

Help is Here!

READING SCHOLARSHIP ACCOUNTS HANDBOOK



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Step Up For Students 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, with an emphasis on families who lack the information and financial resources to access these options. By pursuing this mission, we help public education fulfill the promise of equal opportunity.

One of the primary focuses of Step Up For Students is the administration of four scholarships for students in Florida: the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program (FTC) for lower to middle income families, the Family Empowerment Scholarship (FES) for students with certain special needs or are lower and middle income families, the Hope Scholarship for students who are bullied or are victims of violence and the Reading Scholarship Accounts Program for public school students in third through fifth grades who struggle with reading.

In 2018, the Florida Legislature established Reading Scholarship Accounts to provide educational options for public school students in grades 3 through 5 who struggle with reading.

Florida is the first state to offer an education savings account program for students enrolled in public schools. The program provides parents with access to education savings accounts, worth \$500 each, to pay for tuition and fees related to part-time tutoring in reading, summer and afterschool programs designed to improve reading or literacy skills, instructional materials, that includes limited technology, or curriculum related to reading and literacy.

The sections following this introduction will guide you as you utilize your Reading Scholarship funding.

How do families qualify for a Reading Scholarship Account?

Reading Scholarship Accounts are available to students who are enrolled in grades 3 through 5 in a Florida public school and who scored a level 1 or 2 on their third- or fourth-grade English Language Arts section of the Florida Standards Assessment in the prior year.

Students who are classified as English Language Learners and who are enrolled in a program or receiving services that are specifically designed to meet the instructional needs of English Language Learner students will receive funding priority.

Applying for a Reading Scholarship

To Parents of eligible 3rd-5th grade Florida public school students will be able to apply online. Visit the [Step Up For Students website](#) for more details.

If your child was awarded a Reading Scholarship for the 2020-21 school year, you have been emailed a unique link to apply for the 2021-22 school year. Please apply using that link. The process is different for returning students. DO NOT apply through the application link on the website.

Please note that parents will be asked to upload a copy of the student's [English Language Arts FSA score report](#) from the prior year with the application, as documentation of the level 1 or 2 score. This document is provided to the parent or guardian by the school district.

Step Up For Students reviews the application and supporting documentation to determine conditional eligibility. Once a student has been determined to be conditionally eligible the parent will be notified on a first-come, first-served basis.

A student may only receive one scholarship at a time. If the student leaves the Florida Public School system Step Up should be notified. Leaving the Florida Public School system could affect the student's scholarship status.

Funding for Reading Scholarship Accounts

Funding for the Reading Scholarship Accounts comes from the State of Florida. Each scholarship is \$500. There is no proration of funding.

As long as program funds are available, information for students determined by Step Up For Students to be conditionally eligible will be sent to the Florida Department of Education for a final eligibility review and funding. Funding will be established on a first-come, first-served basis, with English Language Learner students receiving priority. Students are required to be enrolled in a public school to be funded.

Program funding is limited. Parents will be notified via email when the student's account has been funded by the Florida Department of Education, and funds have been deposited into the student's Reading Scholarship account. Funded students should check with their local school district and Step Up For Students' website regarding possible options for authorized uses of the funds.

Once funds have been deposited into the student's account, parents may use the scholarship funds for a variety of services (described in the sections below). Any unused funds will be rolled over for use in subsequent school years, subject to the annual requirements for maintaining a Reading Scholarship Account established by Step Up For Students.

A student's scholarship account must be closed, and any remaining funds shall be sent back to the Florida Department of Education after:

- Denial or revocation of scholarship eligibility by the commissioner for fraud or abuse, including but not limited to, the student or student's parent accepting any payment, refund, or rebate, in any manner, from a provider of any services; or
- Three (3) consecutive fiscal years in which an account has been inactive.

Parents of students receiving scholarship funds through a Reading Scholarship Account may not take possession of funds at any time, unless provided as a reimbursement by Step Up For Students. If a parent receives a refund for any services or goods purchased with Reading Scholarship funds, those funds must be returned to Step Up for Students for deposit into the student's scholarship account.

If you wish to close your student's Reading Scholarship Account, you must contact Step Up for Students at reading@sufs.org or 1-877-735-7837.

