

Choice Scholarship Program
Frequently Asked Questions for Participating Schools
2018-2019 School Year

General Questions

1. What is the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program?

Choice Scholarships, sometimes referred to as vouchers, provide State funding to qualifying students that can be used to offset tuition costs at participating schools. Students qualify based on student eligibility criteria and household income.

2. Who administers the Choice Scholarship Program?

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

3. Where do parents/guardians of students apply for the Choice Scholarship Program?

Applications for Choice Scholarships are submitted electronically at the participating Choice school.

4. When can parents/guardians of students apply for the program?

The application window for the 2018-2019 school year opens on March 1, 2018 and closes on September 1, 2018.

5. 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.

6. How does my school become a participating Choice school?

All schools must complete an updated version of the *Application to Become an Eligible School*. 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's admissions policy, the tuition and fees policy and rates for the 2018-2019 school year, 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.

7. How many years has the Choice Scholarship Program been in existence?

The program has been in place for seven years beginning with the 2011-2012 school year.

Eligibility Questions

1. What are the eligibility requirements for a Choice Scholarship?

There are two components to determining eligibility:

- A. Student eligibility criteria
- B. Household income limits

2. What are the student eligibility criteria?

To be eligible, a student must 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
- (c) Be accepted for enrollment into a participating Choice school

After satisfying the requirements listed above, there are eight different pathways that enable a student to be eligible to participate in the Choice Scholarship Program. The eight pathways, labeled 1 through 8, are outlined below. A student must satisfy the requirements of only one of the eight pathways to be eligible.

1. Continuing Choice Scholarship Student Pathway

- 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, and
- 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 lunch program.

2. Previous Choice Scholarship Student Pathway

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 lunch program.

3. Previous Scholarship Granting Organization (SGO) Award Pathway

- 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.
- ii. 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)
- 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 lunch program.

4. Special Education Pathway

- 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 lunch program.

5. "F" Public School Pathway

- 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. Note: This pathway does not require prior attendance at the school.
- 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 lunch program.

6. Two Semesters in a Public School Pathway

- 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 lunch program.

7. Sibling Pathway

- 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 lunch program.

8. Pre-K Pathway

- 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;
- iii. The student is a member of a household with an annual income equal to or below 69% of reduced lunch eligibility (127% of the federal poverty level).

3. 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 satisfies eligibility and household income criteria.

4. 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 Pathway?

Yes, kindergarten attendance may satisfy the Two Semesters in Public School Pathway requirement.

5. If a student is withdrawn from a public school and entered into a Choice school, is he/she still eligible for the Two Semesters in a Public School Pathway?

The student must be enrolled and expected in attendance at the 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 Pathway.

6. Which A through F grades will be used to determine the F schools for eligibility purposes for the 2018-2019 Choice Scholarship Program?

The A through F grades issued for school performance in the 2016-2017 school year will be used to determine the F schools for eligibility purposes for the 2018-2019 Choice Scholarship Program.

7. **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.
8. **When did the sibling of a student attempting to qualify under the Sibling Pathway have to receive a Choice Scholarship or SGO award for the sibling to be eligible?**
To be eligible under the Sibling Pathway, the student's sibling must have received a Choice Scholarship or SGO award in any previous school year. This means that, for the 2018-2019 school year, the sibling must have received the Choice Scholarship or SGO award in any year up to and including the 2017-2018 school year.
9. **What are the household income limits?**
The income guidelines for the 2018-2019 school year are posted on the Choice Scholarship Program website at www.doe.in.gov/choice.
10. **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 pathways to qualify for a Choice Scholarship.

