



**FAMILY EMPOWERMENT SCHOLARSHIP FOR  
STUDENTS WITH UNIQUE ABILITIES  
SCHOOL & PROVIDER HANDBOOK**



*Click on any line within the Table of Contents to be taken directly to that section.*

## Contents

Contact Information .....	2
Overview .....	2
Qualifying for FES-UA.....	3
Funding for the FES-UA Program .....	4
Award Amounts .....	4
Funding Timelines .....	5
Approved Usage for FES-UA Funding .....	5
Instructional Materials – Enrichment Courses: .....	8
Specialized Services .....	8
Eligible Private School Tuition/Fees.....	9
Home Education Program Tuition/Fees .....	11
Eligible Postsecondary Institution or Program.....	12
Full-Time Private Tutoring.....	13
Part-Time Tutoring Services.....	13
Florida Department of Education Approved Online Course Providers.....	14
Florida Department of Education Approved Virtual Instruction Program (VIP) Providers.....	15
Florida Virtual School (FLVS) .....	15
Stanley G. Tate Florida Prepaid College Program.....	15
Florida 529 College Savings Program .....	16
Tuition and Fees for an Approved Preapprenticeship Program .....	17
Contracted Public School Services .....	17
Fees Associated with Specialized Summer Education Programs.....	17
Fees Associated with Specialized After-School Education Programs .....	18
Transition Services Provided by Job Coaches .....	18
Annual Educational Evaluation Fees .....	19
Tuition and Fees Associated with Programs Offered by Approved Voluntary Prekindergarten Education (VPK) Program Providers .....	20



Tuition and Fees Associated with Programs Offered by Approved School Readiness Providers .....	20
Horse Therapy.....	21
Music and Art Therapy .....	21
Services Provided by a Choice Navigator .....	21
What is Required of Providers? .....	22
Setting Up a Provider Account.....	22
Other Payment Options.....	22
Links to Step Up For Students Landing Pages.....	23
Appendix A.....	24

## **Contact Information**

For questions, please contact us via email at [fes-uaprovider@sufs.org](mailto:fes-uaprovider@sufs.org), or call our Service Center at 877-735-7837, Monday - Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. ET. You may also utilize online chat by simply going to our website, [www.stepupforstudents.org](http://www.stepupforstudents.org).

## **Overview**

Step Up For Students is a state-approved, nonprofit, scholarship funding organization that empowers families to pursue and engage in the most appropriate learning options for their children.

Step Up For Students administers Florida's school choice programs. These programs include the Family Empowerment Scholarship for Educational Opportunities (FES-EO), the Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities (FES-UA), the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program (FTC), the Hope Scholarship for students who are bullied or are victims of violence in a public school, and the New Worlds Scholarship Program for public school students in kindergarten through fifth grades who struggle with math and/or reading.

The Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities (FES-UA) provides access to an education savings account (ESA) that functions like a bank account from which you direct funds to pay for tuition and fees for a private school, homeschooling options, therapies, tutoring, and more. In 2014, Florida became the second state in the nation, after Arizona, to create an education savings account (ESA) program for children with special needs. Formerly called the Gardiner Scholarship, in 2021 this program was rolled into the Family Empowerment Scholarship to help grow the program and to streamline the state's scholarships. The Family Empowerment Scholarship has continued to expand, with the



integration of the McKay Scholarship program into the Family Empowerment Scholarship in 2022. On July 1, 2023, the state of Florida expanded educational choice programs to all K-12 Florida students with the conversion of the Family Empowerment Scholarship for Educational Options and the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship into educational savings accounts (ESAs).

To learn more about education savings accounts (ESA), please click [here](#).

The following sections will help guide you as you provide services to students within the Family Empowerment Scholarship for students with Unique Abilities (FES-UA).

### Qualifying for FES-UA

The Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities (FES-UA) is available to students ages 3 to 22 with the following diagnoses:

- Anaphylaxis
- Autism spectrum disorder
- Cerebral Palsy
- Down syndrome
- Emotional or a 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



**Please note: For a detailed definition of these diagnoses, click the specific diagnosis listed above or see [Appendix A](#) at the end of this document.**

The term "hospital or homebound" includes a student who has a medically diagnosed physical or psychiatric condition or illness, as defined by the state board in rule, and who is confined to the home or hospital for more than 6 months. A current IEP is required as validation for this diagnosis.

Validation of the student's diagnosis is required and must come from a licensed Florida physician, Autonomous Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN), or psychologist; or a physician who holds an active license issued by another state or territory of the United States, the District of Columbia, or the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. A student may also qualify with an official, district-provided IEP written within the past three years in accordance with the rules of the State Board of Education or within the rules of another state.

A current IEP is **required** to demonstrate a dual sensory impaired or a hospital or homebound diagnosis.

Families of students with a diagnosis other than "High-Risk" will need to provide documentation of the diagnosis for the scholarship in their first year only. Families of students who initially qualify under the High-Risk designation, must, at the time the student is six (6) years old on or before September 1 of the school year applied for, provide documentation of eligibility for the student under one of the other diagnoses outlined above.

