pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

February 24, 2022
Sent Via Email

Mrs. Melissa McTiernan
Superintendent
Scranton School District
425 N Washington Ave
Scranton, PA 18503-1305

Dear Superintendent McTiernan,

The Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit Program was created pursuant to Act 85 of 2012 (72 P.S. § 1701-G.1, *et seq*) and amended by Act 86 of 2016 (24 P.S. § 2001-B, *et seq*). This program enables eligible students, residing within the boundaries of low-achieving schools, to apply for a scholarship to attend a participating public or nonpublic school.

Low-achieving schools are defined as public elementary and secondary schools (excluding brick-and-mortar and cyber charter schools, and area vocational-technical schools) within the commonwealth that ranked in the lowest 15 percent of its designation (elementary or secondary) for the school year, based on the combined Mathematics/Algebra I and Reading/Literature scores from the most recent annual assessments (PASA, PSSA, and/or Keystone) administered.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) posts the list of low-achieving schools annually so that eligible students can apply for scholarships for the upcoming school year. Students who reside in an attendance zone of a school that was on a previous list of low performing schools but is not on the 2021-2022 school year list, may also apply to a Scholarship Organization to continue receiving a scholarship.

PDE is required to officially notify you that the Scranton School District has been identified as having at least one school designated as a low-achieving school, based upon 2020-21 school year assessments. The following are the schools within the district designated as low achieving:

1. JOHN ADAMS NO 4
2. SOUTH SCRANTON INTRMD SCH
3. WEST SCRANTON INTRMD SCH
4. ISAAC TRIPP EL SCH

Pursuant to 24 P.S. § 2010-B(C), the district must post on its publicly accessible internet website information about this program within 15 days of receipt of this letter. PDE has compiled and attached the following information in an overview document, which the district must place on its website:

1. The overview of the Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit Program includes:
    a. A description of the Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit Program
    b. Instructions to apply for an Opportunity Scholarship

c. Parental responsibilities regarding enrolling their child in a participating public or nonpublic school

2. A list of schools in the district that have been designated as low-achieving schools.

Additionally, within 15 days of receipt of this letter, the district must also notify the parents of each student who is currently attending or residing within the attendance boundary of a low-achieving school, of that school's designation. The district must also notify parents of kindergarten students registered or registering in a low-achieving school of the school's designation. This notice shall be given by sending the attached letter (sample parent letter) PDE has created, which is also provided as an attachment.

Sincerely,

Sherri L. Smith

Sherri Smith, Ed.D.
Deputy Secretary
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education

Enclosures

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Overview of the Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit Program

Establishment: The Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit Program provides scholarships to eligible students who wish 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 that provides 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 that ranks in the bottom 15 percent of its designation as an elementary or secondary school based on combined Mathematics/Algebra 1 and Reading/Literature scores on the most recent annual assessment (PSSA, and/or Keystone). This term does not include a brick-and-mortar charter school, cyber charter school or area vocational-technical school. Students (including students entering kindergarten) who reside within the boundaries of a low-achieving school as of the first day of classes will be eligible to apply for an opportunity scholarship. Eligible students may include children residing within the boundaries of a low-achieving school who:

- Currently attend a low-achieving school;
- Are currently enrolled in a non-public school;
- 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. The income information and information on additional allowances for people with disabilities can be found on the Department of Community Economic Development's (DCED) website at:

Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit Program (OSTC) - PA Department of Community & Economic Development

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) will annually publish a list of the bottom 15 percent of elementary schools and the bottom 15 percent of secondary schools.

Continuation of Scholarship: A scholarship organization may award a scholarship to an applicant who resides within the attendance boundary of a low-achieving school to attend a participating public school or a participating nonpublic school selected by the parent of the applicant. If an applicant who received an opportunity scholarship under

for the prior school year resides within the attendance boundary of a school that was removed from the list of low-achieving schools provided by the department, the applicant may receive an educational opportunity scholarship. The scholarship may be for each year of enrollment in a participating public school or participating nonpublic school for up to the lesser of five years or until completion of grade 12 provided the applicant otherwise remains eligible.

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 Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) nor PDE. The list of opportunity scholarship organizations is available on DCED's website at: Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit Program (OSTC) - PA Department of Community & Economic Development

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.

SAMPLE PARENT NOTIFICATIOIN/SCHOOL CHOICE LETTER FOR OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIPS

(Place on District Letterhead)

Notice of Opportunity Scholarships
Please Read: Important Information Affecting Your Child

DATE

Dear [Input your School Name] Parent or Guardian,

We would like to make you aware of the choices available to you based on the results of your child's school on the 2020-2021 Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) and/or Keystone Exams. The PSSA and Keystones are annual exams given to Pennsylvania students at various grade levels to measure their academic progress.

The Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit Program (OSTCP) was created pursuant to Act 85 of 2012 (72 P.S. § 1701-G.1, *et seq*) and amended by Act 86 of 2016 (24 P.S. § 2001-B, *et seq*). This program enables eligible students residing within the boundaries of low-achieving schools to apply for a scholarship to attend another public or nonpublic school. A low achieving school is defined as a public elementary or secondary school ranking in the bottom 15% of their designation as elementary of secondary school based on the combined math and reading scores on the previous school year PSSA.

