



GEORGIA
CENTER for OPPORTUNITY

GEORGIA SCHOOL CHOICE HANDBOOK

2019 Parents Guide



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CENTER *for* OPPORTUNITY

The Georgia Center for Opportunity (GCO) is independent, non-partisan, and solutions-focused. Our team is dedicated to creating opportunities for a quality education, fulfilling work, and a healthy family life for all Georgians. To achieve our mission, we research ways to remove barriers to opportunity in each of these pathways, promote our solutions to policymakers and the public, and help effective and innovative social enterprises deliver results in their communities. Our ultimate goal is to see every Georgian who is willing to seize the opportunities presented to them living a life that can be characterized as truly flourishing.

PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

“A charter school is a public school of choice that operates under the terms of a charter, or contract, with an authorizer, such as the state and local boards of education. Charter schools receive flexibility from certain state and local rules in exchange for a higher degree of accountability for raising student achievement.” ¹

Eligibility Requirements

Students must live in the school system of the charter school. Some charter schools have an attendance zone, and students living in this part of the district receive enrollment preference. If space is still available, the charter school can open enrollment to those outside their attendance zone.

School Options

- Some Georgia school systems have multiple charter school options available for students in their district, while others do not have any. Visit (<http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Charter-Schools/Pages/Approved-Charter-Schools.aspx>)
- Georgia has multiple online charter schools that students can attend from anywhere in the state. The county/districts for these schools are identified as “Statewide” in the list of Georgia charter schools.

Costs

- Charter schools are free public schools. They cannot charge tuition.
- Some charter schools do not provide transportation.

How to Apply

1. Find a charter school in your district that you are interested in. Visit (<http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Charter-Schools/Pages/Approved-Charter-Schools.aspx>.) Many charter schools have open houses in the fall and winter to help families learn more about the school.
2. Complete the charter school application by the application deadline. Enrollment periods vary from school to school, often beginning in January with deadlines in March or April. However, some application deadlines may be as early as the end of January. Contact individual schools early to inquire about admission deadlines.
3. Following the application deadline, if the number of applicants does not exceed the available spaces, all eligible applicants will be admitted.
4. If there are more eligible applicants than available spaces, the school is required to hold a public lottery. Lotteries are usually held shortly after the school’s application deadline, and the results must be made public.

¹ “General Frequently Asked Questions,” Georgia Department of Education. Accessed July 26, 2019. <http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Charter-Schools/Pages/General-Frequently-Asked-Questions.aspx>.



CHARTER SCHOOL FACTS

Georgia has 115 Charter Schools 97 start-ups and 18 conversion charter schools.²

In 2017-2018 there were 86,549 students enrolled in Charter Schools – less than 5% of Georgia’s total student population.

In 2017-2018 there were over 15,000 students on the charter school waiting list in Georgia.³

Questions?

Visit the “Programs & Initiatives” section on the Georgia Department of Education website (www.doe.k12.ga.us) and click on Charter Schools or call the DOE (404) 651-8734.

2 “General Frequently Asked Questions.” Career, Technical and Agricultural Education. Accessed January 22, 2019. <http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Charter-Schools/Pages/General-Frequently-Asked-Questions.aspx>.

3 “Charter School Enrollment Numbers in GA.” Georgia Charter Schools Association. 2018. Accessed January 22, 2019. <https://gacharters.org/operate-a-school/for-educators/charter-school-enrollment-numbers-in-ga/>

PUBLIC SCHOOL TRANSFERS

In 2009, the Georgia General Assembly passed a law (House Bill 251) that requires local school systems to offer students the option to transfer to other schools within their school system that have space available. This is known as intra-district transfer.

Eligibility Requirements

Student must be enrolled in a public school in Georgia.

School Options

- Another public school within the student's district of residence that has available space in the student's grade.
- Most districts only allow transfers at the beginning of the school year, but all can elect to accept students throughout the school year.
- A student who transfers to another school may continue to attend the school until completing all grades of the school.

Costs

- School systems cannot charge tuition for students transferring within their district.
- Transportation is the responsibility of the parent/guardian.

