



# FLORIDA

**Gardiner Scholarship Program  
Formerly known as Personal Learning  
Scholarship Account or PLSA**

## **Parent / School Handbook**

## Table of Contents

Gardiner Scholarship Handbook Introduction.....	3
Parent/Guardian Sworn Compliance Statement.....	3
Scholarship Eligibility .....	4
How Much Is The Scholarship Worth? .....	4
How Can the Scholarship Account Funds be Used? .....	4
Scholarship Awarding Procedure .....	5
Scholarship Acceptance .....	5
Pre-Authorization is Required for Certain Purchases.....	6
Scholarship Distributions to Approved Service Providers.....	6
Scholarship Distributions to Parents/Guardians for Approved Expense Reimbursement.....	6
Scholarship Distributions to Eligible Private Schools.....	7
Parental Payments for Tuition and Fees.....	7
Private School Tuition and Fee Payments.....	7
Parent/Guardian Acknowledgment of Payment Received.....	8
Student Transfers.....	8
Scholarship Distributions to Florida Prepaid College or Savings Program.....	9
Loss of Scholarship.....	9
Change of Contact Information.....	10
AAA Contact Information.....	10
Acknowledgement of Receipt and Understanding of the Gardiner Scholarship Handbook.....	11

# **Florida GARDINER SCHOLARSHIP (PLSA) Handbook**

AAA Scholarship Foundation (AAA), a private non-profit organization, is an approved Florida Scholarship Funding Organization (SFO). AAA administers the Florida Gardiner Scholarship Program (formerly known as Personal Learning Scholarship Account or PLSA) which is an annual scholarship that provides parents/guardians of children with specific disabilities the opportunity to better meet the individual needs of their eligible children.

Parents/guardians of eligible Florida children may use the account to purchase approved educational goods or services, as well as provide for prepaid college plans. An AAA Florida Gardiner Scholarship family may NOT accept more than one state-approved scholarship for the same time period.

## **Parent/Guardian Sworn Compliance Statement**

Please remember that in applying for, and accepting, a Gardiner Scholarship you have sworn to comply with the below statements.

1. The student is enrolled in a program that meets regular school attendance requirements as provided in [s. 1003.01\(13\)\(b\) through \(d\)](#).
2. The program funds are used only for authorized purposes serving the student's educational needs, as described in [s. 1002.385\(5\)](#).
3. I am responsible for the education of my student by, as applicable:
  - a. Requiring the student to take an assessment in accordance with [s. 1002.385\(8\)\(c\)](#)
  - b. Providing an annual evaluation in accordance with [s. 1002.41\(1\)\(c\)](#) or,
  - c. Requiring the child to take any pre- and post-assessments selected by the provider if the child is 4 years of age and is enrolled in a program provided by an eligible Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program provider. A student with disabilities for whom a pre- and post-assessment is not appropriate is exempt from this requirement. A participating provider shall report a student's scores to the parent.
4. The student remains in good standing with the provider or school if those options are selected by the parent.
5. All the information provided in this application and all supporting documentation is true, correct and complete. I understand that intentional misrepresentation could result in the scholarship being denied or revoked.

In addition, I agree to and understand that:

- a. I must file an application for initial program participation with an organization by the deadline dates.
  - b. I must notify the school district that the student is participating in the Gardiner Scholarship Program if I choose to enroll the student in a home education program as provided in [s. 1002.41](#). This notification is not in lieu of the required notification I must submit to the district when establishing a home education program pursuant to [s. 1002.41\(1\)\(a\)](#).
  - c. I must enroll my child in a program from a Voluntary Prekindergarten Program provider authorized under [s. 1002.55](#), a school readiness provider authorized under [s. 1002.88](#), or an eligible private school if either option is selected by me.
  - d. I must annually renew participation in the program. Notwithstanding any changes to the student's IEP, a student who was previously eligible for participation in the program shall remain eligible to apply for renewal. However, for a high-risk child to continue to participate in the program in the school year after he or she reaches 6 years of age, the child's application for renewal of program participation must contain documentation that the child has a disability defined in [s. 1002.385\(2\)\(d\)](#) other than high-risk\_status
  - e. I am responsible for procuring the services necessary to educate the student. When the student receives a Gardiner Scholarship, the district school board is not obligated to provide the student with a free appropriate public education. For purposes of [s. 1003.57](#) and the [Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act](#), a participating student has only those rights that apply to all other unilaterally parentally placed students, except that, when requested by the parent, school district personnel must develop an individual education plan or matrix level of services.
  - f. I am responsible for the payment of all eligible expenses in excess of the amount of the Gardiner Scholarship in accordance with the terms agreed to between the parent and the providers.
  - g. I may not transfer any prepaid college plan or college savings plan funds contributed to [s. 1002.385\(5\)\(f\)](#) to another beneficiary while the plan contains funds contributed pursuant to this section.
  - h. I may not receive a payment, refund, or rebate from an approved provider of any services under this program.
  - i. I agree to follow the rules and responsibilities for parents as they apply to the program.
- If I fail to comply, I will forfeit the Gardiner Scholarship.

