

Private School Choice Programs

Frequently Asked Questions – 2016-17 School Year

The state of Wisconsin manages three separate programs that allow eligible students to attend a participating private school. The private school, on behalf of the pupil’s parent or guardian, receives a state aid payment for each eligible student. The three private school choice programs (Choice) are the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), Racine Parental Choice Program (RPCP), and Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP).

Student eligibility, which is established by state law, varies for each program. Student eligibility is a combination of student residence, income and prior year attendance. There is also an age requirement that must be met for grades K4, K, and 1.

1. How do I know which Choice program I am eligible to apply for?

You determine which of the three Choice programs to apply to based on where the family lives at the time of application.

- To apply for the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), the student must reside in the city of Milwaukee. Note: this does not include the other cities in Milwaukee County. Only residents of the city of Milwaukee may apply to the MPCP.
- To apply for the Racine Parental Choice Program (RPCP), the family must reside in the Racine Unified School District.
- To apply for the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP), the family must reside outside of the city of Milwaukee and outside of the Racine Unified School District. Residents of Milwaukee county cities that are not the city of Milwaukee may apply to the WPCP.

2. How does someone qualify for the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (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 2016-17 school year, a new student must have a family income at or below the amount listed in the Table 1. A student continuing in the program or a student that was on a MPCP waiting list at a MPCP school in the prior year does not have to show income eligibility. Family income includes the income of the child’s parent(s) or legal guardian(s) that reside in the same household as the student applicant. If the child’s parents/legal guardians are married their income is reduced by \$7,000 when determining income eligibility for the program. Family size includes parents/guardians and their children by birth, marriage or adoption that reside in the same household as the student applicant.

Table 1
300% of the Federal Poverty Level for 2016-17

<u>Family Size</u>	<u>Maximum Yearly Income</u>
1	\$35,628
2	\$48,219
3	\$60,810
4	\$73,401
5	\$85,992
6	\$98,583
For each additional member add \$12,591.	

3. How does someone qualify for the Racine Parental Choice Program (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. Additionally, pupils in the RPCP must meet at least one of the prior year school attendance requirements: (1) been enrolled in a public school in Wisconsin in the 2015-16 school year, (2) have not been enrolled in school in the 2015-16 school year, (3) be applying for kindergarten, first or ninth grade at the private school in the 2016-17 school year or (4) participated in the RPCP in the 2015-16 school year. For the 2016-17 school year, a new RPCP student must have a family income at or below the amount listed in the Table 2 below. A student continuing in the program or a student that was on a RPCP waiting list at a RPCP school in the prior year does not have to prove income eligibility. Family income includes the income of the child’s parent(s) or legal guardian(s) that reside in the same household as the student applicant. If the child’s parents/legal guardians are married their income is reduced by \$7,000 when determining income eligibility for the program. Family size includes parents/guardians and their children by birth, marriage or adoption that reside in the same household as the student applicant.

Table 2
300% of the Federal Poverty Level for 2016-17

<u>Family Size</u>	<u>Maximum Yearly Income</u>
1	\$35,628
2	\$48,219
3	\$60,810
4	\$73,401
5	\$85,992
6	\$98,583

For each additional member add \$12,591.

4. How does someone qualify for the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP)?

A student qualifies for the WPCP on the basis of their residency and their family income, if applicable. Students must reside in a Wisconsin school district, other than in the city of Milwaukee and Racine Unified School District. Additionally, pupils in the WPCP must meet at least one of the prior year school attendance requirements: (1) been enrolled in a public school in Wisconsin in the 2015-16 school year, (2) have not been enrolled in school in the 2015-16 school year, (3) be applying for kindergarten, first or ninth grade at the private school in the 2016-17 school year or (4) participated in the WPCP in the 2015-16 school year. For the 2016-17 school year, a new student must have a family income at or below the amount listed in the Table 3 below. Students who participated in the WPCP in 2015-16 or were on the DPI’s waiting list in 2015-16 are not required to prove that they are income eligible. Family income includes the income of the child’s parent(s) or legal guardian(s) that reside in the same household as the student applicant. If the child’s parents/legal guardians are married their income is reduced by \$7,000 when determining income eligibility for the program. Family size includes parents/guardians and their children by birth, marriage or adoption that reside in the same household as the student applicant.

