .....	19
Home Education Students .....	19
Funding Amounts .....	20
Matrix Level of Services .....	20
Former Gardiner & McKay Scholarship Recipients .....	21
Funding Schedule .....	22
Funding Proration .....	22
Funding Rollover & Balance Limits .....	22
Accrued Interest .....	23
Funding Errors and Adjustments .....	23
Funding Transfers Among Scholarship Funding Organizations .....	23
Student Applied with Another SFO and Has Not Been Funded .....	23
Student Applied with Another SFO, Has Been Funded and Wants to Transfer .....	24
Switching Between Scholarship Programs .....	24



Funding Discontinuation .....	24
Funding Revocation.....	24
Invoice Approval Requirement.....	25
How to Spend Your Scholarship Funds .....	25
Making Successful Purchases .....	25
What is the EMA Marketplace?.....	25
Eligible Expenses.....	26
Out-of-State Expenses.....	27
Activities and Field Trips .....	27
Exception for Military Families .....	27
Other Out-of-State Rules.....	28
Purchases and Shipping.....	28
How to Use Direct Billing.....	28
Private School.....	28
Transferring Among Private Schools.....	30
Services.....	31
How to Use MyScholarShop.....	31
MyScholarShop Guidelines.....	31
MyScholarShop Returns.....	32
How To Request Reimbursement.....	32
Reimbursement Timeline .....	33
Eligible Reimbursements Before Scholarship Year Begins .....	33
Eligible Reimbursements for Advance Services .....	34
Reimbursement Process .....	34
How To Appeal A Denied Reimbursement.....	35
Submitting Reimbursement Supporting Documentation.....	35
Shipping Guidelines.....	47



Fees Guidelines .....	48
Pre-Authorization Requests .....	48
Additional Purchasing Guidelines .....	48
Receiving Payments, Refunds, or Rebates.....	48
Subscriptions or Online Programs.....	49
Frequency of Purchase Limitations .....	49
Items That Are Lost, Stolen, or Broken Beyond Repair .....	49
Maintenance Agreements & Warranties for Eligible Devices .....	50
Placement In Residential Programs	50
Parent & Guardian Responsibilities	50
Annual Assessment Requirement.....	51
Maintaining Up-To-Date Contact Information.....	51
Use of Funds.....	51
Confidentiality .....	52
Continuing Program Eligibility	52
Leaving The Scholarship Program	53
Actions That May Lead To A Loss of The Scholarship	54
Data Security	55
Account Security	55
Additional Resources	55
Handbook Disclaimer	55
Handbook Feedback Form	56
Appendix A	57
Anaphylaxis.....	57
Autism Spectrum Disorder .....	57
<a href="https://www.autismspeaks.org/autism-diagnostic-criteria-dsm-5">https://www.autismspeaks.org/autism-diagnostic-criteria-dsm-5</a> Cerebral Palsy.....	57
Down Syndrome.....	57



Dual Sensory Impaired.....	57
Emotional or Behavioral Disability .....	57
Hearing Impairment.....	58
High-Risk Child .....	58
Hospital or Homebound .....	58
Intellectual Disability.....	58
Language Impairment.....	59
Muscular Dystrophy.....	59
Orthopedic Impairment.....	59
Other Health Impairment .....	59
Phelan-McDermid Syndrome .....	60
Prader-Willi Syndrome.....	60
Rare Diseases.....	60
Specific Learning Disability .....	60
Speech Impairment.....	60
Spina Bifida .....	60
Traumatic Brain Injury.....	61
Visually Impaired .....	61
Williams Syndrome.....	61
Appendix B—Authorized Uses of Funds Chart	62



## Scholarship Overview

The Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities (FES-UA) offers families the opportunity to customize their student's learning via an education savings account.

An education savings account allows public funds to be deposited into a government-authorized savings account for authorized uses. A parent or guardian may use the funds to pay for private school tuition and fees, online learning programs, private tutoring, community college costs, higher education expenses and other approved services and materials.

## About Step Up For Students

### Our Work

Step Up For Students is a nonprofit Scholarship Funding Organization approved by the state of Florida to administer the FES-UA program and other education choice programs. To explore the various programs administered by Step Up For Students and determine which one is the best fit for your family, we invite you to watch these helpful [videos](#).

### Our Mission

Beyond administering scholarship programs, our mission is to empower families to access the best possible learning options for their children. Since 2002, we have worked to be deeply integrated in the community, highlighting innovation in education and sharing inspiring family stories. To learn more about how we put our mission into action, please visit our [website](#).

## Eligibility Requirements

To qualify for the Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities (FES-UA), your child must meet all of the following requirements:

- **Be age three (3) or older (must turn 3 on or before December 31 of the year the application is submitted) OR be eligible to enroll in a Florida public school (if applicable for their age).**
- **Be younger than 22 years old as of September 1 of the year the application is submitted.**
- **Be a Florida resident, OR:**
- **A dependent of an active-duty U.S. military member with PCS orders to Florida, OR**
  - **A renewing FES-UA student whose parent or guardian is stationed outside Florida but maintains Florida as their home of record.**

Your child must also have **one of the following:**

- **An individualized Education Plan (IEP), OR**



- A validated diagnosis from a licensed medical professional (see [Appendix A](#) for full list).

**List of accepted diagnoses:**

- [Anaphylaxis](#)
- [Autism Spectrum Disorder](#)
- [Cerebral Palsy](#)
- [Down Syndrome](#)
- [Emotional or Behavioral Disability](#)
- [Hearing Impairment, including deafness](#)
- [High-Risk Child](#)
- [Hospital or Homebound](#)
- [Identification as Dual Sensory Impaired](#)
- [Intellectual Disability \(severe cognitive impairment\)](#)
- [Language Impairment](#)
- [Muscular Dystrophy](#)
- [Orthopedic Impairment](#)
- [Other Health Impairment](#)
- [Phelan-McDermid Syndrome](#)
- [Prader-Willi Syndrome](#)
- [Rare Diseases \(defined by NORD\)](#)
- [Specific Learning Disability](#)
- [Speech Impairment](#)
- [Spina Bifida](#)
- [Traumatic Brain Injury](#)
- [Visual Impairment, including blindness](#)
- [Williams Syndrome](#)

## Applying For A Scholarship

### Timeline

The table below outlines when new and renewal applicants must submit their applications:

Type of Applicant	Application Period
Renewal Applicants	February 1 to April 30, 2026
New Applicants	February 1 to November 15, 2026

**⚠ Important:** Renewal applications submitted after the April 30, 2025 deadline, will be considered a new application.



## Creating Your EMA Account

Before you can apply, you'll need to set up an account in **EMA (Education Market Assistant)**. This is Step Up For Students' secure online platform where you can manage everything related to your child's scholarship.

### With EMA, you can:

- Apply for the scholarship
- Upload required documents
- Track scholarship funds
- Make purchases through MyScholarShop
- Submit reimbursement requests
- Find service providers

### How to get started

- Go to [www.stepupforstudents.org](http://www.stepupforstudents.org) and click the "Appy/Login"
- Select "Log In to EMA"
- You will be directed to the EMA (Education Market Assistant) Home Page
- Select "Sign Up" and follow prompts
- Watch this [video tutorial](#) or follow this [step-by-step guide](#)

**⚠ Important:** When creating your account, you must use the phone number, physical address, and email address of the primary parent or guardian listed on the student's account. Using someone else's contact information is not allowed and may delay your application.

## Entering Your Information

Every year, you'll need to complete an application for your student through EMA.

- New applicants must first [create an EMA account](#).
- Renewal applicants must log in to their existing EMA account to submit a renewal application.

### 👉 What you'll need to do in EMA

1. Log in to your EMA account
2. Fill out the application form.
3. Upload required documentation (proof of age, Florida residency, and qualifying diagnosis).
4. Review and sign the Sworn Compliance Statement and Terms & Conditions.
5. Submit the application

### ⚠ Important:

When applying for the FES-UA scholarship, please keep the following rules in mind:



- **One Program at a Time:** You cannot apply for FES-UA and another scholarship program for the same student at the same time. (Programs include Florida Tax Credit, Personalized Education Program, Family Empowerment Scholarship for Educational Options, and Transportation Stipend.)
- **Scholarship or School Type Selection:** If you plan to switch your student from another scholarship program to FES-UA, first confirm that the school where they are enrolled accepts FES-UA.
- **One Parent or Guardian Account:** Each student can only be linked to one parent or guardian account.
  - If a student appears on multiple accounts, it may delay application processing or funding.
  - If guardianship changes or a parent passes away, please contact the [Customer Engagement Center](#) to make necessary changes.
  - **Schools and Providers Cannot Apply on Your Behalf:** Schools and providers also cannot request or use your EMA login credentials

## Uploading Required Documentation

To complete your application, you'll need to upload documents that confirm your child's eligibility.

### 👉 What you'll need:

- Proof of Age
- Proof of Florida residency
- Documentation of a qualifying diagnosis (See Appendix A for condition)

[This checklist](#) gives you the full list of documents for new and renewal applications so you can be sure nothing is missing.

If you're unsure what's required or how to upload a file, watch this [video](#) for practical tips on required documentation.

## Qualifying Unique Ability

To document your student's unique ability, you must submit a copy of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a validated diagnosis that identifies one of the conditions listed in [Appendix A](#).

An IEP must be an official, district provided IEP written within the past three years and in accordance with the rules of the State Board of Education or with the applicable rules of another state.

A validated diagnosis must be documented by one of the following licensed professionals:

- **Florida-licensed Physician or physician licensed by another U.S. state or territory**
- **Florida-licensed Autonomous Advanced Practice Registered Nurse**
- **Florida-licensed psychologist**



To help process your application faster, you will have the option to provide the provider's professional license number when submitting documentation for your student's diagnosis.

For Florida-licensed providers, you may locate this information through the [Florida Department of Health's license verification website](#). If the provider is licensed in another U.S. state or territory, please use the comparable license lookup tool for that jurisdiction.

### Requirements for Renewal Applicants

In most cases, documentation only needs to be submitted once. However, renewal applicants may be required to submit updated documentation if any of the following apply:

- **If the student previously qualified under the high-risk category but will turn six (6) years old on or before September 1 of the upcoming school year, then the student will no longer qualify under that category, and documentation of another eligible condition must be submitted.**
- **Birth certificates are generally only required for new students between the ages of 3 and 6. However, when a student ages out of the high-risk category at age 6 and submits a new diagnosis, they are treated as a new applicant for eligibility purposes. As a result, a birth certificate will also be required.**

### Proof of Residency for Active-Duty Military Families

#### Military Living in Florida

If your military family currently resides in Florida—whether you're applying for the first time or renewing—you'll need to provide proof of residency using documents from the Proof of Florida Residency chart on our scholarship application checklist.

#### Military Moving into Florida

Students who are dependent children of active-duty members of the United States Armed Forces with Permanent Change of Station (PCS) orders to move into Florida can apply for a Unique Abilities scholarship as new students.

If a new student is moving to Florida, but has not yet established residency, the parent or guardian must:

- Upload the Leave and Earnings Statement and PCS orders in the Proof of Residency section of the scholarship application.
- Be sure the physical address in their guardian profile matches the newly assigned Florida unit address on the PCS orders they submit.
- Once residency in Florida is established, update the physical and mailing addresses in the guardian profile and provide new FL Proof of Residency documents.



## Military Moving out of or Living out of Florida

Students who are dependent children of active-duty members of the United States Armed Forces with Permanent Change of Station (PCS) orders to move out of Florida after living in Florida during their first year on the UA scholarship can apply for a UA scholarship as renewal students.

These families must:

- Upload the Leave and Earnings Statement demonstrating that Florida is their legal residence and PCS orders in the Proof of Residency section of the scholarship application.
- Complete a PCS Order Verification Request in EMA.
- Once the PCS Order Verification Request is approved, you will be able to enter your out-of-state address as a Military Address, allowing you to be reimbursed for purchases shipped to that address.

