



# ARIZONA

## Parent and School Handbook

### Disabled/Displaced Students (Lexie's Law) Scholarships

**AAA Scholarship Foundation – Arizona**

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# **Parent and School Handbook – Arizona DD**

AAA Scholarship Foundation (AAA), a private non-profit organization, is an approved Arizona School Tuition Organization (STO). AAA awards annual scholarships to eligible students entering eligible grade levels from eligible households to help them attend an eligible private school of their choice. The scholarships are for tuition only. An AAA family may NOT accept a scholarship from a state-funded program and/or tax credit program for the same time period they accept an AAA Scholarship.

AAA scholarships ARE NOT TUITION VOUCHERS. Tuition vouchers are government-funded and the payments come from the State. AAA Scholarships are tax credit scholarships.

DO NOT enroll your student into a private school until you have actually received an AAA Scholarship Award Letter and School Commitment Form (SCF)! Funding is not guaranteed. If you enroll your student before receipt of an SCF, you will be responsible for their tuition and fees and you may not qualify for future scholarship funding.

## **Please remember that in applying and if accepting a scholarship you have agreed on the application to the below statements in the Certification Signature Section.**

- √ I certify that the information provided on the application and all supporting documentation submitted at any time is true, correct and complete to the best of my knowledge.
- √ I understand that if I give information that is not true or if I withhold information and my student(s) receive a scholarship for which they are not eligible, I can be lawfully punished for fraud and the scholarship will be denied or revoked.
- √ I certify that no parent/guardian of a student on this application is an owner, operator, principal or person with equivalent decision making authority of an eligible private school or not at the school which my student will attend.
- √ I understand that any information I provide at any time will be verified, which may include computer file matching, public records search, and that I may be required to provide other information and/or documentation.
- √ I authorize the release of personal, and educational information for the purpose of determining eligibility and for research.
- √ I understand that AAA Scholarship Foundation does not discriminate because of race, color, sex, age, disability, religion, nationality or political belief.
- √ I agree to follow the rules and responsibilities as they apply to the program as set forth in the Parent and School Handbook, available online at [www.aaascholarships.org](http://www.aaascholarships.org).
- √ I understand if I am deemed eligible and am awarded a scholarship, that I am not automatically entitled to a scholarship in following years.
- √ I understand that it is my responsibility to reapply and document my eligibility whenever I am required to if I accept a scholarship.
- √ I understand if I enroll my student(s) into a private school before receipt of a Scholarship Award Letter and School Commitment Form (SCF), I will be responsible for their tuition and fees, and the student(s) may not qualify for future scholarship funding. I understand funding is not guaranteed.

## **Scholarship Awarding Procedures**

Households must first complete the AAA application process. Applications are available on the AAA website beginning in mid-February and remain available until funding is determined exhausted by AAA. AAA uses an independent application processing company to process applications.

Households that are determined eligible AND have been awarded funding for the upcoming school year will receive a Scholarship Award Letter and School Commitment Form (SCF) via US postal mail directly from AAA. Results letter are not distributed via any other method.

Households that are determined eligible BUT have not been funded for the upcoming school year will receive a Waitlist Letter a via US postal mail directly from AAA. Results letter are not distributed via any other method.

Households that are determined ineligible will receive an Ineligible Letter via US postal mail directly from AAA. Results letter are not distributed via any other method.

The SCF states the deadline for initial submission. The use of a scholarship cannot be postponed to a later time (eg mid-year or an upcoming year). The household must find an eligible private school for their student(s) as soon as they receive a scholarship award letter and SCF. Failure to meet the deadline stated on the SCF will result in the forfeiture of the awarded scholarship. Contact the AAA office as soon as possible if you have any questions about the deadline.

Families should make a copy of the blank SCF before taking it to an eligible school in case they decide to transfer to a different eligible school later in the year (see the Student Transfer Procedure on page 8).

**Schools should not accept any students without an SCF** unless the household:

- 1) is willing to self-pay their tuition until they are awarded a scholarship, and
- 2) will self-pay if they are not funded, and
- 3) is aware that enrolling in the private school may result in the student not being eligible in future years

If a household receives an SCF in error or their eligibility is revoked, the school that has enrolled the student will be notified as soon as possible. By accepting the scholarship student(s) and scholarship payment(s) the school agrees to repay any incorrectly made or overpayment of funds on behalf of the student(s), regardless of the reason.

Households that document eligibility but are placed on a waitlist do not have a scholarship unless they receive a Scholarship Award Letter and SCF at a later date.

