

**Choice Scholarship Program
Participating School 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 and household income. (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 student applications be submitted 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. How does my school become a participating Choice school?

All schools must complete an *Application to Become an Eligible School annually*. This form is available on the Choice Scholarship Program website at www.doe.in.gov/choice. At the time of application, schools must provide a copy of the school application cover sheet, the school's admissions policy for the 2019-2020 school year, the tuition and fees policy and rates for the 2019-2020 school year, a description of fees and discounts, the Special Education Assurance Form, and the Choice School Contact Form. Schools that are not accredited by the Department must provide proof of accreditation from an approved accrediting agency. A list of approved accrediting agencies is posted on the website. Applications may be submitted as a single pdf to choiceschool@doe.in.gov.

6. 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 The scholarship is terminated when the student is withdrawn from the school.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 kindergarten students apply 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 public school requirement for the Two Semesters Public School Track?

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. If a student is withdrawn from a public school before the end of a school year, is he/she still eligible for the Two Semesters in a Public School Track for the upcoming school year?

The student must be enrolled and expected in attendance at an Indiana public school during both the fall and spring count dates in the semesters immediately preceding the school year in which the student applies for the Choice Scholarship to be eligible under the Two Semesters in Public School Track.

5. Which "A" through "F" grades will be used to determine the "F" schools for eligibility purposes for the 2019-

The "A" through "F" grades issued for school performance in the 2017-2018 school year will be used to determine the "F" schools for eligibility purposes for the 2019-2020 Choice Scholarship Program.

6. What does the term "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.

7. **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.

8. **What are the household income limits?**

The income guidelines are specific to each eligibility track. The applicable income guidelines for the 2019-2020 school year are included on each of the track explanation documents posted at www.doe.in.gov/choice. The complete list of household income limits will be posted in the files and bookmarks tab in the Choice Scholarship Community on Learning Connection.

9. **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.

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

Information about determining income and household size is available in the Income Verification Rules and Income Verification FAQ documents posted in the Choice Scholarship Program Community on the Learning Connection.

11. **Can children be included in the household size if parents are separated or claimed in alternating years?**

Yes. The household which serves as the child's primary residence should be used for purposes of applying for a Choice Scholarship. Documentation of this agreement should be kept in the student's file. More guidance for determining household size is available in the Income Verification Rules and FAQs.

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:

a. Tuition and fees at the Choice school;

OR

b. An amount based off the per-student State funding formula for the student's school corporation of legal settlement, determined as follows:

- 90% of the formula amount if household income is up to 69% of Reduced Price 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 Price 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 Price Lunch eligibility.
- 50% of the formula amount if household income is up to 200% of Reduced Price 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 under the Parents/Guardians section. Refer to the school corporation in which the student lives in order to determine the estimated award amount.

4. How will families be notified of their Choice Scholarship award?

The school will print the award or 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.

5. Can a parent/guardian of a student submit an application 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.

6. 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. What should be included in the tuition and fees policy for the Choice school application?

The school's tuition and fees policy must be included in the school application. The school's discount policy should also be included, even if it is not publicized in school documents for prospective families. ***All documents submitted as part of your school's application must be final for the 2019-2020 school year and not subject to change.***

An eligible Choice Scholarship student should be charged the same tuition and fees, and receive the same discounts and reductions of tuition, as a similarly situated non-Choice Scholarship student.

2. 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.

3. Can an optional fee be charged and included in the tuition and fees amount on the Choice application?

No, optional fees cannot be charged and included in reported tuition and fees on Choice applications. A fee must be specifically outlined in your tuition and fees schedule and apply to all students in order to be included on the Choice application. However, the Choice school can charge optional fees that are not included on the Choice application.

4. **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 2019-2020 Special Education FAQs available in the Choice Scholarship Program Community on Learning Connection.
5. **Can a Choice school receive a Curricular Materials Assistance (TB) payment for a Choice student?**
Yes, provided that the Choice student qualifies for the Federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program, has selected to receive curricular materials assistance, and the cost of textbooks is not included in the tuition and fees amount covered by the Choice Scholarship.