You may also visit our dedicated [military family webpage](#) for more information.

**⚠ Important:** A parent or guardian with a legal domicile in Florida but who are currently on orders to another state is not eligible to apply for the scholarship for the first time. Previous ties to Florida, such as having lived in the state or holding a past Florida identification card, are not sufficient for eligibility. Applicants must demonstrate current Florida residency at the time of application.

## Uploading Required Documentation for Annual Capacity Exceptions

The following students are excluded from the annual capacity and can apply for a scholarship any time during the school year:

- Adopted children
- Dependents of active-duty members of the United States Armed Forces
- Dependents of a law enforcement officer as defined in s. 943.10(1).
- Students in foster care or out-of-home care

Parents and guardians with these exceptions applying for a scholarship outside of application season will need to call Step Up For Students at (877) 735-7837 to have an application opened for their student.

## Adoption Status

To provide proof of adoption status, you must upload a copy of an Adoption Decree or other similar legal documentation under the *Additional Documents* section of the application.



### Active-Duty Military Status

To provide proof of the active-duty military status of the parent or guardian, you must upload the Service Member's Leave and Earnings Statement for the month the application was submitted and Permanent Change of Station orders (if applicable) under the *Additional Documents* section of the application.

### Law Enforcement Officer Status

To provide proof of the law enforcement officer status of the parent or guardian, you must upload a photocopy of the law enforcement officer's badge under the *Additional Documents* section of the application.

### Foster Status or Out of Home Care

To provide proof of foster status or out of home care status, you must upload a copy of placement documentation, care placement, or other similar legal documentation under the *Additional Documents* section of the application.

## Submitting Your Application

Before submitting the application, parents and guardians should carefully review all the information they have entered for accuracy. Providing false or misleading information may result in a revocation of the scholarship and may be punishable as a crime.

To complete the application submission, the parent or guardian must agree to the Terms and Conditions and sign the Sworn Compliance Statement, acknowledging you will follow all applicable Florida statutes, rules established by the Florida Department of Education, and Step Up For Students guidelines.

### Eligibility Notification

After the application has been submitted, Step Up For Students will notify the parent or guardian by email and on a rolling basis whether the student is eligible for the scholarship.

If the student may be eligible but documentation is required to confirm eligibility, Step Up For Students will place the application on hold and notify the parent or guardian by email. If the student is determined ineligible, the reason will be available on your EMA account. For questions or further support regarding the eligibility notification, please contact our [Customer Engagement Center](#).

### Award Prioritization

Scholarship applications will be reviewed on a first-come, first-served basis. Scholarships will be awarded in this order of priority:

*Effective January 2026*



1. **Renewal applicants, students who received FES-UA scholarship funds during the immediately preceding school year.**
2. **New applicants, students who did not receive an FES-UA scholarship or declined the scholarship during the immediately preceding school year.**

## Application Deadlines

For students renewing their FES-UA scholarship for the **2026-2027** school year

- By April 30, 2026: renewal students must have submitted their scholarship renewal application.
- By May 31, 2026: parents and guardians of renewal students must have accepted or declined the scholarship.

For students applying for a scholarship for the first time (i.e. new students) for the **2026-2027** school year:

- By November 15, 2026: new students must submit their initial scholarship application.
- By December 15, 2026: parents and guardians of new students must accept or decline the scholarship.

Any applications submitted after the renewal application deadline will have the same priority as new applications.

## How To Accept The Scholarship

Upon receiving notification from Step Up For Students that the student is eligible, Florida law requires the parent or guardian to accept or decline the scholarship by a certain date.

For a step-by-step visual guide on how to accept or decline the scholarship, click [here](#).

## Timeline

The table below outlines when new and renewal applicants must accept or deny the scholarship by:

Type of Applicant	Decision Required By
Renewal Applicants	May 31, 2025
New Applicants	December 15, 2025

## Process

Upon receiving notification from Step Up For Students that the student is eligible, the parent or guardian must log into their EMA account to accept or deny the scholarship.



## Award Notification

After the scholarship has been accepted, Step Up For Students will notify the parent or guardian by email and on a rolling basis whether their student has been awarded a scholarship or if the scholarship program has reached capacity.

The sections below detail the FES-UA program's capacity limitation and categories of students that are exempt from the capacity limit.

## Capacity Limitation

Each year, Florida law sets a maximum number of FES-UA scholarships that can be awarded. If applications reach that limit, some eligible students may not receive funding.

### What this means for families:

- Submit your application and required documents as early as possible.
- Applications may close **before the published deadline** if the program reaches capacity.

## Capacity Exceptions

Some students are excluded from the cap. This means they may still receive a scholarship even if the program is full.

### Students who qualify for a cap exception include:

- Children of law enforcement officers (s. [943.10\(1\)](#)), F.S
- Children of active-duty U.S. military members
- Adopted children
- Foster children
- Students who:
  - Receive specialized instructional services under the Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program (VPK-SIS) (s. [1002.66](#), F.S) and have a current IEP
  - Attended a Florida public school or the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind last year
  - Received a John M. McKay Scholarship in the 2021-2022 school year.

**⚠ Note:** Some exceptions are verified automatically by the Florida Department of Education. Others will require you to upload documentation. EMA will prompt you for the correct documents, and you can review the [Uploading Required Documentation](#) section of the handbook for more guidance.

If a parent or guardian indicates their student falls into one of these categories during the application process, a prompt will appear to upload the required documentation for verification.



Some exceptions require the parent or guardian to provide documentation. Please refer to the [Uploading Required Documentation](#) section of the handbook for specific instructions.

Eligible capacity exceptions include:

- Dependents of a law enforcement officer as defined in Florida Statute [943.10\(1\)](#)
- Dependents of an active-duty member of the United States Armed Forces.
- Adopted child.
- Foster child.
- Students who received specialized instructional services under the Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program described in Florida Statute [1002.66](#) during the previous school year and have a current Individualized Education Plan (IEP) developed by the district school board in accordance with rules of the State Board of Education. This is verified by the Florida Department of Education, so uploading documentation is not required.
- Students who spent the prior school year in attendance at a Florida public school or the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind. This is verified by the Florida Department of Education, so uploading documentation is not required.
- Students who received a John M. McKay Scholarship for Students with Disabilities in the 2021-22 school year. This status is recorded, so uploading documentation is not required.

**⚠ Important:** Applicants may experience a delay in application processing while their documentation is reviewed and verified.

## Enrollment Requirements After Being Awarded

Once awarded a scholarship, parents and guardians should print the notice for their records.

To receive and use scholarship funds, the student must be enrolled in one of the following programs that meets Florida's regular school attendance requirements:

- An [eligible private school](#)
- A home education program for which they have filed a letter of intent with their local school district

## Full-Time Equivalent Crosscheck

**A student cannot be enrolled in a public school while receiving scholarship funds.**

Florida law requires the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) to verify that a scholarship student is not also enrolled in a public school. This process, called the Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Crosscheck, must be completed before any payments are sent.

[https://www.stepupforstudents.org/cross-check-v2/What is "FTE"?](https://www.stepupforstudents.org/cross-check-v2/What%20is%20%E2%80%9CFTE%E2%80%9F?)



FTE stands for **Full Time Equivalent**. It is the term public schools use to measure student attendance for state funding. The Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Crosscheck is a process the state uses to confirm your student is eligible to receive the scholarship.

### Where does the Crosscheck apply?

The crosscheck simply verifies that your student is not being counted for funding at any of the following:

- Florida public schools
- Charter schools
- Florida Virtual School (unless you are paying for the enrollment privately)

For more information, please visit our [crosscheck information page](#).

**⚠ Important:** If the crosscheck shows your student is still listed as being enrolled in a public school, the student's scholarship account cannot be funded. When this happens, you will see an **Action Needed** message in EMA.

You will be required to upload a [Standard Withdrawal Form](#) to verify your student is no longer enrolled in a public school. Once the withdrawal form is verified, your student's account may be considered for funding.

## Public School Enrollment Prohibition

**A student cannot be enrolled in a public school at the same time they are receiving and using scholarship funds, so parents and guardians should ensure proper public school withdrawal.**

To do this, you may request that the district or charter school complete the [Standard Withdrawal Form for Students Entering K-12 Scholarships \(Form IEPC-SWF\)](#) in accordance with [Fla. Admin. Code R. 6A-6.0952](#).

### ⚠ Important: Public School Enrollment Rules:

- Your child **cannot** be enrolled in a public school and receive FES-UA funds at the same time. This would count as "double funding" under state law.
- You can still use public school services (such as individual classes or activities), but you must contract with the school for those services and pay either out of pocket or with scholarship funds.
- If your child uses public school classes or services, be sure the school reports them as privately paying. If the school incorrectly reports your child as a public-school enrollee, you could lose the scholarship.

Florida public schools include:

- **A charter school**
- **A College-Preparatory Boarding Academy**



- A developmental research or laboratory school
- Early Steps Extended Option
- Florida Virtual School or any other online public school as a non-private-pay student
- The SEED School of Miami
- The Florida Scholars Academy
- The Florida School For The Deaf and The Blind
- Public School VPK
- VPK Specialized Instructional Services (VPK-SIS)
- Any other Florida public school

## Voluntary Prekindergarten Enrollment

Students may use the FES-UA scholarship and the Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Program at an eligible private school at the same time.

However, if a student participates in public school VPK or School Readiness programs offered by a public school, the student will be reported as enrolled in public school unless the family is registered as private-pay. Students who are reported as enrolled in public school are not eligible for FES-UA funds, and scholarship funding may be placed on hold or returned to the Florida Department of Education.

- Allowed: VPK at an eligible private school
- Allowed: VPK or School Readiness at an approved private early learning provider
- Not Allowed: Public School VPK unless the student is registered as private-pay

**Students may not use FES-UA funds while participating in VPK's Specialized Instructional Services (VPK-SIS).**

Families are encouraged to contact their local Early Learning Coalition for information about approved private VPK and School Readiness Providers.

## How To Get Your Scholarship Funds

The process for receiving scholarship funds depends on whether the student is enrolled in a private school or participating in a home education program. Please refer to the section that applies to your student.

## Students In Private School

Parents and guardians of students that will be enrolled in a private school full-time or part-time can choose between either direct billing through EMA or paying out of pocket and requesting reimbursement. The sections below detail the process for each option.



## Direct Billing in EMA

Full-time private schools may choose to create an account in EMA and offer families the option to use direct billing. If your student plans to attend a private school that participates in EMA for direct billing, you must follow the steps below to receive scholarship funds.

First, you must contact the private school and provide them with your student's [Award ID](#) which will be provided to you on your EMA account upon being awarded the scholarship. The school will then enroll the student in EMA using the tuition and fee rate agreed upon by both the school and the parent. Once the school completes the enrollment, the parent or guardian will receive a notification to confirm it.

After the enrollment is confirmed, an invoice will be generated each quarter. Both the school and the parent or guardian must review and approve each invoice to verify its accuracy. Once approved by both parties, scholarship funds will be disbursed to the private school.

## 2025–2026 School Year Enrollment and Funding Schedule

The following chart shows the dates by which a student's enrollment must be confirmed and the corresponding dates when scholarship funds will be delivered to the private school.

Enrollment Confirmation Date	Funds Delivered To Step Up
June 15*	August 1*
July 15*	September 1*
September 30	November 1
December 15	February 1
February 15	April 1

\* There are two funding dates for the first quarter.

## Option to Pay Out of Pocket

If the parent or guardian chooses to pay the private school directly, no additional steps are required for funds to be deposited into the student's scholarship account. The parent or guardian will pay for eligible expenses out of pocket and then submit a reimbursement request through EMA to be reimbursed from the student's scholarship account.

## Home Education Students

For students participating in a home education program with their school district, no further action is needed for scholarship funds to be deposited into the student's scholarship account.



## Funding Amounts

Scholarship funding amounts are determined annually by the Florida Legislature. Step Up For Students will publish the funding amounts as soon as they are available. Families can refer to the [2025-26 funding chart](#) for an overview of funding amounts.

