

Private School Choice Programs

Frequently Asked Questions for Parents – 2020-21 School Year

The state of Wisconsin has three programs that allow eligible students to attend a participating private school in grades four-year-old kindergarten (K4) to 12. The private school, on behalf of the student’s parent or guardian, receives a state aid payment for each eligible student. The three private school choice programs (Choice) are the 1) Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), 2) Racine Parental Choice Program (RPCP), and 3) Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP).

Student eligibility requirements, established by state law, vary depending on the program. Student eligibility is a combination of student residence, income, and age (for grades K4, K5, and 1). Generally, for the RPCP and WPCP, students must also be applying to certain grades or meet a prior year requirement. 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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1. How do I know which Choice program I am eligible to apply for?

Determination of which program a student is eligible and may participate is based on where the student lives at the time of application.

- **Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP):** the student must reside in the city of Milwaukee.

Note: The MPCP does not include other cities in Milwaukee County; it is only for residents of the city of Milwaukee. .

- **Racine Parental Choice Program (RPCP):** the student must reside in the Racine Unified School District.
- **Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP):** the student must reside in Wisconsin but outside of the city of Milwaukee and the Racine Unified School District. Residents of Milwaukee county cities that are not in the city of Milwaukee may apply to the WPCP.

2. How does a student qualify for the MPCP?

A student qualifies for the MPCP on the basis of their residency in the city of Milwaukee and their family income, if applicable. For the 2020-21 school year, a new student must have a family income at or below the amount listed in Table 1 below. Students must apply each year to continue in the program. However, a student continuing in any Choice program or a student that was on a MPCP waiting list at an MPCP school in the prior year does not have to prove income eligibility.

Family income includes the income of the student’s parent(s) or legal guardian(s) that reside in the same household as the student applicant. If the student’s parents/legal guardians are married, their income is reduced by \$7,000 when determining income eligibility for the program (*i.e. married family income minus \$7,000 is the income amount married families compare to the table below*). The family size includes parent/legal guardians on the application and their children by birth, marriage, or adoption, who reside in the same household as the student applicant(s) at the time of application.

**Table 1 – MPCP
300% of the Federal Poverty Level for 2020-21**

Family Size	Maximum Yearly Income
1	\$37,470
2	\$50,730
3	\$63,990
4	\$77,250
5	\$90,510
6	\$103,770

For each additional member add \$13,260.

3. How does someone qualify for the RPCP?

A student qualifies for the RPCP on the basis of their residency in the Racine Unified School District (RUSD) and their family income, if applicable. In addition, students applying for the RPCP must (1) be applying to grades K4, K5, 1 or 9 **OR** (2) meet one of the following requirements for the 2019-20 school year: (a) attended a public school in Wisconsin; (b) attended school in another state; (c) not enrolled in school (includes students that were homeschooled for the entire 2019-20 school year); (d) participated in the MPCP, RPCP or WPCP; or (e) on a MPCP, RPCP or WPCP waiting list.

For the 2020-21 school year, a new RPCP student must have a family income at or below the amount listed in Table 2 below. Students must apply each year to continue in the program. However, a student continuing in any Choice program or a student that was on an RPCP waiting list at an RPCP school in the prior year does not have to prove income eligibility.

Family income includes the income of the student's parent(s) or legal guardian(s) that reside in the same household as the student applicant. If the student's parents/legal guardians are married their income is reduced by \$7,000 when determining income eligibility for the program (*i.e. married family income minus \$7,000 is the income amount married families compare to the table below*). The family size includes parent/legal guardians on the application and their children by birth, marriage, or adoption, who reside in the same household as the student applicant(s) at the time of application.

