

# McKay Scholarship Program FAQs

## Definition and Eligibility

---

### 1. What is the McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Program?

The McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Program, originally created in 1999, provides scholarships for eligible students with disabilities to attend an eligible public or private school of their choice. Students with disabilities include K-12 students who are documented as having an intellectual disability; a speech or language impairment; a hearing impairment, including deafness; a visual impairment, including blindness; a dual sensory impairment; an emotional or behavioral disability; a specific learning disability, including, but not limited to, dyslexia, dyscalculia, or developmental aphasia; a traumatic brain injury; a developmental delay; or autism spectrum disorder.

### 2. What options are available to a student with disabilities under the McKay Scholarship Program?

An eligible student with disabilities has several options available, including:

- Attendance at another public school within the district;
- Attendance at an eligible public school in an adjacent district that has space and provides the services identified in the student's individual education plan or 504 accommodation plan; or
- Attendance at an eligible private, sectarian or nonsectarian, school

### 3. Who is eligible for a McKay Scholarship?

Any parent of a public school student with a disability who has an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 accommodation plan may receive a McKay Scholarship if the student meets the following requirements:

- By assigned school attendance area or by special assignment, the student has spent the prior school year in attendance at a Florida public school (the student was enrolled and reported by a Florida school district for funding during the preceding October and February FTE surveys in Pre-K through grade 12), **or**
- The student was enrolled and reported for funding by the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind during the preceding October and February student membership surveys in kindergarten through grade 12, **or**
- The student received specialized instructional services under the Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program during the previous school year and has a current IEP developed by the local school board in accordance with State Board Rule or a 504 accommodation plan, **or**
- The student is a dependent child of a member of the United States Armed Forces who transfers to Florida from out of state due to a parent's permanent change of station orders, **and**
- The parent has notified the school district in a manner that creates a written or electronic record of the notification (this is done by filing intent on the School Choice website) at least 60 days prior to the date of the first scholarship payment, **and**
- The parent has obtained acceptance for admission of the student to a private school that is eligible for the program.

4. **How long does a McKay Scholarship last?**

The scholarship shall remain in effect until the student:

- Returns to a public school;
- Graduates from high school, or
- Reaches the age of 22, whichever occurs first.

A student in a private school on McKay Scholarship can return to a public school using the McKay Scholarship public school option; however, the parent must notify the district prior to doing so. The school district will determine what public school options are available to the student after receiving the request. A student who exercises this choice will need to reestablish eligibility by being in an October and February student survey before being eligible again for the private school option of the McKay Scholarship. In addition, a student is not eligible for a McKay Scholarship while he or she is:

4. Enrolled in a Department Juvenile Justice commitment program;
5. Receiving another state scholarship (including the Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship);
6. Participating in a home education or private tutoring program;
7. Participating in more than two courses per school year in a virtual school, correspondence school, or distance learning program that receives state funding;
8. Enrolled in the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind; or
9. Not having regular and direct contact with his or her private school teachers at the school's physical location.

5. **Are first-year kindergarteners eligible for the scholarship program?**

Yes. Students that have completed a year of pre-kindergarten may be eligible. The student must have been enrolled and reported for funding in a Florida public school during the October and February Florida Education Finance Program surveys and was eligible for services for student with disabilities. The student must also be 5 years old by September 1 of the school year in which he or she intends to use the scholarship.

6. **If a student is dismissed from ESE or if a student's 504 accommodation plan is no longer in effect after the parent files intent and before the student enters the private school, is the student eligible for the McKay Scholarship?**

No. If a student is dismissed from ESE or if a student's 504 accommodation plan lapses while the student is still enrolled in a public school, he or she is no longer eligible for the program.

7. **Are all private schools required to participate in the McKay Scholarship Program?**

No. Private schools are not required to participate in the McKay Scholarship Program. However, participation is open to all private schools that wish to take part in the program, as long as the school meets the eligibility criteria set forth by law.

## Scholarship Student Participation

1. **How does a parent file intent to participate in the McKay Scholarship Program?**

Parents may file intent to participate in the McKay Scholarship Program on the [www.floridaschoolchoice.org](http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org) website by clicking on the McKay Scholarships link and then the link titled "Apply for a McKay Scholarship" located on the quick navigation bar on the left-hand side of the screen. If additional assistance is needed, parents may contact the Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice at 1-800-447-1636.

2. **What is a parent's obligation for transferring a student to another public school under the public school option of the McKay Scholarship Program?**

Parents must file a notice of intent expressing their desire to participate in the scholarship program. Parents should then contact their local district ESE office for further assistance and direction.

3. **May scholarship students who are enrolled in a participating private school attend a public school while they wait for the private school's first day of school?**

No. When students enroll in the scholarship program for the first time, they must wait for classes to begin at the private school for the new school year. Scholarship participants may lose their eligibility if they attend a public school while waiting for their private school to begin classes. Districts are responsible for reporting those students as "returned to public school" students.

4. **Can a McKay scholarship be forfeited?**

Yes. There are several ways that a McKay scholarship may be forfeited.

The scholarship is forfeited when a **parent**:

- Refuses to restrictively endorse the scholarship payment to the appropriate school for deposit into the account of the participating school as required by s. 1002.39(5)(f), F.S.;
- Enrolls or re-enrolls the student in a public school.

The scholarship may be forfeited when a **student**:

- Does not remain in continued attendance at a participating private school throughout the school year (unless excused by the school for illness or other good cause);
- Does not maintain regular and direct contact with the private school teachers at the school's physical location;
- Enrolls in a school operating for the purpose of providing educational services to youth in any Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) programs;
- Participates in more than two courses per year at a virtual school, correspondence school, or distance learning program that receives state funding;
- Enrolls in the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind; or
- Participates in a home education program as defined by s. [1002.01](#)(1), F.S.

5. **If a student was counted for both FTE periods, but has so many absences that the district receives 0 FTE for the student, is he or she still eligible for a McKay Scholarship?**

No. The statute states that a student has to have been “enrolled and reported by a school district for funding...”. If a student receives 0 FTE, he or she was not “reported...for funding”. Therefore, the student is not eligible for a McKay Scholarship.

## **Scholarship Payments**

---

1. **What is the award amount for a McKay Scholarship?**

The amount of the scholarship is equal to the amount the student would have received in the public school to which the student is assigned or the amount of the private school’s tuition and fees, **whichever is less**.

2. **How is a McKay Scholarship payment made?**

Upon proper documentation by the DOE, the Chief Financial Officer must make the scholarship payments in four equal installments (September 1, November 1, February 1, and April 1). The payment must be made by individual warrant (check) payable to the student's parent or guardian and mailed by the DOE to the chosen private school for deposit into the private school's account. The parent must restrictively endorse the warrant to the private school for deposit into the private school's account.

The DOE and the receiving private school are responsible for verifying the student's initial admission acceptance and continued enrollment and attendance at the private school.

3. **Who provides transportation for McKay Scholarship Students?**

If the parents choose a public school option consistent with the school board's choice plan, the school district is responsible for providing transportation to the public school selected by the parent.

**If the parent chooses a public school within the district that is not consistent with the school board's choice plan or a public school in an adjacent district**, the parent is responsible for providing transportation for the student to the selected public school.

**If the parents choose the private school option, the parents are responsible for the student's transportation.**