Application Processing Status Definitions

- **Pending Processing** - The application has been received and is being reviewed for eligibility
- **Conditionally Eligible** - The student appears to be eligible; the application is awaiting confirmation of eligibility from the Florida Department of Education
- **Incomplete** - The application did not have all the information required to determine eligibility and the parent needs to submit a new application
- **DOE Confirmed** - The Florida Department of Education has confirmed the student's eligibility for the scholarship and Step Up is waiting for funding to arrive
- **Funded** - The scholarship dollars have been deposited into the student's account

Approved Uses of Reading Scholarship Account Funds

From time-to-time, Step Up will send the parents of scholarship recipients emails about how to use the Step Up direct payment program to obtain the material and services outlined in this section.

The following categories of items are approved uses for the Reading Scholarship Account funds.

Instructional Materials

Instructional materials must be related to reading or literacy. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Digital devices—limited to desktop computers, laptop computers, and tablets
- Digital material o Stand-alone online class
- Online software programs related to reading or literacy
- Books, including workbooks

Curriculum

Curriculum is defined as a complete course of study for a particular content area or grade level, including any required supplemental materials and associated online instruction related to reading or literacy.

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:

- 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 baccalaureate or graduate degree in Reading, Elementary Education, or English Education

The part-time tutor may be a person who has demonstrated a mastery of subject area knowledge pursuant to s. 1012.56(5), Florida Statutes.

Mastery could be achieved through one or more of the following:

- An official Florida Teacher Certification Examination (FTCE) score report indicating a passing score on a Florida subject area exam, not more than 10 years old; OR

- A passing score report that is not more than 10 years old, above the intermediate level, on both the oral and written exams for a foreign language subject area (excluding French, German or Spanish) administered by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL); OR
- A form provided by a Florida school district and signed by the school district, indicating there is no standardized exam in the subject area, but the person has attained the essential subject matter competencies and subject area specialization requirements; OR o
- A valid certificate issued by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS); OR o A valid certificate issued by the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE); OR
- A valid Statement of Status of Eligibility (SOE) issued by Educator Certification that indicates the educator is ELIGIBLE for a Professional Certificate; OR
- For a subject requiring a master's or higher degree (i.e. Educational Leadership, Guidance Counseling, Reading, or School Psychologist) a score report indicating a passing score on a Florida subject area exam (not more than 10 years old) AND a valid Statement of Status of Eligibility (SOE) issued by Educator Certification that indicates the educator is ELIGIBLE for a Temporary or Professional Certificate; OR
- A valid Statement of Status of Eligibility (SOE) issued by Educator Certification that indicates the educator is ELIGIBLE for a Temporary Certificate but does not list a passing score on the subject area exam under the Professional Certificate requirements

We have created a list of pre-approved part-time tutors! Click [here](#) to see the list.

If the tutor you'd like to use isn't on the pre-approved list and you don't know they meet the requirements, please show the tutor this section of the Handbook and ask them if they meet any one of the requirements needed to be eligible to serve your scholarship student.

Fees Associated with Summer Education Programs

Summer education programs must be designed to improve reading or literacy skills. o

- This means a summer education program that is primarily focused on reading, literacy, English language, English usage, grammar, comprehension, vocabulary, literature, and informational text, or writing in English.

Please click [here](#) for a list of approved programs.

Fees Associated with After-School Education

Programs After-school education programs must be designed to improve reading or literacy skills.

- This means an after-school education program that is primarily focused on reading, literacy, English language, English usage, grammar, comprehension, vocabulary, literature, and informational text, or writing in English.

Please click [here](#) for a list of approved programs.

Submitting Reimbursement Requests

Reimbursement requests will be processed as they are received; however, payments will be made every other month.

Required Supporting Documentation

When submitting reimbursement requests, you will be required to submit, via upload, documentation supporting the purchase of the item or service. The type of information required may be different depending on the type of item or service.

When making purchases from an individual or private seller who does not accept credit or debit cards, (ie. garage sale, flea market, etc.), payment using a cashier's check or money order is required in order to be reimbursed. Using a cashier's check or money order provides the required proof of payment method for the purchase. Reimbursement requests for purchases paid with cash will be denied.

