

STATE OF OKLAHOMA

2nd Session of the 59th Legislature (2024)

HOUSE BILL 3968

By: Echols

AS INTRODUCED

An Act relating to schools; amending 70 O.S. 2021, Section 13-101.2, which relates to the Lindsey Nicole Henry Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Program Act; deleting eligibility requirement that the student attend public school prior to applying; and providing an effective date.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA:

SECTION 1. AMENDATORY 70 O.S. 2021, Section 13-101.2, is amended to read as follows:

Section 13-101.2 A. There is hereby created the Lindsey Nicole Henry Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Program. The Lindsey Nicole Henry Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Program is established to provide a scholarship to a private school of choice for students with disabilities for whom an individualized education program (IEP) in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or an individualized service plan pursuant to Section 1-4-704 of Title 10A of the Oklahoma Statutes has been developed at any time prior to notifying the State

1 Department of Education of the intent to participate in the Program
2 and the IEP is in effect at the time the request for a scholarship
3 is received by the State Department of Education. Scholarships
4 shall be awarded beginning with the 2010-2011 school year.

5 B. The parent or legal guardian of a ~~public school~~ student with
6 a disability may exercise their parental option and request to have
7 a Lindsey Nicole Henry Scholarship awarded for the child to enroll
8 in and attend a private school in accordance with this section and
9 the scholarship shall be awarded if:

10 ~~1. The student has spent the prior school year in attendance at~~
11 ~~a public school in this state. For purposes of this section, "prior~~
12 ~~school year in attendance" means that the student was enrolled in~~
13 ~~and reported by a school district for funding purposes during the~~
14 ~~preceding school year regardless of whether or not the student had~~
15 ~~an IEP at the time the student was counted for funding purposes. A~~
16 ~~student who is a child of a member of the United States Armed Forces~~
17 ~~who transfers to a school in this state from out of state or from a~~
18 ~~foreign country pursuant to a permanent change of station orders of~~
19 ~~the parent shall be exempt from the requirements of this paragraph~~
20 ~~but shall be required to meet all other eligibility requirements to~~
21 ~~participate as provided for in this section. A student who has been~~
22 ~~provided services under an Individual Family Service Plan through~~
23 ~~the SoonerStart program and during transition was evaluated and~~
24 ~~determined to be eligible for school district services shall be~~

1 ~~exempt from the requirements of this paragraph but shall be required~~
2 ~~to meet all other eligibility requirements to participate as~~
3 ~~provided for in this section. A student who was in out-of-home~~
4 ~~placement with the Department of Human Services, who was adopted~~
5 ~~while in the permanent custody of the Department of Human Services~~
6 ~~or who was in out-of-home placement with the Office of Juvenile~~
7 ~~Affairs shall be exempt from the requirements of this paragraph but~~
8 ~~shall be required to meet all other eligibility requirements to~~
9 ~~participate as provided for in this section; and~~

10 2. the eligibility requirements for participation as provided in
11 this section are met. The parent or legal guardian ~~has obtained~~
12 shall obtain acceptance for admission of the student to a private
13 school that is eligible for the program as provided in subsection H
14 of this section and ~~has notified~~ shall notify the State Department
15 of Education of the request for a scholarship. Requests to
16 participate in the program made after December 1 shall be granted,
17 but funding for scholarships requested after December 1 shall not be
18 available until the beginning of the next school year. The request
19 shall be through a communication directly to the Department in a
20 manner that creates a written or electronic record of the request
21 and the date of receipt of the request. The Department shall notify
22 the school district upon receipt of the request. For purposes of
23 continuity of educational choice, the scholarship shall remain in
24 force until the student returns to a public school, graduates from
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1 high school or reaches the age of twenty-two (22), whichever occurs
2 first. At any time, the parent or legal guardian of the student may
3 remove the student from the private school and place the student in
4 another private school that is eligible for the program as provided
5 in subsection H of this section or place the student in a public
6 school.

7 C. A student shall be eligible for a scholarship if the parent
8 or legal guardian of the student made a request for a scholarship
9 for the 2010-2011 school year and the student transferred to an
10 eligible private school but was subsequently denied a scholarship
11 because the student did not have an IEP in effect on October 1,
12 2009, but did meet all other eligibility requirements as set forth
13 in the Lindsey Nicole Henry Scholarships for Students with
14 Disabilities Program Act.

15 D. A student shall not be eligible for a Lindsey Nicole Henry
16 Scholarship if the student is not having regular and direct contact
17 with the private school teachers at the physical location of the
18 private school.

19 E. School districts shall notify the parent or legal guardian
20 of a public school student with a disability of all options
21 available pursuant to this section and inform the parent or legal
22 guardian of the availability of information about the program from
23 the State Department of Education through the toll-free telephone
24 number or website. The notification shall be provided with or
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1 included in the copy of the "Parents Rights in Special Education:
2 Notice of Procedural Safeguards" document given to parents at least
3 annually or as otherwise required by law.

4 F. 1. Acceptance of a Lindsey Nicole Henry Scholarship shall
5 have the same effect as a parental revocation of consent to service
6 pursuant to 20 U.S.C., Sections 1414(a)(1)(D) and 1414(C) of the
7 IDEA.