Table 2 – RPCP
300% of the Federal Poverty Level for 2020-21

Family Size	Maximum Yearly Income
1	\$37,470
2	\$50,730
3	\$63,990
4	\$77,250
5	\$90,510
6	\$103,770

For each additional member add \$13,260

4. How does someone qualify for the WPCP?

A student qualifies for the WPCP on the basis of their residency and their family income, if applicable. Students must reside in Wisconsin, other than in the city of Milwaukee and Racine Unified School District. In addition, students applying for the WPCP must (1) be applying to grades K4, K5, 1 or 9; **OR** (2) meet one of the following requirements for the 2019-20 school year: (a) attended a public school in Wisconsin; (b) attended school in another state; (c) not enrolled in school (includes students that were homeschooled for the entire 2019-20 school year); (d) participated in the MPCP, RPCP or WPCP; (e) on a MPCP, RPCP or WPCP waiting list; **OR** (3) on any prior year WPCP waiting list in 2015-16 or later due to a school district enrollment cap.

For the 2020-21 school year, a new student must have a family income at or below the amount listed in Table 3. Students must apply each year to continue in the program. However, a student continuing in any Choice program or a student on the DPI's WPCP waiting list in the prior year does not have to prove income eligibility.

Family income includes the income of the student's parent(s) or legal guardian(s) that reside in the same household as the student applicant. If the student's parents/legal guardians are married their income is reduced by \$7,000 when determining income eligibility for the program (*i.e. married family income minus \$7,000 is the income amount married families compare to the table on the next page*). The family size includes parent/legal guardians on the application and their children by birth, marriage, or adoption, who reside in the same household as the student applicant(s) at the time of application.

220% of the Federal Poverty Level for 2020-21

Family Size	Maximum Yearly Income
1	\$27,478
2	\$37,202
3	\$46,926
4	\$56,650
5	\$66,374
6	\$76,098

For each additional member add \$9,724

5. How does a student apply for the MPCP?

Each year parents must, during an open application period, complete the online parent application available through the following webpage: dpi.wi.gov/choice. An email address is required to use the online system. Parents must provide residency documentation and income documentation, if applicable, to the school(s) they apply to during the application period or the application is ineligible. Students continuing in any of the Choice programs or on the MPCP waiting list in the prior year do not need to meet the income limits. New students will have to provide income documentation showing the student meets the income requirements. Parents/guardians may either: (a) provide their social security numbers or taxpayer identification number and have the Department of Revenue determine whether the student is income eligible for the program; or (b) use the Department of Public Instruction's income determination method by answering a series of income questions in the online parent application and providing paper income documentation to the school(s) during the open application period. The school will verify that the student meets the income requirements.

Choice schools must inform parents (a) how many Choice program slots are open by grade level; (b) the date, if necessary, of a lottery to select Choice students if more applications are received than there are Choice slots available; and (c) within 60 days of the end of the application period during which the student's application is received, whether or not the student has been accepted into the Choice program. Applicants must also provide proof of residency directly to the schools during the open application period. A student can apply to the Choice program at one or more schools during the open application periods.

6. How does a student apply for the RPCP?

Each year parents must, during an open application period, complete the online parent application available through the following webpage: dpi.wi.gov/choice. An email address is required to use the online system. Parents must provide residency documentation and income documentation, if applicable, to the school(s) they apply to during the application period or the application is ineligible. Students continuing in any of the Choice programs or on the RPCP waiting list in the prior year do not need to meet the income limits. New students will have to provide income documentation showing the student meets the income requirements. Parents/guardians may either: (a) provide their social security numbers or taxpayer identification number and have the Department of Revenue determine whether the student is income eligible for the program; or (b) use the Department of Public Instruction's income determination method by answering a series of income questions in the online parent application and providing paper income documentation to the school(s) during the open application period. The school will verify that the student meets the income requirements.

Choice schools must inform parents (a) how many Choice program slots are open by grade level; (b) the date, if necessary, of a lottery to select Choice students if more applications are received than there are Choice slots available; and (c) within 60 days of the end of the application period during which the student's application is received, whether or not the student has been accepted into the Choice program. Applicants must also provide proof of residency directly to the schools during the open application period. A student can apply to the Choice program at one or more schools during the open application periods.

