



## Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program Understanding the Program

Dr. John D. Barge, State School Superintendent  
"Making Education Work for All Georgians"

The Georgia Special Needs Scholarship (GSNS) Program is a parental choice program for special needs students attending Georgia public schools who are served under an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The following provides information regarding eligibility and the different choice options available under the GSNS Program for the 2012 – 2013 school year.

### STEP 1: VERIFY A STUDENT'S ELIGIBILITY

In order to qualify for the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program a student must meet the following requirements:

**Student Eligibility Criteria 1-** A student have must 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 attended a Georgia public school (grades K – 12) the entire 2011 – 2012 school year. Pre-school special education students do not qualify. A student must complete a full school year in kindergarten before he/she can be eligible.

**Student Eligibility Criteria 3-** A student was reported by a school district(s) during student counts conducted in October 2011 and March 2012 by public schools.

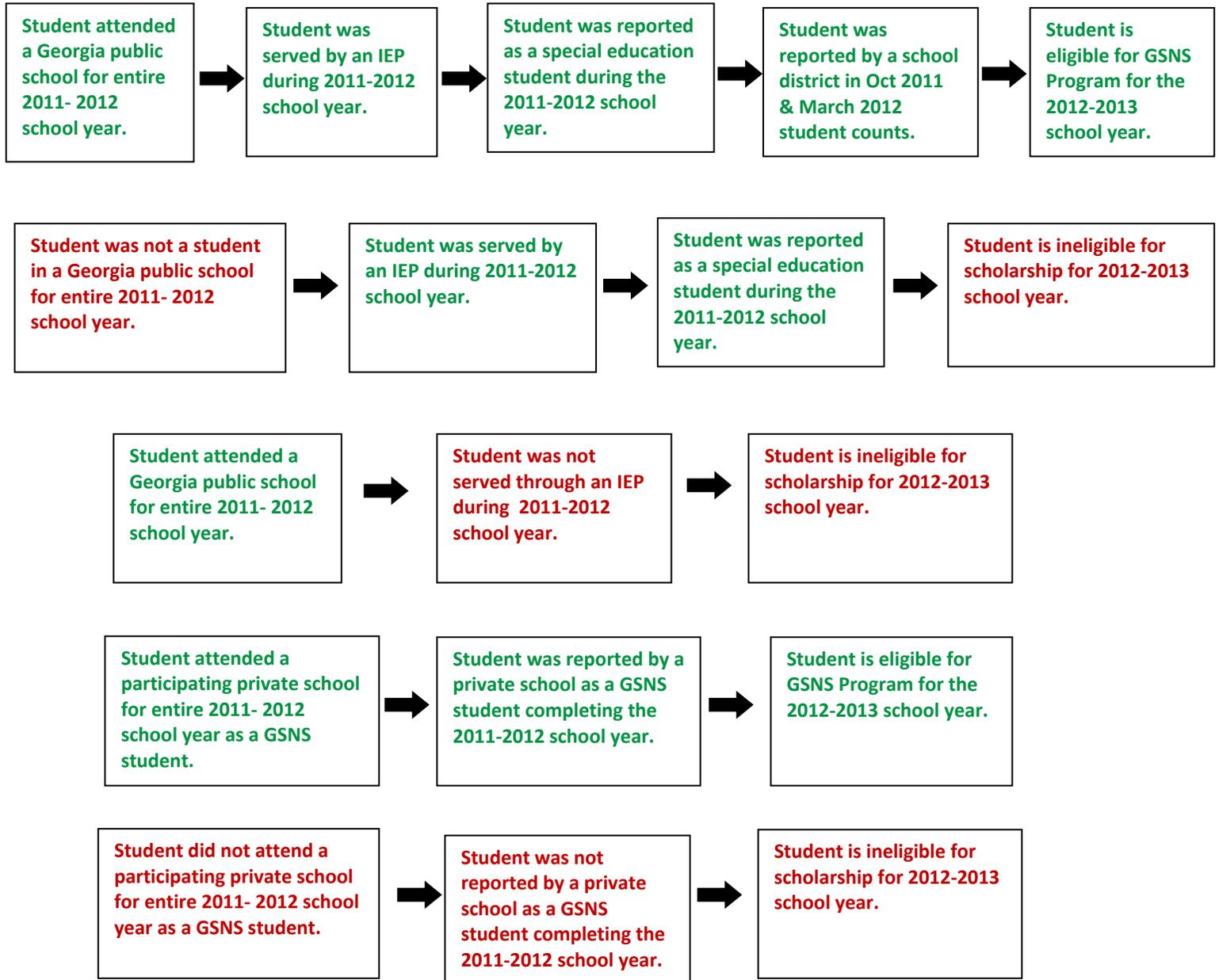
**Student Eligibility Criteria 4 -** A student does not need to have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for the entire school year to qualify for the GSNS Program. A student must have received special education services at some point during the 2011 – 2012 school year under an IEP. A student must be reported by a school district(s) in either the October 2011 **OR** March 2012 student counts **OR** in student record as a student receiving special education services by the end of the school year.



