

**Effective 1/24/2018**

**Part 3**  
**Carson Smith Scholarship Program**

**53F-4-301 Definitions.**

As used in this part:

- (1) "Assessment team" means a team consisting of:
  - (a) the student's parent;
  - (b) the student's private school classroom teacher;
  - (c) special education personnel from the student's school district; and
  - (d) if available, special education personnel from the private school at which the student is enrolled.
- (2) "Eligible private school" means a private school that meets the requirements of Section 53F-4-303.
- (3) "Local Education Agency" or "LEA" means:
  - (a) a school district; or
  - (b) a charter school.
- (4) "Preschool" means an education program for a student who:
  - (a) is age three, four, or five; and
  - (b) has not entered kindergarten.
- (5) "Scholarship student" means a student who receives a scholarship under this part.
- (6) "Value of the weighted pupil unit" means the amount established each year in statute that is multiplied by the number of weighted pupil units to yield the funding level for the basic state-supported school program.

Amended by Chapter 186, 2019 General Session

**53F-4-301.5 Findings and purpose.**

The Legislature finds that:

- (1) the state system of public education as established and maintained under the state constitution shall be open to all children of the state;
- (2) students with disabilities have special needs that merit educational alternatives which will allow students to learn in an appropriate setting and manner;
- (3) those needs may include teachers trained in special teaching methods, small class sizes, and special materials, equipment, and classroom environments;
- (4) parents are best equipped to make decisions for their children, including the educational setting that will best serve the interests and educational needs of their children;
- (5) the establishment of this scholarship program is justified on the basis of funding the special needs of students with disabilities as with other programs similarly funded by the state for people with disabilities;
- (6) children, parents, and families are the primary beneficiaries of the scholarship program authorized in this part and any benefit to private schools, sectarian or otherwise, is purely incidental;
- (7) the scholarship program authorized in this part is:
  - (a) enacted for the valid secular purpose of tailoring a student's education to that student's specific needs;
  - (b) neutral with respect to religion;

- (c) provides limited assistance to citizens who are then able to direct their resources to religious and secular schools solely as a result of their genuine and independent private choices; and
  - (d) in accordance with the best interests of the taxpayers and citizens of the state to encourage educational opportunities; and
- (8) nothing in this part shall be construed as a basis for granting vouchers or tuition tax credits for any other students, with or without disabilities.

Renumbered and Amended by Chapter 2, 2018 General Session

**53F-4-302 Scholarship program created -- Qualifications.**

- (1) The Carson Smith Scholarship Program is created to award scholarships to students with disabilities to attend a private school.
- (2) To qualify for a scholarship:
- (a) the student's custodial parent shall reside within Utah;
  - (b) the student shall have one or more of the following disabilities:
    - (i) an intellectual disability;
    - (ii) deafness or being hard of hearing;
    - (iii) a speech or language impairment;
    - (iv) a visual impairment;
    - (v) a serious emotional disturbance;
    - (vi) an orthopedic impairment;
    - (vii) autism;
    - (viii) traumatic brain injury;
    - (ix) other health impairment;
    - (x) specific learning disabilities;
    - (xi) deafblindness; or
    - (xii) a developmental delay, provided the student is at least three years old, as described to Subsection (2)(c), and is younger than eight years old;
  - (c) the student shall be at least three years old before September 2 of the year in which admission to a private school is sought and under 19 years old on the last day of the school year as determined by the private school, or, if the individual has not graduated from high school, will be under 22 years old on the last day of the school year as determined by the private school; and
  - (d) except as provided in Subsection (3), the student shall:
    - (i) be enrolled in a Utah public school in the school year prior to the school year the student will be enrolled in a private school;
    - (ii) have an IEP; and
    - (iii) have obtained acceptance for admission to an eligible private school.
- (3) The requirements of Subsection (2)(d) do not apply in the following circumstances:
- (a) the student is enrolled or has obtained acceptance for admission to an eligible private school that has previously served students with disabilities; and
  - (b) an assessment team is able to readily determine with reasonable certainty:
    - (i) that the student has a disability listed in Subsection (2)(b) and would qualify for special education services, if enrolled in a public school; and
    - (ii) for the purpose of establishing the scholarship amount, the appropriate level of special education services which should be provided to the student.
- (4)

