

**Office of the Speaker Pro Tem
North Carolina
House of Representatives**

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Opportunity Scholarship Program and Special Education Scholarships for Children with Disabilities

Opportunity Scholarships:

Starting for the 2015-16 school year, students will be eligible if they have not yet received a high school diploma, are at least 5 years old as of August 31, 2015 and meet at least one of the following requirements:

- ✓ Was a full-time student assigned to and attending a public school during the previous semester
- ✓ Received a scholarship during the previous school year
- ✓ Is entering kindergarten or the first grade
- ✓ Is a child in foster care
- ✓ Is a child whose adoption decree was entered not more than a year prior to applying for the scholarship
- ✓ In addition to meeting one of the above criteria, student recipients must reside in a household with an income level not in excess of one hundred thirty-three percent (133%) of the amount required for the student to qualify for the federal free or reduced-price lunch program.

Recent changes to Opportunity Scholarships ([SB 744](#), Section 8.25) included a section prohibiting participating nonpublic schools from discriminating on the basis of race, color or national origin. The 2015 NCGA budget increased funding to \$17,600,000 for 2015-16 and to \$24,000,000 for 2016-17. Students are eligible to receive up to \$4,200 per year.

In July 2015, the North Carolina Supreme Court ruled the Opportunity Scholarship Program constitutional. North Carolina provided Opportunity Scholarships to 1,200 students attending 224 schools in 2014-15. The total of \$4.6M in scholarships were awarded. Over 1,100 of these students reapplied for the scholarship in 2015-16.

For the 2015-16 school year, funding is available for up to 6,000 scholarships. Applications for the 15-16 school year will remain open until January 31, 2016. The priority application window for the 16-17 school year will open on February 1, 2016 and close on March 1, 2016.

Information on the Opportunity Scholarship program is available at <http://www.ncseaa.edu/OSG.htm> or <http://www.schoolchoicenorthcarolina.com/DM2015>. You may contact the NCSEAA at 855-330-3955 (toll-free).

Special Education Scholarships for Children with Disabilities:

To be eligible, a student must meet at least one of the following requirements:

1. Was enrolled in a North Carolina public school during the previous semester.
2. Received special education or related services through the North Carolina public schools as a preschool child with a disability during the previous semester.
3. Was approved for a scholarship for the previous semester.
4. Is a child who is identified as a child with a disability prior to the end of the year of initial enrollment in kindergarten or first grade. An award by the Authority based on this eligibility is conditional; if documentation is not provided to the Authority that the child has a disability prior to the end of the year of initial enrollment, (i) no reimbursement shall be awarded and (ii) the child shall not qualify the following year as an eligible student under sub-sub-subdivision 3. of this section.

The North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority (NCSEAA) administers the scholarship program. The scholarships are reimbursements for tuition, special education, related services, and educational technology costs incurred by parents. The 2015 House Budget raised the scholarship amount from \$3,000 to \$4,000 per semester. In the 2015 session, provisions were enacted that allowed the tuition to be paid directly to the school. Also, the re-evaluation process was changed to give the parents the option of having the local school or an educational psychologist verify the student still has the learning disability.

Applications are available on NCSEAA's website by May 1st each year. Priority is given to students who received a scholarship during the previous semester. Additional scholarships will be awarded to eligible students in the order in which the applications are received.

NCSEAA shall notify parents in writing by July 1st of their eligibility to receive scholarships for costs incurred during the fall semester of that year and by December 1st for costs that will be incurred during the spring semester of the following year. Reimbursements are issued after the conclusion of each semester upon receipt of appropriate documentation.

In 2014-15, changes were made to the Special Education Scholarships for Children with Disabilities ([HB 712](#)) that made the program easier to understand. It clarified the types of services for which parents can be reimbursed, including educational technology.

In 2014-15, the NCSEAA has approved over 700 special needs scholarships with an average yearly scholarship of \$5,400.

You can access the application at <http://www.ncseaa.edu/CDSG.htm>. If you have questions, you may call 855-330-3955 or email dgrants@ncseaa.edu.

For additional information go to www.nchouserepublicanleader.com.