

Help is Here!

**HOPE SCHOLARSHIP
HANDBOOK**



Step Up For Students HOPE SCHOLARSHIP HANDBOOK 2018-19

General Inquiries: 1-877-735-7837 or hope@sufs.org

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Overview

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. These options are: the opportunity to transfer the student to another public school with available capacity within the student's current school district, the opportunity to request a scholarship to transport the student to a public school in another school district, or the opportunity to request a scholarship for the student to enroll in and attend an eligible private school. Step Up For Students is administering the private school and transportation options for the Hope Scholarship.

Funding for the Hope Scholarship Program is provided through tax credits offered to the purchasers of motor vehicles and is distributed **on a first-come, first-served basis, subject to available funding**. 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 at: <https://www.stepupforstudents.org/for-donors/how-to-support-the-hope-scholarship/>.

Step Up for Students (SUFSS) is a private, nonprofit organization and an approved Scholarship Funding Organization (SFO) in the State of Florida. In addition to the Hope Scholarship, Step Up for Students also administers the Florida Tax Credit (FTC) scholarship program which provides K-12 private school scholarships for students from low-income families, the Gardiner Scholarship program which allows parents of students with special needs to personalize the education of their children, and Reading Scholarship Accounts for students in grades 3 through 5 who struggle with reading.

The sections following this introduction will guide parents as they utilize their Hope Scholarships.

Qualifying for a Hope Scholarship

Beginning with the 2018-19 school year, 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 an incident of battery; harassment; hazing; bullying; kidnapping; physical attack; robbery; sexual offenses, harassment, assault or battery; threat or intimidation; or fighting at school.

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

Upon receipt of a report of a listed incident, the school principal, or his/her designee, will 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 request and receive a scholarship to attend an eligible private school, subject to available funding. A parent who chooses to send their student to another public school located outside the district in which the student resides may be eligible for a transportation scholarship. 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. Families may choose between transferring to another

public school within the student's current school district, financial assistance toward private school tuition and fees, or transportation costs to attend a public school in another district.

Both the private school scholarship and the transportation scholarship have the same eligibility requirements.

Applying for a Hope Scholarship

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

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

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**.

Priority in subsequent school years will be given to renewal students from the previous year.

Hope Scholarship Award Amounts

Contributions for the 2018-19 school year will not begin to be made by purchasers of motor vehicles until October 1, 2018. Scholarships will not become available for eligible students until after contributions have been received by Step Up For Students.

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 parent will receive notification if his or her student is able to be awarded and funded with a scholarship.

If the private school option is selected, the maximum amount awarded to a student enrolled in an eligible private school is determined as a percentage of the unweighted FTE funding amount for that state fiscal year. The maximum scholarship amounts for the 2018-19 school year are \$6,519 for kindergarten – fifth grade, \$6,815 for sixth – eighth grade and \$7,111 for ninth – 12th grade. **Please note that all scholarships will be prorated during the 2018-19 school year.**

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 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)

Payment of a scholarship to a student enrolled in private school may not be made if a 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); a school operating for the purpose of providing education to youth in Department of Juvenile Justice programs; participating in a virtual school, correspondence school, or distance learning program that receives state funding unless limited to no more than two courses per school year; *or* receiving any other educational scholarship under Chapter 1002, Florida Statutes.

If the option to transport the student to another public school outside the student's current district is selected, the parent may receive a maximum scholarship of up to \$750, to assist with the cost of transportation to an out-of-district public school.

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.

The student may keep the scholarship – contingent upon available funding and timely notification of renewal – until the student returns to public school or graduates from high school, whichever occurs first. A student who enrolls in a public school or public school program is considered to have returned to public school for purposes of determining the end of the scholarship's term.

If your student wishes to withdraw from the Hope Scholarship Program, you **must** contact Step Up for Students at hope@sufs.org or 1-877-735-7837.

Choosing a Private School

If a parent chooses to enroll a student in an eligible private school, the private school must be compliant and eligible to participate in the Hope Scholarship Program with the Florida Department of Education. A directory of participating private schools is available [here](#).

Once the eligible, private school is chosen, take the student's award letter to the school as validation of the student's scholarship. To complete the selection, the school will have you review and sign a School Commitment Form. This document will document the tuition and fees for the student, and the parent's acceptance of those fees. Once completed, the school will provide a copy to Step Up For Students.

If you enroll your child before your application has been received or prior to being found eligible you will be responsible for paying any tuition and fees due and may not qualify for future scholarship funding.

Scholarship Payments

The scholarship is paid by checks made payable to the primary and/or secondary parent/guardian stated on the application AND the school the parent/guardian has chosen. The checks are sent directly to the private school and the parent/guardian must go to the eligible, participating private school to sign the check. There are no exceptions to this rule. Failure of the designated parent to sign the check within the time specified by the private school's policy will result in the loss of your scholarship. In some extreme cases, a power of attorney for signing scholarship checks may be granted to someone other than the parent/guardian on the application. This person may not be affiliated, in any way, the eligible, participating private school.

The checks are mailed to the school on a quarterly basis. A few weeks before each installment, each private school is provided a report with your child's name and the scholarship amount in order to confirm ongoing attendance. The private school must electronically verify that the information is correct and return the verification to Step Up for Students.

Parent Responsibilities

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 parent/guardian must go to the eligible, participating private school to sign each quarterly scholarship check to the private school for deposit. There are no exceptions to this rule. Parents may not designate another entity or individual associated with the private school as the parent's attorney in fact to endorse a scholarship warrant. Failure of the designated parent to comply will result in forfeiture of the scholarship.

Each parent and student has an obligation to the private school to comply with the school's published policies.

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. 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.

If you receive a Hope Scholarship during the 2018-19 school year, you must confirm your continuing participation in the program by the date established by Step Up For Students in order for your scholarship to remain in force.

Private School Responsibilities

For the 2018-19 school year, private schools that are currently eligible to participate in the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program will be eligible to participate in the Hope Scholarship Program. However, 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, Gardiner, Florida Tax Credit, or McKay) are subject to the Agreed Upon Procedures process. A copy of the requirements can be found [here](#).

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 remove 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 check is sent to that school, it must be signed by the parent/guardian listed on the check. If the school has been overpaid the school will be invoiced for the overpayment.

Important Items to Note

- Parents must notify the public school district in which you live that your child will be participating in the program.
- Parents must notify the eligible, participating private school before withdrawing the student during the school year.
- Parents must notify Step Up for Students if you are moving, whether it is within the area or outside the area you currently reside in.
- Step Up for Students does not govern private school policies regarding the retention of students due to academic or discipline failures.

- Parents must complete the renewal process within the deadline to be confirmed for the new school year.
- Please update your computer to accept email from Step Up For Students so it is not sent to your Spam or Junk folder.

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 personally endorse the scholarship checks.
- Failure of the student to take a required nationally norm-referenced test or the statewide assessment.

The Step Up for Students team wishes you and your Hope Scholarship student a productive 2018-19 school year!

Contact Information

Parent and Private School inquiries: hope@sufs.org

Contact Center: 1-877-735-7837