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The diagram below will assist a parent/guardian verify a student's eligibility for the 2012 - 2013 school year.



**THERE ARE NO EXCEPTIONS TO THE ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA.**



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### The following students are ineligible for the GSNS program:

- Pre-school students,
- Home school students,
- Students privately placed in residential treatment facilities,
- Students attending a Department of Juvenile Justice School,
- Students in the Early Intervention Program (EIP)
- Students with an Individualized Accommodation Plan (IAP); and/or
- Students otherwise not eligible per Official Code of Georgia Annotated §20-2-2114.

### STEP 2: IF A STUDENT IS ELIGIBLE, DECIDE WHICH CHOICE OPTION TO USE

If a student meets the eligibility criteria for the GSNS Program; parents/guardians have 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.

**Note:** Transportation under either the private or public school choice options are the responsibility of a parent. Funds received through the GSNS Program can only be used to offset tuition and fees at a private school authorized by the State Board of Education to participate in the program. Funds cannot be used to offset the costs of out of district tuition, charter schools, or other options available under public school choice.

### PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE OPTION

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

- Another public school within their district of residence; or
- Another public school system outside their district of residence; or
- To one of the three state schools for the blind or deaf.

The authority to grant or deny transfer requests belongs to a school system. School systems can create their own forms and set deadlines for transfer requests. Parents/guardians must contact a school system directly regarding the process the school system uses for public school transfer requests through the GSNS Program.



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Once a transfer request has been authorized by a school system, the student must be allowed to complete all grades at a school. For example, if a student was granted a transfer request to a middle school that serves grades 6 - 8, the transfer request would apply to the student's attendance through grade 8.

While there is a public school choice form available on the GSNS webpage, a parent/guardian must contact a school system directly since many school systems use their own form and can set their own deadlines regarding transfer requests. A parent can link to any school system from the Georgia Department of Education's home page at [www.gadoe.org](http://www.gadoe.org), look for the school finder on the home page.



### TRANSFERS WITHIN A SCHOOL SYSTEM

A school system reviewing a transfer request must evaluate the request based on lack of space and/or the availability of a special education program at the requested public school that can meet the services outlined in a student's IEP. If there is no space available and/or if the public school requested by a parent/guardian cannot provide special education services outlined in a student's IEP, then the school system can deny the transfer request.

### TRANSFERS OUTSIDE OF A SCHOOL SYSTEM

A school system reviewing a transfer request to its school system from another school system can deny a request for even if there is room at a school and the availability of a special education program at the requested public school that can meet the services outlined in a student's IEP.

If a school district approves an out of district transfer request, it can charge a parent/guardian for the costs of educating a student; also known as out of district tuition. **Note:** Funds received through the GSNS Program cannot be used to offset the costs of out of district tuition.



