

## Gadsden County School District Controlled Open Enrollment Plan 2021-2022

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### Open Enrollment Policies

***“Controlled open enrollment” means a public education delivery system that allows school districts to make student school assignments using parents’ indicated preferential educational choice as a significant factor.***

#### ***Introduction:***

Florida Statute 1002.31 states that beginning with the 2017-2018 school year, each district school board shall allow a parent from any school district in the state whose child is not subject to a current expulsion or suspension to enroll his or her child in and transport his or her child to any public school that has not reached capacity in the district, subject to the maximum class size.

#### ***1. Application Process***

The School Board shall establish residential attendance zones for each school. All students, unless otherwise provided by School Board rule or authorized by the School Board’s order, shall attend the school serving the student’s residential attendance zone. A student’s residence is the residence of his/her parent/guardian. Any student residing in the Gadsden County School District (GCSD) shall be assigned to a school for attendance by the Superintendent or his designee.

The Gadsden County School District gladly honors school choice from any parent/guardian. The Gadsden County School District has open enrollment options for parents to choose a school outside their residential attendance zone school. The Gadsden County School District allows parents from any school district in the state, whose child is not subject to a current expulsion or suspension, to enroll his or her child in and transport his or her child to any public school in the district, including charter schools, that have not reached capacity subject to the maximum class size pursuant to Florida

Statutes and the Controlled Open Enrollment Plan adopted by the School Board. No student shall be permitted to transfer, enroll, or be admitted to a school when he/she has been expelled or suspended from another school district. This prohibition shall be effective for the period in which the student was expelled or suspended from another district. Such students shall be accorded the same appeals procedure which is available for district students.

Any parent/guardian wishing to apply should complete the following steps:

1. The parent/guardian will complete the Gadsden County School District's Student Transfer Form to request permission to attend an alternate school to the student's zoned school. This form is available at any school in the district. The form must be completed in its entirety and must have attached any additional justifications/documentation and proof of residency at the time of submission to the school.
2. The parent/guardian will complete a Controlled Open Enrollment Student Performance Contract available on the district's website, at the district office, or at any Gadsden County School.

Once the school receives ALL the required documents, the request will be reviewed. The parent/guardian will be notified in writing via US Mail within two weeks or as soon as a decision is made. Due to this process, students may not be allowed to enroll in the choice school at the time the Application for Attendance is submitted. Once notification of acceptance has been received, the parent/guardian may enroll the student in the approved school.

Charter school open enrollment processes may provide enrollment preferences consistent with the enrollment preferences permitted under the charter school statute (s. 1002.33(10), F.S.), if such preferences are included in the charter school contract. The charter school shall annually post on its website the application process required to participate in controlled open enrollment. Determination of capacity must be listed on the charter school website and must be consistent with its charter school contract.

The Gadsden County School District does not operate a home education program and parent/guardian only registers with the school superintendent for the purpose of complying with the state's attendance requirements under s. 1003.21(1). If a parent or guardian chooses to home school their child(ren) the superintendent shall accept a notice of intent to set up a home education program and shall immediately register the home education program upon receipt of the notice. The notice of intent must come from the parent/guardian and include the full legal name, address, and date of birth of all children who shall be enrolled as students in the home education program. If the student chooses to participate in a school district program additional information or verification from the parent/guardian will be required.

The assigned school for an out-of-district student shall be designated based on space available. Such transfers shall be made on a nondiscriminatory basis and shall not result in reducing desegregation in the school district. The student will be accepted pursuant to the district's controlled open enrollment process described below, and the district will report the student for purposes of the district's funding pursuant to the Florida Education Finance Program. Students residing in the district shall not be displaced by a student from another district who is seeking enrollment through the open enrollment provisions.

The Controlled Open Enrollment Process is approved by the School Board, and is consistent with the School Board Policy 5.23\*+-. The process includes but is not limited to the following:

- A. Eligibility requirements;
- B. Application process;
- C. Forty-five (45) day time period for accepting applications;
- D. Method of determining capacity of schools;
- E. Capacity determination for each District school;
- F. Identification of schools that have not reached capacity;
- G. Class size standards;
- H. Lottery procedure for determining student assignment if transfer requests exceed available space;
- I. Provision for a parent to request placement of siblings within the same school;
- J. Appeals process for hardship cases;
- K. Availability of transportation; and
- L. Method and timeline for notifying a parent of his/her child's placement for the next school year.