### **Scholarship Distribution Priority**

**First Priority (Renewals and Displaced Add-on Siblings):** Renewal students, who received an AAA scholarship for the previous year, meet the current eligibility criteria (Page 4) and meet all deadlines for renewal priority. Funding is not guaranteed.

**Second Priority (Waitlist and Displaced Add-on Siblings):** Students who meet current eligibility criteria and are currently approved but on a waiting list due to lack of funding who meet the current eligibility criteria and meet all deadlines for waitlist priority. Funding is not guaranteed.

**Third Priority (New, Transfers, and Late Applicants):** New and transferring household applicants who meet current eligibility criteria (Page 5) and late applicants (first and second priority students who have missed the priority deadlines) are awarded on a first completed, first awarded basis. Funding is not guaranteed.

### **Renewal Preschool and K- 12 Scholarship Eligibility (NOT New, or Transfer Students)**

Scholarships may be renewed every year through 12<sup>th</sup> grade as long as the household and student(s) continue to meet the conditions of eligibility. After the household's initial determination of eligibility to participate in the AAA Scholarship program, if awarded, the household will be required to complete a school commitment form (SCF) each year they wish to continue. The household must fully re-qualify (see the "fully re-qualifying" process below) when required by AAA, typically every three years. The household may choose to fully re-qualify during the annual renewal application time to change their award amount based on a change to their IEP, MET or 504 by their public school. Household income must be documented and reported, by law, but is not a condition of eligibility.

To be eligible for a **fully re-qualifying** renewal scholarship, all of the following requirements must be met:

- 1) The household must complete the renewal application and send it along with **ALL** required supporting documentation listed on the application to the designated processing company **BY THE STATED DEADLINE**. Failure to meet all renewal deadline requirements will result in the household losing their renewal priority and may result in the household not receiving a scholarship even if they eventually complete the required process.
- 2) The household must have been actively using their AAA scholarship the prior school year.
- 3) The student(s) must continue to age qualify by state guideline on September 1<sup>st</sup>, by law.
- 4) The household must be free of debt to the private school(s) attended during the prior school year.
- 5) The household must not have been disqualified/revoked from the program for any reason, including internal audit process.

### **Add-On Siblings for Displaced Students Scholarship Eligibility (NOT Renewals, New or Transfer Students)**

To be eligible for an add-on scholarship (sibling of a renewal student), all of the following requirements must be met:

- 1) The household must complete the renewal application and send it along with **ALL** required supporting documentation listed on the application to the designated processing company BY THE STATED DEADLINE. Failure to meet all renewal deadline requirements will result in the household losing their renewal priority and may result in the household not receiving a scholarship even if they eventually complete the required process.
- 2) The student must have been included in the household situation to qualify for the scholarship.
- 3) The student(s) must age qualify by state guideline on September 1<sup>st</sup>, by law.
- 4) The student(s) must be entering preschool through 12<sup>th</sup> Grade (prior public school attendance is not required).
- 5) The household must not have been disqualified from the program for any reason, including internal audit process.

### **Transfer Scholarship Eligibility (NOT Renewals, or New Students)**

To be eligible to transfer your current scholarship to AAA (within Arizona only), all of the following requirements must be met:

- 1) The household must complete an application and send it along with **ALL** required supporting documentation listed on the application to the designated processing company BY THE STATED DEADLINE. Failure to meet all renewal deadline requirements will result in the household losing their transfer priority and may result in the household not receiving a scholarship even if they eventually complete the required process.
- 2) The student:
  - a) has an IEP, MET, or 504 plan from an Arizona public school (the district is obligated to provide an MET for your student even if he/she does not attend a zoned public school); **OR**
  - b) was placed at one time in the Arizona foster care system (must be verified by the Arizona Department of Economic Security)
- 3) The student(s) must be entering preschool through 12<sup>th</sup> Grade (prior public school attendance is not required)
- 4) The household must have been a previous recipient of a scholarship at any time and maintained continuous attendance at a private school since that time.
- 5) The student(s) must continue to age qualify by state guideline on September 1<sup>st</sup>, by law.
- 6) The household must be free of debt to the private school(s) attended during the prior school year.
- 7) The household must not have been disqualified/revoked from the program for any reason, including internal audit process.

