



## Exceptional Education

November 2021

As a parent of a student who receives special education in the DeKalb County School District (DCSD), this letter serves to inform you about your options to exercise public and private school choice. Under a state law passed by the Georgia State Legislature in 2007 (SB10) and a revision passed in 2021 (SB47), parents of students who receive special education and students who receive services under Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation of Act of 1973 may choose, if eligibility criteria are met, to transfer their child to another public school within their district of residence, another public school outside their district of residence, one of the state schools for deaf or blind operated by the state board of education, or a private school authorized to participate in the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship (GSNS).

The Georgia Special Needs Scholarship (GSNS) Program (**also known as Senate Bill 10 on the District's School Choice website**) is a school choice program available for special needs students attending Georgia public schools who are served under an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 Plan. **It is important to note that the application process is online, and selection is via lottery and based upon seat availability only.**

Parents are encouraged to review the many documents available on the Georgia Department of Education website (<http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Policy/Pages/Special-Needs-Scholarship-Program.aspx>) for more information about GSNS. Scholarship amounts for the 2022-2023 school year will be available on the Georgia Department of Education web page by mid-July 2022.

In order to qualify for the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program, a student must meet 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, however, the one-year requirement shall not apply if the student's parent is an active duty military service member stationed in Georgia within the previous year; AND

**Student Eligibility Criteria 2-** The student had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) in effect during the previous school year; AND

- This criterion includes students who received preschool special education services during the previous school year, who will be five years old by September 1<sup>st</sup> and entering kindergarten.
- 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 school year through an IEP. A student must be reported by a school district(s) in either the October OR March student counts OR in final student record as a student receiving special education services by the end of the school year.

**Student Eligibility Criteria 3-** The student spent the prior school year in attendance at a Georgia public school. Prior school year in attendance means that the student was enrolled and reported by a public school system or school

systems for funding purposes at the time of at least one FTE program count, conducted each school year in October and March. Prior school year in attendance shall not apply if:

- The student's parent is an active duty military service member stationed in Georgia within the previous year; OR
- The student has been adopted or placed in a permanent guardianship from foster care pursuant to an order issued by a court of competent jurisdiction within the previous year; OR
- The student previously qualified for a scholarship as provided in state law.

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

- Another public school within their district of residence. In the DCSD, this type of transfer request is addressed during the School Choice Open Enrollment period (**DCSD Application Window is January 7, 2022 – February 4, 2022**); or
- Another public school district outside their district of residence; (see website above for more information) or
- One of the state schools for the blind or deaf operated by the state board of education; or
- A private school authorized to participate in the GSNS Program (see website above for more information).

**Parents may make requests for schools both in the district of residence and outside of the district of residence at the same time.** 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.

The GSNS application can also be accessed through the DeKalb County School District website at [www.dekalbschoolsga.org/school-choice/](http://www.dekalbschoolsga.org/school-choice/).

A parent/guardian of a student eligible for the GSNS Program has three opportunities during a school year to transfer an eligible student from a public school **to an authorized private school** by the following dates for the qualifying school year:

1. September 15th of each year- NO FILING OF INTENT FORM REQUIRED.
2. December 15th of each year - Filing of intent form required (see the GaDOE website for the form).
3. March 4th of each year- Filing of intent form required.

A parent/guardian of a student eligible for the GSNS Program must file the Intent to File for Scholarship application and other required documents with the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) by **12 noon on December 15th of each year or March 4<sup>th</sup> of each year**, if a parent/guardian intends to have a student participate in the **private school choice option**. Forms will not be accepted after these dates.

**Parents are encouraged to contact the Department of Exceptional Education at 678-676-1809 to determine if the appropriate program is available at the schools being considered for a transfer within the District.**