2021 – 2022 School Handbook

A Guide to the Alabama Opportunity Scholarship Fund for Partner Schools

Alabama Opportunity Scholarship Fund
P.O. Box 59188 Birmingham, AL 35259
www.alabamascholarshipfund.org
Welcome to the Alabama Opportunity Scholarship Fund

The Alabama Opportunity Scholarship Fund (AOSF) believes that every child is unique, and that every child learns differently. Most students will thrive in their assigned neighborhood. However, there are some children who will need a different learning environment to reach his or her full potential. It's about giving children the tools to help them succeed. Sometimes that means another public school in a different neighborhood or sometimes that means attending private school. AOSF has a vision that one day, every Alabama child has an equal opportunity to a quality education, which can only occur when educators and local communities are empowered to create diverse learning options and all parents are empowered to match their children to the learning option that best meet their needs.

This guide will provide information for schools and the administrations of educational scholarships granted by AOSF. If a parent or guardian has questions about the scholarship process, you may direct them to our website at https://alabamascholarshipfund.org/.

School Contacts

For questions related to student enrollment, scholarship distributions, Partner School policies and procedures, or submitting required Partner School documentation, please contact:

Julie Benz, Scholarship Program Manager
Email: ibenz@alabamascholarshipfund.org
Office Phone: (205) 206-7806

Partner School Requirements

The Alabama Department of Revenue is responsible for the initial approval of nonpublic schools to receive scholarship funds distributed under the authority of the Alabama Accountability Act. All nonpublic schools who partner with AOSF must be approved by the Department of Revenue and must maintain compliance with all legal and regulatory requirements. An Alabama public school wishing to partner with AOSF need not be approved by the Department of Revenue as a participating school. Partner schools must satisfy the following:

General Requirements

- Partner schools must operate in Alabama.
- Partner schools must satisfy the compulsory attendance requirements provided in Section 16-28-7, Code of Alabama 1975.
- Partner schools may develop the terms and conditions under which they would allow a student who receives a scholarship from AOSF to be enrolled, but those terms and conditions cannot discriminate on the basis of race, gender, religion, color, disability status, or ethnicity of the student or the student’s parent.
- Partner schools are nonpublic, private or parochial schools, not under the jurisdiction of the Alabama Superintendent of Education and the Alabama State Board of Education, providing educational services to children, or public schools outside of the resident school district of
  - an AOSF-funded scholarship student.
• Partner schools must comply with all health and safety laws or codes that apply to nonpublic schools, including the fire drill and exit door requirements contained in Section 36-19-10, Code of Alabama 1975.
• Partner schools must not operate as a homeschool, homeschool umbrella agency, or as a homeschool co-op.

Health and Safety Standards
• Partner schools must provide written verification to AOSF that they will do all of the following:
  o Comply with all health and safety laws or codes that otherwise apply to nonpublic schools.
  o Collect immunization records for each scholarship student as required in Section 16-30-4, Code of Alabama 1975.
  o Hold a valid occupancy permit if required by the municipality in which the school is located.
  o Comply with the Alabama Child Protection Act of 1999.
  o Comply with all state laws that apply to public schools regarding criminal background checks for employees and exclude from employment any person not permitted by state law to work in a public school and any person who may reasonably pose a threat to the safety of the students.

Financial Accountability Standards
• Nonpublic partner schools must demonstrate financial viability, if they are to receive donations of $50,000 or more during the school year, by doing either of the following:
  o Filing with AOSF before the start of the school year a surety bond payable to AOSF in an amount equal to the aggregate amount of contributions expected to be received during the school year, or
  o Filing with AOSF before the start of the school year financial information that demonstrates the school’s financial viability.

Academic Accountability Standards
• Partner schools will:
  o Annually administer either the State achievement tests or nationally norm-referenced tests that measure learning gains in math and language arts to all scholarship students in grades that require testing under the accountability testing laws of the State for public schools.
  o Allow costs of the testing requirements to be covered by the educational scholarships funded by AOSF.
  o Provide the parents of each student who was tested with a copy of the results of the test on an annual basis, beginning with the first year of testing.
  o Provide the test results to the ADOR on an annual basis, beginning with the first year of testing, and to AOSF.
  o Report student information that allows the State to aggregate data by grade level, gender, family income level, and race.
  o Provide graduation rates of those students benefiting from education scholarships to the ADOR or an organization chosen by the State in a manner consistent with nationally recognized standards.