### **New Scholarship Eligibility (NOT Renewals, or Transfer Students)**

To be eligible for a new scholarship, all six (6) of the following requirements must be met:

- 1) The household must complete the scholarship application and send it along with **ALL** required supporting documentation listed on the application to the designated processing company
- 2) The student:
  - a) has an IEP, MET, or 504 plan from an Arizona public school (the district is obligated to provide an MET for your student even if he/she does not attend a zoned public school); **OR**
  - b) was placed at one time in the Arizona foster care system (must be verified by the Arizona Department of Economic Security)
- 3) The student(s) must be entering preschool through 12<sup>th</sup> Grade (prior public school attendance is not required)
- 4) Students must meet the age eligibility for Arizona. Student(s) must be between 3-22 years old on September 1<sup>st</sup>, by law.
- 5) The household must not have been disqualified/revoked from the program for any reason, including internal audit process.
- 6) The household must be residents of Arizona to qualify for a scholarship.

**An eligible household may not accept an AAA scholarship for their student from more than one Scholarship Tuition Organization (STO) for the same time period they have accepted an AAA scholarship.**

### **Scholarship Funding Amounts**

The maximum of a student's DD scholarships is limited, by law, to 90% of state aid or cost of tuition, whichever is less.

AAA's scholarship funding calculation is based on a 36-week school year beginning on the first day of school as listed on the SCF. School breaks of one week for Thanksgiving, two weeks for winter and one week for spring are factored into the calculation as well. Every school has different calendars and different breaks. AAA does not try to match its scholarship funding calculation to any specific school calendar.

If the student remains in the school the entire year, the scholarship is paid in four equal installments throughout the 36-week school year.

If a student attends an eligible private school for a period of less than a full school year, the scholarship funding value will be prorated. For example, if a student's maximum scholarship award is \$15,000 but begins attending 21 weeks after the beginning of the school year, the calculated value of those 21 weeks (\$8,750) will be subtracted from the maximum scholarship award to determine the prorated scholarship funding value (\$15,000 – 8,750 = \$6,250).

### **Scholarship Funding Examples**

Here are SOME examples of how we determine the scholarship funding values for an **Arizona** student:

	<b>Example #1</b>	<b>Example #2</b>	<b>Example #3</b>
	<b>Scholarship Award is more than Tuition</b>	<b>Scholarship Award is equal to Tuition</b>	<b>Scholarship Award is less than Tuition</b>
<b>Maximum Scholarship Value (based on AZ Matrix)</b>	<b>\$5,000</b>	<b>\$5,000</b>	<b>\$10,000</b>
<b>Tuition</b>	\$2,800	\$5,000	\$15,000
<b>= Total Paid by AAA</b>	<b>\$2,800</b>	<b>\$5,000</b>	<b>\$10,000</b>
<b>Parent Responsibility</b>	\$0	\$0	\$5,000

If the student transfers to a different eligible school during the school year AAA will determine the prorated amount owed to/from the school for tuition. The remaining balance of the student's scholarship will then be available for use at a new eligible private school, if the student remains eligible to receive the scholarship.

Schools may not charge a different rate for scholarship students. The same tuition schedule must apply to all students enrolled whether they are on AAA scholarships or if their parents are paying for their tuition. Scholarship students are allowed to receive private scholarships or discounts to assist with paying their portion of the financial responsibility to the school.

### **Scholarship Acceptance**

Scholarships are not awarded to schools. Scholarships are awarded to eligible households for eligible students. The household decides which eligible private school to send their student(s). Failure to enroll the student in an eligible private school will result in the loss of the scholarship.

It is the responsibility of the household to determine if the chosen school is meeting their student's needs. If the school is not meeting their needs the household should transfer their student at any time during the school year or for the next school year if deemed eligible to renew. The scholarship follows the student(s) to any eligible school as long as the household and student is eligible. For information on changing schools during the school year see the "Student Transfer Procedure" on page 8.

Scholarship payments will be sent to the eligible school selected by the household. The check will be made payable to the name of parent/guardian A on the application and will require that specified parent/guardian's endorsement before the school can deposit the payment.

**An eligible household may not accept a scholarship for their student from more than one Scholarship Organization and/or from any other state-funded program for the same time period they have accepted an AAA scholarship.**

## **Eligible Private Schools**

**Arizona Eligible schools** are private schools (grades Pre-K-12) that meet all of the following criteria:

- Physically located in Arizona
- Adheres to the provisions of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964
  - <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/civilrights/resources/specialtopics/tanf/crrequirements.html>
- Satisfies the private school requirements prescribed in Arizona state law
- Requires all teaching staff and any personnel that have unsupervised contact with students to be fingerprinted.
- Is not a Charter School or Program operated by a charter school

## **Parental Tuition Payments**

Parental tuition payments are necessary when an eligible private school's tuition and fees total *more* than the awarded scholarship. The household is responsible for the additional charges that exceed the awarded scholarship. Schools are required to report delinquencies on the verification reports prior to scholarship payments or between verification reports as needed.

