

**April 28, 2011**

## **NCSS Announces Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Guidelines for 2011-2012**

Senate Bill 10 as signed into law on May 18, 2007, created the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship (GSNS) Program. The GSNS allows eligible special needs students to transfer to another public school, public school district, state school, or authorized participating private school.

In order for a student to be eligible for this scholarship, the parent/guardian must be a current Georgia resident and must have resided in the state for at least one year. In addition, the student must have spent the entire immediate prior year in attendance at a Georgia public school in grades K-12. The child must also have an Individual Education Program (IEP) written by the school in accordance with federal and state laws and regulations.

“Parents of students who qualify have options available,” said Dr. Sarah West, Newton County School System Director of Special Education. “The law allows parents to request a transfer to another public school within their district, another public school district outside their district, a state school for the blind or deaf, or a private school authorized to participate in the GSNS Program.” Dr. West added that “parents are responsible for providing transportation for students participating in the GSNS Program.”

Once a student qualifies for the GSNS Program, parents do not need to re-apply unless the student is changing levels or schools (elementary to middle, middle to high). If a student is changing schools, the parent must reapply for the GSNS Program.

### **Public School Choice Options**

According to Dr. West, parents can request a transfer to another public school within the school system as long as there is available space at that school and the school has a program with the services agreed to in the student’s existing IEP (Grades 1 – 12). If the parent chooses this option the parent is responsible for transportation to the school.

The NCSS will make a decision regarding a parental request to transfer a special needs student based on two criteria:

- **Class size and school capacity, which is defined by the class-size capacity by grade and subject, based on state law (160-5-1-08), and**
- **The school’s ability to provide the services identified in the student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP).**

Home schooled students, students enrolled in the Department of Juvenile Justice, and students in residential facilities are not eligible. In addition, the Newton County School System is NOT accepting requests for the 2011-2012 school year from parents/students who live outside of Newton County.

Parents who wish to have their special needs student transferred to another school in the district for the 2011-2012 fall semester should submit their application by June 30, 2011. Parents may obtain forms on the NCSS website, [www.newtoncountyschools.org](http://www.newtoncountyschools.org), and submit the completed forms to the Special Education Department by June 30, 2011.

In addition to transfer requests within NCSS, parents of special needs students may also request a transfer to a school in another school system if there is available space and the system and school has a program with the services agreed to in the student's existing IEP. The other school system must agree to accept the student. If the parent chooses this option and the school system accepts the child, the parent is responsible for transportation.

A third public school choice option available for parents of special needs students is a transfer to one of the state schools for the deaf and/or blind operated by the State Board of Education; however, acceptance into a state school is dependent on that setting being appropriate for the student's needs. If the parent chooses this option, the parent is responsible for transportation to the state school. Parents may contact the Georgia Department of Education at <http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/> for more information about transferring to a State School.

Information and forms for public school choice are posted on the Newton County website, [www.newtoncountyschools.org](http://www.newtoncountyschools.org), or you can call the Special Education Department at (770) 787-1330.

### **Private School Choice Option**

Additionally, parents of special needs students may apply for a Georgia Special Needs Scholarship and request a transfer to a private school in Georgia. These scholarships provide funding that can be used to offset tuition costs at participating private schools in the state.

For more information on the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship and the parent application process, parents should visit the Georgia Department of Education's website at <http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/>.

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