7. How does a student apply for the WPCP?

Each year, parents must complete the online parent application available through the following webpage: dpi.wi.gov/choice. Parents must provide residency documentation and income documentation, if applicable, to the school(s) they apply to during the application period or the application is ineligible. Students continuing in any of the Choice programs or on the WPCP waiting list in the prior year do not need to meet the income limits. New students will have to prove income eligibility. Additionally, applicants for the WPCP will have to indicate which of the prior year school attendance requirements they meet. Parents/guardians may either: (a) provide their social security numbers or taxpayer identification number and have the Department of Revenue determine whether the student is income eligible for the program; or (b) use the Department of Public Instruction’s income determination method by answering a series of income questions in the on-line parent application and providing paper income documentation to the school(s) as directed in the application during the open application period. The school will verify that the student meets the income requirements.

Applicants must also provide proof of residency directly to the schools during the open application period. A student can apply to the Choice program at one or more schools during the open application period.

8. When are the Choice schools’ open application periods?

The open application periods vary by Choice program. Each MPCP and RPCP school decides in which of the months listed below it will accept Choice student applications. Applicants are required to submit the Choice application and proof of eligibility during the school’s open application period(s) in which they apply. Parents are encouraged to apply during the school’s earliest open application period. For a listing of the open application period(s) in which each school in the MPCP and RPCP will participate, please see the list of schools intending to participate in the program which is available on the website at dpi.wi.gov/choice.

2020-21 Choice Program Open Application Periods

<p>MPCP Open Application Periods February 3 – February 20 March 1 – March 20 April 1 – April 20 May 1 – May 20 June 1 – June 22 July 1 – July 20 August 1 – August 20 September 1 – September 14 October 1 – October 20 November 1 – November 20 December 1 – January 5</p>	<p>RPCP Open Application Periods February 3 – February 20 March 1 – March 20 April 1 – April 20 May 1 – May 20 June 1 – June 22 July 1 – July 20 August 1 – August 20 September 1 – September 14</p>
	<p>WPCP Open Application Period February 3 – April 16</p>

9. Is there a pupil participation limit for the WPCP?

For the 2020-21 school year, state law mandates that no more than 5% of the pupil membership of a public school district may participate in the WPCP. The DPI will conduct a random drawing of eligible applications. DPI will also notify parents of pupil acceptance and establish a waiting list for students not selected in the random drawing. This pupil participation limit does not apply to either the MPCP or the RPCP.

10. What information can the private schools use in admitting or denying admission to students into the Choice program?

The only information private schools can use to determine eligibility for the Choice program is family income, prior year attendance, residency, and age of students entering grades K4, K5, and 1. Information about an applicant that a school may not use during the admissions process for the Choice program includes but is not limited to an applicant's race, ethnic background, religion, prior test scores, grades, recommendations or membership in the church or parish. Choice schools must accept all eligible Choice applications during each open application period the school is participating in. For the MPCP and the RPCP, the school must, at the end of the application period, have a random drawing to select the Choice students if there are more eligible Choice applications submitted than slots available. DPI will conduct the random drawing for the WPCP.

11. What fees and tuition are the schools allowed to charge Choice students?

Fees: A school may charge choice students (MPCP, RPCP and WPCP students), regardless of their income, fees to recover the cost of the following as set forth in statute:

- a) Personal use items, such as uniforms, gym clothes, and towels.
- b) Social and extracurricular activities if not necessary to the private school's curriculum.
- c) Musical instruments.
- d) Meals consumed by pupils of the private school.
- e) High school classes that are not required for graduation and for which no credits toward graduation are given.
- f) Transportation.
- g) Before-school and after-school child care.
- h) Room and board at the private school.

Per Wisconsin law, a private school may not prohibit an eligible pupil from attending the private school, expel or otherwise discipline the pupil, or withhold or reduce the pupil's grades because the pupil or the pupil's parent or guardian cannot pay or has not paid fees as allowed.