The process for implementing must

- A. Adhere to federal desegregation requirements
- B. Maintain socioeconomic, demographic, and racial balance
- C. Allow a student to remain at the chosen school until he/she completes the highest grade level at the school
- D. Maintain existing academic eligibility criteria for public school choice programs

Information about school choice and special programs is provided annually to the community through parent communication links, listservs, school mail-outs, backpack disseminations, individual program promotional materials, open houses at school sites, school visits, and through the district's Family and Community Engagement Center (FACE).

Open enrollment options include school choice for grandfathering, sibling support, over/under capacity schools, school safety, and other parent hardships. Preferential treatment shall be given to a student whose parent is transferred or is pending transfer to a military installation within the school district while on active military duty pursuant to an official military order and the student shall be considered a resident of the school district for purposes of enrollment when the order is submitted to the school district; children who have been relocated due to a foster care placement in a different school zone; children who move due to a court-ordered change in custody due to separation or divorce; children who have moved due to the serious illness or death of a custodial parent; students at multiple session schools; and students residing in the district.

In all cases, applications for school choice are available at all public schools, the FACE Center, on the district website, or by mail or fax, as requested. The form provides instructions, information, and contact information for questions and support. Applications

are processed by the FACE Center. Applications for magnet and special programs are processed at the school level in accordance with each program's criteria for admission. Determinations about student eligibility for acceptance into the special program are made based on eligibility of the program requirements.

Applications for other choice options are reviewed by the FACE Center, and the Superintendent, or his designee, taking into consideration any hardships that may need to be accommodated. The FACE Center then updates the student information system. A notification letter responding to a school choice application is sent to parents as soon as possible, including an appeal process in the case of a denial for reassignment based on hardship at a school that is over capacity. Parents with an approved school choice request are directed to the new school to proceed with student enrollment.

## ***2. Process for Declaring School Preference***

The Gadsden County School District Choice Options are available on our website <http://www.gadsdenschools.org/>. Applications can be downloaded from the district's website or picked up at any school campus, the district office, or the FACE Center. Additional applications may be required by special programs.

Gadsden County Choice Programs include S.T.E.M. Academies (Gadsden County High School); Information Technology Academies offered at Gadsden County High, West Gadsden Middle, Carter Parramore Academy, and James A. Shanks Middle School; Culinary Academies offered at Gadsden County High School and West Gadsden Middle School; Arts and Sciences Academy (S.T.E.A.M.) offered at Havana Magnet School; Alternative School at Carter-Parramore Academy; Exceptional Student Education at Gadsden Central Academy; Charter School at Crossroad Academy; Dual Enrollment at Gadsden County High School; Advanced Placement at Gadsden County High School; Highest Performing Schools are Gadsden Elementary Magnet School, Crossroad Academy, and Havana Magnet School; Career and Technical Education Programs are offered at Gadsden County High School and Crossroad Academy through Gadsden Technical College and Information Technology Academy at Havana Magnet School. Other Options include PAEC/FLVS Virtual, and Home Education.

A student who has been attending, in the year prior to the designation, a public school that has been classified as performance grade category "F" or has earned three (3) consecutive grades of "D" or a student who is assigned to a public school that has been designated as performance grade category "F" or has earned three (3) consecutive grades of "D" may attend a higher performing public school in the district, virtual, home education, or a school in another district as allowed by law. The school district will provide transportation to a student if they stay enrolled in the school district, but if the parent/guardian opt to move their child(ren) outside the school district transportation will not be provided by the school district. Designation of schools included in Opportunity Scholarship Options are determined by Florida Department of Education.

**Family Empowerment Scholarship (FES) Program:** The Gadsden County School District shall honor a school choice opportunity for low-income and working-class families that is designed to extend support to middle-income families. Priority will be given to students who are at 185% of federal poverty level (per 1002.394). Following the 2019 Legislative Session, Governor Ron DeSantis signed SB 7070, which creates the FES Program and provides 18,000 students life-changing education opportunities for academic and career success. A student is eligible for a scholarship if the student meets the following criteria:

The student's household income level does not exceed 300% of the federal poverty level (\$77,250 for a family of four) or the student is on the direct certification list (list of children who qualify for the food assistance program, the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families Program, or the Food Distribution on Indian Reservations program), or

The student is currently placed, or during the previous state fiscal year was placed, in foster care or in out-of-home care as defined in s. 39.01 **and**

The student is eligible to enroll in kindergarten or has spent the prior school year (2020-21) in attendance at a Florida public school. Prior attendance means the student was enrolled in and in attendance at a Florida public school during both the October and February student counts.

