

How many parent choice programs does Wisconsin have?

Four. The pioneering Milwaukee program was enacted in 1990. The Racine Parental Choice Program, the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program, and the Special Needs Scholarship Program followed in 2011, 2013, and 2015, respectively.

Detailed information for all Wisconsin programs is available at schoolchoicewi.org/programs.

How many private schools and students participate in a taxpayer funded parent choice program in Wisconsin?

For the 2023–2024 school year, a total of 383 private schools enrolled nearly 55,000 students across the four existing parent choice programs in Wisconsin.

Who is eligible for the Milwaukee and Racine programs?

Students must live in Milwaukee or Racine and have a family income at or below 300 percent of the federal poverty level. This is about \$90,000 for a married family of four.

Is eligibility different for the Wisconsin program?

Yes. Eligibility is limited to families with income at or below 220 percent of the federal poverty level. That is about \$68,000 for a married family of four.

May private schools choose which students they will accept?

No. Schools with more eligible applicants than seats must use a lottery. Schools may **not** use academic standards, race, ethnicity, or religion to screen students.

What about students with special needs?

Schools that participate in the Milwaukee, Racine, and statewide programs must accept students with special needs. They are not required to add services for individual students, leaving the decision to enroll in the hands of parents.

Not all private schools are able to serve all special needs students, just as all public schools are not equipped to do so.

Who is eligible for the Special Needs Scholarship Program?

Any child with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Individual Service Plan (ISP) developed by a public school district is eligible. There are no enrollment caps or income limits on the program.

Must a student participate in religious activities?

No. A family may choose to opt their child out of religious activities. However, this rarely occurs because families choose schools in line with their values.

What statutes limit participation?

The Wisconsin program caps enrollment at eight percent of public school district enrollment for 2023–24. In a district that has hit the cap, private schools can take no more students even if they have seats available. This restriction expires after the 2026–2027 school year.

The Wisconsin program also limits enrollment for students already in private schools to grades K4, K5, one and nine. Limited enrollment periods also provide challenges for families and schools. In the Wisconsin program, students may enroll only from February 1 to April 20.

What happens if family income increases?

Once admitted, students may remain in the program regardless of changes in family income. A parent must still complete an annual application.

Are participating schools accountable?

Accountability requirements are extensive. Schools must prove financial viability, demonstrate sound fiscal practices, and attain accreditation within three years. They also must submit an independent GAAP financial audit to DPI each year as well as audits of student participation, background checks for staff and internal fiscal controls.

Schools must provide the same hours of instruction as public schools and adhere to the same health and safety requirements as public schools. Teachers must either be licensed or have a bachelor's degree. Background checks for teachers are also required.

How do we know how students are doing?

Participating students must take the same tests as public school students. DPI reports results for each school on a public report card, just as it does for public schools.

How do private schools fare on state tests and report cards?

Students across Wisconsin's three largest parental choice programs are more likely than their public school peers to attend a school that exceeds state-established expectations. In addition, choice students outscore students from all income levels on college-readiness ACT tests.

In Milwaukee, more than 80 percent of students in the MPCP attend schools that meet, exceed or significantly exceed expectations compared to 53 percent of students in Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS). Forty-two percent of students in the MPCP attend schools that significantly exceed or exceed expectations, compared to 21 percent of MPS students.

In Racine, 83 percent of students in the RPCP attend schools that meet, exceed or significantly exceed expectations, compared to 53 percent of students in the Racine Unified School District (RUSD). Notably, 11 percent of RPCP students attend schools that significantly exceed expectations. No RUSD schools met that criteria.

Statewide, 49.9 percent of students in the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program attend a school that exceeds or significantly exceeds expectations, slightly more than the 48.7 percent of students attending public schools (excluding Milwaukee and Racine) that meet those thresholds.

What does other research show?

Peer-reviewed research shows that Milwaukee school choice students are more likely to be successful in life. They are:

- More likely to graduate from high school;
- More likely to attend safer schools; and
- More likely to seek post-secondary education;
- Less likely to commit crimes.

Do families value school choice?

Yes. The pandemic taught many families the importance of choosing a school in tune with their values. School Choice Wisconsin poll of likely voters conducted in February 2022 showed that 65 percent of Wisconsinites favor school choice for all families. Notably, support has increased among Independents and Democrats.