## **Scholarship Eligibility**

A student is eligible for a Gardiner Scholarship from AAA, if:

1. the student is a resident of Florida;
2. the student is 3 or 4 years old on or before September 1<sup>st</sup> of the year in which the student applies for program participation, or is eligible to enroll in kindergarten through grade twelve in a public school in Florida;
3. has a disability as defined by Section 1002.385(2)(d), Florida Statutes (a written diagnosis from a licensed physician or psychologist that matches the definitions listed on page 4 [below] is required); and,
4. is the subject of an IEP written in accordance with rules of the State Board of Education, or has received a diagnosis of an eligible disability from a licensed physician or psychologist.

What types of disabilities qualify?

1. Autism spectrum disorder, as defined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, published by the American Psychiatric Association
2. Down syndrome, as defined in s. [393.063](#)(13), "Down syndrome" means a disorder caused by the presence of an extra chromosome 21.
3. Cerebral palsy, as defined in s. [393.063](#)(4), "Cerebral palsy" means a group of disabling symptoms of extended duration which results from damage to the developing brain that may occur before, during, or after birth and that results in the loss or impairment of control over voluntary muscles. For the purposes of this definition, cerebral palsy does not include those symptoms or impairments resulting solely from a stroke.
4. Intellectual disability, as defined in s. [393.063](#)(21), "Intellectual disability" means significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior which manifests before the age of 18 and can reasonably be expected to continue indefinitely. For the purposes of this definition, the term: (a) "Adaptive behavior" means the effectiveness or degree with which an individual meets the standards of personal independence and social responsibility expected of his or her age, cultural group, and community; (b) "Significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning" means performance that is two or more standard deviations from the mean score on a standardized intelligence test specified in the rules of the agency.
5. Phelan-McDermid syndrome, as defined in s. [393.063](#)(28). "Phelan-McDermid syndrome" means a disorder caused by the loss of the terminal segment of the long arm of chromosome 22, which occurs near the end of the chromosome at a location designated q13.3, typically leading to developmental delay, intellectual disability, dolicocephaly, hypotonia, or absent or delayed speech.
6. Prader-Willi syndrome, as defined in s. [393.063](#)(25), "Prader-Willi syndrome" means an inherited condition typified by neonatal hypotonia with failure to thrive, hyperphagia or an excessive drive to eat which leads to obesity usually at 18 to 36 months of age, mild to moderate intellectual disability, hypogonadism, short stature, mild facial dysmorphism, and a characteristic neurobehavior.
7. Spina bifida, as defined in s. [393.063](#)(36,) "Spina bifida" means, for purposes of this chapter, a person with a medical diagnosis of spina bifida cystica or myelomeningocele.
8. For a 3-5 year old, being a high-risk child, as defined in s. [393.063](#)(20)(a). "High-risk child" means, for the purposes of this chapter, a child from 3 to 5 years of age with one or more of the following characteristics:  
(a) A developmental delay in cognition, language, or physical development.
9. Muscular dystrophy
10. Williams syndrome

## **How Much is the Scholarship Worth?**

The scholarship amount will vary according to grade, county and disability, and is worth 90 percent of the funding a school district would receive for the student. The average amount for most students in 2016-17 is projected to be around \$10,000.

