

Overview of the Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit Program

Establishment: The Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit Program provides scholarships to eligible students to attend a participating public or nonpublic school of their choice.

Eligibility: The Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit Program allows businesses to contribute to an opportunity scholarship organization to provide funding to eligible students who reside within the attendance boundaries of a low-achieving school. A “low-achieving school” is defined as a public elementary or secondary school in Pennsylvania ranking in the bottom 15 percent of their designation as elementary or secondary school based on combined math and reading scores on the most recent PSSA results available on the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s website. This term does not include a brick-and-mortar charter school, cyber charter school or area vocational-technical school. Beginning in the 2012-13 school year, students residing within the boundaries of a low-achieving school as of the first day of classes will be eligible to apply for an opportunity scholarship, including a student entering kindergarten. Eligible students may include children residing within the boundaries of a low-achieving school who:

- Currently attend a low-achieving school; or
- Are currently enrolled in a non-public school; or
- Were previously home schooled; or
- Were previously attending a charter or cyber charter

Eligible students are defined as those school-age children living in the attendance boundary of a low-achieving school as of the first day of classes and whose household income meets the following criteria:

- Through June 30, 2013: \$60,000, plus \$12,000 for each dependent member of the household
- After June 30, 2013: \$75,000 plus \$12,000 for each dependent member of the household
- For students with a disability, additional adjustments for the allowance will be made pursuant to the law

The Pennsylvania Department of Education will annually publish a list of the bottom 15 percent of elementary schools and the bottom 15 percent of secondary schools, based on combined math and reading PSSA scores, and identify them as low-achieving schools.

Opportunity Scholarship Amount: The maximum amount of an opportunity scholarship awarded to an eligible student is as follows:

- \$8,500 for a student without a disability
- \$15,000 for a student with a disability

Funding: Opportunity scholarships are funded by businesses making contributions to scholarship organizations in exchange for a tax credit. The amount of scholarships cannot exceed the amount of business contributions made to scholarship organizations. Even if a student is eligible for a scholarship, that scholarship is contingent upon funds being available.

Requirements: The scholarship can only be used for tuition costs and school-related fees at the participating nonpublic school or nonresident public school district. A scholarship shall not be awarded for enrollment in a home education program. The combined amount of scholarship and additional financial aid may not exceed the tuition rate and school-related fees associated with the participating school. Scholarship funds received by a parent are not considered taxable income. A participating public or nonpublic school may not charge a higher tuition rate than its normal rates for non-participating students.

Transportation: A resident school district that provides transportation to its own students must provide transportation for a resident student attending a participating nonpublic school that is located within 10 miles of the resident school district's boundaries. A resident school district that provides transportation to its own students may provide transportation for a resident student attending a nonresident public school that is located within 10 miles of the resident school district's boundaries.

How to Apply for an Opportunity Scholarship: Opportunity scholarships will be awarded by approved opportunity scholarship organizations, not the Department of Community and Economic Development. The list of opportunity scholarship organizations is available on DCED's website, www.newpa.com/ostc. This link provides specific instructions on how to contact approved opportunity scholarship organizations. Approved opportunity scholarship organizations will provide details regarding their application process. Parents should work through the approved opportunity scholarship organizations, not DCED, to participate in this program.

Awarding of Scholarships: In awarding an opportunity scholarship, a scholarship organization shall give preference to eligible applicants who:

- Received a scholarship for the prior school year,
- Who meet certain income limits, or
- Who meet certain income limits and who reside in a first class school district, a district with an average daily membership greater than 7,500 that has received an advance of its basic education subsidy, or a district that has received an advance of its basic education subsidy and is either subject to a declaration of financial distress under section 691 of the public school code or is engaged in litigation against the Commonwealth in which the school district seeks financial assistance from the Commonwealth to allow the school district to continue to operate.

Parental Responsibilities: Under the program, parents are responsible for contacting and enrolling their students in a participating public or nonpublic school.