



Private School Scholarship Newsletter | March 2023

2023 Legislative Session

The 2023 Legislative Session is currently underway. Please stay tuned for future updates on the outcome in future bulletins from our office.

Attendance Verification for Scholarship Payment Coverage

Regular and Direct Contact

Private school students participating in the state scholarship programs must have regular and direct contact with their private school teachers at your school's physical location. That means your school must provide a program of instruction that meets for a minimum of 170 actual school instruction days and the hourly equivalent of 180 actual school days, as stated in [Rule](#)

- Kindergarten, this requires 540 net instructional hours;
- Grades 1 - 3, 720 net instructional hours;
- Grades 4 – 12, 900 net instructional hours.

Note: Private school remote or hybrid virtual learning options is prohibited for enrolled scholarship students.

Agreed-Upon Procedures Guidelines

If your school collectively receives more than \$250,000 from the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship, Family Empowerment Scholarship Education Option, Family Empowerment Scholarship Unique Abilities, and Hope Scholarship during a fiscal year, then you must contract with an independent certified public accountant to perform agreed-upon procedures pursuant to section 1002.395(6)(o), F.S. The annual report must be submitted to the scholarship funding organization that awards the majority of your school's scholarship funds. Please contact the scholarship funding organization if you have questions about this requirement.

Norm-Referenced Testing

Private schools participating in the Florida Tax Credit (FTC) Scholarship, Family Empowerment Scholarship (Education Option), or Hope Scholarship Program must make provisions for students in grades 3-10 to take one of the nationally norm-referenced tests identified by the Department of Education. Students awarded the Family Empowerment Scholarship (Unique Abilities) option for whom the tests are appropriate are also included in this requirement. **A list of approved assessments, specific instructions, and deadlines are available on the [School Choice website](#)**

Reporting Assessment Results

Participating private schools must report student's scores to the parent and must submit scholarship student's scores to the independent research organization selected by the Department of Education by **August 15** of each year. Please send copies of score sheets with name, testing date, and national percentile ranking to:

Melissa Dyehouse
Learning Systems Institute
Florida State University
Suite 4600 University Center Bldg. C
Tallahassee, FL 32306-2540

Registration Requirements for Florida Private Boarding Schools

Section 409.175, requires private boarding schools in Florida to submit a **Private Boarding School Registration Form** in order to be listed on the Department of Education website as a boarding school. The [Boarding School Registration Application](#) contains statements of affirmation that the school has provided the required notifications related to accreditation to the Department of Children and Families.

A "boarding school" is a school that is registered with the Department of Education as a school that provides a residential service for students and that is either:

- Accredited for academic programs by the Florida Council of Independent Schools, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, an accrediting association that is a member of the National Council for Private School Accreditation, or an accrediting association that is a member of the Florida Association of Academic Nonpublic Schools, and that is accredited for residential programs by the Council on Accreditation, the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities, or the Coalition for Residential Education; or
- Accredited by one of the organizations specified above as a boarding school that includes both an academic and residential component in its accreditation. (Section 409.175(2)(b), Florida Statutes)

A boarding school that cannot produce the required documentation, is not properly registered with the Department of Education, or has not obtained the required accreditation shall be considered to be providing residential group care without a license. The Department of Children and Families may impose administrative sanctions or seek civil remedies as provided under Section 409.175(11)(a), Florida Statutes. (Section 409.175(17)(d), Florida Statutes)

If you have already registered as a private school by submitting a current Private School Annual Survey, and wish to register as a Private Boarding School, you may access the Private Boarding School Registration Form when you are logged in using your school code and password.

2023 Scholarship Compliance Renewal

Renewing private schools that met the Scholarship Compliance Form submission deadline of March 1 must resolve any outstanding compliance issues by May 1 in order to remain eligible to participate in the state scholarship programs for the 2023-2024 school year. Schools having unresolved issues after that date may not be able to participate in scholarship programs for the upcoming school year.

