



PRIVATE SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAMS INFORMATIONAL BULLETIN

Bulletin 04-02

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Income Verification

This bulletin applies to the Private School Choice Programs (Choice or Choice Program) which includes the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), Racine Parental Choice Program (RPCP), and Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP). The information in this bulletin is based on Wis. Stats. §§118.60 and 119.23 and Wis. Admin. Code PI 35 and PI 48.

Please see the Residency Documentation Bulletin for information about the residency requirements and the Application Verification and Corrections FAQ for information on correcting OAS application data. These documents are available at [Choice Programs: School Application Processing](#).

Schools are required to keep all income and residency documentation. It is recommended that schools use the Student Application checklist available at [Choice Programs: School Application Processing](#) to ensure that each student file includes all required documentation.

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Students that Require Income Eligibility Determinations

The income eligibility determination is required for all students applying to the Choice program except for the following:

- a) Students who participated in any Choice program in the previous school year.
- b) Students who had an eligible application and were on the waiting list in the prior school year for the same Choice program they are applying to. The student must have been on the waiting list after the 2nd Friday in January in the prior year. If the student was offered a Choice seat, they are not considered on the waiting list.
- c) Students applying to the MPCP between October and January if the student was a MPCP student on the 3rd Friday in September in the same school year.

Income Eligibility Requirements Overview

Introduction

For MPCP and RPCP, only pupils with a family income at or below 300% of the poverty level in the prior year may participate in the MPCP and RPCP. For WPCP, only pupils with a family income at or below 220% of the poverty level in the prior year may participate in the WPCP. If the parents are married, their combined income will be reduced by \$7,000 when determining income eligibility for the Choice program.

There are two ways to determine income eligibility: the Department of Revenue (DOR) Income Determination Method or the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) Income Determination Method. The parent indicates which method they would like to use in the online parent application.

Definitions

For purposes of determining Choice income eligibility, parent, family size, and the required income are defined as follows:

- **Parent:** An individual who is either:
 - (a) The pupil’s biological parent, legal guardian, parent by adoption or step-parent who resides in the same household as the pupil applicant. A parent on military duty is considered to be residing in the household; or
 - (b) If no individual meets the requirements in par. (a), an individual who has the legal authority to make educational decisions for the pupil.
- **Family Size:** Family size includes parent(s) on the application and their children by birth, marriage, or adoption, who reside in the same household as the student applicant(s).
- **Income included:** Family income includes the federal adjusted gross income of the parents included in the family size. Note: No adjustments may be made to the income included, even if some of the income is a one-time amount or if the amount of income the parent now receives is less than what they previously received (such as a situation where a parent no longer works).

The following are NOT included in the income calculation:

- Public assistance programs such as Wisconsin Works (W2) cash benefits, FoodShare, and Caretaker Supplement.
- Child support payments. *Alimony payments are considered taxable and must be included as income unless the divorce occurred after 2018 or the divorce or separation agreement was modified to state that the alimony would not be taxable to the recipient.*
- Supplemental Security Income “SSI.” *Social security benefits are included as income in the application whereas SSI is not included in income. Therefore, it is important to determine if SSI or social security benefits were received.*
- Amounts received under W2 (Wisconsin Works) by an individual for job access loans, health care coverage, child care subsidies, and transportation assistance. *Amounts received under W2 for trial jobs are considered taxable and must be included as income.*
- Tax credits such as the federal earned income credit, the federal child tax credit, the Wisconsin earned income credit and the Wisconsin homestead credit.

DOR Income Determination Method

Completing the DOR Check

All parents listed on the application must provide their social security number (SSN) or taxpayer ID number in the online parent application or provide it to the school where they apply. If the parent(s) do not provide their social security number or taxpayer ID number, they must complete the DPI income determination method in the online parent application. If the parent does not complete the DPI income determination method before the end of the open application period, the application is not eligible. If the number is provided to the school, the school must input the parent’s SSN or taxpayer ID number in the Online Application System (OAS).