How to Apply

1. Contact your local school system to see which schools will be accepting transfers and in which grades under House Bill 251. Each system is required to notify parents by July 1st of each year which schools have space available. Many systems post this information on their website well before July 1st.
2. Access a transfer request on your district website, at the district office, or at your local school and complete the transfer application. Some school systems require parents to complete the application in person at the district office. Application periods can be as short as one or two weeks. **The application period for many districts is in June or July, but deadlines could be as early as January.** Contact your district to inquire about transfer deadlines.
3. If more students apply than there is space available, some school systems make decisions on a first come, first served basis, while others hold a random lottery.
4. Following the application deadline, the school system will notify parents if their transfer request was accepted or denied.



💡 PUBLIC SCHOOL FACTS

Georgia's 2,200 public schools serve over 1.6 million students.⁴

Questions?

Contact the main office of your local school system and ask about House Bill 251 public school transfers.

⁴ "Schools and Districts." Career, Technical and Agricultural Education. Accessed January 22, 2019. <http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/AskDOE/Pages/Schools-and-Districts.aspx>.

TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIP FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS

The Georgia Tax Credit Scholarship Program was created by the Georgia General Assembly in 2008 to encourage individuals and corporations to donate money for private school scholarships to increase student access to private schools. In 2018 donation commitments hit the cap of \$58 million by January 2nd to Georgia's Student Scholarship Organizations (SSOs), which provide private school scholarships to Georgia students. Due to the number of donations, all gifts were prorated down to 54.99%. During the 2018 session, the legislature increased the tax credit.⁵

Eligibility Requirements

1. Georgia resident
2. Eligible to enroll in a qualified first grade, kindergarten, or pre-kindergarten program or enrolled in and attending for at least six weeks a Georgia secondary or primary public school. The enrollment and six-week attendance requirement shall be waived for students who:
 - a. Are assigned or would be assigned to a public school that the Office of Student Achievement determines to be a low-performing school
 - b. Were subject of officially documented cases of school-based physical violence or student-related verbal abuse threatening physical harm
 - c. Were enrolled in a home study program for at least one year immediately prior to receiving a scholarship
3. Scholarships are distributed by SSOs and some have additional eligibility requirements.

School Options

Any private school that meets the following criteria:

- Accredited or in the process of becoming accredited.
- Located in Georgia.
- Adheres to the provision of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964.
- Satisfies the requirements prescribed by law for private schools in Georgia.
- Accepts tax credit scholarships from an approved SSO.

Scholarship Amount

- SSOs and private schools determine scholarship amounts.
- The maximum scholarship amount given in any given year cannot exceed the average state and local expenditures per student in public elementary and secondary education.
- The average scholarship value for 2018 was \$3,718.⁶
 - Funds can only be used for private school tuition and fees.
 - Transportation is the responsibility of the parent/guardian.
- The maximum allowed scholarship amount in 2019 is \$10,387.⁷

⁵ "Qualified Education Expense Tax Credit." Department of Revenue. Accessed January 22, 2019. <https://dor.georgia.gov/documents/qualified-education-expense-tax-credit>.

⁶ "Updated GOAL Results." Georgia GOAL Scholarship Program, Inc. Accessed January 30, 2019. <http://www.goalscholarship.org/results/>



