



# HOPE SCHOLARSHIP



PARENT HANDBOOK



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WARNING: Please be advised that some of the Hope Scholarship content may be sensitive in nature and include references to, and descriptions of, topics such as bullying, harassment, hazing, and sexual assault. Step Up For Students acknowledges that this content may be difficult. We encourage you to care for your safety and well-being as you review the content.

## Overview

Step Up For Students is a state-approved nonprofit scholarship funding organization that empowers families to pursue and engage in the most appropriate learning options for their children.

One of the primary focuses of Step Up For Students is the administration of four scholarships for students in Florida: the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program (FTC) for lower to middle income

families; the Family Empowerment Scholarship (FES), which has two components, one for students with Unique Abilities (FES-UA) and a second for lower to middle income families and for students who meet other categorical requirements (FES-EO); the Hope Scholarship for students who are bullied or are victims of violence, and the New Worlds Reading Scholarship Accounts Program (formerly Reading Scholarship Accounts Program) for public school students in kindergarten through fifth grades who struggle with reading.

In 2018 the Florida Legislature established the Hope Scholarship Program. The purpose of the program is to provide parents of public-school students in grades K-12 who are subjected to incidents of bullying or violence with options for a new learning environment.

Funding for the Hope Scholarship Program is provided through tax credits offered to the purchasers of motor vehicles within Florida. Beginning on October 1, 2018, the purchaser of a motor vehicle is given a dollar-for-dollar sales tax credit, up to \$105, against any tax imposed by the state and collected by a dealer, private tag agent or county tax collector as a contribution to Step Up For Students. More information for automobile dealers, car purchasers, and county tax collectors is available by [clicking here](#).

## **Scholarship Eligibility and Application**

### **Eligibility Requirements**

Contingent upon available funds, and on a first come, first-served basis, a student enrolled in a Florida public school in grades K-12 is eligible for a scholarship if the student reported one of the following incidents:

- Battery
- Harassment
- Hazing
- Bullying
- Kidnapping
- Physical attack
- Robbery
- Sexual offenses, harassment, assault, or battery
- Threat or intimidation
- Fighting at school

“School” is defined as any educational program or activity conducted by a public K-12 educational institution, any school-related or school-sponsored program or activity, including riding on a school bus, as defined in s. 1006.25(1), F.S., and waiting at a school bus stop.

Upon receipt of a report of a listed incident, the school principal, or his/her designee, is required to provide a copy of the report to the parent and investigate the incident. Upon conclusion of the investigation or within 15 days after the incident was reported, whichever occurs first, the school district must notify the parent about the Hope Scholarship Program and offer the parent an opportunity to enroll the student in another public school, within the student's current district, that has capacity, or to inform them of the option to request and receive a scholarship to attend an eligible private school, or to a public school located outside the district in which the student resides. The school district must provide the parent with a completed Hope Scholarship Notification Form (Form IEPC-HS1).

The Hope Scholarship Notification Form (IEPC-HS1) is required for Step Up For Students to determine scholarship eligibility. Please note, this is the ONLY form that will be accepted by Step Up For Students for eligibility determination.

The Hope Scholarship Program is not based on financial need.

Both the Hope Scholarship options, private school or transportation to a public school outside the district where the student resides, have the same eligibility requirements.

### **Scholarship Continuity**

Once a student qualifies for a scholarship based on an incident, and is a resident of the state of Florida, the student remains eligible for the Hope Scholarship until he or she returns to public school, graduates from High School or turns 21, whichever occurs first. The student may keep the scholarship – contingent upon available funding and timely notification of renewal.

A student who enrolls in a public school or a public- school program is considered to have returned to public school for purposes of determining the end of the scholarship's term. The student does not have to apply for a scholarship within any established period of time after the occurrence of the incident. If there is a completed Hope Notification Form (IEPC HS-1) submitted with the application, the student may be found eligible.

### **Apply for a Hope Scholarship**

To receive a Hope Scholarship, a parent of an eligible K-12 public school student must apply online. Click [here](#) to apply.

