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## [H.R. 10, Scholarships for Opportunity and Results \(SOAR\) Reauthorization Act](#)

### FLOOR SITUATION

On Wednesday, October 21, 2015, the House will consider [H.R. 10](#), *the Scholarships for Opportunity and Results (SOAR) Reauthorization Act*, under a [structured rule](#). H.R. 10 was introduced on October 5, 2015 by House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) and was referred to the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform.

### SUMMARY

H.R. 10 amends and reauthorizes the Scholarships for Opportunity and Results (SOAR) Act, which provides low-income families in the District of Columbia an opportunity to apply for scholarship funding to attend a private school through the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program (DC OSP). The bill authorizes the appropriation of \$60 million—to be equally divided between the DC OSP, DC public schools, and DC public charter schools—for each of fiscal years 2017 through 2021, the same as the current authorization level.

Specifically, the bill:

- Precludes the imposition of limits based on the number of eligible students receiving scholarships and on type of school a student previously attended or whether the student previously participated in the program;
- Requires eligible entities to employ internal fiscal and quality controls;
- Requires criminal background checks on school employees who have direct and unsupervised interaction with students;
- Prevents funds from being used by students to enroll in private schools unless the school is provisionally or fully accredited on the date of enactment, is pursuing full accreditation within one year of enactment, or is fully accredited within five years of enactment;

- Mandates compliance with data and information requests regarding certain reporting requirements;
- Requires the Secretary to make \$2 million of the DC OSP grant funds available each year to entities to cover administrative expenses, determine the eligibility of students to participate, select eligible students to receive scholarships, determine the amount of and issue scholarships, compile and maintain financial and programmatic records, conduct site visits, and assist parents in the application process;
- Directs the use of unobligated DC OSP funds from previous fiscal years in subsequent fiscal years to be used to award new scholarships;
- Revises program evaluation procedures and requirements by requiring the Secretary of Education and the Mayor of the District of Columbia to enter into an agreement with the Department of Education's [Institute of Education Sciences](#) (the Department's statistics, research, and evaluation entity whose mission is to provide scientific evidence on which to base education practice and policy) to make public an annual evaluation of the DC OSP and the use of funds by public and public charter schools in the District;
- Allows the Secretary to withhold funds, in whole or part, for public and public charter schools in the District of Columbia if the Secretary determines that the Mayor has not complied with any of the conditions of receipt of funds;
- Revises an existing Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretary and Mayor to address programs changes, ensure compliance with fire code standards, and require maintenance of certificates of occupancy.

## BACKGROUND

The DC Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) was established by the DC School Choice Incentive Act of 2003 ([Public Law 108-199](#)), which authorized opportunity scholarships to parents of students in the District of Columbia to expand public and private elementary and secondary educational opportunities. The program was part of a comprehensive three-part funding arrangement that provided funds for public schools, public charter schools, and opportunity scholarships for students to attend private schools in the District of Columbia. In 2011, Congress reauthorized the program and enacted the funding arrangement by passing the Scholarships for Opportunity and Results (SOAR) Act (Division C of [Public Law 112-10](#)).<sup>1</sup>

Under the DC OSP, the Secretary of Education awards grants to eligible entities to make opportunity scholarships available to eligible individuals. Eligible entities are defined as an entity of the District of Columbia government, a non-profit organization, or a consortium of non-profit organizations. In general, priority is given to eligible students attending schools identified by DOE as low achieving, and those from families with limited incomes for whom the scholarship would provide the widest range of school choice options.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See H.R. 10, Section 2(a)(3)(4) and (5).

<sup>2</sup> See CRS Report—“[District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program: Implementation Status and Policy Issues](#),” April 1, 2011 at 5 and 6.

For school year 2014-15, individual scholarship awards are up to \$12,572 for high school and up to \$8,381 for elementary and middle school. Opportunity scholarships may only be used at schools participating in the program and may be used to pay for tuition, school-related fees, and public transportation expenses (up to the annual maximum scholarship award).<sup>3</sup>

In May, before the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Dr. Patrick J. Wolf, a professor at the University of Arkansas who was selected by the Department of Education to conduct an independent evaluation of the DC OSP between 2004 and 2009, testified that “students in our pioneering study graduated from high school at significantly higher rates as a result of the OSP.”<sup>4</sup> Dr. Wolf added that the use of an opportunity scholarship “increased the likelihood of a student graduating by 21 percentage points, from 70 percent to 91 percent.”<sup>5</sup>

According to Speaker Boehner, “there is only one program in America where the federal government allows parents to choose the best schools for their kids, it is right here in Washington, DC, and it is working. This program gets the kind of results parents dream of for their kids. It is a model for how we can break the status quo that deprives too many students of a great education.”<sup>6</sup>

### **COST**

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) [estimates](#) that implementing H.R. 10 would cost \$240 million over the 2017 to 2020 period, assuming appropriation of the authorized amounts. Enacting H.R. 10 would not affect direct spending or revenues; therefore, pay-as-you-go procedures do not apply.

### **AMENDMENTS**

1. Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-UT)—The [manager’s amendment](#) makes small, technical changes to the bill.
2. Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC)—The [amendment](#) restores the requirement that the voucher program be evaluated using the strongest possible research design, and would limit voucher students to no more than 50% of a school’s total enrollment.

### **STAFF CONTACT**

For questions or further information please contact [Jerry White](#) with the House Republican Policy Committee by email or at 5-0190.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://dcscholarships.org/program/default.asp>

<sup>4</sup> See Testimony—“[The DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Making the American Dream Possible](#),” May 14, 2015 at 3.

<sup>5</sup> Id.

<sup>6</sup> See Press Release—“[Speaker Boehner Introduces Bipartisan Legislation to Reauthorize DC School Choice Program](#),” October 5, 2015.