



Council For Lifelong Learning Opportunity Scholarships

Fact Sheet

September 2001

1. What is the Opportunity Scholarship Program?	The Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) is a school choice program created by the Legislature in the 1999 Legislative Session. The program is part of the A+ Education Plan (Ch. 99-398, L.O.F.). Opportunity Scholarships are available for eligible students to attend the eligible public or private school of their choice.
2. Who is eligible for an Opportunity Scholarship?	<p>A <i>public</i> school student is eligible for an Opportunity Scholarship in order to attend an eligible public or private school of their choice if one of the following criteria are met:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the student spent the prior school year in attendance at a public school which was graded "F", and the school has had such low performance for two years in a four-year period;• the student was in attendance elsewhere in the public school system and has been assigned to such a school; or• the student is entering kindergarten or first grade and has been assigned to such a school. <p>(See the School Grading Fact Sheet.)</p>
3. Are private school students eligible for an Opportunity Scholarship?	No. The only students eligible for an Opportunity Scholarship are <i>current</i> public school students, or those students who are just entering the school system in kindergarten or first grade.
4. When does the Opportunity Scholarship begin at a public school?	The OSP becomes available to students at a public school when that school has had two years of low performance in a four-year period. Under current law, "2 years in a 4 year period" means that in any year that a school has a grade of "F" the students in the school are eligible for Opportunity Scholarships if the school also has had a grade of "F" in any of the previous three years.
5. What are the options available to a student under the Opportunity Scholarship Program?	<p>Once a school has been designated as "F" for two years in a four-year period, eligible students have several options available to them, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• attendance at a higher performing public school within the district;• attendance at a higher performing public school in an adjacent district, as long as space is available; and• attendance at an eligible private, sectarian or nonsectarian, school. <p>Students at the designated "F" public school may choose to remain at that school.</p>

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<p>6. What is the school district's role in the Opportunity Scholarship Program?</p>	<p>School districts have certain obligations in the Opportunity Scholarship Program. For each student enrolled in or assigned to a school which has been graded "F" for two school years in a four- year period, the school district must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • timely notify the parent or guardian of the student of all the options available to the student (options listed in prior question); and • offer the student's parent or guardian the opportunity to enroll the child in a higher performing public school within the district. (The school must be graded "C" or higher.) <p>The school district must also provide locations and times for all students participating in the Opportunity Scholarship Program to take all required state assessments.</p>
<p>7. Are all private schools required to participate in the Opportunity Scholarship Program?</p>	<p>No. Private schools are not required to participate in the program. However, participation is open to all private schools that wish to take part in the program, as long as the schools meet the eligibility criteria set forth by law.</p>
<p>8. What must a private school do to become eligible to participate in the Opportunity Scholarship Program?</p>	<p>There are several criteria that a private school must meet to become eligible to participate in the Opportunity Scholarship Program. The private school must be located in Florida, may be sectarian or nonsectarian, and must do the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate fiscal soundness by being in operation for one school year or provide the Department of Education (DOE) with a statement by a certified public accountant confirming that the school is insured and has sufficient capital to operate for the upcoming year; • notify DOE and the school district of its intent to participate in the program by May 1 of the school year preceding the school year in which it intends to participate; • comply with antidiscrimination provisions of 42 U.S.C. s. 2000d, which prohibit discrimination based on race, color, or national origin; • meet state and local health and safety laws and codes; • accept the scholarship students on a random, religious-neutral basis without regard to the student's past academic history (preference may be given to siblings of other OSP students); • be subject to the instruction, curriculum, and attendance criteria adopted by an appropriate nonpublic school accrediting body; • be academically accountable to the parent for meeting the

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	<p>educational needs of the child;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • furnish a school profile which includes student performance; • employ or contract with teachers that meet any one of the following criteria: 1) hold a baccalaureate or higher degree, 2) have at least three years of teaching experience in public or private schools, or 3) have special skills, knowledge, or expertise in subjects taught; • comply with all state laws relating to private schools; • accept as full tuition and fees the amount of the scholarship provided by the state for each student; • agree not to compel any Opportunity Scholarship student attending the private school to profess a specific ideological belief, to pray, or to worship; and • adhere to the tenets of its published disciplinary procedures prior to the expulsion of any Opportunity Scholarship student.
<p>9. Are there obligations for participation in the Opportunity Scholarship Program?</p>	<p>Yes. Students and their parents or guardians must comply with the following criteria to retain the scholarship:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • students must remain in attendance throughout the school year, unless excused for illness or good cause; • students must comply fully with the school's code of conduct; • parents or guardians must comply fully with the private school's parental involvement requirements, unless excused for illness or good cause; and • parents or guardians must ensure that their child takes all required state assessments. <p>A participant who fails to comply with these requirements must forfeit their Opportunity Scholarship.</p>
<p>10. How long does an Opportunity Scholarship last?</p>	<p>The opportunity for a student to <i>continue</i> attending a higher performing public school within the district or in an adjacent district remains in force until the student graduates from high school.</p> <p>The opportunity for a student to <i>continue</i> attending a private school remains in force until: 1) the student returns to the public school, or 2) if the student chooses to attend a private school that only offers classes through the 8th grade, until the student matriculates to high school and the public high school to which the student is assigned is a grade "C" or higher.</p>

