

Understanding

EDUCATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP ACCOUNT (ESA)

Educational Scholarship Account (ESA)

The Mississippi Educational Scholarship was enacted in 2015 and provides an opportunity for parents of children with disabilities to receive money to help defray the cost of private school tuition or other specific allowable expenses to educate their child. The ESA program was created by the Equal Opportunity for Students with Special Needs Miss. Code Ann. §§ 37-181-1 et. seq. The program is being administered by the Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Special Education (OSE).

Who Is Eligible?

- Students who reside in the State of Mississippi
- Students who have an active Individualized Education Program (IEP) within three (3) years from the date of application. An “active IEP” is an IEP developed by a public-school district where the student was enrolled and received special education or related services outlined in the IEP.

Parents Must Sign an Agreement to Abide by the Following Responsibilities:

- Provide an organized, appropriate educational program with measurable annual goals and provide an education for the student in at least the subjects of reading, grammar, mathematics, social studies and science;
- Document the participating student’s disability every three (3) years after initial enrollment in the program;
- Not enroll the participating student in a public school and to acknowledge that the eligible school has provided clear notice that the student has no individual entitlement to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) from the home school district, including special education and related services, for as long as the student is participating in the ESA program;
- Not to file for the participating student a certificate of enrollment indicating participation in a home instruction program under Section 37-13-19, Mississippi Code of 1972; and
- Not to participate in the Mississippi Dyslexia Therapy Scholarship for Students with Dyslexia Program or the Mississippi Speech-Language Therapy Scholarship for Students with Speech-Language Impairments Program while participating in the ESA program.
- Notify the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) immediately upon a change in status that causes one or more of the above items to no longer be met.
- Provide the OSE, ESA division pre- and post-assessments by June of the awarded school year.
- Participate and share the pre-and post-assessments administered by the school the student is attending.



How Are Students Selected?

Once an application is submitted, the application and required documentation will be reviewed within 15 business days to determine student eligibility.

(Incomplete applications will not be processed, and parents will be notified on what is needed to complete the application.) Applications are time and date stamped upon receipt and are reviewed and awarded on a first-come, first-served basis until 50% of the annual enrollment limits are reached. A random selection process will then be used to choose the recipients of the remaining ESAs. A mid-year lottery may be held in the event scholarships become available.

Once a student is awarded an ESA, an award packet will be mailed to the parent/guardian requesting verification of student enrollment at an eligible school and requesting the parent/guardian to complete steps to set up an account to receive reimbursements. Upon receipt of information and final steps being completed the student award will be finalized. The student will remain in the program, remain eligible and will not be subject to the random selection process in subsequent years.

What Does It Mean to Be Placed on A Waitlist?

A waitlist will be maintained of eligible applicants that have not yet been awarded due to limited funds. As applications are received, the OSE will proceed with the review of student eligibility and place additional eligible students on the waitlist. The parents will be notified that their student is eligible but not yet awarded. As funds become available, ESA awards will be awarded in chronological order from the waitlist.

When Is the Best Time to Apply?

To ensure the award notification is received prior to the start of the school year, the best time to submit the application is from December through May. This will allow time to get all documentation submitted and verified. However, applications are accepted throughout the school year.

How Much Is the Scholarship?

The amount is calculated annually each spring and may vary based on the availability of funds. For the 2020 – 2021 School year the maximum reimbursement is \$5,606.36.

How do I apply?

Applications are available through your local public school and the Mississippi Department of Education website: www.mdek12.org/OSE/ESA
Applications will only be accepted via United States Postal Service (USPS). Applications must be complete on submission with all necessary documents. **Any incomplete submissions will not be processed.** Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis. Once enrollment reaches 50%, the MDE will announce a deadline for the random selection of the remaining scholarships.

What Can Be Reimbursed?

- a. Tuition and or academic fees from an eligible school- Fees in addition to tuition are allowable only if they directly impact the educational needs of the student.
- b. Textbooks related to academic coursework
- c. Payment to a tutor - Documentation must be provided that verifies the tutor is certified or licensed by a state, regional, or national certification, licensing or accreditation (The student cannot be homeschooled or enrolled in a public school and receive these funds)
- d. Payment for purchase of curriculum including any supplemental materials required by the curriculum
- e. Fees for nationally standardized norm-referenced achievement tests, including alternate assessments; Advanced Placement exams or similar courses; and any exams related to college/university admission
- f. Educational services or therapies from a licensed or certified practitioner or provider, including licensed or certified paraprofessionals or educational aides (The student cannot be homeschooled or enrolled in a public school and receive these funds)
- g. Tuition, and fees related to dual enrollment at a postsecondary institution, - These expenses are allowable for a **high school student** taking a class or classes at a postsecondary institution (community college, college, or university accredited by a state, regional or national accrediting organization) but they are not allowable for a student who has graduated from high school and is enrolled at a postsecondary institution.
- h. Textbooks related to dual enrollment academic coursework at a postsecondary institution
- i. Surety bond payments if required by MDE
- j. No more than \$50.00 in annual consumable school supplies necessary for educational services and therapies, daily classroom activities, and tutoring
- k. Computer hardware and software and other technological devices if an eligible school, licensed and certified tutor, licensed or certified educational service practitioner or provider, or licensed medical professional verifies in writing that these items are essential for the student to meet annual, measurable educational and academic goals or goals within the scope of the eligible student's IEP. Qualifying expenses for computer hardware and software include only those expenses incurred within the awarded year. Once a student is no longer participating in the program all computer hardware and technology devices must be donated to the public school or library.



How Will I Receive the Funds?

Upon MDE's final determination of the award, parents will be sent a letter requesting additional information that must be completed and submitted in order to finalize the student account for reimbursement of expenses. Funds will be paid quarterly to the parent or to an educational service provider if approved by the parent, on a reimbursement basis. The parent must submit a reimbursement request with proper documentation of expenses incurred.

Tentative Reimbursement Dates for the 2020 – 2021 SY

Quarter	Request Due to MDE Office of Special Education	Disbursement Date
1 st	Due on or before August 27, 2020	September 30, 2020
2 nd	Due on or before November 27, 2020	December 18, 2020
3 rd	Due on or before February 26, 2021	March 31, 2021
4 th	Due on or before May 26, 2021	June 30, 2021

Questions

Additional information on the ESA Program can be found at www.mdek12.org/OSE/ESA or by calling the OSE at 601-359-3498.