



# FLORIDA CHOICE SCHOLARSHIPS

**FAMILY EMPOWERMENT SCHOLARSHIP FOR EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS**  
**FLORIDA TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM**  
**PERSONALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM**  
**SCHOOL & PROVIDER HANDBOOK**



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## Contact Information

For questions, please contact us via email at [provider@sufs.org](mailto:provider@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.

On July 1, 2023, the state of Florida expanded educational choice programs to all K-12 Florida students with the conversion of the FES-EO and FTC Scholarships into educational savings accounts (ESAs). With this expansion also came the Personalized Education Program (PEP). Beginning with the 2023-24 school year, every Florida resident student eligible to enroll in a public K-12 school may receive a school choice scholarship to utilize in one of the following ways:

- **Private School Option (with ESA):** Enrollment in an eligible participating private school.
- **Transportation Option:** Transportation to a public school, including charter school, other than the school that the student is assigned to.

**Personalized Education Program (PEP) Option ESA:** This option is available to students who wish to participate in parent-designated instruction similar to a home education program. A "Personalized Education Program" means the sequentially progressive instruction of a student directed by his or her parent in order to satisfy the attendance requirements of ss. [1003.01](#)(13), and [1003.21](#)(1) while registered with an eligible nonprofit scholarship funding-organization pursuant to s. 1002.395. Personalized Education Program (PEP) students are a subset of the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship, and participation is limited to 20,000 PEP Students for the 2023-24 school year.

This handbook focuses on the FES-EO and FTC Scholarship, including Transportation and PEP, Programs.

## Scholarship Eligibility and Application

### Eligibility Requirements

Contingent upon available funds, and on a first come, first-served basis, a student must meet the eligibility criteria and household income requirements to qualify for the Family Empowerment Scholarship for Educational Options (FES-EO).





## Student Eligibility Criteria

- The student is a resident of the state of Florida.
- The students is eligible to enroll in grades kindergarten – 12 in a public school in the state of Florida.
  - A student entering kindergarten must be 5 years old on or before September 1 of the applying school year
  - A student entering first grade must be 6 years old on or before September 1 of the applying school year
- The student is not enrolled in full-time Florida public school, including a charter school, and is not participating in any other scholarship, including the Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities (FES-UA), Hope, or New Worlds programs, whether administered by Step Up or by another SFO.

## Funding for the FTC/FES-EO Programs

### Funding Timelines

Funding for the Florida Tax Credit (FTC) Scholarship comes from tax credit funds raised from corporate donors by Step Up For Students. Funding for the Family Empowerment Scholarship for Educational Options (FES-EO) comes from the State of Florida. Step Up For Students is required to award and enroll students first on the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship and may not present students for funding under the FES-EO program until a certain threshold of Florida Tax Credit scholarship funds have been obligated.

Funds will be deposited on a quarterly basis in the student's account by Step Up For Students. Step Up For Students will receive funding from the Department of Education (for the FES-EO funding) on the following projected dates:

- August 1 (or when 75% of Florida Tax Credit Scholarships have been obligated, whichever is later)
- November 1
- February 1
- April 1

Funds will be deposited into the students' accounts within two weeks of receiving the funds from the state. Florida Tax Credit Scholarship funding will follow a similar timeline.



Scholarship Funds for Private School and PEP students will be deposited into the student's scholarship account on or around the following dates:

- Quarter 1: August 15 – September 15
- Quarter 2: November 15 – December 1
- Quarter 3: February 15 – March 1
- Quarter 4: April 15 -May 1

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 Funding**

Program funds must be used for eligible expenses that meet the individual educational need of the scholarship student.

Parents/Guardians of students receiving scholarship funds may not take possession of funds at any time and must not receive a payment, refund, or rebate of any scholarship 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 FTC/FES-EO scholarship funds. Eligible Expenses are detailed in the [FTC/FES-EO 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.

- Instructional Materials
- Curriculum
- Eligible Private School Tuition and Fees
- Home Education Instructional Program Tuition and Fees (for PEP Students Only)
- Eligible Postsecondary Institution or Program
- Approved Preapprenticeship Programs
- Full-Time Private Tutoring (for PEP Students Only)
- 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
- Contracted Public School Services
- Part-Time Tutoring Services or Services by 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 or courses 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.