<p>11. Are students with disabilities eligible for an Opportunity Scholarship? Do they receive additional funding?</p>	<p>Yes. Students with disabilities are eligible to receive an Opportunity Scholarship. In addition, these students remain eligible to receive services from the school district as provided by federal or state law.</p> <p>The public or private school that provides services to students with disabilities will receive the weighted funding for such services at a level consistent with the provisions of s. 236.025, F.S.</p>
<p>12. Who provides transportation for students who choose an Opportunity Scholarship?</p>	<p>Responsibility for transportation varies depending upon the option chosen by the parent or guardian of the eligible student. Listed below are the following options and transportation requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>attendance at a higher performing public school within the school district.</i> If this option is chosen, the school district is responsible for providing transportation. School districts may utilize state categorical transportation funds or school choice incentive funds. • <i>attendance at a higher performing public school in an adjacent school district, as long as space is available.</i> If this option is chosen, the parent or guardian is responsible for providing transportation. The State does not provide any transportation assistance. • <i>attendance at an eligible private, sectarian or nonsectarian, school.</i> If this option is chosen, the responsibility for acquiring transportation belongs with the parent; however, if the private school chosen provides transportation, any fees which the school charges for providing the transportation are eligible for inclusion in the scholarship amount (refer to funding example in Question 13).
<p>13. How much does a parent receive for a private school Opportunity Scholarship?</p>	<p>The actual amount of the scholarship is the <i>calculated</i> amount shown below or the amount of the private school's tuition and fees, <i>whichever is less</i> (eligible private school fees may include book fees, lab fees, and other fees related to instruction, including transportation).</p> <p>The calculated maximum Opportunity Scholarship amount available to a parent of the student is a calculated amount equivalent to the following: the base student allocation (BSA) multiplied by the appropriate cost factor for the educational program that would have been provided for the student multiplied by the district cost differential (DCD). In addition, the calculated amount must include the per-student share of</p>

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	<p>instructional materials (book) funding, technology funding, and other categoricals provided in the <i>General Appropriations Act</i>.</p> <p>$BSA \times \text{cost factor} \times DCD + \text{categorical funds} = \text{calculated amount}$</p> <p><u><i>Example of Student X's actual scholarship amount:</i></u> If the calculated amount for Student X using the formula above is: <i>\$4,800</i></p> <p>and the private school tuition and fees are: <i>\$3,300</i> tuition - \$2,500 book fees - \$500 lab fees - \$0 transportation - \$300</p> <p>Then, the <i>actual</i> amount of Student X's Opportunity Scholarship is \$3,300.</p>
<p>14. How is an Opportunity Scholarship payment made?</p>	<p>Upon proper documentation by DOE, the Comptroller must make Opportunity Scholarship payments in four equal installments (September 1, November 1, February 1, and April 1). The payment must be made by individual warrant payable to the student's parent or guardian and mailed by DOE to the chosen private school. The parent or guardian must restrictively endorse the warrant to the private school.</p> <p>DOE is responsible for verifying the student's initial admission acceptance and continued enrollment and attendance at the private school.</p>
<p>15. Is the state beginning to regulate private schools?</p>	<p>No. The inclusion of eligible private schools within the options available to public school students does not expand the regulatory authority of the state, its officers, or any school district to impose any additional regulation of private schools beyond those necessary to enforce requirements <i>expressly</i> set forth in the law.</p>
<p>16. How many Opportunity Scholarships are being utilized in Florida?</p>	<p>During the 1999-2000 school year (the initial year of the OSP), students in only two public schools were eligible to participate in the Opportunity Scholarship Program (Spencer Bibbs Elementary and A.A. Dixon Elementary in Escambia County). There were 140 students at both schools that applied for an Opportunity Scholarship. Of these students, 57 students received scholarships to attend an eligible private school and 83 students chose to attend a higher performing public school. Since the initial year of the Opportunity Scholarship Program, no additional public schools have had</p>

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	performance low enough that their students were eligible to participate in the OSP.
17. What are the applicable statutes and rules?	Section 229.0537, F.S. -- Opportunity Scholarship Program Section 229.0535(1), F.S. -- Definition of "2 years in a 4-year period"
18. Where can I get additional information?	Florida Department of Education Office of Public School Choice (850) 488-5011 or DOE Hotline (800) 447-1636 www.floridaschoolchoice.org The Florida House of Representatives Council for Lifelong Learning (850) 414-6694 The Florida House of Representatives Committee on Education Innovation (850) 488-7451