



**NORTHWEST INDIANA
CHOICE SCHOLAR**

FREQUENTLY

ASKED

QUESTIONS

about the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program



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- 1. Who is eligible for the Indiana Choice Scholarship?**
 - To be eligible, students must meet the following requirements:
 - Be a resident of Indiana
 - Be accepted and enrolled at a participating Choice school in Indiana
 - Be between the ages of 5 and 22 no later than Aug. 1 of the current school year
 - Meet the income and one of the eight eligibility pathway requirements
- 2. What is the income requirement to receive an Indiana Choice Scholarship?**
 - Qualifying families can earn up to (but not exceed) 300% of the Federal Free or Reduced-Price Lunch Program (FRL). For example, a family of four can earn up to \$147,075 in the 2021–22 school year. In Northwest Indiana, nearly 80% of families are financially eligible for the scholarship.
 - A more detailed breakdown of household income limits can be found below in Appendix A.
- 3. What qualifies as income?**
 - The total household income may include several types of income including wages earned from work, welfare/child support/alimony, retirement/disability benefits, and more. A complete list of acceptable sources of income can be found in Appendix B.
- 4. What are the pathway requirements to be eligible for the Indiana Choice Scholarship?**
 - Students must also meet the requirements of one of eight possible student eligibility tracks. The tracks are listed below and outlined in more detail in Appendix C.
 - Two semesters in a public school track
 - “F” public school track
 - Special education track
 - Pre-K track
 - Foster care track
 - Sibling track
 - Previous Scholarship Granting Organization (SGO) track
 - Previous Choice Scholarship student track
- 5. Are preschool and kindergarten students eligible to receive an Indiana Choice Scholarship?**
 - No, preschool and kindergarten students cannot currently receive a Choice Scholarship. However, students who received an Early Education Grant to attend pre-K at an eligible Choice school at which they intend to enroll for kindergarten and are from families that meet the income requirement are eligible to apply for a Choice Scholarship that would kick in in first grade.
 - Kindergarten students may also be eligible for a Scholarship Granting Organization (SGO) scholarship, which would result in eligibility for the Choice Scholarship in their first-grade year.
- 6. Is the Indiana Choice Scholarship application separate from the school enrollment application process?**
 - Yes, the applications are technically separate, but the school at which your child is enrolled is responsible for submitting the Choice Scholarship application on behalf of your child. Once you have applied and are accepted to a Choice school, the school will then begin the process of submitting your application for the Choice Scholarship. Only an approved Choice school may submit a Choice Scholarship student application.
- 7. Where can I apply?**
 - Only approved Choice schools may submit applications. Your application will be submitted by the approved Choice school after you have applied to that school and been accepted through their regular school admissions process.



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8. When can I apply?

- a. There are two application periods for the Indiana Choice Scholarship. First period student applications are for the entire upcoming school year. Second period applications are for students enrolling in a Choice school after the period one deadline, for a scholarship to be used for the second half of the school year. The second period award amount is half the amount the student would qualify for in the first period.
- b. The 2021-2022 Indiana Choice Scholarship student applications may be submitted between November 1, 2021, and January 15, 2022, for the second application period.

9. Can I apply for the Indiana Choice Scholarship at multiple schools at once?

- a. No, a student can only have one Indiana Choice Scholarship application submitted to one school at a time. You may, however, apply for admission to several schools at once. Once you are accepted and enrolled at the school of your choice, you can proceed with the Indiana Choice Scholarship application through that school.
- b. If an Indiana Choice Scholarship application has already been submitted, and 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 alternate application at the preferred Choice school.

10. What should I do before I start my application?

- a. Before starting your application, make sure you have researched schools in your area to ensure you have found the school that is the right fit for your child and family. Next, check to make sure you meet the eligibility requirements to qualify for the Indiana Choice Scholarship. You can also use the calculator at NWChoiceScholar.org to see how much your child may qualify for.

11. Who receives my application and how is it evaluated?

- a. The Indiana Department of Education (IDOE), Office of School Finance, reviews Choice Scholarship applications and determines who is awarded scholarships.

12. When will I hear back about my application?

- a. Once your Indiana Choice Scholarship application has been submitted, the Choice school will then review your materials and issue an award letter or a denial letter. If you receive an award letter, the initial amount listed is an estimated award amount. The actual amount will be updated and issued later on in the school year when all necessary information becomes available.

13. What if my child is already enrolled in a Choice school but is not currently receiving an Indiana Choice Scholarship?

- a. You can still apply for the Indiana Choice Scholarship as long as you are currently enrolled at a participating Choice school and meet the income and pathway eligibility requirements.
- b. For a student that is already enrolled at a Choice School, the most common pathway is the previous SGO track. Families can work with their current school to get their child on an SGO track if they are not already receiving one, so that they will be eligible for the Indiana Choice Scholarship the following school year.