- (a) Except as provided in Subsection (11)(b), to receive a full-year scholarship under this part, a parent of a student shall submit to the LEA where the student is enrolled an application on or before the August 15 immediately preceding the first day of the school year for which the student would receive the scholarship.
  - (b) Except as provided in Subsection (11)(b), the state board may waive the full-year scholarship deadline described in Subsection (4)(a).
  - (c) An application for a scholarship shall contain an acknowledgment by the parent that the selected school is qualified and capable of providing the level of special education services required for the student.
- (5)
- (a) The scholarship application form shall contain the following statement:
    - "I acknowledge that:
      - (1) A private school may not provide the same level of special education services that are provided in a public school;
      - (2) I will assume full financial responsibility for the education of my scholarship student if I accept this scholarship;
      - (3) Acceptance of this scholarship has the same effect as a parental refusal to consent to services pursuant to Section 614(a)(1) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. Sec. 1400 et seq.; and
      - (4) My child may return to a public school at any time."
  - (b) Upon acceptance of the scholarship, the parent assumes full financial responsibility for the education of the scholarship student.
  - (c) Acceptance of a scholarship has the same effect as a parental refusal to consent to services pursuant to Section 614(a)(1) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. Sec. 1400 et seq.
  - (d) The creation of the scholarship program or granting of a scholarship does not:
    - (i) imply that a public school did not provide a free and appropriate public education for a student; or
    - (ii) constitute a waiver or admission by the state.
- (6)
- (a) Except as provided in Subsection (6)(b), a scholarship shall remain in force for the lesser of:
    - (i) three years; or
    - (ii) until the student is determined ineligible for special education services.
  - (b) If a student is determined ineligible for special education services as described in Subsection (6)(a)(ii) before the end of a school year, the student may remain enrolled at the private school and qualifies for the scholarship until the end of the school year.
  - (c) A scholarship may be extended for an additional three years, if:
    - (i) the student is evaluated by an assessment team; and
    - (ii) the assessment team determines that the student would qualify for special education services, if enrolled in a public school.
  - (d) The assessment team shall determine the appropriate level of special education services which should be provided to the student for the purpose of setting the scholarship amount.
  - (e) A scholarship may be extended for successive three-year periods as provided in Subsections (6)(a) and (c):
    - (i) until the student graduates from high school; or
    - (ii) if the student does not graduate from high school, until the student is 22 years old.
- (7) A student's parent, at any time, may remove the student from a private school and place the student in another eligible private school and retain the scholarship.

- (8) A scholarship student:
  - (a) may participate in the Statewide Online Education Program described in Part 5, Statewide Online Education Program; and
  - (b) may not participate in a dual enrollment program pursuant to Section 53G-6-702.
- (9) The parents of a scholarship student have the authority to choose the private school that will best serve the interests and educational needs of that student, which may be a sectarian or nonsectarian school, and to direct the scholarship resources available for that student solely as a result of their genuine and independent private choices.
- (10) The state board shall notify the parents of a scholarship student in writing of:
  - (a) the termination of new applicants in the existing scholarship program; and
  - (b) the ability of a current scholarship student to remain in the scholarship program as described in Subsection (6)(c) and (e).
- (11) After the 2023-2024 school year, an LEA or the state board may not:
  - (a) accept a new application; or
  - (b) provide a waiver of a full-year application.