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### PRIVATE SCHOOL CHOICE OPTION

There are no application or income restrictions for eligibility in the GSNS Program.

Scholarships generally range from \$2,500 - \$13,500. \$6,000 is the average scholarship amount.

A scholarship calculator is available on the web page for parents/guardians to see how much a child would be eligible to receive through the GSNS Program. It is updated annually in May with student information for the upcoming school year.

The scholarship calculator will only work if a student is eligible for the GSNS Program. The amount shown on the award sheet (see example below) is the annual amount that a student will receive over the course of four quarterly payments made during a school year. The word estimate is included because as with all state funded programs, funding for the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program is pending appropriations made by the Georgia General Assembly during a fiscal year.

**The award sheet generated by the scholarship calculator is the only proof needed of a student's eligibility for the GSNS Program. A parent/guardian must print the award sheet and make copies of it.**

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### Determine Student's Scholarship Eligibility/Amount

Please note: The scholarship amount quoted on this website is only an estimate and may not match the actual amount of your child's private school scholarship for the 2010-2011 school year.

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School Year: 2012

Student First Name: [REDACTED]

Student Last Name: [REDACTED]

Student Birthday: [REDACTED]

Estimated Scholarship Amount: \$6789



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The scholarship can only be used at a private school authorized to participate in the GSNS Program. A parent/guardian must provide a copy of the scholarship award sheet to a private school when applying to the private school. This notifies the private school that a student is eligible for the GSNS Program.

In the fall of the new school year, private schools will report to the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) the students enrolled at their schools who are eligible to receive funding through the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program. This lets the GaDOE know which students are participating in the private school choice option and where they are enrolled.

Only private schools authorized by the State Board of Education can participate in the GSNS Program. The list of authorized private schools is on the GSNS web page <http://www.gadoe.org/sb10.aspx>.

### **IMPORTANT**

Many parents/guardians are surprised to learn that a private school participating in the GSNS Program is not required to follow a student's IEP and it is not required to provide special education services to students. This stems from the law governing the GSNS Program, the Official Code of Georgia Annotated 20-2-2114 (f), states ***Acceptance of scholarship shall have the same effect as a parental refusal to consent to services pursuant to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C.A. Section 1400, et seq.*** This means that accepting a scholarship is the same as refusal to provide parental consent for special services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and a participating private school is neither required to follow a student's IEP nor is it required to provide special education services to a student. A parent/guardian must ask a private school directly regarding the specific special education or other services it may be able to provide for students.

The GSNS Program is funded only with state funds. By law, federal and local funds are not included in the scholarship.

On the GSNS webpage there is a document entitled *Choosing a School* which is a guide to assist parents/guardians in choosing private schools for their children.



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### STEP 3: IF CHOOSING THE PRIVATE SCHOOL CHOICE OPTION: ENROLL A STUDENT IN A PARTICIPATING PRIVATE SCHOOL

The scholarship can only be used at a private school authorized to participate in the GSNS Program. The list of authorized private schools is on the GSNS web page <http://www.gadoe.org/sb10.aspx>.

Participation in the GSNS Program is voluntary on the part of private schools and is open to all private schools. If there is a school a parent/guardian is interested in that is not on the current authorized private school list, the parent/guardian is encouraged to ask the school to apply. The application with instructions and eligibility requirements for private schools for the 2012 - 2013 school year will be available on the web page in January 2012.

A private school participating in the GSNS Program is not required to accept a student who is eligible for the GSNS Program nor is it required to alter any of its business practices or policies under the GSNS Program. A parent/guardian must comply with all the private school's policies. GaDOE staff **cannot** resolve disputes that may arise between a parent/guardian and the private school.

If a private school grants admission to a student, **parent/guardian must provide a copy of the student's scholarship award sheet to the private school.** In the fall of the new school year, private schools will report to the Georgia Department of Education the students enrolled at their schools who are eligible to receive funding through the GSNS Program. Without notification of a student's eligibility, the private school will not report that student as enrolled in the GSNS Program to the Georgia Department of Education. This will affect the scholarship payments for a student and could affect his/her eligibility for the GSNS Program.

