

Help is Here!

FAMILY EMPOWERMENT SCHOLARSHIP (FORMERLY GARDINER) PARENT HANDBOOK



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NOTE: GREEN text indicates new or updated information taking effect July 1, 2021

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Overview

Thank you for your interest in this unique educational option.

Step Up For Students is a state-approved nonprofit scholarship funding organization that helps administer 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 children with certain special needs and lower to middle income families, the Hope Scholarship for students who are bullied or victims of violence, and the Reading Scholarship Accounts for public school students in third through fifth grade who struggle with reading.

The Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner) allows parents to personalize the education of their students by directing money toward a combination of programs and approved providers. In 2014, Florida became the second state in the nation, after Arizona, to create an education savings account program for children with special needs. In 2021, the program formerly known as Gardiner, was rolled into the Family Empowerment Scholarship to help grow the program and to streamline the state's scholarships.

The following sections will help guide you as you utilize your Family Empowerment Scholarship Educational Savings Account for students with unique abilities.

Qualifying for the Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner)

The Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner) is available to students ages 3 to 22 with the following diagnoses:

- Anaphylaxis
- Autism spectrum disorder
- Being a high-risk child
- Cerebral Palsy
- Down syndrome
- Emotional or a behavioral disability
- Hearing impairment, including deafness
- 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

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.

For a detailed definition of these diagnoses, please see the appendix at the end of this document.

Families of students with a diagnosis other than High-Risk will only need to provide documentation of the diagnosis for the scholarship in their first year. Step Up for Students requires families to renew their scholarship each year by creating an account or accessing their account at www.stepupforstudents.org. Using this login, parents complete an online application and submit documentation required to confirm the student's age, diagnosis, residency in the state of Florida and confirmation of compliance with the rules of the program (Sworn Compliance Statement).

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.

Once a student is found eligible, parents will be notified via email and directed to access the conditional eligibility letter within the parent login area of the Step Up for Students website. Prior to the distribution of scholarship dollars, the Florida Department of Education will cross-check the eligible student with Florida public school records—including those of the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind; the College-Preparatory Boarding Academy; a developmental research school authorized under s. 1002.32; a charter school authorized under s. 1002.33, s. 1002.331, or s. 1002.332; or a virtual education program authorized under s. 1002.45, VPK records, McKay Scholarship records, Family Empowerment Scholarship income-based records, Hope Scholarship records, and Florida Tax Credit Scholarship records, to ensure the students are only enrolled in the Family Empowerment Scholarship Educational Savings Account for students with unique abilities.

If the student does not 'pass' this cross-check because they are indicated as being in public school, funding will not be released until the student is no longer indicated as being in public school.

Please note: Should a student appear as enrolled and funded in a public school after the student has received funds for the Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner), funds deposited to the student's account for that school year will be returned to the State of Florida. If your student is reported as enrolled in public school or another scholarship program, you will be notified in an email and you should contact Step Up For Students immediately regarding your student's scholarship status.

If your student wishes to leave the Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner) to participate in another scholarship program, VPK, or public school, you **must** contact Step Up for Students at FES-Gardiner@sufs.org or 1-877-735-7837.

Validation of the student's diagnosis is required and must come from a Florida physician 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 OR by an IEP written in accordance with the rules of the State Board of Education or with the rules of another state. A current IEP is **required** to demonstrate a dual sensory impaired or a hospital or homebound diagnosis.

Funding for the Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner)

Award Amounts

Funding for the Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner) comes from the State of Florida. **You are not required to have an IEP or a matrix level to be eligible for funding in the Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner).**

- **Renewal students (Gardiner)**
 - For a student who has a Level I to Level III matrix of services or a diagnosis by a physician or 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.
- For a student who received a Gardiner Scholarship in the 2020-2021 school year, the amount of the award will be the greater of the amount calculated above or the amount the student received for the 2020-2021 school year.
- **New students**
 - For a student who has a Level I to Level III matrix of services or a diagnosis by a physician or 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.
- **Please note that requesting a review of your matrix level could adjust the corresponding amount of scholarship funding down to a lower level.**

Revise Matrix of Services

A parent of a student with a disability who does not have an IEP or who would like a reevaluation of an existing IEP may choose to request an IEP meeting and evaluation from the school district to obtain or revise a matrix of services from the school district. The amount of the scholarship payment will be adjusted **up or down** based on the revised level of services, after the district completes the matrix. Please note that an initial IEP may be requested at any time from the school district, and subsequently, an IEP reevaluation is available every three years.

To seek an evaluation or reevaluation from the school district to obtain or revise a matrix of services:

- Access your online account at www.stepupforstudents.org.
- Select "Request Matrix Review" on the "Application Status" page to notify Step Up for Students.
- Contact your local school district to schedule the evaluation and/or matrix review. The school district is required to complete the IEP and matrix of services within 30 days after receiving notice of the parent's request.
 - If you do not get a response from your student's school district, please contact Step Up For Students or the Florida Department of Education.

