

# Maine's Children's Scholarship Fund Program Guidelines

## I. Purpose: Mission of the Maine's Children's Scholarship Fund

We offer scholarships to low-income Maine families who send their child to a public, private or home school. Scholarships are available for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade as long as funds are available. Families must meet the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch Income guidelines to qualify.

Parental involvement in the education of children is a critical element of success. By directly contributing to the education of their children, families affirm their vital stake in that education. Accordingly, our Fund offers no more than 75 percent of tuition, up to a cap of \$1700; the remainder of the cost is arranged between the parent or guardian, and the school.

MCSF is committed to continuing to provide scholarships to recipients as long as they live in the State of Maine, continue to demonstrate financial need, meet all deadlines and follow the program guidelines, and as long as funds are available.

## II. Selection of Awardees

"Awardees" denotes children and their families who have been offered a scholarship, but have not yet completed the process of confirming acceptance. An awardee becomes a "recipient" when financial verification and a current School Commitment Form (SCF) have been received and approved by the Maine Children's Scholarship Fund.

### A. Eligibility Requirements

#### 1. Residency

- a. Awardees must be residents of Maine.
- b. A child's residence is the same as that of his or her legal guardian.

#### 2. Income

- a. The total household income of awardees must fall below the guidelines set each year by The Maine's Children's Scholarship Fund.
- b. "Income" includes:
  - Adjusted gross income reported to the Federal Government
  - Income reported to foreign governments (for legal alien residents)
  - Child support and alimony
  - Unemployment and disability benefits
  - Pension payments
  - Public assistance, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), food stamps, housing subsidies, and all other benefits or subsidies paid by federal, state, or local governments to any members of the household
  - Other miscellaneous cash income.

c. Income is measured by the most recent calendar year completed, not by the last 12 months.

d. "household" includes all persons living at the same address and/or all persons for whom the head of household claims financial responsibility.

e. The maximum income guidelines for the current academic year are available at [www.mecsf.org](http://www.mecsf.org)

### 3. Age/Academic grade

- a. Awardees must be entering kindergarten through 12th grades in the academic year for which they are applying.
- b. Recipients must be 5 years old by the beginning of the school year for which they have been awarded a scholarship. Exceptions may be made for children who are at least 4 1/2 if the school confirms that they have been accepted into the regular kindergarten class and are expected to enter 1st grade the following academic year.

## Proof of Eligibility

A copy of the 1040 Tax Return is the preferable form of proof of eligibility. If more than one person has custody of a child receiving a scholarship, and they file separate income tax returns, then copies of both returns must be provided.

- a. If the household reports all income (as defined by MCSF) to the Federal Government in the 1040 tax return, this is sufficient proof of income.
- b. The address printed on the 1040 is sufficient proof of residence. A handwritten address is not acceptable as a proof of residence. P.O. boxes are not acceptable proof of residence either.
- c. All members of the household who are dependents should be listed on the form. The awardee(s) must appear in this list of dependents.
- d. Acceptable forms of tax statements include:
  - Copy of 1040A Standard Tax Return that was filed
  - Computer-printed form obtained by request from the IRS
- e. Unacceptable forms include:
  - The "signature page" from an electronically-filed 1040 (unless Accompanied by a complete computer print-out of all information filed)
  - W-2 or WA forms
  - Statements of refund adjustments from the IRS
  - Re-created tax forms
  - Unsigned tax forms

1. If a current tax form is not available, or if conditions (a), (b), or (c) from above are not met on that tax form, the family must submit all of the following:

- a. Notarized statement that declares the following information:
  - Street address of residence
  - Names and birth dates of all members of the household (see II.A.2.d for definition of "household")
  - Total household income (see II.A.2.b for definition of "income") including undocumented income.
  - (As needed) explanation for any discrepancies between this statement and the official documents submitted to affirm this statement.
- b. Proof for each of the above (when not already proved by a tax return):
  - 1.) Residency must be confirmed by one or more of the following Documents bearing the name and current street address of the applicant:
    - a.) Photocopy of a driver's license
    - b.) Phone or utilities bill
    - c.) Lease agreement or official rent statement
    - d.) Canceled pre-printed check dated within the past 6 weeks
    - e.) Signed statement on official letterhead from caseworker
  - 2.) The names of household members must be included on tax or public assistance statements. Discrepancies must be explained and supported by official documents such as copies of court statements concerning adoption, custody decisions, or name changes.
  - 3.) All sources of income must be confirmed by official statements from the appropriate agencies or from an employer if no government documents are

available. Common statements include:

- Public assistance statements from caseworker
- Statements of Social Security, unemployment, disability, or pension income
- Tax statements from foreign governments
- Court orders for alimony
- Letters from employers detailing weekly or annual income

## Choosing Awardees

1. Awardees will be selected from among all the eligible applicants by a random drawing.
2. If chosen, all eligible children who have applied within that household are awarded scholarships.
3. Eligibility is determined by confirmation of information provided and by submitting all information by the deadline.

