

Highlands County School District

Student Assignment, Enrollment and Choice Plan

Introduction:

The Highlands County School District is dedicated to ensuring that all students will choose a learning path that leads to a well-rounded graduate who demonstrates good character and leadership. Students originally are assigned to the school in the attendance zone of their permanent residence; but the District also provides a number of opportunities for parents to select other options for their children in accordance with the terms and conditions of this Student Assignment, Enrollment and Choice Plan ("Plan"), in accordance with F.S. 1002.31.

Options include:

- Programs of Emphasis.
- Controlled Open Enrollment Choice Options.
- Hardship Transfers
- The John M. McKay Scholarship Program for public or private school.
- The Opportunity Scholarship Program
- Virtual School Programs
- Home School

I. Attendance Zone Assignments:

The initial assignment of students to schools is based on established attendance zones and the permanent residence of the student, as determined in accordance with School Board Rule 5.20. All traditional District schools have a geographic area designated for attendance based on their established grade structure. These geographic boundaries are developed utilizing the following parameters and principles:

- Attendance zone should reflect the diversity of the District to the extent practical and consistent with constitutional requirements.
- Maximum utilization of school facilities by distributing students among the existing capacity as evenly as possible.
- School size commitments as recommended by the School Board to the extent practical.
- Includes target enrollments that allow for growth and anticipated changing demographics.
- Keeps neighborhood units in the same attendance zone to the extent practical.
- Assigns students to the closest school to the extent practical.
- Does not place a transportation burden on any identifiable diversity subgroup (socioeconomic, race/ethnicity, ESOL, or disability).
- Maximize transportation efficiency costs.
- Minimize the disruption to students and families related to attendance zone changes to the extent practical.

Descriptions of current school attendance zones are available on the District website under the PARENT link.

II. Residence:

A student's permanent residence is the permanent residence of the student, parents or legal guardian(s) as defined in this section.

"Permanent residence" is defined by Florida Statute 106.012(17) as follows: That place where a person has his or her true, fixed and permanent home and principal establishment to which, whenever absent, he or she has the intention of returning. A person may have only one permanent residence at a time.

An adult student's permanent residence is his or her current permanent residence. A minor student's permanent residence is the permanent residence of his or her parent(s) or legal guardian(s). If a minor student's parents or legal guardians live in separate residences while sharing physical custody under the terms of a court order or otherwise, the student may attend the school zoned for either residence with appropriate residency documentation.

- **Full and Complete Current Residence.**

A person cannot have more than one permanent residence, and only the student's current permanent residence as defined above may be used for enrollment purposes.

- **Proof of Residence**

Highlands County School District requires detailed proof of residence, and only the student's current permanent residence as defined above may be used for enrollment purposes.

- **Change of Residence.**

The following items are evidence that a change of residence is full and complete:

- a. The former residence is not occupied for any purpose at any time by the student or any of the persons with whom the student has been living; and
- b. All personal belongings are moved from the former residence; and
- c. Mail is received at the new residence; and
- d. All utilities are transferred to the new residence.

- **Residency Fraud.**

Parent(s) / Guardian(s) are committing residency fraud if they submit an address during the enrollment process that is not their true permanent residence. If there is reasonable suspicion that the student is not residing at the claimed address, the following procedures may be implemented at the discretion of the Superintendent or his/her designee.

- a. A letter may be sent to the parent(s) requesting that the parent verify and update enrollment information. This may be followed by a phone conversation or home visit.
- b. The school staff may examine the Property Appraiser's website to determine the parent's homestead (permanent residence) location. The homestead address of the parent will be a factor to determine the student's zoned school. A conflicting address indicates that further investigation is required.

III. **Programs of Choice:**

A Program of Choice provides an opportunity for a group of students to enroll in a specific set of courses associated with a designated career or focused educational program of study.

There are currently two acceleration programs in Highlands County high schools:

International Baccalaureate program (IB) at Sebring High School, and **Advanced Placement Capstone Program** at Avon Park High School. Interested students and their parents should contact the schools for further details and program /entrance requirements.

- **Eligibility.**

The Highlands County School District's programs of choice are open to all eligible students in the District and is committed to a policy of nondiscrimination in employment and educational opportunity. No person shall be discriminated against or harassed in any educational program, services or activities or employment conditions or practices on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, disability, marital status, or sexual orientation.

Lack of English language skills will not be a barrier to admission and participation. The district may assess each student's ability to benefit from specific programs through placement tests and counseling, and if necessary, will provide services or referrals to better prepare students for successful participation.

