



ALABAMA
OPPORTUNITY
SCHOLARSHIP FUND

For Immediate Release:

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Alabama Opportunity Scholarship Fund offers AAA scholarships to over 500 low-income students in Baldwin and Mobile counties and 1,400 students statewide

Mobile, Alabama (Oct. 25, 2018) -- Last week, the Baldwin County Board of Education adopted a resolution to take scholarships away from poor, mostly minority children. On Oct. 23, the Montgomery County Board of Education adopted a similar resolution to repeal the Alabama Accountability Act (AAA). These actions are extremely disappointing to thousands of Alabama students who currently rely on these scholarships.

The AAA was created to serve low-income students with priority given to students zoned to a “failing” public school. The Alabama Opportunity Scholarship Fund (AOSF) is one of seven scholarship granting organizations in the state administering the AAA. AOSF provides tax credit scholarships to low-income children so that they can attend a public or private school of their choice.

“It was a relief that nobody would understand unless you’re a single mom with boys trying to not make them a statistic,” said Alleane West, AOSF parent. Of Alleane’s five sons, three have benefited from an AOSF scholarship. One of them, Nick West, graduated from McGill-Toolen Catholic High School in 2016 and is currently on full academic scholarship at University of Alabama at Huntsville. Nick will begin a graduate internship with the FBI in 2019, fulfilling a lifelong dream.

In 2016, 24 percent of African-American high school students in Mobile County did not graduate. Because of the scholarship he received through this program, Nick escaped that fate. “You want them to be able to fend for themselves and not have to rely on the streets. You want them to grow up and take care of themselves and their children and be educated to life’s possibilities that are out there,” said Alleane.

Since 2014, AOSF has distributed more than 10,000 scholarships with an average scholarship amount of \$6,000 to students in 40 counties. AOSF students attend over 100 approved private schools and non-failing public schools. Eighty-one percent of scholarship recipients are minority,

and one hundred percent are eligible for free and reduced priced lunch. The average household income of a scholarship recipient is just over \$28,000 per year.

AOSF students are found all over the state, from urban centers to rural counties. In Baldwin and Mobile counties, more than 500 AOSF students attend 23 schools of their choice. “Most of our students on scholarship were either bullied, suffered from difficulty in learning or were not achieving academic excellence in the school they were attending. Their families applied for and received a scholarship to attend a school where they could succeed,” said Lesley Searcy, Executive Director of AOSF.

Take for example Hunter Findley’s story. Hunter is in high school in Escambia County and represents the several hundred rural students served by the AAA. More than 25 percent of Escambia County residents live in poverty. The high school graduation rate is 82 percent, and the county high school is “failing.” Hunter chose to attend Escambia Academy with his AOSF scholarship because he was scared for his safety at the public high school.

“The staff at Escambia Academy are more involved with the students, not just academically, but personally. They ensure that students, like my nephew are learning in a safe environment. His safety is what I am most concerned about, and I want him to have a future,” said Hollie Findley, Hunter’s aunt.

Many students who receive scholarships have stories just like Nick’s and Hunter’s. Most who have attended the school of their choice on an ASOF scholarship have gone on to graduate and attend college, have caught up to their peers academically, and have found a safe place to learn. Each of these students were only able to do this once they were placed in a learning environment where they could excel.

“Alabama ranks 47th in the U.S. in education. The Alabama Accountability Act offers low-income students an alternative when they are not thriving at their zoned public schools,” Searcy added. “It’s very disappointing that the school boards in Baldwin and Montgomery counties chose to take this action. All of us should be working to meet the needs of students and be open to any innovations to improve the odds for all children.”