Louisiana

SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

PARTICIPATION
GUIDE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Launched in 2008 in New Orleans and expanded statewide in 2012, the Louisiana Scholarship Program is a program designed to provide students with additional opportunities to attend the school of their choice. Student applicants are eligible to receive state-funded Scholarships to enroll in participating nonpublic schools or high performing public schools. The Scholarship Program is a collaborative effort between the Department and participating Scholarship schools with the common objective of providing Louisiana's students with an education that prepares them for college and career success.

The Scholarship Program is governed by RS 17:4014 and *BESE Bulletin 133*. The Scholarship Program is funded through a line item in the state budget.

The Scholarship Program Participation Guide is an overview of the Louisiana Scholarship Program participation requirements and is designed to ensure that participating schools have a clear representation of the programmatic, academic, and financial expectations outlined in *Bulletin 133*.

II. SCHOOL ELIGIBILITY

Both nonpublic schools and traditional public schools may participate in the Louisiana Scholarship Program. Schools seeking to participate in the Louisiana Scholarship Program must meet mandatory school eligibility requirements.

Nonpublic Schools

Nonpublic schools must be both BESE approved and Brumfield v. Dodd compliant to be considered eligible for participation.

BESE Approval

The nonpublic school approval process is intended to confirm that schools utilize "a curriculum of quality at least equal to that prescribed for similar public schools," as required by the Louisiana Constitution. Please visit the *nonpublic school webpage* for additional information regarding the BESE approval process.

Brumfield v. Dodd Compliance

The Brumfield v. Dodd certification process verifies that BESE-approved nonpublic schools do not use racially discriminatory policies and practices. BESE-approved nonpublic schools must be certified as Brumfield v. Dodd compliant to be eligible to receive any state or federal funding. Please visit the *nonpublic Brumfield v. Dodd webpage* for additional information regarding the certification process.

Public Schools

Public schools who wish to participate in the Scholarship Program must have a letter grade of A or B for the most recent school year and have approval to participate by the local superintendent.

III. SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM PARTICIPATION CRITERIA

To ensure the safety and well-being of all students participating in the Scholarship Program, participating schools must meet mandatory program participation criteria outlined in *Bulletin 133*.

The Scholarship Program Participation Criteria consists of four focus areas:

Focus Area 1: Student Enrollment

Focus Area 2: Financial Practice

Focus Area 3: Student Mobility

Focus Area 4: Health, Safety, and Welfare of Students

Schools that do not meet these criteria may be declared ineligible to participate in the program. Ineligibility to participate may result in the school enrolling no new students for one or more years, enrolling no new students permanently, or ending all participation immediately.

Focus Area 1: Student Enrollment

Each year, Scholarship schools fill out a Notice of Intent (NOI) to Participate and indicate the number of students they are able and willing to serve. Schools have flexibility when determining Scholarship student enrollment.

If a school requests a significant number of new students (at least 50 more total new students or greater than 125% of the school year's previous enrollment including pre-K), the Department will conduct a review of the school's demonstrated capacity to serve students as well as parent demand. The Department will use this capacity review to grant the school's requested number of seats or determine a specific number of new Scholarship students the school may enroll (known as the new student cap).

Focus Area 2: Financial Practice

In order to participate in the program, schools must comply with the following rules regarding financial practice:

Use of Funds

- Scholarship funds can be spent only on "educational purposes." Any expenditure of Scholarship funds constituting gross irresponsibility or gross individual enrichment is prohibited.
- Participating schools employees cannot use the authority of an office or position in connection with the school's participation in the Scholarship Program to gain anything of economic value.

Tuition and Fees

- Tuition and fees received through the Scholarship Program for participating students must not exceed tuition and fees charged to enrolled students not participating in the program. Scholarship funds may not be used to pay tuition and fees for students not participating in the Scholarship Program. See *"X. Tuition and Fee Approval" on page 13* for more information.

Annual Independent Scholarship Audit

- The audit addresses the rules of financial practice outlined in *Bulletin 133*. Failure to correct violations of the rules, evidence of gross fiscal irresponsibility, or the failure to complete the audit according to established timelines may result in penalties including the school being declared ineligible to participate. See *"XI. Scholarship Audit" on page 13* for more information.

Focus Area 3: Student Mobility

In participating schools, the Department may investigate instances in which the rate of students remaining enrolled from the beginning of one school year to the next school year falls short of the average of all participating schools by a significant percentage. Schools with exaggerated, repeated, or uncorrected patterns of low relative rates of continued enrollment may be instructed to enroll no new students for one year or to fully end participation.

Focus Area 4: Health, Safety and Welfare of Students

Participating schools must be in compliance with all federal, state, and local laws and regulations pertaining to the health, safety, and welfare of students for public or nonpublic schools, as applicable.

Participating schools must not have an employee, or any person having supervisory or disciplinary authority over children, who has been convicted of or pled nolo contendere to any crime listed in R.S. 15:587.1(C) except R.S. 14:74 or has been convicted under the laws of any state or of the United States or of any foreign government or country of a crime which, if committed in Louisiana, would be an R.S. 15:587.1 crime.

The state superintendent may immediately declare a school ineligible to participate if the school's continued participation endangers the academic welfare, health, or safety of children.

IV. NOTICE OF INTENT TO PARTICIPATE

All schools – including schools currently participating (even if they do not wish to accept new students) and schools seeking to participate for the first time – must submit an annual Notice of Intent (NOI) to Participate. The Department releases the NOI for an upcoming school year in the fall of the current school year. The NOI can be found on the *Department's website* upon release.

In the NOI, schools share:

- Contact information for the school leader, the school Scholarship manager, and the school test coordinator.
  - » The School Scholarship Manager acts as the liaison between the school and the Department and is responsible for communicating with the Scholarship team and sharing all relevant information with school staff.
  - » The school test coordinator oversees the assessment process and ensures tests are administered according to specified requirements included in Bulletin 118.
- The list of grades in which the school will open Scholarship seats[1]
- The number of available seats per grade
- Whether the school elects to offer students who live in their parish preference over other students in the lottery
- An estimate of the tuition and fees for the upcoming school year (final tuition and fee data will be collected in the summer)
- Transportation services offered by the school
- Special education services offered by the school[2]
- Scholarship Program assurances signed by the school leader
- Any other information requested by the Department

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[1] Approval of each schools' number of seats is contingent upon results from the capacity review process, a school's prior year academic performance, and state funding. The Department notifies schools of their approved number of seats during the scholarship application process.