Prior to scholarship funds being awarded, the student must be accepted and enrolled in a participating private school. A private school that is currently eligible to participate in any of the scholarship programs is eligible to participate in the FES. However, parents should contact the schools to inquire as to whether the private school will participate in the program. The student will remain eligible until he/she graduates from high school or turn 21 years of age, which ever first. It is the parent's responsibility to request the scholarship from The Department of Education (DOE) at least 60 days prior to the first payment due date at the school of their choice.

**The Hope Scholarship.** Beginning with the 2018-2019 school year, a student enrolled in a Florida public school in kindergarten through grade 12 are provided the opportunity to transfer to another public school with capacity or enroll in an approved private school under the Hope Scholarship if they have been subjected to any of the following incidents:

- a.) Battery
- b.) harassment
- c.) hazing
- d.) bullying
- e.) kidnapping
- f.) physical attack
- g.) robbery
- h.) sexual offenses
- i.) harassment
- j.) assault, or battery
- k.) threat or intimidation
- l.) fighting at school

Incidents reported may be investigated at the district level; however, there does not have to be substantiation on the part of the district to offer a transfer to another public school with capacity or the ability for the student to move to an eligible private school on scholarship.

**Process that Encourages Placement of Siblings within the Same School**

Students who have siblings enrolled at a school other than their home zone school may apply for reassignment to that same school based on sibling support. GCSD understands the importance of keeping brothers and sisters together and encourages parental involvement.

Parents of siblings who are assigned to the same grade level and school may request that the school place the siblings in the same classroom or in separate classrooms. The sibling must be attending the school the same year as the requested reassignment. Students assigned for sibling support may remain at the assigned school until they change grade levels. On the school choice form, parents identify "sibling support" and provide the name of the sibling who is at the school that the parent wants the student to be reassigned. Parents choosing this option will be responsible for their own student transportation.

Section 1002.40, Florida Statutes (F.S.), was established and provides the parent of a public-school student who was subjected to an incident of bullying or violence (a complete list of incidents is found in section 1002.40(3), F.S.), an opportunity to transfer to another public school, or request a scholarship for the student to enroll in and attend a participating private school. The law states in part, "Upon receipt of a report of an incident, the school principal, or his or her designee, shall provide a copy of the report to the parent and investigate the incident to determine if the incident must be reported as

required by s.1006.09(6). Within 24 hours after receipt of the report, the principal or his or her designee shall provide a copy of the report to the parent of the alleged offender and to the superintendent. Upon conclusion of the investigation or within 15 days after the incident was reported, whichever occurs first, the school district shall notify the parent of the program and offer the parent an opportunity to enroll his or her student in another public school that has capacity or to request and receive a scholarship to attend an eligible private school, subject to available funding.”

Pursuant to State Board of Education Rule 6A-6.0951, Florida Administrative Code, the district shall notify the parent by providing the parent a completed Hope Scholarship Notification Form. The Hope Scholarship Notification Form was adopted by the State Board of Education in July 2018, and therefore shall not be substantively altered.

The Superintendent or his designee, will develop and revise this plan as necessary, including administrative procedures necessary to implement these policies. Except for homeless students, foster students and other student safety measures required by Florida Statute, parents who choose these options are required to provide their own student transportation.

### ***Open Borders***

State Lawmakers in 2016 removed school-district boundaries by allowing parents to enroll children in any public school beginning in 2017-18. School districts must accept most students if the school they want to attend has not reached capacity, according to Florida Statutes. If a school has more applications than openings, the law calls for schools to use a lottery to fill the spots.

### ***3. Lottery Procedure to Determine Student Assignment***

Gadsden County School District uses a lottery procedure for determining student assignment if transfer requests exceed available space. Applications for choice schools and special programs are reviewed at the individual school level in accordance with each program's admissions criteria. Students are admitted to the program according to the available capacity in each program. In the case of too many requests for available slots in a special program or choice school, the district reserves the right to hold a lottery to determine admissions. The lottery process is designed to prevent the loss of more than five percent (5%) enrollment at any one school.

