



Exceptional Education

November 2022

As a parent of a 504-eligible student in the DeKalb County School District, 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 Rehabilitation 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 <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Policy/Pages/Special-Needs-Scholarship-Program.aspx> for more information about GSNS.

For 504-eligible students to qualify for the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program, the student must meet all three requirements:

Student Criteria 1- A student must have a parent who currently resides in Georgia and has been a Georgia 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 Criteria 2- The student had a 504 plan in effect during the 2021-2022 school year relating to one or more of the conditions below:

1. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Attention deficit disorder (ADD);
2. Autism spectrum disorder;
3. Bipolar disorder;
4. Cancer;
5. Cerebral palsy;

6. Cystic fibrosis;
7. Deafness;
8. Down syndrome;
9. Drug or alcohol abuse;
10. Dual sensory impairment;
11. Dyslexia;
12. Emotional or behavioral disorder;
13. Epilepsy;
14. Hearing impairment;
15. Intellectual disability;
16. Muscular dystrophy
17. Specific learning disability;
18. Spina bifida;
19. Traumatic brain injury
20. Visual impairment; or
21. Any rare disease identified by the National Institutes of Health's Genetic and Rare Diseases Information Center's list of rare disease disorders; AND

Student 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 both FTE program counts, conducted each school year in October and March. See OCGA 20-2-2112 (5)

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.

*Please note that previously qualified only waives the prior school year in attendance provision, all other requirements including having a 504 Plan during the previous school year and enrollment in a public school are still in effect

SECTION 504 PLAN APPLICATION PROCESS

The changes to Code Section 20-2-2114 (via SB 47) requires verification that a student who qualifies for the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship through a Section 504 Plan has met the eligibility requirements. Parents who believe their student is eligible for Section 504 Plan GSNS award must visit the GaDOE's website to access the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Calculator.

Shadow Rock Center
1040 Kingsway Drive | Lithonia, GA 30058
678-676-1809 | www.dekalbschoolsga.org

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 10, 2023 – February 6, 2023**); or
- Another public school district outside their district of residence; (see website above <http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Policy/Pages/Special-Needs-Scholarship-Program.aspx> 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 GaDOE website 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/.

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 with the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) by **12 noon on December 15th of each year or March 4th 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.