[2] Nonpublic schools are not required to provide special education services. For nonpublic schools which choose to provide special education services, please indicate what services the school is able and willing to provide.

V. SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION PROCESS

The Department holds two application periods for families.

- Main Round – Occurs in fall/winter

- Round 2 – Occurs in spring

Schools play a central role in the applicant intake process by collecting applications and verifying eligibility as well as providing direct support to families. Helpful information will be included in the *Scholarship application*, the *application guide*, and on *the Scholarship Program's website*. In addition, schools can refer to the *"Technical Appendix"* for additional information on entering applications and verifying eligibility.

School Responsibilities

- Schools inform the Department of the grade(s) they wish to accept applicants in before the Main Round and again before Round 2. Applications will only be accepted by the Department for students entering these grades.

- Schools are not allowed to implement admissions criteria for Scholarship applicants and may not discriminate against any students – such as students with special needs – during the application and registration processes.

  » Schools should not inform families that they have been accepted to their school as a Scholarship student prior to awards being made. Scholarship awards are made by the Department and families must submit a Louisiana Scholarship Program Application. Students who apply to schools directly and meet admissions criteria may be accepted as a *paying* student only.

  » Schools located in Orleans parish participate in OneApp, the parish-wide unified enrollment process. For additional details about OneApp, visit *www.enrollnola.org*.

TYPES OF APPLICANTS	
New Student Applicants	**Continuing Student Applicants**
Must submit an application: • Families can access the application online or complete a paper application and bring it to a participating school or a *New Orleans Family Resource Center.* **Must submit eligibility documentation:** • The student must meet the residency and income requirements of the program. Each year, the Department outlines the approved forms of documentation that families may submit to prove eligibility. This information can be found on *the Scholarship Program's website*, application, and application guide.	**Who wish to remain at their current school:** • Are guaranteed a seat at their current school for the following year, provided they are not in a terminal grade. • Do not need to submit any additional forms.
	In a terminal grade: • Must submit a new application to update their school choices. • Do not need to resubmit eligibility documentation and will automatically be deemed eligible. • Receive priority in the lottery process, but they are not guaranteed a new Scholarship seat.
	Interested in enrolling in a different Scholarship school: • Must submit a new application to change their school choices. • Do not need to resubmit eligibility documentation and will automatically be deemed eligible. • Will lose his or her Scholarship to their current school if awarded to a different school for the following year.

New Student Eligibility

To be eligible to receive a Scholarship, new students must:

- Be a resident of Louisiana

- Be entering grades K-12

- Be attending a "C," "D," "F," or "T" school on both October 1 and February 1 of the current application year OR be entering kindergarten for the first time. Homeschool students and students in grades K-12 who currently attend nonpublic schools are not eligible.

- Have a total family household income that does not exceed 250% of the federal poverty guidelines, as established by the Federal Office of Management and Budget.

Verifying New Student Eligibility

School Responsibilities

- During the application process, participating Scholarship schools are required to review all applications, collect eligibility documentation, and mark the eligibility status for all students in the Scholarship Program's online application system. Please refer to the *"Technical Appendix"* for additional information on entering applications and verifying eligibility.

- Scholarship schools do not need to keep eligibility documentation of file for applicants. When a student is awarded to a school, that school must re-confirm eligibility and should keep all eligibility documentation on file for a minimum of three years.

Department Responsibilities

- The Department conducts an additional review of all applications to determine if they are eligible based on the prior school eligibility requirement.

- The Department runs incomplete applications against other systems such as the Free and Reduced Lunch database in an effort to determine if the family meets income eligibility requirements.

- Students deemed ineligible will not be entered into the lottery for selection.

Lottery and Award Process

Once a student submits an application and is deemed eligible to participate in the program, the application is entered into a lottery. The Department conducts a random selection process to award Scholarships that provides each eligible student an equal opportunity for selection based on students' indicated preferences and priorities outlined in law.

The Scholarship lottery process uses the following priorities (listed in order) to make student awards:

1. Students transferring from a closing Scholarship school

2. Current Nonpublic School Early Childhood Development (NSECD) students, if applicable

3. Siblings of current Scholarship students (In order to link students as siblings, all siblings must be listed on each application.)

4. Current Scholarship student applicants that are in a terminal grade

5. Students transferring from a sanctioned Scholarship school

6. Applicants residing in the same parish as the school, if applicable

7. Applicants attending a D, F, T school

8. Applicants attending a C school

9. Current Scholarship students who wish to attend a different Scholarship school

Upon completion of the lottery, the Department is required to hold the results for a 10 day wait period during which time the lottery file is shared with the United States Department of Justice. After the wait period, award results are mailed and emailed to families. The Department also updates student rosters in SEE, and schools are encouraged to reach out to newly awarded students to welcome them and provide registration information.

Round 2

- Students who applied in the Main Round, but were not awarded or were unhappy with their award, MUST re-apply during Round 2. Applications from the Main Round are not rolled over. These students do not need to re-submit eligibility documentation if they were already deemed eligible in the Main Round.

- Schools accepting new Scholarship students are not required to participate in the Round 2 application process.

- Schools that do not participate in Round 2 will not be eligible to receive any additional Scholarship placements after the Main Round (including waitlist placements).

Waitlist

A waitlist may be operated by the Department for schools outside of Orleans Parish after Round 2 of the application process. The waitlist is an attempt to place students who have either not yet received a Scholarship award or received an award to a school ranked lower on the student's application.

- Students must submit an application in Round 2 in order to be eligible for the waitlist.

- Students are automatically placed on the waitlist for eligible schools based on the application choices listed on their Round 2 application.

- All waitlist decisions are subject to the Louisiana Scholarship Program's budget availability..

VI. NEW STUDENT REGISTRATION

Once the lottery process is complete, the registration process begins. The Main Round and Round 2 application periods have separate registration processes.