A student's scholarship funding amount is based on three factors:

- **The student's grade level**
- **The student's county of residence**
- **The student's matrix level of services**

The funding amount, based on the student's grade level and county of residence, will be determined by Quarter 1 funding. Any grade level or county changes made after Quarter 1 funding will not impact funding for that school year.

The sections that follow provide additional information about how the matrix level of services affects the funding amount.

### Matrix Level of Services

Students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are assigned a matrix level between 1 and 5 (also referred to as 251 and 255), which determines the level of support they would receive in a public school.

#### 👉 How funding works

- Matrix Levels 1-3 (251-253) or students qualifying through a medical/mental health diagnosis → Funded at the average amount of all students with matrix levels 251-253 in the student's local school district.
- Matrix Levels 4-5 (254-255) Students receive *higher scholarship amounts* based on their diagnosis and documented needs.

⚠️ **Important:** Step Up For Students does **not** create or change matrix levels. Only your local school district can assign or revise them.

#### How to Request a New or Revise an Existing IEP and Matrix Level of Services

- If your child **does not have an IEP/matrix level**, you may request an evaluation from your local school district at any time.
- If your child **already has an IEP/matrix level**, you may request a re-evaluation once every three (3) years, or sooner if correcting an error.

When you request a new or revised matrix level, Florida law requires your public school district to:



- Complete the IEP and matrix level of services within **thirty (30)** days after receiving notice of the parent or guardian's request.
- Notify the parent or guardian and the Florida Department of Education within **ten (10)** calendar days after its completion.

The Florida Department of Education will then notify both you and Step Up For Students of your child's funding amount within 10 days of receiving the district's report. Step Up will update the student's application and adjust the scholarship funding if needed.

### Federal Special Education Law

- Under the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**, FES-UA students are considered *parentally placed private school or home education students*.
- This means they do **not** have the same rights as public school students. For example, districts are not required to provide a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to parentally placed private school or home education students.
- However, FES-UA Students **may be** entitled to some special education services through their districts if they:
  - Have a current IEP that identifies a qualifying need **or**
  - Complete an evaluation by the district (districts may also use private evaluations).

👉 **Next Step:** Contact [local school district's special education department](#) or Parentally Placed Private School office to request an evaluation or to learn what services may be available.

For more information, see the Florida Department of Education's guide on [Student's Matrix of Services](#).

### Former Gardiner & McKay Scholarship Recipients

Students who received a Gardiner or McKay Scholarship during the 2020–21 school year will receive the amount the student received for the 2020–2021 school year or the newly [calculated amount for the current school year](#), whichever is greater.

In your EMA account, you will see two different amounts: the Award Amount and the Funding Amount. The Award Amount is an estimate of total funding based on the details submitted in your application, while the Funding Amount shows the actual amount being deposited into your student's scholarship account each quarter. These amounts may not always match for students who are grandfathered from the 2020–2021 school year. While we have made efforts to correct discrepancies, if the Award Amount appears incorrect, please refer to the Funding Amount to verify what your student will receive.



## Funding Schedule

Scholarship funds are deposited into students' scholarship accounts on a quarterly basis. Step Up For Students receives funds from the State of Florida according to the schedule below and will then deposit the funds into students' scholarship accounts within two weeks.

Quarter	Type of Scholarship Student	Step Up For Students Receives Funds
Quarter 1	Renewal students	August 1
Quarter 1	New students	September 1
Quarter 2	All students	November 1
Quarter 3	All students	February 1
Quarter 4	All students	April 1

**⚠ Important:** In the event of a delay in a scheduled deposit, the disbursement may still be processed at a later date.

## Funding Proration

Scholarship funding will be prorated based on the date the guardian has accepted the student's awarded scholarship.

Below is a breakdown of the proration:

- **Students with an awarded and accepted scholarship by September 30, 2025, will receive 100% of the total funding amount for that school year.**
- **Students who miss the September 30, 2025 deadline but have an awarded and accepted scholarship by January 15, 2026, will receive 50% of the total funding amount for that school year.**
- **If a student is not awarded and has not accepted the awarded scholarship by January 15, 2026, they will not be funded for the 2025-2026 school year.**
- **If an awarded and accepted scholarship has been declined but later accepted again, the Funding Proration would be based on the most recent acceptance date.**

## Funding Rollover & Balance Limits

Unspent scholarship funds may be rolled over from one school year to the next. However, Florida law prohibits depositing additional funds into a student's scholarship account if the scholarship account balance exceeds \$50,000.



## Accrued Interest

Florida law requires Step Up For Students to track any interest earned on a student's scholarship account and apply it to the account balance. The earned interest will be deposited into the student's scholarship account based on the quarter in which it was earned.

The table below shows the interest deposit schedule:

Interest Accrual Period	Earned Interest Deposit Date
July - September	October 31
October - December	January 31
January - March	April 30
April - June	July 31

## Funding Errors and Adjustments

If excess funds are mistakenly deposited into a student's scholarship account, Step Up For Students will recover the excess funds by adjusting future funding. Parents and guardians should monitor their student's account carefully and should avoid spending funds that may have been deposited in error.

If a student switches scholarship programs mid-year, Step Up For Students may also recover excess funds associated with their previous scholarship.

## Funding Transfers Among Scholarship Funding Organizations

Students may only receive scholarship funding from one Scholarship Funding Organization (SFO) at a time.

A parent or guardian may choose to transfer from one SFO to another. The steps required to transfer depend on your situation, so please refer to the section below that applies to your student.

If a student completes a transfer, please note the transfer of funds may take several weeks.

### **Student Applied with Another SFO and Has Not Been Funded**

**If the parent or guardian applied with a scholarship funding organization (SFO) other than Step Up For Students, and the student has not yet been awarded a scholarship or received any funds, they must first decline the pending scholarship with the current SFO before applying through Step Up For Students.**



## Student Applied with Another SFO, Has Been Funded and Wants to Transfer

If the student has already been awarded a scholarship and received funds through another SFO, the parent or guardian must first submit a new application through Step Up For Students and receive eligibility confirmation. Once eligibility has been confirmed, the parent or guardian should then contact the current SFO to request a scholarship transfer to Step Up For Students.

## Switching Between Scholarship Programs

Families may request to switch from one scholarship program to another once per school year, during the mid-year period (Quarter 3). This policy set by the Florida Department of Education.

The impact on scholarship funding depends on **when the switch occurs**:

- Before September 30
  - If no funds have been spent under the original program, the student may receive full-year funding under the new program. If some funds have already been used, the student will keep those funds and receive the remaining balance from the new program.
- After September 30
  - The student will receive half of their annual funding from the original program (Quarter 1 and 2) and the remaining half from the new program (Quarters 3 and 4).

All switches are subject to DOE approval, and total funding may not exceed the annual award amount for the new scholarship program.

**⚠ Important:** Families should contact Step Up For Students before requesting a program switch to confirm eligibility, funding impact, and timing requirements.

## Funding Discontinuation

No additional funds will be deposited into a student's scholarship account if the student becomes ineligible. A student becomes ineligible if any of the following apply:

- **Are found to be enrolled in a public school**
- **Graduate from high school**
- **Turn 22 years old on or before September 1 of the upcoming school year**

## Funding Revocation

A student's scholarship account will be closed and any remaining funds, including any contributions to the Florida Prepaid College Plan (Prepaid 529 Plan) or the Florida 529 Savings Program (Investment 529 Plan), will be returned to the state if any of the following occurs:

- **The Florida Department of Education Commissioner deems the student ineligible due to fraud or abuse**



- Three consecutive years pass after high school graduation without enrollment in an eligible postsecondary program
- Two consecutive fiscal years (July 1 – June 30) pass with no spending activity from the student's account

## Invoice Approval Requirement

Parents and guardians must approve private school tuition and fee invoices in EMA within 30 calendar days of the school submitting them.

- If the invoice is not approved within this timeframe, it will be deleted.
- For students funded under FES-UA the funds are returned to the student's scholarship account.

**⚠ Important:** If a parent or guardian does not approve an invoice that is required for school enrollment, the student will not be eligible for funding for the remainder of that scholarship year.

## How to Spend Your Scholarship Funds

### Making Successful Purchases

Your child's scholarship funds are flexible and can be used in a few different ways. The goal is to give you options to match your student's needs.

There are several methods a parent or guardian can use to spend scholarship funds:

- **Direct billing for full-time private school through EMA**
- **Direct billing for services such as tutoring or therapy through *Find Providers* on EMA Marketplace**
- **Purchasing products directly through *MyScholarShop* on EMA Marketplace**
- **Paying out of pocket for eligible expenses and requesting reimbursement**

### What is the EMA Marketplace?

Think of it as an online store and service finder. There are two options in the EMA Marketplace:

- ***MyScholarShop* allows you to purchase eligible instructional materials and curriculum**
- ***Find Providers* allows you to purchase services, such as tutoring and therapy, from pre-approved vendors**

**⚠** Before you spend the funds, check these two things:

- **Eligibility of the expense**
  - Look at the [Purchasing Guide](#) or Appendix B to confirm the item or service is allowed. Keep in mind that something approved in the past, may not be approved now.
- **Available Balance**



- **Check your student's account in EMA to confirm you have enough funds. Reimbursements cannot be approved for amounts that are higher than your available balance.**

**⚠ Important:** All purchases and reimbursements must follow Florida law, Florida Department of Education rules, and Step Up For Students' internal policies and procedures.

**⚠ Note:** Any scholarship funds that are not spent during a school year will roll over to the next year and become part of the student's available balance. These funds remain accessible and can be used for eligible expenses in future years, as long as the student continues to meet scholarship requirements.

## Eligible Expenses

Scholarship funds must be used for eligible expenses that meet the individual educational needs of the student.

For a comprehensive list and detailed guidance on eligible expenses, please consult the [Purchasing Guide](#). For a summary chart of eligible expenses and payment types, please refer to [Appendix B](#) of this handbook.

The following categories of items and services are eligible expenses:

- Instructional materials
- Curriculum and curriculum materials
- [Specialized services](#)
- Tuition and fees:
  - At an eligible private school
  - For home education instructional programs\*
  - At an [eligible post-secondary institution](#), including those participating in the [National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements \(NC-SARA\)](#)
  - At a [Florida Department of Education approved pre-apprenticeship program](#)
  - For a dual enrollment program that is creditable toward high school completion and a career certificate or an associate or baccalaureate degree under [Florida Statute 1007.271](#). [More information is available from the Florida Department of Education.](#)
  - For a private tutoring program
  - For part-time tutoring services or Choice Navigator services
  - At an approved online or virtual provider
  - As a private pay student for Florida Virtual School (FLVS)
- Standardized testing and academic fees, including test administration and proctoring
- Contributions to approved college savings programs
  - Stanley G. Tate Florida Prepaid College Program (Prepaid 529 Plan)
  - Florida 529 Savings Program (Investment 529 Plan)



- Contracted services provided by a public school or school district
- Fees for specialized summer education programs
- Fees for specialized after-school education programs
- [Transition services provided by job coaches](#)
- Annual home education evaluation fees
- Tuition and fees for an approved VPK Program provider, an approved School Readiness provider, or an eligible private school
- Fees for horse therapy
- Fees for music and art therapy

**⚠ Note:** For purposes of the scholarship program, a home education instructional program as an authorized use of funds is different than a home education program as defined in Florida Statute 1002.01(1).

## Out-of-State Expenses

Some expenses outside of Florida may be eligible but have special requirements.

### Activities and Field Trips

- Physical Education (P.E.) activities outside of Florida, including:
  - Dance lessons
  - Gym and fitness memberships, class passes, or on-demand fitness classes
  - Sports lessons, team participation fees, or stand-alone athletic event fees
- Field trips outside of Florida, including:
  - Cultural programming events
  - Museum admission and memberships
  - State and National Park admission
  - Ticketed events (such as plays, musicals, or orchestral performances)
  - Zoo and aquarium admission, memberships and programs

These out-of-state activities and field trips require **pre-authorization before reimbursement**.