IV. **Controlled Open Enrollment Choice Options:**

In addition to the established attendance zone and programs of choice, the Highlands County School District will provide additional options for school assignment based on Controlled Open Enrollment in accordance with Florida Statute 1002.31. The following controlled choice options are permitted pursuant to School Board Rule 5.20 and will provide additional opportunities for students to attend a school other than their zoned school and will provide parents greater choice options. The Controlled Open Enrollment process and procedures are set forth in this Section.

- **Determination of Capacity.**

A determination of the schools with available capacity is updated annually, and will be posted on the School District's website at the following link:

www.highlands.k12.fl.us

For the 2017-18 school year, a school will be subject to Controlled Open Enrollment when it has been determined that the school has available capacity. Capacity will be calculated as follows:

1. Determine for each school the total number of permanent and portable satisfactory student stations from the Florida Inventory School House (FISH).
2. Determine Program Capacity by subtracting student stations assigned to the following rooms (Gym, Band, Chorus, Computer Labs, Exceptional Student Education/Resource and Pre-Kindergarten Classrooms).

3. Determine enrollment as of the October survey date of the current year and subtract students enrolled in Pre-Kindergarten and self-contained Exceptional Student Education programs.
4. Determine available capacity by subtracting 90% of Program Capacity from the enrollment number.

Since Pre-Kindergarten (PK) programs are not mandatory, Controlled Open Enrollment options are not available for PK students.

ESE students are eligible to apply to all programs and eligible schools, including Controlled Open Enrollment. If accepted to the school, an IEP team will convene to determine whether the student’s needs can be adequately addressed and to ensure the IEP can be implemented at the chosen school. If not, the student will not be enrolled, but placed at the appropriate school based on attendance zone or appropriate placement for services if they are a resident of Highlands County. Students residing in another county, whom the District is not able to serve, will be expected to enroll in their home county.

For the 2017-18 school year, the following schools have available capacity for the specified number of seats:

School	AVAILABLE CAPACITY
Avon Park High	79
Lake Placid High	62
Hill-Gustat Middle	12
Lake Placid Middle	12
Avon Elementary	22
Kindergarten Learning Center	13
Lake Country Elementary	47
Lake Placid Elementary	7
Park Elementary	92
Sun n Lake Elementary	63

- **Application Process and Lottery Selection.**
Applications are available on the School District’s website during an open enrollment period as listed in the updated schedule for each year, attached hereto as Exhibit A. Paper copies of the application are also available for those without access to a computer. One application is required for each school to which the student would request consideration. (For example, if the student would be willing to attend two Controlled Open Enrollment elementary schools, two separate applications would be required.)

Students subject to a current expulsion or suspension will not be permitted to take advantage of a Controlled Open Enrollment choice.

Applications for Controlled Open Enrollment will only be accepted during the application window. Once the window is closed, all applications will be randomly numbered with the assistance of a computer program. Available seats will then be assigned to the applicants for the school starting at 1 and ending at the total number of seats available. (For example in 2017-18, Controlled Open Enrollment students will be accepted for Avon Elementary from 1 to 22.)

The application window will run simultaneously for both Highlands County residents and out-of-county residents. There will be two separate lotteries, with in-county and out-of-county students being numbered separately. The out-of-county applications will only be considered if there are still remaining open seats after the completion of the in-county lottery.

Once notified of a lottery selection of an available seat, the parent/guardian must accept and enroll the student in the specified school. If a student happens to receive a lottery selection for more than one school, the parent/guardian must select one and decline the other. If seats re-open due to a declined selection, the student with the next number in the lottery will be notified and offered the seat. Once notified, the parent/guardian will have ten working days to respond. No response will be considered a decline of the selection. This process will only continue until the first day of school. After the first day of school, the wait list will be discontinued.

There is no appeal process for Controlled Open Enrollment as it is based strictly on a lottery procedure.

- **Continuity of Educational Choice.**
For purposes of continuity, 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 the school, the student must be returned 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 District school.
- **Preference for Admission.**
Per Florida Statute 1002.31, the School Board of Highlands County provides preferential treatment in its Controlled Open Enrollment process to the following:
 1. Dependent children of active duty military personnel whose move resulted from military orders.
 2. Children who have been relocated due to a foster care placement in a different school zone.
 3. Children who move due to a court-ordered change in custody due to separation or divorce, or the serious illness or death of a custodial parent.

