

Individualized Education Account (IEA) Program Questions and Answers

(Updated July 2024)

Thank you for your interest in the Individualized Education Account (IEA) Program. We encourage those interested in the IEA Program to review the IEA Account Holder Handbook and the IEA Participating Private School Handbook located [here](#). These resources are the key to understanding and succeeding when participating in the IEA Program. If you have additional questions about the IEA Program, please contact IEA.Questions@tn.gov.

General Information

Q: *What is the Individualized Education Account Program?*

A: The Individualized Education Account (IEA) Program is a school choice program for eligible students with qualifying disabilities. The IEA Program gives parents and students access to public education funds to use on certain types of approved educational expenses that best meet their own unique needs.

Q: *Who is eligible for the IEA Program?*

A: Student eligibility requirements are set by state law. Students are eligible to receive an IEA if they meet all of the requirements posted on the IEA Student Eligibility webpage, a helpful resource to learn about student eligibility requirements, and take the '[Is My Student Eligible?](#)' quiz. For more information, see Chapter 2 of the IEA Account Holder Handbook.

Information on when to apply and enroll a student in the IEA Program is posted on the [IEA Student Application & Renewal webpage](#).

Q: *How will IEA funds be disbursed to parents/students?*

A: The department will distribute the IEA payments onto a pre-paid IEA debit card. The IEA Program is a direct payment program, not a reimbursement program. For more information, see Chapter 4 of the IEA Account Holder Handbook. For the payment schedule, see the IEA [Key Dates](#) webpage.

Q: *Is there a limit on the number of students who can receive an IEA?*

A: No. Any student who is eligible for an IEA may participate after they apply, receive approval from the department, and complete the entire IEA enrollment process.

Q: *Can a student attend a public school full time while participating in the IEA Program?*

A: No. Students in the IEA Program cannot be enrolled full time in a public school. Once a student enrolls in the IEA Program (July 1 of the IEA contract period), they must enroll in and attend either a private school or an independent home school in accordance with Tennessee's school attendance law. For more information, see Chapter 1 of the IEA Account Holder Handbook.

Q: Do students have to live in Tennessee to receive an IEA?

A: Yes. Students must be a resident of Tennessee to be eligible for the IEA Program and to continue to participate in the IEA Program.

Q: If I move to another state, can I transfer my student's IEA? If I move to Tennessee from another state where my student was in a similar program, can I transfer my student's account?

A: No. Each state has rules and regulations regarding participation in scholarship programs. The IEA Program or other similar programs cannot be transferred between states.

Q: What is the difference between an IEA and an ESA?

A: The Education Savings Account (ESA) Program allows eligible K-12 students who are zoned to attend Memphis-Shelby County Schools, Metro Nashville Public Schools, Hamilton County Schools, or a school that was in the Achievement School District (ASD) on May 24, 2019, to use state and local money toward education expenses, including tuition and/or fees at approved non-public schools. Family income must be at or below stated limits. For more information about the ESA Program, including a list of schools where ESA funds can be used for tuition, please visit the [ESA website](#). Students cannot participate in both the ESA program and the IEA program.

Parents

Q: Are students in grades K-12 who are already attending private school or who are home schooling eligible for the IEA Program?

A: No. Per Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-10-1402(3)(C), students must be enrolled in and have attended a Tennessee public school for one full school year immediately preceding the school year in which the student receives an IEA.

Q: Is an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), Individual Learning Plan (ILP), Individualized Program Plan (IPP), 504 Plan, or Individualized Service Plan (ISP) the same as an Individualized Education Program (IEP)?

A: No. IFSPs, ILPs, IPPs, 504 plans, and ISPs are not the same as an IEP and do not meet the requirements set in state law for eligibility for the IEA Program. Since an active IEP is one of the eligibility requirements set in state law, students who only have IFSPs, ILPs, ISPs, or IPPs would not qualify for the IEA Program. Additionally, a plan written by a non-public school is not considered an IEP for this purpose.

