

College Board Launches the Opportunity Scholarship

If I asked you “what is the ideal scholarship” you would probably say a scholarship that isn’t based on merit or test scores or GPA because there are plenty of those types of scholarships already and they are limited to the highest performing students. Next, you might say a scholarship that doesn’t require a long list of requirements, such as submitting an essay or gathering recommendations from teachers and counselors or completing a lengthy application process. Next, you would likely say a scholarship that is not a one-and-done, but instead gives students multiple opportunities to win. Lastly, a scholarship that makes money available to students by rewarding them for the steps they are already taking as they prepare for college, with no extra burden and no additional time-consuming stress.

Surprisingly, such a scholarship already exists! It is called the College Board Opportunity Scholarship and is open to all students beginning their junior year of high school. The Opportunity Scholarship was developed last school year and was designed to reward students for taking the steps towards college that research shows will more likely result in them getting there. The best part is that most students are already taking these important actions and the Opportunity Scholarship is just one more incentive to keep students advancing along the path to college.

The College Board made a \$25 million-dollar, five-year commitment to the Opportunity Scholarships, with nearly half of that amount set aside for low income students. The way it works is that beginning in December of their junior year, students sign up on the College Board website and enter to win. Each month there are drawings where students who have completed specific college steps are eligible ... and students can win for completing multiple steps!

Here are the six steps needed to win and the potential dollar amounts for each.

Step 1.) Building a college list on the College Board Big Future™ website which many students already access. By completing this step, a student can earn a \$500.

Step 2.) Practicing for the SAT® using Official SAT Practice on Khan Academy. By completing this step, a student can earn \$1000. We know that 60% of grade 11 PSAT testers in CT have already linked their College Board account to Khan Academy.

Step 3.) Improving your SAT score by 100 points by using Official SAT Practice. By completing this step, a student can earn \$2000.

Step 4.) Strengthening your college list from Step 1, a student can earn \$500.

Step 5.) Completing the FAFSA federal financial aid form, a student can earn \$1000.

Step 6.) Applying to college, a student can earn \$1000.

Completing all six steps makes a student eligible for one of six grand prizes worth \$40,000. Even better for Connecticut public school students is that an additional \$40,000 has been added to the overall pool, thus increasing their chances to win.

So far, there have been over 100 Connecticut students who have won an Opportunity Scholarship, representing over 40 school districts. Each month the schools that have had student winners are listed in the College Board – CT Administrator Updates email. In the same email, we also include a report showing the total cumulative number of students who have signed up for the Opportunity Scholarship by school-district. After each of the monthly drawings, student winners are notified by the College Board and locally we provide the administrators of the respective school with the name(s) of the student winner(s). During our counselor workshops in the fall, we asked school counselors to help spread the word by taking the “Opportunity Scholarship Pledge.” Over 240 school counselors in Connecticut have done so!

If you want to learn more about the Opportunity Scholarships, just google “College Board Opportunity Scholarship” or use this link: <https://opportunity.collegeboard.org/>. The good news is that 17% of the Class of 2020 have signed up, but we are aiming for 100% for the Class of 2021. To help schools and districts reach this goal, we have provided outreach materials for communicating and promoting the Opportunity Scholarships: <https://pages.collegeboard.org/opportunity-scholarships-outreach-resources>.

Also, look for the College Board – CT Administrator Update email so you can keep track of the number of students in your district who have signed up for the scholarship as well as learn which district-school had a winner(s). The more students who enter to win, the greater the chances that winners will be from your district. Help spread the word.