

Frequently Asked Question for Schools 2014-2015 School Year

Who is School Choice Wisconsin?

WCRIS and School Choice Wisconsin are partners in supporting the expansion of Wisconsin's school choice programs. For nearly 20 years, School Choice Wisconsin has been the lead organization advancing private and religious school choice in Wisconsin. Staffed by experts in government relations and school operations, School Choice Wisconsin works with legislators to expand and improve Wisconsin's school choice programs, works with the Department of Public Instruction to ensure private and religious schools are protected from burdensome regulations, and works directly with private and religious schools to maximize their participation in school choice programs and to assist them with program compliance.

How can School Choice Wisconsin be helpful to schools interested in participating in the statewide school choice expansion?

Together with WCRIS, you should see School Choice Wisconsin as your partner as you learn more about the school choice program. We are your 'help desk' with any questions regarding how the program works, how you apply to the program, how families apply to the program, identifying the statutory and regulatory requirements with which you must comply, assistance with marketing to parents, and any other question you may have. We are available to speak to school leaders, faculty, boards of schools, congregations, parents, and any other group who may wish to learn more about the program. Call School Choice Wisconsin at 414-319-9160 or WCRIS at 608-287-1224 today!

How does the program work?

The goal of the following narrative is to provide basic facts about the statewide expansion of school choice, the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP), so that interested schools can determine whether they want to participate in the program during the 2014-2015 school year.

What schools are eligible to participate in the statewide expansion of school choice?

Any private school in Wisconsin:

- That was in operation by May 1, 2013
- And that meets the necessary accreditation requirements

Is eligible to participate in the WPCP during the 2014-2015 academic school year.

- (If applications to the WPCP exceed available vouchers, schools participating in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) or the Racine Parental Choice Program (RPCP) in 2012-2013 school year are excluded.)

Who is eligible to participate in the WPCP?

Any Wisconsin resident:

- That is not resident in the Milwaukee Public School District or the Racine Unified School District

- With an adjusted gross income at or below 185% of the federal poverty level
Is eligible.

All students:

- Meeting the requirements listed above
 - Entering grades 4K-12
 - For 4K, age four on or before September 1st
 - For 5K, age five on or before September 1st
 - For 1st grade, age six on or before September 1st
 - Whether public school students or private school students
 - Including students who in the prior year were not currently enrolled in school
- May apply to the program.

Family Size	(Adjusted Gross Income) Single Family	(Adjusted Gross Income) Married Family
1	21,554	
2	29,095	
3	36,636	43,636
4	44,177	51,177
5	51,718	58,718
6	59,259	66,259
7	66,800	73,800
8	74,341	81,341

*** For each additional member add \$7,541**

What if family income rises in subsequent years?

A “once in, always in” provision allows family income to rise once a student is in the statewide school choice expansion. Family income is determined for each student in the year they enter the program. Families could have some children qualify and others that do not qualify depending on family income in the year each child sought entry into the program.

The “once in, always in” provision applies only if a student continues to attend a school in the WPCP and does not voluntarily leave the program.

How does a school register to participate in the statewide expansion in 2014-2015?

Schools begin the process of registering for the choice program by first contacting the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction at 608-266-2853 to request a registration packet.

The packet will include a variety of forms that will need to be completed. These forms include:

Due at DPI by Feb 1, 2014:

- Filing the “Intent to Participate Form” with DPI. This form includes a declaration of the number of choice seats the school will make available in each grade;

- Filing the signed “Student Rights Letter” with DPI;
- Filing the school’s Random Selection Plan with DPI;
- Submitting the auditor fee to DPI in the form of a cashier’s check of ~\$900;
- Filing the “Student Application Designee Authorization Form” with DPI;
- Filing the completed Hours of Instruction calculator;
- Filing the Initial Assurances form, notarized;
- Filing school’s certificate of insurance;
- File the Budget and Cash Flow documents;
- File Disclosure of Information form with Board signatures;
- Participate in DPI’s fiscal management and Online Application System trainings
- Certificate of occupancy for each building students will use. If your municipality does not provide certificates of occupancy, then a letter from the municipality stating that it does not provide certificates of occupancy.