Partner Schools must comply with any ongoing requirements or participation standards distributed by AOSF. Due to the nature of the Alabama Accountability Act, new guidance or regulatory
standards may be issued at any time. During the course of the school year, AOSF may distribute information informing schools of communications or events requiring mandatory school participation. Examples of mandatory communications may include conference calls or online training webinars. Advance notice of mandatory events will be given, and there will often be multiple opportunities for a school scholarship administrator to participate.

AOSF will provide materials necessary for the purpose of information or the scholarship application process. Upon request, schools may use AOSF imagery or materials that AOSF provides for their own approved use. Partner schools should not use, duplicate or alter AOSF materials, imagery or other information without the permission of AOSF. Schools may not misappropriate or misrepresent information from AOSF as information of the partner school or any other agency.

AOSF reserves the right to certify or verify information submitted in the process of scholarship administration and management. AOSF further reserves the right to suspend or discontinue partnership with a school due to the school’s non-compliance with AOSF or AAA standards, misrepresentation to AOSF, inappropriate behavior by a partner school in the course of the scholarship management and distribution process, or other circumstances or activities at the discretion of AOSF management.

Once a private school is eligible to participate, there are additional responsibilities to be fulfilled during the tenure of a school’s relationship as an AOSF Partner School. Partner schools shall be accredited by either the National Council for Private School Accreditation, AdvancED, the American Association of Christian Schools, or one of their partner accrediting agencies by June 10, 2021. Current Partner Schools have until June 10, 2021 to obtain accreditation.

Based on the obligations above, there is information that AOSF must collect from partner schools on an annual basis. Below is a checklist of documents that must be submitted to AOSF. These documents include, but are not limited to:

- 2021-2022 AOSF School Participation Agreement (completed online)*
- Copy of published 2021-2022 statement of all tuition and fees, with date of school board approval* (via online screenshot of the school’s website)
- Web address of school’s active website with published tuition and fees (this must be updated prior to the beginning of each academic semester)*
- Standardized test results of all scholarship students in grades 2-8, 10 and 11.
- Proof of financial viability, if school is a nonpublic Partner School and anticipates receiving in the current season, more than $50,000 in scholarship support.*
- Copy of accreditation certificate from one of the accrediting bodies outlined in the AAA*

The above listed documents shall be submitted to AOSF via the K12 online school portal. Items with an (*) indicate items that must be received by AOSF prior to the disbursement of any scholarship fund checks to the Partner School.

Scholarship Application Process

The AOSF scholarship application process is an exclusively parent or guardian driven process. A prospective scholarship student’s application is solely the responsibility of the parent or guardian. Schools should not be actively involved in the scholarship application process on behalf of an applying family. AOSF does not require that a school collect or maintain any information about a scholarship applicant beyond that information that the school is required to collect by law (for example, a birth certificate to prove age-grade eligibility or immunization). In the event that an application requires a current document from a partner school, the school may transmit the document directly to AOSF at the request of the applicant. If a parent or guardian needs assistance with, or has questions about a scholarship application, please direct them to help@alosf.org.
Scholarship Amount

AOSF scholarships are awarded on an academic year basis. AOSF scholarships cover tuition and certain mandatory fees for the time when the student is awarded a scholarship or enrolls in a Partner School, whichever is later. AOSF can cover tuition and certain mandatory academic fees up to the cap amount by grade level. Types of fees that cannot be covered by the scholarship may include athletic fees, endowment fees, or fundraising fees. Fees cannot be covered if they are not listed on the tuition and fee website screenshot that Partner Schools are required to submit annually to AOSF. In the event that a student does not attend the entire school year at a Partner School, tuition and some fees (e.g. consumable/periodic fees that are billed on a daily, weekly, or semester basis) will be prorated using a per diem rate based on a standard 180 school day schedule, and calculated using the student’s start and end date at the Partner School. AOSF pays a maximum scholarship amount by grade level, per student, per academic year. The maximum award amounts are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Range</th>
<th>Award Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K – 5</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – 8</td>
<td>$6,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 – 12</td>
<td>$8,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Partner Schools shall submit to AOSF a published listing of all tuition and fees by grade level. The Partner School’s full tuition and fee schedule must be publicly available on the school’s website. Tuition and fee amounts for scholarship students may not differ from those charged to a non-scholarship student and any discounts and/or financial aid opportunities must be extended by the school to scholarship families in addition to paying families. Schools should provide to all awarded students a listing of the tuition and fees covered by the AOSF scholarship as well as any financial obligations to be incurred by the parent outside of the scholarship.

