

## **ALABAMA ACCOUNTABILITY ACT OF 2013** **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **How do we determine whether or not a school is failing?**

A school is defined as “failing” if it is listed as “persistently low-performing” on the state’s School Improvement Grant application (i.e., they’ve performed in the bottom 5% of schools in the state for three years in a row), if it is ranked in the bottom 15% of schools based on annual reading and math assessment scores, or if, once the school grading system is in place, it has earned a “D” for three consecutive years, or if it has earned an “F”. Student achievement scores in these schools are the worst in the state.

### **How do we know that these students are going to better schools?**

Nonpublic schools must be accredited by a state-recognized accrediting agency or meet a specific set of ten criteria outlined in the bill. The nonpublic schools must be in existence for at least three years, have a minimum 180-day (or hourly equivalent) calendar, and have a day that is at least six and a half hours long. A family may not receive a tax credit for sending their child to a “home school.”

### **Isn’t this taking money away from the local school system?**

Taxpayers deserve to spend their tax dollars in a place that best serves their student. If that student isn’t being well-served in the school they are zoned for, parents deserve to send their child to a school that addresses their child’s educational needs as they see fit. In addition, the school district will not lose the entire state allocation for that child – they will retain 20% of the state allocation and no longer be responsible for serving the child. This 20% should off-set the fixed costs of managing the school district.

### **What if a parent owes less than the tax credit?**

If a parent owes less than the tax credit owed to him/her, the parent will receive a refund or rebate equal to the balance of the unused credit with respect to that taxable year.

### **How do we ensure that parents who need it are receiving the tax credit?**

There is a protocol in place to prove that a child is zoned for a failing school. In order to receive the tax credit, the parent must provide certification that the student was enrolled in or assigned to attend a failing school and was then enrolled in a nonpublic school or non-failing public school. Plus, the parent must show that it actually expended money on transferring the student.

### **What if the feeder pattern (the elementary, middle and high school that the student is assigned to) that a student is zoned for only has one failing school in it?**

A family only qualifies for a tax credit as long as the student is zoned for a failing school. If a student is zoned for a failing elementary school, but the middle school is non-failing, the family only receives the tax credit for the period of time the student is in the elementary school.

**What if the school a student is zoned for becomes a non-failing school while the student is receiving the tax credit?**

The family continues to receive the tax credit until the student reaches the last grade in the failing school.

**What if the family of a student in a failing school does not want to send their student to a private school?**

The family can choose to send their child to a non-failing public school, assuming that the non-failing school agrees to accept the student.

**How do we know that middle-income families won't be the only ones benefitting from the scholarship organization?**

Scholarships must be granted to low-income eligible students at a percentage equal to the percentage of low-income eligible students in the county where the scholarship granting organization is located. Low-income eligible students are part of a family whose income is at or less than twice the federal poverty level.

**Who is eligible to receive a scholarship?**

Each scholarship granting organization must determine its own specific application process, but can only give scholarships to eligible students, i.e., students from low-income families who are zoned to attend a public school in Alabama. However, scholarship organizations are forbidden from discriminating on the basis of race, gender, and disability status of the applicant or parent. Educational scholarships cannot be granted to students to attend a school with paid staff or board members in common with the scholarship granting organization.

**What happens to tenure flexibility if a school moves to non-failing status?**

The school loses its ability to grant new tenure flexibility. However, teachers who have opted out of tenure may continue on a non-tenure track as long as they are at the school.