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 for the school year, an application must be submitted for the student by the September 1 deadline and the student must be enrolled and expected in attendance at the Choice school on the September count day .
2. **If a student receives a Choice Scholarship award and then decides to transfer within the same school year, what happens to the Choice Scholarship?**
As a condition of participation in the program, schools are required to report an exit date for the student on their Enrollment and Mobility (EM) Report within five business days of the student's withdrawal. The Choice Scholarship is terminated when the exit date is entered. If a student has been overpaid, a refund will be calculated and requested by the Department.
3. **Can a student transfer to a different Choice school and retain his/her Choice Scholarship?**
No. The Choice Scholarship is school specific. If the student withdraws prior to the end of the school year, the Choice Scholarship amount will be prorated to the date the student was withdrawn from school. If a payment has already been made, then a refund amount will be calculated and requested by the Department.
4. **Can a student who has been withdrawn from his/her 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, the parent/guardian forfeits the remaining portion of the student's Choice Scholarship award. The student is no longer eligible to receive Choice Scholarship funds for the remainder of the school year.
5. **How will the payment process work?**
In order to receive a payment for a student, the student must have
 - A current Enrollment and Mobility (EM) record;
 - Be included in the Choice school's Membership for Vouchers (MV) submission; and
 - Must have an Endorsement Form (EF) signed by the parent/guardian and uploaded in the STN Application Center by the posted deadline. The endorsement Form instructs the State to provide payment to the school on the student's behalf. Without the completed Endorsement Form, a payment will not be made for that student.
6. **How does the special education payment process work?**
In order for a Choice school to be eligible to receive a special education payment for a Choice student the
 - The student's parent/guardian must have selected the Choice school as the special education service

provider and the Choice school must indicate the selection on the student's Choice application;

- In instances where the Choice school has been selected as the service provider, the student must be enrolled with an Enrollment and Mobility (EM) record on the special education count day;
- The student must be included in the Choice school's Special Education for Vouchers (SV) submission; and
- The Choice school must have collected and uploaded a Special Education Endorsement Form (SF) signed by the parent/guardian by the posted deadline.

7. What happens to the payment if the student is withdrawn before the school year is over?

When a student is withdrawn from the participating school, the Choice Scholarship amount is prorated down to the number of days that the student was enrolled at the Choice School providing that the student was claimed in the school's Membership for Vouchers (MV) count and a signed Endorsement Form (EF) was uploaded for the student. This process is repeated for the second count day, with the exception that the EF is only required to be submitted one time per year.

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.

8. How often will State payments be made?

At a minimum, Choice Scholarship payments will be made at least once per semester.

School Scholarship Tax Credit (SGO) Program

1. What is an 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. For information about the SGOs please see our website at www.doe.in.gov/choice/school-scholarships. Schools should contact the SGO directly for more information regarding their policies.

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 a participating school.

School Policies

1. Does my participating school need to remove its religion classes and/or religious affiliation to qualify?

No. Participation in the Choice Scholarship Program does not require schools to remove religion classes or alter their religious affiliation.

2. How would this program affect my school's admissions policy?

A participating Choice school may not discriminate on the basis of race, color, or national origin. The school must have a written admissions policy. This policy is required to be submitted as part of the school's application to participate in the Choice Scholarship Program. Admission standards for Choice Scholarship students may not be different than the standards used for non-Choice eligible students.

3. Are all participating schools required to have a lottery policy?

Yes, in accordance with IC 20-51-4-3, even if you don't anticipate ever using a lottery, the policy must be in place. A sample lottery policy is posted in the Choice Scholarship Community on Learning Connection.

4. **Can a Choice student be expelled from the school for academic, disciplinary, or other reasons?**

A participating Choice school should follow the policies of the school that have been approved by the school's governing body. The school must notify the Department within five days if a student is withdrawn from the school by submitting an updated Enrollment and Mobility (EM) report. If a student attends less than the period for which the award is allocated, the IDOE will prorate the amount of the Choice Scholarship and request a refund.

