

**2017-18 General Appropriation Bill (H.3720)**  
**As Reported by the Conference Committee on May 31, 2017**

**109.11.** (DOR: **Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children**) (A) As used in this proviso:

(1) "Eligible school" means an independent school including those religious in nature, other than a public school, at which the compulsory attendance requirements of Section 59-65-10 may be met, that:

(a) offers a general education to primary or secondary school students;

(b) does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, or national origin;

(c) is located in this State;

(d) has an educational curriculum that includes courses set forth in the state's diploma requirements, graduation certificate requirements (for special needs children), and where the students attending are administered national achievement or state standardized tests, or both, at progressive grade levels to determine student progress;

(e) has school facilities that are subject to applicable federal, state, and local laws;

(f) is a member in good standing of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the South Carolina Association of Christian Schools, ~~or~~ the South Carolina Independent Schools Association, **or Palmetto Association of Independent Schools**; and

(g) provides a specially designed program or learning resource center to provide needed accommodations based on the needs of exceptional needs students or provides onsite educational services or supports to meet the needs of exceptional needs students, or is a school specifically existing to meet the needs of only exceptional needs students with documented disabilities.

(2) "Exceptional needs child" means a child:

(a) who has been evaluated in accordance with this state's evaluation criteria, as set forth in S.C. Code Ann. Regs. 43-243.1, and determined eligible as a child with a disability who needs special education and related services, in accordance with the requirements of Section 300.8 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; or

(b) who has been diagnosed within the last three years by a licensed speech-language pathologist, psychiatrist, or medical, mental health, psychoeducational, or other comparable licensed health care provider as having a neurodevelopmental disorder, a substantial sensory or physical impairment such as deaf, blind, or orthopedic disability, or some other disability or acute or chronic condition that significantly impedes the student's ability to learn and succeed in school without specialized instructional and associated supports and services tailored to the child's unique needs.

~~(4)~~ (3) "Independent school" means a school, other than a public school, at which the compulsory attendance requirements of Section 59-65-10 may be met and that does not discriminate based on the grounds of race, color, religion, or national origin.

~~(5)~~ (4) "Parent" means the natural or adoptive parent or legal guardian of a child.

~~(6)~~ (5) "Qualifying student" means a student who is an exceptional needs child, a South Carolina resident, and who is eligible to be enrolled in a South Carolina secondary or elementary public school at the kindergarten or later year level for the applicable school year.

~~(7)~~ (6) "Resident public school district" means the public school district in which a student resides, **or in the case of dependents of active military personnel, the public school district which the student may attend.**

~~(8)~~ (7) "Transportation" means transportation to and from school only.

~~(9)~~ (8) "Tuition" means the total amount of money charged for the cost of a qualifying student to attend an independent school including, but not limited to, fees for attending the school, textbook fees, and school-related transportation.

~~(10)~~ (9) "Department" means the Department of Revenue.

(B) (1) There is created the Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children Fund that is separate and distinct from the State general fund. The fund shall be organized by the department as a public charity as defined by the Internal Revenue Code under sections 509(a)(1) through 509(a)(4) and consist solely of contributions made to the fund. The fund may not receive an appropriation of public funds. The fund shall receive and hold all contributions intended for it as well as all earnings until disbursed as provided in this chapter. Monies received in the fund shall be used to provide scholarships to exceptional needs children attending eligible schools.

(2) The amounts on deposit in the fund do not constitute public funds nor are the deposits property of the State. Amounts on deposit in the fund must not be commingled with public funds and the State shall have no claim to or interest in the amounts on deposit. Agreements or contracts entered into by or on behalf of the fund do not constitute a debt or obligation of the State.

(3) The fund public charity shall be governed by five directors, two appointed by the Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, one of which is based upon the recommendation of the South Carolina Association of Christian Schools and one which is based upon the recommendation of the Diocese of Charleston, two appointed by the Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee based upon the recommendations of the South Carolina Independent Schools Association and one appointed by the Governor based upon the recommendation of the Palmetto Association of Independent Schools. The directors of the fund public charity, along with the Director of the Department of Revenue, shall designate an executive director of the fund public charity.

(4) In concert with the fund public charity directors, the Department of Revenue shall administer the fund public charity, including, but not limited to, the keeping of records, the management of accounts, and disbursement of the grants awarded pursuant to this proviso. The department public charity may expend up to two percent of the fund for administration and related costs. Neither the department or the public charity may not expend public funds to administer the program.

(5) By June thirtieth of the current fiscal year, the Department of Revenue must report to the Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, the Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee and the Governor:

(a) the number and total amount of grants issued to eligible schools in the fiscal year;

(b) for each grant issued to an eligible school in the fiscal year, the identity of the school and the amount of the grant;

(c) an itemization and detailed explanation of any fees or other revenues obtained from or on behalf of any eligible schools;

(d) a copy of a compilation, review, or audit of the fund's financial statements, conducted by a certified public accounting firm and;

(e) the criteria and eligibility requirements for scholarship awards.