### Exception for Military Families

Approved military families living outside of Florida do not need pre-authorization for **out-of-state activities and field trips**. They may submit reimbursement requests directly with the required documentation.

#### **⚠ Important:**

Military families living outside of Florida may not use scholarship funds for tuition and fees at private schools located outside of Florida. Only private schools located in Florida are eligible to



participate in the scholarship program. Eligible private schools are listed in the [Florida Private Schools Directory](#).

Please note that tuition and fees paid to an ineligible private school are not eligible for reimbursement.

### Other Out-of-State Rules

- Service Providers: With the exception of credentialed providers who can work virtually (e.g., tutors, Choice Navigators), services must be delivered in Florida.
- Internet Services: In-home internet (including mobile hot-spots and streaming services) must be provided to the Florida residential address listed on the student's scholarship application.

### Purchases and Shipping

Purchases through MyScholarShop must be shipped to the mailing address on file for the scholarship account.

- MyScholarShop orders may not be shipped outside of Florida.
- Reimbursement purchases can be made out-of-state but must be shipped to a Florida address, including P.O. Boxes.

**Exception: Approved military families living out of state may be reimbursed for authorized purchases shipped out of state.**

## How to Use Direct Billing

### Private School

Parents and guardians of students that will be enrolled in an eligible private school full-time or part-time can choose to pay the private school by either direct billing through EMA or paying out of pocket and requesting reimbursement. A list of eligible private schools can be found in the [Florida Private Schools Directory](#).

### Full-Time Private School

Full-time private schools may choose to create an account in EMA and offer families the option to use direct billing. If your student plans to attend a full-time, in-person private school that participates in EMA for direct billing, you'll need to follow a few steps to ensure successful payment to the private school.

First, you must contact the private school and provide them with your student's [Award ID](#) which will be provided to you on your EMA account upon being awarded the scholarship. The school will then enroll the student in EMA using the tuition and fee rate agreed upon by both the school and the parent. Once the school completes the enrollment, the parent or guardian will receive a notification to confirm it.



After the enrollment is confirmed, an invoice will be generated each quarter. Both the school and the parent or guardian must review and approve each invoice to verify its accuracy. Once approved by both parties, scholarship funds will be disbursed to the private school within seven (7) business days.

**⚠ Important:**

- **If a student attends the school for at least 10 days during a quarterly payment period, the school will receive the full distribution for that quarter.**
- **The agreed-upon tuition rate between the private school and the parent or guardian may not exceed the school's published rate for the student's grade level.**
- **Some private schools may offer financial assistance, so the agreed-upon rate may include discounts or other considerations.**
- **If the school's tuition exceeds the scholarship award amount, the parent or guardian is responsible for paying the difference, either by working directly with the school or by using available rollover funds in the scholarship account.**
- **The student's scholarship award is allocated for the private school's tuition and fees and applied to the quarterly payments before any remaining funds can be used for other eligible expenses.**

### Part-Time Private School

Part-time private schools may choose to create a service offering on EMA and offer families the option to use direct billing. If your student plans to attend a part-time, in-person private school that participates in EMA for direct billing, you'll need to follow a few steps to ensure successful payment to the private school.

First, you must log in to your EMA account and click *Marketplace* on the left-hand side of the dashboard. Click *Find Providers* to search for your student's school. Next, you must select your student using the dropdown arrow in the *Select Student* box. Be sure to choose the correct student for whom you are reserving tuition and fees. Use the filters to select *Eligible Private School* as the service category and *Tuition* as the service type, then click search.

Select your student's school from the list and choose the correct location from the dropdown. Review the tuition rate listed by the school, select the quantity, and click *Add to Cart*. Please note, you must have sufficient funds to reserve services.

Click the shopping cart icon, review your selections, and click *Reserve Funds*. Check the *Yes* box and click *Confirm* to give the school access to your contact information and reserve funds. Once funds are reserved, the provider can submit payment for services without further guardian approval.

For more guidance on the part-time private school direct option, please watch this brief [video](#).



**⚠ Important:** Tuition and fees for [Personalized Education Program Hybrid Schools](#) are not eligible expenses under the FES-UA program.

### Full-Time or Part-Time Pre-Kindergarten

Beginning the 2025-2026 school year, scholarship funds can be used for full-time or part-time in-person pre-kindergarten programs offered by an eligible private school. The private schools may choose to create an account in EMA and offer families the option to use direct billing. If your student plans to attend a pre-kindergarten program that participates in EMA for direct billing, you'll need to follow the steps below to ensure successful payment to the private school.

First, you must contact the private school and provide them with your student's [Award ID](#) which will be provided to you on your EMA account upon being awarded the scholarship. The school will then enroll the student in EMA using the tuition and fee rate agreed upon by both the school and the parent. Once the school completes the enrollment, the parent or guardian will receive a notification to confirm it.

After the enrollment is confirmed, an invoice will be generated each quarter. Both the school and the parent or guardian must review and approve each invoice to verify its accuracy. Once approved by both parties, scholarship funds will be disbursed to the private school within seven (7) business days.

### Transferring Among Private Schools

Students who do enroll in private schools may transfer their scholarships between participating private schools. If a parent or guardian is not satisfied with the private school they have chosen, they may find another one.

Before a parent or guardian withdraws their student from the private school, they should notify the school and understand the school's transfer policy.

A student may not be enrolled in a new eligible private school in EMA until the student has been withdrawn from the prior school in EMA.

The transfer process may include final payment to the private school the student is leaving. If a payment is owed to that school, it must be approved by the parent or guardian. If the school has been overpaid, Step Up For Students will invoice the school for the overpayment.

If a student transfers to a different participating school in the same quarter, the first school the student attended for ten (10) days or more during that quarter will receive the full quarter's payment.

Quarter	Dates
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*Effective January 2026*



Quarter 1	July 1 — September 30
Quarter 2	October 1 — December 31
Quarter 3	January 1 — March 31
Quarter 4	April 1 — June 30

The parent or guardian and the two schools may negotiate any amount owed to the new school from the quarterly payment made to the first school. This is not required, but, in the spirit of partnership for the good of the student, is highly recommended.

Parents or guardians should allow five (5) business days for the current school to withdraw the student. If the student has not been withdrawn after five business days, please [contact our Customer Engagement Center](#).

### Services

Step Up For Students allows parents and guardians to pay directly for some eligible educational services. Providers wishing to participate in direct billing payment for educational services from scholarship students must set up a provider account in EMA and submit a service catalog.

Requests for payment directly to a provider may only be approved after the service has been rendered.

### How to Use MyScholarShop

**MyScholarShop allows you to purchase eligible instructional materials and curriculum.**

Parents and guardians can log in to EMA to access MyScholarShop, which becomes accessible within a few days after funds are deposited into a student's account.

If an item is not in MyScholarShop or the program [Purchasing Guide](#), it may still be an eligible expense. If an item is in MyScholarShop, it may not be an eligible item for all scholarship programs.

If a parent pays out of pocket for an item identical to one available through MyScholarShop, but pays a lower price, the parent must be reimbursed for that item.

Parents or guardians should submit a pre-authorization form if they are unsure an item is eligible.

To learn more about MyScholarShop, watch the video [here](#).

### MyScholarShop Guidelines

- **Parents and guardians should ensure they have enough available funds in the scholarship account to cover the entire purchase.**



- If an item requires pre-authorization, the pre-authorization request must be approved before a parent or guardian places the order. The approved pre-authorization number must be included in the appropriate field to avoid a delay or denial of order.
- If an item has an associated purchasing rule, such as size or frequency limitation, those same rules apply in MyScholarShop.
- MyScholarShop orders will ship to the mailing address listed in the guardian profile in EMA. If the mailing address has been recently updated, please confirm the address before placing the order.
- Step Up For Students reserves the right to deny purchase requests.
- These policies do not apply to in-store purchases or purchases from vendor websites.

### MyScholarShop Returns

Returns are completed through the vendor they were purchased from and not through Step Up For Students. Individual vendors list their return policies and instructions in MyScholarShop. Please note that items may not be returned to the store.

Once the vendor has received the item, it may take up to a few weeks for the funds to be credited to the student's scholarship account.

### How To Request Reimbursement

Parents or guardians who choose to pay for eligible tuition and fees, items, or services out of pocket may apply to have those expenditures reimbursed from their student's scholarship account.

Parents and guardians will submit all reimbursement requests through EMA. Step-by-step instructions for submitting a reimbursement request in EMA are [available here](#).

#### **⚠ Important:**

- **Products or services paid for by another agency or source (for example, health insurance, Healthcare Savings Accounts (HSAs), or a School Readiness program) may not be submitted for reimbursement.**
- **Step Up For Students approves reimbursement within the guidance of Florida statutes related to the scholarship program, as well as Florida Department of Education rules and Step Up For Students policies and procedures and reserves the right to close or deny any reimbursement request submitted for payment.**

Looking for more resources on submitting a reimbursement request? Watch a step-by-step video [here](#).



## Reimbursement Timeline

Reimbursement requests are year-specific. Items or services must be purchased using 2025-2026 scholarship funds between July 1, 2025, and June 30, 2026. Requests for reimbursements using scholarship funds from the 2025-2026 school year must be submitted by July 31, 2026.

The table below shows when eligible purchases can be made and when corresponding reimbursement requests must be submitted.

Parents and guardians should allow up to sixty (60) days for reimbursement requests to be reviewed and processed after all required documentation has been submitted. If a reimbursement request is placed "on hold" pending additional documentation or revisions, including corrected amounts, the 60-day review period restarts upon receipt of the requested information.

**To avoid interruptions in the review process, please confirm that your invoice or receipt contains all necessary information related to the category for your reimbursement request, proof of payment, and any additional required documentation, such as credentials.**

The table below shows when eligible purchases can be made and when corresponding reimbursement requests must be submitted.

Reimbursement Type	Eligible Purchase Window	Reimbursement Request Window
Reimbursements	July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026	July 1, 2025 – July 31, 2026
Eligible Reimbursements Before Scholarship Year Begins	Any time before July 1, 2025	July 1, 2025 – July 31, 2026
Eligible Reimbursements for Advance Services	Within 4 months of the reimbursement request, or within 1 year if the provider attests the service is nonrefundable	July 1, 2025 – July 31, 2026

## Eligible Reimbursements Before Scholarship Year Begins

The categories listed below are eligible for advance purchase, meaning they can be purchased before July 1 of the year the student is awarded a scholarship. However, reimbursement requests must be submitted between July 1 and June 30 of the year the student is awarded a scholarship. This is intended to give families flexibility to plan ahead, while ensuring that the correct year's scholarship funds are used.

*Effective January 2026*



- Eligible Private School Tuition and Fees
- Home Education Instructional Program Tuition and Fees
- Public School Contracted Services
- Dual Enrollment Classes
- Full-Time Private Tutoring
- Postsecondary Institution Tuition and Fees
- State-Approved Virtual Instruction Provider
- State-Approved Online Course
- Curriculum

## Eligible Reimbursements for Advance Services

Parents and guardians can submit a reimbursement request for services up to four months in advance. For example, if a tutor asks for payment in advance, a parent can apply on August 15 for reimbursement of tutoring fees paid through December 15. An invoice showing specific dates or a general term like “semester 1” may both be accepted, as long as the service period falls within the four-month limit.

Requests submitted for services more than four (4) months in advance may be approved through the remainder of the school year, up to one (1) year, if the provider attests that the services paid in advance are non-refundable.

Parents and guardians must submit a signed and dated letter from the provider stating the payment is non-refundable or submit published policies from the provider showing these requirements.