See forms on DPI’s website: <http://sms.dpi.wi.gov/wpcp-statewide>

How does the school declare the number the number of choice seats in each grade level that will be made available?

A school determines the grade levels and the number of seats at each grade level that it will make available to students in the WPCP and submits those numbers on the “Intent to Participate Form” by Feb 1, 2014.

The school revises the grade levels and number of seats annually. Schools may choose to leave the choice program at any time.

What is the enrollment period for 2014-2015?

Schools can accept applications for the choice program from Feb 1st to April 21st, 2014 in the grades it designates on its Intent to Participate Form that it files with DPI. If more students apply than there are seats available a random lottery will be held.

How do parents apply for the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program?

To apply for the program a parent or guardian must complete an online application that will be available during the open enrollment period from February 1st to April 21st. A link to the application will be available on February 1st at:

<http://sms.dpi.wi.gov/wpcp-statewide>

Within the online application the parent or guardian will select the schools to which they wish to apply.

After completing the online application:

- The parent or guardian must verify they meet residency and income requirements for the WPCP no later than April 21st
- Complete this verification process separately, at each school to which they initially applied, and at which they continue to seek enrollment.

For information on verifying income the DPI bulletin “WPCP Income Documentation” at http://sms.dpi.wi.gov/sms_mpinfbul

Schools will also need to verify the school district residency for each student. The student participation cap limits the number of students who may participate in the statewide school choice program to a maximum of 1% of the student population from each school district. Please see the DPI bulletin “WPCP Residency Documentation” at http://sms.dpi.wi.gov/sms_mpinfbul

Can parents apply to more than one school through the program?

Yes, Parents could initially apply to several schools; however, each school application is only complete after the parent provides verified income and residency documentation at the individual school.

How will the cap and random lottery be administered?

The Wisconsin Parental Choice Program will be limited to 1000 students in 2014-2015.

If more than 1000 student applicants are reported on April 21st:

- The 25 schools throughout the state with the most applications will be allowed to participate in the program in 2014-2015;
- DPI will administer the random lottery.

Each of the 25 schools will be guaranteed 10 seats, to be assigned at each school by random drawing, with preference given to siblings. The remaining 250 seats will be assigned by random lottery among the 25 schools with no guarantee of additional seats at any particular school.

If 1000 or less applicants are reported on April 21st:

- All schools who successfully applied to the WPCP will eligible to admit student applicants;
- The random lottery will be administered at the school;
- Students who attended public school in the previous school year will be given preference in grades 2-8 and 10-12.

To apply for the program the school must pay an auditor fee of approximately \$900.

What happens to that fee if I am not one of the 25 schools admitted to the program?

All applicant schools must pay the auditory fee that is non-refundable.

Must schools participating in the program be accredited?

Yes. Schools participating in the expanded school choice program must be accredited by an authorized agency or complete the accrediting process by an authorized agency by December 31, 2017.

Which accrediting agencies may accredit schools?

Approved accrediting agencies include:

Wisconsin North Central Association, Wisconsin Religious and Independent Schools Accreditation, Independent Schools Association of the Central States, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod School Accreditation, National Lutheran School

Accreditation, Wisconsin Association of Christian Schools, the diocese or archdiocese within which the private school is located, or any other organization recognized by the National Council for Private School Accreditation.

What are the required hours of instruction at each grade level?

- 4K*: 437 hours of direct pupil instruction
- 5K*: 1,050 hours of direct pupil instruction for a full time student
- Grades 1-6: 1,050 hours of direct pupil instruction
- Grades 7-12: 1,137 hours of direct pupil instruction

* Please note that schools that only offer 4k and 5k are required to provide 875 hours of direct pupil instruction in accordance with standard private school hours requirements.

Are teachers required to hold a bachelor’s degree?

Yes. All teachers must have a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution. Teacher’s aides must have a high school diploma or its equivalent.

