

The Family CAFÉ



CHANGE AGENT NETWORK NEEDS YOU!

Volume 4, Issue 5

This Newsletter Is A Project Of The Family Cafe

December 2023

FRIENDS, WELCOME TO ANOTHER EARLY LEGISLATIVE SESSION!

Important Session Dates

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|--------------------------|---|
| JANUARY 5, 2024 | All drafts of general bills, memorials, and joint resolutions, including drafts for companion bills, must be approved to file in final form |
| JANUARY 9, 2024 | Regular Session convenes (Article III, section 3(b), State Constitution)
12:00 noon — Deadline to file bills for introduction (Senate Rule 3.7(1)) |
| FEBRUARY 24, 2024 | Motion to reconsider made and considered the same day (Senate Rule 6.4(4))
All bills are immediately certified (Senate Rule 6.8) |
| FEBRUARY 27, 2024 | 50th day — Last day for regularly scheduled committee meetings
(Senate Rule 2.9(2)) |
| MARCH 8, 2024 | 60th day — Last day of Regular Session (Article III, section 3(d), State Constitution) |

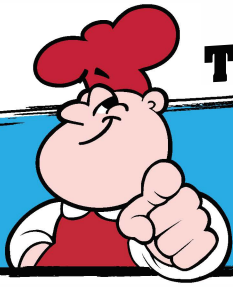
With another Session nearly upon us we will remind ourselves on upcoming important legislative dates & deadlines as well two issues that will be front and center for the disability community: managed care and the creation of the Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities.



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Managed Care Pilot Project

One of the most talked about issues this last legislative session was the inclusion of a managed care pilot program for individuals with developmental disabilities. The pilot was included in a broader health care bill (SB 2510) that Governor DeSantis signed earlier this year. Under the bill, the pilot program will be created in Miami-Dade, Monroe, Hardee, Highlands, Hillsborough, Manatee and Polk counties. Participation in the pilot project will be voluntary and will only be offered to people on the iBudget waitlist. The maximum number of enrollees would be limited to the amount specified in the General Appropriations Act.



The contracted long-term care plan must be a provider service network whose owners include health care providers with experience serving iBudget waiver recipients; this ensures the PSN has experience with this unique population, not only traditional long-term care (with its focus on elderly people). The bill requires the plan to establish an individualized care plan for each enrollee, evaluate and update it at least quarterly, or as changes in conditions and circumstances warrant, and provide services in accordance with that care plan.

AHCA is now in the process of going through the bid process with companies who meet the aforementioned criteria and have submitted their waiver request with the federal government.

This waiver creates:

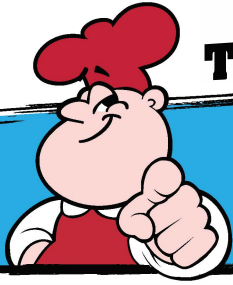
- A voluntary, comprehensive program consisting of managed medical assistance, Long-Term Care (LTC) Waiver services, and Florida Developmental Disabilities Individual Budgeting (iBudget) Waiver services.
- Service for up to 600 individuals who reside in two pilot regions: Region D (Hardee, Highlands, Hillsborough, Manatee, and Polk counties) and Region I (Miami-Dade and Monroe counties).
- Eligibility for individuals 18 years of age or older who are eligible for Medicaid and assigned to one of the categories 1 through 6 as established in s. 393.0659(5) F.S.

We will be paying close attention as this administrative process plays out.

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Changes Made to McKay/Gardiner Scholarships

During last year's Session, legislation was passed that will replace former McKay and Gardiner Scholarship programs with a new combined program called the "Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities." In March of this year, Governor Ron DeSantis signed into law major changes to, and a consolidation of, existing school choice options for all Florida students. Two new programs were created moving forward:

(1) The Family Empowerment Scholarship for Educational Options. This program, which existed previously, has undergone significant financial and regulatory changes. This program has expanded exponentially and will now offer a school voucher to any student regardless of income;

(2) The second program created was named the Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities. Among other things, it will replace both the McKay and Gardiner scholarships.

As has been the case with the McKay Scholarship, FES UA scholarship amounts are based on the Florida Education Finance Program budget established each year by the legislature, and are calculated in relation to the student's grade level, matrix level, and school district.



The Family Empowerment Scholarship was created in 2019 to provide scholarships to students from families with limited financial means. In 2021, House Bill 7045 expanded the program to include two branches of eligibility, the income-based Family Empowerment Scholarship for Educational Options (FES EO) and the Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities (FES UA).

There may be variation in scholarship amount from year to year. However, House Bill 7045 stipulated that for students transitioning to FES UA from McKay, their scholarship amount will not be less than what they received during the 2021-2022 school year.

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Family Empowerment Scholarship — Educational Options FAQs (Florida Department of Education):



1. What is the Family Empowerment Scholarship Educational Options Program (FES EO)?

The Family Empowerment Scholarship Program was established in 2019 by the Florida legislature (Section 1002.394, Florida Statutes) to provide children of families in this state which have limited financial resources with educational options to achieve success in their education. On March 27, 2023, Governor Ron DeSantis signed into law House Bill 1, which expands available school choice options for all students in Florida. As of the 2023-24 school year, financial eligibility restrictions and the current enrollment cap for FES EO have been eliminated.

