

## Choice School Staff Credentials

All private schools participating in the Private School Choice Programs (PSCP or Choice) must ensure that their administrators, teachers, and teacher aides meet the following requirements. PSCP schools that fail to meet these requirements may be terminated from the PSCP. The information in this bulletin is based on Wis. Stats. §§118.60 and 119.23 and Wis. Admin. Code PI 35 and PI 48.

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## Requirements Overview

### Administrators

All administrators at a school participating in the Choice program must have *at least* a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education or a teaching license or administrator’s license issued by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). Administrators include a superintendent, supervising principal, executive director, or other person who acts as the administrative head of the private school.

### Teachers

All teachers at a school participating in the Choice program must have a teaching license issued by the DPI or *at least* a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education. Teacher is defined under current law to mean **a person who has primary responsibility for the academic instruction of pupils**. This would include individuals that have the primary responsibility for providing virtual and/or in-person instruction.

### Teacher Aides

Each private school shall ensure that any teacher aide employed by the private school has *at least* graduated from high school, has been granted a general educational development (GED) or high school equivalency diploma (HSED), or has been granted a high school diploma by the administrator of a home-based private education program. Teacher aide is defined as **any person assisting with educational programming who is not a teacher or volunteer**.

### Rabbinical Studies Exception

A teacher employed by a Choice school who teaches *only* courses in rabbinical studies is not required to meet the credential requirement for teachers. An administrator of a Choice school that prepares and trains pupils attending the school in rabbinical studies is not required to meet the credential requirement for administrators.

## Documentation Requirements

### Overview

A Choice school must have the following documents in each administrator's, teacher's, and teacher aide's personnel file. Schools should obtain the documents prior to hiring the administrator, teacher, or teacher aide. The school's auditor will be required to review the documentation and report the school's compliance or noncompliance to the DPI as part of the Fiscal and Internal Control Practices Report due annually on December 15.

### Administrator

The school must obtain one of the following for each administrator:

- 1) A copy of a current teaching license or administrator's license issued by the DPI.
- 2) A copy of at least a bachelor's degree and a copy of the US Department of Education webpage <http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation/> indicating the institution which granted the degree is accredited.
- 3) An official transcript indicating the administrator received at least a bachelor's degree and a copy of the US Department of Education webpage <http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation/> indicating the institution which granted the degree is accredited.

### Teacher

The school must obtain one of the following for each teacher:

- 1) A copy of a current teaching license issued by the DPI.
- 2) A copy of at least a bachelor's degree and a copy of the US Department of Education webpage <http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation/> indicating the institution which granted the degree is accredited.
- 3) An official transcript indicating the teacher received at least a bachelor's degree and a copy of the US Department of Education webpage <http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation/> indicating the institution which granted the degree is accredited.

### Teacher Aide

The school must obtain one of the following for each teacher aide:

- 1) A copy of at least a high school diploma;
- 2) A letter from a high school stating that the individual graduated;
- 3) An identification of high school graduation on a high school, college, or other post-secondary educational agency transcript;
- 4) A copy of a HSED granted by the DPI or an equivalent credential granted by the DPI or another state;
- 5) A copy of the GED certificate granted by DPI or another state;
- 6) A copy of a degree or educational credential higher than a high school diploma, HSED, or GED;
- 7) An official transcript indicating the teacher aide received a degree higher than a high school diploma, HSED, or GED; or
- 8) Documentation from the administrator of a home-based private educational program stating that the individual graduated.

## Degrees from Overseas Institutions

If a degree is from an overseas institution, the administrator or teacher must have his or her transcripts of credit, pattern of training, and degrees awarded evaluated by a professional evaluation service. Only through this *detailed* or *course-by-course* evaluation process can it be determined if foreign preparation is equivalent to a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution of higher education.

The administrator or teacher must contact a private agency for an assessment of his or her credentials in terms of degree, course equivalence, and translation of course titles. Wisconsin Administrative PI 35.16(4) and PI 48.16(4) require individuals to have the degree or educational credential, transcripts, and pattern of training evaluated by one of the following professional evaluation services to determine if the degree or credential is equivalent to a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution of higher education in the United States: (a) [Educational Credential Evaluators, Inc.](#); (b) Academic and Credential Records Evaluation and Verification Service (ACREVS); (c) the [American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers](#); or (d) and any other organization members of the [National Association of Credential Evaluation Services \(NACES\)](#) or the [Association of International Credentials Evaluators \(AICE\)](#).

The school and teacher or administrator must carefully review the credential evaluation report prepared by the evaluation service to make sure it indicates the administrator or teacher earned the equivalent of a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution of higher education. The school must retain a copy of the report for auditor review.

