

Educational Credits for Exceptional Needs Children (ECENC) State Budget Year 2015-16

As used in this proviso:

(A)(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 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; and
- (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.

(2) “Exceptional needs child” means a child:

- (a)(i) 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
- (ii) 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; and
- (b) the child’s parents or legal guardian believes that the services provided by the school district of legal residence do not sufficiently meet the needs of the child.

(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.

(4) “Nonprofit scholarship funding organization” means a charitable organization that:

- (a) is exempt from federal tax pursuant to Section 501(a) of the Internal Revenue Code by being listed as an exempt organization in Section 501(c)(3) of the code;
- (b) allocates, after its first year of operation, at least ninety-seven percent of its annual contributions and gross revenue received during a particular year to provide grants for tuition to children enrolled in an eligible school meeting the criteria of this proviso, and incurs administrative expenses annually, after its first year of operation, of not more than three percent nor more than \$200,000 in the aggregate, whichever is less, of its annual contributions and revenue for a particular year to cover operational costs;
- (c) allocates all of its funds used for grants on an annual basis to children who are exceptional needs students;

(d) does not provide grants solely for the benefit of one school, and if the Department determines that the nonprofit scholarship funding organization is providing grants to one particular school, the tax credit allowed by this proviso may be disallowed;

(e) does not have as a volunteer, contractor, consultant, fundraiser or member of its governing board any parent, legal guardian, or member of their immediate family who has a child or ward who is currently receiving or has received a scholarship grant authorized by this proviso from the organization within one year of the date the parent, legal guardian, or member of their immediate family became a board member;

(f) does not have as a member of its governing board or an employee, volunteer, contractor, consultant, or fundraiser who has been convicted of a felony;

(g) does not release personally identifiable information pertaining to students or donors or use information collected about donors, students or schools for financial gain; and

(h) must not place conditions on schools enrolling students receiving scholarships to limit the ability of the schools to enroll students accepting grants from other nonprofit scholarship funding organizations.

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

(6) "Person" means an individual, partnership, corporation, or other similar entity.

(7) "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.

(8) "Resident public school district" means the public school district in which a student resides.

(9) "Transportation" means transportation to and from school only.

(10) "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.

(11) "Department" means the Department of Revenue.

(B)(1) A person is entitled to a tax credit against income taxes imposed pursuant to Chapter 6, Title 12, or bank taxes imposed pursuant to Chapter 11, Title 12 for the amount of cash and the monetary value of any publicly traded securities the person contributes to a nonprofit scholarship funding organization up to the limits 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 person does not designate a specific child or school as the beneficiary of the contribution.

(2) An individual is entitled to a refundable tax credit against income taxes imposed pursuant to Chapter 6, Title 12, or bank taxes imposed pursuant to Chapter 11, Title 12 for the amount of cash and the monetary value of any publicly traded securities, not exceeding ten thousand dollars per child, the individual contributes as tuition for exceptional needs children within their custody or care and enrolled in eligible schools who qualify for these grants under the provisions of this proviso. The cumulative maximum total for credits authorized by this subitem may not exceed four million dollars. However, if a child within the care and custody of an individual receives a tuition scholarship from a nonprofit scholar-

ship funding organization, then the individual may only claim a credit equal to the difference of ten thousand dollars or the cost of tuition, whichever is lower, and the amount of the scholarship.

(C) Grants may be awarded by a scholarship funding organization in an amount not exceeding ten thousand dollars or the total cost of tuition, whichever is less, for qualifying students with exceptional needs to attend an independent school. Before awarding any grant, a scholarship funding organization must receive written documentation from the parent documenting that the qualifying student is an exceptional needs child. Upon approving the application, the scholarship funding organization must issue a check to the eligible school in the name of the qualifying student. 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 scholarship funding organization 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.

(D)(1)(a) The tax credits authorized by subsection (B) may not exceed cumulatively a total of twelve million dollars for contributions made on behalf of exceptional needs students. If the department determines that the total of such credits claimed by all taxpayers exceeds either limit amount, it shall allow credits only up to those amounts on a first come, first served basis.

