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**August 1, 2016**

**Tennessee Launches Program to Increase Choice for Students with Disabilities**

*22,000 Tennessee students eligible for new educational opportunity*

NASHVILLE— The Tennessee Department of Education announced today the launch of applications for its new Individualized Education Account (IEA) Program that provides the opportunity for parents of eligible students with disabilities to access public education funds to choose the education opportunities that best meet their child’s own unique needs.

"The Tennessee Department of Education strives to ensure that every Tennessee student has access to the tools they need to maximize learning,” Education Commissioner Candice McQueen said. “We believe this program is a unique opportunity to empower families to make decisions for their individual children as we continue our commitment to supporting all students as one of our five transformative priorities under Tennessee Succeeds.”

The department is now accepting applications online for the program, which was sponsored by Senator Dolores Gresham, R-Somerville, and Representative Debra Moody, R-Covington, and adopted by the General Assembly in 2015.

"It is important that we ensure our most vulnerable children have access to a quality education that meets their unique needs,” Senator Gresham said.

The new program provides parents of eligible students in grades K-12 the ability to choose a variety of approved educational services that best fit the needs of their child. By participating in the IEA Program, parents agree to take full legal responsibility for the education of their child and waive all of their child’s rights to a public education, as well as services under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Once a parent or guardian has been approved for participation in the program, a state funded individualized education account will be created for the eligible student. Funds from each student’s IEA can be used for a variety of approved educational expenses, including private school tuition at schools approved to participate in the program, private tutoring and, educational therapies, and more. Parents can find a complete list of additional approved educational expenses, as well as criteria for entrance to the program, on the IEA [webpage](http://www.tn.gov/education/section/iea).

Because this program utilizes public education funds already assigned to each student, there is no cap on the number of eligible students who can participate. The funding that will be disbursed into the student’s IEA is equal to per pupil state and local funds for the district where the student resides and is zoned to attend school. This amount does not include federal funds or additional education funds that local governments contribute to the school district. The average amount of the IEA annual payment is approximately $6,300, but will vary per district.

Parents can now visit the online portal to submit an application for their child. This statewide program will go into effect in January 2017, with parents getting access to the first accounts for use on Jan. 1, 2017.

To get more information about the IEA Program, including parent resources and answers to frequently asked questions, please visit the IEA webpage on the department’s [website](http://www.tn.gov/education/section/iea).

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