Q: Do students entering kindergarten have to attend a public school to be eligible to receive an IEA?

A: If a student has an active Individualized Education Program (IEP) with an acceptable disability category listed as a primary or secondary disability that is being implemented prior to enrolling in kindergarten

(i.e., in Pre-K) and the IEP is active and being implemented at the time of request for participation in the IEA Program, the student will be eligible to receive an IEA without having to “attend” a Tennessee public school; however, the student may have to be enrolled in a public school (e.g., Pre-K) to keep the IEP active through the date the IEA application is submitted. Please note: For more information about IEPs, parents should contact their school district.

Q: I have a question about my student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) or the services in my student's IEP. Who can I contact?

A: The IEA team cannot provide information on IEPs. Please contact your local public school, the special education supervisor for your public school district, or one of the department's IDEA complaints investigators whose contact information is available on the department of Special Education's [webpage](#).

Q: Can IEA funds be used for Pre-K?

A: No. Students must be in grades K–12 to enroll in the IEA Program and use IEA funds.

Q: Can students in, or entering, postsecondary enroll in the IEA Program?

A: No. Students must be in grades K–12 to enroll in the IEA Program and use IEA funds. If the student is enrolled in the IEA Program and graduates from high school, and if the account holder has leftover funds in an existing IEA and wishes to enroll the student in a postsecondary institution, they may use the remaining funds for approved IEA expenses used for the student's postsecondary education. Postsecondary students in the IEA Program do not receive any additional payments to their IEA. For more information, see Chapter 5 of the IEA Account Holder Handbook.

Q: Are students enrolled in the IEA Program eligible for funds and accommodations through Section 504?

A: Possibly. If a participating school or provider is a recipient of federal funds, accommodations may be available pursuant to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Students or parents should inquire of the school or provider regarding the applicability of Section 504.

Q: Are there any testing requirements for the IEA Program?

A: Yes. Students may be required to take assessments if they are in the IEA Program. For more information, see Chapter 3 of the IEA Account Holder Handbook.

Q: Will the results of student assessments be publicly released?

A: No. The Tennessee Department of Education (department) will not compile, track, or publicly release student assessment results; student assessment results submitted to the department will only be reviewed to verify that the student has taken the required assessments. All assessments will be for parents' information and use only. For more information, see Chapter 3 of the IEA Account Holder Handbook.

Q: How can the IEA funds be used?

A: The IEA Program has 15 approved uses of funds set in state law. For a description of the approved uses of funds, see Chapters 5 and 6 of the IEA Account Holder Handbook.

Q: Which private schools accept IEA funds?

A: IEA funds can be used to pay for tuition, fees, and required textbooks only at private schools approved to participate in the IEA Program and listed on the IEA Participating Schools list for that IEA contract year. The list of participating schools is available [here](#). For more information, see Chapter 5 of the IEA Account Holder Handbook. Once enrolled in the IEA Program, students can attend any non-public school, including private schools, umbrella home schools, and independent home schools; however, IEA funds can only be used to pay for the tuition, fees, and required textbooks at participating schools.

Q: What happens to the funds if I choose to re-enroll my child in public school?

A: Any funds remaining will be returned to the state fund.

Q: How long can my child be in the program?

A: A student who enrolls in the program is eligible to continue participation until he/she returns to a public school, graduates from high school, or reaches 22 years of age by August 15 for the next school year, whichever occurs first.

Q: How do I enroll my child in the IEA Program?

A: For information on enrolling your child in the IEA Program, see the [Student Application and Renewal](#) webpage, and Chapters 1 and 2 of the IEA Account Holder Handbook.

Q: If my student's application is approved for the IEA Program, can I change my mind and keep my child in public school? If so, how long do I have to make this final decision?