## Reimbursement Process

After you submit a reimbursement, it will progress through these statuses:

- **Submitted:** Step Up For Students has received the reimbursement request.
- **In Review:** Step Up For Students is reviewing the reimbursement request.
- **Approved:** If a reimbursement request is approved, the payment will be issued to the parent or guardian from the student’s scholarship account via direct deposit (ACH), PayPal or by check.
  - Parents or guardians will be asked to submit personal banking information to receive ACH payments. If a payment is rejected by the banking institution, the funds will return to the student’s scholarship account after thirty (30) days.
  - Reimbursements for multiple scholarship students on scholarship programs will be paid separately.
- **Denied:** The reimbursement request will not be fulfilled for the identified purchase. Step Up For Students will provide the denial reason via email to the email address in



EMA. Common denial reasons include incorrect or insufficient documentation for the purchase, or the purchase was submitted using the wrong category. Please refer to the [How To Appeal A Denied Reimbursement](#) section for information on the appeals process.

- **On Hold:** The reimbursement request needs further action, information, or documentation from the parent or guardian. Step Up For Students will provide information via email to the email address in EMA. If additional documents are requested for an On Hold reimbursement and none are submitted within thirty (30) days, it will automatically be denied, and the parent or guardian will need to submit a new reimbursement request.

### How To Appeal A Denied Reimbursement

If a reimbursement request is denied, the parent or guardian may appeal the decision once by submitting a new reimbursement request, noting in the description box it is an appeal or reconsideration request, and providing additional documentation.

After the appeal decision is made, additional appeals for the same item will not be reviewed.

Step Up For Students is unable to review appeals or resubmission requests that are sent via email or through any other customer service channel.

Reimbursement requests placed on hold for longer than thirty (30) days after a request for additional documentation will be denied and need to be submitted again.

### Submitting Reimbursement Supporting Documentation

For a reimbursement request to be approved, the parent or guardian will need to upload two documents:

- Proof of payment.
- Documentation that shows the purchase is allowed under the scholarship

Invoices and receipts must include a clear breakdown of all costs, such as the base cost, taxes, fees, and the total amount paid. Handwritten notes, or unofficial documents cannot be accepted. Please make sure your provider's invoice or receipt reflects the total amount charged to your payment method.

Step Up For Students may request additional documentation or clarification when the reimbursement request is reviewed. The parent or guardian will be notified by email to the email address in EMA.

### Supporting Documentation for Proof of Payment

The following documents can serve as proof that the parent or guardian paid for the purchase:



- Receipt showing the full transaction date (MM/DD/YY), provider name, amount paid, and payment method, such as the last four digits of a credit or debit card.
- Credit or debit card statement showing the full transaction date (MM/DD/YY), provider name, and amount paid. (Please black out account numbers and information not related to the reimbursement.)
- PayPal receipt showing the full transaction date (MM/DD/YY), provider name, amount paid, and funding source.
- Check showing the front and back of the cleared check, full payment date (MM/DD/YY), provider name, amount paid, and the last 4 digits of the account used for payment. (Please black out any other account numbers and information not related to the reimbursement).
- Provider invoice showing the full transaction date (MM/DD/YY), provider name, amount paid, and payment method, such as Visa, Amex, Discover, credit card, or debit card.

An invoice that does not show it has been paid in full and does not show the means of payment (such as the number of the credit or debit card used), will not count as proof of payment.

If the provider's name on the proof of payment does not match the provider listed on the invoice or receipt, supporting documentation from the provider will be required to explain the difference (this can be in the form of a letter).

### **Proof of Payment For Private School Tuition Using Tuition Management Systems**

A private school's tuition management system (e.g., FACTS, Blackbaud, TADS) may include the information needed to provide proof of payment.

The billing statement should include:

- **School's name and address**
- **Scholarship student's first and last name as listed in EMA**
- **Description of each payment to be reimbursed (including but not limited to tuition, registration fee, book fees, etc.)**
- **Amount of each transaction**
- **Date of full payment (mm/yy)**

A tuition management system account may show activity related to multiple students and transactions. Each reimbursement request should include the specific scholarship student, and the specific transactions, for which the parent or guardian is seeking reimbursement.

If a private school's tuition management system groups students by family and does not show spending for individual students, a parent or guardian can submit an invoice from the school with appropriate documentation as stated in [Tuition and Fees at an Eligible Private School](#).

**⚠ Important:** Payments made to a non-eligible private school will not be reimbursed.



### **Proof of Payment for Cash, Checks, & Private Sellers**

Cash payments to a provider require a signed, dated letter from the provider on their letterhead that includes:

- Provider's name
- Scholarship student's first and last name
- Description of service (tuition, registration, etc.)
- Date of full payment (mm/dd/yy)
- Amount of purchase
- Method of payment (cash/check)

Requests for reimbursement of cash purchases from private sellers that are not affiliated with a company or institution (garage sale, Facebook Marketplace, Craigslist, private tutors, private therapists) will be denied.

When making purchases from private sellers, payment in the form of a personal or cashier's check, money order, PayPal, Venmo or other electronic payment method is required. This form of payment provides verification of the purchase, which is required for reimbursement.

When submitting a cashier's check, a copy of the cashier's check or a bank receipt confirming the purchase is required.

### **Proof of Payment for Credit Card Points, Gift Cards, & Cash Equivalents**

Purchases made using reward or loyalty points, credits, or gift cards may only be eligible for reimbursement if the proof of payment clearly shows the cash value of the payment method.

For example: A parent or guardian makes an eligible purchase for \$40.48. They pay \$30 with their credit card and \$10.48 using reward points.

They can be reimbursed for the full purchase price of \$40.48 if the receipt from their purchase clearly shows a full price of \$40.48, and the full purchase was for eligible expenses.

If the receipt does not show the full purchase price, they can only be reimbursed for \$30 – the portion paid with a credit card.

### **Proof of Payment For Installment Payments**

If an approved purchase is made using layaway, an installment plan, or a buy now pay later service, such as Klarna or Affirm, Step Up For Students cannot reimburse the full purchase amount until all payments have been made.

However, each installment payment on the approved purchase is eligible for reimbursement once the payment has been made.



**⚠ Note:** Parents or guardians utilizing a payment plan for Florida Theme Park admission must wait until the ticket or pass has been paid in full (or up to \$299) before submitting their reimbursement request.

### Supporting Documentation for Eligible Use of Scholarship Funds

Eligible items and services fall into different categories, and each category has its own documentation requirements. The sections below are organized by category and explain what types of documents are required to show that an item or service qualifies for scholarship funding.

Details on eligible uses of scholarship funds are available in the program [Purchasing Guide](#).

### Instructional Materials, Curriculum, or Curriculum Materials

The invoice or receipt must include:

- **Item(s) purchased**
- **Full date of purchase, including year**
- **Place of purchase**
- **Amount of the purchase, including item price, subtotal, taxes, fees, discounts, and total**
- **Method of payment (see [Proof of Payment](#) section)**

If there are several items listed on the receipt, underline or highlight the item(s) the reimbursement request is for. If possible, purchase the item(s) in a different transaction.

### Internet Resources, Including Mobile Hot Spots

The invoice or receipt must include:

- **All pages of the internet bill**
- **Proof of payment that matches both the payment method and the service dates listed on the internet bill**
- **Service address that matches the physical address listed in the guardian profile in EMA**

Your proof of payment date will need to correspond with the due date on the invoice.

### Streaming Services

The invoice or receipt must include:

- **Provider or company name**
- **Description of the item purchased (i.e. which streaming package)**
- **Full date of purchase or service**
- **Amount of the purchase, including item price, subtotal, taxes, fees, discounts, and total**
- **Method of payment (see [Proof of Payment](#) section)**

The service or billing address does not need to be included for Streaming Services.



### Physical Education (P.E.)

The invoice or receipt must include:

- **Provider's company/league name**
- **Type of service rendered**
- **Time period of service rendered (e.g., date range of services, or Semester 1, or Winter Session, or Fall Semester), including the year**
- **Service rate**
- **Method of payment (see [Proof of Payment](#) section).**

### Electives & Enrichment

Reimbursement requests for elective classes, enrichment or lessons must include documentation demonstrating the provider meets the requirements for part-time tutoring or Choice Navigator services (see the [Purchasing Guide](#) for these requirements), or has one of the following:

- **A valid or expired Florida educator's certificate**
- **Minimum of three years of experience in the relevant subject area as demonstrated by a full LinkedIn profile or resume.**
- **Currently enrolled in a postsecondary educational institution as a student of the relevant subject area**
- **Degree from a postsecondary educational institution in the relevant subject area**
- **Certification or national accreditation in the relevant subject area**

The invoice or receipt must include:

- **Scholarship student's first and last name**
- **Instructor's first and last name**
- **Provider's company name, if applicable**
- **Type of service rendered**
- **Time period of service rendered (e.g., date range of services, or Semester 1, or Winter Session, or Fall Semester)**
- **Service rate**

**⚠ Important:** Supplies that are considered general household expenses or improvement are not eligible for reimbursement (e.g., irrigation systems, large appliances, chicken coops).

### **Summer Programs & Day Camps**

Summer day camps and seasonal enrichment programs may be eligible when they provide structured instruction in an academic, artistic, athletic, or skill-based area and are led by providers who meet the Electives & Enrichment instructor qualifications listed above.

The invoice or receipt must include:

- **Scholarship student's first and last name**
- **Instructor or provider's name**



- Provider or organization name (if applicable)
- Type of program or class offered
- Dates or session period (including year) of participation
- Service rate or tuition amount
- Method of payment (see [Proof of Payment](#) section)

If the summer program includes multiple activity types, only the **instructional component** is eligible for reimbursement

**⚠ Important:** Traditional overnight summer camps that provide general recreation, lodging, or non-instructional activity programming **are not** eligible for reimbursement.

To submit a reimbursement request, families should follow the same documentation requirements listed under Electives & Enrichment.

### Specialized Services

The invoice or receipt on business letterhead must include:

- **Scholarship student's first and last name**
- **Time period of service rendered (e.g., date range of services, or Semester 1, or Winter Session, or Fall Semester)**
- **Type of service rendered**
- **Amount due for the service**
- **First and last name of the service provider who rendered the service**
- **Service provider's license number**
- **Method of payment (see [Proof of Payment](#) section)**

**⚠ Important:** If the invoice includes medical billing codes rather than the type of service rendered, it may result in delays in processing.

### Florida Department of Education Approved Pre-Apprenticeship Program

The invoice or receipt on craftsperson or company letterhead must include:

- **Scholarship student's first and last name**
- **Name of the Florida Department of Education-approved pre-apprenticeship course**
- **Craftsperson name, company name (if applicable) and license number or listed on the Florida Department of Education website**
- **Time period of service rendered (e.g., date range of services, or Semester 1, or Winter Session, or Fall Semester)**
- **Program rate**
- **Total amount due for the service**
- **Method of payment (see [Proof of Payment](#) section)**

More information about Florida Department of Education approved pre-apprenticeship programs can be found [here](#).



### Full-Time Private Tutoring Program

Full-time private tutoring is an option for students to satisfy state attendance requirements outlined in Florida Statute [1002.43](#). Parents must select a credentialed provider and participate in a minimum number of instructional hours by grade level.

The invoice or receipt on business letterhead must include:

- Scholarship student's first and last name
- Tutor's first and last name
- Tutor's Florida Department of Education certification number
- Tutor's company name, if applicable
- Time period of service rendered (e.g., date range of services, or Semester 1, or Winter Session, or Fall Semester)
- Include it is for full-time tutoring
- Tutor's hourly rate
- Total amount due for the service
- Method of payment (see [Proof of Payment](#) section)

**⚠ Important:**

- Full-time tutors who have not previously received payment via scholarship funds will be required to submit a Step Up For Students [Full-Time Tutor Participation Agreement](#) and W-9.
- To ensure correct processing, each reimbursement request should include documentation in English of the service provider's license number and/or credentials.

