

**Catoosa County Public Schools**  
**Information - Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Act**

**Dear Parent /Guardian**

As the parent of a student who receives section 504 services in our school system, we wanted to let you know about your options to exercise public and private school choice. Under a state law passed by the Georgia State Legislature, parents of students who receive section 504 services may request to transfer their child to a private school or another public school in Georgia.

**Private School Choice Option (See Georgia Department of Education website for more information)**

If you are interested in transferring your child to a private school in Georgia, you may be able to take advantage of a Georgia Special Needs Scholarship. These scholarships provide funding that can be used to offset tuition costs at participating private schools in the State of Georgia. For more information on the application process, please visit the Georgia DOE website at [www.doe.k12.ga.us](http://www.doe.k12.ga.us).

**Parental Right to Choice**

Under the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship (GSNS) law passed in 2007 (O.C.G.A. § 20-2-2113), parent(s)/guardian(s) whose child meets the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship eligibility criteria now have the right to request a public school transfer 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.

Funds received through the GSNS Program can only be used to pay for tuition and fees at a private school authorized by the State Board of Education to participate in the program. The attached form must be completed and sent directly to the school system you want your child to attend. Parent(s)/guardian(s) should contact the school system's office to find out to whom the form should be sent and any deadlines involved in making the request.

**Georgia Special Needs Student Scholarship Eligibility Criteria**

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) or under section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973. In order to qualify for the Georgia special Needs Scholarship Program a student must meet the following requirements:

Student Eligibility Requirement 1 -The student's parent currently resides within Georgia and has been a Georgia resident for at least one year; provided, however, that 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;

**Student Eligibility Requirement 2** - The student has spent the prior school year in attendance at a Georgia public school. 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; AND

**Student Eligibility Requirement 3** - The student had a 504 plan in effect during the school year relating to one or more of these conditions:

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.

### **Transfers Within A School System**

A school system considering a transfer between schools must evaluate the request based on capacity at a requested school(s) and the availability of a program at a requested school(s) which is aligned with the student's Section 504 plan. Capacity is defined in two ways:

- Capacity of the school building based on established health and safety provisions; and
- Class-size capacity by grade and subject, based on state law and rule.

### **Transfers Out of a School System**

A school system considering a request for a transfer into its school system has the authority to approve or deny a public school transfer request for any reason. A school system considering a transfer can deny a request even if there is capacity and a program available that is aligned to the student's IEP within its system. If a request is approved, a school system can charge parent(s)/guardian(s) for the costs of educating a student from outside its school system.

### **Important**

Transportation under this public school choice option is the responsibility of a parent. Funds received through the Special Needs Scholarship Program cannot be used to offset the costs of out of district tuition, charter schools, or other options available under public school choice. Once a transfer request has been approved by a school system, the student must be allowed to complete all grades at a school. The school system can report the student for FTE purposes.