

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

AUTISM SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM (ASP) GUIDELINES

THESE GUIDELINES ARE SUBJECT TO REVISION

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Introduction

The Autism Scholarship Program (ASP) offers educational options for students with autism. The purpose of the program is to give the parent of a qualified special education child the choice to send the child to an alternative public provider, a private school, or a special education program instead of the one run by their school district to receive the services in the child's individualized education program (IEP).

The scholarship can be used only to pay to attend a special education program that implements the child's IEP. A registered private or alternative public provider must provide the special education and related services during the Ohio school year.

The typical school year runs from the end of August to the early part of June. Some students may qualify for services over a 12 month period if their child's IEP covers the summer months. The ASP is not for summer services only. A student should not apply for the scholarship if he/she will be attending the public school district in the fall.

ASP students are still subject to compulsory school attendance. School aged students must enroll in either a public school that is a scholarship provider or a private school. Many of the providers that participate in the ASP are not schools and enrollment in these programs does not meet the compulsory attendance requirement. If the parent wishes to use these services and home school their child, they must notify their school district and receive approval for home schooling. For more information go to: <http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/3321>

Parent Application

Application process for new applicants

A parent of a child who meets the eligibility criteria for a special education child found in Ohio Administrative Code (OAC) Rule 3301-10-03 (B) (1) through (8), and who wishes to have the child participate in the Autism Scholarship Program (ASP), must complete and submit an application.

To apply, the parent must first select a registered provider who will provide special education and related services to their child. Parents can search for registered providers at <https://scholarship.ode.state.oh.us>

The provider will give the parent the autism scholarship application form. The parent fills out the application form and returns it to their provider. The provider submits the information and a copy of the form through a secure, online application system. The provider that submits the application will be the student's Primary Provider.

The parent can select one or multiple providers. Once the provider(s) is selected, the parent and provider will complete a fee and service agreement that lists the services the provider will be providing and the fees for those services. This agreement will help the parent decide how much of their scholarship to allocate to each provider.

The public school district of residence must review the application, provide the student's current evaluation team report (ETR) and IEP, and verify the student's eligibility. The district or the department may also request a proof of address, birth certificate or documentation of custody to verify the student's information and eligibility. The scholarship is awarded once the district verifies that the student is eligible.

Parents may not claim services that occurred before the approval date of the application.

Application deadlines

The department accepts applications for the ASP throughout the year. Applications received during the 4th quarter (April 1 – June 30) will be considered for the next program year. The scholarship program year is July 1 – June 30.

Renewal Application

Parents must submit a renewal application to continue their scholarship for the next program year. The department mails renewal reminders and application forms to parents in late March. ODE accepts applications for renewal beginning April 1st. Forms can also be obtained from our registered providers.

Students participating in the ASP cannot be concurrently enrolled in the Jon Peterson, EdChoice, or Cleveland Scholarships or attend a community school.

Program Participation

Scholarship Award and Acceptance

The department sends an award or denial letter to the parent. If a scholarship is awarded, the letter will show the amount of the scholarship. An acceptance form is included with this letter. The parent needs to mark whether they accept or decline the scholarship, sign the form, and return it to their primary provider. If the scholarship is accepted, the parent must list the amount of funds they want to allocate to each provider on the acceptance form.

Reporting Changes

Parents are required to report the following changes to the autism scholarship office:

- Change of address
- Change of custody status
- Withdrawal from the program
- Change of primary provider

If a parent moves to a new public school district, the parent must notify their old district. They also must contact the new district to register their child and create an IEP with the new district of residence.

Changing Providers

If the parent chooses to use a different provider or add a secondary provider, the parent must complete a Request for New Provider form and give it to their new provider. If they are also making a change in primary provider, they must inform the scholarship office.

Providers can add themselves to a student's application as a new provider through the online application system. The parent must reallocate their funds whenever they add a new provider or withdraw from a current provider.

Withdrawal from the ASP

If a parent whose child is using the ASP chooses to withdraw from the program, the parent must immediately notify his or her school district of residence and the department. The scholarship ends as of the last day of service. The amount of the scholarship is prorated based on the time the student was enrolled in the program. If a parent whose child is using the ASP returns to the district of residence, the scholarship ends as of the date the child enrolls at the district.

Parents are required to pay any money owed to their approved private provider(s). Failure to pay for services used could result in the department withdrawing the child from the ASP.