8 2. Upon acceptance of a Lindsey Nicole Henry Scholarship, the
9 parent or legal guardian shall assume full financial responsibility
10 for the education of the student, including but not limited to
11 transportation to and from the private school.

12 G. If the parent or legal guardian requests a Lindsey Nicole
13 Henry Scholarship and the student is accepted by the private school
14 pending the availability of a space for the student, the parent or
15 legal guardian of the student shall notify the State Department of
16 Education before entering the private school and before December 1
17 in order to be eligible for the scholarship during the school year
18 when a space becomes available for the student in the private
19 school. If notification is made after December 1, payment of the
20 scholarship shall not begin until the next school year.

21 H. 1. To be eligible to participate in the Lindsey Nicole
22 Henry Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Program, a private
23 school shall notify the State Department of Education of its intent
24 to participate. The notice shall specify the grade levels and
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1 services that the private school has available for students with
2 disabilities who are participating in the scholarship program. The
3 State Department of Education shall approve a private school as
4 eligible to participate in the scholarship program upon
5 determination that the private school:

- 6 a. meets the accreditation requirements set by the State
7 Board of Education or another accrediting association
8 approved by the State Board of Education. The State
9 Department of Education shall list on its website all
10 accrediting associations approved by the Board,
- 11 b. demonstrates fiscal soundness by having been in
12 operation for one (1) school year or providing the
13 State Department of Education with a statement by a
14 certified public accountant confirming that the
15 private school desiring to participate is insured and
16 the owner or owners have sufficient capital or credit
17 to operate the school for the upcoming year by serving
18 the number of students anticipated with expected
19 revenues from tuition and other sources that may be
20 reasonably expected. In lieu of a statement, a surety
21 bond or letter of credit for the amount equal to the
22 scholarship funds for any quarter may be filed with
23 the Department,

- c. complies with the antidiscrimination provisions of 42 U.S.C., Section 2000d,
- d. meets state and local health and safety laws and codes,
- e. will be academically accountable to the parent or legal guardian for meeting the educational needs of the student,
- f. employs or contracts with teachers who hold baccalaureate or higher degrees, or have at least three (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,
- g. complies with all state laws relating to general regulation of private schools, and
- h. adheres to the tenets of its published disciplinary procedures prior to the expulsion of a scholarship student.

2. Upon approval of a private school, the State Department of Education shall provide on its website all information and material submitted by the private school with its application.

I. 1. Lindsey Nicole Henry Scholarship Program participants shall comply with the following:

- 1 a. the parent or legal guardian shall select the private
2 school from the schools approved for eligibility
3 pursuant to subsection H of this section and apply for
4 the admission of the child,
- 5 b. the parent or legal guardian shall request the
6 scholarship no later than December 1 of the school
7 year during which the scholarship is requested,
- 8 c. any student participating in the scholarship program
9 shall attend throughout the school year, unless
10 excused by the school for illness or other good cause,
11 and shall comply fully with the code of conduct for
12 the school,
- 13 d. the parent or legal guardian shall fully comply with
14 the parental involvement requirements of the private
15 school, unless excused by the school for illness or
16 other good cause, and
- 17 e. upon issuance of a scholarship warrant, the parent or
18 legal guardian to whom the warrant is made shall
19 restrictively endorse the warrant to the private
20 school for deposit into the account of the private
21 school. The parent or legal guardian may not
22 designate any entity or individual associated with the
23 private school as the attorney in fact for the parent
24 or legal guardian to endorse a warrant. A parent or
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1 legal guardian who fails to comply with this
2 subparagraph shall forfeit the scholarship.

3 2. A participant who fails to comply with this subsection
4 forfeits the scholarship.

5 J. Provisions governing payment of a Lindsey Nicole Henry
6 Scholarship shall be as follows:

7 1. The State Department of Education shall calculate the total
8 cost of all scholarships for all eligible students in the state.

9 The State Department of Education shall then reserve or retain from
10 the total amount appropriated to the State Board of Education for
11 State Aid purposes and any other revenue available for allocation
12 for State Aid purposes the total cost for all scholarship payments;

13 2. The maximum scholarship granted for an eligible student with
14 disabilities shall be a calculated amount equivalent to the total
15 State Aid factors for the applicable school year multiplied by the
16 grade and disability weights generated by that student for the
17 applicable school year. The disability weights used in calculating
18 the scholarship amount shall include all disability weights which
19 correspond to the disabilities included in the multidisciplinary
20 evaluation and eligibility group summary for the student at the time
21 the request for a scholarship is made by the parent or legal
22 guardian. The maximum scholarship amount shall be calculated by the
23 State Board of Education for each year the student is participating
24 in the scholarship program;

1 3. The amount of the scholarship shall be the amount calculated
2 in paragraph 2 of this subsection or the amount of tuition and fees
3 for the private school, whichever is less, minus up to two and one-
4 half percent (2 1/2%) of the scholarship amount which may be
5 retained by the State Department of Education as a fee for
6 administrative services rendered. The amount of any assessment fee
7 required by the private school and the amount associated with
8 providing services and therapies to address the disabilities of the
9 student may be paid from the total amount of the scholarship. The
10 amount of the scholarship shall be prorated to reflect the number of
11 days remaining in the current school year, if the scholarship
12 request is granted after the beginning of the school year;