Enrolling Scholarship Students

Students who are awarded an AOSF scholarship for the 2021-2022 school year and who have been admitted into the partner school should log into their K12 Portal must accept their scholarship award. The school must then log into their K12 Portal and enter in the tuition and fee information and click “Accept” to “activate” the scholarship. Scholarship awards will contain an expiration date, and will expire if not activated. The expiration date for 2020-2021 is August 15. In order to ensure that the student will receive scholarship funding, please complete the tuition and fee information in a timely manner. AOSF cannot guarantee the reinstatement of any expired scholarship award.

The tuition and fee form contains pertinent information about the student that AOSF will use to calculate the payment amount for the 2021-2022 school year. These forms are to be completed electronically by the school’s scholarship administrator. School administrators have until August 15 to complete the tuition and fee form for that given student. After August 15, if an administrator still has not completed the form for an enrolled student, scholarship funds cannot be guaranteed to the school for that student.

NOTE: AOSF cannot guarantee funding for any student unless the student has received a valid official award letter for the 2021-2022 school year. AOSF encourages schools not to enroll a pending scholarship student (a student who has applied for an AOSF scholarship but has not yet been awarded) unless the applicant family and the school have discussed or made arrangements for financial responsibility of the student’s tuition and fees in the event that the student does not receive scholarship...
funding. Enrolling a student without a scholarship award is a financial risk not encouraged by AOSF. Additionally, enrolling a student without a scholarship could affect the student’s scholarship eligibility in future academic years. Not all students who apply for an AOSF scholarship will be funded and, if awarded, scholarship funding cannot relate back to cover any financial obligations incurred at a school for any period before the student was awarded for the school year. All scholarship payments will be prorated to pay for the co-occurring period of the student’s valid scholarship award and the student’s enrollment in and attendance at a partner school. AOSF cannot be held responsible for any financial obligations incurred while an applicant-student attends the partner school without an award letter.

Dis-enrolling Scholarship Students

Because the AOSF scholarship is granted to the student and not his or her school, awarded students may leave your school before the end of the school year. In that case, we require the school to mark the student as “withdrawn” when doing the quarterly enrollment verification order to ensure the portability of scholarships for funded students, AOSF has an Inter-Partner School Transfer Policy. This policy provides that transfers by an AOSF scholarship recipient student from one Partner School to another Partner School will be permitted at any point in the school year. Depending on the cost of the previous school, a scholarship student may not have the amount of funds to cover the remainder of the year’s tuition and fees. In that case, the financial responsibility falls upon the parent of the scholarship student.

Following the submission of a withdrawal form, it may be determined that additional funds are owed to the private school or that the private school owes AOSF funds due to overpayment. In either event, AOSF will contact the partner school regarding the under or overpayment due. In the event of an overpayment, AOSF will provide to the partner school a detailed invoice for any funds which should be remitted to AOSF. Failure to return overpaid funds in a timely manner may result in a school’s severance from AOSF as a partner.

Distribution of AOSF Scholarship Funds

Scholarships are paid in full by May 31st of each school year. For the 2021-2022 school year, AOSF will make four distributions of scholarship funds during the academic year. Prior to each distribution of funds, private schools must verify the enrollment of their scholarship students. If a student is listed on your verification but no longer attends your school, AOSF requires the submission of a withdrawal form for that student before funds are distributed.

Scholarships are paid in the form of an ACH (automated clearing house) issued to the school on behalf of the parent or guardian listed on the scholarship application. The school will receive an electronic deposit and a payment detail report that will have each student’s payment amount itemized.

Effective 02/2021