Reentering the ASP

The department may allow a child to reenroll in the program after withdrawal within the same school year if the original withdrawal involved health and/or safety issues or documented extenuating circumstances. The department has sole authority to determine if any of these issues or circumstances existed.

Once a student has withdrawn from the program, if the parent wants the student to reenter the ASP they must re-apply by completing a new autism scholarship application. The student may reenter the program once the application is approved.

Payment under the ASP

Amount of the Scholarship

The maximum amount of the scholarship is \$27,000.00. The department will pay the **lesser** of either the fee charged by the provider to provide special education and related services or \$27,000.00 per program year.

Students applying after the start of the school year or withdrawing prior to the end of the school year will receive a prorated scholarship.

Invoicing and Payment Process

Providers invoice monthly through our secure, online scholarship system. Only services listed on the IEP are reimbursable. If a parent believes their child needs an educational service that is not on the IEP, they will need to work with their provider to request a modification of services. If approved, this will allow payment for the additional service. This process does not alter the IEP.

Please note:

The provider can only claim services rendered by an approved provider and the provider's employees. Non-employees cannot receive payments through the scholarship.

Payments will not be made for services provided to the child prior to the department's approval of the student's application.

All scholarship payments are issued in the name of the parent AND the provider and will be mailed to the provider. The parent MUST sign the scholarship checks.

Parents cannot use scholarship funds to pay for assessments, respite care, martial arts, riding lessons or other similar programs. Scholarship funds also cannot be used to purchase equipment or materials.

Services can only be billed for the month in which they were provided. Unspent funds cannot be "billed out" at the end of the year to purchase future services.

Reconciliation

After the fiscal year billing closes, the department will run a reconciliation process to finalize all payments and inform providers of any overpayments. Providers will have 45 days to reimburse the state of Ohio for any overpayments.

Provider Application, Eligibility and Standards

Provider Application

Prospective providers must apply to the department through the secure, online scholarship system. Businesses that serve children through multiple locations must register each location separately.

A complete application must include:

- The signed affidavit indicating that the prospective provider meets the requirements of OAC 3301-103-06 and agrees to follow the program guidelines;
- Verification that the provider has been in operation for at least one full year;
- A list of all employees and contractors including their credentials and BCI and FBI background check history;
- A copy of the provider's current tuition and fee schedule;
- Proof of insurance;
- Health and safety documents;
- Proof of address;
- Documentation of Tax ID;
- And copies of their business policies.

A private provider and all individuals acting on behalf of the private provider must make available any information the department reasonably deems necessary to determine that they meet all the requirements of the ASP.

Self-employed individuals approved as scholarship providers must meet all of the requirements of private business providers. Self-employed providers cannot have staff and will only be allowed to bill for services they personally provide to the scholarship students.

Alternative Public Providers must apply to the department through the secure, online scholarship system. An alternative public provider may only enroll a student in their special education program if the child's parent would owe fees for the services provided.

The department will send written notification to approved providers. Providers must notify the department of changes in name, ownership, staff, services or location. All providers must renew their registration annually.

Fees

Providers must make their fee schedule publicly available and provide copies to the department. Fees charged to the scholarship must be the provider's usual and customary fees. A separate "scholarship" fee scale is not necessary or appropriate. The scholarship does not cover all fees a provider may charge. The scholarship can only pay for special education and related services as detailed in the IEP and provided directly to the child. If a parent chooses to purchase services such as; recreational classes, assessment, respite care or equipment, those fees cannot be charged to the scholarship. For additional information see the payment section above.

Auxiliary or IDEA-B funded staff cannot be used to deliver the non-public school's special education program for scholarship students. Services provided by auxiliary or IDEA funded staff in a non-public school cannot be charged to the scholarship.

Revocation

The Ohio Department of Education may revoke the registration of a registered private provider if the department determines that the registered private provider is in violation of any of the provisions of Ohio Revised Code 3310.41 or OAC 3301-103-01 to 07.

District of Residence Requirements

Student Eligibility

The district of residence is required to enroll the child; to evaluate the child if the district suspects he or she is a child with a disability; and, if the child is determined eligible for services, develop an IEP according to existing federal and state laws. This process applies for all children suspected of having a disability, including children whose parents are applying to the ASP. For children whose parents are applying to the ASP, the district develops the IEP to offer FAPE to the child as if the district of residence was going to implement the IEP. There should be no mention of the ASP and/or any provider within the child's IEP.