- The school district will complete the evaluation and matrix review and notify the parent and the DOE of the student's updated matrix level within 10 calendar days after its completion.
- The DOE will send a notification to Step Up For Students and the parent within 10 days after receiving the school district's notification of the matrix level.
- Step Up for Students will update the matrix level on the student's account, which will generate a notification email and an updated eligibility letter.

Please note: The new matrix level reported by the school district could increase *or decrease* your student's scholarship amount.

Funding Prioritization

Funding is prioritized in this order based on the date and time eligibility was determined:

- For the 2021-2022 school year, a student who received a Gardiner Scholarship in the 2020-2021 school year.
- Renewal students
- Students on a wait list from the prior year
- New students

Renewal applications for the 2021-2022 school year must be received, and eligibility determined on or before **April 30, 2021 to maintain priority.**

Funding Pro-ration

The amount of funding is prorated based on the date the student is found eligible by the SFO.

- Application must be received on or before August 1 and be eligible on or before September 1 = 100%
- Application must be received on or before October 1 and be eligible on or before November 1 = 75%
- Application must be received on or before January 1 and be eligible on or before February 1 = 50%
- Application must be received on or before March 1 and be eligible on or before April 1 = 25%

Click [here](#) for the 2021-22 funding amounts.

Eligibility is conditional until the Florida Department of Education has cross-checked the student against the rosters for public school and the other Florida scholarship programs. Cross-checks will be conducted prior to each scheduled funding date as new applications are found conditionally eligible until all available scholarships have been filled.

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 Revenue on the following dates:

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

Funds will be deposited into the student's accounts within two weeks of receiving the funds from the state.

Funding Continuation

Once funds are 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 utilization in subsequent school years, assuming the student remains eligible for the Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner).

Funding to the account will continue each year, based on the annual application submission, and agreement to comply with the rules (Sworn Compliance Statement). Once the student graduates from high school or attains 22 years of age on or before July 1 (whichever comes first), no additional funds will be deposited into the student's account, but they may continue to use the funds in the accounts.

If during the school year the Florida Department of Education finds a student in a Florida public school, or any education program funded by the state, or if the parent withdraws the student from the scholarship program, funds received for **that school year** will be returned to the state.

Closure of Accounts

A student's scholarship account must be closed and any remaining funds, including any contributions made to the Stanley G. Tate Florida Prepaid College Savings Program or to the Florida College Savings Program (529) will be returned to the state after:

- Denial or revocation of program eligibility by the commissioner for fraud or abuse,
- Any period of three (3) consecutive years after high school completion or graduation during which the student has not been enrolled in an eligible postsecondary educational institution or a program offered by the institution, or
- A student is ineligible for additional scholarship payments if the student's account has been inactive (no spending activity) for two (2) consecutive fiscal years (July 1-June 30). However, once an eligible expenditure is made, the student is eligible for additional scholarship payments based on available funds.
- Accounts with no spending activity for two (2) consecutive fiscal years will be closed and all remaining funds will be returned to the State of Florida.

Parents of students receiving scholarship funds through the Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner) may not take possession of funds at any time and are prohibited from providing specialized services to their own Scholarship student. Parents are subject to all the

Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner) responsibilities as outlined in the annual Sworn Compliance Statement. If a parent 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.

If a student leaves the program at any time during the school year, parents are responsible for contacting Step Up for Students immediately.

Approved Usage for Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner) Funding

Program funds must be used to meet the *individual educational needs* of the eligible student. A parent, 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 (formerly Gardiner) funds.

The following categories of items and services are approved uses for the Scholarship funds. **If the item or service you are interested in purchasing is *not* on the [pre-approved list](#), you must submit a *pre-authorization request* BEFORE making the purchase. A review will be conducted to determine if the item or service is allowable under Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner).**

Instructional Materials

Instructional material includes, but is not limited to:

- Device - Digital
- Device - Digital periphery
- Device - Assistive technology
- Device - Training associated with use
- Device – Maintenance Agreement (not warranties)
- Digital material
- Stand-alone online class
- Internet resources
- Sensory material
- PE supplies
- Books
- Musical instrument
- Sports lessons
- Material or digital programs required for home education programs
- Programs through museums
- Other instructional material (requires a pre-authorization)

A list of pre-approved instructional materials may be found here, [Pre-Approved Instructional Material](#).

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.

Specialized Services

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

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
- Services provided by a Florida licensed Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP)
- Services provided by a Florida licensed occupational therapist
- Services provided by Florida licensed physical therapists
- Services provided by listening and spoken language specialists
- Other specialized services (requires a pre-authorization)

Helpful links:

- [Agency for Persons with Disabilities \(APD\)](#)
- [Florida Department of Health](#)
- [Specialized Instructional Services \(SIS\) / Early Learning Coalition](#)
- [Behavioral Analyst Certification Board \(BACB\)](#)

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 this state, 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. [1002.39](#) (John M. McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Programs) or s. [1002.395](#) (Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program), as applicable, if the private school participates in a scholarship program under s. [1002.39](#) or s. [1002.395](#).

Tuition and fees *required for enrollment* at an eligible private school are covered by the Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner).

