

**Choice Scholarship Program
Parent and Student FAQ
2019-2020 School Year**

Information contained in this document reflects current law and may be subject to change after the current session of the Indiana General Assembly.

General Questions

1. What is the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program?

The Choice Scholarship Program provides State funding to qualifying students that is used to help offset tuition costs at participating Choice schools. Students qualify based on student eligibility criteria. (Please see Eligibility Questions below.)

2. Who administers the Choice Scholarship Program?

The Indiana Department of Education, Office of School Finance, administers the Choice Scholarship Program.

3. When and where can I apply for the program?

Student applications may be submitted between March 1 and September 1, 2019 for the upcoming school year. Only an approved Choice school may submit a Choice Scholarship student application. Student applications are submitted electronically by the Choice school to the Indiana Department of Education.

4. Which schools participate in the Choice Scholarship Program?

A list of participating schools can be found on the program website at www.doe.in.gov/choice.

5. Can a Choice Scholarship be transferred to another school during the school year?

No. The Choice Scholarship is specific to a student as well as to a school. The scholarship is terminated when the student is withdrawn from the school.

Eligibility Questions

1. What are the student eligibility criteria?

To be eligible, a student must first satisfy each of the following requirements:

- (a) Have legal settlement in Indiana
- (b) Be between the ages of 5 and 22 no later than August 1 of the school year

After satisfying the requirements listed above, there are eight different tracks that enable a student to be eligible to participate in the Choice Scholarship Program. The eight tracks are outlined below. A student must satisfy the requirements of only one of the eight tracks to be eligible. A complete explanation of each of the eight eligibility tracks can be found in the documents explaining each track posted at www.doe.in.gov/choice, in the Student Eligibility section.

Continuing Choice Scholarship Student Track

- i. The student received a Choice Scholarship in the school year that immediately precedes the school year for which the student is applying for a Choice Scholarship;
- ii. The student is required to have remained enrolled at the Choice school for the entirety of the **immediately preceding school year**; and

- iii. The student is a member of a household with an annual income equal to or below 200% of the amount to qualify for the Federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program.

Previous Choice Scholarship Student Track

EITHER

- i. The student received a Choice Scholarship in a previous school year that does not immediately precede the school year for which the student is applying for Choice Scholarship;

OR

- ii. The student received a Choice Scholarship in the immediately preceding school year, but the student exited the Choice school prior to the end of the school year;

AND

- iii. The student is a member of a household with an annual income equal to or below 150% of the amount to qualify for the Federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program.

Previous Scholarship Granting Organization (SGO) Award Track

- i. The student received an SGO Scholarship in a previous school year, including a school year that does not immediately precede the school year for which the student is applying for a Choice Scholarship. The approved Scholarship Granting Organizations (SGOs) are:

- Community Foundation of Elkhart County
- Institute for Quality Education, Inc. (Formerly Educational Choice Charitable Trust)
- LaGrange County Community Foundation, Inc.
- Professional Athletes of Indiana
- Sagamore Institute Scholarships for Education Choice
- School Scholarship Granting Organization of Northeast Indiana
- The Lutheran Scholarship Granting Organization of Indiana
- Tuition Assistance Fund of Southwestern Indiana (Closed February 2013)

AND

- ii. The student is a member of a household with an annual income equal to or below 150% of the amount to qualify for the Federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program.

Special Education Track

- i. The student has a disability that requires special education services;
- ii. An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) pursuant to IC 20-35 or a Service Plan (SP) pursuant to 511 IAC 7-34 has been developed for the student; and
- iii. The student is a member of a household with an annual income equal to or below 200% of the amount to qualify for the Federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program.

"F" Public School Track

- i. The student would be required to attend a specific public school based on his/her residence that has been assigned an "F" grade. The list of "F" schools for Choice Scholarship eligibility is posted prior to the beginning of the school year; and
- ii. The student is a member of a household with an annual income equal to or below 150% of the amount to qualify for the Federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program.

Two Semesters in a Public School Track

- i. The student was enrolled in kindergarten through grade 12 in a public school, including a charter school, in Indiana for at least two semesters immediately preceding the first semester for which the individual receives a Choice Scholarship; and
- ii. The student is a member of a household with an annual income equal to or below 150% of the amount to qualify for the Federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program.

