



*Every child deserves a chance to succeed.  
Some may need something special.*



## PROVIDER HANDBOOK

### GARDINER SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

2017-18

## Step Up for Students

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## Overview

Thank you for your interest in this unique educational option.

Step Up for Students (SUFS) is a private, nonprofit organization and an approved Scholarship Funding Organization (SFO). In addition to the Gardiner Scholarship Program, Step Up for Students also administers the Florida Tax Credit (FTC) scholarship which provides K-12 private school scholarships for students from low-income families.

The Gardiner Scholarship program is a unique program for children with special needs. The scholarship allows parents to personalize the education of their children by directing money toward a combination of programs and approved providers. Florida became the second state in the nation, after Arizona, to create an education savings account program for children with special needs in 2014. In 2016, the Florida legislature renamed the program in honor of then Florida Senate President Andy Gardiner and his family. Gardiner and his wife, Camille, have championed the cause of children with unique abilities for many years. The Gardiners have two daughters and a son, Andrew, who has Down syndrome.

The sections following this introduction will guide you as you provide for students receiving Gardiner Scholarship funding.

## Qualifying for the Gardiner Scholarship Program

The Gardiner Scholarship is available to students ages 3 to 22 with the following diagnoses: **Autism spectrum disorder, Muscular dystrophy, Cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, Phelan McDermid syndrome, Prader-Willi syndrome, Spina bifida, Williams syndrome, Intellectual disability (severe cognitive impairment), rare diseases as defined by the National Organization for Rare Disorders, anaphylaxis, deaf, visually impaired, dual sensory impaired, traumatic brain injured, hospital or homebound as defined by the rules of the State Board of Education and evidenced by reports from local school districts, or three, four or five year-olds who are deemed high-risk due to developmental delays.**

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

Private schools working with families to complete their eligibility application process please note: The application process *must* be completed by the parent/guardian. Providing access to a computer, copier or fax machine is a great way to assist, but taking possession of confidential documents in order to submit them on behalf of the parent is *strongly discouraged*.

**Providers MAY NOT ask for or require a parent to provide the username and/or password to their Gardiner account. Providers should never access to the student's Gardiner Scholarship application or account for *any* reason. Doing so may result in loss of provider participation and/or scholarship eligibility and funding for the student.**

For more detailed information regarding program eligibility, please refer to the [Parent Handbook](#).

# Funding for the Gardiner Scholarship Program

Funding for the Gardiner Scholarship program comes from the State of Florida.

- **Renewal students**
  - The funding calculation defaults to a matrix that assigns the student to 90% of the 253 level, unless the student's parent has asked the school district for a revised matrix.
- **New students**
  - If the student does not have a matrix level of services, funding defaults to 90% of the 253 level.
  - If the student has a matrix level of services on file with the Florida Department of Education, due to public school enrollment, of 254 or 255, they will be funded at 90% of that matrix level, and they will not need to utilize the matrix review process established in the Gardiner law in order to receive the additional funding.
    - Most students with an IEP will not have a matrix level of services.
    - If you have an IEP, you are not required to request a matrix level. **Please note that doing so could adjust your matrix level and corresponding amount of scholarship funding down to a lower level.**

When a student has been found eligible, the Department of Education reviews the student's records to ensure they are not enrolled in one of the other state scholarship programs or in a Florida public school program. A student cannot be funded through the Gardiner Scholarship program if they are using other state scholarships or are enrolled in a Florida public school or public school program. Once final eligibility is verified, funding is sent to the SFO to be held in escrow for the use of the student for his/her educational needs. Unused funds may roll forward form one year to the next, but use of the funds is strictly at the discretion and approval of the student's parent or guardian.

Funding is prorated based on the date the student is found eligible by the SFO.

- Eligible on or before September 1 = 100%
- Eligible on or before November 1 = 75%
- Eligible on or before February 1 = 50%
- Eligible on or before April 1 = 25%

Accounts with no spending activity for two (2) consecutive fiscal years (July 1 – June 30) will become inactive until spending has occurred. Accounts with no spending activity for three (3) consecutive fiscal years will be closed and all remaining funds will be returned to the State of Florida.