- Not all private schools are eligible to participate. Schools must meet the criteria described above and *elect* to participate in the Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner) 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 (formerly Gardiner).”

Please note: This list is updated periodically and may not be 100% accurate. Contact the private school to confirm their participation in the Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner).

There is no need for a parent to provide a student’s eligibility letter to an eligible private school. Recipients of the Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner) are 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. The agreed upon amount of tuition and fees for each student should be a contractual agreement between the parent and the eligible private school.

Home Education Program Tuition/Fees

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 to satisfy the attendance requirement of ss. [1002.41](#), [1003.01\(13\)](#), and [1003.21\(1\)](#), F.S.

Approved Home Education Programs:

- [CEDAR](#)
- Classical Conversations
- The Healthy Utilization of Brains ([The HUB](#))
- [Class Source](#)
- Providence Extension Program ([PEP](#))
- Trinity Education Academy of Christian Homeschoolers ([T.E.A.C.H.](#))
- [Equip Education](#)
- Lighthouse Christian Homeschool Academy
- [North Bay Christian Academy](#) (5318) (Contact - Christie Dittmer)
- [HEED](#) (Contact - Sue Puchferran)
- [HEED Adventures](#) (Contact – Sue Puchferran)
- Inspire Studios (Contact – Jason Rhodes)
 - [Programs for students with unique abilities](#)

- Home Education Programs
- [Libertas Academic Collaborative](#) (Contact – Cathy Campbell)
- [Magnolia Christian School](#)
- [Schole Educational Discovery](#)
- [Tampa Covenant Homeschoolers](#) (Contact – Mary Lynch)

An eligible, private school is one that is found compliant to participate in the Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner) by the Florida Department of Education.

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

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 Scholarship 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 list 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](#). Choose “List of accredited nonpublic postsecondary educational institutions.”

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 (equivalent to 180 teaching days)

Per Step Up policy, full-time private tutors may not have more than five (5) students at one time.

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

If the part-time tutor does not have one of the credentials outlined above, they 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, **OR**
 - 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**
 - A valid certificate issued by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), **OR**
 - 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.

Florida Department of Education Approved Online Course Providers

- Accelerate Education (Grades K-5) /approved courses listed [here](#)

- Apex Learning (Grades 9-12) / approved courses listed [here](#)
- [Connections Education of Florida, LLC](#) (Grades K-12 for 2018-19 to 2021-22)
- [Edgenuity](#) (Grades 6-12 for 2018-19 to 2021-22)
- Edison Learning (Grades 9-12) / approved courses listed [here](#)
- Edmentum (Grades 6-12) / approved courses listed [here](#)
- Founders Education LLC (Grades 9-12) / approved courses listed [here](#)
- [K12 Florida](#) (Grades K-12 for 2018-19 to 2021-22)
- [Mater Virtual Academy](#) (Grades 6-12 for 2020-21 to 2022-23)
- My Virtual Academy (Grades 9-12) / approved courses listed [here](#)
- National Highway Safety Administration (Grades 9-12) / approved courses listed [here](#)
- [Somerset Virtual Academy](#) (Grades 6-12 for 2018-19 to 2020-21)

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

- [Connections Education of Florida, LLC](#) (Grades K-12 for 2018-19 to 2021-22)
- [Edgenuity](#) (Grades 6-12 for 2018-19 to 2021-22)
- [Edmentum](#) (Grades 6-12 for 2020-21 to 2022-23)
- [K12 Florida](#) (Grades K-12 for 2018-19 to 2021-22)
- [Mater Virtual Academy](#) (Grades 6-12 for 2020-21 to 2022-23)
- [Somerset Virtual Academy](#) (Grades 6-12 for 2018-19 to 2020-21)

Florida Virtual School (FLVS)

Students utilizing Florida Virtual School must be enrolled as a *private-paying student*. Florida Virtual School will submit reimbursement requests to Step Up for Students, which must be approved by the parent prior to payment being released.

Please note: If a student is enrolled in Florida Virtual School and funded as a public-school student, the student may lose eligibility and funding for the Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner).

Standardized Testing Fees

- Nationally standardized, [Norm-Referenced Assessments](#)
- Advanced Placement (AP) examinations
- Industry certification examinations
- Assessments related to postsecondary education
- Other assessments

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 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.
- If you have an existing Florida 529 College Savings plan, Scholarship funds will be managed in a separate account from private funds that are invested.

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

Contracted Public School Services

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

- A Gardiner 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 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 (formerly Gardiner) and jeopardize his/her scholarship.

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

Fees Associated with Specialized Summer Education Programs

The term “specialized” is intended to mean a program developed specifically for students with special needs or is a specialized program (for example, a STEM summer program). A program that is open to all students would require documentation from a provider of specialized services indicating how that specific program meets the *educational needs* of that student OR a description of the program to indicate that it is a specialized type of program. A note from a physician or an approved provider of specialized services may also be provided to document that a program is specialized.

Fees Associated with Specialized After-School Education Programs

Please see the definition of “specialized” above.

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 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.
 - 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 2021-22 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 scholarship.