A: Yes. The IEA Application is just the **first step** in enrolling your student in the IEA Program. If your application is approved, you will receive a notification from the IEA team that will explain the next steps for completing the IEA enrollment process. You can withdraw your IEA student application at any time before the effective date of July 1, by emailing IEA.Questions@tn.gov. Withdrawing your application before July 1 will not impact your student's public school enrollment or Individualized Education Program (IEP) status. Additionally, you can choose to withdraw your student from the IEA Program at any time during the year. Chapter 8 of the IEA Account Holder Handbook provides more information on that process.

Q: Can the Tennessee Department of Education make exceptions to the student eligibility requirements?

A: Eligibility requirements for the IEA Program are set by Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-10-1402(3) and State Board of Education Rule 0520-01-11-.02(11). The Tennessee Department of Education does not have the authority to waive statute or rule.

Providers and Non-Public Schools

Q: Does the Tennessee Department of Education (department) pay schools and/or providers directly?

A: No. The department does not directly approve providers (e.g., therapists and tutors) nor do we publish a list of approved providers. Parents receive the IEA funding and will pay the providers and participating schools with which they contract. Parents are solely responsible for determining how to use the IEA funds allocated to their student following the laws, rules, and procedures of the IEA Program. The parent is responsible for any contract signed with a provider and ensuring that the terms of the contract are fulfilled. The department cannot void a private contract, give legal advice, or arbitrate payment schedules. IEA account holders must request pre-approval from the department and receive approval before they can use IEA funds to pay for tutoring and educational therapy services. Each pre-approval notice is only valid for the individual student, provider, and services listed on the approved notice until the expiration date on that notice. For more detailed information on pre-approvals, see Chapters 5 and 6 of the IEA Account Holder Handbook.

Q: Can therapists and tutors apply directly to the Tennessee Department of Education to be approved to receive IEA funds?

A: No. Tutors and therapists cannot apply directly to participate in the IEA Program. Instead, parents/guardians of students enrolled in the IEA Program must submit the appropriate pre-approval form to the department following the procedures in Chapter 6 of the IEA Account Holder Handbook.

Q: Does the IEA Program have a list of approved providers?

A: No. The IEA Program does not recommend specific providers. We allow the account holder to choose the best provider that best fits the student's needs.

Q: How does a non-public school become an IEA participating school?

A: Tennessee Department of Education approved non-public schools may apply to partner with the IEA Program at any time during the year. Details and the application are available on the [IEA website](#).

Public Schools

Q: How do school districts code students enrolled in the IEA Program?

A: For instructions on how to code students receiving IEAs in the Tennessee Education Information System (EIS), see the IEA [EIS/SIS Guide](#).

Q: What are the school district's responsibilities for Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and special education eligibility for a student enrolled in the IEA Program?

A: School districts still have child find responsibilities. Students participating in the IEA program are also eligible for an Individualized Services Plan (ISP), if appropriate and if the parent chooses. As a non-public school student, however, students enrolled in the IEA Program are not eligible for an IEP.

Q: How can a school district change the name or contact information for the IEA Local Education Agency (LEA) liaison?

A: To change the name or contact information for the IEA LEA liaison, email IEA.Questions@tn.gov.

Q: Do test scores of students in the IEA Program impact the school where the test is taken?

A: No. The assessment results of students who are appropriately coded as students receiving IEAs are not included in the accountability for school or system-wide school district results. For more information on how to code students receiving IEAs in the Education Information System (EIS) and Student Information System (SIS), please see the IEA [EIS/SIS Guide](#).

Q: Are there special rules for administering the TCAP assessment to an independent home school student with an IEA?

A: If a school district administers a Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) assessment to an independent home school student who is enrolled in the IEA Program, the district should follow the IEA instructions in the Test Administration Manual.

Q: Will the results of the assessments for students receiving IEAs be publicly released?

A: No. The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) will not compile, track, or publicly release assessment results for students receiving IEAs; assessment results for students receiving IEAs submitted to the TDOE will only be reviewed to verify that the student receiving an IEA has taken the assessments required by state law.