Amended by Chapter 466, 2024 General Session

**53F-4-303 Eligible private schools.**

- (1) To be eligible to enroll a scholarship student, a private school shall:
  - (a) have a physical location in Utah where the scholarship students attend classes and have direct contact with the school's teachers;
  - (b)
    - (i) contract with an independent licensed certified public accountant to conduct an Agreed Upon Procedures engagement, as adopted by the state board, or obtain an audit and report from a licensed independent certified public accountant that conforms with the following requirements:
      - (A) the audit shall be performed in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards;
      - (B) the financial statements shall be presented in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles; and
      - (C) the audited financial statements shall be as of a period within the last 12 months; and
    - (ii) submit the audit report or report of the agreed upon procedure to the state board when the private school applies to accept scholarship students;
  - (c) comply with the antidiscrimination provisions of 42 U.S.C. Sec. 2000d;
  - (d) meet state and local health and safety laws and codes;
  - (e) provide a written disclosure to the parent of each prospective student, before the student is enrolled of:
    - (i) the special education services that will be provided to the student, including the cost of those services;
    - (ii) tuition costs;
    - (iii) additional fees a parent will be required to pay during the school year; and
    - (iv) the skill or grade level of the curriculum that the student will be participating in;
  - (f)
    - (i) administer an annual assessment of each scholarship student's academic progress;
    - (ii) report the results of the assessment described in Subsection (1)(f)(i) to the student's parent; and
    - (iii) make the results available to the assessment team evaluating the student pursuant to Subsection 53F-4-302(6);

- (g) employ or contract with teachers who:
    - (i) hold baccalaureate or higher degrees;
    - (ii) have at least three years of teaching experience in public or private schools; or
    - (iii) have the necessary special skills, knowledge, or expertise that qualifies them to provide instruction:
      - (A) in the subjects taught; and
      - (B) to the special needs students taught;
  - (h) maintain documentation demonstrating that teachers at the private school meet the qualifications described in Subsection (1)(g);
  - (i) require the following individuals to submit to a nationwide, fingerprint-based criminal background check and ongoing monitoring, in accordance with Section 53G-11-402, as a condition for employment or appointment, as authorized by the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006, Pub. L. No. 109-248:
    - (i) an employee who does not hold a current Utah educator license issued by the state board under Title 53E, Chapter 6, Education Professional Licensure;
    - (ii) a contract employee; and
    - (iii) a volunteer who is given significant unsupervised access to a student in connection with the volunteer's assignment; and
  - (j) provide to the parent of the scholarship student the relevant credentials of the teachers who will be teaching the scholarship student.
- (2) A private school is not eligible to enroll scholarship students if:
- (a) the private school requires a student to sign a contract waiving the student's rights to transfer to another eligible private school during the school year;
  - (b) the audit report submitted under Subsection (1)(b) contains a going concern explanatory paragraph;
  - (c) the report of the agreed upon procedure submitted under Subsection (1)(b) shows that the private school does not have adequate working capital to maintain operations for the first full year, as determined under Subsection (1)(b); or
  - (d) the private school charges a scholarship student more in tuition or fees than another student based solely upon the scholarship student being a scholarship recipient under this part.
- (3) A home school is not eligible to enroll scholarship students.
- (4) Residential treatment facilities licensed by the state are not eligible to enroll scholarship students.
- (5) A private school intending to enroll scholarship students shall submit an application to the state board by May 1 of the school year preceding the school year in which it intends to enroll scholarship students.
- (6) The state board shall:
- (a) approve a private school's application to enroll scholarship students, if the private school meets the eligibility requirements of this section; and
  - (b) publish on the state board's website, a list of private schools approved under this section.
- (7) An approved eligible private school that changes ownership shall:
- (a) submit a new application to the state board; and
  - (b) demonstrate that the private school continues to meet the eligibility requirements of this section.