(b) 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 item (5), contributions must be made on or before June 30, 2016, in order to claim the credit. The credit must be claimed on the return for the tax year that the contribution is made.

(2) A taxpayer may not claim more than sixty percent of their total tax liability for the year in contribution toward the tax credit authorized by subsection (B)(1). This credit is not refundable.

(3) If a taxpayer deducts the amount of the contribution on the taxpayer's federal return and claims the credit allowed by this proviso, then the taxpayer must add back the amount of the deduction for purposes of South Carolina income taxes.

(4) The department shall prescribe the form and manner of proof required to obtain the credit authorized by subsection (B). Also, the department shall develop a method of informing taxpayers if the credit limit is met at any time during Fiscal Year 2015-16.

(5) A person only may claim a credit pursuant to subsection (B) for contributions made between July 1, 2015, and June 30, 2016.

(E) A corporation or entity entitled to a credit under subsection (B) 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.

(F) Except as otherwise provided, neither the Department of Education, 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 proviso.

(G)(1) By August 1, 2015, each independent school must apply to the Education Oversight Committee to be considered an eligible institution for which it may receive contributions from a nonprofit scholarship funding organization for which the tax credit allowed by this proviso is allowed. The Education

Oversight Committee, as established in Chapter 6, Title 59, is responsible for determining if an eligible school meets the criteria established by subsection (A)(1), and shall publish an approved list of such schools meeting the criteria. If an independent school does not apply to be an eligible school, the independent school may not be published as an approved school, and contributions to that school shall not be allowed for purposes of the credit allowed by this proviso. The Education Oversight Committee must publish the approved list of schools on its website by September first of each year, and the list must include their names, addresses, telephone numbers, and, if available, website addresses. Also, the score reports and audits received by the Education Oversight Committee pursuant to items (2)(b) and (c) must be published with the list. The Education Oversight Committee shall summarize or redact the score reports if necessary to prevent the disclosure of personally identifiable information. For this purpose, it also shall promulgate regulations further enumerating the specifics of this criteria. In performing this function, 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. The advisory committee shall provide recommendations to the Education Oversight Committee on the content of these regulations and any other matters requested by the Education Oversight Committee.

(2) An independent school's application for consideration as an eligible institution must contain:

- (a) the number and total amount of grants received from each nonprofit scholarship funding organization 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 proviso in the previous fiscal year;
- (c) a copy of a compilation, review, or compliance audit of the organization's financial statements, 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.

(3) Any independent school not determined to be an eligible school pursuant to the provisions of this proviso 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.

(4) The Education Oversight Committee, after consultation with its nine-member advisory committee, may exempt an independent school having students with exceptional needs who receive scholarship grants pursuant to this proviso from the curriculum requirements of subsection (A)(1)(d).

(H)(1) By August first of each year, each nonprofit scholarship funding organization must apply to the department to be considered an eligible organization for which its contributors are allowed the tax credit allowed by this proviso. If a nonprofit scholarship funding organization does not apply, the organization may not be published as an approved organization, and contributions to that organization shall not be allowed for purposes of the credit allowed by this proviso. A nonprofit scholarship funding organization's application must contain:

- (a) the number and total amount of grants issued to eligible schools in the preceding fiscal year;
- (b) for each grant issued to an eligible school in the preceding 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 the organization's Form 990 or other comparable federal submission that indicates the provisions of the Internal Revenue Code under which the organization has been granted exempt status for purposes of federal taxation;

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

(f) the criteria and eligibility requirements for scholarship awards; and

(g) a certification by the organization that it meets the definition of a nonprofit scholarship funding organization as that term is defined in subsection (A)(4) and that the report is true, accurate, and complete under penalty of perjury in accordance with Section 16-9-10.