The submitted application must include all the required student information to be considered complete. Incomplete applications cannot be processed. The parent will be required to upload a copy of the completed Hope Notification Form (IEPC-HS1) that was provided by the public-school principal, or his/ her designee, along with the application.

If a school principal, or his/her designee do not provide the Hope Notification Form after an incident has occurred, please contact the Florida Department of Education for further assistance.

It is the responsibility of the parent/guardian, *not the school*, to complete the application and provide any documents required by Step Up For Students.

Applications, including all supporting documents, are processed in the order they are received. Once a student has been determined eligible by Step Up For Students, the parent will be notified of conditional eligibility and may be funded based on program funds available on a first come, first served basis.

Students who have been awarded a Hope Scholarship will have the following options:

- Transfer to another public school with available capacity within the student's current school district
- Request a scholarship to transport the student to a public school in another school district
- Request a scholarship for the student to attend an eligible, participating private school

Step Up For Students administers the private school and transportation options for the Hope Scholarship.

### **How to find an eligible private school?**

Once a student has been approved for the scholarship, the next step is to select an eligible, participating private school. To find private schools that accept the Hope Scholarship [click here](#).

Once a private school has been selected, the parent/guardian may take the student's award letter to the private school. The award letter can be found by logging into the parent's portal by using their login. The award letter will allow the school to enroll a student through our system and begin scholarship payments.

A student's scholarship may be transferred to another eligible, participating private school during the school year if the student needs to change schools throughout the school year.

Please keep in mind that if a student is enrolled before an application has been received or prior to being found eligible the parent/guardian will be responsible for paying any tuition and fees due to the school. Awards are not guaranteed and are on a first-come, first-served basis.





## Transferring

One of the benefits of the Hope Scholarship is that it can be transferred. If you are not satisfied with the eligible, participating private school you have chosen, you may find another one.

Before you withdraw your student from the private school, you should notify the school and understand the school's policy regarding transferring to another school.

Step Up For Students will not transfer a scholarship until it has confirmation of the student's withdrawal from the school and notification from the new eligible, participating private school of the student's start date.

The transfer process may include a final payment to the private school the student is leaving. If a payment is owed to that school, it must be approved by the parent/guardian. If the school has been overpaid the school will be invoiced for the overpayment.

Please allow five business days for the current school to withdraw your student. If the student has not been withdrawn after five business days, please contact Customer Service.

## Scholarship Awards and What Is Covered

A parent of a student who applies and is determined eligible will be notified of conditional eligibility and may be funded based on program funds available on a first come, first served basis.

The calculated amount for a participating student to attend an eligible private school will be based on the grade level and school district in which the student resides. The funding amount will be based on the private school's tuition and fees, or the calculation above, whichever is less.

Scholarship award amounts for the 2022-23 school year can be found by clicking [here](#).

### What is covered?

The Hope Scholarship offers two options for eligible students. One option is for attendance at a K-12 private school and one option is for transportation to an out-of-district public school.

### Private School Tuition and Fees

Schools participating in the scholarship program may not charge a different rate for scholarship students. The same published tuition schedule must apply to all students, whether they are on scholarships or paying privately. Likewise, Step Up For Students may not pay for fees that are not included on the published fee schedule provided to all prospective parents.

Many eligible, participating private schools charge more than the value of the scholarship. In some cases, eligible, participating private schools may decide to provide scholarship students with supplemental financial assistance at their own discretion. Parents will be required to pay the difference between the value of the scholarship and the full tuition and fees.