At times, the school may award a supplemental scholarship to the household, but if this does not occur, the difference is the sole responsibility of the household. **NO EXCEPTIONS.**

All households must remain current with their payments to the school for any fees owed by the household, not including the scholarship payments. Failure to pay, or make arrangements to pay, a balance owed may result in the school suspending or expelling your student. If the student is expelled they will no longer be eligible for the scholarship.

AAA Scholarship Foundation will not renew or transfer scholarships while money is owed to a school unless a current payment arrangement is in place.

## **Scholarship Payments**

*By accepting the scholarship student(s) and scholarship payment(s) the school agrees to repay any incorrectly made or overpayment of funds on behalf of the student(s), regardless of the reason. Failure to return the funds to AAA could lead to loss of eligibility as a participating school in the scholarship program and/or may lead to legal ramifications relating to the scholarship laws. The household is responsible for any balance of tuition/fees not covered by the scholarship.*

Scholarships are generally paid in four installments throughout the school year (see exceptions under Scholarship Funding Amounts on page 5). The payment calendar can be found at <http://aaascholarships.org/Schools>

Before each installment is processed, a verification report will be sent to the school, listing the student's name and scholarship payment amount. The school must:

- 1) verify each student's information is correct
- 2) report each student's absences to date (students may not have more than 18 days "excused" or "unexcused" absences per year)
- 3) report if the household is current with any monies privately owed to the school (if not current the past due amount must be reported)
- 4) sign and date the verification report and return it to AAA by the stated deadline

Provided the verification report is returned to AAA by the deadline stated on the form a separate check is issued for each scholarship student attending a school, even if multiple students are from the same household, and distributed via US postal mail.

Student withdrawal may result in an exit payment being owed to the school or the school being required to reimburse the scholarship for the difference between actual time period attended and actual scholarship funds received to date. For information on changing schools during the year see the "Student Transfer Procedure" on page 8 of this handbook. The scholarship only pays for services rendered.

If any student receiving an AAA scholarship also receives a scholarship from another Scholarship Organization or a State Funded Scholarship the school/guardian must contact AAA and the school must return the un-cashed check to AAA immediately. Failure to report such situations to AAA may result in a school's loss of eligibility to enroll new scholarship students and/or legal ramifications with the State Attorney's Office.

If a school receives a check for a student who is not currently attending their school they must return the un-cashed check to AAA immediately, unless it is the final "exit" payment as determined by AAA. If the student has expenses over and above tuition for actual attendance at their school before the receipt of this check, it is the household's responsibility to pay the debt. If pro-rated monies are owed to the school a check will be issued following receipt of the Student Withdrawal Form (SWF). Exit Payments must be signed by Parent/Guardian A, therefore submitting the SWF prior to the student leaving, whenever possible, is critical.

Failure to return the checks to AAA in these situations could lead to loss of eligibility as a participating school in the AAA scholarship program and/or may lead to legal ramifications relating to the scholarship laws.

### **Depositing Scholarship Checks**

Schools must process and deposit the checks for scholarship students promptly. Upon receipt of a scholarship check, the school must immediately stamp/write the first three of the following lines on each check before the Parent/Guardian signs the check. The back of the check should read:

**For Deposit Only**  
**(Name of School's Bank)**  
**Into the account of (Name of School/Account Number)**  
*Parent Signature*

The school shall then notify the household that the scholarship check has arrived and have them come in to "restrictively endorse" the check to the school. Failure of the designated parent to sign the check within five business days of being notified by the school or within the time specified by school policy, whichever is less, may result in the loss of the scholarship. Schools should notify AAA as soon as possible if a parent does not fulfill this obligation.

**The check will be made payable to the name of Parent/Guardian A listed on the application. That individual MUST be the person who endorses the scholarship check when received by the school. ONLY the individual on the check can endorse the back of the check. If a household needs the parent listed to be changed they must make a request to AAA in writing to change the name to the other parent/guardian.**

**NO POWER OF ATTORNEY OR OTHER TRANSFER OF SIGNATURE AUTHORITY IS ALLOWED!**

The scholarship checks may not leave the possession of the school. Students may not bring scholarship checks home for parent endorsement (signature).

Failure by the school to follow these procedures may result in loss of eligibility as a participating school for the scholarship program, legal ramifications with the state attorney's office, and reimbursement in full of any overpaid monies due to AAA.