Sibling Track

- i. The sibling of the newly applying student received either a Choice Scholarship or an SGO Scholarship in a previous school year, including a school year that does not immediately precede the school year for which the student is applying for a Choice Scholarship; and
- ii. The student is a member of a household with an annual income equal to or below 150% of the amount to qualify for the Federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program.

Pre-K Track

- i. The student received and used an Early Education Grant under IC 12-17.2-7.2 to attend Pre-K at an eligible Choice school;
- ii. The student is applying for a Choice Scholarship at the same Choice school in which they attended Pre-K with an Early Education Grant; and
- iii. The student is a member of a household with an annual income equal to or below 69% of the amount to qualify for the Federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program (127% of the federal poverty level).

2. Can a kindergarten student be eligible for a Choice Scholarship?

Yes, a parent/guardian of a kindergarten student may apply for a Choice Scholarship provided that the child meets the requirements of one of the eight tracks listed above.

3. If a child attends a public school for kindergarten, can this count toward the two semesters in a public school requirement?

Yes, providing the student was enrolled at a public school in kindergarten for the two semesters immediately preceding the first semester for which the student receives a Choice Scholarship.

4. What does "sibling" mean for purposes of the Choice Scholarship Program?

For purposes of the Choice Scholarship Program, the term "sibling" means one of two or more individuals having one or both parents, legal guardians, or legal custodians in common. The term does not require a consanguineous (blood) relationship between the individuals.

5. When did the sibling of a student attempting to qualify under the Sibling Track have to receive a Choice Scholarship or SGO award for the sibling to be eligible?

To be eligible under the Sibling Track, the student's sibling must have received a Choice Scholarship or SGO award in any previous school year. This means that, for the 2019-2020 school year, the sibling must have received the Choice Scholarship or SGO award in any year up to and including the 2018-2019 school year.

6. What are the household income limits?

The income guidelines for the 2019-2020 school year are included on the Choice Scholarship Eligibility Track documents. These are posted on the Choice Scholarship Program website at www.doe.in.gov/choice in the Student Eligibility section.

7. Is the household income of the foster parent included when determining whether the foster child is eligible to receive a Choice Scholarship?

No. Foster children are automatically income eligible for the Choice Scholarship Program. Official documentation of the student's current foster status must be kept in his/her file. Foster children must satisfy the criteria for student eligibility and meet the requirements of one of the tracks to qualify for a Choice

If the household includes biological or adopted children in addition to foster children, payments received for serving as a foster parent will not be included in the household income calculation for purposes of determining eligibility for the biological or adopted children.

8. **What counts as income and who should be included in the household size?**

For questions about determining income and household size, please contact the Choice school. The school will assist with questions and provide guidance specific to your circumstances.

Application Process

1. **Who is responsible for determining whether a student is eligible for a Choice Scholarship?**

The participating Choice school is responsible for determining whether a student meets the eligibility guidelines. Parent/guardian of the student must provide documentation establishing eligibility, which must be kept on file at the school.

2. **How is the amount of the Choice Scholarship award determined?**

The award is the lesser of:

1. Tuition and fees at the Choice school; or
2. An amount based off the per-student State funding formula for the student's school corporation of residence, determined as follows:
 - 90% of the formula amount if household income is up to 69% of Reduced Lunch eligibility (127% of the Federal poverty level) **if the student is eligible under the Pre-K Track.**
 - 90% of the formula amount if household income is up to 100% of Reduced Lunch eligibility for students who are eligible under all Tracks except the Pre-K Track.
 - 50% of the formula amount if household income is up to 150% of Reduced Lunch eligibility.
 - 50% of the formula amount if household income is up to 200% of Reduced Lunch eligibility **if the student is eligible under the Continuing Choice Scholarship Student Track or Special Education Track.**

3. **Where can I review the Choice Scholarship award amounts?**

The award amounts for each school corporation are available on the Choice Scholarship Program website at www.doe.in.gov/choice in the section for Parents/Guardians. Refer to the school corporation in which the student lives in order to determine the estimated award amount.