## Approved Usages for Gardiner Scholarship 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 Gardiner Scholarship funds.

The following items and services are approved uses for the Gardiner Scholarship funds.

For additional information regarding these approved uses, please refer to the [Parent Handbook](#).

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## 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
- Home education co-ops
- Sports lessons
- Programs through museums
- Other instructional material (requires a pre-authorization)

## 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. 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 a Florida licensed physical therapist
- Services provided by listening and spoken language specialists
- Other specialized services (requires a pre-authorization)

## Eligible Private School

Tuition and fees that are associated with enrollment.

## Home Education Program Tuition/Fees

Programs, courses, camps, or classes that are offered to home education students through an eligible, private school and are a part of the sequentially progressive instruction of the student according to the definition of a home education program.

A “home education program” means the sequentially progressive instruction of a student directed by his or her parent in order to satisfy the attendance requirement of ss.1002.41, 1003.01(13), and 1003.21(1), F.S.

An eligible, private school is one that has been found compliant to participate in the Gardiner Scholarship Program 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](#)

## Eligible Postsecondary Institution or Program

### Full-Time Private Tutoring

### Part-Time Tutoring Services

### Florida Department of Education Approved Online Courses

- Edmentum, Inc. (Grades 6-12) / approved courses listed [here](#)
- Odysseyware Academy (Grades 6-12) / approved courses listed [here](#)
- Apex Learning (Grades 9-12) / approved courses listed [here](#)
- National Highway Safety Administration (Grades 9-12) / approved courses listed [here](#)
- Founders Education LLC (Grades 9-12) / approved courses listed [here](#)

### Florida Department of Education Approved Online Providers

- Edgenuity (Grades 6-12 for 2016-17- to 2018-19)
- Connections Education of Florida, LLC (Grades K-12 for 2016-17 to 2018-19)
- K12 Florida (Grades K-12 for 2016-17 to 2018-19)
- Mater Virtual Academy (Grades 6-12 for 2016-17)
- Somerset Virtual Academy (Grades 6-12 for 2016-17 to 2017-18)

### Florida Virtual School (FLVS)

### Standardized Testing Fees

### Stanley G. Tate Florida Prepaid College Program

### Florida 529 College Savings Program

### Contracted Public School Services

### Fees Associated with Specialized Summer Education Programs

The term “specialized” is intended to mean a program developed specifically for students with special needs. 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.

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

Please see the definition of “specialized” above.

### Transitional Services Provided by Job Coaches

Students age 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 Agency for Persons with Disabilities for job coaches;
- Meet the criteria/training of the Association of Rehabilitation Facilities;
- Have an Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE) certification;
- Have an Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) certification;
- Have an Institution for Community Inclusion certification; or
- 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
- 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

### Annual Educational Evaluation Fees

These fees are limited to the annual evaluations of educational progress by a state-certified teacher which may be chosen by those students in home education programs.

### Tuition and Fees Associated with Programs Offered by Approved Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program Providers

Gardiner Scholarship students 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 2017-18 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 Gardiner Scholarship Program.

A Gardiner 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 Gardiner Scholarship student cannot be counted or reported to the Early Learning Coalition to receive public funding for the VPK program. If the Gardiner 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 Gardiner Scholarship account.

### 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 Gardiner Scholarship Program and any remaining funds in the account will be returned to the State of Florida.

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

### Horse Therapy

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

### 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.

## What is Required of Providers?

For a reimbursement request to be paid, the provider must meet specific criteria based on the service they are providing for the Gardiner Scholarship recipient. Following is a guide to the type of validation that is required for payment to be made.

**Providers MAY NOT ask for or require a parent to provide the username and/or password to their Gardiner account. Providers should never access to the student's Gardiner Scholarship application or account for any**



**reason. Doing so may result in loss of provider participation and/or scholarship eligibility and funding for the student.**

### Specialized Services

For those providers falling into one of the specialized service areas, this will be validated through one of the following; the Florida Department of Health License Verification website (active license only), the Agency for Persons with Disabilities Provider search site, or the Office of Early Learning Specialized Instructional Services (SIS) provider search site. Providers must be Florida licensed in the area pertaining to the services provided. The links to these sites can be found on the Florida Department of Education’s website, or by clicking this link: [Eligible Service Providers](#).