After the SSN or taxpayer ID number is entered into the online parent application or OAS a “Preliminary DOR Check” is completed that will indicate if the DOR has the information available to determine income eligibility for the parents on the application. An indication that this information is available **does not** mean that the application will be determined income eligible.

If the “preliminary DOR check” indicates the DOR has no records and is unable to verify income based on the information provided, the parent must complete the DPI income determination method portions of the online parent application and submit the required supporting income documentation to the school before the end of the open application period. If the parent does not complete this before the end of the open application period, the application is not eligible.

The DOR income determination is completed once for each parent unless an additional parent is added to an application that was previously determined eligible by DOR in the same or in a future open application period. If an additional parent is added, the DOR income determination must be completed again with both parents. The DOR income determination for a student that applied to multiple schools will be reflected for all of the student’s applications in OAS at all of the schools where the student applied.

Explanation of How DOR Determines Eligibility

If the DOR method is selected, the DOR will determine if an application qualifies based on the 2019 income tax return(s) for all parents on the application. If the 2019 income tax return is not available, the DOR will determine eligibility based on the 2018 income tax return. The DOR income determination method uses the income for all of the individuals on the parents’ tax return(s), even if all of the individuals on the tax return are not identified as a parent on the application. As a result, applicants should consider using the DPI income determination method if they filed a joint return and no longer live with the other individual on their return. See the DOR Income Determination Method Frequently Asked Questions for additional information.

DPI Income Determination Method

Parent Completion of the Online Parent Application

If the DPI income determination method is used the parent(s) will be required to answer a series of income-related questions in the online parent application to determine if the family is income eligible. The DPI income determination method is based on the 2019 income. The online application will first ask the parent if they have filed their 2019 Federal 1040 tax form. If so, the online parent application will require the adjusted gross income on the return.

If a Federal 1040 tax form was not completed, the parent must indicate what income or government assistance the parent(s) on the application received in 2019. This includes indicating if the parent(s) on the application had: 1) wages included on a 2019 W2 tax form or a final, December 2019 earning statement, 2) any 2019 1099 tax forms, 3) any cash income and/or 4) any government assistance. If a parent had 2019 cash income, they will be required to provide the following in the online parent application: 1) the name of the parent that had cash income and the amount; 2) an indication that no written documentation can be provided for the amount received and has not been or will not be included on an income tax form; and 3) the source of the income (name of employer or if self-employed, the self-employed activity). If the parent did not complete a Federal 1040 tax form or identify any income on the application, the parent must also explain how basic needs (food, clothing, and shelter) were met.

OAS Application Verification for Applications with Income

If income is identified on the application, the school must complete the OAS Application Verification as follows.

- 1) **Income Documentation:** The parent must provide the following supporting documentation to the school during the open application period that the application is received:
 - a. *Parent Filed a 2019 Federal 1040 Tax Form:* If the parent filed a 2019 Federal 1040 tax form, a signed and dated Federal 1040 tax form must be provided to the school supporting the amount. The return provided to the school must include the first two pages of the return. If the return is a joint tax return, both taxpayers should sign and date the form. However, the application is still eligible even if the tax return is not signed by one or both taxpayers. The Wisconsin tax return, e-file signature authorization form, or other schedules from the Federal 1040 tax form are NOT acceptable income documentation.
 - b. *Parent Did Not File a 2019 Federal 1040 Tax Form:* If the parent did not file a 2019 Federal 1040 tax form but identified other sources of income, the school must obtain the following documents if listed on the OAS Application Verification screen: 2019 W2 tax form, final December 2019 earning statement, and any 2019 1099s. If the OAS application verification screen states, “A copy of [parent name] 2019 documents that support the 'Other Income' total reported of ...”, the school must obtain documentation supporting the amount identified. If the OAS Application Verification screen does not indicate any income documentation is required, the parent only identified cash income was received. In this case, the school does not need to obtain any supporting documentation for the cash income.
- 2) **Amounts Match:** The school must ensure that the amount of income on the OAS Application Verification screen matches the income documentation. If the amount does not match the income documentation and it is before the end of the open application period in which the application was received, ask that the parent log back into the online parent application and correct the amount(s). If it is after the open application period in which the application was received, determine if the application is income eligible with the correct amount of income. The income limits are available in the Income Limits document at dpi.wi.gov/choice. If the parents are married, their combined income should be reduced by \$7,000 when determining income eligibility for the program. If the application is eligible with the correct amount, the school may accept the supporting documentation (no correction to OAS is required). If not, the application must be determined ineligible.
- 3) **Parent Names Match:** The OAS Application Verification screen will identify the required income documentation and the name of the parent that must be on that income documentation. For example, if the parent indicates they filed a 2019 Federal 1040 tax form, the OAS Application Verification screen will specify the school must obtain, “A signed copy of [parent name or names]’s 2019 1040, adjusted gross income should be ...” In this case, the return must include the first and last name(s) of the parent(s) identified.