### Part-Time Tutoring Services or Choice Navigator Services

The invoice or receipt on business letterhead must include:

- Scholarship student's first and last name
- Tutor's or navigator's first and last name
- Tutor's company name, if applicable
- Type of service rendered
- Time period of service rendered (e.g., date range of services, or Semester 1, or Winter Session, or Fall Semester)
- Tutor's hourly rate (not required for Choice Navigator services)
- Total amount due for the service
- Method of payment (see [Proof of Payment](#) section)

**⚠ Important:**

- To ensure correct processing, each reimbursement request should include documentation, in English, of the service provider's license number and/or credentials.
- If the provider of these services has not already been approved in EMA, reimbursement requests for these services should include documentation of their credentials. Options for acceptable documentation are detailed in the program [Purchasing Guide](#).



### [Stanley G. Tate Florida Prepaid College Program \(Prepaid 529 Plan\)](#)

The Stanley G. Tate Florida Prepaid College Program (Prepaid 529 Plan) will be transitioning from reimbursement to direct pay at a future date. This change is intended to simplify and improve the process for families. The exact date of this transition has not yet been determined.

Until the transition is complete, families will have the option to use either direct pay or reimbursement. Once the transition takes effect, families will be formally notified before reimbursement is phased out.

The reimbursement procedure outlined below remains in effect. Reimbursement requests must be submitted by the 14<sup>th</sup> day of each month and will be sent to Florida Prepaid for verification monthly before each reimbursement or payment is made. Any requests received after the 14<sup>th</sup> day of each month will not be sent to Florida Prepaid for verification until the next month.

The reimbursement request must include:

- **A Florida Prepaid College Program account statement with the following:**
- **Scholarship student's first and last name**
  - **The student's name listed on the scholarship account must match the name of the beneficiary of the Florida Prepaid account.**
- **Scholarship student's Florida Prepaid College Program Plan account number**
- **Account type (e.g., one year Florida University Plan)**
- **Proof of payment, including:**
  - **Full payment date, including year**
  - **Payment amount**

### [Florida 529 College Savings Program \(Investment 529 Plan\)](#)

Florida 529 College Savings Program (Investment 529 Plan) contributions must occur via direct payment. Florida 529 College Savings Program reimbursement requests submitted for payment to the parent or guardian will be denied.

Please note families must enter their Florida 529 College Savings Program (Investment 529 Plan) account number in the "NOTES" section once the service order is reviewed in the Shopping Cart.

### [Contracted Services Provided By A Public School or District](#)

The invoice or receipt must include:

- **Scholarship student's first and last name**
- **Name and address of the school**
- **Services provided**
- **Time period of service rendered (e.g., date range of services, or Semester 1, or Winter Session, or Fall Semester)**
- **A statement showing the amount paid (or billed)**
- **Proof of payment (see [Proof of Payment](#) section)**



### Tuition & Fees At An Eligible Private School

Requests for reimbursement of tuition and fees at a participating private school submitted by the parent or guardian must include a complete invoice and proof of payment containing the following information:

- School's published tuition and fee rates
- Annual tuition rate for the scholarship student
- Name and address of the private school
- Scholarship student's first name and last name (The student's name on the invoice must match Step Up For Student's records. Nicknames, middle names as first names, etc. are not accepted.)
- Time period of service rendered (e.g., date range of services, or Semester 1, or Winter Session, or Fall Semester)
- School year the payment is for
- Method of Payment (see [Proof of Payment](#) section)
- Itemized charges for each tuition or fee payment

#### **⚠ Important:**

- School lunch and before- and after-school care are not eligible expenses. You may review the [Purchasing Guide](#) to view all prohibited fees.
- If the private school uses a tuition management system (e.g., FACTS, Blackbaud, TADS), only the annual fee for use of the billing service will be eligible for reimbursement.
- If a student withdraws or transfers, refunds (if any) will be based on the school's policy and must be paid back to Step Up For Students for credit to the student's scholarship account. The parent or guardian may not accept refunds of scholarship dollars from the school.
- Tuition and/or fees paid to an ineligible private school that does not participate in the scholarship program are not eligible for reimbursement.
- If submitting a reimbursement for basic uniform pieces purchased from a school-required vendor:
  - Only the retailer's name, date of purchase, item description, and total amount paid are required for the receipt or invoice.
  - Documentation confirming that the vendor is required by the school, or other proof that the school designates the vendor for uniform purchases is required.
  - The school's uniform policy, including school name, address, and school year is required.

#### **Eligible fees include:**

- Academic services fee
- Activity fee, including choir, band, etc.



- Application fee (payable in the fiscal year preceding the academic year)
- Athletics fee
- Club fee
- Book fee
- Enrollment fee
- Graduation fee
- Registration fee (payable in the fiscal year preceding the academic year)
- Security fee
- Technology fee
- Test fee
- Uniform fee (basic uniform pieces purchased from a school-required vendor including sports uniforms)

**Prohibited fees:**

- Annual funds
- Before- or after-school care
- Costs associated with scholarship management
- Food fees, including breakfast and lunch
- Fundraising fees, donation fees, giving fees, volunteer waiver fees
- Nursery or daycare fees
- Optional fees
- Shoes and accessories fees

If the private school uses a tuition management system (e.g., FACTS, Blackbaud, TADS), only the annual fee for use of the billing service will be eligible for reimbursement. Any fees charged for use of a credit card will not be reimbursed.

Tuition and/or fees paid to an ineligible private school that does not participate in the scholarship program are not eligible for reimbursement.

**Tuition & Fees As A Private-Pay Student For Florida Virtual School (FLVS)**

The invoice or receipt must include:

- **Scholarship student's first and last name**
- **Name of course paid for (or billed)**
- **Time period of service rendered (e.g., date range of services, or Semester 1, or Winter Session, or Fall Semester)**
- **A statement showing the amount paid (or billed)**
- **Proof of payment (see [Proof of Payment](#) section)**

If the student withdraws from the course within fourteen (14) days, a refund will be issued to the entity/individual from which payment was received.



### Tuition & Fees At An [Eligible Postsecondary Institution](#), A [Home Education Instructional Program](#), or An [Approved Online or Virtual Provider](#)

The invoice or receipt must include:

- **Scholarship student's first and last name**
- **Name of the institution or course provider**
- **Course description**
- **Time period of service rendered (e.g., date range of services, or Semester 1, or Winter Session, or Fall Semester)**
- **Amount of tuition and fees**
- **Proof of payment, on institution letterhead, if applicable (see [Proof of Payment](#) section)**

For first-time Home Education Instructional Program providers who have not previously been vetted, reimbursement requests must also include:

- **Tuition and fees schedule**
- **Address where the individual classes are held**
- **Descriptions of courses or activities**

### Tuition & Fees For An [Approved VPK Program Provider](#) or An [Approved School Readiness Provider](#)

The invoice or receipt must include:

- **Scholarship student's first and last name**
- **Name and address of the approved provider**
- **Time period of service rendered (e.g., date range of services, or Semester 1, or Winter Session, or Fall Semester)**
- **Description of the services provided**
- **Amount of tuition and fees**
- **Proof of payment (see [Proof of Payment](#) section)**

Tuition and fees must be for the educational needs of the student and may cover a full-day program, and must be accurately described in the invoice. Fees for nursery or daycare will not be covered.

School lunch and other fees that are not mandatory or are not educational are not covered by the scholarship.

If a student withdraws or transfers schools, refunds (if any) will be based on the provider's policy and must be paid back to Step Up For Students for credit to the student's scholarship account. The parent/guardian may not accept refunds of scholarship dollars from providers.



### Fees For Specialized After-School Education Programs or Specialized Summer Education Programs

The invoice or receipt must include

- Scholarship student's first and last name
- Time period of service rendered (e.g., date range of services, or Semester 1, or Winter Session, or Fall Semester)
- Description of the services provided
- Amount of fees
- Proof of payment (see [Proof of Payment](#) section)

#### **⚠ Important:**

- Specialized summer education programs, including overnight and day educational camps require pre-authorization.
- If the camp is not designed specifically for students with special or unique needs, the pre-authorization request must include a letter from a therapist or doctor describing how the camp will benefit your student's needs.
- Please note that camp lodging and food costs are not eligible for reimbursement.

### Fees For Annual Home Education Evaluation or Testing and Academic Services, Including Test Administration & Proctoring

The invoice or receipt must include:

- Student's first and last name
- Full date of the evaluation/test, including year
- Description of the services provided
- Amount of fees for the evaluation/test
- For an assessment not listed on the DOE list of approved norm-referenced assessments: Documentation of the teacher's Florida Department of Education certification number or psychologist's Florida Department of Health license number
- Proof of payment (see [Proof of Payment](#) section)

### Transition Services Provided By Job Coaches

Transition services provided by job coaches at eligible private schools may be included in the school's fees (see [Tuition and Fees](#) for required documents)

The invoice or receipt for transition services provided by a job coach outside an eligible private school must include:

- Scholarship student's first and last name
- Time period of service rendered (e.g., date range of services, or Semester 1, or Winter Session, or Fall Semester)
- Description of the services provided
- Total amount due for the service



- **Proof of payment** (see [Proof of Payment](#) section)
- **Documentation the job coach meets one of the criteria listed in the [Authorized Uses of Scholarship Program Funds](#) section.**

### [Fees For Horse Therapy](#)

Includes equestrian therapy services provided at a center that is a member of the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH).

The invoice or receipt on business letterhead must include:

- **Scholarship student's first and last name**
- **Time period of service rendered (e.g., date range of services, or Semester 1, or Winter Session, or Fall Semester)**
- **Type of service rendered**
- **Amount due for the service**
- **First and last name of the therapist who rendered the service**
- **Method of payment (see [Proof of Payment](#) section)**

If the invoice includes medical billing codes rather than the type of service rendered, it may result in processing delays.

### [Fees For Music & Art Therapy](#)

Includes services provided by a therapist who is certified by the Certification Board for Music Therapists or Credentialed by the Art Therapy Credentials Board, Inc.

The invoice or receipt on business letterhead must include:

- **Scholarship student's first and last name**
- **Time period of service rendered (e.g., date range of services, or Semester 1, or Winter Session, or Fall Semester)**
- **Type of service rendered**
- **Amount due for the service**
- **First and last name of the therapist who rendered the service**
- **Method of payment (see [Proof of Payment](#) section)**

**⚠ Note:** If the invoice includes medical billing codes rather than the type of service rendered, it may result in processing delays.

### [Shipping Guidelines](#)

- **MyScholarShop Purchases:** All purchases made through MyScholarShop must be shipped to the Florida mailing address listed on the student's scholarship account.
- **Reimbursed Purchases:** For purchases submitted for reimbursement, items must be shipped to either a Florida address or a Florida P.O. Box.



- **Parents/guardians who are active-duty members of the United States Armed Forces and received permanent change of station orders to Florida or, at the time of renewal, whose home of record or state of legal residence is Florida are exempt from this and may have items shipped to an address outside of Florida.**

## Fees Guidelines

- **Shipping fees: All shipping types, including import/export duty, expedited, and overnight fees are eligible uses of scholarship funds and are reimbursable.**
- **Credit card fees: Credit card fees are reimbursable with the exception of credit card fees added to a private school tuition and fees invoice.**

**⚠ Important:** Shipping and credit card fees denied prior to the implementation of this policy will not be reimbursed retroactively.

## Pre-Authorization Requests

Pre-authorization requests can be submitted for expenses planned in the future. Once a request is approved, it can be used to submit a reimbursement or to make a MyScholarShop purchase.

Payment method information must be kept up to date in EMA to complete a pre-authorization.

Include detailed information about the item or service requested for pre-authorization, along with any supporting documents for the purchase.

If the pre-authorization request is approved, the item or service on the proof of purchase must match the approved pre-authorization; otherwise, the request may be denied.

If the pre-authorization request is put on hold, log into EMA to see the reason why it was put on hold, provide the required information or documentation, and re-submit the pre-authorization request.

If the pre-authorization request is denied, the reason for the denial will be listed in EMA. Denied pre-authorization requests may not be appealed, so no further action may be taken.

