

Choice Scholarship Program
Getting Started: How Schools Can Participate
2017-2018 School Year

- 1) Read through the materials at <http://www.doe.in.gov/choice>, especially the *FAQ for Schools* document as a starting point. These materials provide important background on rules and requirements for participating schools.
- 2) If your school is not currently accredited by the State Board or a Board-recognized entity, you must complete the appropriate process for accreditation. Accreditation is a program requirement (IC 20-51-1-4.7). Schools in the process of accreditation will not be allowed to participate. Schools with accreditation that expires before or during the school year must provide proof of renewal. For accreditation related questions, please contact the Department's Office of Accountability and Accreditation at (317) 232-6610.
- 3) Complete the school application process. Fill out the *School Application Form*. Please email this document along with a copy of the school's 2017-2018 tuition and fees policy, including your policy for tuition discounts, admissions policy, Special Education Assurance Form, Choice School Contacts Form, and proof of accreditation, if the school is not accredited by the Department, as a single pdf to choiceschool@doe.in.gov.
- 4) Schools will be sent a letter by email when the Department approves their application and the school's name will appear on the Department's website as a resource for parents. The letter will include the next steps the school should take to fully enroll in the Choice Scholarship Program.
- 5) Review the following documents available on the Choice website in preparation for submitting student applications:
 - *Student Eligibility Criteria*
 - *Household Income Limits*
 - *Income Verification Rules*
- 6) Be sure that your school has a lottery process in place; IC 20-51-4-3(c) says that if a school receives more Choice Scholarship applications for enrollment than spaces that the school has available, then the school shall hold a lottery of those students who met the criteria for admission. The preceding subsection states that a school shall apply its written admissions policy fairly and without discrimination (IC 20-51-4-3(b)). The Department interprets that these two provisions operate together such that:
 - A school may make its admissions decisions prior to and independent of the lottery. If a school's written admissions policy states that preference shall be given to church members, then the school may apply that policy so long as it is applied fairly and without discrimination.
 - If, after offers of admission have been made to students according to the admissions policy, a school has more Choice Scholarship Students who seek to

- actually enroll by the school's enrollment date than the number of spaces that the school has available, then the school shall hold a lottery.
- If a lottery is held, the only students who may be excluded from the lottery process and given preference for enrollment are students who 1) have siblings enrolled at the school; or 2) students who attended the school in the prior year.
 - After the lottery date has passed, the school may continue to admit students via a first-come, first-served basis until desired capacity has been reached. However, 'first-come, first-served' implies that the school has first admitted any students who were part of the lottery pool that the school did not originally have room for.
 - A sample lottery is available on Learning Connection, in the files and bookmarks tab in the Choice Scholarship Community.
- 7) Be sure that you have a means of quickly communicating with parents or legal guardians of students that are approved for a Choice Scholarship. Parents or legal guardians are required to complete Endorsement Forms authorizing the Department to make the scholarship payment to the participating Choice School on the student's behalf.
- 8) Make sure that there are one or more points of contact available at the school who are familiar with the program. This is important for several reasons:
- Schools are required by law to "promptly" provide parents with their child's ISTEP+ scores. The State Board interprets this as one week from the date scores are sent by the Department.
 - The volume of information is such that any staff turnover/transitions at the school could increase the possibility of a deadline being missed if the deadline falls within the transition.
- 9) Please maintain up to date contact information on file with the Department. If any changes need to be made to your school's contact information, please email the changes to choiceschool@doe.in.gov.

Learning Connection

- The Choice Scholarship Department strongly encourages all school and corporation staff to join the Learning Connection. Information about the Choice Scholarship Program, including announcements about Program updates and important dates, is posted in the Choice Scholarship Community on the Learning Connection.
- To join the Learning Connection community, sign up at www.learningconnection.doe.in.gov. Once you have logged in, click on "my communities" under "Contacts & Communities" and search for "Choice Scholarship" under "Find a Community". We also recommend joining the School Accountability and Data Collection communities.
- Schools can find announcements from the each of these divisions as well as resources on different areas in the files and bookmarks folders. Please contact choiceschool@doe.in.gov if you need help accessing these communities.