5. **Will my school be required to do teacher evaluations?**

Yes. Pursuant to IC 20-28-11.5-4, eligible Choice schools are required to develop a plan for annual performance evaluations for each certificated employee.

Accreditation/Accountability

1. **If my school is not accredited by the State Board, what national/regional accrediting entities are recognized by the Board?**

The State Board of Education currently recognizes eight accrediting entities for purposes of participating in the Choice Scholarship Program. The recognized accrediting agencies are the following:

- Accrediting Association of Seventh-day Adventist Schools, Colleges, and Universities (AASDAS)
- American Association of Christian Schools (AACCS)
- Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)
- Christian Schools International (CSI)
- Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS)
- International Christian Accrediting Association (ICAA)
- National Lutheran Schools Accreditation (NLSA)
- North Central Association (NCA) / AdvancED

2. **Will my school's "A"- "F" grade be public?**

All school grades for public, charter, State accredited non-public, and participating Choice schools are publicly reported. School and corporation results are posted on the Department's website, Compass, at <https://compass.doe.in.gov>. Additional information is available on the Office of Accountability website, www.doe.in.gov/accountability.

3. **Will my school's "A"- "F" grade affect my school's eligibility to participate in the Choice Scholarship Program?**

Per IC 20-51-4-9, "A"- "F" grades will affect participating Choice schools in the following manner:

- A school designated a "D" or "F" school for two consecutive years will receive a one-year suspension from accepting new Choice Scholarship students.
- A school designated a "D" or "F" school for three consecutive years cannot accept new Choice Scholarship students until receiving a "C" or higher for two consecutive years.
- A school designated an "F" school for three consecutive years cannot accept new Choice Scholarship students until receiving a "C" or higher for three consecutive years.

4. **Are there any exceptions to these consequences?**

An eligible school may submit a request to the State Board of Education to waive or delay consequences for a particular school year. The State Board may grant a request if the eligible school demonstrates that a majority of students in the eligible school demonstrated academic improvement during the preceding school year.

5. **Is there a minimum number of students required to receive a grade?**

Yes. Because schools participating in the Choice Scholarship Program are required to administer statewide assessments and receive a grade under the State "A"- "F" system, the IDOE must have a statistically valid number of students off which to base the school 'grade'. The number of students (n-size) in tested grades who

met the 162 day rule and have valid test results (not necessarily Choice Scholarship students) differs based on the indicator/domain. The n-size for performance = 30; growth = 40; multiple measures = 10. Data may be aggregated over consecutive years, if necessary, to meet the minimum group size. For additional information about grade calculations, please contact School Accountability at schoolaccountability@doe.in.gov.

Assessment

1. Will my school be responsible for the cost of State mandated tests?

No. The State will pay these costs.

2. What assessments are Choice schools required to administer?

Depending on the grades served, Indiana statewide assessment tests must be administered as part of a school's participation in the Choice Scholarship Program.

3. Is the test administrator required to be a licensed teacher?

Statewide assessment examiners (i.e. the person(s) administering the test) must have an Indiana Department of Education issued license (instructional, administrative, or school services). This requirement is in place to ensure that test security procedures are followed.

4. How will parents be notified of testing results?

The school will notify parents of results. As per IC 20-32-5-9, school corporations, charter schools, and accredited nonpublic schools must promptly provide parents with information to access their child's test results.

5. Are all of my school's students required to participate in State tests, or just the students who receive Choice Scholarships?

All students in the school who are in assessment-tested grades must complete the required assessments.

6. Our school does not have access to technology for all of our students, are we required to participate in tests online?

Please contact the Office of Student Assessment at INassessments@doe.in.gov regarding any questions about paper/pencil or online testing.

Contact Information

Choice Scholarship Program

email choiceschool@doe.in.gov

phone [\(317\)233-2200](tel:(317)233-2200)

Accountability

email schoolaccountability@doe.in.gov

phone [\(317\)232-6610](tel:(317)232-6610)

Assessment

email INassessments@doe.in.gov

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Special Education

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