

Florida's Five Scholarship Programs

January 2022



Florida is a national leader in educational choices, and Step Up For Students helps to deliver several of those options. Today, Step Up offers five scholarships to meet the diverse needs of Florida's public, private and home education students.

Florida Tax Credit Scholarship

Created in 2001, the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship (FTC) served 15,585 students in the inaugural 2002-03 school year. For the 2021-22 school year, Step Up helped 80,536 low-income students enroll in private schools through the scholarship program. Today, 73 percent of the students are non-white, and the average student comes from a household earning \$40,759 a year, while 53 percent of students live in a single-parent household.

Scholarships are paid for by private corporate donations. Donors receive a dollar-for-dollar tax credit for their contribution with tax credits capped at \$873.5 million. Scholarships values vary from county-to-county and by grade, but average about \$7,300. Students may also receive a \$750 transportation scholarship to attend an out-of-district public school.

Family Empowerment Scholarship for Educational Options (FES-EO)

The Family Empowerment Scholarship (FES) is Florida's first voucher program for low- and middle-income students. Like the McKay Scholarship for students with special needs, FES is funded from the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP), an operational formula that funds K-12 student choices in district schools, charter schools and private schools. Scholarship values vary by grade and county but average about \$7,300. The program is serving 74,418 students this year.

Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities (FES-UA)

The FES-UA program (formerly the Gardiner Scholarship) was created in 2014 as an education savings account (ESA) for students with special needs. The program allows families to personalize the education of their special-needs children by directing money toward a combination of programs and approved providers, such as textbooks, school supplies, tutors, therapies, curriculum, and even tuition and fees. For 2021-22, Step Up is serving 23,719 students with unique abilities, with an average scholarship value of about \$10,000.

Hope Scholarship

Florida created the Hope Scholarship in 2018, making it a first-of-its-kind school choice program that provides scholarships to students suffering from bullying at their prior public school. K-12 students who have reported an incident of harassment, hazing, bullying, robbery, sexual assault and more, may be eligible for a scholarship to attend a private school or a public school in a different school district.

The scholarships are funded by individual donors who receive a tax credit, up to \$105 on their motor vehicle purchase taxes to the program. Today, 189 students are receiving a scholarship that varies in value by grade and county, but averages about \$7,300. Students may also receive a \$750 transportation scholarship to attend an out-of-district public school.

Reading Scholarship

Florida in 2018 became the first state to offer an education savings account (ESA) for students enrolled in public schools. The program offers families of public school students in third through fifth grade, who are struggling with reading and literacy, access to ESAs worth \$500. The scholarship pays for tuition and fees related to part-time tutoring, summer and after-school literacy programs, instructional materials and curriculum related to reading or literacy. So far this year, 1,608 public school students have been found eligible.