How to Apply

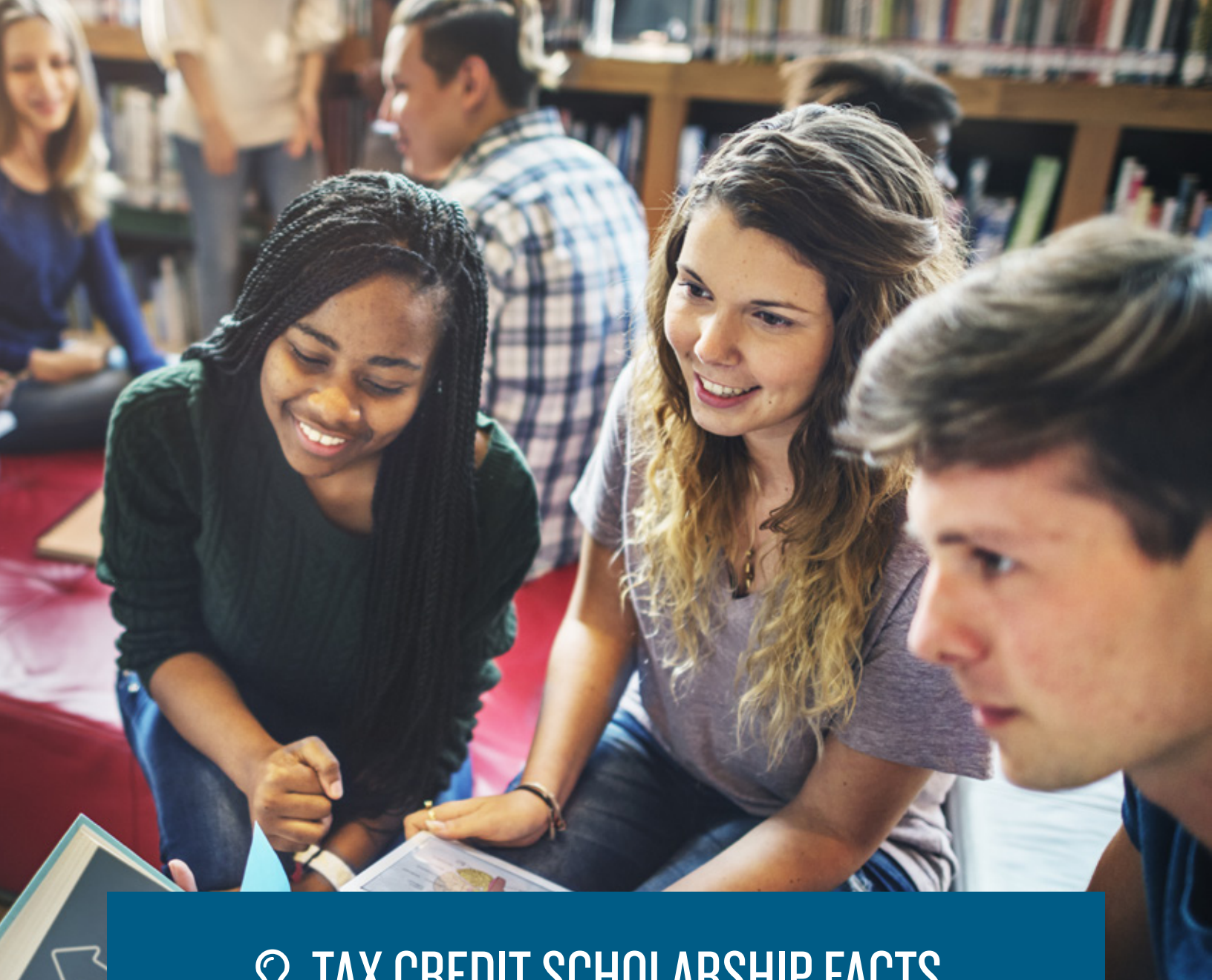
Scholarships are distributed by Student Scholarship Organizations (SSOs). As of December 2018, there were 32 approved Georgia SSOs.⁸ Students can apply for a scholarship in two ways:

1. Through a private school:
 - a. Identify a private school you are interested in.
 - b. Ask the school what SSO they work with and how you can go about receiving a tax credit scholarship.
2. Through a SSO:
 - a. Contact a SSO on the approved list (Visit <http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Policy/Documents/SSO%20List%20Revised%20December%202018%20%282%29.pdf>)
 - b. Ask each SSO how to apply for a scholarship.

Each SSO and private school has a limited number of tax credit scholarships available, and scholarships run out quickly. Parents should begin looking into scholarships as early as January for the following school year.

⁷ "Georgia Tax Credit Program." Career, Technical and Agricultural Education. Accessed January 22, 2019. <http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Policy/Pages/Tax-Credit-Program.aspx>.

⁸ "Georgia Tax Credit Program." Career, Technical and Agricultural Education. December 5, 2018. Accessed January 22, 2019. <http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Policy/Pages/Tax-Credit-Program.aspx>.



💡 TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIP FACTS

In 2017 a total of 13,247 tax credit scholarships awarded to 13,247 Georgia Students.⁹

Questions?

Visit the "Georgia Tax Credit Program" section of the Georgia Department of Education website (<http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Policy/Pages/Tax-Credit-Program.aspx>) or call 404-463-7891.

