

MCKAY SCHOLARSHIPS PARENT GUIDE

OFFICE OF INDEPENDENT EDUCATION AND PARENTAL CHOICE
"IMPROVING K-12 EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS"

WELCOME TO THE MCKAY SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Dear McKay Parents,

We are pleased to welcome you to the **John M. McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Program**. The McKay Scholarships Program allows parents the choice of receiving funding to place their child in a private school they feel may better meet the child's needs, or if they prefer, they may select another public school.

From its beginnings in 2000, with a student base of 970, the McKay Program has grown rapidly, until today over 19,000 students benefit from the option of attending a private school selected by their parents, while many others have taken the opportunity to choose another public school.

This **McKay Scholarships Parent Guide** was developed to help you maintain your McKay Scholarship and to understand your options within the program. We hope you will familiarize yourself with the requirements and rules which govern the program so that we can work together to ensure your child's McKay Scholarship experience is a successful one.



Every child has different learning needs, so there is no one best school for everyone.

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Sincerely,

Laura Harrison
Scholarship Programs Director

MCKAY PARENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Making the right choice

As the parent of a student in a McKay private school, you are responsible for guiding your child's education.

Because the Florida Department of Education does not regulate private schools, the parent is responsible for making sure their child receives the educational and therapeutic supports necessary to succeed academically.

The School Choice Office annually verifies that participating schools are compliant with health, safety and financial soundness requirements. However, private schools are regarded as private businesses, and as such, are not required to adhere to the same rules that apply to public schools. **Unlike public schools, private schools are not required to:**

- adhere to the academic benchmarks set by the Sunshine State Standards
- provide the services described in the child's IEP (Individual Education Plan)
- administer standardized testing such as the FCAT to measure yearly progress
- provide transportation to and from school
- have accreditation.

It is the McKay parent's job to make sure the chosen school provides the curriculum, services, and educational approach the child needs. You must work with the school to design a program that meets your child's needs and to resolve any problems that may arise.

School Policies—Be aware that you and your child must comply with the private school's published policies. A McKay student is subject to the same rules as any other student enrolled at the school. As a private business, the school may have parents sign a contract upon enrollment. Parents are advised to review this document and discuss any concerns with the school's administration prior to signing. Where conflicts arise, it is the responsibility of the parent and the school to resolve them.

FCAT—If you wish your child to take the FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test), you must contact your school district to make arrangements and you must provide transportation to the testing site.

Accreditation—Participating schools may or may not have accreditation. Accreditation is provided by any one of several private accrediting organizations, which are not associated with or approved by the Department of Education. Accreditation does not guarantee that a student's course credits or diploma will be accepted by another institution. Parents are advised to contact the admissions office of the college or other school the child might later wish to attend to determine whether their child's credits will be accepted.

Getting Involved

How can you make sure your child's McKay experience is successful? The key lies in a strong parent-school partnership. As an involved McKay parent, here are some things to consider.

- At the beginning of the year, meet with your child's teachers to discuss your child's learning and social needs. Work together to develop a plan. While private schools are not required to follow the IEP developed by your school district, it may be a useful starting point for discussing the kinds of teaching and support your child could benefit from.
- Get to know your child's teachers, and stay in touch with them throughout the year through notes or scheduled meetings to follow your child's progress and resolve problems.



You are responsible for your child's education.

“Make sure the school you have chosen provides the curriculum, services, and educational approach your child needs.”

- Talk with the other parents in your child's class and get to know the children. You and the other parents may be able to work together to support the teaching and learning that takes place in your child's school.
- Encourage your child. Listen and observe how he or she feels about school. Join in his or her enthusiasms, and be alert for signs of frustration or problems.
- Show your child that you are interested in his or her school by becoming involved in school activities, attending parent meetings and providing support and supplies as your resources permit.
- At home, designate a time and a place for school work to be done daily. This "study spot" should be located away from distractions, and supplied with basic items such as paper, pencils, crayons, a dictionary and a ruler.
- Make sure your child is prepared for school each day. Children get their best start to the day when they are well rested and fed, and arrive on time with their homework complete.

By becoming an involved parent, you and your school can help your child to achieve success.



Create a study area in the home with pencils, paper and other supplies, away from distractions.

FUNDING

How funding is determined – The scholarship funding a McKay student receives is based on the **matrix code** assigned by the school district. The matrix code designates funding for the level of services described in the student's most recent IEP. If the student's IEP was revised after the original matrix was assigned, the school district should submit a correction reflecting the more recent IEP. If you believe an error was made in your child's matrix code, you can contact your school district to request a review.