Department Responsibilities

- Notify families of their awards and registration deadline
- Provide rosters to schools
- Provide timeline for registration to schools and families
- Provide required registration forms to schools

School Responsibilities

- Review and maintain eligibility documentation for each student
- Notify the Department of any students deemed ineligible based on income and residency review
- Share required registration information and forms (see below) with families, including the school handbook
- Share list of registered students with the Department
- Inform Department if school wishes to drop or maintain all students who have not registered by the deadline.

Required Registration Information and Forms to Share with Families

- Schools must inform families of all school rules, regulations, and policies, and have the family sign an acknowledgement of receipt of these rules.
- Schools must require parents to fill out and sign the three forms below. As these forms are subject to audit, they must remain in each student's folder for the duration of the student's enrollment plus three years.

Form	By signing this form, parents indicate they understand that:
Parent Waiver for Special Education Services	• Nonpublic Scholarship schools are not required to provide special education and related services • Parents waive their right to any special education and related services their child may have
Parent Acknowledgments Regarding Scholarship Funds	• The Department pays the school directly and that the family will not receive any funds • There will be no refund to a parent under any circumstances • The family chose to register at the school of their own free will • The parent will update the school in the case of address change or transfer, among other matters
Receipt of Rules and Regulations Form	• The Scholarship school has informed them of any and all rules, policies, and procedures of the school, including but not limited to academic policies, disciplinary rules, and procedures of the school

Registering a Transfer Student or a Continuing Student

- Schools do not need to collect eligibility documentation for students who transfer to their school mid-year or for continuing students. Schools should place a copy of the transfer form and approval e-mail in the student's cumulative file.
- Schools should collect the three registration forms and have parents review and sign receipt of the school handbook each year for every student – new, transfer, or continuing.

VII. STUDENT ENROLLMENT

Enrollment Verification

Quarterly Counts

- Schools report Scholarship enrollment in four quarterly enrollment count dates throughout the year (September, December, February, and May). During each quarterly count, schools are required to mark whether or not a student is enrolled at the school as of the count date.
- Students with excessive absences (>10) should not be included as enrolled for that quarter. Students may be marked as enrolled in subsequent quarters if they meet attendance requirement for that quarter.
- Schools must maintain up-to-date enrollment records in order to substantiate which students were actually enrolled on each of the four count dates. If schools do not properly mark enrollment for a student, they may not receive payment for that student.
- Schools are responsible for notifying the Department if a currently enrolled student's grade, address or other enrollment information has changed.

Payments

- Schools receive payment in four equal installments. In certain circumstances, schools may receive payment adjustments if the Department identifies any discrepancies in student enrollment.
- Schools will only receive payment for the students enrolled on the date of the quarterly count.
- Schools that incorrectly report student enrollment will have 30 days after the count date in each quarter to notify the Department using the *Payment Update Form.*
- Payments are made based on the student enrollment counts that schools submit each quarter. Payments are typically processed within ten days of the count date and should be direct deposited or mailed to schools within two weeks of the count date. Please note that the Quarter 4 payment may be delayed due to the annual audit.

Student Withdrawals

- If a student withdraws from a school, the school will indicate that on the next quarterly enrollment report. For example, if a student withdraws in October, schools will notify the Department on the December enrollment report. Schools should make their best effort to determine where the student intends to enroll next.
- To indicate that a student is no longer in attendance, schools will enter the student's last date of attendance and select an exit code from a pre-populated *menu of exit codes*. An accurate exit code must be entered for every student that is dropped from a school's roster.
- Students who withdraw from a Scholarship school who do not transfer to another Scholarship school will lose their Scholarship award for the remainder of the year. If the student would like to apply for a Scholarship seat the following year, the family will need to re-verify income and residential eligibility.

Student Transfer Process

- Current Scholarship students who wish to transfer from one participating Scholarship school to another during the school year are required to submit a formal *Hardship Transfer Request* to the Department signed by both the parent/guardian and a representative of the receiving school.
- A student is not permitted to enroll at a different participating Scholarship school until the Department has notified the family and participating schools that the transfer has been approved. If a student transfers without a completed transfer form and e-mail approval from the Department, they may lose their Scholarship. It is the school's responsibility to inform the family when the transfer has been approved.
- Transfers will be approved on a case-by-case basis for hardships including but not limited to:
  - » Sibling unification
  - » Family relocation
  - » Student expulsion
  - » To accommodate a student's special needs

- Transfers are only allowed to schools that are not sanctioned and who have not exceeded their new student caps.

- The Scholarship Team will update school rosters if a transfer is approved. If a student transfers to another Scholarship school during the school year, the school in which the Scholarship recipient is enrolled on the next count date will receive the next payment. Schools should enter the student's last date of attendance and select exit code **42: Transfer Under SSE to NonPub or 43: Transfer out of District Remain Under SEE** from the pre-populated menu of available *exit codes*.

- Scholarship students that transfer schools are considered new placement students for enrollment purposes and count towards a school's new student cap.

Student Expulsions

- All schools must adhere to policies outlined in the school's handbook when implementing expulsions.

- If a student is expelled from a participating school, the school must notify the Department of the expulsion within two days, as per Bulletin 133.

- Students who are expelled from a participating school are allowed to transfer to another participating school and should follow the Hardship Transfer Process. Please note that transfer placements for expelled students are not guaranteed.

- Schools should enter the student's last date of attendance and select exit code *01: Expelled* from the pre-populated menu of available *exit codes*.

VIII. SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

Enrolling Students with Disabilities

- Participating Scholarship schools are not required to provide special education or related services to students with disabilities.

- Schools are required to accept any eligible student who was awarded to their school, including students with disabilities. During the registration process, all families must review and sign the special education waiver, in which a parent waives any rights to special education and related services.

- Schools must accept the student if the family still chooses to enroll their child despite the school's lack of available special education services.

Scholarship School Special Education Programs

If a participating school charges a higher tuition for students receiving special education services and meets the criteria outlined below, the Department will allocate an amount per pupil equal to a special education tuition amount based on the cost of providing special education services identified for that student. This amount is in addition to the participating school's maximum Scholarship payment, but the total of the payment and the special education tuition may not exceed the amount allocated for that student to the local school system if the student otherwise would be attending public school.