(C) (1) Grants may be awarded in an amount not exceeding eleven thousand dollars or the total annual cost of tuition, whichever is less, to a qualifying student at an eligible school.

(2) Before awarding any grant, the fund public charity must receive written documentation from the qualifying student's parent or guardian documenting that the qualifying student is an exceptional needs child. Upon approving the application, the fund public charity must issue a check to the eligible school in the name of the qualifying student within either thirty days upon approval of the application or thirty days of the start of the school's semester.

(3) In the event that the qualifying student leaves or withdraws from the school for any reason before the end of the semester or school year and does not reenroll within thirty days, then the eligible school must return a prorated amount of the grant to the fund public charity based on the number of days the qualifying student was enrolled in the school during the semester or school year within sixty days of the qualifying student's departure.

(4) The department public charity may not award grants solely for the benefit of one school.

(5) The department or the public charity may not release any personally identifiable information pertaining to students or donors or use information collected about donors, students, or schools for financial gain.

(6) The department public charity shall develop a process to prioritize the awarding of grants to eligible incumbent grant recipients at eligible schools.

(D) (1) (a) Tax credits authorized by subsection (H)(1) and subsection (I) of this proviso annually may not exceed cumulatively a total of ~~ten~~ eleven million dollars for contributions to the Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children Fund.

(b) Tax credits authorized pursuant to subsection (H)(2) of this proviso annually may not exceed cumulatively a total of two million dollars for tuition payments made on behalf of qualifying students.

(c) If the department determines that the total of the credits claimed by all taxpayers exceeds either limit amount as contained in items (a) or (b), it shall allow credits only up to those amounts on a first come, first served basis.

(2) (a) The department shall establish an application process to determine the amount of credit available to be claimed. The receipt of the application by the department shall determine priority for the credit. Subject to the provisions of subitem (e), contributions must be made annually on or before June thirtieth, in order to claim the credit. The credit must be claimed on the return for the tax year that the contribution is made.

(b) A taxpayer may not claim more than sixty percent of his total tax liability for the year in contribution toward the tax credit authorized by subsection (H)(1) or subsection (I). This credit is not refundable.

(c) If a taxpayer deducts the amount of the contribution on his federal return and claims the credit allowed by subsection (H)(1) or subsection (I), then he must add back the amount of the deduction for purposes of South Carolina income taxes.

(d) The department shall prescribe the form and manner of proof required to obtain the credit authorized by subsection (H)(1) or subsection (I). The department shall also develop a method of informing taxpayers if the credit limit is met at any time during the fiscal year.

(e) A taxpayer only may claim a credit pursuant to subsection (H)(1) and subsection (I) for contributions made during the fiscal year.

(3) A corporation or entity entitled to a credit under subsection (H)(1) and subsection (I) may not convey, assign, or transfer the credit authorized by this proviso to another entity unless all of the assets of the entity are conveyed, assigned, or transferred in the same transaction.

(E) (1) On or before **August 1, 2016 of the current fiscal year an independent schools may apply to the Education Oversight Committee to be certified as an eligible institution school who participated in the program in the prior fiscal year and who desires to participate in the program in the current fiscal year must reapply to the Education Oversight Committee. The independent school must certify to the Education Oversight Committee that it continues to meet all program requirements and must provide to the committee student test score data from the prior school year by December 31. If student test score data are not submitted by December 31, then the Education Oversight Committee must remove the school from the program. The Education Oversight Committee must consult with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the South Carolina Association of Christian Schools, the South Carolina Independent Schools Association, Palmetto Association of Independent Schools, or the Diocese of Charleston to verify that the school is still a member in good standing and that the school continues to serve exceptional needs children. An independent school who did not participate in the program in the prior fiscal year but desires to participate in the program in the current fiscal year must apply to the Education Oversight Committee.** The Education Oversight Committee shall develop an application to be completed by the independent schools which must contain at least:

(a) the number and total amount of grants received in the preceding fiscal year;

(b) student test scores, by category, on national achievement or state standardized tests, or both, for all grades tested and administered by the school receiving or entitled to receive scholarship grants pursuant to this chapter in the previous fiscal year;

(c) a copy of a compilation, review, or compliance audit of the organization's financial statements **as relating to the grants received**, conducted by a certified public accounting firm; and

(d) a certification by the independent school that it meets the definition of an eligible school as that term is defined in subsection (A)(1) and that the report is true, accurate, and complete under penalty of perjury in accordance with Section 16-9-10.

