

**Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program  
Private School Financial Guidance  
2011 – 2012 School Year**

**IMPORTANT:** This document is for private schools authorized to participate in the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship (GSNS) Program. This page is only a guide to summarize important financial requirements related to the GSNS Program. The provisions written in GSNS law and rule take precedence. Private schools must also refer to the *Private Schools Responsibilities* document posted on the GSNS web page <http://www.gadoe.org/sb10.aspx> for complete documentation regarding the allowable uses of funds received through the GSNS Program.

1. If a private school operates another location or would like to open a new location, would the authorization received by the private school to participate in the GSNS Program apply to the new location(s)?

No, the authorization received by a private school does not apply to other or new locations. To participate in the GSNS Program, new locations of a currently authorized private school must apply by submitting a completed application package to the GaDOE by June 30 of a calendar year to participate in the GSNS Program for the next school year.

Potential private school applications must include all program information requested by the GaDOE. Including documentation necessary for the GaDOE to ensure the potential private school can meet eligibility requirements as outlined in O.C.G.A. § 20-2-2115. Failure by a private school to complete any component of the application by the provided deadline will result in an incomplete application. Incomplete applications will not be recommended to the SBOE for authorization and inclusion on the authorized GSNS private school list.

2. Can a private school participating in the GSNS Program enroll a public school student after the September 16, 2011 deadline and a parent still receive scholarship funds for the student?

No, a student must be enrolled and attending a participating private school by September 16, 2011 to receive funding under the GSNS Program for the 2011 – 2012 school year.

3. Can a private school participating in the GSNS Program enroll a student transferring from another private school?

At any point during the school year, a parent can transfer a student to another private school authorized to participate in the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship (GSNS) Program. To maintain a student's scholarship, the GaDOE recommends that a parent not remove a student from his/her current private school until parent has received acceptance from another authorized private school.

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Transferring a student to another private school does not dismiss parents from their obligation to pay tuition and/or fees owed to the original private school. Private schools can divide a payment if a transfer student's scholarship is sufficient to cover tuition and fees at both schools during the payment cycle. Schools can decide between themselves how the payment will be divided.

The following is only an example of how schools can divide a scholarship payment if there are sufficient funds:

**EXAMPLE:** Student's scholarship payment was \$2,000 for a payment cycle. Student attended School A for 35 school days during the payment cycle and then transferred to School B. School A would receive the payment. School A determines its per diem costs are \$50/day and retains \$1,750 of the payment. School A would issue a check drawn from its school account to School B for the remaining \$250.

4. Can a student attend a private school participating in the GSNS Program for only part of a service period and be eligible to receive a payment?

A GSNS student must be enrolled and attending an authorized private school for a majority of school days during a payment cycle to be eligible to receive a payment for that cycle. The cutoff dates for a student to be eligible to receive a payment for a cycle are provided in the fiscal year 2012 payment calendar posted on the GSNS web page. If a student withdraws from a private school prior to the date designated for each payment cycle and does not transfer to another authorized private school, no scholarship payment for the student will be issued. Withdrawal from a private school does not release parents from any contractual obligations they have entered into with a private school. The GaDOE recommends private schools make parents aware of this requirement and include it in agreements or contracts.

5. Can a student transfer to a private school from a public school after September 16, 2011 and receive scholarship funds for the 2011 – 2012 school year?

No, a student cannot transfer to a participating private school from a public school after September 16, 2011 and receive scholarship funds for the 2011 – 2012 school year.

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6. How are the scholarship amounts calculated for students who participated in the GSNS Program during the 2010 - 2011 school year and are continuing in the GSNS Program for the 2011 - 2012 school year?

Scholarship payments for the 2011 – 2012 school year are calculated using the data from the last year a student was in a Georgia public school. The data is entered into the state’s public education funding formula that applies to the 2011 - 2012 school year to determine the scholarship amount for a student.

As with all state funded programs, scholarships actually paid through the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program are dependent on appropriations made by the Georgia General Assembly.

7. How will GaDOE make payments to parents of eligible students attending private schools?

Four times during the school year, each private school will submit its enrolled GSNS students through the GSNS portal for the processing of scholarship payments. Each school is issued a username and password to the portal. Private schools should restrict who has access to the log-in information. It is also recommend that two people in the office be responsible for submitting enrolled GSNS students to GaDOE. This way if one person is unavailable another staff person can complete the work.

The Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program Office will verify the information submitted with internal records of scholarship recipients. When verification is completed, scholarship **checks made payable to students’ parents** will be mailed to the appropriate private school. Mail out dates for the 2011 – 2012 school year are listed in the fiscal year 2012 payment calendar posted on the GSNS web page.

If a school fails to report a GSNS student to the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE), a scholarship payment for the student will not be issued. Therefore, it is important to submit accurate student information by deadlines established by the GaDOE. Submission deadlines for the 2011 – 2012 school year are listed in the fiscal year 2012 payment calendar posted on the GSNS web page.

