



**Frequently Asked Questions for Schools
WPCP 2015-2016 School Year
Governor's Proposed Budget 2015-2017**

Who is School Choice Wisconsin?

For 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?

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 that may wish to learn more about the program. Call School Choice Wisconsin at 414-319-9160.

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 wish to participate in the program during the 2015-2016 school year.

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

- Any private school in Wisconsin is potentially eligible to participate. A school that has been in existence for 12 or more months applies by February 1st in the school year prior to that in which the school intends to participate.
- Schools that have **not** been in existence 12 or more months must apply by the August 1st prior to the regular February 1st deadline.
- Additionally, schools that have 40 or more students in three or more grades can apply by February 1st whereas schools with less students or grades offered must apply by August 1st.

Who is eligible to participate in the WPCP?

A student is eligible to receive a voucher to attend a private or religious school participating in the WPCP if the student is a resident of the State of Wisconsin, residing outside of the Milwaukee and Racine Unified school districts, and whose family has an Adjusted Gross Income at or below 185% of the federal poverty level

In the Governor's proposed 2015-2016 state budget:

- Eligible students must be entering grades 4K-12.
- If entering 4K, student must be age four on or before September 1st.
- If entering 5K, student must be age five on or before September 1st.
- If entering 1st, student must be age six on or before September 1st.

In grades 4K, K and 1st grade:

- **All students may apply to the program** whether private or public school students, or students who in the prior year were not enrolled in school.

In grades 2-8 and 10-12:

- **Eligible students must have been enrolled in the prior year in a public school or not previously enrolled in school including homeschooled students.**

How does a family meet the income requirements?

To meet the income requirements for the program a student’s family must have an Adjusted Gross Income at or below 185% of the federal poverty level with an additional \$7,000 allowed for a married couple as illustrated in the table below.

2015-2016 Adjusted Gross Income limits are shown below:

Family Size	Single Family	Married Family
2	\$29,566	
3	\$37,197	\$44,197
4	\$44,828	\$51,828
5	\$52,459	\$59,459
6	\$60,090	\$67,090

What if family income rises in subsequent years?

A “once in, always in” provision allows your child to keep his or her voucher even if family income rises above the income limits in subsequent years. Family income is determined for each child in the year they enter the WPCP. Therefore, families could have some children qualify and others not qualify for the WPCP depending on the amount of the family's Adjusted Gross Income in the year in which 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 WPCP?

The initial registration period closed February 2nd. School registrations will be reopened in July 2015 at the conclusion of the budget process. To begin the process of registering for the choice program contact the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI)

at 608-266-2853 or visit the DPI registration website:

sms.dpi.wi.gov/sms_pscp_reg_2015-16

The registration materials include a variety of forms that will need to be completed. Schools must complete the following steps to complete the registration process:

- 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 \$740;
- 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:

sms.dpi.wi.gov/sms_pscp_reg_2015-16

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

Each private or religious school determines the grade levels and the number of seats it will make available at each grade level to students in the WPCP and submits those numbers on the “Intent to Participate Form”. The school revises the grade levels and number of seats annually. Schools may choose to leave the choice program at any time.

What are the enrollment periods for 2015-2016?

The 98 schools that applied by February 2nd may accept applications for the choice program from Feb 2nd to April 20th, 2015. School Choice Wisconsin is working to ensure that additional schools may register to participate in the WPCP in July 2015. This would be followed by an additional student enrollment period in August 2015 for the 2015-2016 school year.

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 2nd to April 20th and potentially again in an August student enrollment period. A link to the application is

available at:

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

Within the online application the parent or guardian will select the school(s) to which they wish to apply. After completing the online application, the parent or guardian must provide proof that they meet residency and income requirements at each school to which they have applied, no later than April 20th, 2015. The online application is not complete until each school to which the parent or guardian has applied has verified and accepted the required documentation. This process may be repeated in August 2015.

What if applications to a grade level exceed the school's declared choice capacity?

If applications to any grade level exceed the declared choice seats available, the school will conduct a random lottery with certain allowable preferences for continuing students and siblings.

How does a school verify income documentation?

For information on verifying income the DPI bulletin “WPCP Income Documentation” at:

http://sms.dpi.wi.gov/sms_mpinfbul

How does the school verify residency documentation?

Schools need to verify the residency documents for each student applying for a voucher. 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 can 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 many students may participate in the WPCP in 2015?

In the Governor's proposed state budget, the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program has **no limits on the number of students who may participate** and no limits on the percentage of students who may transfer out of a public school district.

How many schools may participate in the WPCP in 2015?

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Must schools participating in the program be accredited?

Yes. Schools participating in the WPCP must be accredited by an authorized agency or complete the accrediting process by an authorized agency by December 31st, 2018.

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.

Must schools have in place a Student Information System?

Yes. Schools participating in the WPCP in 2015-2016 must have in place a student information system (SIS) that complies with DPI reporting requirements. SIS vendors that have completed compliance testing with DPI are listed at:

<https://goo.gl/V2w8TQ>

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
- 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_mpinfbul

What are the program testing requirements?

In 2015-2016, all schools in the program must test participating choice students in the same grades and subject areas as Wisconsin’s public school students:

- A test in reading, math, and language arts in grades 3-8 that has yet to be determined
- WKCE for science and social studies in grades 4 and 8
- ACT Aspire twice in grade 9, in spring in grade 10, and ACT in spring in grade 11
- Parents may opt their children out of state testing.
- 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 the Governor's proposed budget, the 2015-2016 per-pupil payment:

- **For 2014-2015 voucher holders**, 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.
- **For new voucher students**, the per-pupil payment is the lesser of a school's average audited per-pupil cost or the average state equalization aid for all districts that have students accepted into the program.
- The estimated voucher amount for 2015-2016 for new students is approximately \$5,000 for all grade levels. School Choice Wisconsin will be working to increase the voucher amount during the state budget process that concludes in June.

For 4K students, reimbursement is 60% of a full voucher payment 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. For more information please consult DPI bulletin "Outreach Activities" at:

http://sms.dpi.wi.gov/sms_mpinfbul

Full-time 5K pupils that meet the 1,050 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, 5K, and 1st 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.

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 grade and subject 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 provide transportation?

No. Schools are not required to provide transportation to students participating in parental choice programs. If the school chooses to provide transportation, a fee may be charged. In certain situations, the district is obligated to provide transportation to the student or enter into a contract with parents to reimburse for transportation costs.

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.

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/choice_programs

What are the fiscal accountability deadlines?

- The Fiscal and internal control practices report is **due December 15, 2015**. The work is typically done sometime between October and early December.
- The September enrollment audit is **due December 15, 2015**. The work is typically done between October and early December.
- The Financial Information Report (FIR) audit is **due September 1, 2016 following the end of the fiscal year (which is June 30, 2016)**. The work is typically done in the summer.
- The January enrollment audit is **due September 1, 2016 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.

Are schools required to provide free and reduced price lunch?

No.

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

Department of Public Instruction at:

Tricia Collins: 608-266-7475,
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>