A Scholarship student may be in a class mixed with students who are funded through other state programs such as VPK, VPKSIS, 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 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 (formerly Gardiner) 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

Fees for services provided at a center that is a member of the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International.

To find a PATH certified 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

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](#).

Tuition or Fees for Nationally or Internationally Recognized Training Programs for Children with Neurological Disorders or Brain Damage

Pre-Authorization

Many items and services have been pre-approved as authorized uses of funds for the Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner). These items or services fall into different categories, such as instructional material, curriculum, technology, and specialized services. The first step in using Scholarship funds is familiarizing yourself with the types of items and services that are pre-approved.

If the item or service is not available on MyScholarShop or is indicated to require a pre-authorization, the pre-authorization must be submitted **before** purchasing the item or service. ***The pre-authorization is for the item or service only and is based on the rules at the time of approval. The pre-authorization is not a confirmation of the provider's eligibility or the funding available for the reimbursement.*** A pre-authorization will *require* supporting documentation and an explanation of how the item will meet the *individual* educational needs of the student and/or will allow the student to access instruction or instructional content. In other words, parents will need to demonstrate *how the item or service will help their student learn*.

The pre-authorization should be specific to the student and contain as much detail about the specific item or service being requested, including the approximate cost of the item or service. If approved, the items or services submitted on the reimbursement that corresponds to the pre-

authorization should match those on the pre-authorization. If they do not, Step Up For Students reserves the right to deny the reimbursement.

Approval of pre-authorization requests are made on a case-by-case basis relevant to the circumstances of the individual student.

Pre-authorizations, submitted and/or approved, will expire after 30 days.

Submitting Pre-Authorization Requests

1. Go to stepupforstudents.org and choose "LOGIN."
2. Under "Special Needs Scholarship" choose "LOGIN" or click here: [Account Login](#).
3. Enter User ID and Password and click "Log In."
4. Choose "Reimbursement Requests."
5. Choose "Submit a Pre-Authorization Request."
6. Complete the Provider Information and Pre-Authorization Details sections, providing the answer to the question, "How will this item or service help my student learn?" in the Description box.
7. Click "Save This Item."
8. Add additional items, if applicable, or click "Submit."
9. Upload documentation supporting the requested item or service by choosing "Upload Documents," following the instructions and choose "Finish."
10. To fax, choose "Print Fax Cover Sheet," open the Fax Cover Sheet document and print. Choose "Finish" and then fax the supporting documentation using the cover sheet provided.

The pre-authorization request will be reviewed, and a notification of the outcome will be sent via email. If the preauthorization is approved, once you have purchased the item or service, you may submit a request for payment.

To view the pre-authorization submission video, [click here](#).

Submitting Reimbursement Requests

All reimbursements are paid to the parent via ACH bank transfers, also known as direct deposit. This requires submission of your banking information to Step Up for Students. This information is saved behind your personal account login. The information available behind your login is confidential and personal. Because there is sensitive information behind your login, it is imperative you **DO NOT provide anyone, especially service providers, and personnel at the private school, access to your Scholarship account by giving them your username and password. Doing so may result in loss of scholarship eligibility and funding.**

Providers of specialized services and tutoring may submit invoices directly to Step Up for Students and once approved by the parent, payment is made directly to the provider. (For more detail about how this works, please see the 2021-22 Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner) Provider Handbook.)

Reimbursement requests are year specific. Unused funds from a prior year will roll forward into the current school year's balance. Requests for reimbursements for items or services purchased between July 1, 2021 and June 30, 2022 must be submitted by August 31, 2022 to be approved.

Setting-Up the Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner) Account

1. Go to stepforstudents.org and choose "LOGIN."
2. Under "Special Needs Scholarship" choose "LOGIN" or click here: [Account Login](#).
3. Enter User ID and Password and click "Log In."
4. Choose "My Information" and scroll to the "ACH Bank Information" section at the bottom of the page.
5. Click the Paper/Pencil icon in the lower right corner and enter your banking information, making sure to *read* and click the authorization statement.
6. Click the Computer Disk icon in the lower right corner to save.

Submitting a Reimbursement Request

Once funds have been deposited into the student's Scholarship account, reimbursement requests may be submitted.

1. Go to stepforstudents.org and choose "LOGIN."
2. Under "Special Needs Scholarship" choose "LOGIN" or click here: [Account Login](#).
3. Enter User ID and Password and click "Log In."
4. Choose "Reimbursement Requests."
5. Choose "Submit a Reimbursement Request."
6. If a pre-authorization was submitted and approved, choose the pre-authorization from the Pre-Authorization Reimbursement Code dropdown. Choosing this will pre-fill the reimbursement form with the information from the Pre-Authorization. NOTE: This step is critical to link the pre-authorization and the reimbursement. Skipping this step may cause delays in processing or even denial of the request.
7. If no pre-authorization was submitted, complete the Provider Information and Reimbursement Request Details sections of the form and click "Save This Item."
 - There are two "Pay To" options: Myself and Provider. If you have purchased the item or service and want the reimbursement deposited into your account, choose "Myself." If you are being invoiced for the service and want the provider paid directly, choose "Provider."
- NOTE: Multiple items from the same provider may be entered on the same form if the provider is a retailer. If the provider is providing specialized services, please submit individual reimbursement requests for each provider.
8. Once all the items have been entered, *read* and certify the Certification Statement and click "Submit."