Funding source – Funding at each matrix level is established by the Florida Legislature and comes from the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP). This is the program that also funds public school students. Funding may vary from one year to the next, or even throughout the year, according to legislative budget decisions.

Be aware that, once correctly assigned, **the student's matrix level cannot be changed** during the life of the scholarship. Parents should discuss the assigned funding amount with their child's school to be sure they can meet any financial obligations not covered by the scholarship amount.

PAYMENTS

Scholarship amount – The amount paid will be the state maximum or the private school tuition and fees, whichever is less. The scholarship amount is divided into in four equal payments, issued to the school on September 1, November 1, February 1, and April 1. These payments cover the following payment periods: July 1-September 30, October 1-December 31, January 1-February 28, and March 1-June 30.

Eligibility for payment – A student who has met the filing and enrollment deadlines and has attended the participating private school for 10 or more days during the payment period is eligible to receive a scholarship payment for that quarter. A quarterly payment may not be issued if:

- The intent was filed less than 60 days - or the enrollment was completed less than 30 days - prior to the payment date.
- The student's attendance was not verified by the private school during the designated Attendance Verification Week.
- The school district indicated the student was enrolled in public school.

"The student's matrix level cannot be changed during the life of the scholarship."

In cases where a quarterly payment was not received even though the student appears to be eligible, the school administrator should contact the School Choice Office to resolve the problem. If it is determined that a payment should have been issued, or if the amount was incorrect, a supplemental payment may be sent.

Signing the check — Scholarship checks, or “warrants”, are made out to the parent or guardian, and mailed to the school. The check must be signed by the designated parent or guardian; failure to do so may cause the child to lose the scholarship.

Only the person whose name is on the check may sign it. That person must come to the school since the checks should not leave the school premises. In cases where the designated person is unable to sign, a Power of Attorney may be drawn up giving another person the legal authority to sign. However, no individual associated with the school may be given Power of Attorney for the purpose of check signing. Also under no circumstances may a student sign the check for his or her scholarship payment.

If a change in the household requires a different person to sign the check, you should request your school to submit a **McKay Guardian Change Form** to the School Choice Office so that future checks may be issued in the appropriate name.

Scholarship funds are not income — It is not necessary to report funds from the McKay Scholarship as part of your income. These are monies that would normally go to the public school for your child’s education; instead they are being directed to a private school for the same purpose, and are not to be regarded as income.



Be sure you can meet any financial obligations not covered by your scholarship funding.

MONITORING YOUR CHILD’S SCHOLARSHIP

Parents should be aware of their child’s funding amount and quarterly payments, and should monitor how those funds are being used by the school.

To do so, have a look at your student’s **Individual Fee Schedule**. The Individual Fee Schedule is the list of services that your school creates for your particular child when they enroll him or her. The Fee Schedule can be changed throughout the year as needed.

You can view your child’s scholarship funding information and the Individual Fee Schedule online. Go to www.floridaschoolchoice.org, and select **Parent Login** from the menu on the left. You will be asked for the password sent to you at the time your child enrolled, and the Social Security Number of the parent of record. (If you do not have your password, please contact the School Choice Office for help.)

The items and services that you will see on your child’s Individual Fee Schedule are selected from the private school’s **General Fee Schedule**, which includes all the items, services and fees offered by the school to all students. (Think of the school’s General Fee Schedule as a restaurant menu. From this menu, the specific items and services provided to your child would be listed on his or her Individual Fee Schedule.)

Your child’s Individual Fee Schedule will, of course, list tuition. It may also include a number of other academic items or services that relate to your child’s education. You may see various fees, special programs, tutoring, therapy, or summer school. Schools may also charge for supplies, materials, transportation, uniforms, insurance, field trips, or other items or activities related to the child’s education. Non-academic items such as meals or day care cannot be included on the student’s Individual Fee Schedule.

The Individual Fee Schedule lists the total charges for your child for the school year. If this amount is less than your scholarship amount, the payment checks will be issued for the lesser amount. If the total comes to more than your scholarship, you will be responsible for coming to an arrangement with the school to deal with the difference. If you have any questions about your child’s fee schedule, arrange to discuss them with your school administrator.

“You can view your child’s scholarship funding information and the Individual Fee Schedule online. Go to www.floridaschoolchoice.org, and select Parent Login from the menu.”

MAINTAINING THE SCHOLARSHIP

Your child may remain on the McKay Scholarship until he or she graduates from high school or reaches the age of 22, whichever comes first. A McKay student who becomes 22 after September 1 may remain in the program to finish the school year.