## III. Awarding of Scholarships

### A. Notification of Families

1. The guardians of all awardees will be notified immediately after selection by a phone call and a Letter of Congratulations. Final approval will depend upon receipt of registration information, financial information and a School Commitment Form (SCF).

### B. Requirements for Receiving Funds

1. Once the child is enrolled, the school must complete a SCF to confirm enrollment and tuition.
2. The school must submit a separate SCF for each child.
3. The school must select approved personnel from among the following to sign School Commitment Forms, Exit Forms, and Award Verification Forms:
  - Principal, Headmaster, Director, or equivalent
  - Assistant Principal~ Dean, or equivalent
  - Director of Admissions
4. Secretary signatures are not acceptable unless the secretary fulfills the duties of one or more of the positions named above.
5. The tuition stated on the SCF must reflect all discounts and financial aid (see section III.C for more details). In the case of multiple children in a family receiving a group rate, the tuition of the 2nd child is to be reported as the difference between the 1-child and 2-child rates (and the 3rd child's tuition is the difference between the 2-child and 3-child rates, etc.), NOT the average tuition per child.
6. If the SCF reveals that the child being awarded the initial scholarship is NOT in grades K-12, the award will be revoked.
7. If the family has moves out of the State of Maine before confirming the award, the award will be revoked.
8. If the SCF and all other essential documentation is not received by the deadline, the student will not be considered a recipient, and must repeat the application process to be considered for an award in the future.

### C. Determining the Amount of the Award

1. Confirmation of School Tuition
  - a. Information about tuition must specify:
    - 1.) Discount rates for multiple children in a family, if applicable.
    - 2.) Rates for parishioners vs. non-parishioners (or denomination or association members) if applicable.
  - b. Books, uniforms, registration fees, and all other fees should be listed separately, and are NOT to be included in the cost of tuition.
2. The Maine Children's Scholarship Fund tuition award covers only tuition. No other fees or costs

should be included in determining the amount of the award.

*Important: All of the above information must be provided on or accompanying the School Commitment Form. Misrepresentation of tuition costs will be grounds for exclusion of a school from the MCSF program.*

3. Other Financial Assistance

a. Recipients may receive other financial assistance from a variety of sources. MCSF will then figure the scholarship award from the remaining cost to the family after all other sources of aid have been subtracted from the tuition.

All such assistance must be shown on the School Commitment Form for each child. Omission of information will be grounds for exclusion of a school from the MCSF program.

4. Computation of Annual Scholarship

A Scholarship is calculated: Total tuition charged for that child minus School Assistance, financial aid or provided by other sources multiply by 75%, equals scholarship award up to \$1700.

D. Scholarship Awards for Home Schooling

1. MCSF scholarships may be used toward defraying the cost of home schooling children. In this case, the award will be applied toward the cost of materials or enrollment in a program or school service.

2. For home schoolers, the SCF must be completed by the independent study program, correspondence course, or school service in which they are enrolled. If a family does not enroll with a recognized program to which they pay tuition or similar fees, they must submit a copy of a private school affidavit, letter of assurance, or other evidence that they are legally-operating as required by MCSF. This evidence will take the place of the SCF.

3. Families may be partially reimbursed for textbooks and other learning materials, enrollment costs for single academic courses, or other costs directly attributable to the cost of home education of the child who is the recipient of the scholarship. Original receipts must be submitted. MCSF reserves the right to determine which expenses are reimbursable.

4. The scholarship will be calculated the same as above, except the maximum award for home schooling will be \$500 per child.

E. Scholarship Payments to Schools

1. Under normal circumstances, awards will be evenly divided into three payments that will be disbursed to schools in September (40%), January (40%) and May (20%). The awards will be sent directly to the schools from MCSF.

2. Verification of awards

A. Award verification reports will be sent to schools and parents before each payment. The reports from both parent and School must be returned to MCSF by the specified date before payment will be sent. Schools and Parents should keep a copy of the completed form for their records.

a. The school is to review the award verification report with the list of students and the amount of their awards to be paid in the upcoming payment. Schools must note:

- if each child has a satisfactory attendance rate
- If there are any changes or corrections that must be made

This report must be completed and signed by the principal (or equivalent).

b. The parent will review the award verification report listing child(ren) and the scholarship amount. Each parent must sign and print their name next to each child of theirs receiving a scholarship. A signature affirms that the child is currently attending that school and that the scholarship amount is correct.