## **How Can the Scholarship Account Funds be Used?**

The accounts can be used to pay for eligible\*:

1. Instructional materials, including digital devices, digital periphery devices, and assistive technology (pre-approval by AAA is required);
2. Curriculum materials (pre-approval by AAA is required);
3. Specialized services by approved providers which may include, but are not limited to applied behavior analysis services, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapy; physical therapy; services from listening and spoken language specialists;

4. Tuition and fees at an eligible private school; Enrollment in, or tuition or fees associated with enrollment in, a home education program, an eligible private school, an eligible postsecondary educational institution or a program offered by the institution, a private tutoring program authorized under s. 1002.43, a virtual program offered by a department-approved private online provider that meets the provider qualifications specified in s. 1002.45(2)(a), the Florida Virtual School as a private paying student, or an approved online course offered pursuant to s. 1003.499 or s. 1004.0961
5. Private tutoring; (full or part-time by a state-certified teacher)
6. Virtual programs offered by FL DOE approved private online providers; see Q&A online at AAA website
7. Florida Virtual School;
8. Approved online courses;
9. Fees for nationally standardized, norm-referenced achievement tests, AP exams, industry certification exams, assessments related to postsecondary education or other assessments;
10. Contributions to Florida Prepaid College Program or Florida College Savings Program; go to <http://www.myfloridaprepaid.com/GardinerScholarship> for more information.
11. Contracted services provided by a public school or school districts;
12. Fees for specialized summer education programs
13. Fees for specialized after-school education programs;
14. Transition services provided by job coaches;
15. Fees for an annual evaluation of educational progress by a state-certified teacher under s.1002.41(1), if this option is chosen for a home education student;
16. Tuition and fees associated with programs offered by Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program providers approved pursuant to s.1002.55 and school readiness providers approved pursuant to s.1002.88.

\*For the list of eligible schools, programs, services and products go to <http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/Information/plsa/>

### **Scholarship Awarding Procedure**

Interested households must first complete the AAA application form online or print, sign and mail it to the processor along with the Notarized Sworn Compliance Statement and copies of the following documents:

1. Florida Doctor's Written Diagnosis form (Page 4 of the application);
2. Parent/Guardian's Florida Driver's License OR Current Florida Utility Bill in the name of the parent or Guardian;
3. Student's Birth Certificate;
4. Prior School Year or Year-to-Date report card (for private or public school students);
5. Letter from the public school district verifying registration in a home education program or letter from an eligible private school to show enrollment;
6. Florida Individual Education Plan (IEP), if available.

Scholarships are awarded to eligible students in the following priorities: renewing students from the previous school year; students retained on the previous school year's wait list; newly approved applicants; and late-filed applicants on a first-completed, first-awarded basis.

For initial eligibility for the program, students determined eligible by AAA for a Gardiner Scholarship by:

1. September 1 shall receive 100 percent of the total awarded funds.
2. November 1 shall receive 75 percent of the total awarded funds.
3. February 1 shall receive 50 percent of the total awarded funds.
4. April 1 shall receive 25 percent of the total awarded funds

### **Scholarship Acceptance**

Once a student is determined eligible AND has received funding, the parent/guardian must:

1. Un-enroll the eligible student from Public School – if the eligible student is still enrolled in a public school, you must un-enroll him/her before using the Gardiner Scholarship.
2. Un-enroll the eligible student from McKay or Step Up for Students - if the eligible student has a McKay or Step Up for Students scholarship, you must un-enroll him/her before using the Gardiner Scholarship.
3. Sign and Return the Handbook Acknowledgement Form to AAA – this form is located on the last page of this Handbook. It must be signed, dated and returned to AAA before using the Gardiner Scholarship.

Failure to meet the above requirements may result in the loss of the Gardiner Scholarship award.

Parents/guardians of eligible students will receive a Scholarship Award Letter along with a School Commitment Form (SCF) (required for Private School payments), Florida Prepaid College & Savings Plan form, Pre-Authorization for Gardiner Scholarship Purchase of Item and/or Curriculum Form, Direct Payment to Service Provider/Vendor Form and a Parent/Guardian Expense Reimbursement Form in the mail directly from AAA to begin using the Gardiner Scholarship.

Parents/guardians should make copies of the blank School Commitment Form sent to them by AAA before having the school complete it for the first time to ensure they have sufficient forms available in case they decide to transfer to a different eligible school later in the year (see the Student Transfer Procedure on page 8) or use multiple Approved Providers/Services. This will help prevent payment delays.