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.
11. **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 and Income Verification FAQ documents posted on the Choice Scholarship Program website at www.doe.in.gov/choice. The documents are also available in the Choice Scholarship Community of the Learning Connection.
12. **Can children be included in the household size if parents are separated or claimed in alternating years?**
Yes, provided that the parent claiming the child has full or joint custody of the child or children and supporting legal documentation. The household which serves as the child's primary residence should be used for purposes of applying for a Choice Scholarship.
13. **If a student transfers to a Choice school from a public school, how would his/her eligibility in IHSAA sanctioned events be affected?**
A student's eligibility to participate in Indiana High School Athletic Association (IHSAA) sanctioned events is strictly controlled by IHSAA's bylaws which are available at www.ihsaa.org/AboutIHSAA/ByLaws/tabid/91/Default.aspx. This is true regardless of whether a student attends a public or nonpublic school. If a student athlete is concerned about how a transfer to or from a Choice school will affect his/her ability to participate in athletics, the student should consult IHSAA's bylaws.

Application Questions

1. **Who is responsible for determining whether a student is eligible for a Choice Scholarship?**
The participating Choice school is responsible for determining whether the student meets the eligibility guidelines. As part of being eligible, the participating school must have enrolled (or agreed to enroll) the student and may do so on the condition of the student receiving a Choice Scholarship award.

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 Lunch eligibility (127% of the Federal poverty level) **if the student is eligible under the Pre-K Pathway.**
 - 90% of the formula amount if household income is up to 100% of Reduced Lunch eligibility for students who are eligible under all pathways **except** the Pre-K Pathway.
 - 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 Pathway or Special Education Pathway.**

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. You should refer to the school corporation in which the student lives in order to determine the estimated award amount for the student.

4. **How will families be notified of their award?**

The school will print the award letter for the family at the time the application is approved. The initial award letter is an estimated award amount. An updated award letter with final award amounts will be available to the Choice school when the public tuition support payment amounts are final.

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 student's application must be deleted from the original Choice school so that the application at the student's preferred Choice school can be submitted before the application deadline.

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 pathway 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 and rates must be included in the school application. All discount policies should be included, even if they are not publicized in school documents for prospective families. Any changes to the school's tuition and fees policy and rates must be submitted as an amendment to your school's application for approval before the school application deadline.

The documents submitted as part of your school's application must be considered final for the 2018-2019 school year and not subject to change.

2. **Does the Choice Scholarship award amount always cover the complete tuition and fees at the Choice school?**

No. The parent/guardian could be responsible for any tuition and fees at the participating school that is not covered by the Choice Scholarship award amount in accordance with the Choice school's policy.

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 Choice Scholarship and Special Education Services FAQ available on the Choice Scholarship Program website at www.doe.in.gov/choice.
5. **Is there a limit to the number of Choice Scholarship awards each school year?**
No, there is no limit to the number of scholarships that can be awarded each year.
6. **Can a Choice school receive a Curricular Material Assistance (TB) payment for a Choice student?**
Yes, provided that the Choice student qualifies for free/reduced school lunch and has selected to receive

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, 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 at the Choice school on the September count day and February 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, the IDOE requires schools to report the student as exiting on their Enrollment and Mobility (EM) Report within five business days of the student's withdrawal. If a payment for the student has already been made, the IDOE will contact the school to collect a prorated refund for the portion of the school year the student is not attending the Choice school. If the payment has not yet been made, it will be prorated by the IDOE to reflect the student's enrollment at the Choice school.
3. **Can a student transfer to a different Choice school and retain their Choice Scholarship?**
No. The Choice Scholarship is school specific. If the student withdraws prior to the end of the first semester, 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.
4. **Can a student who has 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?**
If a student has been withdrawn and is reported as exited on the Enrollment and Mobility Report in compliance with the five day requirement, the parent/guardian forfeits the remaining portion the student's Choice Scholarship award. At the time the student is withdrawn from the Choice school, the student is no longer eligible to receive Choice Scholarship award funds for the remainder of the school year in which the student was withdrawn.
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, the student must be included in the Choice school's Membership for Vouchers (MV) submission, and the student must have an Endorsement Form (EF) that has been signed by the parent/guardian 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 following steps must be completed:

- 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
- The student must be included in the Choice school's Special Education for Vouchers (SV) submission;
- 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. For example, if the school year for XYZ School is 180 days and Student A was enrolled in the school for 45 days then withdrew, Student A would have been enrolled for 25% of the school year. If Student A's Choice Scholarship Award was \$4,000, 25% or \$1,000 would be paid to the participating school on the student's behalf.