Table 3
185% of the Federal Poverty Level for 2016-17

<u>Family Size</u>	<u>Yearly Income</u>
1	\$21,971
2	\$29,735
3	\$37,499
4	\$45,263
5	\$53,027
6	\$60,791

For each additional member add \$7,764.

5. How does a student apply for the MPCP?

Parents must complete the on-line student application available through the following webpage: <https://apps4.dpi.wi.gov/ChoiceParent>. 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. New students, not continuing in the program or on a choice waiting list at a choice school in the prior year, will have to also provide income documentation. Parents/guardians may either: (a) provide their social security numbers or taxpayer identification number to the school 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 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 receiving the student's completed application, whether or not the child 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?

Parents must complete the on-line student application available through the following webpage: <https://apps4.dpi.wi.gov/ChoiceParent>. 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. New students, not continuing in the program or on a choice waiting list at a choice school in the prior year, will have to also provide income documentation. Additionally, applicants for the RPCP will have to indicate which of the school attendance requirements they meet. Parents/guardians may either: (a) provide their social security numbers or taxpayer identification number to the school 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 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 receiving the student's completed application, whether or not the child 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?

The application period for the 2016-17 school year is from **February 1 – April 20th, 2016. Late applications will not be accepted for any reason.** Parents must complete the on-line student application available through the following webpage: <https://apps4.dpi.wi.gov/ChoiceParent>. 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. Additionally, applicants for the WPCP will have to indicate which of the school attendance requirements they meet. Parents/guardians may either: (a) provide their social security numbers or taxpayer identification number to the school 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 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 periods.

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

The open application periods vary by choice program. Each MPCP and RPCP school decides which of the months listed below it will accept Choice student applications. Applicants are required to submit the Choice application and proof of eligibility only during the school's open application period(s). An application received outside a school's designated open application period(s) or not completed (including failure to provide income or residency verification) by the end of the specific application period will be considered ineligible. 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 in, please see the list of schools intending to participate in the program which is available on the website at <http://dpi.wi.gov/sms/choice-programs/student-applications> or request a list by phone (toll free 888-245-2732).

2016-17 Choice Program Open Application Periods

MPCP	RPCP	WPCP
February 1-22	February 1-22	February 1 – April 20
March 1-21	March 1-21	
April 1-20	April 1-20	
May 1-20	May 1-20	
June 1-20	June 1-20	
July 1-20	July 1-20	
August 1-22	August 1-22	
September 1-14	September 1-14	
October 1-20		
November 1-21		
December 1- January 9		

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

For the 2016-17 school year, state law mandates that no more than 1% 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 the MPCP and 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 parish. Choice schools must accept all eligible Choice applications during each open application period the school is participating in for the 2016-17 school year. 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.

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. 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
220% of the Federal Poverty Level for 2016-17

<u>Family Size</u>	<u>Maximum Yearly Income</u>
1	\$26,127
2	\$35,360
3	\$44,593
4	\$53,826
5	\$63,059
6	\$72,292

For each additional member add \$9,233.

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 child in the Choice program for failure to participate in fundraising activities or volunteer time.

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

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

14. How much is the state aid per student in the Choice program and what can the school spend that state aid on?

For the 2016-17 school year, the estimated 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 \$7,323 for pupils in grades K-8 and \$7,969 for pupils 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 pupil, 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 child hopes to attend and with the school district to determine what transportation options are available at the school, if any.

16. Is a child 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 child 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 child 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 child. 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 children with special needs who are enrolled in the public schools and the lesser services that the school district provides children with special needs who are enrolled in private schools.

18. Are there statutory 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 child, 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 child transfer from the Choice program at one school to the Choice program at another school at any time?

No. A child 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 child is enrolled and in attendance on the two count dates (3rd Friday in September and 2nd Friday in January). A Choice-eligible child 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.

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.

Students that participate in the MPCP that move outside of the city of Milwaukee and wish to apply for either the RPCP or WPCP must apply as new students and provide both income and 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 must apply as new students and provide both income and residency documentation.

20. Can a school withhold grades, pupil records, or a high school diploma for any reason?

No, a Choice school may not withhold grades or pupil 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 pupil's records upon request from the pupil's parent or guardian.

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

Choice schools are required to send pupil records to another school district or school (including private Choice schools) within 5 working days of receiving written notice from the pupil 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.

22. 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.

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.