### **Pre-Authorization is Required for Certain Purchases**

Pre-approval by AAA is required when purchasing eligible\*:

1. Instructional materials, including digital devices, digital periphery devices and assistive technology;
2. Curriculum.

Once processed (allow 10 business days for processing), AAA will return a copy of the form to you indicating whether the purchase was approved or denied. **Pre-authorization forms will have a 90 day expiration date from the approval date and will be discarded if not used.** You can re-submit a new pre-authorization form if the prior one was expired. If approved, include a copy of the approved form with your request for reimbursement or direct payment to service provider form. If denied, you will be allowed one appeal by doing the following: in writing explain in further detail the necessity and educational value; you may include further support and/or a letter from a Licensed Physician or Therapist with recommendation of requested item on company letterhead, then you will be given the final decision in 10 business days. You will NOT be reimbursed for your purchase with Gardiner Scholarship funds if pre-authorization form was denied.

\*For the list of eligible schools, programs, services and products go to <http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/Information/plsa/>

### **Scholarship Distributions to Approved Service Providers**

Direct payment to vendors and service providers for eligible\* purchases from the eligible student's Gardiner Scholarship funds by AAA is allowed. All payments are made as an ACH Debit transfer. The parent or guardian must complete the "Direct Payment to Service Provider Form" and submit it to AAA with the supporting invoice (and approved Pre-Authorization Form if required) for approval. Service Providers may also be required to complete a Form W-9 before payment is approved. All payment requests that have been submitted and approved by Tuesday of each week will be paid Friday of that same week.

\*For the list of eligible schools, programs, services and products go to <http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/Information/plsa/>

### **Scholarship Distributions to Parents/Guardians for Approved Expense Reimbursement**

Direct reimbursement for eligible\* purchases from the eligible student's Gardiner Scholarship funds by AAA is allowed. All payments are made as an ACH Debit transfer. The parent or guardian must complete the "Parent/Guardian Expense Reimbursement Form" and submit it to AAA with the supporting paid receipts (and approved Pre-Authorization Form if required) for

approval. All payment requests that have been submitted and approved by Tuesday of each week will be paid Friday of that same week.

\*For the list of eligible schools, programs, services and products go to <http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/Information/plsa/>

### **Scholarship Distributions to Private Schools**

Direct payment to eligible\* private schools for tuition and fees for the benefit of the eligible Gardiner Scholarship student by AAA is allowed. All payments are made as ACH Debit transfers only.

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 to assist with meeting their portion of the financial responsibility to the school.

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 to any eligible school as long as the household is eligible. For information on changing schools during the school year see the "Student Transfer Procedure" on page 8.

\*For the list of eligible schools, programs, services and products go to <http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/Information/plsa/>

### **Parental Payments for Private School Tuition and Fees**

Parental 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.

At times, the school may award a supplemental private 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 may no longer be eligible for the scholarship.

### **Private School Tuition and Fee 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 paid in four installments throughout the school year. The payment calendar can be found at <http://www.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, 2) indicate each student's absences to date and 3) state whether the household is current with any monies privately owed to the school. The school must sign and date the verification report and return it to AAA by the stated deadline. Schools must explain any "no" answers, in writing, on this report and/or attach documentation.

A separate ACH payment is issued for each scholarship student attending a school, even if multiple students are from the same household.

Student withdrawal may result in 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 funds to AAA within ten days. Failure to report such situations to AAA may result in a school's loss of eligibility to enroll new scholarship students and/or to legal ramifications with the State Attorney's Office.

If a school receives a payment for a student who is not currently attending their school they must return the funds to AAA immediately, unless it is the final "exit" payment as determined by AAA. If the student has expenses over and above tuition and fees for actual attendance at their school for prior year(s), it is the household's responsibility to pay the debt. The school may not keep funds or request funds for prior year(s).

Failure to return the funds to AAA in these situations may 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.

If pro-rated monies are owed to the school an exit ACH Debit payment will be issued following receipt of the Student Withdrawal Form (SWF).

### **Parent/Guardian Acknowledgment of Payment Received**

Schools must record receipt of scholarship funds for eligible students immediately.

The school should notify the parent/guardian that the scholarship payment has been received and have them come in to sign a "Payment Received Form" which is supplied to the school by AAA. The signed form must be emailed to [PLSA@aaascholarships.org](mailto:PLSA@aaascholarships.org) confirming receipt of funds within ten days by the school.