Instructional materials and curriculum related to reading or literacy

- Proof of payment **must** include the following:
 - The item purchased related to reading or literacy; **and**
 - The date of purchase; **and**
 - The place of purchase or vendor; **and**
 - The amount of the purchase; **and**
 - The method of payment

Part-time tutoring

- A form for invoicing for part-time tutoring is now available. It can be found [here](#). Use of this form takes the place of the submission of any the payment documentation indicated below
- If not using the invoice form, an invoice on business letterhead or receipt must include the following:
 - The Reading Scholarship student's first and last name; and
 - The Reading Scholarship student's FLEID number; and
 - The tutor's first and last name; and
 - The company name, if applicable; and
 - Dates and hours of instruction; and
 - Hourly rate; and
 - Proof of payment
- Validation of credentials as a part-time tutor, if not previously submitted (See the Part-Time Tutoring Services section above for details)

If you select this option and the tutor has a direct pay partnership with Step Up for Students, when you register your student you will be provided the opportunity to approve Step Up For Students to pay the tutor directly for the services rendered. Choosing this option indicates approval for the tutor to be given priority over other reimbursements submitted for payment.

Summer and After-school Education Programs Designed to Improve Reading and Literacy Skills

- Student's name
- Student's FLEID
- Date of program
- Amount of fees
- Documentation that the program is primarily focused on reading, literacy, English language, English usage, grammar, comprehension, vocabulary, literature and informational text, or writing in English
- Proof of payment (for reimbursement to parent)

If you select this option and the program has a direct pay partnership with Step Up For Students, when you register your student you will be provided the opportunity to approve Step Up For Students to pay the district directly for the summer or after-school program. Choosing this option indicates approval for the after school or summer program to be given priority over other reimbursements submitted for payment.

Important Items to Note

- If you do not spend any money from your account for three consecutive fiscal years (July 1 – June 30), your account will be closed, and all remaining funds will be returned to the Florida Department of Education. If your scholarship eligibility is denied or revoked by the commissioner for fraud or abuse, including but not limited to, the student or student's parent accepting any payment, refund, or rebate, in any manner, from a provider of any services, your account will be closed and all remaining funds will be returned to the Florida Department of Education. Step Up For Students staff may request additional documentation or clarification when they review a reimbursement request. These requests will arrive via email to the email address associated with your account.

Please update your computer to accept email from Step Up For Students so it is not sent to your Spam or Junk folder.

- Requests for reimbursement for the current school year, must be submitted, with all the required supporting documentation, no later than August 31 to be considered for payment.
- If a single reimbursement is submitted that totals more than the maximum scholarship award (\$500) OR the account balance at the time of submission, the reimbursement will be adjusted to the maximum scholarship amount or the amount available.

If multiple reimbursement are submitted totaling more than the maximum scholarship award (\$500) OR the account balance at the time of submission, the reimbursements will be paid in the order received by Step Up until the account balance is used. This could result in a partial payment or a denial of one or more of the reimbursements due a lack of available funds.

- If you have been reimbursed from Reading Scholarship funds for an item that is returned, and for which you receive cash, that cash should be returned to the student's Reading Scholarship account. A check, made payable to Step Up for Students, indicating the Reading Scholarship student's name and ID number should be sent to Step Up for Students at the following address:

Step Up for Students Attention:
Accounts Receivable
4655 Salisbury Road, Suite 400
Jacksonville, Florida 32256

- If a reimbursement request is denied, you may appeal that decision ONE TIME by submitting a new reimbursement request, notating in the description box that this is an appeal or reconsideration request.

This form should be faxed to 904-302-8265 along with any supporting documentation that supports your reconsideration request. The decision made by the Step Up for Student's appeal team is final. After the appeal decision is made, any additional appeals for the same item will NOT be reviewed.

- Step Up for Students reserves the right to deny any reimbursement request submitted for payment.

The Step Up for Students Reading Scholarship team wishes you and your Reading Scholarship student a productive and fun-filled 2021-22 school year!

For help with your Reading Scholarship Account, you can contact Step Up for Students at reading@sufs.org or 1-877-735-7837.