Please contact your [Regional Manager](#) promptly if you have any questions concerning the review process. Schools are advised to contact them as early as possible, as the increasing volume of calls and e-mails may delay their response as deadlines approach.

Scholarship Compliance Notes: *Fingerprint Retention*

During compliance renewal season, it is important for both renewing schools and new participants to understand the employee fingerprinting requirements. Every employee or contracted personnel must electronically undergo a set of fingerprints through the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) for a state and national background screening. The screening results must be securely stored at the school's location and be available for inspection by the Department of Education should your school be selected for a site visit. Once the criminal history report is received, it is the private school's responsibility to ensure each employee and contracted personnel meets the background screening standards described in Section 1002.421, Florida Statutes.

After initial processing, the electronic fingerprint submissions will be retained by FDLE in the Applicant Fingerprint Retention and Notification Program. The retained fingerprints will be searched against all incoming in-state arrest fingerprint submissions, and any matches will be reported to the private school. In addition, schools are required to instruct FDLE to re-run the FBI screening every five years. In order to remain in compliance with program requirements, private schools should promptly pay FDLE invoices for any personnel still working with your school. Further information on the VECHS program can be obtained at <http://www.fdle.state.fl.us/Background-Checks/VECHS-Home.aspx> or by calling (850) 410-8161.

Requirements for Owners/Operators:

Section 1002.421(p), Florida Statutes, requires private schools that intend to participate in state scholarship programs to have **each owner/chief administrator, operator, officer, and board member** reported to the Division of Corporations (www.sunbiz.org) undergo a level 2 background screening **regardless of their contact with scholarship students**. The fingerprints must be submitted electronically through the school's **Volunteer and Employee Criminal History System (VECHS)**.

2023 Scholarship Compliance Upcoming Deadlines

March 1

Date by which participating private schools must mail in an original Scholarship Compliance Form in order to renew scholarship program participation for the 2023-2024 school year.

May 1

Date by which all Compliance Renewal issues must be resolved.

August 15

Date by which standardized testing results must be submitted

Useful Links:

[Regional Managers](#)

[Application & Renewal Instructions](#)

[Compliance Resources](#)

[Update Notification Form](#)

Other Resources



Lieutenant Governor Jeanette Nuñez announced the launch of the 2023 Florida Space Art Contest. With March being Youth Art Month, students are encouraged to create an art piece inspired by the theme ***Time to Travel to 2123: Florida's Future as the Space Capital***. Students in grades K-5 are invited to participate in the art contest. All entries must be received by 5 PM on **Monday, May 8, 2023**. Student contest rules and guidelines can be found online at www.FloridaSpaceArt.com.



Created by the Florida Legislature and housed at the University of Central Florida, the Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities provides financial support so students with intellectual disabilities have opportunities for on-campus college experiences and employment opportunities through degree, certificate, or non-degree programs. Support provided by the Center includes scholarship funding for students and grant funding to support postsecondary institutions as they develop new opportunities. For more information, see fcsua.org.



Commissioner Manny Diaz, Jr. has launched the Commissioner's Book of the Month, a monthly reading challenge to promote literacy and reading engagement in K-12 schools. Literacy skills developed during formative years are essential for students to succeed both academically and in life, and reading comprehension develops as students engage with interesting and meaningful books. Teachers and parents are encouraged to recommend these books to students.

"The Commissioner's Book of the Month will be an opportunity to highlight authors and titles, offering students rewarding opportunities for classroom and at-home discussion.

The Commissioner's recommendations for March 2023 are:

- **Grades K-2 – "The Lion and the Mouse," by Aesop**
- **Grades 3-5 – "Roberto Clemente: Pride of the Pittsburgh Pirates," by Jonah Winter**
- **Grades 6-8 – "Lifeboat 12," by Susan Hood**
- **Grades 9-12 – "The Raft," by S.A. Bodeen**

Guiding questions for educators and parents, can be found each month on the [Commissioner's Book of the Month page](#) of the FDOE website.