

February 19, 2010

Dear Parents,

The following is an explanation of the Tuition Assistance Programs available to students in Catholic Schools. There are two sources of money and only one application.

First: **Bishop's Education Fund (BEF)**—This is for Catholic students in Grades K-12 that are attending eligible schools. The Pastor MUST sign this form. (It may be signed before the form is completed.)

Second: **Scholastic Opportunity Scholarship Program (SOS)**—This is for any Pre-K—12 student (Catholic or non-Catholic) attending any eligible Catholic School in the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

✓ **Need Assessment through Private School Aid Service (PSAS)**

All parents applying to either the Bishop's Education Fund or the Scholastic Opportunity Scholarship Fund must have their need assessed by Private School Aid Service (PSAS), a company from Cleveland, Ohio that specializes in evaluating financial need. Parents submit a copy of their federal tax return (and state tax return if applying to SOS), a completed 2010-2011 "Student Aid Form" (with their pastor's signature if applying to BEF), and a \$21 administrative fee. "Student Aid Forms" are due to PSAS no later than **March 15, 2010**. Incomplete forms will be put on hold until the requested information is received. The signed form must be sent directly to PSAS as indicated in the instructions on the form itself. The form is also available on the Diocesan website.

✓ **One Application**

As the above descriptions indicate, some students will be eligible for both programs and others only eligible for SOS. However, the **same application** is used to assess student need with the applicant indicating to which program or programs application is being made. In addition, only one application per family is necessary even though a family might have children at the preschool, elementary and secondary levels.

✓ **Due Date**

The completed PSAS application form with the appropriate fee along with the pastor signature (if applying to BEF) must be received by PSAS no later than **March 15, 2010**. Any forms received after this date will not be reviewed. Incomplete forms will be put on hold until the requested information is received.

✓ **Notification of Awards**

All parents who applied will receive a letter directly from the Diocese including those whose applications have been put on hold. Determinations are mailed directly to you in June.

✓ **Pastor Signature (for BEF only)**

Parents **must** have their pastor sign their "Student Aid Form" (verifying that they are Catholic) prior to sending it for evaluation. As the form notes, **parents may ask their pastor to sign a partially completed form that does not contain their financial information**. A pastor's signature only confirms that the family is indeed Catholic based on the following canonical criteria: a) the child is baptized; b) the family is registered in the parish; and c) the family attends Mass regularly and uses the parish envelope system. Signing the form does not commit a parish to any financial obligation for aid.

✓ **Fee**

Parents will be asked to pay PSAS directly for this service. The fee for the 2010-2011 applications will be \$21 per family.

✓ **2010-2011 Tuition Rates**

K-12 rates will be communicated directly by the Diocese to PSAS based on an annual spring tuition survey. Parents can, therefore, leave the tuition information blank for these programs. The principal enters preschool tuition rates on the form itself. If children attend any other schools charging tuition (e.g. college) the rate should be noted.

✓ **Who Should Or May Apply To The Scholastic Opportunity Scholarship Fund**

There are clear guidelines noted on the form entitled "Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) Supplemental Form." Any student residing in Pennsylvania coming from a family that meets the income guidelines may apply. Although application to the fund does not guarantee an award will be made, since the inception of the program, each eligible student has received a grant of at least \$100 while funds remained. We hope to award each eligible applicant a grant again this year but awards will depend upon the number of applicants and the actual amount of funds available to distribute.

✓ **New for 2010-11: SOS/EITC Applicants with Special Needs Students**

***Families applying to SOS with a special needs student will be considered eligible using more generous income guidelines.*** These changes provide a multiplier of 1.5 times the standard income limits for special needs students not enrolled in a special education school and 2.993 times the standard income limits for a special needs student who is enrolled in a special education school. ***The Special Education Supplemental Form will need to be completed. As indicated above, eligibility does not guarantee a grant.***

✓ **Who should or may apply to the Bishop's Education Fund**

Any Catholic family who completes an aid application that is signed by a pastor from an eligible parish will automatically be evaluated for a BEF grant. As indicated above, actual grant awards will depend upon the number of applicants and the actual amount of funds available to distribute. In general, if a family exceeds the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's income criteria for receiving an EITC/SOS grant (see application), they are unlikely to receive a BEF grant.

✓ **School Reports**

After making awards in May or early June, the diocese will send a report to each school with parent need information and the grant amounts for each student. This information can then be used to award local tuition assistance funds (i.e., angel funds, etc.).

✓ **Communication to PSAS**

All communication to PSAS must be done through the Diocese (with the exception of certain high schools who have individual contracts). If you have specific questions on procedure or have other concerns, please contact the Department for Catholic Schools at 412-456-3090.

✓ **Emergency Aid**

Emergencies (e.g. death/illness of a parent, job loss, etc.), will be evaluated on an individual basis. A letter outlining the emergency nature of the situation must be sent by the parent or guardian to Dr. Ronald Bowes, Department for Catholic Schools, 111 Boulevard of the Allies, Pittsburgh, PA 15222.

The application forms are available here in the school office. Just call 724-285-4276 or send in a note to request an application. The application can also be downloaded from the Diocesan website: [www.diopitt.org](http://www.diopitt.org). (There is a pull down menu at the top of the page. Go to Welcome, Diocesan Posting Board, Education, and PSAS 2010-2011 Student Aid Application.) Please take advantage of this tuition assistance. The funds are there.

May our Provident God bestow His blessing of wisdom upon you.

Sister John Ann