Amended by Chapter 353, 2023 General Session

**53F-4-304 Scholarship payments.**

- (1)
  - (a) The state board shall award scholarships subject to the availability of money appropriated by the Legislature for that purpose.
  - (b) The Legislature shall annually appropriate money to the state board from the General Fund to make scholarship payments.
  - (c) The Legislature shall annually increase the amount of money appropriated under Subsection (1)(b) by an amount equal to the product of:
    - (i) the average scholarship amount awarded as of December 1 in the previous year; and
    - (ii) the product of:
      - (A) the number of students in preschool through grade 12 in public schools statewide who have an IEP on December 1 of the previous year; and
      - (B) 0.0007.
  - (d) If the number of scholarship students as of December 1 in any school year equals or exceeds 7% of the number of students in preschool through grade 12 in public schools statewide who have an IEP as of December 1 in the same school year, the Public Education Appropriations Subcommittee shall study the requirement to increase appropriations for scholarship payments as provided in this section.
  - (e)
    - (i) If money is not available to pay for all scholarships requested, the state board shall allocate scholarships on a random basis except that the state board shall give preference to students who received scholarships in the previous school year.
    - (ii) If money is insufficient in a school year to pay for all the continuing scholarships, the state board may not award new scholarships during that school year and the state board shall prorate money available for scholarships among the eligible students who received scholarships in the previous year.
  - (f) Beginning with the 2025 fiscal year, the state board shall:
    - (i) calculate a maximum award cap that may not exceed the cost of the program including scholarship payments from the previous fiscal year; and
    - (ii) transfer any funds in excess of the amount described in Subsection (1)(f)(i) to the Carson Smith Opportunity Scholarship Program established in Section 53E-7-402.
- (2) Except as provided in Subsection (4), the state board shall award full-year scholarships in the following amounts:
  - (a) for a student who received an average of 180 minutes per day or more of special education services in a public school before transferring to a private school, an amount not to exceed the lesser of:
    - (i) the value of the weighted pupil unit multiplied by 2.5; or
    - (ii) the private school tuition and fees; and
  - (b) for a student who received an average of less than 180 minutes per day of special education services in a public school before transferring to a private school, an amount not to exceed the lesser of:
    - (i) the value of the weighted pupil unit multiplied by 1.5; or
    - (ii) the private school tuition and fees.
- (3) The scholarship amount for a student enrolled in a half-day kindergarten or part-day preschool program shall be the amount specified in Subsection (2)(a) or (b) multiplied by .55.
- (4) If a student leaves a private school before the end of a fiscal quarter:
  - (a) the private school is only entitled to the amount of scholarship equivalent to the number of days that the student attended the private school; and

- (b) the private school shall remit a prorated amount of the scholarship to the state board in accordance with the procedures described in rules adopted by the state board in accordance with Title 63G, Chapter 3, Utah Administrative Rulemaking Act.
- (5) For the amount of funds remitted under Subsection (4)(b), the state board shall:
  - (a) make the amount available to the student to enroll immediately in another qualifying private school; or
  - (b) refund the amount back to the Carson Smith Scholarship Program account.
- (6)
  - (a) The state board shall make an additional allocation on a random basis before June 30 each year only:
    - (i) if there are sufficient remaining funds in the program; and
    - (ii) for scholarships for students enrolled in a full-day preschool program.
  - (b) If the state board awards a scholarship under Subsection (6)(a), the scholarship amount or supplement may not exceed the lesser of:
    - (i) the value of the weighted pupil unit multiplied by 1.0; or
    - (ii) the private school tuition and fees.
  - (c) The state board shall, when preparing annual growth projection numbers for the Legislature, include the annual number of applications for additional allocations described in Subsection (6)(a).
- (7)
  - (a) The scholarship amount for a student who receives a waiver under Subsection 53F-4-302(3) shall be based upon the assessment team's determination of the appropriate level of special education services to be provided to the student.
  - (b)
    - (i) If the student requires an average of 180 minutes per day or more of special education services, a full-year scholarship shall be equal to the amount specified in Subsection (2)(a).
    - (ii) If the student requires less than an average of 180 minutes per day of special education services, a full-year scholarship shall be equal to the amount specified in Subsection (2)(b).
    - (iii) If the student is enrolled in a half-day kindergarten or part-day preschool program, a full-year scholarship is equal to the amount specified in Subsection (3).
- (8)
  - (a) Except as provided in Subsection (8)(b), upon review and receipt of documentation that verifies a student's admission to, or continuing enrollment and attendance at, a private school, the state board shall make scholarship payments quarterly in four equal amounts in each school year in which a scholarship is in force.
  - (b) In accordance with state board rule, made in accordance with Title 63G, Chapter 3, Utah Administrative Rulemaking Act, the state board may make a scholarship payment before the first quarterly payment of the school year, if a private school requires partial payment of tuition before the start of the school year to reserve space for a student admitted to the school.
- (9) A parent of a scholarship student shall notify the state board if the student does not have continuing enrollment and attendance at an eligible private school.
- (10) Before scholarship payments are made, the state board shall cross-check enrollment lists of scholarship students, LEAs, and youth in custody to ensure that scholarship payments are not erroneously made.