9. Upload documentation supporting the requested item or service by choosing “Upload Documents,” following the instructions and choose “Finish.”

10. To fax, choose “Print Fax Cover Sheet,” open the Fax Cover Sheet document and print. Choose “Finish” and then fax the supporting documentation using the cover sheet provided.

To view the reimbursement submission video, [click here](#).

Required Supporting Documentation

When submitting reimbursement requests, you will be required to submit, via upload or fax, documentation supporting the purchase of the item or service and proof of the method of payment. The type of information required may differ from one category of reimbursement to another. An invoice or statement marked “PAID” or showing a zero balance will not be accepted as proof of payment. Reimbursement requests placed ON HOLD for additional documents longer than 30 days will be denied and will require resubmission.

When making purchases from private sellers (i.e. garage sale, Craigslist, tutors, therapists, etc.) payment in the form of a personal or cashier’s check, money order, PayPal, Venmo or other electronic payment method is REQUIRED. This form of payment provides verification of the purchase, which is required for reimbursement. Requests for reimbursement of cash purchases from private sellers **will be denied**. If proof of payment is a copy of a cleared personal check, please black out the routing and account numbers before submitting the copy.

Instructional materials and curriculum

- Proof of payment that includes the following:
 - The item purchased
 - The date of purchase
 - The place of purchase
 - The amount of the purchase
 - The method of payment

Specialized services

- Invoice or receipt on business letterhead that includes the following:
 - The Scholarship student’s first and last name
 - The date the service was rendered
 - The type of service rendered
 - The first and last name of the therapist who rendered the service, if the payee is the service provider
 - Indication of payment for the services if the payee is the parent

Full-time tutoring

- Invoice or receipt on business letterhead that includes the following:
 - The Scholarship student’s first and last name

- The Scholarship student's ID number
- The tutor's first and last name
- The tutor's DOE certification number
- The company name, if applicable
- Dates and hours of instruction
- The tutor's hourly rate
- Proof of payment, if the payee is the parent

Part-time tutoring

- Invoice or receipt on business letterhead that includes the following:
 - The Scholarship student's first and last name
 - The Scholarship student's ID number
 - The tutor's first and last name
 - The company name, if applicable
 - Dates and hours of instruction
 - The tutor's hourly rate
 - Proof of payment, if the payee is the parent
- Documentation of certification:
 - The DOE certification number if the tutor is certified, or
 - The school district issuing the adjunct teaching certificate, or
 - A bachelor's or graduate degree in the subject area.
- Documentation of mastery of subject area knowledge (if no documentation of certification):
 - An official 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**
 - A valid certificate issued by the national Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), **OR**
 - 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.

Florida Prepaid College Program Plans and Florida 529 College Savings Plans

- The reimbursement request must include the following:
 - The Scholarship student's first and last name
 - The Scholarship student's ID number
 - The Scholarship student's Florida Prepaid/529 College Savings Plan account number
 - The account type (for example, 1-year Florida University Plan)
 - A copy of the Florida Prepaid/529 College Savings Plan account statement and/or ID card showing proof of payment and payment date if the payee is the parent.

Parents may submit requests for reimbursement *or* for direct contributions. Reimbursement requests or direct contribution requests must be submitted by the 14th day of each month and will be sent to Florida Prepaid for verification **monthly before each reimbursement or payment is made**. The student name listed on the Scholarship account must match with the name of the beneficiary of the Florida Prepaid account or the Florida 529 College Savings account.

Any requests received after the 14th day of each month will not be sent to Florida Prepaid for verification until the next month.

Contracted Public-School Services

The parent may pay for services and request reimbursement, or the school district may choose to be paid directly as a provider.

- The reimbursement request must include the following:
 - The Scholarship student's first and last name
 - The Scholarship student's ID number
 - Services provided
 - Date the services were provided
 - A statement showing the amount paid (or billed)
 - Proof of payment if the payee is the parent

Tuition and fees

- Eligible, participating private school – reimbursement requests submitted by the parent must include the following:
 - The Scholarship student's first and last name
 - The Scholarship student's ID number
 - The 2021-22 annual tuition for the Scholarship student
 - The name of the eligible, private school
 - The dates of the quarter being reimbursed
 - The amount of the tuition and fees required for enrollment for the quarter
 - Proof of payment if the payee is the parent

School lunch, before and after care and other *non-mandatory fees* are not covered by the Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner). Private schools may also bill Step Up For Students directly as described in the [Provider Handbook](#).

- If the private school uses a 3rd party for billing (like FACTS) only the annual fee will be approved for payment. Any fees charged to you for use of a credit card will NOT be reimbursed.

Please note: if a student withdraws or transfers, refunds (if any) will be based on the school's policy and must be paid back to Step Up for Students for credit to the student's Scholarship account. The parent may not accept refunds of Scholarship dollars from the school.

