

THE MCKAY SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

FACT SHEET

Florida: In the Forefront With A National Model, Serving Children with Disabilities

Did You Know That The McKay Scholarship Program:

- Started in 1999 as a pilot program in Sarasota with 2 children
- Has grown to over 22,000 children this year
- Is available **ONLY** for children with disabilities with IEP's or on 504 Plans.

Why was the McKay Scholarship Program established?

Children with disabilities have a tremendous number of unique needs. While many good programs exist in the public school system, the public schools do not have the ability to meet every need of every disability. The McKay Scholarship program allows parents the essential flexibility to choose a program that best meets their child's needs.

What makes a child eligible for The McKay Scholarship Program?

1. The public school tests students and identifies their disability.
2. The public school determines the level of services for the child through the Individual Educational Plan (IEP) process. (These services reflect the child's funding in the public school and determine the amount of McKay scholarship they receive.)
3. Children who have a 504 Plan are eligible for the McKay Scholarship Program.
4. The child must have attended the public school for one year prior to entering the McKay Scholarship Program.
5. Parents must file a notice of intent to participate in the McKay Scholarship Program with the FLDOE.

How much are the scholarships?

1. Funding for students with an IEP is set by the level of services they receive through the IEP process. Students who are on a 504 plan receive the base state funding allocation.
2. The average scholarship award for students with an IEP during the 2010-2011 year was \$7,209. Students on a 504 plan receive an average of \$3,892 per scholarship.
3. Because services for children with disabilities are often higher than the scholarship, parents may supplement the scholarship. Many private schools also provide additional scholarships to assist families to obtain these services.

Where may the scholarships be used?

1. Parents may choose to use the McKay Scholarship at a nonassigned **public school** or an adjacent school district if the parent feels the chosen public school has a more appropriate program for their child.
2. Parents may choose to use the scholarship at a **private school** that participates in the program if the parent feels the school is better equipped to meet their child's needs.

Who holds the private schools accountable?

1. **For fiscal and statutory compliance:** Under the law DOE is responsible for holding private schools accountable for remaining in compliance with state statutory requirements and for fiscal soundness. The current oversight, management and accountability measures are working.
2. **For the child's progress:** Under this program the parent holds both the public and the private school accountable. For the first time, the parent may leave a school without penalty to themselves or their child and take their scholarship elsewhere if the school does not follow through with appropriate services. Previously, a parent could not leave a public school program without penalty because their child's funding would stay in the public school and the parent would have to use their own money to pay for private schooling.

Are parents satisfied with the McKay Scholarship Program?

According to the Manhattan Institute report 92% of currently participating parents indicated their satisfaction with the program. Of parents who are no longer utilizing the program, "90.7% responded that the program should continue to be available." (www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_38.htm)

How have the "growing pains" and accountability issues improved?

Through the passage of The Scholarship Accountability Statute and revisions of The McKay Scholarship Statute, the Legislature has provided many more accountability measures. The statutes have:

- ✓ Established the Annual Notarized Compliance Form
- ✓ Developed a tighter attendance verification procedure, cross checking with public school attendance
- ✓ Required State and Federal Fingerprinting for staff with direct contact with students
- ✓ Set-up a hot line for complaints and systems for investigating them
- ✓ Instituted more fiscal responsibility
- ✓ Directed guidelines for reporting of student progress

A strong Public-Private Partnership exists between FLDOE and the Private Sector. DOE and the Private Sector have:

- ✓ Established better communication
- ✓ Built a strong web based system for circulating information
- ✓ Established a system to verify compliance documents every three years
- ✓ Developed Rules approved by the Board of Education
- ✓ Established systems for resolving compliance issues

Prepared by The Coalition of McKay Scholarship Schools which is an organization of non-public schools that accepts students receiving funding through the McKay Scholarship program and individuals who are committed to keeping the McKay Scholarship Program a viable choice for parents of students with disabilities in Florida. The Coalition's mission is to assimilate and disseminate information about the McKay Scholarship program from sources such as the Department of Education (DOE), the legislature, schools, parents, and the community. The Coalition also advocates for McKay Scholarship schools and students with disabilities to ensure viability of this program.