4. Children of full-time Highlands County School District employees desiring to attend the school where the parent works or that feeder pattern.
- **Availability of transportation.**
No District transportation options are available to any Controlled Open Enrollment choice option in Highlands County. Transportation must be arranged by the parent/guardian.
 - **Student-Athlete Transfers**
Student-athletes who transfer to another school must comply with the FHSAA Rules of Athletic Eligibility in order to be eligible to participate in interscholastic athletics and intrascholastic extracurricular activities.
 1. A student participating in Controlled Open Enrollment or a choice program is immediately eligible upon enrollment to participate in interscholastic athletics and intrascholastic extracurricular activities.
 2. 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:
 - a. Dependent children of active duty military personnel whose move resulted from military orders.
 - b. Children who have been relocated due to a foster care placement in a different school zone.
 - c. Children who have been moved due to a court-ordered change in custody due to separation or divorce, or the serious illness or death of a custodial parent.
 - **Voluntary Return to Assigned School or District.**
Upon request, a student shall be permitted to return to the student's zoned school; however, it is recommended that the student return at the end of the marking period or semester, unless extenuating circumstances are present.
 - **Rescinding Placement.**
Approval of a school choice application may be rescinded if:
 - a. False information was provided (F.S.837.06 & F.S. 92.525 – providing false information is a criminal act).
 - b. It is determined by District and school personnel that enrollment at a requested school is having a negative impact on the student's educational progress.
 - c. The student withdraws from a course of study that was the basis for enrollment at the requested school.
 - d. The student does not maintain passing grades, good attendance, appropriate behavior, or if the student is chronically tardy to school.
 - e. The Principal will contact the Assistant Superintendent of Student Support Services about the possibility of school choice approval being rescinded.
 - f. The Principal will meet with the parent to discuss concerns and the possibility of school choice being rescinded. Conference notes will be documented.
 - g. Documentation will be sent to the Assistant Superintendent of Student Support Services' office.

- h. If academic behavioral or attendance concerns persist, the parent will be notified in writing by the Principal that school choice is being rescinded, and the student must return to his/her zoned school. A copy of the letter will be sent to the Assistant Superintendent of Student Support Services. The letter will include language that informs the parent that an appeal may be requested through the Assistant Superintendent of Student Support Services. The Assistant Superintendent will review the documentation and uphold or deny the appeal. The decision of the Assistant Superintendent is final.
- i. An elementary or middle school student whose reassignment has been rescinded, will return to his/her zoned school at the end of the quarter. A high school student whose reassignment has been rescinded, will return to his/her zoned school at the end of the current semester. Rescinding school choice approval requires written documentation that the parent has received prior notification of the principal's intent to revoke choice.

V. Hardship Transfers:

Applications for waivers are accepted outside the Open Enrollment period **ONLY** when a school choice request is based on a documented hardship. A student may be granted a "hardship" transfer when a condition or situation exists that implies an adverse or compelling circumstance or a state of misfortune unique to that student's life or family's life situation. The situation could impact the student's ability to achieve success at their zoned school. Relevant documentation may be provided with out-of-zone transfer requests.

- **Preferential Placement.**

Preferential placement will be provided to the following through the Hardship Transfer process:

- a. Dependent Children of active duty military personnel whose move resulted from military orders.
- b. Children who have been relocated due to a foster care placement.
- c. Children who have been moved due to a court-ordered change in custody.
- d. School District employees may request, as a privilege of employment, to bring their children to either the school in which they work or the closest school in proximity to their place of employment. Employees will complete the appropriate application. If the employee is not a resident of Highlands County, it is the employee's responsibility to obtain a release from the school district in which they reside. If the conditions of employment or placement should change, the employee transfer will be null and void. If the place of employment has changed, a new application must be submitted.

- **Grandfathered Requests for Highlands County Residents.**

Fifth, Eighth and Twelfth grade students may remain at his/her previous school, if the parent/guardian chooses to submit a Hardship Transfer Application. Siblings, however must attend their zoned school, unless they too, have an approved Hardship Transfer.

- **Pending Move Transfer Requests.**
Parents or guardians who can demonstrate they are purchasing, building, renting or moving into a home in a different zone from where they are currently living are eligible to file a Hardship Transfer Request. Documentation which may be required include:
 - a. Original electric or water bill in their name.
 - b. Rental agreement signed by both parties indicating address of property and effective date of the lease.
 - c. Notarized statement from landlord.
 - d. Deed or construction contract.

- **Out of County Residents.**
Out-of-County Residents may only apply to attend Highlands County Schools on a Hardship Waiver as a current employee.

- **Hardship Application Process.**
 - Transportation must be provided by the parent.
 - Parent agrees that any time during the school year, a transfer may be revoked due to poor attendance, tardiness or discipline issues.
 - Requested school must be compliant with the Class Size rules of F.S. 1002.31.
 - Falsification of residency may result in waiver being revoked.
 - Parent must complete a separate application for each child seeking to transfer. Sibling hardship requests are not automatically approved based on a sibling's enrollment at an out of zone school (I.B., Capstone, McKay, etc.)

