

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE OPTION CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

The Option Certificate Program expands school choice within Douglas County School District, recognizing that the interests of students and parents are paramount. The OCP's purposes are to provide greater educational choice, improve educational performance through competition, obtain a high return on educational spending, and close academic achievement gaps for disadvantaged student populations.

The OCP achieves these ends by issuing to parents Option Certificates, which are checks that may be restrictively endorsed at participating nonpublic schools for the sole purpose of paying educational costs. An Option Certificate is worth the lesser of the actual educational cost per pupil of attending an OCP nonpublic school or 75% of PPR for students in grades 1-12, or 35% of PPR for kindergarten students. Payments are made quarterly in September, November, February, and May. If a student does not remain enrolled at an OCP nonpublic school for the entire school year, then the school may receive only the *pro rata* amount for that period when the student was enrolled. A student may disenroll from an OCP nonpublic school or from the OCP at any time without penalty.

Nonpublic schools that reside in the District, whether religious or nonreligious, may apply to participate in the OCP. The District shall determine whether a nonpublic school qualifies based on criteria described in the Policy, such as a quality educational program that fulfills the Board's End Statements; financial stability; safety; and sound employment, enrollment, and student conduct policies. Nonpublic schools that qualify shall be able to participate in the OCP for a term of 1-5 years after which they must re-apply.

OCP nonpublic schools must agree to give the CSAPs, or other statewide assessments chosen by the District, so that it is possible to compare the student achievement of OCP and non-OCP students. OCP nonpublic schools may not discriminate in employment or enrollment decisions on any basis protected under federal or state law, except that religious nonpublic schools may make employment and enrollment decisions based upon religious beliefs, so long as they disclose how those religious beliefs affect those decisions. Nonpublic schools shall be eligible to participate in the OCP without regard to religion.

The District shall gather information about the OCP nonpublic schools so that it may be published on a website or other information clearinghouse to permit comparisons among OCP nonpublic schools. An annual report to the Board shall be made to provide information on student achievement, financial effect, and popularity of the OCP.

Both parents and OCP nonpublic schools must sign contracts with the District agreeing to the terms of participation. Either students or nonpublic schools may be involuntarily terminated from the OCP for violations of the Policy or contract, subject to an appeal process described in the Policy.