Requirements for Additional Special Education Tuition Payments:

- For at least two years, the school has provided special education services to students with disabilities (services provided by the local school system do not satisfy this requirement).

- The school has provided needed services to students by teachers holding appropriate special education certification or other appropriate education and training as defined in *Bulletin 1706.*

- The school provides services and instruction in accordance with a student's individual education plan.

IX. SCHOOL WITHDRAWAL FROM THE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Schools that wish to completely withdraw from the Scholarship Program must submit a letter in writing to the Department. Please note that schools may elect not to accept new students in a given year; not accepting new students does not mean the school has withdrawn from the program.

- If a school fails to notify the Department of this withdrawal decision, the Department may disallow the school from participating for up to five academic years.

- If a school withdraws from the Scholarship Program in the middle of a school year, the school must allow all enrolled Scholarship recipients to remain at the school for the remainder of the school year and must pay for the educational services for those students.

X. TUITION AND FEE APPROVAL

The Department reviews Tuition and Fee amounts two times during each school year: during the NOI process (preliminary tuition and fee information) and again during the Tuition and Fee Submission process (final tuition and fee information).

Preliminary Tuition and Fee Information

Each fall during the NOI process, the Department will request the maximum amount of tuition (including all allowable fees) that the school will charge each grade served for the upcoming school year. The amount of tuition and fees entered during the NOI process is non-binding and is used for internal review purposes only.

Final Tuition and Fee Information

Each spring, the Department will collect final tuition and fee information from schools. The Department requires tuition and fees to be listed individually by grade level. Additionally, supporting documentation (for example, a tuition and fee schedule) must be submitted for each tuition or fee amount requested. The Department reviews the information submitted to ensure it follows the guidelines established in Chapter 5 of Bulletin 133. Once the tuition and fee data is finalized, school leaders certify the amounts which are then used to make reimbursements during the quarterly enrollment counts.

XI. SCHOLARSHIP AUDIT

Because Scholarship schools receive funds from the Department generated from public tax dollars, these funds come with a high level of responsibility and accountability to the State of Louisiana and Louisiana citizens. La. R.S. 17:4022(3) requires a financial audit of those schools receiving Scholarship funds. The audit must be conducted by a certified public accountant. The audit is performed by the Department on behalf of the schools through contracted services with CPA firms approved by the Louisiana Legislative Auditor. The cost of the audit is paid for by the Department.

The Department publishes *audit guidance*, including an *engagement letter*, regarding the annual independent Scholarship audit so as to ensure compliance with the law.

Audit Components

The audit includes five (5) separate tests for compliance (See *"Appendix C: Scholarship Audit Compliance Tests" on page 27* for additional detail):

1. Tuition and Fee Verification

2. Income Eligibility

3. Use of Funds

4. Payment Accuracy Verification

5. Special Education Tuition

Audit Timeline

Phase I: Tuition and Fees Verification and Income Eligibility - October through November

Phase II: Use of funds, Payment Accuracy Verification and Special Education Tuition - February through March

Consequences for Fiscal Irresponsibility

Schools that demonstrate fiscal irresponsibility by failing to submit required documentation for the audit according to a timeline established and shared by the Department, failing to comply with the aforementioned audit provisions, and/or failing to correct violations of the rules may incur penalties including:

*   Being placed on probation for one year, during which time the school will not be allowed to enroll additional Scholarship students. Removal from probation will occur upon correction of the violation.

*   Being declared ineligible to participate in the program

XII. ACADEMIC ACCOUNTABILITY

Academic Accountability Criteria

- All enrolled Louisiana Scholarship Program students must take the same state assessments under the State and District Accountability System as students in public schools. Student achievement on these assessments is used to determine the status of a school's continued participation in the program.

- To ensure compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), a participating school's state assessment scores will be reported publicly if the school has:
  - » Ten or more total Scholarship students taking state assessments, and/or
  - » Any grade level with ten or more participating Scholarship students taking state assessments.

Testing Requirements

Test Security Policy

- Participating Scholarship schools are required to develop and annually submit a test security policy to the Department, in compliance with *Bulletin 118, Chapter 3.*

- Participating Scholarship schools must investigate and report any testing irregularities and/or violations of test security to the Department. In addition, in the rare case that this becomes necessary, the Department has the authority to conduct an investigation and void any scores deemed to be invalid.

District/School Test Coordinator

- Participating Scholarship schools are required to designate a school test coordinator (or, in the case of diocese schools, a district test coordinator), whose responsibilities include:
  - » Attending pretest workshops designed for participating schools as well as any additional training required to administer the state assessments.
  - » Making all arrangements for testing.
  - » Handling and maintaining the security of test materials.

Data Verification

- The Department orders testing materials using the student enrollment data reported each year in the Quarter 1 Enrollment Count.

- To ensure the Department has accurate and reliable data, all schools/dioceses will annually be asked to review assessment rosters via an online data system.

Scholarship Cohort Index (SCI)

- A Scholarship Cohort Index is an accountability performance score for schools participating in the Louisiana Scholarship Program who have:
  - » An average of ten or more participating students per K-12 grade, and/or
  - » 40 or more students enrolled in tested grades.
- The SCI ranges from 0-150.

How is SCI calculated?

SCIs are produced after the school year in which assessments were taken.

- SCIs are calculated in a manner that is substantially similar to the school performance score (SPS) outlined in Bulletin 111 and is based on state assessments of student learning.

- The SCI measures only students in the Scholarship Program rather than the school as a whole.

There are two fundamental rules of the accountability system for Scholarship schools that receive SCIs:

1. If the school receives an SCI below 50 in the second year of participation or in any year thereafter (on a scale of 150), the the school will not be allowed to enroll additional Scholarship recipients for the next school year. Students attending a participating school that receives a score below 50 in any year will have priority in the lottery to attend another participating school the following year.

2. Following four school years of program participation, and in any period of four school years thereafter, if the participating school has scored below 50 for the majority of years in which it received an SCI, the school will be able to enroll new Scholarship recipients only after achieving a score greater than 50 and a satisfactory quality review by the Department.