### 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 Florida, which offers an education to students in any grades K-12, and which meets the requirements of:

- Sections [1002.42](#) and [1002.421](#); and

Private School Eligibility and Obligations: An eligible private school may be sectarian or nonsectarian and must:

- Comply with all requirements for private schools participating in state school choice scholarship programs pursuant to s. [1002.421](#), including maintaining regular and direct contact with students (full-time, onsite instructions of scholarship students).
- Annually administer or make provision for students participating in the scholarship program in grades 3 through 10 to take one of the nationally norm-referenced tests identified by the Department of Education or the statewide assessments pursuant to



s. 1008.22. Students with disabilities for whom standardized testing is not appropriate are exempt from this requirement. A participating private school must report a student's scores to the parent. A participating private school must annually report by August 15 the scores of all participating students to a state university described in paragraph (9)(f).

- Administer the statewide assessments pursuant to s. 1008.22 if a private school chooses to offer the statewide assessments. A participating private school may choose to offer and administer the statewide assessments to all students who attend the private school in grades 3 through 10 and must submit a request in writing to the Department of Education by March 1 of each year in order to administer the statewide assessments in the subsequent school year.
- If a private school fails to meet the requirements of this subsection or s. 1002.421, the commissioner may determine that the private school is ineligible to participate in the scholarship program.

Private schools who are interested in serving students through the FTC and FES-EO programs must be registered with the Florida Department of Education and must have completed the Department's requirements for participation in both programs. 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 Student 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 FES-EO/FTC Scholarship.

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
- Costs associated with scholarship management
- 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 FTC and/or FES-EO programs with the Florida Department of Education.
- Schools determined eligible by the Florida Department of Education may be found at the [Florida Private Schools Directory](#).

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.

All Family Empowerment Scholarship recipients not registered in the PEP or Transportation program will be required to enroll in an Eligible Private School using EMA. The school will initiate student enrollment and the parent/guardian will confirm enrollment.

**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 but must be at least \$4. 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.**





Should a non-PEP student unenroll from an eligible private school at any time during the school year, they will be unable to access any funds for other eligible expenses. Only once the student

- is fully enrolled in the EMA platform at an eligible private school with an agreed-upon tuition and fee rate, *or*
- has the requested to transfer to and been enrolled into the PEP program

will the student be able to access any non-committed eligible private school funds for other eligible expenses.

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.

In order for the student to be eligible for a quarterly payment to an eligible private school, the school and parent must complete the enrollment process by the following dates:

- For Quarter 1: a student must be enrolled in the EMA platform at least 30 days before the Quarterly Payment, which is August 1<sup>st</sup> or after 75% of FTC funds have been obligated.
- November 1, enrollment deadline October 1
- February 1, enrollment deadline January 1
- April 1, enrollment deadline March 1

### **Home Education Instructional Program Tuition/Fees (for PEP students only)**

FTC-PEP students may use scholarship funds towards tuition and fees associated with programs, courses, or classes offered to PEP students through an eligible, private school 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.

The following considerations apply when determining whether a program is an eligible home education program tuition & 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 PEP student may not be reported for attendance as a private school student by any attending educational 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 facilities-based Full-Time tutoring categories. All other live instruction, in-person or via remote access online, must meet the requirements for part-time tutoring services to be eligible.

### Full-Time Private Tutoring (for PEP Students Only)

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 or Choice Navigator 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.
- 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.

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.

### 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)
- 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 FES-EO/FTC program.

### 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](#).

### 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-EO/FTC 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 FES-EO/FTC program and jeopardize his/her scholarship.

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

## What is Required of Providers?

For a service to be eligible to be used for FES-EO/FTC 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 provider 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 FTC/FES-EO, 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 catalog of eligible services.

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](#).

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

## Payment Options

Families and providers may elect to participate in direct payment, or the parent/guardian of the scholarship student may also pay for services and 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 Provider Landing Pages

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



## Ineligible Items/Services

- Any item for which the scholarship student does not meet manufacturer's minimum age recommendation
- Digital Devices including laptops or desktops
- Live animals
- Food or housing for 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 or 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 or 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 (including lodging or meals)