### **Funding for the FES-UA Program**

**Students who are found eligible and funded for an FES-UA scholarship must be treated as private pay students. The funds in the student's account may be used for a variety of purposes. Please make sure you are in constant contact with the parent/guardian when serving a scholarship student.**

### **Award Amounts**

Funding for the Family Empowerment Scholarship for students with Unique Abilities (FES-UA) comes from the State of Florida.

- For a student who received and used FES-UA or the McKay Scholarship in the 2021-2022 school year, the amount of the award will be the greater of the amount calculated above or the amount the student received for the 2021-2022 school year.
- For a student who has a Level I to Level III matrix of services or a diagnosis by a physician, an autonomous Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN), or a psychologist, the calculated scholarship amount for a student participating in the



program must be based upon the grade level and school district in which the student would have been enrolled. The funds must be allocated based on the school district's average exceptional student education guaranteed allocation funds per exceptional student education full-time equivalent student.

- For a student with a Level IV or Level V matrix of services, the calculated scholarship amount must be based upon the school district to which the student would have been assigned as the total funds per full-time equivalent for the Level IV or Level V exceptional student education program.

Click [here](#) for the 2023-2024 funding amounts. The award amounts shared are maximum annual award amounts by grade level, county and matrix score, but a student's individual award amount may be prorated based on the student's eligibility and/or funding date.

**Please note** that FES-UA recipients are **not** required to disclose their scholarship award amounts to providers, including schools.

### **Funding Timelines**

Funding for the Family Empowerment Scholarship for students with Unique Abilities (FES-UA) comes from the State of Florida.

Funds will be deposited on a quarterly basis in the student's accounts by Step Up For Students. Step Up For Students will receive funding from the Department of Education on the following dates:

- September 1
- November 1
- February 1
- April 1

Funds will be deposited into the students' accounts within two weeks of receiving the funds from the state. After funds have arrived, families will be notified by email.

Please note, the dates above are for regularly scheduled funding distribution. Students who miss a regularly scheduled distribution may be paid in a supplemental payment.

### **Approved Usage for FES-UA Funding**

Program funds must be used for eligible expenses that meet the individual educational needs of the scholarship student. A parent/guardian, student, or provider of any services may not bill an insurance company, Medicaid, or any other agency for the same services that are paid for using Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities (FES-UA) funds.



Parents/Guardians of students receiving scholarship funds through Family Empowerment Scholarship for students with Unique Abilities (FES-UA) may not take possession of funds at any time and must not receive a payment, refund, or rebate of any FES-UA funds. Accordingly, a parent/guardian, even if appropriately credentialed, is prohibited from providing services to their own scholarship student. If a parent/guardian receives a refund for any services or goods purchased with scholarship funds, those funds must be returned to Step Up For Students for deposit into the student's scholarship account.

The following categories of items and services are approved uses for the scholarship funds. Eligible Expenses are detailed in the [FES-UA Purchasing Guide](#).

**Please note:** Reimbursement requests submitted for an item or service that is not on the pre-approved list may result in delayed processing or denial of the reimbursement if submitted without an approved pre-authorization. For information on pre-authorizations, please click [here](#).

- Instructional Materials
- Curriculum
- Specialized Services
- Eligible Private School Tuition and Fees
- Home Education Program Tuition and Fees
- Eligible Postsecondary Institution or Program
- Full-Time Private Tutoring
- Part-Time Tutoring Services
- Florida Department of Education Approved Online Course Providers
- Florida Department of Education Approved Virtual Instruction Program (VIP) Providers
- Florida Virtual School (FLVS) as a private paying student
- Standardized Testing Fees
- Stanley G. Tate Florida Prepaid College Program
- Florida 529 College Savings Program
- Approved Preapprenticeship Programs
- Contracted Public School Services
  - There is no requirement for public schools or school districts to contract for services with a scholarship participant or to set up an account for payment as a provider. Participation is optional for the public schools and/or districts.



- Fees Associated with Specialized Summer Education Programs
- Fees Associated with Specialized After-School Education Programs
- Transition Services Provided by Job Coaches
- Annual Educational Evaluation Fees
- Tuition and Fees Offered by Approved Voluntary Prekindergarten Education (VPK) Program Providers
  - The student must be a 3-, 4- or 5-year-old who is not enrolled in kindergarten
  - A scholarship student can take advantage of the educational services provided by approved VPK providers. However, the student may not be enrolled through the VPK mechanism. Rather, the student would be registered for the program and/or the full day as *private-pay* students, not receiving public funding for the VPK program.
  - Please note, the student cannot be counted or reported to the Early Learning Coalition to receive public funding for the VPK program. If the scholarship student is funded through the VPK program, the scholarship may be lost, and the guardian may be responsible for repaying funds to the student's scholarship account.
  - If a student receives services funded through the Florida Education Finance Program (such as VPK Specialized Instructional Services) the student is considered enrolled in public school, and the student will lose eligibility to participate in the scholarship program and any funds remaining in the account will be returned to the State of Florida.
- Tuition and Fees Offered by Approved School Readiness Providers
  - A student may continue to receive federal funding for a school readiness program if they are between the ages of 3 and 12. However, if a student is receiving simultaneous services funded through the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP), such as a VPK program, the student is considered to be enrolled in public school, and the student will lose eligibility to participate in the Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities (FES-UA) and any remaining funds in the account will be returned to the State of Florida.
  - Under this category, the scholarship student **may** participate in the VPK program by enrolling as a private pay student (see above).