On-line training sessions are held for schools regarding submitting data through the GSNS portal. Recordings of the training sessions are posted on the GSNS web page for schools to review.

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8. How should tuition and fee charges be administered for families where one sibling has a scholarship and the other does not?

It is strongly recommended that the accounts for siblings receiving the scholarship be kept separate from siblings not receiving a scholarship. Scholarship funds of an eligible student **cannot** be used to pay for tuition or other fees of siblings attending the private school who are ineligible for the GSNS Program.

9. Can a private school charge different tuition to just GSNS students?

No, a private school cannot charge higher tuition or unique fees to only GSNS students. Private schools participating in the GSNS Program can use a differentiated tuition and fee schedule. For example, tuition plans based on student grade level. The differentiated tuition and fee schedule established by a private school must be clearly defined in writing for parents and equitably applied to all students attending the school.

For example, a participating private school could have a tuition plan for its special needs students that is \$2,000 above the tuition plan for its non special needs students. This would be permissible because all families with special needs students attending the private school are charged under the same tuition plan, not just the GSNS students at the school. This example would not be permissible if only families of GSNS students were charged under the costlier tuition plan, but not other families of special needs students attending the private school.

A private school cannot charge higher tuition or unique fees to only GSNS students in order to obtain the full amount a student qualifies for under the GSNS Program. Any school found doing so will be in violation of the GSNS Program and could lose its eligibility to participate.

10. If checks are made payable to a student's parent or guardian, how does the private school receive payment?

Private schools notify parents of GSNS students that a payment has been received by the school. The parent (**whose name is on the check**) has 30 calendar days from date of notice to endorse the check over to the private school for deposit. This is referred to in the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship law as a *restrictive endorsement*.

If a parent fails or refuses to endorse the check within the timeframe outlined a private school must return the check to GaDOE after 30 calendar days from the date of notice. When returning a check, a school must fill out and include a check return form which is available on the GSNS web page.

A private school cannot return a check prior to the 30 day window and must give a parent a reasonable opportunity to endorse a scholarship check.

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Under no circumstances is a parent to be allowed to remove a check from a private school.

Under no circumstances is a school to endorse checks for parents even if they have given a school permission to do so.

Under no circumstances is a school to deposit a scholarship check without a parent's signature.

11. How does a private school reimburse a parent who has already paid tuition?

A parent would still need to endorse a scholarship check over to the private school for the private school to deposit. The private school would issue a refund to the parent using a check drawn directly from the school's accounts. It is recommended that private schools have a written policy regarding the tuition and fee policies for parents whose children participate in the GSNS Program and provide this information to parents.

12. What happens if a private school is not paid for a student it has enrolled in the GSNS Program?

Private school should verify that the student was submitted as enrolled at the school using the GSNS portal. If a student was not submitted to the GaDOE, the private school must contact the GaDOE regarding the error and request funds for the student. A private school would need to provide proof the student was enrolled and attending prior to September 16, 2011.

If the GaDOE can verify the student was enrolled and attending prior to September 16, 2011, it will notify the private school of funds it is due and a payment will be issued at the next payment cycle.

13. How does a private school return payments to the GaDOE?

Private Schools must complete the check return form found on the GSNS web page when returning scholarship checks to the GaDOE.

14. Does a private school participating in the GSNS Program have to alter any of its business practices?

A private school participating in the GSNS Program is under no obligation to alter its business practices. A parent is responsible for complying with the private school's business practices and policies.

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A parent must read and understand any contracts/agreements entered into with a private school. Therefore, a private school must provide a parent 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 and a private school.

15. Are funds received through the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program sufficient to cover tuition and fees at a private school?

In most cases, a student's scholarship will not be sufficient to cover tuition and fees at a private school. Scholarships paid through the GSNS Program are dependent on appropriations made by the Georgia General Assembly and are only intended to offset the tuition and fees at a private school.

The amount of a scholarship is equal to the amount of state funds the public school system received for the special education student during the prior school year; or the amount of the tuition and fees charged by the private school, **whichever is less**. Remaining funds return to the State treasury.

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. If tuition and fees are less than the scholarship award, the lesser amount will be paid under the scholarship. The GSNS Program by law will always pay the lesser of the two amounts.

**Example:**

Tuition & Fees= \$12,000  
Less Student Scholarship = (\$5,000)  
Parent Financial Responsibility= \$7,000

16. What types of expenses would **not** be covered by the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program?

GSNS funds cannot be used to pay for the following:

- Transportation
- Before or after school care
- Meals
- Tutoring
- Fees associated with field trips

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- Athletic fees
- School supplies
- Summer school programs
- Other fees as determined by the GaDOE.

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17. How long can a student continue to receive funds through the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program?

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

- ✓ Student remains a resident of Georgia; and
- ✓ Student's parent/guardian remain residents of Georgia; and
- ✓ Student has continual enrollment and attendance in a private school participating in the GSNS Program; 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.