



Frequently Asked Questions for Schools

WPCP 2017-2018 School Year

Who is School Choice Wisconsin?

For 25 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
- 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 help schools interested in learning more about participating in the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP)?

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 including:

- How do Wisconsin's private and religious school choice programs function?
- How do schools apply to the program?
- How do families apply to the program?
- What are the statutory, regulatory and financial requirements?
- What is the dollar value of each voucher?
- How do we market our school to parents and the community?

Perhaps you have had questions from board members or parents about the school choice program and did not know where to turn?

School Choice Wisconsin is available to meet at your school to help educate you, school leadership, parents, faculty, staff, school boards, and congregations. [Call School Choice Wisconsin at 414-319-9160.](tel:414-319-9160)

Does School Choice Wisconsin charge for its services?

No. School Choice Wisconsin is funded by foundations and generous individuals to provide information to private and religious schools regarding Wisconsin's school choice programs.

How does the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP) function?

The goal of the following narrative is to provide basic facts about the statewide program, so that interested schools can determine whether they wish to participate in the program during the 2017-2018 school year.

How does a school notify the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) that it is interested in obtaining more information about private school choice?

Schools should register to receive more information on the 2017-2018 school year registration at the following website: <http://dpi.wi.gov/sms/choice-programs/school-registration>

How many schools may participate in the WPCP in 2017-18?

There are no limits on the number of schools that may participate in the WPCP.

Which schools are eligible to participate in the WPCP?

Most private or religious schools in Wisconsin are eligible to participate.

A small number of schools must apply by August 1, 2016:

If your school has been open for less than 12 consecutive months OR if your school has less than 40 students enrolled in two or fewer grade levels, the school must attend new school training during the summer of 2016. Initial paperwork is due August 1, 2016

Most schools must apply by January 10, 2017:

If your school has been in operation for more than 12 consecutive months and has more than 40 students in three or more grade levels, the school must complete new school training, which should be available in December 2016. Initial paperwork is due January 10, 2017

What are the important registration deadlines and dates for mandatory WPCP training? By

January 10, 2017:

- File 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.
- File the signed "Student Rights Letter" with DPI.
- File the school's Random Selection Plan with DPI.
- Submit the auditor fee to DPI in the form of a cashier's check of ~\$600.
- File the "Student Application Designee Authorization Form" with DPI.

- File the completed Hours of Instruction calculator.

Mid January 2017:

- Participate in DPI's Online Application System trainings.

February-March 2017:

- Participate in DPI's fiscal management trainings.

May 1, 2017

- File the Budget and Cash Flow documents.

August 1, 2017

- File Disclosure of Information form with Board signatures.
- Submit proof of pre-accreditation or accreditation.
- Submit proof of insurance and fidelity bond.

What are the fiscal accountability requirements?

All schools participating in parental choice programs must follow a variety of fiscal accountability provisions. For more information, consult the DPI website: <http://dpi.wi.gov/sms/choice-programs/financial-reports/fiscal-practices>

What are the fiscal accountability deadlines for the 2017-2018 school year?

- The Fiscal and Internal Control Practices report is **due December 15, 2017**.
- The September enrollment audit is **due December 15, 2017**.
- The January enrollment audit is **due May 1, 2018**.
- The Generally Accepted Accounting Principals (GAAP) audit is **due October 15, 2018**. This work is typically done in the summer prior.
- 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 Wisconsin Parental Choice Program.

How many students may participate in the WPCP in 2017-2018?

- In 2017-2018, the number of students who may participate in the WPCP is limited to 2% of eligible school age children resident in a school district.
- Eligible school age children include all public, private, and homeschool students.
- The 2% limit is based on the district residence of the student, not the location of the school.

- Schools can enroll children from multiple districts.
- Where multiple private schools are enrolling students from a particular district, the private schools together cannot exceed the 2% limit of eligible school age children in that district.

Can the school determine the number of students and the grade levels it will make available for students enrolling through the WPCP?

Yes. 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.

Which students are eligible to participate in the WPCP?