- Horse Therapy
- Music and Art Therapy
- Services through a Choice Navigator

Below, you will find a list of categories for educational services or programs, which have credentialing or program requirements on part of the educational organization or a service provider. In all instances where credentialing is required, a provider is eligible to render services only during the period in which a license, certification, or status is valid and active.

### **Instructional Materials – Enrichment Courses:**

Lessons generally associated with elective or enrichment (non-core academic subjects) may be rendered by providers who satisfy the credentialing requirements of Part-Time tutors, or may providers who possess one of the following:

- A valid or expired Florida educator's certificate.
- At least 3 years of experience in the relevant subject area as demonstrated by employment records.
- Currently enrolled in a postsecondary educational institution as a student of the relevant subject area.
- A degree from a postsecondary educational institution in the relevant subject area.
- A certification or national accreditation in the relevant subject area.

### **Specialized Services**

Specialized services are those provided by approved providers or by a hospital in Florida selected by the parent/guardian.

An approved provider is one licensed by the state of [Florida Department of Health](#) to perform the service; approved as a provider by the [Agency for Persons with Disabilities](#); or approved as a [Specialized Instructional Services \(SIS\) Provider by the Office of Early Learning](#). An approved provider must provide services in the specialized area in which they are approved. These services include, but are not limited to:

- Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) services provided by a [Board Certified](#) Behavior Analyst (BCBA).
- Services provided by a Florida licensed Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP).
- Services provided by a Florida licensed occupational therapist.
- Services provided by Florida licensed physical therapist.
- Services provided by a Florida licensed listening and spoken language specialist.



- Vision Therapy Provided by Florida licensed optometrist.
- Psychotherapy or counseling by a Florida licensed Psychologist, Mental Health Counselor, Marriage & Family Therapist, or Clinical Social Worker.

## Eligible Private School Tuition/Fees

An “eligible private school” is defined in s. 1002.395(2)(g) as “a private school, as defined in s. [1002.01](#), which is located in the state of Florida, which offers an education to students in any grade from kindergarten to grade 12, and which meets the requirements of:

- Sections [1002.42](#) and [1002.421](#); and
- A scholarship program under s. [1002.395](#) (Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program), as applicable, if the private school participates in a scholarship program under s. [1002.395](#).

Private schools who are interested in serving students in the Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities (FES-UA) must be registered with the Florida Department of Education and must have completed the Department’s requirements for participation in the FES-UA. For more information regarding how to become an eligible private school, please contact the Florida Department of Education’s toll-free hotline at 800-447-1636, the FLDOE [Regional Managers](#) or click this link: [Requirements for Participating in State Scholarship Programs](#). Eligible private schools wishing to have an account with Step Up For Students will be required to provide banking information to allow for direct deposit (ACH transfers)

Tuition and fees ***required for enrollment*** at an eligible private school are covered by the Family Empowerment Scholarship for students with Unique Abilities (FES-UA).

### Eligible Fees:

- Application Fees (payable in the Fiscal Year preceding the academic year)
- Registration Fees (payable in the Fiscal Year preceding the academic year)
- Uniform Fees (basic uniform pieces purchased from a school-required vendor; shoes and accessories are not eligible).
- Book Fees
- Technology Fees
- Test Fees
- Athletics and Club Fees
- Graduation Fees

### Prohibited Fees:

- Fundraising Fees/Donation Fees/Volunteer Waiver Fees
- Annual Funds
- Giving Funds



- Therapies or services as fees (Credentialed Services including tutoring and therapies should be billed in their categories)
- Costs associated with scholarship management (including service fees)
- Optional Fees

NOTE: Field Trip Fees at an Eligible Private School are reimbursable to the guardian under the Instructional Materials – Field Trip expense category.

- Not all private schools are eligible to participate. Schools must meet the criteria described above and *elect* to participate in FES-UA with the Florida Department of Education.
- Schools determined eligible by the Florida Department of Education may be found at the [Florida Private Schools Directory](#). Choose “Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities (FES-UA).”

This list is updated periodically and may not be 100% accurate. Please reach out to the Department of Education if your school is not displayed.

Beginning with the 2023-24 school year, schools may enroll an FES-UA scholarship student in the EMA platform, which will allow the school to invoice students quarterly. This is optional for the parent, who may choose to direct pay their school via the enrollment function.