The school must ensure the first and last name(s) on the income documentation exactly matches the parent name(s) in the OAS Application Verification screen. If the name(s) do not match, see the question regarding the parent name not matching at this end of this bulletin for further information.

- 4) **Corrections if Income Documentation is Missing:** If income documentation was received during the open application period that the application was received from at least one of the parents on the application but it was not the allowed support in the required documentation section or is not for the correct year, the school may correct the application if it is able to obtain a 2019 tax transcript for all parents on the application by the time the eligibility determination must be made for the application. The tax transcript(s) must show that the family is income eligible as described in the “Amounts Match” section. *Make sure to retain the originally provided documentation and write “Original” on it with the date it was received.*

The eligibility determination for WPCP applications must be completed by the first weekday in May. The eligibility determination for MPCP and RPCP applications must be completed by the earlier of the following: (a) prior to the next application period, (b) prior to completing a random drawing, if required, (c) within 60 days of the end of the application period during which an application is received by the school, or (d) prior to the next count date. **If the parent does not provide the school the required documentation by the time the application must be verified, the application must be determined ineligible.** The availability of tax transcripts is subject to when the tax returns are submitted, the IRS processing, and when the IRS makes the tax transcripts available. As a result, schools are strongly encouraged to obtain the required documentation during the open application period in which the application is received.

OAS Application Verification for Applications with No Income

If the parent did not complete a Federal 1040 tax form or identify any income on the application, the school must verify the application by completing the following:

- 1) **Review Basic Needs Explanation:** Review the parent’s explanation of how basic needs (food, clothing, and shelter) were met to ensure it is sufficient to explain how basic needs were supplied. Explanations that only indicate the parent provided the basic needs are not sufficient. The explanation must explain how the parent provided the basic needs. Some acceptable explanations may include obtaining support from family/friends or identifying government assistance received, which must also be identified in the government assistance section. When reviewing the explanation of basic needs, the review must include the following:
 - a. If any government assistance is indicated in the explanation of basic needs, determine that the program is also identified in the required documentation section of the OAS Application Verification screen. As explained in 2 below, support for all government assistance programs must also be provided.
 - b. Determine that the explanation of basic needs does **not** indicate that the parent received any income (even if cash income). If there is any income identified, the parent must log back into the online parent application, include this income in the online parent application, and provide any supporting documentation to the school before the end of the open application period. If the parent has any income and it is after the open application period in which the application was received, the application is ineligible.
- 2) **Government Assistance Documentation:** Obtain documentation showing 2019 participation in ALL government assistance programs listed on the OAS Application Verification screen. This documentation must be a statement from the assistance provider indicating the parent received the assistance in 2019. This documentation must be obtained in the same open application in which the application is received, except in the limited circumstances described in 3.

The OAS Application Verification screen will specify which parent received the government assistance in the list of required income documentation. The school must ensure the first and last name of the parent identified exactly matches the parent's first and last name on the government assistance documentation. If the name does not match, see the question regarding the parent name not matching the documentation at the end of this bulletin for further information.

In most cases, parents can obtain and print a statement of government benefits they have received by using the Wisconsin Department of Health Services online tool at <https://access.wisconsin.gov/> (Access.gov). To access a statement of government benefits received, parents will need to create an online account and enter their SSN or pin number, their date of birth and their case information. If a statement is used from the Access.gov website, ensure the print screen includes the parent name, shows the type of assistance received, and identifies that the assistance was received in 2019.

