

Step Up For Students



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OFFICE OF POLICY AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Florida is a national leader in educational choices and Step Up For Students helps to deliver several of those options. Today, Step Up offers five scholarships to meet the diverse needs of Florida's public, private and home education students.

Florida Tax Credit Scholarship

Created in 2001, the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship (FTC) served 15,585 students in the inaugural 2002-03 school year. So far this year, Step Up has helped 102,969 low-income students enroll in private schools through the FTC scholarship program. Today, 74 percent of the students are non-white, and the average student comes from a household earning about \$32,000 a year, while 56 percent of students live in a single-parent household.

Scholarships are paid for by private corporate donations. Donors receive a dollar-for-dollar tax credit for their contribution with tax credits capped at \$873.5 million. Scholarship values vary from county-to-county and by grade, but average between \$6,673 and \$7,169. Students may also receive a \$750 transportation scholarship to attend an out-of-district public school.

Gardiner Scholarship

The Gardiner Scholarship, created in 2014 and named in honor of State Sen. Andy Gardiner and his family, is an educational savings account (ESA) for students with special needs. The program allows parents to personalize the education of their special-needs children by directing money toward a combination of programs and approved providers, such as textbooks, school supplies, tutors, therapies, curriculum, and even tuition and fees.

For 2020-21, Step Up is serving 17,451 students with unique abilities, with an average scholarship value of \$10,300. The Florida Legislature appropriated \$189.9 million for the program, enough for about 18,000 students.

Hope Scholarship

Florida created the Hope Scholarship in 2018 to give bullied students a fresh start in a new environment. This first-of-its-kind school choice program provides scholarships to students suffering from bullying at their prior public school. K-12 students who have reported an incident of harassment, hazing, bullying, robbery, sexual assault and more, may be eligible for a scholarship to attend a private school or a public school in a different school district.

The program is paid for by individual donors who receive a tax credit, up to \$105, on their motor vehicle purchase taxes. Today, the scholarship serves 452 students with scholarships that average between \$6,673 and \$7,169, depending on grade and county. Students may also receive a \$750 transportation scholarship to attend an out-of-district public school.

Reading Scholarship

Florida in 2018 became the first state to offer an education savings account (ESA) for students enrolled in public schools. The program offers parents of public school students in third through fifth grade, who are struggling with reading and literacy, access to ESAs worth \$500. The scholarship pays for tuition and fees related to part-time tutoring, summer and after-school literacy programs, instructional materials and curriculum related to reading or literacy. So far this year, 2,571 students have already benefited from the program, with more expected to enroll in the spring to get help before taking the Florida Standards Assessment.

Family Empowerment Scholarship

The Family Empowerment Scholarship (FES) is Florida's first voucher program for low- and middle-income students. Like the McKay Scholarship for students with special needs, FES is funded from the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP), an operational formula that funds K-12 student choices in district schools, charter schools and private schools. The scholarships will average between \$6,673 and \$7,169 depending on the grade level and county of the student. The program is capped at 46,000 students for the 2020-21 school year and currently serves 36,305 students.