



# Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program

## Atlanta Girls' School

### About the Program

The Georgia Special Needs Scholarship (GSNS) Program is a school choice program available for special needs students attending Georgia public schools who are served under an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Parents/Guardians new to the program should refer to the Understanding the Program section of the Georgia Department of Revenue website. Parents/Guardians of students continuing in the private school choice option should refer to the Continuing Participation information on the same site. <http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Policy/Pages/Special-Needs-Scholarship-Program.aspx>

To newly qualify for the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program a student must meet all the following requirements:

- **Student Eligibility Criteria 1-** A student must have a parent/guardian who currently lives in Georgia and has been a resident for at least one calendar year.
- **Student Eligibility Criteria 2-** A student was enrolled and completed the previous school year in a Georgia public school in grades kindergarten through twelfth.
- **Student Eligibility Criteria 3-** A student was reported as attending a Georgia public school by a school district(s) during mandatory student counts.
- **Student Eligibility Criteria 4 -** A student does not need to have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for the entire school year to qualify for the GSNS Program. A student must have received special education services at some point during the previous school year through an IEP. A student must be reported by a school district(s) in its student counts OR in final student record as a student receiving special education services by the end of the previous school year.

If a student meets the eligibility criteria for the GSNS Program, a parent/guardian has the right to request a transfer from a student's current public school to:

- Another public school within their district of residence; or
- Another public school district outside their district of residence; or
- One of the three state schools for the blind or deaf; or
- A private school authorized to participate in the GSNS Program. Funds received through the GSNS Program can only be used to pay for tuition and fees at a private school authorized by the State Board of Education to participate in the program.

A parent/guardian re-enrolling a student in the same private school must follow the re-enrollment procedures in place at the private school. A parent/guardian is required to provide a private school with a copy of the new scholarship award sheet for the student. This notifies a private school that a student is still eligible for the GSNS Program and what his/her award amount will be for the new school year. The award sheet is the only document needed by a parent/guardian for proof of a student's continued eligibility for the GSNS Program.

Under the GSNS Program, if tuition and fees charged by a private school are higher than the scholarship award, a parent/guardian is responsible for paying the additional tuition. Most private schools participating in the GSNS

Program charge tuition and fees that are more than the amount of a student's scholarship. GSNS funds cannot be used to pay for the following:

- Transportation
- Before or after school care
- Meals
- Tutoring
- Field trip fees
- Athletic fees
- School supplies
- Summer school/camp programs
- Other fees as determined by the GaDOE

A scholarship calculator is available on the Georgia Department of Education web page for parents/guardians (<http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Policy/Pages/Special-Needs-Scholarship-Program.aspx>), but will only work if a student is eligible for the GSNS Program. Print the award sheet generated by the scholarship calculator. It is the only proof needed of a student's eligibility. A parent/guardian must provide a copy of the student's scholarship award sheet to the private school. Authorized private schools have access to an electronic system which they use to report eligible students enrolled at their schools to the GaDOE. Each school year private schools report enrolled students, so the GaDOE knows which students are participating in the private school choice option and where they are enrolled. Without notification of a student's eligibility, the private school will not report the student as enrolled in the GSNS Program to the GaDOE. This will affect the scholarship payments for a student and could affect his/her eligibility for the GSNS Program.

## How Payments are Made

- Four times during a school year scholarship checks are issued by the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) for the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship (GSNS) Program. The GaDOE is authorized to make one payment per student per quarter and is not authorized to make any partial or retroactive payments. Payment for each quarter is for instruction and services provided to a student.
- A payment calendar is posted each school year and outlines the periods each payment covers and when payments will be sent during a school year. Parents/Guardians should refer to the GSNS web page <http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Policy/Pages/Special-Needs-Scholarship-Program.aspx> (click Additional Resources on the right side of the page) and review the payment calendar that applies to the current school year.
- Scholarship checks issued by the GaDOE are made out to the parent(s)/guardian(s) of record submitted by a private school, but are mailed directly to a private school.
- A private school must notify the parent(s)/guardian(s) of students in writing when scholarship payments are received by the school.
- A parent/guardian is required to endorse scholarship checks over to a private school within 30 days of his/her receipt of the notice from the private school. A private school must provide a reasonable opportunity for parent(s)/guardian(s) to restrictively endorse a check to the school.
- Upon endorsing a check to the private school, the parent(s)/guardian(s) and the private school validate that the payment amount is correct. Any discrepancies thereafter shall be resolved between the parent(s)/guardian(s) and the private school.
- Parent(s)/Guardian(s) cannot remove a scholarship check from a school's premises and cannot refuse to endorse a check; either or both could result in forfeiture of the scholarship.

Parents/Guardians should refer to the GSNS Program pages on the Georgia Department of Education website for the most recent information about the program. <http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Policy/Pages/Special-Needs-Scholarship-Program.aspx>