For teachers who do not currently hold a bachelor’s degree and have worked at the school for at least five years, a waiver may be obtained from the DPI allowing that teacher to complete a bachelor’s program within five years. Please consult the bulletin “Staff Credentials” at http://sms.dpi.wi.gov/sms_mpinfo

What are the program testing requirements?

In 2014-2015, all schools in the choice program must administer the Smarter Balanced Assessment, the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE), and the ACT Aspire suite to all participating choice students in the same grades and subject areas as Wisconsin’s public schools:

- Smarter Balanced for reading, math language arts in grades 3-8
- WKCE for science and social studies in grades 4 and 8
- ACT Aspire in fall and spring of 9th grade and spring in grades 10 and 11.

Schools must submit standardized test scores to DPI and to parents of current students, and all program applicants who request them. Schools may, and often do, administer other standardized tests in addition to the required state test.

What are the per-pupil payments?

In 2014-2015, the per-pupil payment is the lesser of a school’s average audited per-pupil cost or \$7,210 for students in grades K-8 and \$7,856 for students in grades 9-12. Payments are made to schools as directed by the parent.

For 4K students, reimbursement is 60% of a full payment (\$4326) if schools meet the required number of hours and provide an additional 87.5 hours of outreach activities. If outreach activities are not provided, reimbursement is 50% of the full payment (\$3,605). For more information please consult DPI bulletin “Outreach Activities” at http://sms.dpi.wi.gov/sms_mpinfo

Full-time 5K pupils that meet the 1050 hours of instruction requirements will be reimbursed for a full payment. Schools must work with their independent CPA to determine the reimbursement for 5K pupils that attend less than full time.

For questions concerning early entry to 4K and first grade and how this affects student funding please consult DPI bulletin “Early Entry” at http://sms.dpi.wi.gov/sms_mpinfbul

When do schools get paid?

Schools receive four equal payments at the end of September, November, February, and May. The first two payments are generated by the third Friday in September enrollment count date, and the last two payments are generated by the second Friday in January count date.

Can a school collect fees from a student in the choice program?

Yes. A private school may charge a choice student reasonable fees for personal items such as towels, gym clothes or uniforms, social and extracurricular activities if the activity is not a part of the required curriculum, musical instruments, meals, and high school classes not required or credited for graduation.

A choice student cannot be charged a fee for registration or application to the choice program, books, teacher salaries, buildings, maintenance, equipment, computers, and any other fee directly related to the required curriculum such as field trips. For more information please consult DPI bulletin “Student Fees” at http://sms.dpi.wi.gov/sms_mpinfbul

Can the Choice school require fundraising and school service of the choice parent?

No. A school may not impose any penalties on a parent or child in the choice program for failure to engage in fundraising (which would include any required service to the school).

Can schools charge tuition in addition to the program payment?

As the families eligible for the statewide school choice program must have income at or below 185% of poverty, no tuition for new students may be charged in addition to the program payment. If family income rises above 220% of federal poverty levels in subsequent years, high school students may be charged additional tuition.

Can schools test students in the WPCP prior to admission?

A student that meets residency and income requirements is eligible for the program. A school may not use grades or test scores as a condition of acceptance into the program. Once a student is accepted into the program, a school may test a student for placement purposes.

Can students opt out of religious instruction and activities?

Yes, parents can choose to opt their children out of religious activities. However, few parents choose to exercise this option.

Can schools suspend or expel students that violate school policies and procedures?

Yes. Once a student is enrolled and accepted in the school, he or she is bound by school

policies and procedures regarding suspension or expulsion. The school's handbooks and written policies should be explicit as to student responsibilities, expectations, and causes for disciplinary action including suspension and expulsion. Parent and older students should sign a document stating that they have read the handbooks and policies, understand them, and will abide by them. This document forms a contract between the school and the parent/student. State law requires private choice schools to have procedures in place regarding student suspensions and expulsions. Parents should ask the school to which they are applying to provide a copy of the procedures the school has in place for imposition of or appeal of suspensions or expulsions.