### **Student Transfer Procedures**

One of the benefits of private education is that if the parent/guardian is not satisfied with a school they may choose another one.

**A student's scholarship may be transferred to another eligible in-state private school at any time during the year.** However, AAA will not renew or transfer scholarships while money is owed to a previous school.

If the parent/guardian plans to withdraw a student during the school year, the parent/guardian should notify the school at least two weeks prior to withdrawal.

How to transfer a scholarship during the school year:

1. Upon notification the school the student is leaving must complete a Student Withdrawal Form (SWF) and return it to AAA within 5 business days of being notified that the student is leaving. AAA will not transfer a scholarship until the school confirms that the household has no outstanding balance owed or a payment schedule is in place.



2. The new school must fill out a School Commitment Form (SCF) for each student and send it to AAA.

This process may result in a final payment to the school that is being exited, which must be signed by the appropriate individual following the check cashing policy, or a request for refund of over payment for the student transferring.

How to transfer a scholarship *for the upcoming school year during the renewal process:*

1. The household must complete the renewal process.
2. Upon receipt of the SCF the household must take it to the eligible private school of their choice; be it the same as the previous year or another eligible school.
3. The school must complete and sign the form then send it to AAA.

If at any time while utilizing the scholarship a student returns to public school the student will lose their scholarship. The household will be required to reapply and document eligibility to qualify in future years.

### **Student Behavior**

Scholarship students must follow all academic and discipline policies of the individual private school. Schools may expel or suspend students if their policies are not followed.

If a student is expelled from school, he or she will lose their scholarship and will not be eligible to renew. This will not affect the scholarships of any siblings.

Students expelled from public school are not eligible for a scholarship.

Scholarship students assigned by the courts to the juvenile justice system will immediately lose their scholarship and will be required to reapply and document eligibility to qualify in future years.

### **Student Attendance**

AAA Scholarship students may not be absent more than 18 days during the 36-week school year ("90 percent attendance"). Failure to be present for this minimum amount of time will result in the loss of the scholarship. If you plan to withdraw your student during the school year, please notify the school at least two (2) weeks prior to withdrawal.

### **Loss of A Scholarship**

A household/student will lose their scholarship for any of the following:

1. Providing fraudulent information or withholding information on the application or at any time (pg. 3)
2. Enrolling the student in a school that is not eligible (pg. 7) or a public school.
3. Receiving multiple scholarships for the student. An AAA family may NOT accept a scholarship from more than one state approved scholarship organization and/or state-funded program for the same time period they accept an AAA Scholarship. (pg. 3)
4. Being expelled from school (pg. 9)
5. Failure to maintain 90 percent attendance for the entire school year (pg. 9)
6. Failure to endorse scholarship payments within 5 business days of being notified by the school or within the time specified by school policy, whichever is less (pg. 8)
7. Failure to stay current on an agreed upon payment schedule for any balance owed by the household (pg. 7)
8. Not completing the renewal process by the deadline (pg. 4)
9. Failure to complete the internal audit process, if required
10. Parent/Guardian is the owner, operator, principal or person with equivalent decision making authority of an eligible private school, regardless of where the student attends (pg. 3)
11. Otherwise violating the conditions of the scholarship program

### **Scholarship "Hold" Status**

A scholarship may, in rare circumstances, be put on hold for a limited period of time if the student has a valid reason to temporarily be unable to attend school as determined by AAA on a case-by-case basis. The parent must notify AAA within 5 business days that they wish to have their scholarship placed on "hold" including detailed documentation as to why the student is unable to attend. During the "hold" period the student may not be attending a public school or the public school disqualification will take effect.

While the scholarship is on hold, the student's scholarship payments will not be made. When the student returns to the eligible private school (when the situation is resolved) the scholarship payments will resume. The parent must notify AAA of the student's return to school.

In a penalty situation, such as a suspension, the parent may be responsible for payment to the school during the "Hold" period.

### **Change of Contact Information**

If there is a change of address, telephone, cell phone or E-mail address, the parent/guardian must immediately notify AAA. AAA must be notified if the household is moving regardless of whether it is within the area or outside the area the household currently reside in. A scholarship can be transferred to any eligible private school in the state the scholarship was awarded as long as eligibility is maintained. Failure to inform AAA of the household's current address may result in the household not receiving important, time-sensitive communication from AAA, such as renewal communication, and may result in the loss of the scholarship. It is very important that AAA be able to reach you!

Reach us at [Arizona@aaascholarships.org](mailto:Arizona@aaascholarships.org)