- **Hardship transfers are valid for one school year only.** Students currently on a hardship waiver are not automatically guaranteed acceptance for the next school year. A new application must be submitted annually. Assistant Superintendent of Student Support Services will review the hardship request for an out of zone transfer. A decision will be made based on the information provided in the application and any additional documentation.

- **Hardship Appeals Process:** If an application for a Hardship is denied, a parent/guardian may request an appeal in writing to the Assistant Superintendent of Student Support Services. Once the denial is provided to the parent, however, the parent must enroll the student in the attendance zone in which they reside, even if appealing the decision. The Parent may appeal the denial to the School Board, whose decision will be final.

VI. McKay Scholarship Program:

The District participates in the McKay Scholarship program offered through the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE). Parents of eligible students with special needs or a 504 Plan may select a placement in a private school or selected public school, including charter schools. Florida's School Choice Programs ensure that no child will be left behind by allowing parents to choose the best educational setting – public or private – for their child.

The McKay Scholarships Program for Students with Disabilities Program currently provides more than 31,000 Florida students with special needs the opportunity to attend a participating private school. The McKay Scholarships Program also offers parents public school choice. A parent of a special needs student who is dissatisfied with the student's current school may choose to transfer the student to another public school. Contact the FLDOE, Office of Independent Choice and Parental Choice at (800) 447-1636 or see the Florida Department of Education McKay homepage.

The McKay Scholarship public school option is subject to the availability of required services for the individual student at the requested school. With the district's assistance, FLDOE determines deadlines, eligibility, award amounts and payment distributions based on Florida Statute 1002.39 and State Rule 6A-6.0970. Parents can learn more about this option by visiting the District's website at <http://www.highlands.k12.fl.us/ese/>. Information about this option also is provided to parents by District schools during the process of developing and implementing the child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Section 504 Accommodation Plan.

Transfers under the McKay Scholarship Program Public School Option are approved based on the following criteria:

- The student applied for a McKay Scholarship through the FLDOE and your child was found eligible to receive the scholarship, and
- The review of the student's ESE or 504 records indicate that the special education services he/she needs can be provided at the requested school.

The McKay Scholarship allows the student to continue at the approved public school until he or she has successfully completed all grades offered at that school. Transportation is provided within certain zones for McKay Scholarship Students.

A student that is approved for the McKay Scholarship and would like to transfer to another public school under McKay must complete a written request to the Director of Exceptional Student Education. Requests can be sent via the following contact information:

Pat Landress	(863) 471-5583
426 School Street	Fax (863) 471-5603
Sebring, FL 33870	

VII. Opportunity Scholarship Program:

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 or a school in another district as allowed by law.

VIII. Home School:

Pursuant to Section 1002.41 F.S. a parent or guardian shall notify the district school superintendent of the county in which the parent resides of his/her intent to establish and maintain a home education program. The notice shall be in writing, signed by the parent, and shall include the names, addresses and birth dates of all children who shall be enrolled as students in the home education program. The notice shall be filed in the district school superintendent's office within 30 days of the establishment of the home education program. A written notice of termination of the home education program shall be filed in the district school superintendent's office within 30 days after said termination.

Further information is available by contacting the district at: (863) 471-5569.

IX. Virtual School:

Highlands County Virtual Instruction Program offers high quality, online k-12 curriculum taught by My District Virtual School (MDVS)/Florida Virtual School (FLVS) teachers. Students are able to take individual courses while they attend their traditional school or apply to become a full-time virtual school student. Highlands County virtual school students who earn the necessary credits, receive a Highlands County Virtual School diploma. The next enrollment window for full-time virtual school students will open on May 12th, 2017 and close on August 10th, 2017.

- **Part Time Options.** Students are able to take MDVS/FLVS courses during the school day in a lab at their school of attendance or at home as an additional course. If you are looking to have your child take a course during the school day, please work with your child's guidance counselor for placement.
- **Full Time Options.** Highlands County Virtual Instruction Program is a district school of choice meaning students must apply and be accepted. Acceptance is based on prior student grades, test scores, and student attendance. The rationale for our selective process is based on the premise that if a student is not successful in the full-time program or chooses to withdraw, a student can severely disrupt their graduation timeline.

Enrollment windows will open in May of each year. A second enrollment window, for second semester, will open in late November/early December. More information on how to register for a part-time course or to apply for full-time virtual school in Highlands County is available at the website:
<http://www.highlands.k12.fl.us/sbhc/parents.html>.