**Please note: only full-time private school scholarship students educated on site at the school’s physical location are eligible for tuition and fee enrollment through the EMA platform.**

At the time of enrollment, the school and parent/guardian must both certify the agreed-upon tuition and fee rate for that student. The agreed-upon tuition and fee rate for the student may include discounts or other considerations and may be less than the school’s published tuition and fee rate for the student’s grade level. However, the agreed-upon tuition and fee rate may not exceed the school’s published tuition and fee rate for the student’s grade level. The agreed upon amount of tuition and fees posted in EMA for each student should not exceed any contractual agreement between the parent/guardian and the eligible private school.

Step Up will commit the total amount of tuition and fees for that student and bill them quarterly before a parent/guardian can access any remaining funds for other eligible expenses. **If the parent has agreed to use only a portion of scholarship funds towards the tuition and fees, the student’s enrollment in EMA should reflect only that portion of scholarship funds that the family has committed to the school for tuition and fees.**

Once a student is enrolled and attending a school for 10 or more days during a quarterly payment period, that school will receive the full quarter’s distribution. If a student transfers to a



different participating school in the same quarter, the first school the student attended for 10 days or more in the quarterly payment period will receive the full quarter's payment. It is acceptable for the parent/guardian and the two schools to negotiate any amount owed to the new school from the quarterly payment made to the first school by Step Up For Students. This is not required, but, in the spirit of partnership for the good of the student, is highly recommended.

If a parent/guardian decides to pay out of pocket and get reimbursed for tuition, there is no need for a parent/guardian to provide a student's FES-UA Award ID to an eligible, participating private school. Recipients of FES-UA can be considered private-pay students at a private school; therefore, the eligible private school **does not** need to know the total amount of a student's scholarship award before the tuition and fees are agreed upon with the parent/guardian. The agreed upon amount of tuition and fees for each student should be a contractual agreement between the parent/guardian and the eligible private school.

Please note that the Eligible Private School criteria relate to K-12 programs. Preschool tuition and fees **may not** be billed under Eligible Private School, and these students should not be enrolled under the school profile. For information about eligibility to provide services to FES-UA 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old students who are not enrolled in kindergarten, please refer to the Voluntary Prekindergarten and/or School Readiness eligible expense sections.

## Home Education Program Tuition/Fees

For FES-UA scholarship students who are registered as home education students with a Florida public school district, scholarship funds may be used towards tuition and fees associated with programs, courses, or classes offered to home education students through an eligible, private school (see definition [above](#)) and are a part of the sequentially progressive instruction of the student per the definition of a home education program or an approved program listed below.

A "home education program" means the sequentially progressive instruction of a student directed by his or her parent/guardian to satisfy the attendance requirement of ss.[1002.41](#), [1003.01\(13\)](#), and [1003.21\(1\)](#), F.S.

To visit the Department of Education's website for additional information about home education programs, click this link: [Home Education Programs](#).

The following considerations apply when determining whether a program is an eligible home education program tuition and fee expense. Eligible programs must:

- Be a program selected by the parent/guardian as a part of their home education student's parent/guardian-directed instruction. (Programs may not be full-time or full-



time equivalent). Private schools, virtual schools, and public or charter schools are not considered a home education program.

- Provide courses and/or activities for home education students that enhance or enrich the child's learning opportunities.
- Have publicly available/reviewable program descriptions of courses and/or activities.
- Have a published tuition and fee schedule.
- Be in a non-residential physical location (cannot be in a home) **and**
- Be a business organization (tuition and fees may not be payable to an individual, with the exception of regional program directors or designated liaisons of national home educational communities).

Please note: A program that reports students' attendance as a private school student cannot be considered a home education program.

Full-time education is not eligible for payment under a Home Education Program and must be considered under the Eligible Private School or the group Full-Time tutoring.

**NOTE: All other live instruction, in-person or via remote access online, must meet the requirements for part-time tutoring services to be reimbursed by FES-UA funds.**

### Eligible Postsecondary Institution or Program

This includes the following institutions or programs offered by:

- A Florida College System institution listed at [Florida Colleges](#)
- A state university listed at [State University System of Florida - Universities](#)
- A school district technical center listed at [Career and Technical Education](#)
- A school district adult general education center listed at [Adult Education](#)
- An independent college or university that is eligible to participate in the FRAG Program
  - The William L Boyd, IV Florida Resident Access Grant (FRAG) provides tuition assistance for resident students attending non-profit colleges and universities in the state of Florida. Qualified applicants must be residents of Florida for at least 12 consecutive months prior to starting school. Residency cannot be established by an out of state student whose primary purpose for living in the state is attending college.

An accredited nonpublic postsecondary educational institution, licensed to operate in the state, listed at [Eligible Service Providers](#).