- Florida Virtual School
 - Within three days of your student's course request, Florida Virtual School will submit an invoice to your Scholarship account
 - You will receive an email notification from Florida Virtual School within three (3) days of invoice submission to Step Up for Students
 - Florida Virtual School requires an APPROVED invoice BEFORE your student will be cleared for placement in the requested classes
 - Failure to approve the invoice (or make other payment arrangements with Florida Virtual School) within seven (7) days or receipt of the notification will result in the course request being dropped
 - If the student withdraws from the course within 14 days a refund will be issued to the entity/individual from which payment was received
- Eligible post-secondary institution, a home education program, a DOE-approved online provider, and a DOE-approved online course – reimbursement requests submitted by the parent must include the following:
 - The Scholarship student's first and last name
 - The Scholarship student's ID number
 - The name of the institution or course provider
 - Course description
 - Dates of course/service
 - Amount of tuition and fees
 - Proof of payment, on institution letterhead, if applicable
- Approved VPK program provider or an approved School Readiness provider – reimbursement requests must include the following:
 - The Scholarship student's first and last name
 - The Scholarship student's ID number

- The name of the approved provider
- Dates of service (for the 2018-19 school year)
- Amount of tuition and fees
- Proof of payment

Tuition and fees 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 scholarship.

Approved VPK program providers and approved School Readiness program providers may also bill Step Up For Students directly for tuition and fees as described in the [Provider Handbook](#).

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

- Fees associated with specialized after-school education programs or specialized summer education programs – reimbursements must include the following:
 - The Scholarship student's first and last name
 - The Scholarship student's ID number
 - Date of the program
 - Amount of fees
 - Documentation that the program is specifically for students with special needs
 - If the program is open to all students, a letter from an approved provider of specialized services explaining why the program is needed for the special educational needs of the student
 - Proof of payment if the payee is the parent
- Fees for annual evaluation for a home education student or standardized testing – reimbursement requests must include the following:
 - The Scholarship student's first and last name
 - The Scholarship student's ID number
 - The date of the evaluation/test
 - Amount of the fees for the evaluation/test
 - Documentation of the teacher's Florida Department of Education certification number; and
 - Proof of payment

Transition services provided by job coaches

- Transition services provided by job coaches at eligible private schools may be included in the school's fees (see required documentation under **Tuition and Fees**)

- Transition services provided by a job coach outside an eligible private school – Reimbursement request must include the following:
 - The Scholarship student’s first and last name
 - The Scholarship student’s ID number
 - The date of the services provided
 - The services provided
 - Proof of payment
 - Documentation that the job coach meets one of the criteria listed above in the **Approved Uses of Scholarship Funding** section

Tuition or fees for nationally or internationally recognized training programs for children with neurological disorders or brain damage

- Reimbursement requests must include:
 - The Scholarship student’s first and last name
 - The Scholarship student’s ID number
 - The dates of the quarter being reimbursed
 - The amount of the tuition and fees required for enrollment for the quarter
 - Proof of payment if the payee is the parent

Reviewing Payment Requests Submitted by Providers

Providers may request payment directly via a provider login site. This option allows you to use Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner) funds for approved specialized services without paying out of pocket and waiting for reimbursement.

When a provider submits a payment request on your student’s behalf, you will be notified via email and on your online parent statement. You may approve or reject provider requests in total or in part and provide notes if you wish.

It is important the payment requests are reviewed in a timely manner. Reimbursement requests placed in AWAITING PARENT APPROVAL longer than 30 days will be denied.

It is imperative that YOU, the parent, and owner of the Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner) account, are the ONLY person with access to approve or deny payment requests from a provider. DO NOT provide anyone, especially service providers, and personnel at the private school, access to your Scholarship account by giving them your username and password. Doing so may result in loss of scholarship eligibility and funding.

Reviewing Provider Payment Requests

1. Go to stepforstudents.org and choose “LOGIN.”

2. Under “Special Needs Scholarship” choose “LOGIN” or click here: [Account Login](#).
3. Enter User ID and Password and click “Log In.”
4. Choose “Reimbursement Requests.”
5. Choose “Approve a Provider Reimbursement.”
6. Choose “Review / Approve.”
7. After *carefully reviewing the request* choose “Approve Invoice” or “Deny Invoice.”
8. If denying the request, enter the reason.
9. Click “Submit.”

MyScholarShop

Step Up for Students has developed an e-purchasing platform to assist you in purchasing *without* any upfront cost to you! Welcome to MyScholarShop!

Items available through MyScholarShop are approved for purchase using your Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner) funds. If you do not see an item in MyScholarShop, it does not mean the item is not approved; however, it is strongly suggested you submit a pre-authorization if you are unsure if the item is eligible for reimbursement.

Please read these instructions very carefully.