Parents and guardians should allow up to sixty (60) days for pre-authorization requests to be reviewed and processed after all required documentation has been submitted. The status of pre-authorization requests can be monitored in EMA. The deadline to submit pre-authorization requests for 2025-2026 is May 29, 2026.

## Additional Purchasing Guidelines

### Receiving Payments, Refunds, or Rebates

Parents or guardians may not receive a payment, refund, or rebate of scholarship funds from a provider.

*Effective January 2026*



## Subscriptions or Online Programs

**Families with more than one scholarship student may choose to purchase a family or multi-user subscription plan when it is more cost-effective than buying individual student plans.**

- Each Scholarship student is eligible for reimbursement of their portion of the plan, up to the cost of an individual plan.
- Parents must submit a separate reimbursement request for each scholarship student's share.

**If the plan also covers non-scholarship family members, only the scholarship students' prorated portion can be reimbursed.**

## Frequency of Purchase Limitations

Program rules limit the frequency with which families can purchase certain items using scholarship funds.

These rules apply by calendar year. For example, a laptop may have a two-year purchasing frequency, meaning a student who purchased a laptop on November 10, 2025, will be eligible to purchase another laptop using scholarship funds on or after November 11, 2027.

If you purchased a device using scholarship funds prior to a frequency of purchase rule being implemented, that purchase will still count toward the rule. For example, a pair of headphones purchased on June 1, 2025 will still count toward the two-year rule for headphones that was implemented on July 1, 2025, and an additional pair of headphones will not be able to be purchased with scholarship funds until June 2, 2027.

Frequency of purchase rules apply to all scholarship programs, even if a student changes programs. For example, if a parent/guardian purchased a tablet with New Worlds Scholarship Accounts funds on November 10, 2025, so the student would not be eligible to purchase a tablet using any other scholarship until November 11, 2027.

Information on the categories that the frequency of purchase rule applies to can be found on the [Purchasing Guide](#).

## Items That Are Lost, Stolen, or Broken Beyond Repair

If an item purchased with scholarship funds is broken beyond repair, it may be replaced with a similar item of equal or lesser value.

A parent or guardian must submit a pre-authorization request and documentation from a repair shop or service technician showing the item is beyond repair. Photos of the damaged item do not qualify as sufficient documentation.

If the item can be repaired, scholarship funds may be used to cover the cost of repair, but they cannot be used to cover the cost of a replacement.



If an item was stolen, a parent or guardian must submit a pre-authorization request and police report for review.

Replacement of lost items will not be approved.

If a replacement item is authorized, the two (2) calendar-year period will reset. For example, a student who purchased a laptop on July 10, 2025, but then is authorized to purchase a replacement device on October 10, 2026, will not be eligible to purchase another laptop using scholarship funds until on or after October 11, 2028.

### **Maintenance Agreements & Warranties for Eligible Devices**

Maintenance agreements for eligible devices purchased with FES-UA funds are eligible FES-UA expenses. Maintenance agreements/warranties are service agreements with a device manufacturer or vendor to support regular service on that device.

### **Placement In Residential Programs**

If a scholarship student is placed in any residential program, the parent or guardian must confirm how participating students meet the mandatory school attendance requirement.

- **If the program uses any Florida public school, including a full-time online school, the student may lose their scholarship eligibility if the online school reports them to the state for funding.**

If the program includes a private school that is approved by the Florida Department of Education to participate in scholarship programs, the student's scholarship funds may be available to cover the cost of tuition and fees.

### **Parent & Guardian Responsibilities**

To make sure your child remains eligible for the FES-UA scholarship, there are a few important responsibilities you'll need to keep in mind.

#### **⚠ Quick Checklist:**

- Annual Assessment – Your child must complete an annual educational evaluation
- Private or Home Education Enrollment Only – Your child cannot be enrolled in public school on a full-time basis while receiving FES-UA funds.
- Keep Contact Information Current – Update your information in EMA if anything changes
- Use Funds Correctly – Spend scholarship funds only on eligible expenses
- Protect Your Child's Privacy – Do not share your EMA login or password.



## Annual Assessment Requirement

Students in grades 3-10 attending an eligible private school using scholarship funds are required to take a [standardized assessment approved by the Florida Department of Education](#).

Students must participate in **one** of the following:

- A nationally norm-referenced test identified by the Florida Department of Education pursuant to Florida Statute 1002.394(8)(a), or the statewide assessments pursuant to Florida Statute [1008.22](#).
- Students with disabilities for whom the physician, psychologist, or IEP team determines that standardized testing is not appropriate are exempt from this requirement.
- An annual educational evaluation in accordance with Florida Statute [1002.41](#) (1)(f);
- A preassessment and post assessment selected by the provider if the child is 4 years of age and is enrolled in a program provided by an eligible Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program provider.
- A student with disabilities for whom the physician or psychologist who issued the diagnosis or the IEP team determines that a preassessment and post assessment is not appropriate is exempt from this requirement.
- The participating provider shall report the student's scores to the parent of guardian.

More information, including a list of approved assessments, is [available at the Florida Department of Education](#). Instructions for how to submit assessment results to Step Up For Students can be found [here](#).

Students with disabilities for whom standardized testing is not appropriate are exempt from this requirement. These students must submit the [Standardized Testing Exemption Form](#) to Step Up For Students.

## Maintaining Up-To-Date Contact Information

Parents and guardians must keep their contact information in EMA current, especially their primary email address, as this is how Step Up For Students will communicate important information.

To update proof of residency, parents or guardians should contact Step Up For Students.

To avoid important communications from going to spam or junk folders, parents and guardians should update their email filters to accept messages from Step Up For Students.

## Use of Funds

Parents and guardians are required to keep scholarship funds in an account managed by the Scholarship Funding Organization. Parents and guardians can direct how funds are used, but it is prohibited for parents and guardians to personally access the funds.



Additionally, parents and guardians cannot be paid with scholarship funds for services provided to their own scholarship student.

## Confidentiality

To protect the confidentiality of personal and financial information stored in EMA, only the parent or guardian listed on the account is permitted to access and manage it.

Parents and guardians must not share account login credentials with anyone, including school and service provider personnel, or other individuals. Sharing login information or allowing another person to access the account may result in loss of scholarship eligibility and funding, and financial or criminal penalties.

Step Up For Students is not responsible for changes to the account or unauthorized transactions made by someone other than the parent or guardian listed on the account.

## Continuing Program Eligibility

Once a student's scholarship has been funded, a parent or guardian may continue with the scholarship as long as they meet residency requirements and remain eligible to enroll in a Florida public school. The student will remain eligible until they return to public school, graduate high school, or turn twenty-two (22) years old. If a student graduates high school before the end of the school year, the parent or guardian must [contact Step Up For Students](#). Failure to do so may be considered fraud and may result in financial or criminal penalties.

Renewal students do not have to requalify for the scholarship unless their qualifying disability status changes.

A student will need to apply for the scholarship as a new student if they:

- **Do not renew their scholarship and “sit out” a year.**
- **Leave the program and later seek to resume participation.**

If a student turns twenty-two (22) years old, graduates high school, or enrolls in a public school on a full-time basis but still has funds remaining in their scholarship account, the parent or guardian may continue to access and spend those funds on eligible expenses until no funds remain in the scholarship account.

Contributions made to the Stanley G. Tate Florida Prepaid College Savings Program (Prepaid 529 Plan) or to the Florida College Savings Program (529) (Investment 529 Plan) qualify as account activity.

Accounts will be closed after two years without any spending activity or any period of three (3) consecutive years after high school completion during which the student has not been enrolled in an eligible postsecondary educational institution or a program offered by the institution.



## Leaving The Scholarship Program

Parents and guardians must notify Step Up For Students immediately by declining the scholarship in their EMA account, if a scholarship student:

- Enrolls, and is reported to the state for public funding, in any public school, including Florida Virtual School or another online school. (Students may use their scholarships to pay for courses or other services provided by these institutions.)
- Intends to apply for the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship, the Family Empowerment Scholarship for Education Options, a Personalized Education Program (PEP) scholarship, the Transportation Stipend, or New Worlds Scholarship Accounts program.
- Receives Specialized Instructional Services under the Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program described in Florida Statute [1002.66](#).
- Moves out of state (except for renewing students of active-duty members of the United States Armed Forces who receive permanent change of station orders out of state while maintaining legal residence in Florida).

### To decline a scholarship:

- The parent or guardian must log in to their EMA account
- Go to the application where the scholarship was previously accepted
- Select the Decline Scholarship option
- Once declined, the status will update in EMA under the *Application Details* and a timestamp will show when the decline was made.

For a visual guide on how to decline a scholarship, click [here](#).

**⚠ Important:** Parents and guardians cannot decline the scholarship if the student is enrolled with a school. If the student is currently enrolled with a school, they must be withdrawn or disenrolled before the decline can be submitted.

Failure to notify Step Up For Students could result in a:

- Loss of funding
- Loss of future eligibility
- Financial or criminal penalties

If state records show a student enrolled in a public school after receiving scholarship funds, the funds deposited into the student's account for that school year will be returned to the state of Florida.

If a student is found enrolled in public school or another scholarship program, their parent or guardian will be notified by email and should contact Step Up For Students immediately.



## Actions That May Lead To A Loss of The Scholarship

Actions that may lead to a loss of the scholarship include, but are not limited to:

- Parents and guardians must approve each quarterly payment to their students' school and may not designate any organization or individual to approve the payment on their behalf. Parents and guardians who fail to approve quarterly payments for the eligible private school where their student is enrolled may forfeit their scholarship.
- Misrepresenting or withholding information on the scholarship application or reimbursement documentation.
- Failure to enroll a K-12 student in a private school or to file a letter of intent to participate as a Home Education Student with their Florida public school district.
- Failure to satisfy state compulsory attendance requirements as provided in Florida Statute [1003.01\(16\)\(b\), \(c\), or \(d\)](#).
- Failure to satisfy attendance requirements outlined by their eligible private school, if applicable.
- Failure of the student to take a required nationally norm-referenced test or the statewide assessment, if applicable (students exempt from norm-referenced testing are not subject to this requirement).
- Moving or residing outside of the state of Florida. With the exception of renewal FES-UA scholarship students of active-duty members of the United States Armed Forces with Permanent Change of Station (PCS) orders to move out of Florida.
- Enrolling in a public school, including the Florida Virtual School, the Florida School For The Deaf and Blind, the College-Preparatory Boarding Academy, the Florida Scholars Academy, a developmental research school, a charter school, or any other Florida public school, on a full-time basis.
- Utilizing another state scholarship.
- Fraudulent activity, including taking possession of any scholarship funds by refund, resale, rebate, or credit from a provider or purchase.
- Allowing another party, including a provider or school representative, to access or manage a student's scholarship account.
- Step Up For Students determines the student is not eligible for program renewal.
- The Commissioner of Education suspends or revokes program participation or use of funds.
- The student graduates high school or reaches twenty-two (22) years of age, whichever occurs first.

The above actions, or any violation of scholarship statutes, rules, policies, or procedures may result in the loss of the scholarship, loss of future scholarship eligibility, and/or financial or criminal penalties.



## Data Security

Step Up For Students will never ask a parent or guardian for the following information via email, phone call, live chat, or text message:

- **Password to their secure online account**
- **Full social security number (only the last four digits may be requested for verification)**
- **Credit card number or banking details**
- **Personal identification numbers (only the PIN provided on the scholarship application may be requested for verification)**

Parents or guardians who receive any communication requesting this type of information or receive a suspicious email must not respond or click on any links. Instead, [report the activity immediately on the Contact Us page](#) on the Step Up For Students website.

## Account Security

Parents may be asked to provide their student ID or award ID when enrolling through EMA or when verifying information during a customer service call. These IDs are also included in official award letters and communications. However, Step Up For Students staff will never disclose or share a student ID or award ID with parents or guardians over email, phone, live chat, or text message.