(2) (a) The Education Oversight Committee may waive the August first deadline contained in subsection (E) upon good cause shown by an independent school.

(b) The Education Oversight Committee may waive some or all of the curriculum requirements contained in subsection (A)(1)(d) following consultation with the advisory committee.

(3) (a) By September 1, 2016 the Education Oversight Committee shall publish on its website a comprehensive list of independent schools certified as eligible institutions. The list shall include for each eligible institution:

(i) the institution's name, addresses, telephone numbers, and, if available, website addresses; and

(ii) the score reports and **compliance audits** received by the committee pursuant to subsection (E)(1)(b) and (c).

(b) The Education Oversight Committee shall summarize or redact the score reports identified in item (3)(a)(ii) if necessary to prevent the disclosure of personally identifiable information.

(4) An independent school that does not apply for certification pursuant to this subsection must not be included on the list of eligible schools and contributions to that school shall not be allowed for purposes of the tax credits permitted by this proviso.

(5) An independent school that is denied certification pursuant to this section may seek review by filing a request for a contested case hearing with the Administrative Law Court in accordance with the court's rules of procedure.

(F) (1) The Education Oversight Committee shall establish an advisory committee made up of not more than nine members, including parents, and representatives of independent schools and independent school associations.

(2) The advisory committee shall:

(a) consult with the Education Oversight Committee concerning requests for exemptions from curriculum requirements; and

(b) provide recommendations on other matters requested by the Education Oversight Committee.

(G) Except as otherwise provided, the Department of Education, the Education Oversight Committee, and the Department of Revenue, nor any other state agency may regulate the educational program of an independent school that accepts students receiving scholarship grants pursuant to this chapter."

(H) (1) A taxpayer is entitled to a tax credit against income taxes imposed pursuant to Chapter 6, Title 12 for the amount of cash and the monetary value of any publicly traded securities the taxpayer contributes to the Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children Fund up to the limits contained in subsection (D)(1)(a) of this proviso if:

(a) the contribution is used to provide grants for tuition to exceptional needs children enrolled in eligible schools who qualify for these grants under the provisions of this proviso; and

(b) the taxpayer does not designate a specific child or school as the beneficiary of the contribution.

(2) (a) A taxpayer is entitled to a refundable tax credit against income taxes imposed pursuant to Chapter 6, Title 12 for the amount of cash and the monetary value of any publicly traded securities, not exceeding eleven thousand dollars per child, for tuition payments to an eligible school for an exceptional needs child within his custody or care who would be eligible for a grant pursuant to this proviso up to the limits contained in subsection (D)(1)(b) of this proviso.

(b) If a child within the care and custody of taxpayer claiming a tax credit pursuant to this item also receives a grant from the Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children Fund, then the taxpayer may only claim a credit equal to the difference of eleven thousand dollars or the cost of tuition, whichever is lower, and the amount of the grant.

(I) A taxpayer is entitled to a tax credit against income taxes imposed pursuant to Chapter 11, Title 12 for the amount of cash and the monetary value of any publicly traded securities the taxpayer contributes to the Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children Fund up to the limits contained in subsection (D)(1)(a) of this proviso if:

(1) the contribution is used to provide grants for tuition to exceptional needs children enrolled in eligible schools who qualify for these grants under the provisions of this proviso; and

(2) the taxpayer does not designate a specific child or school as the beneficiary of the contribution.

(J) ~~On or before August 1, 2016, each scholarship funding organization organized and operating pursuant to SECTION 9 of H. 4230, R. 130, Act 92 of 2015 shall deposit with the Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children Fund all remaining funds on hand as of July 1, 2016. Scholarship funding organizations organized and operating pursuant to SECTION 9 shall remain in existence after the effective date of this act solely for the~~

~~purpose of winding down operations and depositing remaining funds with the Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children Fund pursuant to this provision. On August 1, 2016 all scholarship funding organizations organized pursuant to SECTION 9 shall cease to exist.~~ *The department shall conduct a comprehensive study of the Exceptional Needs Tax Credit program. The study shall examine the following:*

*(1) whether or not the students participating in the program have experienced measurable improvement as a result of participation;*

*(2) the allocation of scholarship funds and tax credits among students, including the effect of funding limitations on the addition of new participants; the demographic and socio-economic data of the participants and their families; and the geographical distribution of the participants;*

*(3) the distribution of scholarship funds among all eligible schools;*

*(4) identification of the schools in which the most measurable improvement has occurred among students, with an analysis of the types of schools achieving the best results and best practices implemented by those schools; and*

*(5) any other aspect of the program that the department determines would be relevant and useful in making future policy decisions in regard to the program and its continued existence or expansion.*

*The department shall submit a report of its study to the General Assembly no later than January 15, 2018.*