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. The family is responsible for the discrepancy in tuition charges resulting from the state's system of prorating payments down to the day and the participating school's withdrawal and tuition payment policies.

8. How often will State payments be made?

At a minimum, Choice Scholarship payments will be made twice per year.

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 more information about the SGOs please see our website at www.doe.in.gov/choice/school-scholarships.

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

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

Yes, even if you don't anticipate ever using a lottery, the policy must be in place. For additional discussion on

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

5. **What other legal requirements are required of Choice schools?**

- Notify the Department when an employee with a Department-issued license is convicted of certain felonies (IC 20-28-5-8)
- Conduct expanded criminal history checks and child protection index checks for all applicants for
- Provide parental access to student records. (IC 20-33-7)

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

Yes. This requirement took effect for the 2012-2013 school year. Schools that accept SGO students but do not participate in the Choice Scholarship Program are not bound by this requirement.

Under IC 20-28-11.5-4, eligible Choice schools are required to develop a plan for annual performance evaluations for each certificated employee and submit these plans to the Department. Participating schools are free to use the model evaluation tool being developed by the department, the system for Teacher and Student Advancement (i.e. the TAP model), or the Peer Assistance & Review model. They may also develop their own local evaluation and/or utilize master teachers in their building to conduct the evaluation. The IDOE has included an assurance on the Choice Scholarship School Application Form (to the IDOE) that this requirement will be fulfilled.

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 - public, charter, State accredited non-public, participating Choice schools - are publicly reported.

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 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 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 Choice Scholarship Schools are required to be graded under the state A-F system and administer ISTEP, the IDOE must have a statistically valid number of students off which to base the school 'grade.' In order to receive an A-F grade for English or Math performance, a school must have at least 30 students in tested grades who met the 162 day rule and have a valid ISTEP+ or ISTAR test result (not necessarily Choice Scholarship Students). This is commonly referred to as the "n-size" requirement.

For example, a school with the following

- Grade 1: 20
- Grade 2: 15
- Grade 3: 10
- Grade 4: 10
- Grade 5: 12

However, a school with the breakdown below

- Grade 1: 40
- Grade 2: 25
- Grade 3: 5
- Grade 4: 5
- Grade 5: 5

6. Where did this requirement come from?

This is in accordance with IC 20-51. The requirements are included in the legislation that created the Choice Scholarship Program.

All public schools, including small schools with "n" sizes of less than 30, must be assessed annually for state accountability. Public schools with enrollments in tested grades that are below 30 are assessed by aggregating multiple years of data. Setting a minimum "n" size of 30 helps to ensure statistical reliability when doing performance calculations. Equally important, just as A-F grades inform high-stakes consequences for public schools (i.e. possible state takeover), IC 20-51-4-9 allows these grades to impact a school's future ability to accept new Choice Scholarship students. The 30-student requirement ensures these high-stakes consequences are statistically reliable.

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?

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 a Department 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. The ISTEP statute requires that scores be returned to parents "promptly" (IC20-32-5-9). With ISTEP+ scores generally returned in the summer, participating Choice schools should plan to have someone available to handle these duties.

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

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?

For questions regarding paper/pencil testing, please contact Assessment at INassessments@doe.in.gov.

Contact Information

Choice Scholarship Program

email choiceschool@doe.in.gov

phone (317)233-2200

Accountability

email schoolaccountability@doe.in.gov

phone (317)232-6610

Assessment

email INassessments@doe.in.gov

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