### Frequently Asked Questions

**1. Are substitute teachers required to have a bachelor's degree or a teaching or administrator license?**

Yes, if they have primary responsibility for the academic instruction of pupils.

**2. If a class does not have Choice students in it, does the teacher for the class need to meet the educational credential requirements?**

Yes. The teachers for all K-12 educational programming classes must meet the educational credential requirements.

**3. If the school has an early childhood program, do the teachers for the early childhood program need to meet the educational credential requirements?**

The Choice program does not fund 3-year-old programming, so teachers for 3-year-old children would not need to meet the education credential requirement.

If a school is offering programming to 4-year olds, the school must determine whether they consider it to be educational programming or daycare. If the 4-year-old program is considered educational programming, the teachers must meet the educational credential requirement. If the program is considered daycare, the grade cannot be an available Choice grade or identified as a non-Choice grade available for the school. If the 4-year-old program is daycare, the teachers do not need to meet the educational credential requirement.

**4. Is it sufficient to obtain evidence of a college degree for a teacher aide?**

Yes, the law requires that each private school shall ensure that any teacher aide employed by the private school has *at least* graduated from high school or been granted a general educational development (GED) or high school equivalency diploma (HSED), or been granted a high school diploma by the administrator of a home-based private educational program. The degree for a teacher aide does not need to be from an accredited institution.

**5. Is it sufficient to obtain evidence that a teacher has a master's degree from an accredited college rather than obtaining evidence of a bachelor's degree?**

Yes, the law requires that teachers have *at least* a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution of higher education.

**6. What should the school do if the institution of higher education does not show up on the US Department of Education webpage when you know the institution is accredited?**

First, the school should make sure the institution's name is spelled correctly. Do not use abbreviations. For example, a search using "UW Madison" will provide no results; however, if you type "University of Wisconsin Madison" the search will work. You may also try searching just the main word of the institution's name. If you continue to have problems, please contact the DPI at [PrivateSchoolChoice@dpi.wi.gov](mailto:PrivateSchoolChoice@dpi.wi.gov) or 1-888-245-2732 ext. 3 for assistance.

**7. How should a school proceed if the degree institution closed or has lost its accreditation status?**

If the institution was accredited at the time the degree was awarded, the degree would meet DPI's educational credential requirement. The school would need to obtain documentation that the institution was accredited at that time. If you are unable to determine whether the institution was accredited at the time the degree was awarded, please contact the DPI at [PrivateSchoolChoice@dpi.wi.gov](mailto:PrivateSchoolChoice@dpi.wi.gov) or 1-888-245-2732 ext. 3 for assistance.

**8. Can a school have more than one administrator?**

Yes. However, a school may only have one Choice administrator. All administrators at a school participating in the Choice program must have at least a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution of higher education or a teaching license or administrator's license issued by the DPI. Administrators include a superintendent, supervising principal, executive director, or other person who acts as the administrative head of the private school participating in the program.

**9. How can I verify if an applicant has a current Wisconsin teaching or administrator license?**

The DPI online database for Education Licensing at <https://elo.wieducatorlicensing.org/datamart/publicSearchMenu.do> includes all DPI issued licenses and an indication of the expiration date (if they are not a lifetime license).

**10. If a teacher has a license for a specific grade or type of teaching, can the teacher only teach that grade or teach those specific classes?**

No. A teacher with any type of current, DPI-issued teacher license (except a short-term substitute teacher license) can teach any grade or subject at a Choice school. A short-term substitute teacher license does not meet the Choice program teacher educational credential requirement.

**11. Does the school need to have a copy of all educational credential documentation, including the documentation for personnel from a staffing agency?**

The records and documents obtained showing the personnel meet the staff credential requirements must be retained and accessible to the school and available to the school's independent auditor for all administrators, teachers, and teacher aides. The school's independent auditor will verify that the school's administrators, teachers, and teacher aides meet the staff credentials requirements as part of the school's audits.

**12. What documentation should a school obtain from an employee if the educational credential has a former name of the individual listed?**

If there has been a name change, the school should obtain documentation to support the name change such as a court order, marriage certification, or divorce decree. If a marriage certificate is provided, the school should not make a copy of the certificate. Instead, the school should draft a letter that includes the following: (1) the original name of the employee (which matches the documentation for the credential requirement); (2) the legal name of the employee; (3) the date of the marriage; (4) the government entity that issued the marriage license (e.g., state registrar, local registrar, U.S. Dept. of State, or other foreign country); and (5) the signature and signature date of the school employee drafting the letter. The school should maintain a copy of the letter in the personnel file for the employee.