

Memphis-Shelby County Schools

Division of Optional Schools & Advanced Academics

2025-26 Frequently Asked Questions

What are Optional Schools?

One of the most exciting choices in Memphis-Shelby County Schools (MSCS) 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 MSCS website, www.scsk12.org, beginning at 10 a.m. on Tuesday, January 28, 2025. A valid email address is required in order to submit the application online. Current MSCS students are encouraged to use their PowerSchool student number (also same as lunch number). For non-MSCS 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 28, 2025, beginning at 10 a.m.

What documents are needed in order to apply for an Optional transfer?

If the applicant is a current MSCS student, MSCS already has the required documents on file. Once a current MSCS student's online application is submitted, no further action is needed to finalize the application. Parents/legal guardians of **non-MSCS 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 i-Ready Diagnostic Reading and Math assessments (2024-25); 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 2024 or later.

- Applicants must score at or above a specific percentile on a TCAP English and Mathematics End of Course test and/or another acceptable nationally normed achievement assessments, including the ACT or Pre-ACT (Reading and Math), PSAT or SAT (Evidence-Based Reading and Writing and Mathematics) with the assessment being administered in person no more than one year prior to the date of application for Optional Schools.
- The only acceptable achievement tests from licensed psychological examiners are the Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement, 3rd Edition (KTEA III), or the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test, 4th Edition (WIAT-IV), with composite scores in Reading and Mathematics on grade-level norms. **Entrance requirements vary by school.**
See 2025-26 Optional Handbook.

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 recommended for all Kindergarten applicants. Other acceptable documents include passport, visa, I-94, etc. Children must turn five (5) years old on or before August 15, 2025, for the 2025-26 school year.**

All documents (except birth certificates) are required from non-MSCS 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 MSCS 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 11, 2025 is the last day for sibling preference.
- Qualified students who are residents of MSCS
- Qualified siblings who are non-residents of MSCS with a sibling who is in the Optional program at the same school and maintaining the Optional requirements
- Non-MSCS 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

***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 11, 2025.**

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 31, 2025, 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 MSCS. The names of all remaining MSCS-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 MSCS will be included in the lottery.

The lottery will be held February 20, 2025 in the MSCS Board of Education Auditorium and is open to the public. This lottery will apply only to those schools with more applicants on January 31, 2025 (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 2025-26 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?

A representative from the Optional school will attempt to notify parents/legal guardians within 4 to 6 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 scsop@scsk12.org.

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



What happens if I submit my child's Application for Optional Schools with the proper documents but my child does not meet the school's minimum requirements?

- If, at the time of application, the student does not meet the school's entrance requirements, he/she will not be approved to attend the school requested.
- If, at a later date, the student's attendance, skills and behaviors, conduct, and/or academic performance improve and he/she meets the entrance requirements of the school requested, he/she may re-apply.
- If, at a later date, an approved assessment from Spring 2025 or the TCAP Achievement Spring 2025 test scores become available and meet the test score requirements, the student may re-apply.
- If, at a later date, the student's family chooses to have the applicant evaluated by a licensed psychological examiner using an appropriate assessment, and the student meets the test requirements, then he/she may re-apply.
- The student's new application will receive a new electronic date and time.



What if, at the end of the school year, a student who was approved did not maintain entrance requirements for the specific program?

Final approval for enrollment in an Optional program is reserved until the end of the school year. Final report cards must be submitted and reviewed by the school. The student's second semester grades, conduct, skills and behaviors, and attendance must meet the school's entrance requirements.

If I receive an Optional transfer to an Optional school, is transportation provided?

No. If an Optional transfer is approved, transportation must be provided by the parent/legal guardian.

What if I live in an MSCS zone when my child is accepted but we move to an area not zoned to MSCS when school begins?

Newly approved applicants who are zoned to MSCS must continue to reside within the MSCS zone to maintain an approved status in schools where space availability is limited.

Are students who are not zoned to MSCS eligible to transfer to MSCS through the Optional Schools Application Process?

Yes. MSCS invites all interested parents/legal guardians to complete an online Application for Optional Schools regardless of residence. However, applications for students zoned to MSCS will be given first priority, and if spaces remain in Optional programs, non-MSCS residents may be awarded transfers if requirements are met. Tuition may apply.

If you have questions, you may email scsop@scsk12.org or call 901-416-5338.



Memphis-Shelby County Schools offers educational and employment opportunities without regard to race, color, religion, sex, creed, age, disability, national origin, or genetic information.