The scholarship may be used towards the following school expenses, in this order:

- Tuition
- Books sold through the school (e.g., textbooks, workbooks, etc.)
- Registration
- Transportation services offered by the school that occur during school hours (e.g., transportation services to/from school or for field trips)
- Uniforms sold through the school
- Testing (e.g., standardized or entrance testing)
- Other fees, not including before and/or after school care services or after school sports fees (e.g., graduation fees, yearbook fees, field trips)

Students may not receive funding if the student is:

- Enrolled in public school (including the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind, the College-Preparatory Boarding Academy, or a charter school);
- Enrolled in a school providing education to youth in Department of Juvenile Justice programs;
- Enrolled in a virtual school, correspondence school, or distance learning program that receives state funding unless they are taking no more than two courses per school year;
- Receiving any other educational scholarship under Chapter 1002, Florida Statutes (Family Empowerment, Florida Tax Credit, or New Worlds Reading).

Scholarship funding can be transferred to another eligible, participating private school during the school year if the student moves within the state, or simply wants to attend a different participating private school.

You must find an eligible, participating private school for your student as soon as you receive your scholarship award letter. Failure to do so could result in loss of the scholarship due to exhausted funds.

### **Transportation Option**

If the option to transport the student to another public school outside the student's current district is selected, the parent may receive the greater of \$750 or the value of the local school district's per-pupil expenditure on transportation to assist with the cost of transportation to an out-of-district public school.

If awarded a scholarship and the student meets the requirements above, the parent or guardian can request a Transportation Form via chat at [www.stepupforstudents.org](http://www.stepupforstudents.org), by phone at 877-735-7837, or by email at [hope@sufs.org](mailto:hope@sufs.org).

The following information is needed to complete the Transportation Form:

- Application ID number
- Student's full name
- Parent's full name
- The name and county of the public school the student is zoned for
- The name and county of the public school of choice the student will be attending

Parents will need to email a report card or progress report from the student's school on a quarterly basis to [hope@sufs.org](mailto:hope@sufs.org) to receive payment.

## **Scholarship Payments**

Step Up For Students issues Hope Scholarship payments to schools electronically. This process takes place at least four times per school year and requires the parent/guardian to electronically verify their student's payment before Step Up For Students can release the student's scholarship funds to the school.

The parent/guardian must approve payment when they receive notification from Step Up For Students. Failure to approve a scholarship payment in a timely manner could result in the loss of scholarship and/or an outstanding balance at the eligible, participating private school.

When there is a payment to approve, parents/guardians will receive an email asking them to follow the steps below:

- Click on the link included in the email
- Review the student's payment information to their school and, if correct, click "Approve" and then "Complete."
- Once this has been done, the student's school will receive the scholarship payment indicated for the student.

Parents must submit payment approval in order for the school to receive payment. If a parent is dissatisfied with a school, it is not a valid reason to deny payment. If services were rendered, parents must submit the approval for payment.



**Under no circumstances should an eligible, private school approve any scholarship payments on behalf of the parent/guardian. Doing so may result in revocation of scholarship participation.**

Scholarships are paid to the school on a quarterly basis. If a student attended a school a minimum of 10 days, the school would receive the full quarter's tuition.

## **Prorated Awards**

The student's funding is based on the **latest** of the following three factors:

- the date of the student's scholarship award
- the student's first day of attendance at the school
- or the date the school became compliant with the Florida DOE

If a student's tuition and fees are less than the student's maximum allowable scholarship award amount, the student will receive the lesser amount.

## **Student Behavior and Scholarship Requirements**

Scholarship students must follow **all** academic and discipline policies of the private school they attend. Private schools have the right to expel or suspend students if their published policies are not followed. We recommend you carefully review those policies and procedures to ensure your children remains eligible for the scholarship. Step Up For Students does not govern private school policies regarding the retention of students due to academic or discipline failures.

We have found that some students need help in making the adjustment to a new private school environment. The courses may be more advanced and difficult. There may be more homework. The private school may have tougher enforcement of rules, stricter discipline procedures and less tolerance for unruly or disrespectful behavior. We urge parents to remain in constant contact with the private school, its counselors, and teachers, and to seek tutoring or mentoring services that might be available.

## **Parent Responsibilities**

- Parents must keep a current, active email address on file with Step Up For Students. Please update your email server to accept email from Step Up For Students so it is not sent to your Spam or Junk folder.
- Parents must notify the public school district in which you live when you withdraw your child to participate in the program and enroll in an eligible private school.
- Parents are responsible for selecting a private school and applying for admission.



