

Choice Scholarship Program
Frequently Asked Questions for Parents and Students
2017-2018 School Year

This FAQ reflects current law and may be subject to change after the current session of the IN General Assembly.

General Questions

1) What is the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program?

Choice Scholarships provide State funding to qualifying students that can be used to offset tuition costs at participating Choice 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 I apply for the Choice Scholarship Program?

Parents and students apply at a participating Choice school.

4) When can I apply for the program?

The application window for the 2017-2018 school year opens on February 27, 2017, and closes on September 1, 2017.

A second application window, for the 2nd semester only, opens on September 2, 2017. The deadline to apply for the spring semester is January 15, 2018.

5) If my child was approved for a Choice Scholarship in the fall, do I need to re-apply for the spring semester?

No. The Choice Scholarship is a year-long award. It is only necessary to apply for the spring semester if the student has been withdrawn from the school and wishes to use a Choice Scholarship to attend a Choice School in the spring semester.

6) 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.

7) How many years has the program been in existence?

The program has been in place for six years and began 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:

1. Student eligibility criteria
2. Household income limits

2) What are the student eligibility criteria?

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

1. Have legal settlement in Indiana
2. Be between the ages of 5 and 22 no later than August 1 of the school year
3. Be accepted for enrollment into a participating Choice Scholarship School

After satisfying the requirements listed above, there are seven different pathways that enable a student to be eligible to participate in the Choice Scholarship Program. The seven pathways, labeled 1 through 7, are outlined below. A student must satisfy **ONLY ONE** of the seven 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 a 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 seven approved Scholarship Granting Organizations (SGOs) are:

- Community Foundation of Elkhart County
 - Institute for Quality Education, Inc. (Formerly Educational Choice Charitable Trust)
 - School Scholarship Granting Organization of Northeast Indiana
 - Sagamore Institute Scholarships for Education Choice
 - The Lutheran Scholarship Granting Organization of Indiana
 - LaGrange County Community Foundation, Inc.
 - 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 and related services;
- ii. An Individualized Education Program (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 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 **preceding 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.

3) 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 satisfies the 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?

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

5) If a child attends the public school in the spring and fall semesters, can they use the Two Semesters Public School Pathway?

Yes. The requirements for the Two Semesters Public School Pathway require that the student was attending a public school for the 2 semesters immediately preceding the semester in which the child is applying for the Choice Scholarship. The student qualifies to apply in the fall if they attended the public school in the fall and spring of the previous year. The student qualifies to apply in the spring if he/she attended the public school in the spring and fall semesters immediately preceding the spring application.

6) Which A through F grades will be used to determine the F schools for eligibility purposes for the 2017-2018 Choice Scholarship Program?

The A through F grades issued in December of 2016 for school performance in the 2015-2016 school year will be used to determine the F schools for eligibility purposes for the 2017-2018 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 had to receive a Choice Scholarship or SGO Award in any previous year.

9) If a student is awarded a Choice Scholarship in the fall, can his/her sibling apply for the spring semester using the Sibling Pathway?

No. The Sibling Pathway requires that the sibling received a Choice Scholarship in a **previous school year**. An award in the current school year does not satisfy the requirement.

10) If a student receives an SGO in the first semester, does the student qualify for the spring semester Choice Scholarship using the Previous SGO Pathway?

No. The Previous SGO Pathway requires that the student received an SGO in a **previous school year**. An SGO award in the current school year does not satisfy the requirement.

11) What are the household income limits?

The income guidelines for the 2017-2018 school year are posted on the Choice Scholarship Program website at www.doe.in.gov/choice.

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

No. Because foster children are directly certified for the free and reduced school lunch program, they satisfy the income eligibility requirements to qualify for a Choice Scholarship. 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 your 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.

13) What counts as income and who should be included in the household size?

For questions about determining income and household size, please view the income verification documents posted on the Choice Scholarship Program website at www.doe.in.gov/choice.

Application Process

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

The participating Choice Scholarship School is responsible for determining whether a student meets the eligibility guidelines. To be 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.

Income documentation establishing eligibility 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 funding formula amount if the family income falls within 100% of the reduced school lunch eligibility.
 - 50% of the funding formula amount if the family income is above 100% but under 150% of the reduced school lunch eligibility.
 - 50% of the funding formula amount if the family income is above 100% but under 200% of the reduced school lunch eligibility if the student is a Continuing Choice Scholarship Student or if the student has an IEP (Individual Education Plan).
- 3) **Where can I review the per-student State funding for the corporation of residence?**
This information is available on the Choice Scholarship Program website at www.doe.in.gov/choice.
- 4) **Can a parent/guardian of a student apply to the Indiana Department of Education for a Choice Scholarship Award?**
No. A parent/guardian, applying on behalf of a child, must apply for a Choice Scholarship at a participating Choice Scholarship School. The school will electronically submit the student's application to the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) to determine whether or not the student is eligible for an award.
- 5) **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.
- 6) **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.

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. The school's policies may include language requiring payment regardless of whether a Choice Scholarship is awarded. A Choice Scholarship 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 a parent or guardian selects the Choice School 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 www.doe.in.gov/choice.

3) Is there a limit of Choice Scholarship awards each school year?

No, there is no limit to the number of scholarships that can be awarded each year.

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 entire 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 on both the September Count Day and the February Count Day.

If the student has not submitted an application by the September 1 deadline and/or the student is not enrolled and expected in attendance on the September Count Day, the student may apply for a scholarship for the spring semester. The application window for the spring semester is September 2, 2017 – January 15, 2018. To receive a payment, the student must be enrolled and attending the Choice School on the 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 Indiana Department of Education requires a school to report a student as exiting on the Enrollment and Mobility (EM) Report within five business days of the student's withdrawal from the Choice School. 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 his/her 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. The student may apply for a Choice Scholarship for the spring semester during the spring application window.

4) 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?

If a student has been withdrawn and is reported as exiting 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 semester in which the student was withdrawn. If the student has been withdrawn and then re-enrolls prior to the end of the second application window, the student may apply for a Choice Scholarship for the spring semester.

5) 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 directly to the participating 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. This Endorsement Form will instruct the State to provide payment to the school on the student's behalf. Without the completed endorsement form, the State will not make a payment for that student.

6) 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?

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.

7) How often will State payments be made?

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

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. For more information about the SGO Scholarship please see the link below:

<http://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 the school.

Questions

If you have further questions, the first point of contact should be the Choice School you are interested in having your student attend. The school can help you with enrollment and application questions. You may also contact the Department at choiceschool@doe.in.gov or (317)233-2200.