

# **Help is Here!**

## **FAMILY EMPOWERMENT SCHOLARSHIP (FORMERLY GARDINER) PROVIDER HANDBOOK**



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## *Overview*

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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 provide services to students in the Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly known as Gardiner).

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## *Qualifying for the Family Empowerment Scholarship (formerly Gardiner)*

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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
- Language impairment
- Muscular dystrophy
- Orthopedic impairment
- Other health impairment
- Phelan-McDermid syndrome
- Prader-Willi syndrome
- Rare diseases
- Specific learning disability
- Speech impairment
- Spina bifida
- Traumatic brain injury
- Visual impairment, including blindness
- Williams syndrome

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

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.

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](http://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 for students with unique abilities, funds deposited to the student's account for that school year will be returned to the State of Florida. If a student is reported as enrolled in public school or another scholarship program, the parent will be notified in an email and they should contact Step Up For Students immediately regarding the student's scholarship status.

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.

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*Funding for the Family Empowerment Scholarship for  
Students with Unique Abilities*

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### 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.
- Most students with an IEP will not have a matrix level of services.

- If the student has an IEP, they are not required to request a matrix level and they will be funded at the average of the level I to III funding level. **Please note that requesting a review of a student's matrix level could adjust the 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 Family Empowerment Scholarship for students with Unique Abilities 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 from 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%

A student is ineligible for a scholarship 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 a scholarship 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.

Award amounts for the 2021-2022 school year can be found [here](#).

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

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### *Approved Usage for Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities Funding*

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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 for students with unique abilities 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 acceptable and meets the educational needs of the student.**

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

## 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 for students with unique abilities.

- Not all private schools are eligible to participate. Schools must meet the criteria described above and *elect* to participate in the Family Empowerment Scholarship for students with unique abilities 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. Please reach out to the Department of education if your school is not displayed.

Recipients of the Family Empowerment Scholarship for students with unique abilities 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 or guardian 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 for students with unique abilities 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)
- 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 for students with unique abilities.

### 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 Family Empowerment Scholarship for students with unique abilities 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 for students with unique abilities 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 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 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 Family Empowerment Scholarship for students with unique abilities.

A Scholarship student may be in a class mixed with students who are funded through other state programs such as VPK, VPKEIS, 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 for students with unique abilities 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**

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## *What is Required of Providers?*

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For a reimbursement request to be paid, the provider must meet specific criteria based on the service they are providing for the 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 Scholarship account. Providers should never access to the student's Scholarship application or account**

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

### **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
- 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 students in the Family Empowerment Scholarship for students with Unique Abilities must be registered with the Florida Department of Education and must have completed the Department’s requirements for participation in the Family Empowerment Scholarship for students with unique abilities. 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 students in the Family Empowerment Scholarship for students with unique abilities 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 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.

### 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.**

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## *Setting Up an Account*

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To provide an additional level of service to the families served by the Family Empowerment Scholarship for students with Unique Abilities, 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 request directly to Step Up For Students for payment for services rendered. After approval from the parent, the payment request will be reviewed by the Step Up for Students staff to ensure the request, and any required 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 Scholarship account. Providers should never access to the student's Scholarship application or account for any reason. Doing so may result in loss of provider participation and/or scholarship eligibility and funding for the student.**

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

1. Create a provider account via the Step Up For Students website
2. Complete and submit the online [Provider Account Request](#)
3. Submit the required documentation

Step Up For Students has developed a video to walk you through the creation of your Provider account.

Click [here to view the video](#).

Below is a list of the type of documents you will be required to submit to set-up your account based on the specific services you will be providing.

#### 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

4. 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 username and temporary password for accessing the account.
5. Accounts are accessed via our website or by clicking here: [Provider Account Login](#)

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

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

Step Up For Students has developed a video to walk you through the steps for submitting requests for Direct payment for the services listed above. [Click here to view the video.](#)

1. Go to [stepupforstudents.org](http://stepupforstudents.org) and choose "LOGIN"
2. Go to "FES (formerly Gardiner) 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. 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

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

- First and Last name of the 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

Step Up For Students has developed a video to walk you through the steps for submitting requests for direct payment for tuition and fees to an eligible private school. [Click here to view the video.](#)

1. Go to [stepupforstudents.org](http://stepupforstudents.org) and choose “APPLY/LOGIN”
2. Go to “FES (formerly Gardiner) 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 Scholarship 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 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.

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### *Links to Step Up for Students Documents*

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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.

- [2020-21 Full-time Private Tutoring Participation Agreement](#)
- [W-9](#)

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### *Appendix*

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## 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.