To continue the scholarship each year— Have your McKay school reenroll the student at the end of the school year, or transfer and enroll in another participating private school. Reenrollment or transfer and enrollment should occur before August 2nd in order to meet the enrollment deadline for the first quarterly payment.

Forfeiture — There are circumstances that could result in loss of the scholarship. Your child may forfeit the McKay Scholarship if any of the following occur.

The student:

- does not maintain regular attendance throughout the year in a participating school,
- becomes a home-schooled student,
- becomes a Florida Virtual School student taking three or more classes,
- enters a non-participating private school,
- enters a Department of Juvenile Justice facility for a period of 15 or more days, or
- re-enters public school (including, but not limited to, enrollment in a summer program, evening program, driver's education or the public school McKay program).

Important: Returning to public school, even for one day, will result in forfeiture of the private school scholarship. Parents are advised that entering any school district program funded by the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) would be regarded as a return to public school.

What about summer school? A McKay student may not attend any summer program funded by FEFP. However, if there are funds remaining in the child's scholarship at the end of the school year, they may be used for the child to attend a summer program provided by any school that participates in the McKay Scholarship Program.

What about emergencies? There may be times when continued attendance is not possible. Requests for temporary suspension of the scholarship due to legal or medical circumstances are considered on a case by case basis by the School Choice Office. If, for example, doctor's orders require an extended absence from school, the parent should discuss the issue with their child's school. A copy of the doctor's orders and documentation from the school would be sent to the School Choice Office where a determination will be made. During the time the student is out of school, he or she is not eligible to receive scholarship payments. The student may be hospitalized, entered into a residential treatment program, or remain at home. However, if the student returns to public school or receives services from the school district as a Hospital/Homebound student during this time, forfeiture of the scholarship would result.

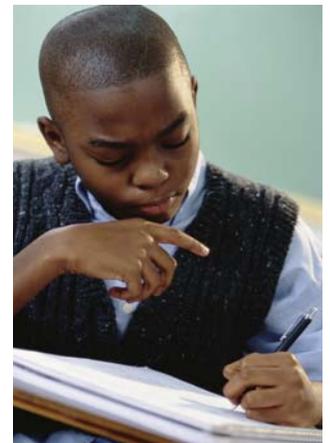
“Failure to maintain continued attendance may result in termination of the scholarship.”

REQUALIFYING

A child who has forfeited the McKay Scholarship may apply again the following year and be found eligible if he or she:

- has attended a Florida public school for a full school year,
- is enrolled in a Florida public school at the time of filing,
- has an active IEP, and
- is at least 5 years old and less than 22 by September 1 of the scholarship year.

A new intent must be filed, and all eligibility requirements must be met.



A child who has lost the scholarship may requalify after a year in public school.

TRANSFERS

If you have concerns regarding your child's experience in his or her current school, you have a number of options. Try talking with your child's school regarding your concerns. Discuss ways you and the school can work together towards solving the problem. Better communication may be all that is needed to improve your child's learning experience.

If you feel that a move is needed, you have two options. You can transfer your child at any time during the school year to another participating private school as a McKay Scholarship student. Or, you can return the child to a public school, which will result in forfeiture of the private school scholarship.

Transferring to another private school

It is simplest to transfer at the end of the school year, but you may also transfer at any time during the school year. Here are a few transfer **DOs** and **DON'Ts**:

- **Don't** enroll in public school, register for home school or Virtual School, or enter a non-participating private school during the time your child is transferring. Any of these activities will result in your child losing eligibility for the McKay Program.
- **Don't** withdraw your child and keep him or her out of school for any length of time. The law requires continuous attendance to maintain eligibility in the McKay Program. If your child is withdrawn from one participating school and is not enrolled in another within a reasonable time, eligibility may be lost.
- **Do** make sure any balance is paid before you leave. The school cannot refuse to withdraw your child, but they may refuse to release records if money is owed.
- **Do** discuss payment issues with both schools involved before making a decision. The first school that your child attends for 10 days during the payment period will receive the quarterly scholarship payment. If a transfer is made after 10 days, it is up to the schools to come to an equitable arrangement regarding the funds. If that is not possible, you as the parent may be responsible for any amount owed.

Returning to public school

You have the option of transferring your child back to public school at any time, either as a regular student returning to his or her zoned school, or under the public school McKay option allowing you to select a public school in your own or an adjacent district. If you select a public school other than your zoned school, the district may deny your request if the chosen school does not have room or does not offer the services required by your child's IEP. The district may also have other policies or restrictions that apply. To transfer your child to a public school, contact the school district to discuss placement, then withdraw the student from the McKay school. You will be responsible for transportation to a school outside your district's Choice Plan. Also be aware that **any return to public school will forfeit the private school scholarship.**

Whichever kind of transfer you choose, **DO** prepare your child for the changes that will take place by visiting the new school with your child ahead of time. Meet the teachers, tour the rooms, and check out the lunch, playtime, and restroom areas. Make that first day in the new school something to look forward to.