3. Verification sent to MCSF
  - a. After the Award Verification Reports are received from both the school and the parent by the deadline, the checks will be sent to the schools.
  - b. Scholarship award money must be used solely for the payment of tuition for the child specified. Any other use of the money is strictly prohibited. Violation of this rule is grounds for dismissal from the scholarship.
  - c. For home schoolers submitting receipts, there will be no Award Verification Reports. Checks will be made out solely to the parent/guardian, refunding the appropriate percentage of costs already incurred and demonstrated by submitting receipts or similar proof of payment.
  
4. Adjustments to Normal Disbursements
  - a. Errors: If a check arrives for the wrong amount, the adjustment will be made to the next payment.
  - b. School Transfers and/or Changes in Tuition or Financial Aid
    - Any time a child transfers schools or experiences a mid-year change in tuition or financial aid, a new School Commitment Form must be submitted to reflect these changes. The new SCF should reflect the tuition for the remainder of the year only, not the whole year. Section IV.C. outline conditions for transferring awards to a new school.
    - If a student transfers before the 3rd week of September (or before at least 3 full weeks of attendance for that school year), MCSF will pay for the full years tuition at the new school by the normal procedures, but families will be responsible for any charges at the first school.
    - If a student moves to a different school during the school year, the award may be recalculated to reflect the change in tuition. Any changes in the award will take effect as of the next tuition payment period after the new school commitment form is received.
    - If a check needing adjustment has already been deposited, the school must reimburse MCSF for the appropriate amount. Failure to do so will exclude the school from eligibility to accept future scholarships.
    - Schools may not substitute other students as scholarship recipients when the original student withdraws or is expelled from the school.
    - Schools must submit an "Exit Form" whenever a scholarship-receiving student leaves. See Sec. IV C. 1.

## **IV. Renewal of Scholarship Awards**

### **A. Eligibility Requirements**

1. Income eligibility guidelines for continuing recipients are the same as that for new applicants. Guidelines will be adjusted annually according to the rate of inflation.
2. Age/Academic Grade
  - a. Continuing recipients may renew their scholarships through the 12th grade as long as funds are available.
  - b. Any student who will reach the age of 20 before the beginning of the school year is not eligible to renew, even if he or she has not completed the 12th grade.
  - c. If the school recommends or requires that a continuing recipient repeat a grade level, this will not affect the award, provided that the student still meets the previous condition.

### **B. Annual Update Requirements**

1. Proof of income will be required each new calendar year, by April 30.
2. A new School Commitment Form must be submitted by the school after the Scholarship is offered to the awardee.

### C. School Transfers

1. Whenever a student transfers schools, either during the school year or during summer break, the old school must complete a Maine Children's Scholarship Fund "Exit Form."
  - a. For the student to be eligible for scholarship transfer, the school must affirm:
    - 1.) The guardian does not owe the school any money;
    - 2.) The student has left voluntarily, and has not been expelled for any reason.
  - b. The Exit Form must be completed by one of the persons authorized to complete SCF's. (See section III.B.3)
2. A new School Commitment Form must be submitted by the new school. The adjustment of the award amount is determined on an individual basis.

## V. Suspension and Termination of Scholarship Awards

### A. Leaving Private School

1. Families who choose not to reenroll their child in a private school will be dropped from the program. They are free to reapply at a future date if applications are being accepted. Special exceptions might be made for extenuating circumstances.
2. Any student expelled from school for any reason will have his or her award terminated immediately. Siblings also receiving awards will not be affected. The expelled student will not be eligible to reapply for an award.
3. Any student suspended from school for any reason for more than one week will have his or her award suspended for the duration of the school suspension. Schools should inform MCSF of any suspensions of more than a week, and the award amount will be adjusted accordingly.

### B. Late Update for Requalification

1. Grace Period
  - a. Deadline for continuing student updates to re-qualify for scholarships is April 30.
  - b. Those who are late submitting their updates will be reminded by letter and a telephone call once. After these reminders, MCSF will consider to have made sufficient attempts to contact the family and is not obligated to issue any further reminders.
  - c. If MCSF does not receive update information in a timely manner, the scholarship will be terminated.

### C. Causes for Scholarship Award Termination

1. MCSF will not continue to provide awards for families that have moved out of the State.
2. The family exceeds the income limit.
3. The family does not meet all written deadlines

- D. All students or families whose awards have been terminated for any reason except expulsion are free to re-apply in future years if applications are being accepted. This will not affect in any way their chances of receiving a scholarship in the year for which they apply.

## VI. Changes in Policy

MCSF reserves the right to change policies and rules as may be found necessary.