If you receive any communication offering to provide your student ID, award ID, or other sensitive information, do not respond or click any links. Instead, [report the activity immediately on the Contact Us page](#) on the Step Up For Students website.

## Additional Resources

Step Up For Students has created additional resources to help you navigate the scholarship program. To explore these tools, visit:

- [Document Library](#)
- [Resources Page](#)
- [FES-UA Scholarship Information](#)
- [FES-UA Purchasing Guide](#)
- [Program Facts](#)
- [Find a School Tool](#)

## Handbook Disclaimer

Please note that the information and terms outlined in this handbook are subject to change as laws or rules are amended. To ensure you have the most current information, we update this handbook regularly.



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## Handbook Feedback Form

Step Up For Students welcomes feedback from parents and guardians to help improve this handbook. We encourage you to share your suggestions using the [Parent Handbook Feedback Form](#).



## Appendix A

### Anaphylaxis

Per [Fla. Admin. Code R. 6A-6.0251](#), the medical term for the life-threatening allergic reactions that may occur when allergic individuals are exposed to specific allergens. Anaphylaxis is a collection of symptoms affecting multiple systems in the body.

### Autism Spectrum Disorder

As defined by the [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, published by the American Psychiatric Association](#), an autism diagnosis requires persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts, as manifested by all of the following: deficits in social-emotional reciprocity, in nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction, and in developing, maintaining and understanding relationships.

[https://www.autismspeaks.org/autism-diagnostic-criteria-dsm-](https://www.autismspeaks.org/autism-diagnostic-criteria-dsm-5)

### 5Cerebral Palsy

Per [Florida Statute § 393.063\(6\)](#), a group of disabling symptoms of extended duration which results from damage to the developing brain that may occur before, during, or after birth and results in the loss or impairment of control over voluntary muscles. For the purposes of this definition, cerebral palsy does not include those symptoms or impairments resulting solely from a stroke.

### Down Syndrome

Per [Florida Statute § 393.063\(14\)](#), a disorder caused by the presence of an extra chromosome 21.

### Dual Sensory Impaired

Per [Fla. Admin. Code R. 6A-6.0322](#), a student who has dual-sensory impairments affecting both vision and hearing, the combination of which causes a serious impairment in the abilities to acquire information, communicate, or function within the environment, or who has a degenerative condition which will lead to such an impairment.

### Emotional or Behavioral Disability

Per [Fla. Admin. Code R. 6A-6.03016](#), a student with an emotional/behavioral disability who has persistent (is not sufficiently responsive to implemented evidence-based interventions) and consistent emotional or behavioral responses that adversely affect performance in the educational environment that cannot be attributed to age, culture, gender, or ethnicity.



## Hearing Impairment

Per [Fla. Admin. Code R. 6A-6.03013](#), a student who is deaf or hard-of-hearing and has hearing loss aided or unaided, that impacts the processing of linguistic information, and which adversely affects performance in the educational environment. The degree of loss may range from mild to profound.

## High-Risk Child

Per [Florida Statute § 393.963\(23\)](#), a child is considered “high-risk” if they are from three (3) to five (5) years of age before September 1<sup>st</sup> of the school year with one or more of the following characteristics:

- A developmental delay in cognition, language, or physical development.
- A child surviving a catastrophic infectious or traumatic illness known to be associated with developmental delay when funds are specifically appropriated.
- A child with a parent or guardian with developmental disabilities who requires assistance in meeting the child’s developmental needs.
- A child who has a physical or genetic anomaly associated with developmental disability.

Under [Florida Statute 393.063\(23\)](#), a child can qualify as high-risk based on developmental delay only between the ages of three (3) and five (5). Although developmental delays may be diagnosed for children age 6 and older, the high-risk definition is limited to ages 3-5. Children at age six (6) are no longer eligible as high risk based on developmental delay alone and will need to establish eligibility under another disability from [Florida Statute 1002.394\(2\)\(e\)](#) to continue participating in the program. For example, a student can qualify as speech delayed until aged 5, after that the student would need to qualify under speech impairment.

## Hospital or Homebound

Per [Fla. Admin. Code R. 6A-6.03020](#), a student who has a medically diagnosed physical or psychiatric condition which is acute or catastrophic in nature, or a chronic illness, or a repeated intermittent illness due to a persisting medical problem that confines the student to home or hospital and restricts activities for more than six months.

## Intellectual Disability

Per [Florida Statute § 393.063\(23\)](#), significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior which manifests before the age of 18 and can reasonably be expected to continue indefinitely.

Per [Florida Statute § 393.063\(23\)\(a\)](#), “adaptive behavior” means the effectiveness or degree with which an individual meets the standards of personal independence and social responsibility expected of his or her age, cultural group, and community.



Per [Florida Statute § 393.063\(23\)\(b\)](#), “significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning” means performance that is two or more standard deviations from the mean score on a standardized intelligence test specified in the rules of the agency.

### Language Impairment

Per [Fla. Admin. Code R. 6A-6.030121](#), language impairments are disorders of language that interfere with communication, adversely affect performance and/or functioning in the student’s typical learning environment, and result in the need for exceptional student education. A language impairment is defined as a disorder in one or more of the basic learning processes involved in understanding or in using spoken or written language. These include phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics.

The language impairment may manifest in significant difficulties affecting listening comprehension, oral expression, social interaction, reading, writing, or spelling. A language impairment is not primarily the result of factors related to chronological age, gender, culture, ethnicity, or limited English proficiency.

### Muscular Dystrophy

As defined by the [Center of Disease Control](#), muscular dystrophies are a group of muscle diseases caused by mutations in a person’s genes. Over time, muscle weakness decreases mobility, making everyday tasks difficult. There are many kinds of muscular dystrophy, each affecting specific muscle groups, with signs and symptoms appearing at different ages, and varying in severity.

### Orthopedic Impairment

Per [Fla. Admin. Code R. 6A-6.030151](#), orthopedic impairment means a severe skeletal, muscular, or neuromuscular impairment. The term includes impairments resulting from congenital anomalies (e.g., including but not limited to skeletal deformity or spina bifida), and impairments resulting from other causes (e.g., including but not limited to cerebral palsy or amputations).

### Other Health Impairment

Per [Fla. Admin. Code R. 6A-6.030152](#), other health impairment means having limited strength, vitality or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that is due to chronic or acute health problems. This includes, but is not limited to, asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, Tourette syndrome, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and acquired brain injury.



## Phelan-McDermid Syndrome

Per [Florida Statute § 393.063\(28\)](#), a disorder caused by the loss of the terminal segment of the long arm of chromosome 22, which occurs near the end of the chromosome at a location designated q13.3, typically leading to developmental delay, intellectual disability, dolichocephaly, hypotonia, or absent or delayed speech.

## Prader-Willi Syndrome

Per [Florida Statute § 393.063\(29\)](#), an inherited condition typified by neonatal hypotonia with failure to thrive, hyperphagia or an excessive drive to eat which leads to obesity usually at 18 to 36 months of age, mild to moderate intellectual disability, hypogonadism, short stature, mild facial dysmorphism, and a characteristic neurobehavior.

## Rare Diseases

Per Florida Statute § 1002.394(e), rare diseases which affect patient populations of fewer than 200,000 individuals in the United States, as defined by the [National Organization for Rare Disorders](#).

## Specific Learning Disability

Per [Fla. Admin. Code R. 6A-6.03018](#), a specific learning disability is defined as a disorder in one or more of the basic learning processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest in significant difficulties affecting the ability to listen, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematics. Associated conditions may include, but are not limited to, dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, or developmental aphasia. A specific learning disability does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of a visual, hearing, motor, intellectual, or emotional/behavioral disability, limited English proficiency, or environmental, cultural, or economic factors.

## Speech Impairment

Per [Fla. Admin. Code R. 6A-6.03012](#), speech impairments are disorders of speech sounds, fluency, or voice that interfere with communication, adversely affect performance and/or functioning in the educational environment, and result in the need for exceptional student education.

## Spina Bifida

Per [Florida Statute §393.063\(41\)](#), a person with a medical diagnosis of spina bifida cystica or myelomeningocele.



## Traumatic Brain Injury

Per [Fla. Admin. Code R. 6A-6.030153](#), a traumatic brain injury means an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that adversely affects educational performance. The term applies to mild, moderate, or severe, open or closed head injuries resulting in impairments in one or more areas such as cognition, language, memory, attention, reasoning, abstract thinking, judgment, problem-solving, sensory, perceptual and motor abilities, psychosocial behavior, physical functions, information processing, or speech. The term includes anoxia due to trauma. The term does not include brain injuries that are congenital, degenerative, or induced by birth trauma.

## Visually Impaired

Any impairment in vision regardless of significance or severity that, even with correction, adversely affects the student's educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness, including ocular, brain-based and neurological disorders, but does not include esotropia (crossed eyes), hyperopia (farsightedness), and myopia (nearsightedness).

## Williams Syndrome

As defined by the [National Organization for Rare Disorders](#), a rare genetic disorder characterized by growth delays before and after birth (prenatal and postnatal growth retardation), short stature, a varying degree of mental deficiency, and distinctive facial features that typically become more pronounced with age.



## Appendix B—Authorized Uses of Funds Chart



# Authorized Use of Scholarship Funds 2025-26

Authorized Use of Funds	Scholarship Program				Payment Method
	FES-UA	FES-EO/FTC	PEP	NWSA	
Instructional materials	X	X	X	X (DP)	DP or R
Curriculum and curriculum materials	X	X	X	X (DP)	DP or R
<b>Tuition and fees for:</b>					
Full-time, in-person private school	X	X			DP or R
Part-time, in-person eligible private school	X		X		DP or R
Hybrid private school			X		DP or R
Home education instructional programs	X		X		DP or R
Eligible postsecondary institution	X	X	X		DP or R
Dual enrollment	X	X	X		DP or R
Approved pre-apprenticeship programs	X	X	X		Reimbursement
Approved online or virtual provider	X	X	X		DP or R
Private-pay Florida Virtual School	X	X	X		DP or R
Approved VPK program provider	X				DP or R
Approved school readiness provider	X				DP or R
<b>Standardized testing fees</b>	X	X	X		DP or R
<b>Contracted services provided by a public school or school district</b>	X	X	X		DP or R
<b>Private tutoring</b>					
Full-time private tutoring	X		X		DP or R
Part-time private tutoring	X	X	X	X (DP)	DP or R
<b>Services provided by a Choice Navigator</b>	X	X	X		DP or R
<b>Contributions to approved college savings programs</b>					
Stanley G. Tate FL Prepaid College Program	X				DP or R
FL 529 Savings Program	X				Direct Pay
<b>Specialized services by approved providers or a Florida hospital</b>					
Applied behavior analysis	X				DP or R
Speech-language pathologist services	X				DP or R
Occupational therapy services	X				DP or R
Physical therapy services	X				DP or R
Listening and spoken language specialist services	X				DP or R
Psychotherapy or counseling by a licensed Psychologist, School Psychologist, Mental Health Counselor, Marriage and Family Therapist, or Clinical Social Worker	X				DP or R
Vision therapy by a licensed Optometrist	X				DP or R
<b>Fees for specialized summer education programs</b>	X				DP or R
<b>Fees for specialized after-school education programs</b>	X				DP or R
<b>Fees for summer education programs that improve reading, literacy, or math skills</b>				X (DP)	Direct Pay
<b>Fees for after-school education programs that improve reading, literacy, or math skills</b>				X (DP)	Direct Pay
<b>Transition services provided by job coaches</b>	X				Reimbursement
<b>Annual home education evaluation fees</b>	X				DP or R
<b>Fees for horse therapy</b>	X				DP or R
<b>Fees for music and art therapy</b>	X				DP or R

"DP" = Direct Pay through EMA or MSS; "R" = Reimbursement. All NWSA purchases must be made by Direct Pay

11/2025

"DP" = Direct Pay through EMA or MSS; "R" = Reimbursement. All NWSA purchases must be made by Direct Pay

Effective January 2026