Amended by Chapter 466, 2024 General Session

**53F-4-304 Scholarship payments.**

- (1)
  - (a) The state board shall award scholarships subject to the availability of money appropriated by the Legislature for that purpose.
  - (b) The Legislature shall annually appropriate money to the state board from the General Fund to make scholarship payments.
  - (c) The Legislature shall annually increase the amount of money appropriated under Subsection (1)(b) by an amount equal to the product of:
    - (i) the average scholarship amount awarded as of December 1 in the previous year; and
    - (ii) the product of:
      - (A) the number of students in preschool through grade 12 in public schools statewide who have an IEP on December 1 of the previous year; and
      - (B) 0.0007.
  - (d) If the number of scholarship students as of December 1 in any school year equals or exceeds 7% of the number of students in preschool through grade 12 in public schools statewide who have an IEP as of December 1 in the same school year, the Public Education Appropriations Subcommittee shall study the requirement to increase appropriations for scholarship payments as provided in this section.
  - (e)
    - (i) If money is not available to pay for all scholarships requested, the state board shall allocate scholarships on a random basis except that the state board shall give preference to students who received scholarships in the previous school year.
    - (ii) If money is insufficient in a school year to pay for all the continuing scholarships, the state board may not award new scholarships during that school year and the state board shall prorate money available for scholarships among the eligible students who received scholarships in the previous year.
  - (f) Beginning with the 2025 fiscal year, the state board shall:
    - (i) calculate a maximum award cap that may not exceed the cost of the program including scholarship payments from the previous fiscal year; and
    - (ii) transfer any funds in excess of the amount described in Subsection (1)(f)(i) to the Carson Smith Opportunity Scholarship Program established in Section 53E-7-402.
- (2) Except as provided in Subsection (4), the state board shall award full-year scholarships in the following amounts:
  - (a) for a student who received an average of 180 minutes per day or more of special education services in a public school before transferring to a private school, an amount not to exceed the lesser of:
    - (i) the value of the weighted pupil unit multiplied by 2.5; or
    - (ii) the private school tuition and fees; and
  - (b) for a student who received an average of less than 180 minutes per day of special education services in a public school before transferring to a private school, an amount not to exceed the lesser of:
    - (i) the value of the weighted pupil unit multiplied by 1.5; or
    - (ii) the private school tuition and fees.
- (3) The scholarship amount for a student enrolled in a half-day kindergarten or part-day preschool program shall be the amount specified in Subsection (2)(a) or (b) multiplied by .55.
- (4) If a student leaves a private school before the end of a fiscal quarter:
  - (a) the private school is only entitled to the amount of scholarship equivalent to the number of days that the student attended the private school; and



