

Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Accountability

Academic

- ✓ All scholarship students must take nationally norm-referenced test approved by DOE. Students may take the FCAT, but the complication is that private schools are prohibited from administering it.
- ✓ Most students, 71 percent, take the Stanford Achievement, another 20 percent take the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and 4 percent take the Terra Nova.
- ✓ Schools must submit test results to an independent research organization, contracted by DOE.
- ✓ The research organization, which is currently University of Florida research David Figlio, must report “year-to-year improvements of participating students.”
- ✓ Learning gains for reading and math are reported for students who are in grades 3-10 with a prior-year test score from the same school. The gains are reported statewide and for every participating school with at least 30 students meeting the criteria.

Financial

- ✓ FTC schools must be in operation for at least three years or obtain a surety bond or letter of credit for the amount equal to the scholarship funds for any quarter.
- ✓ Any FTC school receiving at least \$250,000 in scholarship money the prior year must submit a financial report completed by a certified accountant.
- ✓ Schools must provide Scholarship Funding Organizations (SFOs), upon request, all documentation required for the student's participation, including the private school's and student's fee schedules.
- ✓ Parent must restrictively endorse the scholarship check to the school each quarter.
- ✓ SFOs “must provide to the Auditor General and the Department of Education an annual financial and compliance audit of its accounts and records conducted by an independent certified public accountant and in accordance with rules adopted by the Auditor General.”
- ✓ SFOs cannot carry forward more than 25 percent of net eligible contributions from one year to the next.

Regulatory

- ✓ School owners must submit to criminal background check. “It shall be unlawful for a person who has been convicted of a crime involving moral turpitude to own or operate a private school.”
- ✓ Schools must assure that “each employee and contracted personnel with direct student contact” is submitted to a criminal background check and fired if any of a lengthy list of crimes is discovered.
- ✓ Schools must meet all applicable state and local health, safety, and welfare laws, codes, and rules, and fire and building safety codes.
- ✓ Schools must “employ or contract with teachers who hold baccalaureate or higher degrees, have at least 3 years of teaching experience in public or private schools, or have special skills, knowledge, or expertise that qualifies them to provide instruction in subjects taught.”
- ✓ Schools must keep a register of enrollment and attendance and report the information to DOE.
- ✓ Schools must adopt and adhere to “standards of ethical conduct” to guard against misconduct with students. A school may not sign any confidentiality agreement with a staff member that hides alleged misconduct.
- ✓ Schools and SFOs cannot discriminate on the basis of race, color or national origin.
- ✓ SFOs must document each student’s eligibility each year.
- ✓ SFO owners cannot have filed for bankruptcy in the previous seven years.
- ✓ SFO operators cannot operate an eligible school.
- ✓ SFO owners and operators must submit to criminal background checks.
- ✓ SFOs receive 3 percent administrative allowance only if they can first produce three years of clean audits. The covered expenses must be “reasonable and necessary” and no more than one-third can be spent for fundraising.
- ✓ DOE, by way of enforcement, may conduct random site visits of schools.