- Must be a resident of the State of Wisconsin.
- Must reside outside of the Milwaukee and Racine Unified school districts.
- The family must have an Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) at or below 185% of the federal poverty level.
- Current public school students, with the exception of public school open enrollment participants, can enroll in a private school at any grade level.
- Current homeschool students can enroll in a private school at any grade level.
- Students who did not attend any school in prior year (e.g., new 4K student) can enroll in a private school at any grade level.
- Current private school students enrolling in a private school in 4K, 5K, 1st grade, or 9th grade.

What are the age requirements to receive a voucher in 4K, 5K, and 1st grade?

- **If entering 4K**, student must be age four on or before September 1, 2017
- **If entering 5K**, student must be age five on or before September 1, 2017
- **If entering 1st**, student must be age six on or before September 1, 2017

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.

Must schools have in place a DPI-compliant Student Information System (SIS)?

Yes. Schools participating in the WPCP in 2017-2018 must have in place a student information system (SIS) that complies with DPI reporting requirements for the state-issued private school report card.

- SIS vendors that have completed compliance testing with DPI are listed at: <http://goo.gl/V2w8TQ>
- SIS required data elements for WPCP schools are listed at: <http://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/wisedata/pdf/ChoiceDataIntro.pdf>

What are the program testing requirements?

In 2017-2018, schools with 20 or more students participating in the WPCP must administer the state examinations to WPCP students in the same grades and subject areas as Wisconsin's public school students:

- Wisconsin Forward Exam for English Language Arts and Mathematics assessments in the spring of 2018 for grades 3-8.
- Wisconsin Forward Exam for Science in the spring of 2018 for grades 4th and 8th.
- Wisconsin Forward Exam for Social Studies in the spring of 2018 for grades 4th, 8th, and 10th.
- ACT Aspire™ in spring of 2018 for 9th and 10th grade.
- The ACT® and ACT WorkKeys® in the spring of 2018 for 11th grade.
- The state civics exam in high school.
- Schools may administer other standardized tests in addition to the required state test.
- The DPI pays the cost of state testing for WPCP students. Schools may choose to administer the state test to non-WPCP students but those costs are the responsibility of the school.
- Schools must submit standardized test scores to DPI and to parents of current students, and all program applicants who request them.
- Schools will be required to place a link to their DPI-issued school report card on the homepage of their school website.
- Parents may opt their children out of state testing.

Can schools test students participating in the WPCP prior to enrollment?

- A student that meets residency and income requirements and receives a voucher may not be denied admission.
- 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.

What are the amounts of the per pupil payments?

- Per pupil payments for 2017-2018 will be not be known until the biennial state budget is completed in June 2017.
- 2016-2017 per-pupil payment for students
- \$7,323 for students in grades 1-8
- \$7969 for students in grades 9-12.
- 4K pupils:
 - Reimbursement is 60% of a full payment (\$4,393) 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 (\$3661).
 - For more information please consult DPI bulletin “Outreach Activities” at: <http://dpi.wi.gov/sms/choice-programs/bulletins>.
- 5K pupils:
 - Schools that meet the 1050 hours of instruction requirements will be reimbursed for a full payment of \$7,323.
 - Schools must work with their independent CPA to determine the reimbursement for 5K pupils that attend less than full time.

When do schools receive payments?

- 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.
- The last two payments are generated by the second Friday in January enrollment count.

Can schools charge tuition in addition to the program payment?

- Families eligible for the statewide school choice program must have income at or below 185% of poverty, tuition for new students may not 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.
- For more information please consult DPI bulletin “Student Tuition and Fees” at: <http://dpi.wi.gov/sms/choice-programs/bulletins>

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 may not 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 Tuition and Fees” at: <http://dpi.wi.gov/sms/choice-programs/bulletins>

Can a school require fundraising and volunteer services 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). Schools may still ask all parents if they would voluntarily assist their child's school.
- For more information please consult DPI bulletin “Student Tuition and Fees” at: <http://dpi.wi.gov/sms/choice-programs/bulletins>

Can parents opt their children out of religious instruction and activities?

- Yes, parents can choose to opt their children out of formal religious instruction and worship.
- Few parents choose to exercise this option.
- Most schools have never received such requests.
- Religious schools should still remain true to their mission and culture and they may continue to imbue their curriculum with the teachings and values of their faith. Schools may display symbols of their faith in hallways and classrooms, pray together at the beginning of class or before meals, and all other actions that affirm their belief and traditions.

