

# The Scholarships for Opportunity and Results (SOAR) Act

Introduced by

Representatives John Boehner, Darrell Issa, John Kline, Daniel Lipinski, Duncan Hunter and  
Trey Gowdy

Senators Joseph Lieberman, Susan Collins, Dianne Feinstein, Lamar Alexander and John Ensign

The SOAR Act would reauthorize the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP), which provides low-income students, many of whom attend persistently failing public schools in Washington, DC, an opportunity to receive a scholarship to attend a DC private school of their parent's choice. The legislation would also authorize funding for school improvement for DC public schools and DC public charter schools, as part of a three-sector approach to school reform. Finally, the SOAR Act would authorize funding to be equally divided between the DC OSP, the DC public schools and the DC public charter schools.

## ❖ Improvements to the existing DC OSP.

- ✓ **Financial Accountability:** Ensures that an administrating entity(s) has financial controls in place.
- ✓ **Increases Scholarship Awards:** Provides students attending elementary school a scholarship up to \$8,000 per year and students attending high school a scholarship in the amount of up to \$12,000 per year.
- ✓ **OSP School Accountability:** Adopts Democratic reforms to the program, including requiring schools participating in the DC OSP to maintain a valid certificate of occupancy issued by the District of Columbia; make readily available information on its school accreditation; demonstrate that it has adequate financial resources reflecting its financial sustainability if the schools have been operating for less than five years; agree to site visits by the administrator; have financial systems in place to ensure funds are used according to this Act; and that each teacher of core subject matter has a baccalaureate degree or equivalent degree.
- ✓ **Administrative Expenses:** Administrative expenses are capped at 3 percent, but an additional 2 percent of the appropriated funds may be used to educate parents about the program and assist them with the application process.
- ✓ **Tutoring for High Need Students:** Administrating entity(s) may use up to 1 percent of funds to provide tutoring services to students who need additional academic assistance.

## ❖ Assessing the academic achievement and progress of the scholarship recipients.

- ✓ **Academic Achievement of Scholarship Users: Continues the current requirement for a rigorous evaluation of the program.** Compares the academic achievement of students who use the scholarships to the achievement of students who applied for scholarships but were not offered one.

- ✓ **Parental Satisfaction:** Assesses the success of the program in expanding choice options for parents, improving parental and student satisfaction, and increasing parental involvement in the education of their children.
  - ✓ **Reasons for Parental Choice:** Identifies the reasons parents choose to participate in the program.
  - ✓ **Comparing Key Indicators of DC Public Schools and DC OSP Schools:** Compares the retention rates, dropout rates, and (if appropriate) graduation and college admission rates, of students who used the scholarships to attend private schools with the rates of students of similar backgrounds who do not participate in the program.
  - ✓ **School Safety:** Compares the safety of the schools attended by students who used the scholarships to the safety of the schools of students who do not participate in the program.
- ❖ Reporting requirements of private schools participating in the DC OSP.
- ✓ **Administration of a National Norm-Reference Test:** Schools shall administer a national norm-referenced standardized test in reading and math to each student enrolled in the school that receives an opportunity scholarship.
  - ✓ **Report Test Results to Parents and Guardians:** The results of the test are to be reported to the student's parents or legal guardians and to the Institute of Education Sciences.
- ❖ Reporting requirements of the Mayor for receipt of school improvement funding for DC public schools and DC public charter schools.
- ✓ The Mayor shall submit a report to Congress on how the funds authorized and appropriated under the SOAR Act for DC public schools and DC public charter school were used and how such funds are contributing to student achievement.
- ❖ Priority and Eligibility of DC OSP Recipients.
- ✓ The SOAR Act is only available to students from low-income families and gives a preference to siblings of current scholarship recipients.
  - ✓ An eligible DC OSP student must be a student who is a resident of the District of Columbia and comes from a household that receives assistance under the supplemental nutrition assistance program or whose income does not exceed 185 percent of the federal poverty line.
  - ✓ Some DC OSP recipients lost their scholarships when their parents' economic situation modestly improved. To ensure there is no disincentive to accept job promotions or get married, the household income limit would be increased to 300 percent of the federal poverty for students already participating in the DC OSP.