The following exceptions exist:

- The State Superintendent can waive the above provisions if likely new enrollees otherwise would predominantly be enrolled in schools performing at levels lower than or equivalent to the participating school.

- The State Superintendent can waive the above provisions if the school's SCI has improved by more than 15 points over the last four school years, with the 2012-2013 school year being the first such year.

Lack of Basic Academic Competence

If a participating school demonstrates gross or persistent lack of basic academic competence, the school may receive sanctions including ineligibility to participate or accept new students. The Department may sanction schools that demonstrate lack of basic academic competence even if they are not eligible to receive an SCI.

Schools are considered to lack basic academic competence if:

- The school has participated in the Scholarship Program for at least two years, and

- Has at least ten tested students (and a minimum of 40 tested units), and

- Received a proficiency rating of <25% on state assessments during the current year, and/or

- The Department determines that students' academic welfare is in danger based on any other substantial evidence.

XIII. SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM COMMUNICATION

Scholarship Program Communication

In an effort to keep schools abreast of important information regarding the Scholarship Program and the Department in general, schools will receive regular communication from the Scholarship team.

Scholarship Program - School Newsletter

The Scholarship Program newsletter, released each Thursday, contains important information about program procedures such as student enrollment, the student application process, and quarterly enrollment counts. In addition, the newsletter contains assessment information and deadlines along with resources from the Department. The newsletter is the Department's primary method of communication, and the Scholarship team relies on the newsletter to provide necessary information to schools.

Scholarship Program - Parent Newsletter

The Scholarship Program parent newsletters contain important information for current and prospective Scholarship families who'd like to learn about the application and registration processes. The Scholarship team will publish two newsletters; one in the fall to share information about program requirements and the Main Round application process and another in the winter to share information about registration and the Round 2 application process. The Scholarship team will share the newsletter with schools and encourages schools to distribute the information to interested families.

Student Scholarship Email

The Scholarship email account, *studentscholarships@la.gov*, is used by schools and families. This email account allows the Scholarship team to collect questions and other information from schools and families in a convenient location. Responses are provided within 24 hours.

Louisiana Believes Scholarship Webpage and Library

Schools and families can access information about the Scholarship Program and its requirements by visiting the *Scholarship webpage on the Louisiana Believes website.* Additional information, including the Scholarship Annual Report, can be viewed in the *Louisiana Believes library.*

Public Reporting Requirements

- The Department annually reports to the Senate Committee on Education, the House Committee on Education, and the Joint Legislative Committee on the Budget regarding the implementation of the program, including:
  » The number of eligible students receiving Scholarships
  » A list of participating schools and the number of Scholarship recipients each school enrolled
  » Aggregate test result data for the Scholarship recipients enrolled in each participating school
- The Department also annually publishes the following information:
  » The most recent aggregate average proficiency rates on state assessments for Scholarship recipients enrolled at each participating school
  » A list of all public schools with a letter grade of "C", "D", or "F", or any variation thereof
  » The rate at which Scholarship recipients finish the highest grade level offered at a participating school, by entering cohort
  » The retention rate for Scholarship recipients
  » The percentage of parents or legal guardians of Scholarship recipients who are satisfied with the participating school
  » The rate at which all participating schools admit and serve students with special education needs

APPENDIX A:

SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM ANNUAL CALENDAR

Please note: this sample Scholarship Program Annual School Year calendar is subject to change.

August

Action	Page	Who does this apply to?
Waitlist Process	8	Schools outside of New Orleans who are eligible for the waitlist process
Transfer Process Opens	10	Schools who are eligible to accept transfer students
Scholarship Student Enrollment • Schools report total number of new and continuing Scholarship students enrolled 10 days after the start of the school year	10	All Schools
Special Education Tuition and Fees • Department collects documentation from schools	12	Schools that charge a higher tuition to provide special education and related services
NPS/BvD Approval Docs • Required documentation shared with schools; due in October	3	All Schools

September

Action	Page	Who does this apply to?
Quarter 1 Enrollment Count & Payment	10	All Schools
Educational Purposes Assurance Form due	21	All Schools
Department releases Fall Scholarship Parent Newsletter	16	All Schools
Notice of Intent Forms released to schools	5	All Schools

October

Action	Page	Who does this apply to?
Notice of Intent Due	5	Schools located in Orleans Parish
Brumfield v. Dodd documentation due	3	All Schools
BESE Nonpublic School Approval Process	3	All Schools
OneApp application process begins	6	Schools located in New Orleans who are able to accept new students
Financial Audit Phase I: Tuition and Fee Verification & Income Eligibility *(through November)*	13	All Schools

December

Action	Page	Who does this apply to?
Scholarship Annual Report released pending assessment data	16	All Schools
Quarter 2 Enrollment Count & Payment	10	All Schools
Notice of Intent due	5	All Schools located outside of Orleans Parish
Financial Audit: Budget due	22	All Schools

January

Action	Page	Who does this apply to?
Scholarship Main Round Application Process Begins	6	Schools outside of Orleans Parish who are able to accept new students
Test Security Policy Due	14	Schools serving students in tested grades (3-12)

February

Action	Page	Who does this apply to?
Quarter 3 Enrollment Count & Payment	10	All Schools
Financial Audit Phase II: Use of Funds, Payment Accuracy, Special Education Tuition *(through April)*	13	All Schools
Internal Control Questionnaire due	22	All Schools
Transfer Process Closes	10	All Schools

March

Action	Page	Who does this apply to?
Department releases Spring Scholarship Parent Newsletter	16	All Schools

April

Action	Page	Who does this apply to?
Main Round Award Results • Families receive letters/emails • Schools receive new student rosters	7	Schools accepting new students in the Main Round
Administer required state assessments	14	Schools serving students in tested grades (3-12)
Scholarship Round 2 Application Process Begins	8	All schools participating in Round 2

May

Action	Page	Who does this apply to?
Continue to administer state assessments	14	Schools serving students in tested grades (3-12)
Preliminary Audit results shared with schools; Q 4 payments adjusted as necessary	13	All Schools
Quarter 4 Enrollment Count & Payment	10	All Schools
End of Year Survey • Department releases survey for Scholarship schools to complete	16	All Schools

