Shelby County Schools
Division of Optional Schools & Advanced Academics
2022-23 Frequently Asked Questions

What are Optional Schools?
One of the most exciting choices in Shelby County Schools (SCS) is the Optional Program. Parents/legal guardians may choose from 45 theme-based programs tailored to their children’s special talents and abilities. Optional schools offer programs at the elementary, middle and senior high levels throughout the county. These programs enrich, supplement and broaden the standard school curriculum.

Some Optional programs offer more challenging or additional courses of study. Some use different methods in unique learning environments. Others focus on developing students’ talents in particular areas. What all Optional schools have in common is they foster an environment of high expectations where children will learn beside classmates who are similarly driven to succeed.

Who can transfer into an Optional program?
Qualified students can transfer into an Optional Program when the applicants meet all of the entrance requirements of the school's Optional Program and space is available.

How do I apply online?
The Optional Schools Application Process is completely online for new students. Parents/legal guardians can easily complete and submit an online application from any personal computer, tablet or smartphone (with Internet access) that supports online forms.

The online application portal will be accessible on the SCS website, www.scsk12.org, beginning at 10 a.m. on Tuesday, January 25, 2022. A valid email address is required in order to submit the application online. Current SCS students are encouraged to use their PowerSchool student number (also same as lunch number). For non-SCS students, a social security number is requested. You will receive an email confirmation with the date and time of your application submission.

How do I participate in the process if I do not have a computer with Internet access?
Parents/guardians without a personal computer or smart phone with internet access may consider visiting a Memphis Public Library location during regular business hours to access the online application.

• All Memphis public libraries locations will be open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday thru Friday.

When is the first day to apply for an Optional transfer?
Online applications may be submitted on Tuesday, January 25, 2022, beginning at 10 a.m.

What documents are needed in order to apply for an Optional transfer?
If the applicant is a current SCS student, SCS already has the required documents on file. Once a current SCS student's online application is submitted, no further action is needed to finalize the application. Parents/legal guardians of non-SCS students must submit the following documents within 10 business days AFTER submitting the online application:

1. Nationally normed achievement test scores
   • Applicants must score at or above a specific percentile on school-based administration of the Illuminate FastBridge aReading and aMath assessments (2021-22) and/or i-Ready Diagnostic Reading and Math assessments (2021-22); or score at or above a specific percentile on the TCAP Achievement English Language Arts and TCAP Achievement Mathematics assessments; or score at or above a specific percentile on the Total Reading/Reading Composite and Total Mathematics/Mathematics Composite of an acceptable nationally normed achievement test. Acceptable tests in person must be dated Spring 2021 or later.
2. A copy of a current comprehensive report card including grades, skills and behaviors, conduct and attendance is required.

3. An original copy of the birth certificate is required for all Kindergarten applicants.

All documents are required from non-SCS applicants as part of the application process. Documents must be submitted within 10 business days of the online application submission to:

Division of Optional Schools & Advanced Academics
160 S. Hollywood, Coe 106
Memphis, TN 38112
(901) 416-5338

You may also scan and email your documents to scsop@scsk12.org.

If my child is already attending a school on an Optional transfer, do I have to apply again?

Applications for Optional Schools must be renewed annually.

- Students are eligible for renewal transfers to the same school if they remain in that specific school's Optional program all year and maintain the Optional school's renewal requirements. Parents/legal guardians will need to log into their PowerSchool account and access the renewal form.
- If a student wishes to attend a different Optional school, a new Application for Optional Schools must be submitted online for the new school.

What is the order in which new applications are processed?

Applications are processed on a first-come, first-served basis, within priority categories, unless there are more applications than spaces available. If applications exceed spaces, the first 80 percent are processed on a first-come, first-served basis, and 20 percent are chosen by lottery.

*For all Optional schools, final acceptance is contingent upon review of the student's second semester/final report card.

When applications do not exceed available spaces, we use the following procedures to process applications on a first-come, first-served basis:

- Sibling preference is available for qualified students who are residents zoned to SCS with a sibling who is in the Optional program, at the same school and maintaining the Optional requirements. A sibling is a brother or sister who lives at the same address. Slots for qualified siblings are held for 10 business days. February 7, 2022 is the last day for sibling preference.
- Qualified students who are residents of SCS
- Qualified siblings who are non-residents of SCS with a sibling who is in the Optional program at the same school and maintaining the Optional requirements
- Non-SCS residents (families that live within Shelby County but reside in a municipal school district)
- Non-Shelby County residents (families that reside in another county in TN)
- Out-of-state residents

When there are more applications than available spaces, we use the following procedures to process applications according to guidelines for 80-percent first-come, first-served selection and 20-percent lottery selection:

If any Optional program has more applications than available space on January 28, 2022, a lottery is implemented. Eighty (80) percent of the space available in the oversubscribed programs will be filled on a first-come, first-served basis (subject to sibling and proximity preference) by students zoned to SCS. The names of all remaining SCS-zoned applicants will be placed in a random, computer-generated lottery. The remaining 20 percent of the spaces will be filled by applicants selected from the computer-generated lottery (within priority categories). Please note that only students zoned to SCS will be included in the lottery.

The lottery will be held February 23, 2022 in the SCS Board of Education Auditorium and is open to the public. This lottery will apply only to those schools with more applications on January 28, 2022 (by 11:59 p.m.) than available space. Applicants who are not selected by the lottery will be assigned to a waiting list according to the date and time order of the online application submission.

May I apply for more than one Optional school per child?

Yes, parents/legal guardians may apply for two Optional schools. The online application process offers opportunities for a parent/legal guardian to list a first choice and a second choice for each child. If you choose to apply for two schools, please note the following:

- Parents/legal guardians are not required to select two schools.
- If the student qualifies for the first choice and space is available, the student will be approved for his/her first choice school. The second choice school will no longer be valid.
- If the student does not qualify for his/her first choice but does qualify for his/her second choice and space is available, then the student will be approved for his/her second choice. The student will not be placed on a waiting list for the first choice.
- If the student qualifies for both schools but neither school has space, he/she will automatically be placed on the waiting list for his/her first preference only. Parents/legal guardians will be notified that their child has been placed on a waiting list, which will be maintained until 20 days after the first day of the 2022-23 school year. Parents/legal guardians will have the option either to keep their child on the waiting list or to apply for another school that has space. If the student applies for another school, his/her name will be removed from the waiting list.
- If the student does not qualify for his/her first or second choice, the student will not be approved for either school and may restart the application process for a new school. The new application will receive a new electronic date and time once the new application is submitted.

When will I find out if my child has been accepted into an Optional school?

The Division of Optional Schools & Advanced Academics staff will attempt to notify parents/legal guardians within 10 to 12 weeks from the time the application is submitted. If an answer is needed sooner, please contact the requested Optional school or the Division of Optional Schools & Advanced Academics in writing at www.scso@scsk12.org.

Applications from incoming 1st and 2nd grade applicants who apply to schools that require testing will take additional time to process. Admittance testing begins in March.

*There are two exceptions: Maxine Smith STEAM Academy and East High School T-STEM reserve half of their available spaces for qualified students who live within their designated zone through February 7, 2022.\n\n\nWhen students who live within their designated zone through February 7, 2022.\n\n*There are two exceptions: Maxine Smith STEAM Academy and East High School T-STEM reserve half of their available spaces for qualified students who live within their designated zone through February 7, 2022.\n\n*There are two exceptions: Maxine Smith STEAM Academy and East High School T-STEM reserve half of their available spaces for qualified students who live within their designated zone through February 7, 2022.