13 4. The State Department of Education shall notify the private
14 school of the amount of the scholarship within ten (10) days after
15 receiving the request for a scholarship, when the total State Aid
16 factors have been determined for the current fiscal year. The
17 initial payment shall be made after the Department verifies
18 admission acceptance and enrollment. Quarterly payments shall be
19 made upon verification of continued enrollment and attendance at the
20 private school. Payment shall be made by the Department with an
21 individual warrant made payable to the parent or legal guardian of
22 the student and mailed by the Department to the private school that
23 the parent or legal guardian chooses. The parent or legal guardian
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1 shall restrictively endorse the warrant to the private school for
2 deposit into the account of the private school;

3 5. The State Department of Education shall not be responsible
4 for any additional costs associated with special education and
5 related services incurred by the private school for the student
6 including the cost of teachers, equipment, material, and special
7 costs associated with the special education class;

8 6. The State Department of Education shall establish a toll-
9 free telephone number or website that provides parents or legal
10 guardians and private schools with information about the program;

11 7. The State Department of Education shall require an annual,
12 notarized, sworn compliance statement by participating private
13 schools certifying compliance with state laws and shall retain all
14 records received from a participating private school. The State
15 Department of Education shall post on its website the annual
16 compliance statement for each participating private school; and

17 8. The State Department of Education shall cross-check the list
18 of participating scholarship students with the public school
19 enrollments prior to each scholarship payment to avoid duplication.

20 K. 1. The State Superintendent of Public Instruction shall
21 deny, suspend, or revoke the participation of a private school in
22 the scholarship program if it is determined that the private school
23 has failed to comply with the provisions of this section. However,
24 in instances in which the noncompliance is correctable within a
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1 reasonable amount of time and in which the health, safety, or
2 welfare of the students is not threatened, the Superintendent may
3 issue a notice of noncompliance which shall provide the private
4 school with a time frame within which to provide evidence of
5 compliance prior to taking action to suspend or revoke participation
6 in the scholarship program.

7 2. If the Superintendent intends to deny, suspend, or revoke
8 the participation of a private school in the scholarship program,
9 the Department shall notify the private school of the proposed
10 action in writing by certified mail and regular mail to the private
11 school's address of record with the Department. The Department
12 shall also notify any parents or legal guardians of scholarship
13 students attending the private school. The notification shall
14 include the reasons for the proposed action and notice of the
15 timelines and procedures set forth in this subsection.

16 3. The private school that is adversely affected by the
17 proposed action shall have fifteen (15) days from receipt of the
18 notice of proposed action to file with the Department a request for
19 an administrative hearing proceeding pursuant to the Administrative
20 Procedures Act.

21 4. Upon receipt of a request for a hearing, the State Board of
22 Education shall commence a hearing within sixty (60) days after the
23 receipt of the formal written request and enter an order within
24 thirty (30) days after the hearing.

1 5. The Board may immediately suspend payment of scholarship
2 funds if it is determined that there is probable cause to believe
3 that there is an imminent threat to the health, safety, or welfare
4 of the students or fraudulent activity on the part of the private
5 school.

6 L. No liability shall arise on the part of the state, the State
7 Board of Education, the State Department of Education, or a school
8 district based on the award or use of any scholarship provided
9 through the Lindsey Nicole Henry Scholarships for Students with
10 Disabilities Program.

11 M. The inclusion of private schools within options available to
12 public school students in Oklahoma shall not expand the regulatory
13 authority of the state or any school district to impose any
14 additional regulation of private schools beyond those reasonably
15 necessary to enforce the requirements expressly set forth in this
16 section.

17 N. If the State Department of Education determines that a
18 school district prior to the effective date of this act has failed
19 to comply with the provisions of the Lindsey Nicole Henry
20 Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Program Act and has
21 failed to make full or partial scholarship payments for eligible
22 students, the Department shall have authority to reduce the amount
23 of State Aid allocated to the school district or require the school
24 district to make repayment to the Department of State Aid

1 allocations in an amount equal to the amount of scholarship payments
2 the school district failed to make. The Department shall make
3 payment to the parent or legal guardian in the amount the school
4 district failed to make in the manner as provided for in subsection
5 J of this section.

6 O. The State Department of Education shall annually prepare and
7 post on its website a report of Lindsey Nicole Henry Scholarships
8 for Students with Disabilities Program. The annual report shall
9 include, but not be limited to, the following information:

- 10 1. The total number and amount of scholarships awarded and
11 reported for each participating private school;
- 12 2. The total number of scholarships denied;
- 13 3. The total number and amount of scholarship payments
14 suspended for each participating private school; and
- 15 4. Data on participating students, disaggregated by years of
16 participation in the program, grade level, economically
17 disadvantaged status, racial and ethnic groups, and disability
18 category.

19 SECTION 2. This act shall become effective November 1, 2024.

21 59-2-9499 EK 01/10/24