- (b) the private school shall remit a prorated amount of the scholarship to the state board in accordance with the procedures described in rules adopted by the state board in accordance with Title 63G, Chapter 3, Utah Administrative Rulemaking Act.
- (5) For the amount of funds remitted under Subsection (4)(b), the state board shall:
  - (a) make the amount available to the student to enroll immediately in another qualifying private school; or
  - (b) refund the amount back to the Carson Smith Scholarship Program account .
- (6)
  - (a) The state board shall make an additional allocation on a random basis before June 30 each year only:
    - (i) if there are sufficient remaining funds in the program; and
    - (ii) for scholarships for students enrolled in a full-day preschool program.
  - (b) If the state board awards a scholarship under Subsection (6)(a), the scholarship amount or supplement may not exceed the lesser of:
    - (i) the value of the weighted pupil unit multiplied by 1.0; or
    - (ii) the private school tuition and fees.
  - (c) The state board shall, when preparing annual growth projection numbers for the Legislature, include the annual number of applications for additional allocations described in Subsection (6)(a).
- (7)
  - (a) The scholarship amount for a student who receives a waiver under Subsection 53F-4-302(3) shall be based upon the assessment team's determination of the appropriate level of special education services to be provided to the student.
  - (b)
    - (i) If the student requires an average of 180 minutes per day or more of special education services, a full-year scholarship shall be equal to the amount specified in Subsection (2)(a).
    - (ii) If the student requires less than an average of 180 minutes per day of special education services, a full-year scholarship shall be equal to the amount specified in Subsection (2)(b).
    - (iii) If the student is enrolled in a half-day kindergarten or part-day preschool program, a full-year scholarship is equal to the amount specified in Subsection (3).
- (8)
  - (a) Except as provided in Subsection (8)(b), upon review and receipt of documentation that verifies a student's admission to, or continuing enrollment and attendance at, a private school, the state board shall make scholarship payments quarterly in four equal amounts in each school year in which a scholarship is in force.
  - (b) In accordance with state board rule, made in accordance with Title 63G, Chapter 3, Utah Administrative Rulemaking Act, the state board may make a scholarship payment before the first quarterly payment of the school year, if a private school requires partial payment of tuition before the start of the school year to reserve space for a student admitted to the school.
- (9) A parent of a scholarship student shall notify the state board if the student does not have continuing enrollment and attendance at an eligible private school.
- (10) Before scholarship payments are made, the state board shall cross-check enrollment lists of scholarship students, LEAs, and youth in care to ensure that scholarship payments are not erroneously made.

Amended by Chapter 20, 2024 General Session

**53F-4-305 State board to make rules.**

In accordance with Title 63G, Chapter 3, Utah Administrative Rulemaking Act, the state board shall make rules consistent with this part establishing:

- (1) the eligibility of students to participate in the scholarship program;
- (2) the application process for the scholarship program; and
- (3) payment procedures to eligible private schools.

Amended by Chapter 408, 2020 General Session

**53F-4-306 Enforcement and penalties.**

- (1)
  - (a) The state board shall require a private school to submit a signed affidavit assuring the private school will comply with the requirements of this part.
  - (b) If a school fails to submit a signed affidavit within 30 days of receiving notification that the school is an approved private school to receive the Carson Smith Scholarship, the state board may:
    - (i) deny the private school permission to enroll scholarship students; and
    - (ii) interrupt disbursement of or withhold scholarship payments.
- (2) The state board may investigate complaints and convene administrative hearings for an alleged violation of this part.
- (3) Upon a finding that this part was violated, the state board may:
  - (a) deny a private school permission to enroll scholarship students;
  - (b) interrupt disbursement of or withhold scholarship payments; or
  - (c) issue an order for repayment of scholarship payments fraudulently obtained.

Amended by Chapter 186, 2019 General Session

**53F-4-307 Limitation on regulation of private schools.**

Nothing in this part grants additional authority to any state agency or LEA to regulate private schools except as expressly set forth in this part.

Renumbered and Amended by Chapter 2, 2018 General Session