

Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program

Understanding the Private School Choice Option

The Georgia Special Needs Scholarship (GSNS) Program is a parental choice program for students attending Georgia public schools who meet specific requirements. The following provides information regarding eligibility for the Scholarship Program. The [GSNS web page](#) also has other important information regarding the GSNS Program including other public school choice options.

STUDENT ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

In order to qualify for a Georgia Special Needs Scholarship for the 2021-2022 school year, a student must meet the following requirements in one of the areas outlined below:

1. Individualized Education Plan (IEP) Eligibility (all components[a, b, and c] must be met)

- a) The student's parent currently resides within Georgia and has been a Georgia resident for at least one calendar year however, that the one-year requirement shall not apply if the student's parent is an active duty military service member stationed in Georgia within the previous year; AND
- b) The student had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) during the 2020-2021 school year; AND
- c) Spent the prior school year in attendance at a Georgia public school. For the 2021-2022 school year only, prior school year in attendance means that the student was enrolled and reported by a public school system or school systems for funding purposes at the time of at least one FTE program count, conducted each school year in October and March, during either the 2019-2020 or 2020-2021 school years. Prior school year in attendance shall not apply if:
 - i. The student's parent is an active duty military service member stationed in Georgia within the previous year; OR
 - ii. The student has been adopted or placed in a permanent guardianship from foster care pursuant to an order issued by a court of competent jurisdiction within the previous year; OR
 - iii. The student previously qualified for a scholarship as provided in state law.

2. Kindergarten Eligibility (all components[a, b, c and d] must be met)

- a) The student's parent currently resides within Georgia and has been a Georgia resident for at least one calendar year however, that the one-year requirement shall not apply if the student's parent is an active duty military service member stationed in Georgia within the previous year; AND
- b) The student received preschool special education or related services in the 2020-2021 school year; AND
- c) The student must be entering Kindergarten in the 2021-2022 school year; AND
- d) The student must attain the age of five on or before September 1, 2021.

3. 504 Plan (all components[a, b, and c] must be met)

- a) The student's parent currently resides within Georgia and has been a Georgia resident for at least one calendar year however, that the one-year requirement shall not apply if the student's parent is an active duty military service member stationed in Georgia within the previous year; AND
- b) Spent the prior school year in attendance at a Georgia public school. For the 2021-2022 school year only, prior school year in attendance means that the student was enrolled and reported by a public school system or school systems for funding purposes at the time of at least one FTE program count, conducted each school year in October and March, during either the 2019-2020 or 2020-2021 school years. Prior school year in attendance shall not apply if:
 - i. The student's parent is an active duty military service member stationed in Georgia within the previous year; OR
 - ii. The student has been adopted or placed in a permanent guardianship from foster care pursuant to an order issued by a court of competent jurisdiction within the previous year; OR
 - iii. The student previously qualified for a scholarship as provided in state law; AND
- c) The student had a 504 plan in effect during the 2020-2021 school year relating to one or more of these conditions:
 - i. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Attention deficit disorder (ADD);
 - ii. Autism spectrum disorder;
 - iii. Bipolar disorder;
 - iv. Cancer;
 - v. Cerebral palsy;
 - vi. Cystic fibrosis;
 - vii. Deafness;
 - viii. Down syndrome;
 - ix. Drug or alcohol abuse;
 - x. Dual sensory impairment;
 - xi. Dyslexia;
 - xii. Emotional or behavioral disorder;
 - xiii. Epilepsy;
 - xiv. Hearing impairment;
 - xv. Intellectual disability;
 - xvi. Muscular dystrophy
 - xvii. Specific learning disability;
 - xviii. Spina bifida;
 - xix. Traumatic brain injury
 - xx. Visual impairment; or
 - xxi. Any rare disease identified by the National Institutes of Health's Genetic and Rare Diseases Information Center's list of rare disease disorders.

The Georgia Department of Education does not have access to all of the information necessary to make a determination regarding student qualifications with a 504 plan. We will make available a form that parents can download and take to the local school system of residence to complete and return to the Department. The additional information needed to make a scholarship qualification

determination will be provided in coordination with the local school system the student last attended.

STUDENTS INELIGIBLE FOR THE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

- a) The following students are ineligible for the GSNS program:
 - i. Students privately placed in residential treatment facilities
 - ii. Students attending a Department of Juvenile Justice School
 - iii. Students that are not residents of Georgia
 - iv. Students receiving services through state Early Intervention Program (EIP) in elementary grades
 - v. Students otherwise not eligible per Official Code of Georgia Annotated Section §20-2-2114.

GSNS APPLICATION PROCESS

1. Application for IEP and Kindergarten Eligibility

There are no official application for IEP eligibility in the GSNS program, since the eligibility requirements (outlined above) are generally determined with information already reported by public schools to the GaDOE.

For students who meet the residency and attendance eligibility requirements and who had an IEP or received services through Pre-K Special Education during the 2020-2021 school year, a Scholarship Calculator is available on the GADOE web page for parents/guardians to verify their student's eligibility and to see the eligible student's award amount. The calculator is updated annually in July with award amounts for the upcoming school year.

