



SMART START EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT EDUCATION

Policy Manual



1. GENERAL SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

Mission Statement

Smart Start Exceptional Student Education provides inclusive, individualized, and evidence-based education for students with unique learning needs.

We recognize that students with unique abilities are not meant to fit in a box. We strive to create a learning environment tailored to your child's individual needs.

Legal Compliance

The school will comply with all relevant Florida Statutes, including:

- §1002.42 – Private Schools
- §1002.421 – Accountability for Scholarship Participants
- §1003.21 – Compulsory School Attendance
- FERPA (20 U.S.C. § 1232g) for student records

2. NON-DISCRIMINATION AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Non-Discrimination Policy

The school does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, or other protected classes.

ADA Compliance

Reasonable accommodations will be made for qualified individuals with disabilities in accordance with the ADA.

Title IX Compliance

Sex-based discrimination is strictly prohibited.

3. ADMISSION AND ENROLLMENT

Enrollment Requirements

Smart Start ESE will collect the following at the time of enrollment: Enrollment Application, Student data which includes a valid birth certificate, custody documents as applicable, social security number for the student, health records such as immunization (Form DH 680), health exam (Form DH 3040), and prior records, emergency contact information, previous academic records as applicable, financial data and agreements, medical and educational release forms and other consent forms.



Scholarship Participation

Smart Start ESE accepts Family Empowerment, FTC, Hope, McKay/Gardiner (now FES-UA) and will comply with all accountability requirements of the State.

4. STUDENT CONDUCT

Code of Conduct

Smart Start ESE strives to maintain a positive learning environment, as such, students are expected to behave respectfully and safely. Prohibited behaviors include bullying, dishonesty, disruption, weapons/drugs.

Discipline Procedures

May include warnings, loss of privileges, suspension, or expulsion. Due process will be provided.

5. ACADEMIC ACCOUNTABILITY

Curriculum Standards

Curriculum is research-based and developmentally appropriate.

Progress Monitoring

Quarterly assessments and progress will be communicated to parents.

Testing

Students with disabilities may be exempt from standardized testing.

6. ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance Requirements

In accordance with §1003.21 students covered under state scholarship funds must be present for 170 school days and meet 540 net instructional hours for kindergarten and 720 net instructional hours for grades 1-3, and 900 net instructional hours for students in grades 4-12. Excused absences include illness, holidays, emergencies.

Truancy Prevention

Includes parent meetings and possible reporting.

7. STUDENT RECORDS

Student Records and Right to Privacy

As a participating provider in Florida's school choice scholarship programs, Smart Start Exceptional Student Education is committed to protecting the privacy and integrity of all student



education records. Although FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) applies primarily to public schools and institutions receiving federal funds, our school voluntarily aligns with FERPA standards as required under Florida Statute **1002.421** and the terms of participation in **Step Up for Students** programs.

Definition of Education Records

Education records include any records, files, documents, and other materials that contain information directly related to a student and are maintained by the school or an employee of the school.

Parent and Student Rights Regarding Education Records

1. Right to Inspect and Review

Parents (or students over the age of 18) have the right to inspect and review their child's education records upon written request. The school will respond within **a reasonable timeframe, not to exceed 30 days** from receipt of the request.

2. Right to Request an Amendment

If a parent believes a record is inaccurate, misleading, or otherwise in violation of the student's privacy rights, they may submit a written request for amendment. If the school denies the request, the parent has the right to request a formal review.

3. Right to Consent to Disclosures

The school will not disclose personally identifiable information (PII) from education records without prior written consent from the parent, except where disclosure is permitted or required by law (e.g., to state scholarship program administrators, in the event of a health or safety emergency, or under a court order).

4. Right to File a Complaint

Parents have the right to file a complaint if they believe their privacy rights have been violated. Complaints may be directed to the school's administration or to the **Florida Department of Education** or **Step Up for Students** for scholarship-related concerns.

Safeguarding Student Records

Smart Start Exceptional Student Education maintains all student records in a secure manner, with access limited to authorized personnel only. Electronic records are password-protected, and physical records are kept in locked filing systems. Staff are trained on the confidentiality of student information.



Directory Information and Opt-Out

The school may designate certain limited information as “directory information” (e.g., student name, grade level, or honors received) for use in yearbooks, programs, or announcements. Parents may opt out of the release of directory information by submitting a written request annually.

Record Retention and Destruction

Student records are retained according to Florida Department of Education guidelines. Records are securely destroyed after the retention period of 5 years from withdrawal or graduation unless otherwise requested in writing by the parent.

8. HEALTH, SAFETY, AND EMERGENCIES

Emergency Procedures: Drills & Natural Disasters

The safety of our students and staff is a top priority. Smart Start Exceptional Student Education maintains a comprehensive emergency preparedness plan to respond effectively to various emergencies, including natural disasters, threats, and campus incidents. While private schools in Florida are not legally required to follow all public-school mandates, we voluntarily adopt best practices to ensure the safety and readiness of our school community.

9. STAFF REQUIREMENTS

Background Screening

All staff will undergo Level 2 FDLE background checks required.

Professional Conduct

Staff must follow Florida's Educator Code of Ethics.

Training

Includes CPR, first aid, mandated reporting, curriculum.

10. SCHOOL OPERATIONS

Hours of Operation

Mon-Fri, 8:00 AM to 3:30 PM.

Complaint Resolution

Follow internal grievance process first by contacting school administration at leadership@smartstartese.org

Or contact the Florida DOE Office of Professional Practices Services:
(850) 245-0438 Professional_Practices@fldoe.org



Student Withdrawal

Written Notice Requirement:

Parents/guardians must submit a **written notice of withdrawal** to the school administration. The notice must include the student's full name, date of intended withdrawal, and reason for leaving. The official withdrawal date will be recorded as either the student's last day of physical attendance or the date the written notice is received—whichever is later.

FES Scholarship-Specific Requirements:

For students receiving the **Family Empowerment Scholarship (FES)**, the following apply:

- **Immediate Notification to Scholarship Organization:**
Smart Start Exceptional Student Education will notify the scholarship funding organization (e.g., Step Up For Students) of the student's withdrawal within 15 calendar days, as required by law.
- **Scholarship Payment Adjustments:**
Tuition and fees will be calculated based on the quarter of withdrawal. FES funding is distributed quarterly, and schools must only retain the funds proportionate to the time the student was enrolled and attending.

Quarter	Dates	Retained Funds
Q1	July–September	25%
Q2	October–December	25%
Q3	January–March	25%
Q4	April–June	25%

- Any unused portion of the scholarship will be returned to the scholarship funding organization in accordance with §1002.394 and the signed parent-school agreement.

Refund Policy for Non-Scholarship Students:

Refunds for privately paying families will follow the terms outlined in the signed enrollment agreement:

- **Registration and materials fees** are non-refundable.
- Tuition will be refunded **prorated monthly** if the student withdraws within the first **60 days** of the school year. After this period, no tuition refunds will be given, except for extraordinary hardship reviewed by school administration.

**Final Records and Balances:**

The school will release student records to the receiving school or district after the account is settled and school property is returned. However, records will be released upon direct request from a public school or scholarship entity in accordance with FERPA and FES law, even if a balance is outstanding.

Hardship Review:

Refund requests due to serious illness, family relocation, or death in the immediate family may be reviewed for discretionary approval by the school administrator. Documentation must be provided.