June

Action	Page	Who does this apply to?
Registration deadline for Main Round Scholarship Award recipients:	9	Schools who accepted new students in the Main Round
Tuition and Fee Certification Process	13	All Schools
Round 2 Award Results • Families receive letters/emails • Schools receive new student rosters	7	Schools accepting new students in Round 2

July

Action	Page	Who does this apply to?
Registration deadline for Round 2 Scholarship Award recipients:	9	Schools who accepted new students in Round 2

Ongoing

Action	Page	Who does this apply to?
Read the weekly newsletter – Scholarship Program News	16	All Schools
Inform Department of any expulsion within 2 days	11	All Schools
Maintain eligibility documentation in each Scholarship student's file	7	All Schools
Inform the Department within 15 days if the School Testing Coordinator changes	14	All Schools

APPENDIX B: TECHNICAL APPENDIX

The technical appendix contains information and user guides that will help Scholarship schools access the Scholarship Program's Online Enrollment Management Systems.

The Scholarship Program utilizes two different online systems for enrollment management and application entry.

- Statewide Scholarship schools utilize the Scholarships for Education Excellence (SEE) system for all enrollment and application purposes.

- Scholarship schools located in Orleans Parish utilize SEE for all enrollment purposes and SchoolForce for all application purposes.

The chart below outlines when schools should use each system and links to guides that provide step by step instructions for accessing and completing enrollment and application.

When to Use	Who Should Use	System Name	User Guide
Application Entry	Schools located outside of Orleans Parish	SEE – Scholarships for Education Excellence*	*Application entry for Statewide Schools*
	Orleans Parish Schools Only	SchoolForce	*Application entry for Orleans Parish Schools*
Eligibility Verification	Schools located outside of Orleans Parish	SEE – Scholarships for Education Excellence*	*Verifying Main Round/Round 2 eligibility for applicants (Statewide)*
	Orleans Parish Schools Only	SchoolForce	*Round 2 Eligibility Verification for Orleans Parish Schools*
Enrollment Verification	All schools	SEE – Scholarships for Education Excellence*	*Enrollment verification*
* The SEE system is accessed through the LEADS portal.			

APPENDIX C: SCHOLARSHIP AUDIT – ANNUAL COMPLIANCE TESTS

The audit includes five (5) separate tests for compliance:

1. Tuition and Fee Verification
2. Income Eligibility
3. Use of Funds
4. Payment Accuracy Verification
5. Special Education Tuition

1. Tuition and Fee Verification

Purpose: Tuition and fees charged to Scholarship students cannot be higher than amounts charged to non-Scholarship students.

- The tuition and fees charged for a sample of non-Scholarship students will be reviewed to verify that the tuition and fee amount charged for these students is not less than the amounts charged to students participating in the Scholarship Program.
- In the event that the financial audit identifies a finding regarding inappropriate payment of tuition and fees, payment adjustments will be made, schools may be required to reimburse the Department for overpaid tuition and fees, and schools may receive further sanctions.

2. Student Income Eligibility

Purpose: Auditors will examine student income eligibility documentation, as collected in the registration process, to ensure that all students are eligible for the Scholarship program.

- In the event that the financial audit identifies a finding regarding student income eligibility, payment adjustments will be made, schools may be required to reimburse the Department for the ineligible student's tuition and fees, and schools may receive further sanctions.
- In addition, ineligible students will lose their Scholarship and be ineligible to receive a new award because they've attended a nonpublic school and therefore, will not meet prior school eligibility requirements.

3. Use of Funds

Purpose: Verification that Scholarship program funds are managed using an adequate system of accounting controls and that expenditures are for educational purposes. The Use of Funds audit review includes five sub-components: 1) educational purposes; 2) individual enrichment; 3) financial controls; 4) financial reports; and, 5) segregation of Scholarship funds.

Educational Purposes

- The *Educational Purposes Assurance Form* must be completed and returned to the Department.
- Completion of this form serves as an assurance by the school that program funds will be spent only for educational purposes in the categories listed below:
  - » Instructional Programs
  - » Business Services
  - » Pupil Support Programs
  - » Operation and Maintenance of Plant Services
  - » Instructional Staff Programs
  - » School Administration
  - » Transportation
  - » General Administration
  - » Food Services Operations
  - » Facility Acquisition and Construction Services
- For greater detail regarding these expenditure categories, please review the *Louisiana Accounting Uniform Guidance Handbook (LAUGH GUIDE).*

Individual Enrichment

- The *Individual Enrichment Assurance Form* must be submitted by key personnel at each participating school.

- Completion of this form serves as an assurance that no employee of a participating school may use the authority of his office or position in connection with the school's participation in the Scholarship Program, directly or indirectly, in a manner intended to compel or coerce any person to provide himself or any other person with anything of economic value.

- Key personnel that must submit the Individual Enrichment Assurance Form include school board members, school administrators/principals, assistant principals, academic officers/directors.

Financial Controls

- The financial environment in which Scholarship funds are managed will be audited to determine if adequate internal controls exist to safeguard state funds.

- In anticipation of this review, schools should examine existing financial systems to ensure controls are present as follows:
  - » Up-to-date accounting policies and procedures
  - » Trained finance and accounting staff
  - » Dual signature requirement for issuance of checks
  - » Reconciliation of bank statements and resolution of discrepancies
  - » Ability to report on program funds via system account coding, separate fund/account or a substitutionary system such as an allocation methodology
  - » Limits on access and changes to master payroll files
  - » Adequate segregation of duties
  - » Maintenance of supporting documentation for transactions

- Refer to the Louisiana Legislative Auditor website for various tools and additional guidance.

Financial Reports

- Financial records maintained by a participating school and all financial reports must thoroughly document the use of Scholarship funds.