2. What are the eligibility requirements for FES EO?

A parent of a student may apply for and receive from the state a scholarship if the student is a Florida resident and is eligible to enroll in kindergarten through grade 12 in a public school in this state. Priority is given first to students whose household income level does not exceed 185% of the federal poverty level or who is in foster care or out-of-home care, then to students whose household income level exceeds 185% of the federal poverty level, but does not exceed 400%.

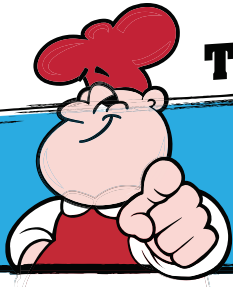
3. What options are available for students under FES EO?

Families of students participating in FES EO may choose to enroll their students in private school that best meets their academic needs and is approved to participate in the scholarship program. Alternatively, the family of a student enrolled in a Florida public school that is different from the school to which they were assigned may request to receive a \$750 scholarship to help cover the cost of transportation if the school district does not provide the student with transportation to the school.

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Family Empowerment Scholarship — Educational Options FAQs (Florida Department of Education): ...continued

4. How many students may participate in FES EO?

As of the 2023-24 school year, there is no longer a cap on the number of FES EO participants in the scholarship law.

5. What is the average award amount for FES EO?

The maximum scholarship amount for each student is based upon their grade level and county of residence. In the 2022- 23 school year, the average award amount was \$7,700. Updated award amounts for 2023-24 will be available soon.

6. How do parents apply for FES EO?

Parents must apply to an eligible non-profit scholarship funding organization that is administering the program. For a list of non-profit scholarship funding organizations please visit the Department's SFO website.

7. Who determines students' eligibility for FES EO?

Once families apply to one of the two approved scholarship funding organizations (SFOs), Those organizations are responsible for collecting and evaluating documentation in support of the applications. SFOs submit eligible students to the Department for funding on a quarterly basis, and then distribute tuition payments to private schools on behalf of the families.



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Family Empowerment Scholarship — Educational Options FAQs (Florida Department of Education): ...continued

8. *What are my responsibilities as a parent?*

The parent of a student participating in FES EO is responsible for:

- Enrolling the student full-time in a private school that is approved to participate in the FES EO program.
- Meeting with the school's principal or designee prior to enrollment to review the school's academic programs and policies, specialized services, code of conduct, and attendance policies.
- Requiring the student to take the norm-referenced assessment administered by the private school.
- Approving each payment made to the private school prior to deposit of funds.
- Fulfilling financial obligations for all eligible expenses in excess of the amount of the scholarship as applicable.
- Applying or renewing participation in the program and providing any necessary documentation in support of the application or renewal, meeting deadlines and other requirements established by the SFO.

9. *Can a child receive an FES EO scholarship and receive their education through a home education program?*

In the 2023-24 school year, students participating in FES EO will meet attendance requirements by enrolling in a private school that is approved by the Department to participate in the scholarship program. Traditional home education options are only available to eligible FES UA students. The Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program will, however, include a "homeschool" option for up to 20,000 students in the 2023-24 school year referred to as a personalized education program (PEP). Families should indicate their interest in the new option when completing their student's application with the SFO.



10. *Are sibling(s) of FES UA students eligible for an FES EO scholarship?*

With the passage of HB1, all Florida students eligible to enroll in a K-12 public school may receive an FES EO scholarship. Parents of students who participated in FES EO as the sibling of an FES UA student in the 2022-23 school year should complete an FES EO application for the 2023-24 school year to continue participation.

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Family Empowerment Scholarship — Educational Options FAQs (Florida Department of Education): ...continued

11. May FES EO students take Florida Virtual School courses?

No K-12 scholarship student may take Florida Virtual School courses except as a private-paying student.

12. Who will administer FES EO funds to schools?

SFOs provide funds to the private school of the parent's choice on a quarterly basis. Parents must approve the payment before scholarship funds are deposited.

13. Can FES EO students use scholarship funds to attend a school that does not meet the requirements for scholarship participation?

No. In order to use scholarship funds, FES EO students must be attending a private school approved by the Department to participate in the program.

14. Will all private schools be required to accept FES EO students?

Private schools are not required to participate in K-12 scholarship programs. Private schools may request to participate in FES EO and become approved by the Department once they have met the requirements established in scholarship law.



This branch of the Family Empowerment Scholarship Program is designed to offer families of students with disabilities, as young as 3 years of age, access to additional education options. Families may choose to enroll their student in another public school, or they may choose to take the opportunity to receive a personal education savings account (ESA) for their student. With an ESA, instead of having their child attend a public school, parents receive a deposit of public funds into government-authorized savings accounts with restricted, but multiple, uses. An ESA can be used to fund not only items such as private school tuition and fees, but also online learning

programs, private tutoring, community college costs, higher education expenses and other approved customized learning services and materials. Families apply and annually renew for participation in FES UA through one of the approved SFOs, which are responsible for determining eligibility, awarding and distributing funding to eligible student accounts, and approving eligible expenditures.

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See you next year!

26TH ANNUAL Family

CAFÉ

JUNE 14-16, 2024

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