Tuition: A private school may not charge or receive any additional tuition payments for a Choice student in grades kindergarten through 8. However, a private school may, in addition to the state aid payment it receives, charge a Choice student tuition in an amount determined by the school if both of the following apply: (a) the student is in grades 9 through 12; and (b) the family income of the student exceeds 220% of the federal poverty level as listed in Table 4. If the student's parents/legal guardians are married, their income is reduced by \$7,000 when determining income for tuition purposes (*i.e. married family income minus \$7,000 is the income amount married families compare to the table below*). The private school makes the determination whether the school can charge tuition to a student in grades 9 through 12. The private school must establish a process for accepting appeals to the governing body related to the school's determination to charge tuition to a student based on the student's family income.

**Table 4- Continuing 9-12 Grade Students
Tuition Income Requirements
220% of the Federal Poverty Level for 2020-21**

Family Size	Yearly Income Must Exceed
1	\$27,478
2	\$37,202
3	\$46,926
4	\$56,650
5	\$66,374
6	\$76,098

For each additional member add \$9,724.

12. Can a school require parents to raise funds or volunteer time?

A school may ask a parent to raise funds for or contribute volunteer time to the school, but cannot require it as a condition of admission or impose any penalties on a parent or student in the Choice program for failure to participate in fundraising activities or volunteer time.

13. How do the parent and private school receive state aid payments?

The state will issue payments payable to the Choice school where the student is enrolled in the Choice program. The first two payments (in September and November) are sent to the school where the student is enrolled and attending on the 3rd Friday in September. The second two payments (in February and May) are sent to the school where the student is enrolled and attending on the 2nd Friday in January.

14. How much is the state aid per student in the Choice program?

For the 2020-21 school year, the state aid for a student enrolled full-time in the Choice program (defined as enrolled in the Choice program and in attendance on both the 3rd Friday in September and the 2nd Friday in January) is \$8,300 for students in grades K-8 and \$8,946 for students in grades 9-12.

15. Is transportation available for students in the Choice program?

A private Choice school is not required to provide transportation to Choice students. If a private school notifies the school district of the school's attendance area and the names and addresses of its students for the following school year, in some cases the school district will provide transportation or reimburse parents' transportation costs in part. If the school district is not required to provide transportation for the Choice student, and the Choice school chooses to provide transportation, the Choice school may charge the parent or guardian a fee for the service. Parents should check with the Choice school where their student hopes to attend and with the school district to determine what transportation options are available at the school, if any.

16. Is a student in the Choice program at a private religious school required to participate in religious activities or instruction?

No. If a Choice student's parent or guardian submits to the student's teacher or the school's principal a written request that the student be excused from any religious activity, the teacher and school must honor that request.

17. Is a private Choice school required to enroll a student with special needs in the Choice program, and to provide the child with whatever services are required to allow the child to learn?

A private school may not discriminate against a student with special educational needs during the admissions process for the Choice program. However, as a private school, a Choice school is required to offer only those services to assist students with special needs that it can provide with minor adjustments. Parents should contact the Choice school during the admission process about the services the school is able to provide for their student. Parents should also contact the school district in which the private school is located for more information on the services the school district provides to students with special needs who are enrolled in the public schools and the lesser services that the school district provides students with special needs who are enrolled in private schools.

18. Are there procedures regarding student suspensions and expulsions that a private Choice school is required to follow?

Yes. State law requires private Choice schools to have written procedures in place regarding student suspensions and expulsions, including procedures for appealing a suspension or expulsion. Parents should check with the Choice school they are considering for their student, regarding procedures the school has in place. Choice schools are required to provide parents with a copy of these and certain other school policies at the time of application.

19. Can a student transfer from the Choice program at one school to another school in the same Choice program at any time?