- Each participating school must complete and submit the following two financial reports:

  1. *Budget* - Each participating school must submit a simple budget to the Department, detailing the manner in which the total estimated program revenue allocated to the school will be spent.
     - » Must be submitted by December each year.
     - » Categories of expenditures may include: Salaries, Benefits, Purchased Services, Supplies and Materials, Property or Other (Other - expenditures that do not fall in the preceding categories).
     - » If an allocation methodology is being used to account for Scholarship funds, the Department approved allocation spreadsheet must be submitted with the annual budget.

  2. *Total Expenditures* - Year to date expenditures as of January 31 must be reported by budgeted category.
     - » Expenditures must be submitted by February of each school year.
     - » If an allocation methodology is used as a means to separately account for Scholarship expenditures, the school must submit the completed Department approved allocation spreadsheet with the expenditure(s) allocation through January 31 of the current year.

Segregation of Scholarship Funds

- Schools are required to implement processes and procedures that will allow Scholarship program revenue and expenditures to be easily segregated from the non-Scholarship revenue and expenditures.

- To effectively distinguish Scholarship funding and related expenditures from private funding and related expenditures, accounting controls should be implemented through the use of one of the following three methods:

  1. Separate bank accounts for each fund source
  2. An accounting system with unique revenue codes or account identifiers for tuition and other income from private sources

3. Substitutionary System (*Allocation Spreadsheet*)

    » The Department approved allocation spreadsheet may be used as a substitutionary system of demonstrating the segregation of funds through an allocation of expenditures based on the percent of Scholarship student population to the total student population by classroom, grade, or school.

    » The allocation spreadsheet will provide data relative to Scholarship expenditures in the areas of salaries, benefits, and other charges.

4. Payment Accuracy Verification

Purpose: Enrollment and attendance documentation will be reviewed for a sample of students identified as participating in the Scholarship program to determine that payments are accurate.

- Payments for tuition are based on student enrollment and attendance. Therefore, schools must maintain records in order to substantiate that Scholarship students were actually enrolled and present on each of the four count dates.

- The following documents must be prepared and maintained by the school and available for audit annually:

    » Application and enrollment forms for each Scholarship student

    » Daily attendance rosters (manual or electronic) inclusive of all Scholarship students

- In the event that the financial audit identifies a finding regarding attendance that indicates a particular student should not be funded, payment adjustments will be made, schools may be required to reimburse the Department for students that should not be funded, and schools may receive further sanctions.

5. Special Education Eligibility

Purpose: A sample of eligible special education students will be selected to verify that the school is providing services to those students for which tuition is being charged.

APPENDIX D: GLOSSARY

BESE – The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) is the administrative body for all Louisiana public elementary and secondary schools; it also performs certain administrative functions for the state's non-public elementary and secondary schools.

BESE Bulletin 111 – BESE Bulletin that contains policies and procedures related to public school accountability

BESE Bulletin 118 – BESE Bulletin that contains policies and procedures related to assessment administration

BESE Bulletin 133 – BESE Bulletin that outlines the requirements for participation in the Louisiana Scholarship Program

BESE Bulletin 741 for Nonpublic Schools – BESE Bulletin that contains policy information for nonpublic school administrators

Continuing Scholarship Student – A student who was awarded a Scholarship at a Scholarship school who will continue at their current Scholarship school the next school year

Department – the Louisiana Department of Education.

Educational Purposes Assurance Form – A form signed by each administrator at a Scholarship school assuring that Scholarship Program funds shall only be spent for education purposes in the categories listed on the form. This form is due annually in October.

Eligible Nonpublic School – a non-public school that meets the following criteria:
- Is approved, provisionally approved, or probationally approved by the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Is approved according to Brumfield v. Dodd

Eligible Public School – Public school with a letter grade of "A" or "B", or any variation thereof, for the most recent school year a letter grade is available, pursuant to the school and district accountability system.

Eligible Student – A student, who resides in Louisiana, is a member of a family with a total income that does not exceed two hundred fifty percent of the current federal poverty guidelines as established by the federal office of management and budget, and who meets any one of the following criteria:
- Is entering kindergarten and has enrolled in the local school system in which the public school he/she would have otherwise attended is located or in a school under the jurisdiction of the Recovery School District
- Was enrolled in a public school in Louisiana on October first and on February first of the most recent school year pursuant to the definition of student membership established by the state board for purposes of the Minimum Foundation Program formula, and such school received a letter grade of "C", "D", or "F" or any variation thereof, for the most recent year a letter grade is available, pursuant to the school and district accountability system
- Received a scholarship pursuant to this Program in the previous school year.

Fees – Standard educational fees that are charged to all students at a participating school.

First Time Applicant – An applicant who has not previously applied to the Scholarship Program during the current application period (For example: A student who applied in SY 13-14 but was not awarded a Scholarship can re-apply for SY 14-15 and will be considered a first-time applicant)

Individual Enrichment Assurances Form – A form signed by each administrator and key personal at a Scholarship school that assures that school staff will not use their connection with the Scholarship Program to compel or coerce any person to provide himself or any other person with anything of economic value. This form is due annually in October.

Louisiana Scholarship Program – A program that empowers low-income families with the same opportunity more affluent families already have – the ability to send their child to the school of their choice. Eligible applicants may receive state-funded scholarships to enroll in participating nonpublic schools or high-performing public schools.

Minimum Foundation Program (MFP) – In Louisiana, the Minimum Foundation Program is the formula that determines the cost to educate students at public elementary and secondary schools and defines state and local funding contributions to each district. The MFP is adopted each year by the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, and is approved by the Louisiana State Legislature.

New Placement Student – A current Scholarship student that transfers to a Scholarship school other than the school they were initially awarded to at any point during the year. New placement students count towards a schools new student cap.

New Scholarship Student – A student who was awarded a Scholarship for the first time. New students count towards a schools new student cap.

Nonpublic School (Approved) – The Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approves any private elementary, secondary, or proprietary school upon application, if the school meets and maintains a sustained curriculum or specialized course of study of a quality at least equal to that prescribed for similar public schools.

- After initial approval, the board will annually determine whether the private school is maintaining such quality and, if not, shall discontinue approval of the school.
- Schools are evaluated annually. A school can be classified "approved" if the school meets all the standards specified in the state's standards for approval of nonpublic schools, "provisionally approved" if the school has deficiencies based on the standards, "probationally approved" if the school assumes one or more of three defined errors, or "unapproved." An unapproved school becomes ineligible for state and federal funding.
- All certificates and diplomas issued by an approved nonpublic school shall carry the same privileges as one issued by a state public school.