### Eligible Private Schools

Private schools who are interested in serving Gardiner Scholarship students must be registered with the Florida Department of Education and must have completed the Department’s requirements for participation in the Gardiner Scholarship program. For more information regarding how to become an eligible private school, please contact the Florida Department of Education’s toll-free hotline at 800-447-1636, the [Regional Managers](#) or click this link, [Requirements for Participating in State Scholarship Programs](#).

Eligible private schools wishing to have an account with Step Up for Student will be required to provide banking information to allow for direct deposit (ACH transfers).

Tuition and fees for Gardiner Scholarship students may be submitted by the eligible private school to Step Up for Students quarterly using the following schedule:

Date	Amount billed
July 1	25% of annual tuition and 100% of fees mandatory for enrollment
October 1	25% of annual tuition
January 1	25% of annual tuition
April 1	25% of annual tuition

### Part-time Tutoring Services

Part-time tutors interested in providing services to Gardiner Scholarship students must

- hold a current, valid Florida educator’s certificate, pursuant to Florida Statute 1012.56,
- hold an adjunct teaching certificate from a Florida school district pursuant to Florida Statute 1012.57,
- be a person who has demonstrated a mastery of subject area knowledge, pursuant to Florida Statute 1012.56(5).

Verification, in the form of a copy of the tutor’s valid teaching certificate, adjunct teaching certificate, or one of the following to demonstrate mastery, will be required.

- 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 (ie. 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.

### Full-time Private Tutoring

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)

**Full-time private tutors may not have more than five (5) students at one time.**

### Setting Up an Account

To provide an additional level of service to the families served by the Gardiner Scholarship, Step Up for Students has developed a method of direct reimbursement for approved providers of specialized services, eligible private schools, approved tutors, public school or public school districts and approved VPK and School Readiness providers. Setting up an account will allow you, the provider, to submit a reimbursement request for services rendered directly to Step Up for Students. After approval from the parent, the reimbursement request will be reviewed by the Step Up for Students staff to ensure the request, and any documentation, includes the required information necessary for payment. If found eligible, payment is made by ACH directly to the provider’s account. Submissions found eligible for payment are submitted to the bank on a weekly schedule.

**Providers MAY NOT ask for or require a parent to provide the username and/or password to their Gardiner account. Providers should never access to the student’s Gardiner Scholarship application or account for any reason. Doing so may result in loss of provider participation and/or scholarship eligibility and funding for the student.**

### What are the steps to set-up an account?

1. Submit a request for an account by completing the online form found here: [Provider Account Request](#)
2. Submit the following documentation
  - Full-time tutors
    - Tutor Participation Agreement
    - Completed W9
  - Part-time tutors
    - Copy of a valid, current, Florida educator’s certificate, pursuant to Florida Statute 1012.56; OR
    - Copy of adjunct teaching certificate from a Florida school district pursuant to Florida Statute 1012.57; OR
    - Copy of one of the documents outlined above to demonstrate mastery of subject area knowledge.
    - Completed W9

- Specialized service providers
    - Completed W9
  - Approved VPK provide or Approved School provider
    - Completed W9
    - Copy of the tuition and fee schedule for the current school year. This should include any fees for additional services for students with special needs, if applicable. The published rate should be used as the standard amount charged.
  - Public school or school district
    - Completed W9
  - Horse Therapy
    - Completed W9
    - Demonstration of membership in Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International
  - Music and Art Therapy
    - Completed W9
    - Demonstration of certification by the Certification Board for Music Therapists
    - Copy of credentials issued by the Art Therapy Credentials Board, Inc.
3. After completing the online form and submitting the required documentation, Step Up for Students will review the packet. If approved for an account, a notification will be sent which will include a user name and temporary password for accessing the account.
  4. Accounts are accessed via our website or by clicking here: [Provider Account Login](#)

For additional questions or clarification, please reach out to the Gardiner Scholarship Service Ambassadors; Beatriz Sarmiento or Erica Guerrero at [gardinerpayments@sufs.org](mailto:gardinerpayments@sufs.org).

