

SCHOOL CHOICE

Understanding Options



Frequently Asked Questions



What is school choice?

No Child Left Behind, an education law of 2001, provides you with more choices regarding your child's education. You have the greatest understanding of your child's educational needs and interests, and the law allows you to make decisions about where your child attends school. Options vary among school districts, but all school districts are required to provide a variety of choices.

How does school choice work in Florida?

In Florida, you have the right to make choices about where your child attends school. Florida's options vary among districts but usually include the following:

- No Child Left Behind School Choice
- Public School Choice
- Home education
- Private schools
- Scholarship programs

What is No Child Left Behind (NCLB) School Choice?

NCLB provides options to children that attend low-performing schools:

- **NCLB School Choice with Transportation:** NCLB provides students who attend low-performing schools the opportunity to attend a better-performing school with transportation paid for by the district. Students that attend Title I schools* that have not made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)* may attend a better-performing school with transportation paid for by the district.
- **Supplemental Educational Services (SES):** NCLB School Choice also provides the opportunity for eligible students to receive SES. SES provides free tutoring to students that qualify for free or reduced price lunch and attend a Title I school* that has not made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)* for three or more years.

* Title I schools are schools that receive federal funds based on a high percentage of students from low-income families.

* AYP is the government's measurement of a school's overall success. (**see also: *No Child Left Behind: A Parent Guide***)

How do I know if my child is eligible for NCLB School Choice or SES?

Districts are required to notify you before the start of the school year if your child is eligible for NCLB School Choice or SES. If you have not been notified, contact your school or district office.

What is Public School Choice?

Public School Choice varies among school districts, but many Florida districts offer the following options:

- **Controlled Open Enrollment:** Some districts offer parents the opportunity to choose among existing public schools based on availability and a lottery system.
- **Charter Schools:** Charter schools are state-funded but privately operated. They have the freedom to set their own rules regarding curriculum, teaching styles, personnel, and discipline. Charter schools often offer specialized programs and increased hands-on experiences for students.
- **Magnet Schools:** Magnet schools adopt a theme or academic focus such as performing arts, mathematics, business, or technology. These schools offer parents the opportunity to choose a school that appeals to their child's interests and talents.
- **Virtual School Programs:** Virtual schools are Internet-based and available to Florida students in grades six through twelve.
- **Career Academies:** Career academies are small learning communities within a high school that combine academic and occupational courses focusing on areas such as health or electronics.
- **Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate Programs:** These programs offer students the opportunity to earn college credit by taking college-level courses in high school.
- **Dual Enrollment:** Eligible students can take college courses at Florida's public community colleges and some state universities to earn credit toward a college degree or technology certificate while attending high school.

What is home education?

Home education offers you the option of educating your child at home. You are not required to be a certified teacher, but you must register your child in the home education program with your school district. You must maintain a portfolio of records and provide an annual evaluation of your child's progress.

What are private schools?

Private schools are nonpublic schools that have unique philosophies and purposes. These schools operate with limited regulation by the state.

What are scholarship programs?

Florida offers three scholarship programs that allow you to choose among public and private schools. These scholarship programs include:

- **John McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities:** Parents of eligible students with disabilities have the option to request a different public school within their district, in an adjacent school district, or receive a scholarship to attend a participating private school.
- **Opportunity Scholarship Program:** Students that attend a school that has received two "F" grades from the state within four years may be eligible to transfer their child to a higher-performing public school or an eligible private school.
- **Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship:** This program encourages contributions from corporate donors to non-profit scholarship organizations. These organizations award scholarships to children from low-income families to attend an eligible private school or a public school in an adjacent district.

What are the benefits of Florida's school choice programs?

You are the first expert about your child's educational needs and interests. Florida's school choice options offer you the ability to choose a school that best meets your child's needs and interests. When children attend a school that meets their needs then they are more likely to succeed. Also, schools are encouraged to improve their services and programs when they are competing with each other for student enrollment.

Where can I find more information about school choice?

Contact your child's school, school district, or one of the following organizations:

The Florida Parental Information and Resource Center (PIRC) at USF:

Toll free: (866) 775-8661 or www.floridapirc.usf.edu

Florida Department of Education:

Toll free: (800) 447-1636 or www.floridaschoolchoice.org

United States Department of Education:

Toll free: (800) 872-5237 or www.ed.gov/nclb