Nonpublic School (Registered) – Nonpublic schools must be registered with the state of Louisiana in order to comply with Louisiana statute. Registered nonpublic schools (not seeking state approval) may include 1) educational programs or 2) traditional schools with a physical location.

Nonpublic School Early Childhood Development Program (NSECD) – The Nonpublic School Early Childhood Development (NSECD) Program reimburses participating nonpublic schools throughout the state of Louisiana for providing four-year-old children with pre-kindergarten classes, before-and-after-school enrichment activities, and social services to support optimal development.

- Teachers must be early childhood certified by the Louisiana Department of Education.
- Classrooms must meet the child-to-adult ratio of 10 to 1 with no more than 20 children per certified classroom teacher.
- NSECD classrooms are fully integrated; having children served through NSECD Program funds and children served through any other funding source, including private tuition payments, enrolled in the same classrooms.

Notice of Intent (NOI) – The Notice of Intent is submitted to the Department each year in December (schools located in Orleans Parish may be required to submit NOI information earlier). The NOI will collect information including (but not limited to):

- Number of available Scholarship seats per grade
- Enrollment Preferences (NSECD, Geographic)
- Tuition and Fee Amounts
- Any Special Education services provided

OneApp – Scholarship applicants applying to schools located in Orleans Parish use the OneApp Application to submit their Scholarship as well as public school choices.

Parent Acknowledgments Regarding Scholarship Funds – One of three forms families of Scholarship students must sign each school year during the registration process. This form acknowledges that the Department will make tuition payments directly to the school on the family's behalf.

Parent Waiver for Special Education Services – One of three forms families of Scholarship students must sign each school year during the registration process. This form acknowledges that the school is not obligated to provide special education and related services, and waives the right that the Scholarship student may have had to these services at a public school.

Receipt of Rules and Regulations Form – One of three forms families of Scholarship students must sign each school year during the registration process. This form acknowledges that all rules, policies, procedures, and regulations of the Scholarship school were explained to the family prior to enrollment.

Sanctioned Scholarship Schools – Schools that have not satisfied Scholarship Program requirements. These schools may keep continuing Scholarship students, but may not accept new Scholarship students.

Scholarship Audit – An independent financial audit conducted each school year by a certified public account that has been approved by the Louisiana Legislative Auditor. Scholarship schools are required to participate in the audit each year. Scholarship schools that fail to complete or comply with the audit process may be placed on probation in accordance with BESE Bulletin 133.

Scholarship Cohort Index (SCI) – A performance score for schools with 40 tested students or an average of 10 tested students per grade that is calculated in a manner similar to the School Performance Score (SPS) used for public school accountability purposes; however, the SCI is based only on students participating in the Scholarship Program.

Scholarship Manager – The School Scholarship Manager acts as the liaison between the school and the Department and is responsible for communicating with the Scholarship team and sharing all relevant information with school staff.

Scholarship School – A public or nonpublic school that meets program requirements and seeks to enroll Scholarship recipients pursuant to BESE Bulletin 133

Scholarship Student – An eligible student who is awarded a Scholarship pursuant to the Scholarship Program

School Test Coordinator – The school test coordinator oversees the assessment process and ensures tests are administered according to specified requirements included in Bulletin 118.

Terminal Grade – The highest grade a Scholarship school serves.

Transfer – A change in enrollment status resulting from the movement of an eligible student from one participating Scholarship school to another participating Scholarship school during the current school year. Transfers must have Department approval before the student can switch schools. Current Scholarship students that transfer to a new school are considered new placement students, and count towards a schools new student cap.

Tuition Paying Student – A non-Scholarship student enrolled at a nonpublic school.

Waitlist – A waitlist offered by the Department after Round 2 of the application processes has ended. Scholarship students may be placed on a school's waitlist if they have not yet received a Scholarship award or if they received an award to a Scholarship school they ranked lower on the student's application. Waitlist placements and offers are not guaranteed.

APPENDIX E: LINK INDEX

- *BESE Bulletin 133: http://www.doa.louisiana.gov/osr/lac/28v153/28v153.doc*

- *BESE Bulletin 118: http://doa.louisiana.gov/osr/lac/28v111/28v111.doc*

- *BESE Bulletin 1706: http://www.doa.louisiana.gov/osr/lac/28v43/28v43.doc*

- *"Technical Appendix" Page 19*

- Registration forms

  » Sped Waiver: *https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/school-choice/3-waiver-for-special-education-services.pdf?sfvrsn=2*

  » Rules and Regs: *https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/school-choice/5-receipt-of-rules-and-regulations.pdf?sfvrsn=2*

  » Receipt of Rules: *https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/school-choice/5-receipt-of-rules-and-regulations.pdf?sfvrsn=2*

- Payment Update Form: *https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/school-choice/6-payment-update-form.pdf?sfvrsn=2*

- Menu of Exit Codes: *https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/school-choice/7-menu-of-exit-codes.pdf?sfvrsn=2*

- Hardship Transfer form: *https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/school-choice/8-hardship-transfer-request.pdf?sfvrsn=2*

- Finance Documents

  » Allocation Template: *https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/school-choice/11-allocation-template.pdf?sfvrsn=2*

  » Allocation Template Instructions: *https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/school-choice/12-allocation-template-instructions.pdf?sfvrsn=2*

  » Allocation Examples: *https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/school-choice/13-allocation-examples.pdf?sfvrsn=2*

  » Internal Control Questionnaire: *https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/school-choice/14-internal-control-questionnaire.pdf?sfvrsn=2*

  » Scholarship Program Budget Form: *https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/school-choice/15-scholarship-program-budget-form.pdf?sfvrsn=2*

- Financial Assurances

  » Educational Purposes: *https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/school-choice/16-education-purposes-assurance-form.pdf?sfvrsn=2*

  » Individual Enrichment: *https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/school-choice/17-individual-enrichment-assurance-form.pdf?sfvrsn=2*