(2) By receiving the application materials and approving the organization as an eligible organization pursuant to item (1), the department is not determining that the organization meets all of the requirements of a qualified nonprofit scholarship funding organization and the organization remains subject to examination as provided for pursuant to subsection (l).

(3) The department has authority to disclose the names of qualifying nonprofit scholarship funding organizations to the Education Oversight Committee. The department also may disclose to the Education Oversight Committee the names of organizations that applied but were not qualified by the department and those organizations whose eligibility has been revoked in accordance with subsection (l)(2), as well as the reason the application of the organization was not accepted or the reason its qualification was revoked.

(4) By September first of each year, the Education Oversight Committee must publish on its website a list of all qualifying nonprofit scholarship funding organizations, provided by the department, to include their names, addresses, telephone numbers, and, if available, website addresses. Also, the results of the audit required by item (1)(e) must be published with the list.

(l)(1) The department has authority to oversee, audit, and examine the nonprofit scholarship funding organizations, including determining whether the nonprofit scholarship funding organization is being operated in a manner consistent with the requirements for an IRC Section 501(c)(3) organization or is in compliance with any other provision of this proviso.

(2)(a) If at any time during the year, the department has evidence, through audit or otherwise, that a nonprofit scholarship funding organization is not being operated in a manner consistent with the requirements for operating an IRC Section 501(c)(3) organization or is not in compliance with any other provision of this proviso, the department may immediately revoke the organization's participation in the program and must notify the organization and the Education Oversight Committee in writing of the revocation.

(b) Notice of Revocation may be provided to the organization by personal delivery to the organization, by first class mail to the last known address of the organization, or by other means reasonably designed to provide notice to the organization.

(c) Any donations made following the date the notice of revocation is received by the organization or in the case of delivery by mail ten days after the notice of revocation was mailed, will not qualify for the credit and the donated funds must be returned to the donor by the organization. This proviso shall not limit the department's authority to deny any tax credit or other benefit provided by this proviso if the circumstances warrant.

(d)(i) Within thirty days after the day on which the organization is notified of the revocation, the organization may request a contested hearing before the Administrative Law Court. Within thirty days after a request for a contested case hearing is received by the Administrative Law Court, an administrative law

judge shall hold the contested case hearing and determine whether the revocation was reasonable under the circumstances. The department has the burden of proof of showing that the revocation was reasonable under the circumstances. The revocation is “reasonable” if the department has some credible evidence to believe that the organization is not being operated in a manner consistent with the requirements for operating an IRC Section 501(c)(3) organization or is not in compliance with any other provision of this proviso. The decision made by the administrative law judge is final and conclusive and may not be reviewed by any court. If the organization does not request a contested case hearing within thirty days of the immediate revocation, the revocation shall become permanent.

(ii) If the administrative law judge determines that the revocation was reasonable, the administrative law judge shall remand the case to the department to issue a department determination for permanent revocation within the time period determined by the judge. The organization may appeal this department determination in accordance with Section 12-60-460. At the contested case hearing on the department determination, the parties can raise new issues and arguments in addition to those issues and arguments previously presented at the revocation hearing.

(iii) If the administrative law judge determines that immediate revocation is not reasonable, the revocation shall be lifted and the organization may resume accepting donations and award scholarships hereunder. The department may still issue a department determination in accordance with Section 12-60-450(E)(2).

(iv) If at any time during the process, the department believes the organization is in compliance, the department, in its sole discretion, may reinstate the organization and notify the Education Oversight Committee.

(v) Following the permanent revocation of a nonprofit scholarship funding organization, the Education Oversight Committee has the authority to oversee the transfer of donated funds of the revoked organization to other nonprofit scholarship funding organizations.

(J) A nonprofit scholarship funding organization may transfer funds to another nonprofit scholarship funding organization, especially in the event that the organization cannot distribute the funds in a timely manner or if the organization ceases to exist. None of the funds that are transferred by one nonprofit scholarship funding organization to another may be considered by the former organization when calculating its administrative expenses.