### Submitting Requests for Direct Payment for Specialized Services, Tutoring, Contracted Public School or School District Services

1. Go to [stepupforstudents.org](http://stepupforstudents.org) and choose "LOGIN"
2. Go to "Gardiner (PLSA) School & Provider Login" and click "Login"
3. Enter your user ID and password
4. Choose "Reimbursement Requests"
5. Choose "Submit a Reimbursement Request"
6. Complete the form
  - a. Choose "Specialized Services," "Full-Time Private Tutoring Program," or "Part-Time Private Tutoring Services," or "Contracted Public School Services," or "Programs Offered by VPK Program Providers or School Readiness Providers" as the reimbursement category
  - b. If you have more than one item to submit, they may be submitted on one form but entering one and click "Save This Item," then enter the next, etc.
  - c. If there is no tax, leave the line blank
  - d. Read and acknowledge the Certification Statement and click "Submit"
7. If, after clicking "Submit" an error is found on the form, you may be required to complete the form again.
8. Once the request has been accepted, the system will provide you the screen to upload the required supporting documentation.
  - a. If faxing, please use the fax coversheet provided for *that* reimbursement, as it will attach automatically to the correct file.
9. After the request has been submitted, the parent will receive a notification that a request is pending approval. Until the parent approves the request, no further action will be taken by Step Up for Students.
  - a. You will be able to follow the status of submitted requests by choosing "View Reimbursement Activity."

10. Once the request has been approved by the parent, it will be submitted to the processing queue for review.
11. If approved for payment, a payment request will be sent to the bank on the Wednesday following the date of approval. Allow 2-3 business days for the ACH deposit to post to your account.

Submitting requests for reimbursements for therapy provided for one student by different therapists requires separate requests. Multiple providers cannot be submitted on one request.

Supporting documentation should be on business letterhead and include the following:

- First and Last name of the Gardiner Scholarship student
- First and last name of the service provider
- Service provided
- Date of service

### Submitting Requests for Direct Payment / Eligible, Private Schools and Home Education Tuition and Fees

1. Go to [stepupforstudents.org](http://stepupforstudents.org) and choose "APPLY/LOGIN"
2. Go to "Gardiner (PLSA) School & Provider Login" and click "Login"
3. Enter your user ID and password
4. Choose "Reimbursement Requests"
5. Choose "Submit a Reimbursement Request"
6. Enter the student's Gardiner ID
7. Enter the Invoice Number
8. Enter the Invoice Date
9. Choose "Eligible Private School" as the reimbursement category
10. Enter the "Annual Tuition and Fees Required for Enrollment"
11. Enter the "Tuition and Fees Required for Enrollment Invoice Period"
12. Choose the correct "School Quarter"
13. Read and acknowledge the Certification Statement and click "Submit"
  - a. If, after clicking "Submit" an error is found on the form, you may be required to complete the form again.
  - b. Once the request has been accepted, the system will navigate to the upload documents screen.
14. After the request has been submitted, the parent will receive a notification that a request is pending approval. Until the parent approves the request, no further action will be taken by Step Up for Students.
  - a. You will be able to follow the status of submitted requests by choosing "View Reimbursement Activity"
15. Once the request has been approved by the parent, it will be submitted to the processing queue for review.
16. If approved for payment, a payment request will be sent to the bank on the Wednesday following the date of approval. Allow 2-3 business days for the ACH deposit to post to your account.

### Other Payment Options

The parent of the Gardiner Scholarship student may also submit a reimbursement / payment request to Step Up for Students indicating the payment should be made directly to the provider of specialized services. In these instances, no action is required from the provider, but the provider must have an established account with Step Up for Students.

## Links to Step Up for Students Documents

Documents, developed by Step Up for Students, which may be required for account set-up or payment may be found on our website at [www.stepupforstudents.org](http://www.stepupforstudents.org) or by clicking corresponding link below.

- [2017-18 Full-time Private Tutoring Participation Agreement](#)
- [W-9](#)