

Facts About Public, Private and Charter Schools, Homeschooling, Vouchers and Accountability

AAUW Wisconsin

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What is the difference between public schools, charter schools, and private schools?



Public schools

Tuition free and funded by public tax dollars.

Run by local school districts and follow state and federal regulations.



Charter schools

Tuition free and funded by public tax dollars, run independently from local school districts

Generally authorized by School Districts, Universities/Technical Colleges, Cities, Counties, Tribal Nations

Have a Governing Board, held accountable to a contract with the Board of Education of the public school district.

Students must usually apply to attend a charter school as enrollment is limited.



Private schools

Not funded by public tax dollars and charge tuition fees.

Run by private individuals or groups and do not have to follow state and federal regulations.

May have religious or other affiliations.

Can be funded through voucher program

How does homeschooling work?

Homeschooling in Wisconsin is a home-based private educational program where parents or guardians take full responsibility for their children's education.

- Homeschooling parents or guardians
 - Must file a form of intent with the Department of Public Instruction and provide 875 hours of instruction each school year.
 - Must teach the required subjects and provide a sequentially progressive curriculum.
- Homeschooling teachers do not need to be certified and homeschooling families can decide their own schedule, curriculum, testing, and record keeping.
- Homeschooled children can participate in two public school classes as well as extra-curricular activities.

What is a voucher and how do voucher schools operate?

- School vouchers are state-funded scholarships that allow students to attend a private school of the family's choice.
- Voucher schools are private schools that use taxpayer dollars to subsidize the cost of private education for K4-12 students from lower-income families in the form of a voucher.
- The payments go directly from the state to the school based on the number of voucher students enrolled at the school at the beginning of each semester.
- Parents who qualify may choose to send their children to private voucher schools instead of their local public school.
- In Wisconsin, voucher schools are those currently participating in at least one of [four state-run, state-funded programs](#): the [Milwaukee](#) Parental Choice Program, the [Racine](#) Parental Choice Program, the [Wisconsin](#) Parental Choice Program and the [Special Needs Scholarship \(SNSP\) Program](#).

Who can apply to a voucher school?

There are income limits which exist for a child/family to receive a voucher payment.

(MPCP - Milwaukee Parental Choice Program)

(RPCP - Racine Parental Choice Program)

(WPCP - Wisconsin Parental Choice Program)

Table 1 – MPCP, RPCP and WPCP 2023-24 Income Limits

| Family Size | <u>MPCP and RPCP</u> Yearly Income* | <u>WPCP</u> Yearly Income* |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | \$40,770 | \$29,898 |
| 2 | \$54,930 | \$40,282 |
| 3 | \$69,090 | \$50,666 |
| 4 | \$83,250 | \$61,050 |
| 5 | \$97,410 | \$71,434 |
| 6 | \$111,570 | \$81,818 |
| For each additional family member add | \$14,160 | \$10,384 |

* If the student's parents on the application are married, their income is reduced by \$7,000 when determining income eligibility for the program. (i.e. married family income minus \$7,000 is the amount married families compare to the table).

Voucher vs Public Cost Per Student

- For 2023-24, the annual voucher payment was \$8,399 for K-8 students, and the voucher schools could not charge additional tuition from these families. For grade 9-12 students, the annual payment was \$9,045, and schools could charge additional tuition if the family's income exceeds 220% of the federal poverty level, which is \$61,050 for a family of four.
- The latest available numbers from DPI show in the 2021-22 school year, Wisconsin spent \$7,728 in state revenue per public school pupil. By comparison, the voucher payments [that year](#) were \$8,336 in kindergarten through eighth grade, and \$8,982 in grades nine through 12th in the Milwaukee, Racine and statewide programs, and \$13,013 for Special Needs Scholarship Program vouchers.

