



## K-12 Scholarships from the State of North Carolina

North Carolina has two scholarships to assist children and their families who want to attend non-public (private or home) schools for all or part of kindergarten through the end of high school. The Disabilities Grant Program assists children with disabilities, and the Opportunity Scholarship assists lower income families. Find information about both on the North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority website at [www.ncseaa.edu/K-12Grants.htm](http://www.ncseaa.edu/K-12Grants.htm). Students with disabilities from low-income families might qualify for both programs, so please be sure to look at the pages for both.

**The Disabilities Grant Program** allows families to apply for grants of up to \$4,000 per semester to assist with tuition for students with disabilities who are attending or planning to attend non-public schools. Grant funds can be used for tuition, special education instruction, related services such as speech or occupational therapy, and educational technology. Application criteria have changed since the program started, so please review the information below carefully.

Currently, any student with a disability who has lived in the state for at least six months is eligible to apply. "Disability" is determined by the local education authority (LEA), or local school system, as something causing a student to need special education services. In North Carolina, the determination is made through the DEC 3 process. Typically, children with a disability determination from the LEA also have a current or past Individualized Education Program (IEP) from a public school.

Note that at this time, students who are new to the scholarship program need a DEC 3 and/or an IEP from a North Carolina public school to apply for the grant. Students who have a scholarship and are having their disability re-determined may have that done by either their local public school or a private psychologist specializing in school psychology.

Changes to the law allow for two new groups to apply for scholarships, if they have a disability determination: children who are in military families (those currently here and those who moved to the state recently) and children who left the public school system in previous years to attend non-public schools.

Applications begin in May, and scholarship awards are granted in July. Scholarships are awarded based on a priority level determination. Applicants who fall into a top priority get the first chance at funds for the program, and then the other priorities any remaining funds. Those who qualify, but for which no funds are available, will be placed on a waiting list. The current priority list:



Autism Society  
of NORTH CAROLINA

1. **First priority:** Eligible students who received a scholarship in the previous semester
2. **Second priority:** Students who were enrolled in a public school during the previous semester, OR who received special education or related services through the public schools as a preschool child with a disability the previous semester, OR a child identified as a child with a disability in the public school system before the end of initial enrollment in kindergarten or first grade, OR (new) a child whose parent or legal guardian is on full-time duty status in the armed forces.
3. **Third priority:** a child who has been living in the state for at least six months.

Because qualification for the program is complicated, we encourage families who think they may qualify to contact the NC State Education Assistance Authority ([www.ncseaa.edu/K-12Grants.htm](http://www.ncseaa.edu/K-12Grants.htm)) directly with questions.

**Opportunity Scholarships** are open to lower and middle-income students, foster children, and children who have recently been adopted, any of whom move from the public school system into a non-public school. Young children just entering kindergarten or first grade from those groups would also qualify. There are other criteria for eligibility and a formula for how the scholarships are awarded. Please see the NC State Education Assistance Authority website, [www.ncseaa.edu/K-12Grants.htm](http://www.ncseaa.edu/K-12Grants.htm), for information about when and how to apply, what the scholarships can be used for, and more.

**Please note that at this time the Autism Society of North Carolina does not have a list of schools where tuition is at or near the amount of the scholarships/grants.** The NC Division of Non-Public Education publishes a list of private schools in North Carolina at <http://ncadmin.nc.gov/about-doa/divisions/division-non-public-education>. Parents can use this as a starting point for their school research.

**Non-public schools are not required to offer the same services and special education as public schools to children determined to have disabilities.** Private schools are not required to provide a “free and appropriate education” for children with disabilities as public schools are. Your child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP), covering special education and related services needs, is a **legal document** in the public school, and the school is required to follow it. If your child attends a private school, your child may have a personalized education plan or a similar document outlining their needs, but it is only a **guideline**. Private schools are not required to provide the same things as the public schools; in some cases, they may not be able to do so without additional tuition fees.



Autism Society  
of NORTH CAROLINA

For this reason, the Autism Society of North Carolina urges parents to carefully select a private school. Be sure to explain all of your child's needs and behaviors to make sure the school is ready to provide them with the supports to be successful. Ask that the school use the child's IEP as a guide, and add any other supports that you think will be needed. Ask that a personalized education plan be used to document strengths and needs similar to the IEP. The NC Division of Non-Public Instruction provides **information** on private schools at [www.ncdnpe.org](http://www.ncdnpe.org), including frequently asked questions and a guide to selecting a non-public school.

*If you have questions that are not answered in this article or through the NC State Education Assistance Authority, please contact Jennifer Mahan, Director of Advocacy and Public Policy at the Autism Society of North Carolina, 919-865-5068 or [jmahan@autismsociety-nc.org](mailto:jmahan@autismsociety-nc.org).*