[Input your School Name] is on the list of the bottom 15% for performance on the combined Math and Reading tests on the 2020-2021 PSSA and/or Keystone exams.

Under the OSTCP program, [Input your School Name] must offer students the choice to transfer to another school district or nonpublic school. Please know that the staff at [Input your School Name] has a relationship with your child and wants to continue serving your child. However, if you feel your child will be better served in another school, you may request a transfer for your child to one of the schools participating in the OSTCP.

If you wish to take advantage of this opportunity for your child to attend another school, you must go to the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) website:
www.dced.pa.gov/programs/opportunity-scholarship-tax-credit-program-ostc/

You can review the list of scholarship organizations for the school districts and nonpublic schools that are participating in this program. DCED has information regarding the application process. Scholarships are contingent upon available funding.

Additional information is available on our school district website www.xxxx.xxx and the PA Department of Education website http://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Opportunity%20Scholarship%20Tax%20Credit%20Program/Pages/default.aspx#tab-1

Sincerely,

PRINCIPAL

Scranton School District
425 North Washington Avenue
Scranton, PA 18503

Mr. Robert Gentilezza
Director of Compliance

Phone: (570) 348-3432
FAX: (570) 348-3618

Dear Parent or Guardian,

The Scranton School District believes that student learning needs are well supported in neighborhood schools. Board approved **Policy 206-"ASSIGNMENT WITHIN DISTRICT"** states that all students must attend their school within its boundary residence zone.

Under certain circumstances, however, the defined school boundaries may not always meet the needs of students and/or families. The Board provides parents with an alternative under the Scranton School District Boundary Exception (BEX) Policy.

Permission to attend a school outside of the mandated attendance area is granted on an annual basis and is dependent upon available space in the grade level requested. The availability of space will be determined by the building principal in conjunction with the Director of Compliance of the Scranton School District-Robert Gentilezza. Boundary Exceptions will be granted for a term of one year. Parents must complete a new boundary exception request form each year for renewal purposes. The deadline for the submission for the 2022-23 school year is **May 15, 2022**. **The Scranton School District does not provide transportation for students attending a school on a boundary exception.**

Please be advised that boundary exceptions that have been granted will be rescinded if the classroom roster exceeds the contractual class size limit at any time throughout the duration of the school year or if a student becomes disruptive and/or if truancy issues arsies. Boundary exceptions will be rescinded based on a last in, first out basis.

Please complete the attached form requesting the boundary exception and return it to the Scranton School District administration building at 425 North Washington Avenue. **Original signatures are required and faxed copies will not be accepted. Boundaries are based on a yearly basis only.**

Sincerely,

Robert Gentilezza

Director of Compliance
Scranton School District

2022-23 SCRANTON SCHOOL DISTRICT REQUEST FOR BOUNDARY EXCEPTION

○ Renewal

○ First Time

Please complete the form below if you are requesting a boundary exception for your child.
(A form must be completed for each child.)

The Scranton School District DOES NOT provide transportation to boundary exception students. The Superintendent of Schools reserves the right to rescind any boundary exception due to the failure of a student to obey school district rules and policies.

If a classroom roster exceeds the contractual limit, students who were approved a boundary exception will have to return to their home school. This will be determined on a case by case basis by reverse order in which boundary exceptions were received. Faxed forms are not accepted.

ALL BOUNDARY EXCEPTION FORMS MUST BE FILLED OUT EVERY YEAR ON AN ANNUAL BASIS.
DEADLINE FOR THE 2022-23 SCHOOL YEAR FORM IS MAY 15, 2022

RETURN ALL FORMS TO THE
DIRECTOR OF COMPLIANCE

Completing this form does not guarantee placement

Student's Name: _____ Phone: _____
(First) (Last)

Grade Entering in 2022-2023 school year_____

Check one:

Regular Education_____ Special Education_____

Parent's Name: _____

Home Address: _____

Boundary exception from: _____
Home School Name

Boundary exception to: _____
School Name

Reason for requesting a boundary_____

The Opportunity Scholarship Tax credit Program (OSTCP)

Parent's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Approved: _____ Denied: _____

Supervisor Signature_____

BOUNDARY EXCEPTION APPLICATION
2022-23

_____Renewal (renovar)

_____Primera vez (first time)

Student Name: _____
Nombre del alumno

Grade entering for 2022-23: _____
Grado para el año 2022-23

Parent Name: _____
Nombre del padre/madre/guardián

Address: _____
Dirección

_____

Phone: _____
Teléfono

Home School: _____
Escuela que le corresponde

BEX Requested to: _____
Escuela para la que quiere la excepción

Reason for request: _____
Motivo por el cual está solicitando la excepción

_____

The opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit Program (OSTCP)

_____

_____
Parent Signature
Firma

_____
Date
fecha

_____

○ **Approved** ○ **Denied** **Reason** _____

_____

_____

_____