⁹ "Georgia - Qualified Education Expense Tax Credit." EdChoice. Accessed January 23, 2019. <https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice/programs/georgia-qualified-education-expense-tax-credit/>.

SPECIAL NEEDS SCHOLARSHIP FOR PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS

The Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program was created by the Georgia General Assembly in 2007 (Senate Bill 10) to provide students with special needs greater educational options in both public and private schools.

Eligibility Requirements

1. Students must have a parent/guardian who currently lives in Georgia and has been a resident for at least one calendar year.
2. Must have received special education services through an IEP at some point during the year.
3. Attend a Georgia public school the entire previous school year.¹⁰

Note: A parent or guardian of a student with a medical condition may petition the State Board of Education to expedite the development of an IEP and waive the one-year public school enrollment requirement.

School Options

- Another public school within the student's district of residence that has available space
- Another public school district outside of the student's district of residence that has available space
- One of the three state schools for the blind or deaf
- A private school authorized to participate in the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program. Visit (<http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Policy/Pages/Special-Needs-Scholarship-Program.aspx> for the list of approved private schools.)

Scholarship Amount

Whichever is less:

- Tuition and fees of the private school
- Amount of public school funding student would have received in public school
 - In 2017-2018, the average annual scholarship amount was \$6,672
 - Scholarships ranged from \$646-\$14,454.
 - Transportation is the responsibility of the parent/guardian.
- Scholarships may only be used for private school tuition. The funds may not be used to offset the costs of out-of-district tuition or other public-school choice options available.¹¹

¹⁰ "Special Needs Scholarship Program." *Career, Technical and Agricultural Education*. Accessed January 22, 2019. <http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Policy/Pages/Special-Needs-Scholarship-Program.aspx>.

¹¹ Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program End of School Year Report 2017-2018 School Year. Ebook. Georgia Department of Education. Accessed January 22, 2019. https://gosa.georgia.gov/sites/gosa.georgia.gov/files/related_files/site_page/GSNS%20Annual%20Report%20SchYr%2017-18.pdf.

How to Apply

1. Complete the scholarship calculator to determine student eligibility and private-school scholarship amount. Visit the “Program & Initiatives” section of the Georgia Department of Education website (www.gadoe.org) and click on the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program, then click on the Additional Resources for Parents, Schools, etc.
2. If selecting the public-school transfer option #12:
 - a. Contact the school system you are interested in transferring to and say you are looking for a Special Needs Scholarship/Senate Bill 10 transfer.
 - b. Complete a public-school choice form.
3. If selecting the private school option:
 - a. Print the reward sheet from the scholarship calculator.
 - b. Apply to eligible private schools you are interested in having your child attend.
 - c. Submit the scholarship calculator reward sheet to the eligible private school.
 - d. For assistance in selecting a private school, visit (<http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Policy/Pages/Special-Needs-Scholarship-Program.aspx>.) for a list of qualifying private schools participating in the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program.¹²
4. The application deadlines for a student to receive a scholarship and transfer from a public school are September 15th, December 15, and March 4 of each school year.

SPECIAL NEEDS SCHOLARSHIP FACTS

In 2017-2018, 249 private schools participated in the Special Needs Scholarship Program.

In 2017-2018, 4,664 students received scholarships and 3,321 continued their participation from the previous school year.

Total 2017-2018 scholarships amounted to \$29 million.

Tuition at participating private schools ranged from \$646-\$14,454.

In 2017-2018 the average voucher value was \$6,672.¹³

Questions?

Visit the “Georgia Special Needs Scholarship” section of the Georgia Department of Education website (<http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Policy/Pages/Special-Needs-Scholarship-Program-Resources.aspx>) or call 770-344-4315.

¹² “Special Needs Scholarship Program Resources.” Career, Technical and Agricultural Education. Accessed January 22, 2019. <http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Policy/Pages/Special-Needs-Scholarship-Program-Resources.aspx>.

¹³ Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program End of School Year Report 2017-2018 School Year. Ebook. Georgia Department of Education. Accessed January 22, 2019. https://gosa.georgia.gov/sites/gosa.georgia.gov/files/related_files/site_page/GSNS%20Annual%20Report%20SchYr%2017-18.pdf.



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