No. A student may transfer from the Choice program at one school to another only during a school's open application periods and only if the second school has a Choice seat available. The student's parent or guardian must complete and submit a Choice application with proof of residency to the second school during an open application period the school offers. If a student transfers during the school year, the state aid for the student will be sent to the school where the student is enrolled and in attendance on the two count dates (3rd Friday in September and 2nd Friday in January). A Choice-eligible student can transfer from the Choice program at one school to the Choice program at another school between school years, but must apply during open application periods. If there are more applications than available seats, the Choice transfer is not guaranteed a seat at the new Choice school.

20. Can a student change Choice schools if the student moves?

Students that participate in the WPCP and move to the city of Milwaukee or the Racine Unified School District may apply as continuing students to the MPCP or RPCP, but must do so by submitting an application to the MPCP or RPCP school during an open application period that the MPCP or RPCP school offers and must provide applicable residency documentation. Note: if a WPCP student moves to the city of Milwaukee or the Racine Unified School District after the end of the WPCP application period and will continue to attend the same school, the parent should contact the school directly regarding information needed.

Students that applied to the WPCP who move between April 21 and the 3rd Friday in August may transfer their application to another WPCP school if the private school to which the application would be transferred has space available and if the student: (1) was determined eligible to participate in the WPCP for the 2020-21 school year; (2) continues to reside in a Wisconsin school district, other than in the city of Milwaukee and Racine Unified School District; and (3) resides in a school district that has not exceeded its school district enrollment cap. The parent must contact the school directly regarding eligibility for this type of school change.

Students that participate in the MPCP that move outside of the city of Milwaukee and wish to apply for either the RPCP or WPCP may apply as continuing students during an open application period that the RPCP school offers or during the WPCP application period and must provide applicable residency documentation.

Students that participate in the RPCP that move outside of the Racine Unified School District and wish to apply for either the MPCP or WPCP may apply as continuing students during an open application period that the MPCP school offers or during the WPCP application period and must provide applicable residency documentation.

If a student changes schools during the school year, the state aid for the student will be sent to the school where the student is enrolled and in attendance on the two count dates (3rd Friday in September and 2nd Friday in January).

21. Can a Choice school withhold grades, student records, or a high school diploma for any reason?

No, a Choice school may not withhold grades or student records from a student for any reason, including failure to pay any required fees. A Choice school must issue a high school diploma or certificate to each Choice student who attends the school and satisfactorily completes the course of instruction and any other requirements necessary for high school graduation. A Choice school is also required to provide a copy of a choice student's records upon request from the student's parent or guardian.

22. What are the requirements a private Choice school must follow regarding transfer of Choice student records to the parent or guardian or to another private or public school?

Choice schools are required to send student records to another school district or school (including private Choice schools) within 5 working days of receiving written notice from the student or the parent of a minor student that the student intends to enroll in the other school.

Upon request, a Choice school must provide a student or the parent of a minor student who is attending the school

with a copy of the student's progress records. Progress records mean those student records which include the student's grades, a statement of the courses the student has taken, the student's attendance record, the student's immunization records, any lead screening records required under state law and records of the student's school extracurricular activities.

A Choice school must maintain progress records for each Choice student while the student attends the school and, unless the school ceases operation, for at least five years after the student ceases to attend the school. A Choice school that ceases operating must either; (1) transfer all progress records for Choice students to the school district in which the private school is located and send written notice to each student or the parent or guardian of a minor student that the records have been transferred, or (2) transfer the Choice student's records to an affiliated organization that will maintain the progress records for at least five years if the student or the parent of a minor student consents in writing to the release of the progress records to the affiliated organization.

23. Is there an opportunity for parents to meet with the school's governing board?

Yes. The school is required to have at least two meetings a year for the parents to meet with the governing board. The school must notify parents at least 30 days prior to the meeting. Parents may also ask the school for the dates the meetings will be held.

If you have any questions that are not included here, e-mail them to PrivateSchoolChoice@dpi.wi.gov or call toll free 1-888-245-2732 ext. 3.