- 3) **Corrections if Government Assistance Documentation is Missing:** If government assistance documentation was received during the open application period that the application was received from at least one of the parents on the application but it was not the allowed support in 1 or is not for the correct year, the school may correct the application through one of the following options.
- a. Obtain 2019 tax transcript(s) verification of non filing for all parents on the application and the required support showing the parents obtained the government assistance identified on the application during 2019.
 - b. Obtain 2019 tax transcript(s) showing all parents on the application did not have any adjusted gross income.

Make sure to retain the originally provided documentation and write "Original" on it with the date it was received. If a is completed, write "Additional documentation" on any new government assistance documentation received and the date it was received.

The eligibility determination for WPCP applications must be completed by the first weekday in May. The eligibility determination for MPCP and RPCP applications must be completed by the earlier of the following: (a) prior to the next application period, (b) prior to completing a random drawing, if required, (c) within 60 days of the end of the application period during which an application is received by the school, or (d) prior to the next count date. **If the parent does not provide the school the required documentation by the time the application must be verified, the application must be determined ineligible.** The availability of tax transcripts is subject to when the tax returns are submitted, the IRS processing, and when the IRS makes the tax transcripts available. As a result, schools are strongly encouraged to obtain the required documentation during the open application period in which the application is received.

Children in Kinship or Foster care

Foster children and children in the kinship care program are counted as a family of one (1) because they are supported by the state or county. Therefore, the income of parents is **not** counted when determining eligibility for the Choice program. The parent should indicate that the pupil is in kinship care or foster care on the online parent application. Documentation supporting the pupil's participation in foster care or kinship care must be provided to the school. Documentation that would be sufficient for this is a verification letter showing the child is in the foster or kinship care program, a check for foster or kinship

care, court documents showing placement for foster care students, or a reassessment letter for payment under the kinship care program indicating that the requirements have been met. The verification and reassessment letter must come from one of the contracted agents for the kinship care agency. A list of the contracted agents for Milwaukee is available at <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/mcps/contacts>.

The documentation must be provided before the eligibility determination must be made for the application. The eligibility determination for WPCP applications must be completed by the first weekday in May. The eligibility determination for MPCP and RPCP applications must be completed by the earlier of the following: (a) prior to the next application period, (b) prior to completing a random drawing, if required, (c) within 60 days of the end of the application period during which an application is received by the school, or (d) prior to the next count date.

An adopted child that has been legally adopted is the full financial responsibility of the individual who adopted him or her; therefore, the parent(s) income is counted in the case of an adopted child.

Tuition

Students in grades 9-12 may be charged tuition, in an amount determined by the private school, if the student's family income exceeds 220% of the federal poverty level. Applicants with married parents shall reduce their family income by \$7,000 in order to determine if tuition may be charged. Students in grades K-8 may not be charged any tuition, regardless of their income.

Schools must annually determine income eligibility in order to charge students in grades 9-12 tuition. A Tuition Income Determination form is available to assist with this determination. Schools must establish a process for the governing body of the school to accept appeals regarding determinations to charge tuition. For additional information see the Student Application Processing webpage at [Choice Programs: School Application Processing](#) for the Student Tuition and Fees Information Bulletin and the Tuition Income Determination form.

Appendix A: Frequently Asked Questions

DOR Income Determination

1) Can a parent apply again for the same school year if they were determined ineligible by DOR?

No. Parents who were determined ineligible by DOR cannot apply again for the same school year. The parent can apply to the Choice program in a future school year.

If a parent submits another application for the same student using a different email address, the school should mark the application as “The family is not eligible for the MPCP/RPCP/WPCP based on the information provided.”

The Application Summary in OAS has a column called “Multi App” which schools can use to identify possible duplicate applications or new applications for a student where the student was previously determined Ineligible by DOR. The “Multi App” column will include an asterisk by an application if there are other applications for the same student with the status of Not Yet Verified, Verified, Submitted, or Ineligible per DOR. The applications must have the same student name and birth date to be identified as a potential duplicate student. The school must review the application data to determine if the students are the same student or not and if they are identified due to a student being determined ineligible by DOR.