## Full-Time Private Tutoring

To be a full-time private tutoring program authorized under [s. 1002.43, Florida Statutes](#):

- The tutor must hold a current, valid Florida teaching certificate for the subject or grade level
- The tutor must complete and submit the Step Up For Students' [full-time tutor participation agreement](#) and a W9

For grades K-3, full time tutoring is considered 720 hours per school year

For grades 4-12, full time tutoring is considered 900 hours per school year (equivalent to 180 teaching days)

A full-time private tutor receiving ESA funds may not serve more than 5 students at one time. However, a full-time private tutor may provide tutoring for up to 25 students if the following facility requirements are satisfied:

Private tutoring may be provided for up to 25 students in any commercial building with a valid certificate of occupancy, library, community service, museum, performing arts, theatre, cinema, or church facility; in any facility or on any land owned by a Florida College System institution or university; in any similar public institution facility; and in any facility recently used to house a school or child care facility licensed under s. 402.305 within the preexisting zoning and land use designations of the facility without obtaining a special exception, rezoning, or a land use change so long as the provision of such tutoring meets all applicable state and local health, safety, and welfare laws, codes, and rules, including those pertaining to fire safety and building safety.

## Part-Time Tutoring Services

Part-time tutoring includes tuition and fees for part-time tutoring services provided by a person who holds one of the following certifications:

- A current, valid Florida educator's certificate pursuant to [s. 1012.56](#), Florida Statutes; or
- A person who holds an adjunct teaching certificate given by a Florida school district pursuant to [s. 1012.57](#), Florida Statutes; or
- A bachelor's or graduate degree in the subject area
  - This may be a copy of the bachelor's or graduate degree diploma or official college transcript stating the degree conferred.; or
- Has demonstrated a mastery of subject area knowledge pursuant to s. 1012.56(5), F.S. by one of the following ways:



- For a subject requiring only a baccalaureate degree for which a Florida subject area examination has been developed, achievement of a passing score on the Florida-developed subject area examination specified in state board rule;
- For a subject for which a Florida subject area examination has not been developed, achievement of a passing score on a standardized examination specified in state board rule, including, but not limited to, passing scores on both the oral proficiency and written proficiency examinations administered by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages;
- For a subject for which a Florida subject area examination has not been developed or a standardized examination has not been specified in state board rule, completion of the subject area specialization requirements specified in state board rule and verification of the attainment of the essential subject matter competencies by the district school superintendent of the employing school district or chief administrative officer of the employing state-supported or private school;
- For a subject requiring a master's or higher degree, completion of the subject area specialization requirements specified in state board rule and achievement of a passing score on the Florida-developed subject area examination or a standardized examination that is directly related to the subject specified in state board rule;
- Documentation of successful completion of a United States Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center program;
- Documentation of a passing score on the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT); or
- For a subject requiring only a baccalaureate degree for which a Florida subject area examination has been developed, documentation of receipt of a master's or higher degree from an accredited postsecondary educational institution that the Department of Education has identified as having a quality program resulting in a baccalaureate degree or higher in the certificate subject area as identified by state board rule.

### Florida Department of Education Approved Online Course Providers

- Accelerate Education (Grades K-5 through 2025-26) /approved courses listed [here](#)
- EdisonLearning (Grades 6-12 for through 2024-25) / approved courses listed [here](#)



- Edmentum/Apex Learning (Grades 9-12 through 2025-26)/approved courses listed [here](#)
- eDynamic Learning ULC (Grades 6-12 through 2024-25) / approved courses listed [here](#)
- Founders Education LLC (Grades 9-12 through 2025-26) / approved courses listed [here](#)
- Grade Results, Inc. (Grades K-12 for through 2023-24) / approved courses listed [here](#)
- My Virtual Academy (Grades 9-12 through 2025-26) / approved courses listed [here](#)
- National Highway Safety Administration (Grades 9-12 through 2024-25) / approved courses listed [here](#)

### Florida Department of Education Approved Virtual Instruction Program (VIP) Providers

- Accel Schools East (Grades K-12 through 2023-24)
- Connections Education of Florida, LLC (Grades K-12 through 2024-25)
- Graduation Alliance (Grades 9-12 for 2023-24)
- Imagination Learning (Grade K-12 through 2024-25)
- K12 Florida (Grades K-12 for 2018-19 to 2024-25)
- Mater Virtual Academy (Grades K-12 through 2023-24)
- OptimaED, LLC (Grades K-9 through 2023-24/2022-23)
- Somerset Virtual Academy (Grade K-12 through 2023-24)

### Florida Virtual School (FLVS)

Students utilizing Florida Virtual School must be enrolled as a private-paying student. A parent/guardian may choose to pay out-of-pocket and submit a reimbursement request to Step Up For Students or Florida Virtual School can direct-bill scholarship parents.

**Please note:** If a student is enrolled in Florida Virtual School and is funded as a public-school student, the student may lose eligibility and funding for the Family Empowerment Scholarship for students with Unique Abilities (FES-UA).

### Stanley G. Tate Florida Prepaid College Program

- 1-Year University Plan
- 4-Year University Plan
- 2-Year College Plan



- 4-Year College Plan
- 2+2 Florida Plan
- Dormitory Plan

There are restrictions on scholarship funds contributed to a Florida Prepaid College account.