If a private school participating in the GSNS Program accepts a student, a parent/guardian must read and understand any contracts/agreements entered into with a private school. Parent/guardian must obtain written copies of any contracts/agreements entered with the school (e.g. tuition reimbursement, fee schedules). GaDOE staff **cannot** resolve any disputes that may arise between a parent/guardian and a private school.

Upon acceptance of the scholarship, a parent/guardian assumes full financial responsibility for the education of the scholarship student, including transportation to and from the participating school.

Once accepted into a private school a parent/guardian must withdraw their student from the public school at the beginning of the new school year following the procedures of the public school. A student cannot be dually enrolled at a public and private school and receive a scholarship.



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### **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.**

### **STEP 4: CONTINUING A STUDENT'S PARTICIPATION IN THE GSNS PROGRAM**

A student may continue to participate in the GSNS Program in subsequent school years as long as:

Student remains a resident of Georgia; and

Student's parents/guardians remain residents of Georgia; and

Student has continual enrollment and attendance in a private school participating in the GSNS Program unless excused by the school for illness or other good cause; and

Parent/guardian complies with GSNS law and rule.

Eligibility for the GSNS Program ends once a student graduates from high school and receives a high school diploma or if the student turns 21 years old and has not yet received a high school diploma.

If a parent/guardian transfers a student back into public school during the school year, the scholarship for a student will end. A student will need to regain eligibility for the GSNS Program.

Scholarship payments for returning GSNS students are calculated using the data from the last year a student was in a Georgia public school. The data is entered into the State public education funding formula that applies to the upcoming school year.

**Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program  
Explanation of Funding for New and Continuing Students**

The Georgia Special Needs Scholarship amount is based on information reported by each school system during the previous school year's October student count -- FTE. The amount of state funds a school system earns for a special education student in Georgia is based on four factors: the student's disability, severity of that disability as rated by the IEP team, segments (hours) served at time of October Full-Time Enrollment-1 count, and the level of service for those segments. By law, federal and local funds are not included in the scholarship.

There are six (6) state funded segments (classes) for which a student is registered. The state funding for the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program is determined by multiplying the number of segments for each class by the earnings for that class. The sum of these earnings represents both the state funding a school system has earned for a student and the funding amount available for a student's Georgia Special Needs Scholarship.

Scholarship payments for continuing GSNS students are calculated using the data from the last year a student was in a Georgia public school. The data is entered into the State public education funding formula that applies to the upcoming school year.

Scholarships actually paid through the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program are dependent on annual appropriations made by the Georgia General Assembly and is the maximum the Georgia Department of Education can use for a child's scholarship.

Segments for 2010 - 2011 & 2011 - 2012 School Year	Per Segment (class) amount	Student #1		Student #2	
		Per Segment (class) amount	Earnings	Per Segment (class) amount	Earnings
Kindergarten	679		0		0
Kindergarten EIP	839		0		0
Grades 1-3	526		0		0
Grades 1-3 EIP	738		0		0
Grades 4-5	422	4	1,688	3	1,266
Grades 4-5 EIP	735		0		0
Grades 6-8 Middle Grades	415		0		0
Grades 6-8 Middle School Incentive	459		0		0
Grades 9-12	409		0		0
Vocational Labs	484		0		0
Special Education I	979		0		0
Special Education II	1,152		0	2	2,305
Special Education III	1,468	2	2,936		0
Special Education IV	2,381		0	1	2,381
Special Education V	1,005		0		0
Gifted	682		0		0
Remedial	537		0		0
Alternative Program	656		0		0
Eng. to Speakers of other Langs. (ESOL)	1,036		0		0
<b>Total of 6 Segments</b>			<b>4,624</b>		<b>5,952</b>