Interesting Facts about Voucher Schools

- In the most recent biennium budget approved by the Wisconsin legislature, voucher schools received a major expansion of school choice funding. This will eventually increase voucher payments from \$8,399 to **\$9,874 per-student** for younger students and from \$9,045 to \$12,368 for high school students.
- Voucher schools cannot charge voucher students fees for registration but may charge “reasonable fees for certain personal use items,” according to the Department of Public Instruction.
- There were [373 participating schools](#) for the 2022-23 school year. According to a Wisconsin Watch analysis, 95% of the currently participating schools are religious. Voucher students have a legal right to opt-out of religious activity.
- During the 2022-23 school year, private school choice programs received \$444 million in taxpayer money, according to state data.

Voucher Schools and LGBTQ+

- Private schools cannot deny admission to voucher students on the basis of LGBTQ+ identity. School policies apply once a student enrolls. But there is no state law prohibiting LGBTQ+ discrimination against enrolled students.
- Religious entities — which comprise 95% of current voucher schools — are exempted from federal Title IX protections against discrimination if complying with the law “would be inconsistent with the religious tenets of the organization.”
- A Wisconsin Watch investigation has found that many voucher schools have policies targeting LGBTQ+ students for disparate treatment. Some warn they may discipline or expel students for being gay or transgender.

Voucher School and Students with Disabilities

- The Special Needs Scholarship Program (SNSP) allows a student with a disability, who meets certain eligibility requirements, to receive a state-funded scholarship to attend a private school that is located in Wisconsin and participating in the SNSP. The school receives a state aid payment for each eligible student.
- A student must be a Wisconsin resident and must either have: (1) an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or services plan that is currently being implemented or (2) an IEP or services plan that was developed no earlier than September 15, 2020 and have not subsequently been determined to no longer have a disability.
- Private voucher schools are “only required to offer services to assist students with special needs that it can provide with minor adjustments,” according to DPI. SNSP schools are required to implement the IEP or services plan of SNSP students **as modified by agreement** between the SNSP school and the student’s parent.
- See document: COMPARISON OF RIGHTS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES UNDER STATE AND FEDERAL SPECIAL EDUCATION LAW AND UNDER THE WISCONSIN SPECIAL NEEDS SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM [2020-21 Comparison Document.pdf \(wi.gov\)](#)

Staff requirements

- School administrators must undergo financial training and have at least a **bachelor's degree** from an accredited institution of higher education to be employed by a voucher school.
- Teachers must have a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution of higher education and teacher aides must have received a high school diploma or been granted a GED or HSED.
- Public school administrators and teachers must be licensed by the Wisconsin Department Public of Instruction and typically have an education degree from an accredited institution of higher education.
- Private schools **are not obligated to employ only licensed or certified teachers.**

Accountability Requirements and Data

- Beginning with the 2021- 2022, schools with 20 or more students participating in any of Wisconsin's parental choice programs must administer the state examinations to participating students in the same grades and subject areas as Wisconsin's public school students, as follows:
 - Wisconsin Forward Exam for English Language Arts and Mathematics assessments in the spring for grades 3-8.
 - Wisconsin Forward Exam for Science in the spring for grades 4 and 8.
 - Wisconsin Forward Exam for Social Studies in the spring for grades 4, 8, and 10.
 - ACT Aspire™ in spring for grades 9 and 10
 - The ACT® and ACT WorkKeys® in the spring for grade 11
 - The state civics exam in high school.
- School Report Card data and achievement scores can be found at [Report Cards Home | Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction](#)

Additional Sources and Resources

For more information on the voucher system in Wisconsin, go to: [Voucher Transparency Toolkit.pdf - Google Drive](#)

For more information on how vouchers impact students, schools, and communities, go to: [NCPE Voucher Toolkit \(squarespace.com\)](#)

[What parents of children who are LGBTQ+ or have a disability should know about Wisconsin voucher schools \(pbswisconsin.org\)](#)

[School Choice Programs | Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction](#)

[Charter Schools in Wisconsin | Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction](#)

[Home-Based Private Education Program \(Homeschooling\) | Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction](#)