2) What if a parent made a mistake and did not enter all family members in the application and the application is determined ineligible by DOR?

See the [Income Included](#) section for information on how the income determination is completed. If the parent made a mistake and did not enter all family members that reside in the same household that meet the requirement to be included as a family member, please have the parent email the school the following information:

- Parent Name(s):
- Parent Address:
- Student Name:
- Student Date of Birth:
- Additional family member first and last name:
- Additional family member address:
- Additional family member is in foster care or kinship care (yes or no):
- Additional family member relation to student (shares at least one parent by birth, shares at least one parent by adoption, shares at least one parent by parent’s current marriage, parent by birth, parent by adoption, or parent by marriage):

The school should forward the email to privateschoolchoice@dpi.wi.gov.

The DPI will then review the request. If it were approved to add family member(s) to the application, the following are the next steps:

- School completed DOR Check in OAS: The DPI would update the application to add the family member(s). The DPI would notify the school to run the DOR records check and DOR income

determination again after the change is made. Please note that this issue must be resolved before the eligibility determination must be made for the application or the application will continue to be DOR ineligible and the student is not eligible to apply again for the school year. The eligibility determination for WPCP applications must be completed by the first weekday in May. The eligibility determination for MPCP and RPCP applications must be completed by the earlier of the following: (a) prior to the next application period, (b) prior to completing a random drawing, if required, (c) within 60 days of the end of the application period during which an application is received by the school, or (d) prior to the next count date.

- Parent completed DOR Check in the parent application: The DPI would update the parent application so that the parent may add the family member(s). The DPI would notify the school that the change has been completed and that the school should inform the parent to return to the application, add the family member(s), and complete the application in the parent application. If it is after the end of the application period, the parent could apply in a future open application period, if available.
- 3) Does a parent need to provide income documentation to the school if the parent is determined to be income eligible by the DOR in the online parent application?**

No. If the parent entered their social security number(s) or taxpayer ID(s) into the online parent application and was determined to be income eligible by the DOR, the parent is not required to provide additional income documentation to the school.

Changing Income Determination Methods

- 4) Can a parent switch the income determination method during an open application period?**

Yes, if the application hasn't already been determined ineligible based on exceeding the income limits. Parents should change the income determination method in the online parent application. The parent must then re-submit the application.

- 5) Can a parent or school switch the income determination method after the open application period ends?**

No. The income determination method cannot be switched after the open application period.

Income Included in Income Eligibility Determination

- 6) Can a family use current year income rather than prior year income for the income determination?**

No, current year income is not used to determine eligibility for the Choice programs. The DPI income determination method is only completed using the prior calendar year income. The DOR income determination method is only completed using the prior year calendar year income or the income from two years prior.

- 7) **A parent filed a joint tax return in 2019 and no longer lives with his or her spouse/ex-spouse. This may be due to a divorce, separation, or a spouse's death. The parent is not income eligible with their spouse/ex-spouse's income but is eligible without the spouse/ex-spouse's income. How should the parent proceed?**

The DOR income determination method will include all income on the tax return, including that of a parent's spouse/ex-spouse, even if they are not on the application. As a result, applicants should consider using the DPI income determination method.

The first question for the DPI income determination method is if the parent filed a 2019 Federal 1040 tax form. Since the parent did not file a 2019 Federal 1040 tax form that only identifies his/her income, the parent should indicate that he/she did not file a 2019 Federal 1040 tax form. The parent should then identify any income or government assistance he/she received in the online parent application and bring in supporting documentation as identified in the online parent application. The spouse/ex-spouse's income and government assistance should not be identified in the online parent application.

- 8) **Can income be excluded if a parent no longer has a job they had in a previous year or can one-time income sources (e.g. IRA distributions, bonuses, etc.) be excluded from adjusted gross income when determining if the family income meets the income eligibility requirements?**

No. No adjustments may be made to income, even if some of the income is a one-time amount or if the current parent income is less than the previous year.