1. Make sure you have available funds in your Scholarship account to cover the entire purchase.
2. This partnership is ONLY for goods purchased through MyScholarShop and does NOT apply to in-store purchases or purchases from the vendor’s website.
3. If an item requires pre-authorization you must complete the pre-authorization process and have an approval *prior* to placing your order.
4. If an item has an associated purchasing rule, such as size limitation, multiple items or frequency, those rules will apply when using the MyScholarShop platform.
5. MyScholarShop orders cannot be shipped out-of-state or to a post office box.
6. When purchasing multiple items, include ALL items on one order!
7. Please be aware that Step Up for Students reserves the right to deny requests.
8. Access to MyScholarShop will be activated once your student’s account has funding.
9. Step Up For Students reserves the right to limit or deny access to MyScholarShop.

Purchasing

To access MyScholarShop, [click here](#).

1. Log in using your current credentials (email and password)
2. Click on the “MyScholarShop” tab
 - a. When logging in the first time you will be required to read and acknowledge the Privacy Statement
3. Confirm the address on file using the “Update Address” option

4. Select the student account
5. Search for the items you wish to purchase
 - a. Choose the tile with the item category or type the item name in the search window
 - b. Hover or click on the item, select the item, and click "Add to Cart"
6. Review your cart
 - a. After reviewing the cart, choose "Check Out"
7. Review your 'ship to' information
8. Choose "Send Request" to complete the purchase

NOTE: The following items require approval for purchasing in MyScholarShop:

- Device – Digital
 - Computer – Desktop
 - Computer – Laptop
 - iPhone/Android Phone
 - Tablet – Boogieboard LCD
 - Tablet – iPad
 - Tablet – Leap Frog
 - Tablet – Reader
- Game Consoles and Video Gamers

These items will be sent to a queue for approval. If the request is rejected, you will receive the reason in MyScholarShop under "My Requests." If the request is approved, the item will be sent to our supplier for fulfillment.

Returns

Returns are done through the vendor they were purchased from and not through Step Up For Students.

1. To return an item purchased via MyScholarShop [click here](#).
2. Find the correct vendor and follow the instructions.

Once the vendor has received the item, it may take up to 14 days for the funds to be credited to the student's Scholarship account.

Status Definitions

- Composing – The MyScholarShop request is pending; the cart has not been submitted for purchase.
- Submitted – The MyScholarShop request was submitted and is pending review.
- Approved – Items requiring review have been approved and sent to the vendor/s for fulfilment.
- Denied – Items requiring review have been denied. One appeal is allowed.
- Ordering – A fully approved order is in the process of being generated.
- Ordered – All items associated with an order or requisition have been sent to the vendor to fulfil.
- Cancelling – The order was canceled after it was placed.
- Cancelled – An order cancelled after being submitted and approved.
- Receiving – Ordered items have been shipped and are in the process of being delivered.

- Received – Ordered items have been fully received.

For more in-depth information on MyScholarShop, [click here](#).

Important Items to Note

About Reimbursements

- Reimbursement requests for goods or services purchased between July 1, 2021 and June 30, 2022 must be received by Step Up for Students by August 31, 2022.
- If an ACH payment is rejected by the banking institution, the funds will revert to the student's account after 30 days.
- Cash payments to private sellers will not be eligible for reimbursement. You must use a money order, personal or cashier's check, PayPal or other electronic payment method for reimbursement to be considered. **When submitting a copy of a cleared check, please black out the routing and account numbers.**
- If you do not spend any money from your account for two consecutive fiscal years (July 1 – June 30), your account will be closed, and **all remaining funds, current and those rolled over from a prior year**, will be returned to the State of Florida.
- Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner) funds may only be used to purchase the following types of technology after two calendar years have passed since date the item was purchased. For example: A student who purchases a laptop on July 10, 2020 will be eligible to purchase another laptop using Scholarship funds on or after July 11, 2022.
 - Laptop computers
 - Desktop computers
 - Tablets / Readers
 - Televisions 55" or less
 - Smart phones
 - Smart watches
 - Gaming consoles
 - Mp3 players
 - iPods
- If, at any time during the waiting period outlined above, the student's device, purchased with Scholarship funds, is damaged or broken beyond repair it *may* be

- replaced ONE time with a similar item of equal or lesser value. A pre-authorization request and documentation validating the device is beyond repair is required for review.
- Lost or stolen technology items *may* be considered for replacement on a case-by-case basis via the submission of a pre-authorization request.
 - Multiples of the following items require a pre-authorization:
 - Mouse / Touchpads / Trackballs
 - Keyboards
 - Game Controllers
 - Headsets / Earbuds
 - Virtual reality glasses / goggles
 - iPad pencils / pointer devices
 - Monitors
 - Cameras
 - GoPros
 - Video recorders
 - Fitbits
 - LeapFrog readers
 - Readers
 - DVD/Blu-ray players
 - Printers
 - Televisions
 - Televisions used as monitors MUST be 36" or less.
 - The following items may be purchased through MyScholarShop or with a pre-authorization ONLY:
 - Costumes for role-play limited to ONLY career and/or cultural themes
 - Swings and swing sets for larger students
 - Classroom or educational space furnishings designed for children
 - Televisions 55" or less are pre-authorized. Any requests for televisions larger than 55" require a separate pre-authorization before the purchasing and will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
 - The Step Up for Students staff may request additional documentation or clarification when they review the reimbursement request. These requests will arrive via email to the email address associated with your account.
 - Step Up for Students reserves the right to close any reimbursement request submitted for payment.