- The account owner cannot change the beneficiary of an account that contains scholarship funds.
- The privately contributed funds in the account (if any) will be used to pay plan benefits before the scholarship funds.
- If a Prepaid College account is closed, the money will go back to the open scholarship account along with any interest accumulated, or to the State of Florida if the scholarship account has been or is being closed.
- If a student's scholarship account closes for any reason, any money in the student's Florida Prepaid account contributed through the scholarship will be returned to the State of Florida.

Click [here](#) for more information about the Stanley G. Tate Florida Prepaid College Program.

### Florida 529 College Savings Program

There are restrictions on scholarship funds contributed to a Florida 529 College Savings account.

- The account type must be an UTMA or UGMA.
- The account owner cannot change the beneficiary of an account that contains scholarship funds.
- The privately contributed funds in the account (if any) will be used to pay plan benefits before the scholarship funds.
- If a Florida 529 College Savings account is closed, the money will go back to the open scholarship account along with any interest accumulated, or to the State of Florida if the scholarship account has been or is being closed.
- If a student's scholarship account closes for any reason, any money in the student's 529 College Savings account contributed through the scholarship will be returned to the State of Florida.
- For an existing Florida 529 College Savings plan, scholarship funds will be managed in a separate account from private funds that are invested.



- **FES-UA Scholarship funds must be used to pay for postsecondary expenditures and may not be used for K-12 expenditures, including at any private school, regardless of FES-UA program participation.**

Click [here](#) for more information about the Florida 529 College Savings Program.

### **Tuition and Fees for an Approved Preapprenticeship Program**

Tuition and fees for an organized course of instruction designed to prepare a person 16 years of age or older to become an apprentice in a course approved by and registered with the department and sponsored by a registered apprenticeship program under s. [446.052](#).

Tuition and fee schedules must be published and made publicly available.

### **Contracted Public School Services**

Services provided by a Florida public school or school district, including classes.

- An FES-UA Scholarship recipient may take courses or receive services from a public school (including the Florida Virtual School), if the student contracts for classes/services on a *private pay basis*.
- The parent/guardian can pay for services and request reimbursement, or the school district can choose to be paid directly as a provider.
- There is no requirement for public schools or school districts to contract for services with a scholarship participant or to set up an account for payment as a provider. Participation is optional for the public schools and/or districts.
- If the district reports the student for any FTE funding or other state funding, the student will be ineligible for the Family Empowerment Scholarship for students with Unique Abilities (FES-UA) and jeopardize his/her scholarship.

Click here for a listing of [Public Schools / Districts](#).

### **Fees Associated with Specialized Summer Education Programs**

Fees for specialized summer education programs (or other programs during standard school breaks) meeting eligibility criteria are covered by the Family Empowerment Scholarship.

The term “specialized” means a program developed specifically for students with special or unique needs or a program that can meet the student’s needs.

Overnight educational camps may be permitted with Pre-Authorization and documentation of the educational benefit from a physician or licensed therapist.



Published fees must be provided to the SFO prior to receipt of any FES-UA funding. Proof of attendance is required.

### **Fees Associated with Specialized After-School Education Programs**

Fees for after-school education programs meeting eligibility criteria are covered by the Family Empowerment Scholarship.

The term “specialized” means a program developed specifically for students with special or unique needs or a program that can meet the student’s needs.

Published fees must be provided to any SFO prior to receipt of FES-UA funding. Proof of attendance is required.

For students aged 16 and up, full or half day education programs are permitted with Pre-Authorization.

### **Transition Services Provided by Job Coaches**

Students aged 14 through 22 may submit reimbursements for transition services by job coaches.

The job coach must meet one of the following criteria:

- Hired by the private school as a job coach
- Hired by the public-school system as a job coach
- Meet the criteria/training of the Florida Agency for Persons with Disabilities for job coaches
- Meet the criteria/training of the Florida Association of Rehabilitation Facilities
- Have an Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ARCE) certification
- Have an Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) certification
- Have an Institution for Community Inclusion certification
- Employment Specialist Vendor for Vocational Rehabilitation

Types of Transition Services that may be provided by the job coach:

- Conducting career and interest assessments
- Self-determination/Self-advocacy training
- Employability/Soft skill education



- Job development
- Job training
- Interview skill development and support—assistance with preparation and post-interview, resume development
- Onsite job coaching
- Follow-along support to maintain employment
- Monitoring and re-training for changes on the job site
- Benefits planning and financial literacy services (ex. Working with the student to understand the impact of work on SSI benefits and income)
- Advocacy services (ex. Working on benefit issues, social security, facilitating transportation services)
- Career Exploration
- Career Counseling

Scholarship participants should explore all available State resources including Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and financial aid. Vocational Rehabilitation helps youth with disabilities in high school establish a foundation for a seamless transition to individualized training, education, and employment.