DPI Income Determination Method

- 9) **What if the income forms or amounts provided by the parent do not match the information the parent entered in the online parent application?**

See the [Amounts Match](#) section for an explanation of how the application should be processed if the amounts do not match.

If the income forms identified in the OAS Application Verification screen do not match the forms provided by the parent, and it is before the end of the open application period in which the application was received, ask that the parent log back into the online parent application, correct the information, and resubmit the application. If it is after the open application period in which the application was received, the application may be correctable in limited circumstances as described in the [Corrections if Income Documentation is Missing](#) section.

- 10) **Does the Federal 1040 tax form the parent provides for proof of income have to be signed?**

No. The Federal 1040 tax form should be signed, but the application is NOT ineligible if the Federal 1040 tax form is not signed.

11) Do the children on the Choice family application need to match the dependents on the Federal 1040 tax form?

No, they do not need to match. The children on the Choice family application may be different than the children on the family's tax return.

12) How should families from out of state or out of the country complete the income determination in the Online Parent Application and what supporting income documentation should the family provide?

The parents of students who are from out of the state or country that are applying to the Choice program must use the DPI income determination method when completing an application in the online parent application. These families cannot use the DOR income determination method since the DOR will not have any records for the parents. If the family is from a different country, the family will need to provide income documentation from their country of origin. If the family is unable to provide any income documentation, they must indicate that cash income was received and fill out the applicable information in the online parent application. If the family had no income, they must identify and provide support for any government assistance received and explain how basic needs were supplied.

13) If a parent identifies they received child support payments, what income documentation does the parent need to provide to the school?

Child support payments are not considered income or government assistance. No documentation is required for child support payments, because income documentation support is only required for income or government assistance. However, if the parent received alimony, it may be taxable. See the [explanation of income included in the income eligibility determination](#) section above for additional information.

14) The required income documentation section in the OAS Application Verification screen is blank. How should the school proceed with the verification?

If the parent(s) only identify cash income in the online parent application, the required income documentation section of the OAS Application Verification screen will be blank since the school does not need to obtain anything from the parent(s) for cash income. As a result, the school can check the box that they received the required income documentation.

15) How do I obtain a tax transcript for a parent?

Information on how to obtain tax transcripts is available on the IRS website at <https://www.irs.gov/individuals/get-transcript>.

16) Are students in subsidized guardianship considered to be in foster care?

Yes, students in subsidized guardianship are considered to be in foster care.

17) What is the required support if the parent received social security benefits? If the school determines the parent received social security income (SSI) rather than social security benefits, how should the school proceed?

If the parent received social security benefits, the support must be a 1099.

If the parent received SSI but indicated on the application that he or she received social security benefits, the parent must log back into the online parent application before the end of the open application period in which the application is received and change the income/benefits received to SSI. If not, the application must be determined ineligible.

18) What is the required support if the parent received SSI? If the school determines the parent received social security benefits rather than SSI, how should the school proceed?

If the parent received SSI, the support must be a government assistance statement showing SSI.

If the parent received social security benefits but indicated on the application that he or she received SSI, the parent must log back into the online parent application before the end of the open application period in which the application is received and change the income/benefits received to social security benefits. If not, the application must be determined ineligible.

19) How should the school proceed if the first and last name of the parent on the income documentation (including government assistance) does not match the parent name in OAS?

All supporting income documentation must include the legal first and last name of the parent. Differences due to punctuation, spacing, or capitalization do not need to be corrected. See the Application Verification and Corrections FAQ for information: (a) on how to make corrections if the parent name is incorrect in OAS or on the income documentation; and (b) for examples of what does and does not require a correction to OAS.

20) Is the address on the income documentation required to match the address on the OAS Application Verification screen?

If the parent is using the same document for income and residency documentation, the address must match. If the parent is using a different document for residency documentation, the address on the income documentation is not required to match the address in OAS. Because the income documentation is from the 2019 tax year, the family may have moved and the address on the income documentation may not match the address in OAS.