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

- Yes. State law requires WPCP-participating schools to have policies and procedures in place and published in handbooks that regulate suspensions and expulsions.
- The school’s handbooks and written policies should be explicit as to student responsibilities, expectations, and causes for disciplinary action including suspension and expulsion.
- Once a student is enrolled and accepted in the school, he or she is bound by school policies and procedures including suspension or 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.
- Schools must supply parents with a copy of its handbooks including 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 with a voucher that meets income eligibility and residency requirements.
- Schools are not permitted to select students with a voucher based on any other factors.
- Once a child is admitted, the private school is only required to offer those services assisting students with special needs that it can provide with minor adjustments. Private schools should work with their school districts, which have the legal responsibility to provide services to special needs children in private schools.

Are religious schools exempt from Title IX provisions that conflict with faith?

- Title IX only applies to institutions that receive federal financial assistance from the U.S. DOE. Private elementary and secondary schools whose students or teachers receive equitable services under federal education programs are not considered to be 'recipients of federal financial assistance. (Council for American Private Education)
- Footnote to the recent Dear Colleague Letter on gender identity: 20 U.S.C. §§ 1681–1688; 34 C.F.R. Pt. 106; 28 C.F.R. Pt. 54. In this [Dear Colleague] letter, the term schools refers to recipients of Federal financial assistance at all educational levels, including school districts, colleges, and universities. *An educational institution that is controlled by a religious organization is exempt from Title IX to the extent that compliance would not be consistent with the religious tenets of such organization.* 20 U.S.C. § 1681(a)(3); 34 C.F.R. § 106.12(a).

Are schools required to participate in federal free and reduced price lunch program?

- No.

What is the student enrollment period for 2017-2018?

- The student application period begins February 1 and continue until April 20.

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 from February 1 to April 20. A link to the parent application will be available the morning of February 1 at: <http://dpi.wi.gov/sms/choice-programs>
- Within the online application the parent or guardian selects the school(s) to which they wish to apply.
- After completing the online application, the parent or guardian must provide proof they meet residency and income requirements at each school to which they have applied, no later than April 20, 2018.
- The online application is not complete until each school to which the parent or guardian has applied has accepted and verified the required documentation.

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

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

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 DPI will conduct a random lottery with certain allowable preferences for continuing students, siblings, and students holding a voucher switching to another WPCP-participating school.

What if applications exceed the district's 2% limit of eligible school age children?

If applications from a school district exceed the 2% limit on eligible school age children, the DPI will conduct a random lottery with certain allowable preferences for continuing students, siblings, and students holding a voucher switching to another WPCP-participating school.

What are the maximum income levels for participation in the WPCP?

- To meet the income requirements for the program a student’s family must have an Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) at or below 185% of the federal poverty level.
- A married couple may earn up to and additional \$7000 in AGI and qualify for the WPCP.

2017-2018 Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) limits are shown below:

Family Size	Single Family	Married Family
3	\$37,296	\$44,296
4	\$44,955	\$51,955
5	\$52,614	\$59,614
6	\$60,273	\$67,293

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. Continues to attend is defined as enrolled in the private school on the previous count date, which in the WPCP will be the second Friday in January.

How does a school verify income documentation?

Continuing WPCP students do not need to submit income information. Schools need to verify the income of new applicants to the WPCP. See the DPI bulletin “WPCP Income Documentation” at <http://dpi.wi.gov/sms/choice-programs/bulletins>

How does the school verify residency documentation?

Schools need to verify the residency documents for each student applying for a voucher each year. Please see the DPI bulletin “WPCP Residency Documentation” at: <http://dpi.wi.gov/>

[sms/choice-programs/bulletins](#)

What are the estimated costs for first-year schools?

- \$10-15K for audit cost annually.
- \$600 application fee annually.
- The cost of a student information system if you don't already have one:
~\$2,500 startup costs and \$10 per student per annum (only WPCP students must participate)

What are the time commitments for first-year schools? Finance:

- 40 hours budget preparation
- 8 hour budget training
- 40 hours audit preparation

Administration: Up to 20 students,

- 20 hours to prepare application forms
- 20 hours to complete student applications
- 20 hours of reports due throughout the year
- A good principal/secretary/parent volunteer team can handle this initially

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

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<http://www.chooseyourschoolwi.org>