- Parents are responsible for taking their confirmed eligibility letter to the school they have selected as validation of the scholarship award.
- Any student participating must remain in attendance throughout the school year unless excused by the school for illness or other good cause. The school's attendance policy as listed in the school's handbook should be followed at all times.
- **The parent/guardian must approve each quarterly scholarship payment to deposit the funds to the school via ACH. There are no exceptions to this rule.**
  - If a student attended the school, the parent must approve the payment, even if the parent is having issue with the school or is not happy with the service.
  - Parents that do not approve scholarship payments may jeopardize their student's scholarship.
- Each parent and student have an obligation to the private school to comply with the school's published policies. Step Up For Students does not govern private school policies regarding the retention of students due to academic or discipline failures.
- Upon reasonable notice to the Department of Education and the school district, the parent may remove the student from the private school and place the student in a public school.
- Parents must notify the eligible, participating private school before withdrawing the student during the school year.
- Step Up For Students must be notified if the student is withdrawn from the private school.
- Parents must ensure that a student in grades 3-10 take a DOE approved, national, norm-referenced test or the statewide assessment.
- Parents must notify Step Up For Students if you are moving, whether it is within the area or outside the area your currently reside in.
- If you receive a scholarship during the school year, you must confirm your continuing participation in the program by completing the Intent to Continue by the date established by Step Up For Students in order for your scholarship to remain in force for the following school year.

## **Private School Responsibilities**

Prior to accepting a student awarded a Hope Scholarship, each school will need to indicate their intent to participate in the Hope Scholarship by checking the Hope Scholarship box on the school's Department of Education private school log-in.

Participating private schools must comply with all of the requirements for private schools participating in state school choice programs pursuant to s. 1002.421, F.S. This includes annually administering a nationally norm-referenced test or the statewide assessments for students in grades 3 through 10 and reporting the student's scores to his or her parent.

Participating private schools may also choose to administer the statewide assessment to all private school students in grades 3 through 10 and must submit a request to the Department of Education by March 1 of each year in order to administer the statewide assessments in the subsequent school year.

If a private school fails to meet the requirements of the Hope Scholarship Program or s. 1002.421, F.S., the Commissioner may determine that the private school is ineligible to participate in the program.

Participating private schools must abide by the policies of Step Up For Students associated with, but not limited to the timely submission of School Commitment Forms, tuition and fee schedules, Exit Confirmation Forms and completion of pre-funding student verification.

Participating private schools that receive a minimum of \$250,000 from any one or a combination of any of the scholarship programs (Hope, Family Empowerment, Florida Tax Credit, or McKay), from either or a combination of Scholarship Funding Organizations (Step Up For Students or AAA Scholarship Foundation) are subject to the Agreed Upon Procedures process.

A copy of the requirements can be found [here](#)

### **Actions That May Lead to a Loss of the Scholarship**

- Misrepresenting or withholding information on the scholarship application.
- Enrolling the child in a private school that is not eligible to participate.
- Failure to regularly attend the private school.
- Failure of the parent to approve quarterly scholarship payments.
- Failure of the student to take a required nationally norm-referenced test or the statewide assessment.
- Moving out of the state of Florida.
- Returning to a public school or utilizing another statewide scholarship.

## Contact Information

There are 3 ways to reach us:

 Chat with a live agent at [www.sufs.org](http://www.sufs.org)

 Email us at [hope@sufs.org](mailto:hope@sufs.org)

 Call us at 877-735-7837

For Service Center hours, please visit our [“Contact Us”](#) page on our website.

The Step Up For Students team wishes you and your Hope Scholarship student a productive 2022-23 school year!

The terms outlined in this handbook are subject to change. You may familiarize yourself with updates by occasionally checking our website at [www.stepupforstudents.org](http://www.stepupforstudents.org) for any updates.