“The private school which the student first attends for 10 days during the payment period will be issued the quarterly check.”



A McKay student transferring back to public school may reenter his zoned school or choose a different public school under the public McKay option.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?

Reevaluation

The school district is required by federal law to offer reevaluation to all Exceptional Student Education (ESE) students at least every three years. This applies to students in private schools as well, including McKay Scholarship students. The parent has the option of agreeing or refusing to have the child reevaluated. The reevaluation may consist of tests and reported observations from the child's parents and teachers, similar to the evaluation done when the student was first considered for ESE. Reevaluation will not produce a new IEP, change the child's matrix or affect the child's McKay Scholarship status. In addition, reevaluation does not require reenrollment in public school and will not result in services being provided to the McKay student by the district. If you choose to accept the reevaluation, the results may provide you and the private school with an up-to-date picture of your child's progress and current learning needs. If you have questions about the reevaluation process, please contact your school district's ESE office.

School District Services

A student attending private school does not have an active IEP, which is a document intended to provide services funded through FEFP to public school students. However, some students in non-profit private schools may have a document called a **Services Plan** which provides services supported by federal funds. These funds are limited and are used pursuant to a consultative agreement between the participating non-profit private schools and the school district. These services will be provided through a Services Plan and will not jeopardize the student's McKay Scholarship.

Graduation

Upon graduation from high school with a standard diploma, McKay Scholarship benefits cease. Students who have not earned a standard diploma by grade 12 may remain in the McKay Program until graduation or until they reach the age of 22. (See *Maintaining the Scholarship*, p.4.) Parents seeking financial support beyond high school for further education or training should contact the **Office of Student Financial Assistance** (OSFA) as early as possible in the student's high school career to explore the available options for scholarships, grants or loans. Parents may also want to contact the **Office of Vocational Rehabilitation** (Voc Rehab), which may provide training, guidance or financial support for teens and adults with disabilities who need assistance in transitioning into the workforce.

Complaints

Concerns regarding actions by the school which the parent believes may be fraudulent, or which affect the safety and welfare of the students should be reported to the School Choice Office. Abuse should also be reported to law enforcement authorities.



Your child may remain in the McKay Scholarship Program until he or she graduates from high school.

“Reevaluation will not produce a new IEP, change the child’s matrix or affect the child’s McKay Scholarship status.”

ABOUT FLORIDA SCHOOL CHOICE

Florida leads the nation in school choice options. Ensuring that every child receives a quality education is one of the highest priorities for Florida citizens. School choice empowers parents and gives them a tool to use in making sure their children get the very best education possible. School choice programs in Florida are in high demand and growing as an increasing number of families take advantage of their right and responsibility to select the appropriate learning option for their children.

One of the strategic goals established by Florida's State Board of Education is to "**Improve K-12 educational choice options.**" Support for this initiative, coupled with Florida's groundbreaking legislation, has resulted in programs which allow children to get the education they deserve while simultaneously providing the incentive for innovation and improvement across the educational system.

School Choice is not about one type of school being better than another. It is about letting parents who know, love, and share the fate of their children make the decision about how and where their child will be educated.

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

*Office of Independent Education
and Parental Choice*

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Fax: 850-245-0875

E-mail: SchoolChoice@fldoe.org

www.floridaschoolchoice.org

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

If you have questions about the McKay Scholarship or suggestions on how we can improve our services, please call **1-800-447-1636** or e-mail **SchoolChoice@fldoe.org**. Below are additional resources that may be helpful.

Links:

District McKay Program Contacts:

[http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/
Information/District/District_List.asp](http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/Information/District/District_List.asp)

Private Schools in the McKay Program:

[http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/
Information/PrivateSchoolDirectory/](http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/Information/PrivateSchoolDirectory/)

Florida Department of Education:

<http://www.fldoe.org/default.asp>

U.S. Department of Education:

<http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml>

The McKay Scholarships Statute (s. 1002.39, *Florida Statutes*) and Rule (6A-6.0970, *F.A.C.*) may be found at the Florida Legislature Web site:

<http://www.leg.state.fl.us>

Other State of Florida Offices:

Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services:

1-850-245-0475

Office of Student Financial Aid:

1-888-827-2004

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation:

1-800-451-4327

Agency for Persons with Disabilities:

1-866-273-2273

Student Support Services Project:

1-850-922-3727



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