For more information on VR's Transition Program, visit the [Division of Vocational Rehabilitation](#).

### Annual Educational Evaluation Fees

Section [1002.41\(1\)\(c\)](#), Florida Statutes, requires parents/guardians of students in home education programs to select one of five methods of annual educational evaluation. Fees covered by the scholarship are limited to the annual evaluations of educational progress of the home education student, completed by a state-certified teacher.

Scholarship funds may be used to cover the fees associated with the evaluation if one of the methods listed below is chosen:

- Evaluation of a student's educational progress upon review of the portfolio and discussion with the student, by a teacher, selected by the parent/guardian.
  - The teacher must hold a valid regular Florida certificate to teach academic subjects at the elementary or secondary level.
- Administration of any nationally normed student achievement test administered by a certified teacher.



- Administration of a state student assessment test used by the school district, administered by a certified teacher, at a location and under testing conditions approved by the school district.

### **Tuition and Fees Associated with Programs Offered by Approved Voluntary Prekindergarten Education (VPK) Program Providers**

The student must be a 3-, 4- or 5-year-old who is not enrolled in kindergarten.

A scholarship student can take advantage of the educational services provided by approved VPK providers. However, the student may not be enrolled through the VPK mechanism. Rather the student would be registered for the program and/or the full day as private-pay students, not receiving public funding for the VPK program. Tuition and fees must be for the 2023-24 program year, must be for the educational needs of the student, and may cover a full-day program. School lunch and other fees that are not mandatory or are not educational are not covered by the Family Empowerment Scholarship for students with Unique Abilities (FES-UA).

A scholarship student may be in a class mixed with students who are funded through other state programs such as VPK, VPKEIS, or Head Start. However, please note, the student cannot be counted or reported to the Early Learning Coalition to receive public funding for the VPK program. If the scholarship student is funded through the VPK program, the scholarship may be lost, and the parent/guardian may be responsible for repaying funds to the student's scholarship account.

If a student receives services funded through the Florida Education Finance Program, the student is considered to be enrolled in public school, and the student will lose eligibility to participate in the scholarship Program and any funds remaining in the account will be returned to the State of Florida.

Local Early Learning Coalitions approve providers for the VPK program and the School Readiness Program and may assist you in finding one of these providers.

Click here to access a map of the Early Learning Coalitions and their contact information: [Early Learning Coalitions](#).

### **Tuition and Fees Associated with Programs Offered by Approved School Readiness Providers**

A student may continue to receive federal funding for a school readiness program if they are between the ages of 3 and 12. However, if a student is receiving simultaneous services funded through the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP), such as a VPK program, the student is considered to be enrolled in public school, and the student will lose eligibility to participate in



the Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities (FES-UA) and any remaining funds in the account will be returned to the State of Florida.

Under this category, the scholarship student may participate in the VPK program by enrolling as a private pay student (see above).

Local Early Learning Coalitions approve providers for the VPK program and the School Readiness Program and could assist you in finding a provider.

Click here to access a map of the Early Learning Coalitions and their contact information: [Early Learning Coalitions](#).

### **Horse Therapy**

This category includes fees for services provided at a center that is a member of the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International. Eligible membership includes both Center Membership and Premier Accredited Center Membership.

To find a PATH member center in Florida, [click here](#).

The PATH certification must be issued to the center and not to individuals working at the center.

### **Music and Art Therapy**

This category includes fees for services provided by a therapist who is certified by the Certification Board for Music Therapists or credentialed by the Art Therapy Credentials Board, Inc.

To find a therapist in Florida certified by the Board for Music Therapists, [click here](#).

To find a therapist in Florida credentialed by the Art Therapy Credentials Board, Inc., [click here](#).

### **Services Provided by a Choice Navigator**

A “Choice Navigator” means an individual who meets the credentialing requirements of a Part-Time Tutor (above) and who provides consultations, at a mutually agreed upon location, on the selection of, application for, and enrollment in educational options addressing the academic needs of a student; curriculum selection; and advice on career and postsecondary education opportunities. A Choice Navigator may not oversee or exercise control over the curricula or academic programs of a student.

Choice Navigators have the same credentialing requirements of Part-Time Tutoring (see above).



## What is Required of Providers?

For a service to be eligible to be used for FES-UA funds, the provider must meet specific criteria based on the service they are providing for the scholarship recipient. Providers may only provide services for which they are eligible under any credentialing requirements. Please note that eligibility is not impacted by a parent's/guardian's mechanism of payment and credentialing requirements apply whether a family will be paying out of pocket to be reimbursed for the service or the provider will be direct invoicing the student's account.

**Providers, including schools, may not limit, restrict, or attempt to control a parent/guardian's use of student funds for tuition, fees, or other eligible expenses. Providers MAY NOT ask for or require a parent/guardian to provide the username and/or password to their scholarship account. Providers should never access the student's scholarship application or account for any reason. Doing so may result in loss of provider participation and/or scholarship eligibility and funding for the student, as well as financial or criminal penalties.**

## Setting Up a Provider Account

To provide an additional level of service to the families served by the Family Empowerment Scholarship for students with Unique Abilities (FES-UA), Step Up For Students has developed a method of direct payment to approved providers. Providers wishing to participate in direct payment from families must set up a provider account in the EMA system and submit a service catalogue.