IMPORTANT: The scholarship calculator will only provide a result if the student is identified as eligible for the GSNS scholarship award based on the requirements in state law. The award sheet generated by the scholarship calculator is the only proof needed of a student's eligibility for the GSNS Program. It shows the annual amount that a student will receive divided over the course of four payments made during a school year. A student must be all enrolled in a participating private school by September 15, 2021, and remain enrolled in a participating private school to receive the full scholarship award.

Acceptance of scholarship shall have the same effect as a parental refusal to consent to services pursuant to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. Section 1400, et seq. When parent(s) accepts a GSNS for a child he/she is refusing to provide parental consent for special services under IDEA in a public-school district. A participating private school is not required to follow a student's IEP nor is it required to provide special education services to a student.

2. Application for 504 Plan Eligibility

Students who meet the residency and attendance eligibility requirements and who had a 504 Plan relating to one or more of the outlined conditions during the 2020-2021 school year, will need to complete the

[Section 504 Plan Qualification for Participation](#) and submit to to their child's public school or system for verification. Complete information on 504 Plan Application Requirements are available [here](#).

ENROLLING A STUDENT IN A PRIVATE SCHOOL

In order to be eligible to receive funds through the GSNS Scholarship, a parent must enroll a child at a [private school authorized by the State Board of Education](#) to participate in the GSNS Program.

Parents have three opportunities during a school year to transfer an eligible student from a public school to an authorized private school by the following dates for the qualifying school year:

- September 15th of each year – NO INTENT TO FILE FORM NEEDED
- December 15th of each year – SUBMIT AN INTENT TO FILE FORM
- March 4th of each year – SUBMIT AN INTENT TO FILE FORM

ONLY for the December and March dates parents must complete an Intent to File.

Scholarship payments are prorated for students enrolling:

- December 15 (1/2 of scholarship amount printed on the award sheet paid)
- March 4 (1/4 of scholarship amount printed on the award sheet paid) for the upcoming school year.

The enrollment dates above, to transfer from public school to participating private school, only apply for a student that completed the prior school year in a Georgia public school and wants to transfer from a public school to a GSNS participating private school. A student enrolled in a participating GSNS private school may transfer to another GSNS participating private school at any time during the school year.

A parent/guardian must print the award sheet from the calculator and make copies of it. A copy must be given to a private school authorized by the State Board of Education to participate in the GSNS Program. The list of authorized private schools is posted on the GSNS webpage.

Participation in the GSNS Program is voluntary on the part of private schools and is open to all eligible private schools approved by the State Board of Education. Parents/guardians interested in a private school that is not on the list of authorized private schools are responsible for contacting and encouraging the private school to apply for the program. The application with instructions and eligibility requirements for private schools for the school year is available on the GSNS webpage. Applications are received from private schools annually from January through June prior to the school year of participation.

If an authorized private school grants admission to a student, a parent/guardian must provide a copy of the student's scholarship award sheet to the private school. Participating private schools have access to an electronic system which they use to report eligible students enrolled at their schools to the GaDOE. Each school year private schools report enrolled students, so the GaDOE knows which students are participating in the private school choice option and where they are enrolled.

Without notification of a student's eligibility, the private school will not report the student as enrolled in the GSNS Program to the GaDOE. This will affect the scholarship payments for a student and could affect his/her eligibility for the GSNS Program.

IMPORTANT: A parent/guardian must obtain written copies of any contracts/agreements entered with a private school (e.g. tuition reimbursement, fee schedules). The tuition and fees documents should clearly explain how the private school charges for tuition and fees and how payments are accepted. Tuition information must also explain how the private school handles the processing of tuition for GSNS students.

Upon acceptance of the scholarship, a parent/guardian assumes full financial responsibility for the education of the scholarship student, including transportation to and from the participating school. A parent/guardian must comply with all the private school's policies. Once accepted into a private school a parent/guardian must withdraw a student from the public school at the beginning of the new school year following the procedures of the public school. A student cannot be dually enrolled at a public and private school and receive a scholarship.

At any point during the school year, a parent/guardian can transfer a GSNS student to another private school authorized to participate in the GSNS Program. Refer to the Transfer Information document posted on the web page for more information regarding transferring a student.

MAINTAINING ELIGIBILITY IN THE PRIVATE SCHOOL CHOICE OPTION

Important: A student must complete the current school year at an authorized private school to continue in the private school choice option for the next school year.

Promotion or retention of a student does not affect eligibility for the GSNS Program.

STATE FUNDING AND THE GEORGIA SPECIAL NEEDS SCHOLARSHIP

For more information about how award amounts are determined for the Scholarship, please refer to [Understanding State Funding and the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship](#).

Under the GSNS Program, if tuition and fees charged by a private school are higher than the scholarship award, a parent/guardian is responsible for paying the additional tuition. Most private schools participating in the GSNS Program charge tuition and fees that are more than the amount of a student's scholarship.

GSNS funds can be used at a participating private school to pay for the following:

- a) Student assessment
- b) Uniforms
- c) Physical therapy, speech therapy, or occupational therapy
- d) Transportation provided by the participating school
- e) Meals
- f) Summer school programs
- g) Tutoring