- If you have been reimbursed from Scholarship funds for an item that is returned, OR have been reimbursed for lessons or therapy session in advance of the scheduled lesson or session and do not attend the session, any refund for which you receive cash should be returned to the student's Scholarship account. A check, made payable to Step Up for Students, indicating the 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 it is an appeal or reconsideration request and providing documentation that supports your reconsideration request. The decision made by the Step Up for Students appeal team is final. After the appeal decision is made, any additional appeals for the same item will NOT be reviewed.
- Always check the balance of your student's account prior to making purchases and when submitting reimbursement requests. You may view the balance on the online statement provided within your login.

- Annual passes to theme parks are not eligible for reimbursement. Theme parks include, but are not limited to the following:
 - Disney's Magic Kingdom
 - Disney's Animal Kingdom
 - Disney's Hollywood Studios
 - Epcot
 - Universal Studios
 - Sea World
 - Busch Gardens
 - LEGO Land
 - Water parksSpecialized programs offered for an additional fee at any theme park require a pre-authorization.

- Memberships to gyms, YMCAs and other facilities will be covered **ONLY** with a letter from the student's physical/occupational therapist and/or physician outlining the educational goals for the student and how the facility will be used to achieve the goals.
 - Reimbursement for the cost of a single student membership will be covered.
 - If the facility does not have a student membership or a family membership is purchased, reimbursement will be paid up to the cost of a single membership.

- If the facility does not offer a single membership, the reimbursement request will be denied.
- CLARIFICATION on Museums, zoos, and aquariums:
 - Reimbursement for the cost of a student membership to museums, zoos, aquariums will be covered.
 - If the facility does not have a student membership or a family membership is purchased, reimbursement will be paid up to the cost of a single membership.
 - If the facility does not offer a single membership, the reimbursement request will be denied.

About Eligibility

- If your student has turned 22 or graduated but still has funds remaining, you **MUST** complete a renewal application and provide the required documentation to use the remaining funds.
- Step Up for Students **MUST** be notified immediately if your Gardiner Scholarship student enrolls in one of the options listed below, or if you move out of state. Failure to do so could result in a loss of funding.
 - Public school or any public-school classes
 - Charter school
 - Services funded through the Florida Education Finance Program
 - Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK)
 - Florida Virtual School – as a public-school student, not as a Scholarship, private-pay, student
 - McKay Scholarship program
 - Florida Tax Credit Scholarship program
 - Hope Scholarship program
- If your Scholarship student is placed in any residential program, it is important that you ask about the mandatory school attendance requirement while the student is in the program. If the program uses any Florida public school option (district school, charter school, Florida Virtual School), the student's Scholarship will be in jeopardy. If the program uses a private school option, if the private school is an eligible, participating private school, your student's Scholarship funds, may be available to cover the cost of tuition and fees while the student is attending.

About Other Things

- Please keep your contact information current, especially your email address. This is the primary way Step Up For Students will communicate important information related to your student's Scholarship.
- Please update your computer to accept email from Step Up for Students so it is not sent to your Spam or Junk folder.
- Periodic surveys intended to validate your Scholarship student's continued participation may be sent to you during the school year. Participation in these surveys will be required.

- Students in grades 3-10 attending an eligible, private school using Scholarship funds are required to take an approved, nationally standardized, norm-referenced assessment. Students with disabilities for whom standardized testing is not appropriate are exempt from this requirement.
- Scholarship students who choose to attend a private school will not be entitled to services under IDEA Part B *unless* they have been evaluated by the public-school district.

What Information is Available Through My Online Account?

Logging in to your Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner) account allows you access to:

- Review and update your contact information
- Change your account password
- Review and update your banking information
- Check the status of your scholarship application
- Print your eligibility letter
- Upload documents to your application or print documents associated with your application
- View your student's account statement
- Submit a reimbursement request
- Submit a pre-authorization request
- Approve a provider request
- Upload documents to a reimbursement
- Print the student's ID card
- Send an email to Step Up for Students

Please DO NOT provide your login information to ANYONE. Providing login information will allow them to access this critical information, make changes, and approve expenditures from your student's account. Step Up For Students will not be responsible for changes and/or charges made by anyone other than the account owner if the login information has been shared.

The Step Up for Students Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner) team wishes you and your Scholarship student a productive and fun-filled 2021-22 school year!

Ineligible Items/Services

- Live animals
- Food or housing for live animals
- Gas or electric powered gardening tools

- In-ground or above-ground swimming pools
- Blades or knives or items with blades or knives
- Theme park admissions or annual passes
- 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.)
- Family memberships to gyms, YMCAs or other facilities
- Hyperbaric chambers
- Pool tables
- Household items, including kitchen appliances and cookware
- Footwear of any kind
- Sports uniforms
- Jacuzzis
- Bouncy houses
- Inflatable slides
- Trampolines larger than those for an individual

Appendix

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 a 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, dolicocephaly, 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 Injured

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.