For additional information about appearing in the provider service marketplace please refer to the School and Provider landing page. To review a provider checklist, please click [here](#).

Students who received and utilized FES-UA funding during the 2022-23 school year will begin the 2023-24 school year in the SAS system, and existing, eligible providers may continue to invoice renewal students through that system. New FES-UA students will be invoiced in EMA. SAS accounts are accessed via our website or by clicking here: [Provider Account Login](#). Renewal FES-UA recipients will move to the EMA system in Fall 2023. EMA accounts are accessed via our website [here](#).

For additional questions or clarification, please reach out to the scholarship provider relations team at [fes-uaprovider@sufs.org](mailto:fes-uaprovider@sufs.org).

## Other Payment Options

Families and providers may elect to participate in direct payment, or the parent/guardian of the scholarship student may also pay for tuition and fees, credentialed services, and/or goods out of



pocket, and submit a reimbursement request. In these instances, no action is required from the provider but the parent/guardian may request supporting documentation from the provider.

### **Links to Step Up For Students Landing Pages**

Click [here](#) to access the Schools and Provider landing page on our website.



## **Appendix A**

### **Disability Definitions**

#### **Anaphylaxis**

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 in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, published by the American Psychiatric Association.

#### **Cerebral Palsy**

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 that 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**

A disorder caused by the presence of an extra chromosome 21.

#### **Dual Sensory Impaired**

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. (Current IEP required)

#### **Emotional or Behavioral Disability**

A student with an emotional/behavioral disability 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**

A student who is deaf or hard-of-hearing 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**

A 3-5-year-old\*, being a high-risk child with a developmental delay in cognition, language, or physical development. (\*On or before September 1 of the school year.)

**Hospital or Homebound**

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 and that confines the student to home or hospital and restricts activities for more than six months. FLDOE definition/current IEP required.

**Intellectual Disability**

Significantly sub average 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.

“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.

“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**

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**

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**

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**

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**

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, hypotonic, or absent or delayed speech.

### **Prader-Willi Syndrome**

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 mental retardation, hypogonadism, short stature, mild facial dysmorphism, characteristic neurobehavior.

### **Rare Diseases**

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**

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**

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**

A person with a medical diagnosis of spina bifida cystica or myelomeningocele.

### **Traumatic Brain Injury**

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 (1) 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**

Students who are blind, have no vision, or have little potential for using vision or students who have low vision. The term visual impairment does not include students who have learning problems that are primarily the result of visual perceptual and/or visual motor difficulties. (FLDOE definition)

### **Williams Syndrome**

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 as defined by the National Organization for Rare Disorders.



## Ineligible Items/Services

- Any item for which the scholarship student does not meet manufacturer's minimum age recommendation
- Live animals
- Gas or electric powered gardening tools
- Ornamental plants (shrubs, landscaping, houseplants). Please note: this does not include seeds, seedlings, or fruit/vegetable/herb plants which are eligible expenses
- Household items, other than cooking supplies or items on the classroom furnishings list
- Commercial grade tools/equipment
- Blades or knives or items with blades or knives (with the exception of scissors, math tools, or some cooking equipment)
- Water parks admission or annual pass
- In-ground or above-ground swimming pools
- Jacuzzis
- Bouncy houses
- Inflatable slides
- Trampolines larger than those for an individual
- Motorized exercise equipment (other than treadmills or walking pads)
- Motorized boats
- Motorized scooters or ride-ons (including golf carts)
- Single-admission leisure events (with the exception of bowling, trampoline park, or ice skating sessions)
- Pool toys/floats (except kickboards)
- Family memberships to gyms, YMCAs, libraries, museums or other facilities
- Family or Multi-User Subscriptions (when a single-user subscription is available)
- Group admissions or rentals (with the exception of a canoe or two-person kayak rental)
- Pool tables
- Arcade games
- Arcade visits
- Footwear of any kind
- Sports uniforms
- Performance costumes
- Outdoor televisions/Inflatable outdoor theatres
- Video Streaming Services
- Television Services
- In-Game/In-App Purchases or video game credits
- Social Media Subscriptions or purchases (except LinkedIn Learning for Students)
- Activities occurring outside of the state of Florida that are not Pre-Authorized
- Costs of Transportation (including gas, mileage, or public transportation)
- Costs of Accommodations
- Cell Phones
- Smartwatches



- Gaming Consoles without educational software
- Hyperbaric chambers
- Wheelchairs
- Walkers and walking devices
- Braces (back, leg, neck, etc.)
- Medical testing kits and testing equipment
- Medically required equipment and accessories (feeding tubes, hygiene, sleeping, etc.)
- Hearing Aids