Application Review

The district of residence is required to review applications submitted for their students in the online scholarship system. That review process consists of verifying the accuracy of information, verifying that the student's disability category qualifies them for the ASP, and providing electronic copies of the student's current ETR and IEP.

The district must update the IEP annually for students participating in the autism scholarship.

Free appropriate public education (FAPE)

Districts are relieved of the requirement to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for any resident child approved for and participating in the ASP.

Each school district of residence is responsible for initiating and conducting annual meetings to develop, review and revise the IEP of a child with a disability.

For students in grades nine through twelve, the district and parent(s) must address the issue of earning credits towards graduation as well as the issuance of a diploma prior to the child's participation in the autism scholarship program and record those decisions on the child's current IEP.

Change of Resident District

If the parents of a child participating in the ASP moves to a new public school district, the new district of residence, within two to three weeks, assumes the responsibility for initiating and conducting meetings to develop, review and revise the child's IEP. Parents are required to notify, immediately, both the old and new districts of residence and the department of this change.

Reporting participating students in the EMIS

The resident district must report all students who participate in the Autism Scholarship Program in EMIS during the annual reporting periods. These students are included in the Federal December Child Count. Do not withdraw these students. Do not report the 215xxx Special Education Service program codes for these students.

Transportation

Transportation responsibilities depend on Rule 3301-51-10 of the OAC and ORC Sections 3314.09 and 3327.01 through 3327.05.

Situations are as follows:

If transportation is listed on the IEP as a related service, the parent may obtain transportation from an approved private provider who is qualified to operate such transportation and claim it for reimbursement through the ASP. The district is under no obligation to provide transportation as a related service.

If transportation is NOT listed on the IEP as a related service and the parent chooses an approved private provider, the parent will be responsible for transporting the child to the approved private provider.

If transportation is NOT listed on the IEP as a related service and the parent enrolls the child in a nonpublic school that is chartered or operating under a letter of approval, the child is entitled ONLY to the same transportation being offered by the resident district to regular education students attending that nonpublic school, as required in ORC 3327.01.

ASP student participation in state testing

Students in the ASP are not required to participate in state achievement and graduation tests. Students participating in the program, who are attending chartered nonpublic high schools, are required to participate in any tests required for graduation.

Students Attending Chartered Nonpublic Schools

Evaluation for students attending a chartered nonpublic school

If the parent of a child with autism currently enrolled in a chartered nonpublic school that is located in a district other than the child's district of residence wants to participate in the ASP, the child requires an ETR and IEP from the district of residence.

The resident district and parents may exercise the following options:

If the child has already received an initial evaluation and/or reevaluation from the district where the nonpublic school is located, the child's district of residence may accept the child's current evaluation as its own evaluation, convene an IEP team meeting and create an IEP so that the child may participate in the ASP; or the district of residence may conduct its own evaluation, then complete the IEP process.

If the child is attending a chartered nonpublic school and is suspected of having a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), the parent of the child may request an initial evaluation from either the district of residence or the district where the chartered nonpublic school is located. If the parent is interested in having his or her child participate in the ASP, the district of residence must complete the initial evaluation.

Children currently participating in the ASP

If the district of residence has identified the child as a child with a disability and the child enters a chartered nonpublic school while participating in the ASP, the district where the nonpublic school is located will complete the reevaluations. (Operating Standards for Ohio Educational Agencies serving Children with Disabilities Rule 3301-51-08 (R) (1) through (2)).

ASP student attendance

ASP students are still subject to compulsory school attendance. School aged students must enroll in either a public school that is a scholarship provider or a private school. Many of the providers that participate in the ASP are not schools and enrollment in these programs does not meet the compulsory attendance requirement. If the parent wishes to use these services and home school their child, they must notify their school district and receive approval for home schooling. Students who are home schooled are not issued a state of Ohio diploma upon graduation. For more information go to: <http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/3321>

Reporting of Children in the ASP

Progress Reporting

The private provider will submit quarterly progress reports that will be available to the child's school district of residence through the online scholarship system. They will also give copies of the quarterly reports to the parent. These reports should indicate the child's progress toward the annual IEP goals and the extent to which that progress is sufficient for the child to achieve the goals by the end of the year.

Participation Reporting

If a child withdraws from services with a provider, the provider must update the student's enrollment period in the online scholarship system to show the last date of service and notify the department.

If a child withdraws from the program, the parent and provider must notify the department of the last date of service.

If a child reenrolls in a public school, the parent and the public school district must notify the department.