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

The scholarship funds may not leave the possession of the school nor should any funds be "kicked back" to any family member of the eligible student. Students may not bring home the "Payment Received Form" for parent 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 Transfers**

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

**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 two weeks prior to withdrawal.

\*For the list of eligible schools, programs, services and products go to <http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/Information/plsa/>

How to transfer a scholarship *during the school year*:

1. The school the student is leaving must complete a Student Withdrawal Form (SWF) and return it to AAA within five business days of being notified that the student is leaving. AAA will not transfer a scholarship to a new school nor process other payments until the exiting 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 email it to AAA at [PLSA@aaascholarships.org](mailto:PLSA@aaascholarships.org).

AAA will complete the transfer process when both documents have been received. This process may include a final payment to the school that is being exited, which the Payment Received form must be signed by the appropriate individual following the check cashing policy, or a request for refund of over payment for the student transferring.

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.

### **Scholarship Distributions to Florida Prepaid College or Florida Savings Program**

To transfer funds to the Florida Prepaid College Program or the Florida Savings Program, the parent/guardian must establish an account with the Florida Prepaid College Board. Go to <http://www.myfloridaprepaid.com/GardinerScholarship> for more information on establishing an account. Once the account has been established, the parent/guardian of a Gardiner Scholarship recipient can request a transfer of the awarded funds to the established account by providing the required information. See "Transfer to Florida Prepaid College & Savings Plan Form" on our website.

### **Loss of a Scholarship**

A household may lose their scholarship for any of the following:

1. Providing fraudulent information or withholding information on the application or at any time.
2. Failing to comply with the requirements of the Sworn Compliance Statement.
3. Continuing to attend a Florida public school, including:
  - a. Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind
  - b. Florida Virtual School (as a public school student)
  - c. College-Preparatory Boarding Academy
  - d. A developmental research school
  - e. A district charter school
  - f. A district virtual education program (as a public school student)
  - g. Florida VPK (unless being funded with Gardiner Scholarship funds)
4. Accepting a McKay Scholarship or Step Up for Students (Income-Based) Scholarship.
5. Enrolling in a school operating for the purpose of providing educational services to youth in the Department of Juvenile Justice commitment programs.
6. Accepting any payment, refund, or rebate from a provider of any services for the Gardiner Scholarship program.
7. Accepting multiple Gardiner scholarships (during the same period).
8. Failing to sign the "Payment Received Form" for payments within 5 business days of being notified by the school or within the time specified by school policy, whichever is less.
9. Failing to sign and return the Handbook Acknowledgement Form to AAA by the stated deadline.
10. Failing to complete AAA's internal audit process, if required.
11. Owning, operating, or acting in the capacity of a principal or person with equivalent decision making authority of an eligible private school, regardless of where the student attends
12. Otherwise violating the conditions of the scholarship program

### **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 resides 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 and may result in the loss of the scholarship. It is very important that AAA be able to reach you!

**Reach us at 888-707-2465 or [PLSA@aaascholarships.org](mailto:PLSA@aaascholarships.org)**

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2016-2017 Gardiner Scholarship Handbook

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF RECEIPT AND UNDERSTANDING OF GARDINER HANDBOOK**

INSTRUCTIONS: One of the steps in accepting the Gardiner Scholarship award is to sign the bottom of this acknowledgement form and return it to AAA at [PLSA@aaascholarships.org](mailto:PLSA@aaascholarships.org) (email), or by fax at 888-707-2465 or by mailing it to Gardiner-AAA Scholarships PO Box 15719, Tampa, FL 33684-0719.

By signing this form, I acknowledge receipt, understanding and agreement to comply with the information, policies and procedures in the handbook.

The handbook describes important information about the Gardiner Scholarship and I understand that I should consult AAA regarding any questions not answered in the handbook.

Since the information, policies, and procedures described here are necessarily subject to change, I acknowledge that revisions to the handbook may occur and I understand that revised information may supersede, modify, or eliminate existing policies.

Furthermore, I acknowledge that this handbook is not a contract or guarantee of a Gardiner Scholarship. I have received the handbook, and I understand that it is my responsibility to read and comply with the policies contained in this handbook and any revisions made to it.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Signed

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Printed Name

**\*\*\*\*\*Please return this signed page to AAA Scholarship Foundation\*\*\*\*\***