5. **How will families be notified of the Choice Scholarship awarded to their child?**

The school will print the award letter or the denial letter at the time the application is submitted. The initial award letter is an estimated award amount. The actual award amounts are calculated using information that is not available until later in the school year. An updated award letter with final award amounts will be available to the Choice school when the public tuition support payment amounts are final. Families should retain copies of all forms and letters.

6. **Can a parent/guardian of a student submit an application for a Choice Scholarship to multiple schools?**

A student can only have one application submitted to one school at a time. If a parent/guardian wishes to apply at a different school, the parent/guardian must withdraw the student's application at the original Choice school and submit an application at the preferred Choice school.

7. **Why are siblings living in the same household sometimes required to use different income guidelines for eligibility?**

The Choice Scholarship is a student level award, and each student must meet the income guidelines that are applicable to the track under which the student qualifies.

Tuition and Fees

1. **Can participating schools charge tuition and fees in addition to what is covered by the Choice Scholarship award?**

Yes. The parent/guardian is responsible for any tuition and fees that the participating school charges beyond the Choice Scholarship award amount. A parent/guardian should carefully read any agreement signed at a participating school. A Choice school is not allowed to charge Choice Scholarship students additional fees and costs that are not routinely charged to non-Choice eligible students.

2. **Will the Choice school receive additional funding if a student receives special education services?**

The parent or guardian of an eligible special education student will designate either the Choice school or the public school corporation as the special education service provider. If the Choice school is selected as the service provider, the Choice school will be eligible to receive the State special education funding allocated for that student. This funding is to be used to provide special education services for the eligible student. For more information on the Choice Scholarship Program and special education, please review the Choice Scholarship and Special Education Services FAQ available on the Choice Scholarship Program website at www.doe.in.gov/choice.

Attendance and Payment Process

1. **Can a student receive a Choice Scholarship after the school year has already begun?**

To be awarded a Choice Scholarship, a complete application must be submitted for the student by the September 1 application deadline and the student must be fully enrolled and expected in attendance on the September count day.

2. **Can a student who has been withdrawn from their Choice school return to the same Choice school at a later date in the school year and continue to receive his/her Choice Scholarship award?**

At the time a student is withdrawn from the Choice school, the parent/guardian forfeits the remaining portion the student's Choice Scholarship award. The student is no longer eligible to receive Choice Scholarship funds for the remainder of the school year.

3. **How will the payment process work? Is there anything I need to do once school starts?**

The parent/guardian plays a very important role in the payment process. The Choice Scholarship award is designated by the parent/guardian to be paid directly to the participating Choice school on the student's behalf. At the time of application, the Choice school will download and print a Choice Scholarship Endorsement Form. The Endorsement Form must be signed and dated by the parent/guardian. Without the completed Endorsement Form, the State will not make a payment for that student.

4. **What happens to the payment if the student is withdrawn before the school year is over? Are there any costs to the family beyond what is covered by the Choice Scholarship?**

At the time a student is withdrawn from the Choice school, the parent/guardian forfeits the remaining portion the student's Choice Scholarship award. The student is no longer eligible to receive Choice Scholarship Award funds for the remainder of the school year.

Knowing the participating school's policies concerning student withdrawal and tuition payment is important. Individual school policies vary and may require that tuition and fee costs be paid for the full month for which the student withdraws or even for the full semester. In accordance with the school's policy, the family may be responsible for any unpaid tuition resulting from the State's process of prorating payments.

School Scholarship Tax Credit (SGO) Program

1. **What is the SGO Scholarship?**

The program provides a 50% state tax credit for contributions made to qualified Scholarship Granting Organizations (SGOs) which offer scholarships to low and middle income children to attend private schools of their choice. More information about SGOs is posted on our website at www.doe.in.gov/choice/school-scholarships. For more information on whether your child qualifies for an SGO award, please contact the Choice school.

2. **Can a student who receives a Choice Scholarship also receive an SGO Scholarship?**

Yes. A student who meets the requirements for a Choice Scholarship could qualify for an SGO Scholarship as well, provided that the combination of the two amounts does not exceed tuition and fees at the school. Please contact the Choice school for more information about this program.

If you have further questions, the first point of contact should be the Choice school in which you are interested in having your student attend. The school can give guidance concerning enrollment and application questions. You may also contact Choice Scholarship Program staff at ChoiceSchool@doe.in.gov or (317)233-2200.