



## **FINANCIAL AID POLICY**

*Financial Aid Application Procedures and Deadlines can be found on our web site by visiting [www.ows.org](http://www.ows.org); or [www.vistaacademy.org](http://www.vistaacademy.org).*

It is the goal of Open Window School to provide consistent information to parents, students, faculty, board members, administration and the greater community regarding financial aid. The following guidelines are designed to assist the Open Window School community in understanding the philosophy and process associated with the awarding of financial aid to families.

### **Philosophy**

Open Window School is committed to preparing students for success in a diverse and changing world. We seek to offer our students a learning environment that is representative of our community: socially, culturally and economically. OWS strives to maintain a student population that represents the diverse socio-economic backgrounds of our community. Toward that end, the purpose of Open Window School's financial aid program is to provide financial assistance to families for whom, without such assistance, an OWS education would not be an option. It is our continued desire to provide more financial support for a greater number of families and we encourage families to apply. A financial aid award is based on family financial need, and does not need to be repaid. Tuition assistance is based on financial need as opposed to academic merit. Families receiving aid will be required to contribute at some level to the cost of tuition. There will be no awards of 100% of tuition. OWS recognizes that many families make significant financial sacrifices to enroll in the school. Our policies and philosophy aim to ensure that each family who requests financial aid receives full consideration.

## **Confidentiality**

The financial aid process requires families to provide information of an inherently personal nature and OWS adheres to the highest standards of confidentiality. Students and families are not identified as financial aid recipients by the school. In the case of separated and/or divorced parents, no information will be given by the school to either parent regarding the other parent's financial disclosures. Applicants are considered for admission on a need-blind basis. Once accepted, student enrollment contracts and acceptance letters are amended to reflect financial aid awards. All discussions and decisions about financial aid applicants for new and returning students are kept strictly confidential

## **Financial Aid Award Computation**

Financial aid is awarded on the basis of a family's financial need. A variety of criteria are considered, including income (taxable and nontaxable), assets, number of dependents, number of children attending tuition-based schools, number of parents who are working, etc. Parents are obligated to disclose if they receive any outside financial help for education from relatives, friends or other sources. This information is balanced with data about living expenses, medical costs, indebtedness, and other factors such as child support and legal expenses. A standardized approach is used to determine a family's discretionary income. A portion of this discretionary income is considered available for educational costs.

To gather information and objectively evaluate it, OWS subscribes to School and Student Service (SSS). Most PNAIS schools also utilize this service. SSS independently assesses a family's ability to pay school costs and forwards that information to the schools requested by the family. This information is then evaluated in the context of each family's individual circumstances.

It is expected that families will apply for financial aid for all children in tuition charging institutions, including secondary schools and colleges. The school seeks an equitable distribution of financial aid resources from all institutions.

The Head of School and Controller review the applicant's tax return and the SSS forms in order to make award decisions. Anonymous award information (i.e. number of families receiving aid, award ranges, etc.) is reviewed by the Board to insure that the school is meeting its strategic goals. Effort is made to support current OWS families before awarding aid to new families.

Eligible faculty and staff members will follow the same procedures as other parents. There is no tuition remission program offered.

## **Financial Aid Guidelines**

The amount of aid provided to each family depends upon established need, the amount of aid dollars available, and the number of applicants for this aid. The needs of current families will be met before serving the needs of new families. Financial Aid Awards are made in accordance with all other policies of the school.

### **Returning Students Receiving Financial Aid**

Families who already receive aid will be mailed information packets in late December and must apply each year. Current families applying for Financial Aid must submit an Academic Enrollment and Tuition Contract and the required deposit by the re-enrollment deadline. In the event that the financial aid award is insufficient for re-enrollment, the deposit will be returned. The size of awards will continue to depend upon demonstrated need, the number of financial aid applicants, and dollars available. Financial aid applications will not be considered if there is a past due balance on the current year's tuition.

### **Returning Students Requesting Aid for the First Time**

Families may request a financial aid packet by contacting our Controller. All forms must be completed and submitted by the financial aid application deadline. The Academic Enrollment and Tuition Contract and the required deposit must be returned by the re-enrollment deadline. Notification of awards will be mailed in the spring. In the event that the financial aid award is insufficient for re-enrollment, the tuition deposit will be returned. Financial aid applications will not be considered if there is a past due balance on the current year's tuition.

### **Accepted Applicants**

Admissions decisions are made without consideration of a family's application for financial aid. Financial aid decisions are based on a family's financial need, resources available to the family and the school's ability to support that family. Families of applicants to OWS should submit all required information by the Financial Aid Deadline published in the application materials. The amount of the financial aid award will be included in the student's acceptance letter and enrollment contract. Unfortunately, we cannot guarantee that we can meet the needs of all applicants.

## Late and Mid-Year Applicants for Financial Aid

Families who are interested in financial aid may inquire at any time; however most awards are made in the spring following the Financial Aid Deadline. We encourage families to meet the deadlines for application if they want to be considered. Late or mid-year applicants will be considered when they apply. However, all financial aid dollars may have been distributed and aid may not be available to late applicants even if qualified.

## Separated and Divorced Parents

Financial aid at OWS is determined by a family's ability to meet educational expenses; it is based on need, not on a willingness or unwillingness to pay. It is the position of the school that divorced or separated parents retain the obligation to contribute to the education of their children whether or not there is legal agreement between them to do so. The assets of both parents will be considered before making any award; the assertion that one parent has disclaimed responsibility for educational expenses does not apply. If one parent has legally been granted sole custody of the student and assumes all financial obligations for that child, then only the assets of that parent will be considered. If either parent has remarried, we will consider also the assets of the stepparent, always bearing in mind the obligation of that stepparent to his or her own natural children.

Same sex families and parents who have never been married will be treated the same as all other families when considering the family's request for financial aid. Both parents' assets whether married, living together or separated will be used to determine the family's need for aid.

## Additional Charges for Other Services

OWS will strive to offer limited financial aid for extra-curricular school programs such as after-school clubs and classes, Parent Association events, and special grade-level experiences outside of the regular field trips. These programs and events are offered to enrich a student's OWS experience and provide activities to strengthen social interactions and community involvement. Expenses incurred for the use of the extended day program, EDEP, are factored into Financial Aid Awards. Consequently there is no separate aid for EDEP. Aid will not be limited to those families currently receiving tuition assistance. Non-Tuition Activities will be funded from a Board Designated fund for Enrichment Scholarships. The priority for awards from this fund are first to classroom required programs, second to after-school activities, and third to Parent Association sponsored events.

## **Notification of Financial Aid Award**

Existing and new families are notified of awards at the time accepted applicants are sent an Academic and Enrollment Tuition Contract in the spring. Confirmation of financial aid acceptance is due back to the Controller by the deadline provided.

## **Appeals Process**

Once financial aid has been granted, families may appeal their awards by contacting the Controller by phone or in writing. The appeal will be assessed and a decision made in a timely manner. Computation of a new award must meet all financial aid policies.

*We encourage any families who have further questions about financial aid to contact our Controller, Marja Ziuzin, [marjaz@ows.org](mailto:marjaz@ows.org).*