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News

Promise scholarship applications on way

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By Joe Smydo, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The Pittsburgh Public Schools today will mail Pittsburgh Promise applications and related materials to about 1,900 high school seniors, letting them know how to cash in on the district's new scholarship program.

School district spokeswoman Ebony Pugh said the mailing, which includes a color brochure, is one more way to draw attention to the program. She said the materials also will be available at high school guidance offices and posted on the district's Web site at www.pghboe.net.

"We just want to make sure all of our students are able to take advantage of Promise dollars," Ms. Pugh said.

School Superintendent Mark Roosevelt and Mayor Luke Ravenstahl announced the Promise in December 2006.

The first major funding commitment came only two months ago, when University of Pittsburgh Medical Center offered \$10 million up front and up to \$90 million more through a 10-year challenge grant.

The first scholarships will be awarded to 2008 graduates who have grade-point averages of 2.0 or higher and have attended district schools at least since ninth grade.

"This year marks the beginning of a new and exciting chapter in the rich history of the Pittsburgh Public Schools," Mr. Roosevelt says in a letter accompanying the application and brochure.

Four or five weeks after submitting applications, students will receive letters outlining their eligibility and next steps, Mr. Roosevelt said.

The Pittsburgh Foundation, which is administering the scholarship program, produced the brochure and application. The mailing hits on some of the points the school district most wants families to understand:

- The program is open to students regardless of income.
- Each 2008 graduate will qualify for up to \$5,000 in scholarship money annually for four years, but amounts will vary according to college costs, eligibility for federal grants and the number of years enrolled in the school district. The money must be used at one of about 100 approved schools.

- Students must fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA. The district wants students to leverage as much grant money as possible so Promise dollars are stretched as far as possible.

Students will face tougher Promise eligibility criteria in future years. Beginning with the class of 2012, the maximum Promise scholarship would increase to \$10,000 annually for four years for those who pass a graduation exam and meet other requirements.

Joe Smydo can be reached at jsmydo@post-gazette.com or 412-263-1548.

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