For purposes of continuity of educational choice, a student who enrolls or transfers under Controlled Open Enrollment may remain at the Controlled Open Enrollment School until the student completes the highest grade level at the school. After completion of the terminal grade of that school, the student must return to their zoned school or apply for and be granted another lottery selection through Controlled Open Enrollment. Students residing in another county must return to their school district in the absence of another lottery selection entitling them to enroll in another school in another district.

#### **4. *Appeals Process for Hardship Cases***

Students may be allowed to attend a school other than their residentially zoned home school, based on documented economic, medical hardship, or for other documented reason. A reassignment or transfer form must be completed, signed by both school administrators, and submitted to the FACE Center for review.

A hardship is defined as documented economic or medical factors that are beyond the student's and parent's/guardian's control that have a negative impact on the student's educational process, safety, mental health, or physical well-being. Upon receipt of a hardship reassignment request, the Superintendent or his/her designee will afford the parent/guardian or student an opportunity to present such evidence as may be appropriate. Thereafter, the Superintendent will make his/her recommendations to the Board. The Superintendent or his designee will furnish the parent/guardian or student a copy of his/her recommendation to the Board.

If the parent/guardian or student wishes to appeal the recommendation of the Superintendent, they must submit a detailed statement specifying the basis for the disagreement to the Superintendent within ten (10) working days of receipt of the recommendation. If the Superintendent denies the reassignment appeal, the parent/guardian may appeal the decision to the Board at the next Board meeting. The parent/guardian must register for an appeal through the Board secretary prior to the meeting. The Superintendent will permit the student to remain at the current school until a decision is made by the Board. Parents choosing this option will be responsible for providing their own student transportation.

#### **5. *Procedures to Maintain Socioeconomic, Demographic, and Racial Balance***

Gadsden County School District provides equal opportunity for school choice to all students in the district regardless of race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status. To ensure that participation in school choice supports socioeconomic, demographic, and racial balance, Gadsden County School District annually evaluates participation by race and free and reduced lunch eligibility and make changes accordingly.

#### **6. *Homeless Students***

Pursuant to Gadsden County School District's School Board Policy 5.14\*, (Homeless Students), any child in Gadsden County whose primary nighttime residence is in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter for temporary accommodations, or in a public or private place not designated for, or ordinarily used for continuing human habitation or is currently in foster care shall be entitled to enrollment in the Gadsden County School District at their school of origin, unless it is determined that their school of origin placement is not in the best interest of the child. The school district's homeless coordinator shall work in collaboration with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to determine the school of origin for foster children. Student transportation to their school of choice will be provided if their school of origin is within the school district. If the verified homeless situation is such that the student is crossing district lines, the Gadsden County Transportation Department will coordinate transportation between the district and neighboring districts.



**7. Availability of Transportation**

Except for homeless students or foster care students, it is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to provide transportation for students who chose to participate in a choice option and are approved to attend a school other than their residentially zoned school. Transportation can be arranged by contacting Gadsden County's Transportation Department. Transportation provisions will follow s. 1002.31(2) F.S.

**8. Parental and Family Engagement**

Encouraging and promoting strong parental and family engagement is a priority of every school and department throughout Gadsden County. Throughout the district, there are parent liaisons, community liaisons, instructional specialists, guidance counselors and other staff in positions to help strengthen parental involvement.

**9. Strategy for Establishing an Information Clearinghouse**

Gadsden County has a full-time, year-round FACE Center that serves as a clearinghouse for information on school choice opportunities for students. In addition, each school disseminates information and promotes their choice options. Information is provided to parents and to the community through parent communication links, listservs, school mail-outs, individual program promotional materials, open houses at school sites, school visits, and through the district FACE Center.

**10. Athletic Eligibility**

A student participating in controlled open enrollment, or a choice program will be immediately eligible to participate in interscholastic and interscholastic extracurricular activities. However, a student may not participate in a sport if the student participated in that same sport at another school during that school year, unless the student meets one of the following criteria:

1. Dependent child of active-duty military personnel whose move resulted from military orders
2. Child who has been relocated due to a foster care placement in a different school zone
3. Child who moves due to a court-ordered change in custody due to separation or divorce, or the serious illness or death of a custodial parent.
4. Authorized for good cause in district or charter school policy.