Are schools required to accept special needs students?

Schools must accept any student that meets income eligibility and residency requirements. Schools are not permitted to select students based on any other factors. However, as a private school, the school is only required to offer those services to assist students with special needs that it can provide with minor adjustments.

Are schools required to provide transportation?

No. A private school is not required to provide transportation to choice students. If the school chooses to provide transportation, a fee may be charged. In some cases, the district of residence will provide transportation or pay the parent a certain amount for their transportation costs through a contract. Check directly with the private school you plan to attend or with your district of residence.

Are schools required to provide free and reduced price lunch?

No.

What are the fiscal accountability requirements?

All private schools participating in the choice program must follow a variety of fiscal accountability provisions. Schools must annually submit documentation for all of the following information. For more information please consult the DPI website: http://sms.dpi.wi.gov/sms_choice

- A budget and cash flow form that establishes per-pupil costs and all other expenses. This form must be submitted to DPI by July 26, 2013. The form includes breakdowns of:
 - Salaries and wages for employees
 - FICA and Medicare taxes
 - Unemployment taxes
 - All employer paid benefits
 - Contracted professional services
 - Purchased services such as utilities, security, maintenance, etc.
 - Rent
 - Office supply expenses
 - Insurance coverage
 - Student and employee counts
 - All debt and financial liabilities
 - Cash on hand

- Non-MPCP fees and revenues
 - Cash flows by month
 - The school’s operating budget
- All schools must provide to DPI evidence of sound fiscal practices as prescribed by DPI. Sound fiscal practices include:
 - Having a system of internal controls
 - Using a double-entry accounting system that can track revenues, expenses, assets and liabilities
 - Preparing a budget
 - Paying vendors within 90 days
 - Paying employees as per written documentation. This must be done at a minimum once a month (every 31 days)
 - Obtaining various kinds of insurance (including bus insurance, if applicable)
 - Being current with state and federal filings
- All schools must provide to DPI evidence of financial viability as prescribed by DPI. Evidence of financial viability includes:
 - Paying bills on time
 - Paying federal and state withholdings
 - Repaying money owed to DPI
 - Having a budget that shows that the organization's revenues can cover expenses

All schools in the choice program must follow uniform financial accounting standards established by DPI.

In addition, all schools must file annually an “independent financial audit of the private school conducted by a certified public accountant, accompanied by the auditor’s statement that the report is free of material misstatements.” In addition, auditors must review student files for income and residency documentation as prescribed by DPI.

Audit deadlines

- The Fiscal and internal control practices report is **due December 15, 2014**. The work is typically done sometime between October and early December.
- The September enrollment audit is **due December 15, 2014**. The work is typically done between October and early December.
- The Financial Information Report (FIR) audit is **due September 1, 2015 following the end of the fiscal year (which is June 30, 2015)**. The work is typically done in the summer.
- The January enrollment audit is **due September 1, 2015 following the end of the fiscal year**. The work is typically done in the summer.

The length of time that each audit takes varies depending on many factors, including the size of the school, the readiness of the school for the audit, and the complexity of the school's audit issues. Each firm will be able to provide more information about how long each audit will take, and will also be able to provide information on when they would perform each audit.

Please contact School Choice Wisconsin at 414-319-9160 for a list of auditing firms that perform audits for schools in the Milwaukee Parental Choice program, the Private Parent School Choice Program, and the statewide school choice program.

For more information on how to participate in the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program contact:

Department of Public Instruction at:

Tricia Collins: 608-266-2853, Tricia.Collins@dpi.wi.gov

Molly Koranda: 608-266-0523, Molly.Koranda@dpi.wi.gov

Latoya Holiday: 608-266-8066, Latoya.Holiday@dpi.wi.gov

School Choice Wisconsin at:

414-319-9160

<http://www.chooseyourschoolwi.org>

Wisconsin Council of Religious and Independent Schools at:

608-287-1224

<http://www.wcris.org>