14. What if my child is already receiving other scholarship support or tuition assistance?

- a. Students may continue to receive free or reduced lunch, as well as curricular materials assistance, so long as they qualify for such assistance and those costs are not already included in the tuition fees and amounts covered by the Indiana Choice Scholarship.

15. Can I apply for multiple children in one household?

- a. Yes, siblings may be eligible under the Sibling Track pathway. 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 2021-2022 school year, the sibling must have received the Indiana Choice Scholarship or SGO award in any year up to and including the 2020-2021 school year.

16. Is this opportunity only available to Catholic families and students?

- a. No, you do not need to be Catholic to qualify for the Indiana Choice Scholarship and attend a Catholic school. The Choice schools affiliated with the Catholic Diocese of Gary welcome all students and families, regardless of religion, ethnicity, race, or income.

17. What if I'm not sure if my child is eligible for the Indiana Choice Scholarship?

- a. You can check your eligibility using the NWI Choice Scholar tool, powered by Big Shoulders Fund. Find out if you are a candidate, here: NWChoiceScholar.org.

APPENDIX

Appendix A:

Families must have an annual income equal to or below 300% of the Federal Free or Reduced-Price Lunch Program (FRL).

HOUSEHOLD SIZE	HOUSEHOLD INCOME LIMIT TO QUALIFY
1	\$71,484
2	\$96,681
3	\$121,878
4	\$147,075
5	\$172,272
6	\$197,469
7	\$222,666
8	\$247,863
9	\$273,060
10	\$298,257

For a household size of eleven or more:

ADD TO THE ANNUAL LIMIT FOR EACH ADDITIONAL MEMBER	SCHOLARSHIP TYPE
\$5,719	90% Scholarship Pre-K Only
\$8,288	90% Scholarship Excluding Pre-K
\$10,360	70% Scholarship Excluding Pre-K
\$12,432	50% Scholarship Excluding Pre-K
\$16,576	50% Continuing Choice and Special Education Only

Appendix B:

The following types of income must be **included** in the total household income:

- **Earnings from work**
 - Wages, salaries, tips, commissions, overtime pay, bonuses
 - Income from self-owned businesses and farms
 - Strike benefits, unemployment compensation, and workers' compensation
- **Welfare/Child Support/Alimony**
 - Public assistance payments/welfare benefits
 - Alimony or child support payments
- **Child's income**
 - Earnings of a child who is a full-time or regular part-time employee are included
 - Social Security
 - Supplemental security income
- **Retirement/Disability Benefits**
 - Pensions, retirement income, veterans' benefits
 - Social Security
 - Supplemental security income
 - Disability benefits
- **Other income**
 - Distributions from retirement or investment accounts
 - Rental income, annuities, and royalties
 - Interest and dividend income
 - Inheritance, income from estates, trusts, and/or investments
 - Cash or investment gifts
 - Military pay that is not received as a result of the service member's deployment to or service in an area that has been designated as a combat zone
 - Military pay that is received prior to the service member's deployment to or service in the designated combat zone
 - Living insurance benefits
 - Living allowance

The following types of income are **excluded** from the total household income:

- Payments received for the care of foster children
- Student financial assistance provided for the costs of attendance at an educational institution, such as grants and scholarships
- Loans, such as bank loans
- Value of non-cash benefits
- Value of benefits under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Food Distribution Program on Indiana Reservation (FDPIR)
- Military pay received as a result of the service member's deployment to or service in an area that has been designated as a combat zone
- Occasional earnings received on an irregular basis (not recurring, such as payment for occasional baby-sitting or mowing lawns)
- Adoption subsidies
- If 2020 unemployment exemption was not applied on the family's 2020 tax return, the first \$10,200 of 2020 unemployment may be deducted from the household income

Appendix C:

Choice Scholarship Program Track Eligibility Requirements:

- **Previous Choice Scholarship Student Track**
 - The student received a Choice Scholarship in a previous school year.
- **Previous Scholarship Granting Organization (SGO) Award Track**
 - The student received an SGO Scholarship in a previous school year.
 - 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. (no longer participating, effective January 2020)
 - 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
- **Special Education Track**
 - The student has a disability that requires special education services and has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Individual Service Plan (ISP).
- **"F" Public School Track**
 - The student is assigned to an "F-rated" public school based on their residence for the upcoming school year.
- **Two Semesters in a Public School Track**
 - The student attended an Indiana K-12 public school, including a charter school, for at least two semesters immediately preceding the first semester of receiving a Choice Scholarship and is entering 1st grade or higher.
- **Sibling Track**
 - The student has a sibling who received either a Choice Scholarship or an SGO scholarship at any time in their K-12 education.
- **Pre-K Track**
 - The student received and used an Early Education Grant (state-funded 'On My Way' Pre-K) and is attending kindergarten at the same school that they attended preschool.
- **Foster Track**
 - A student must be placed in foster care, as defined in IC 31-9-2-46.7. The child's placement must be supported by a letter from a Department of Child Services (DCS) case worker that is signed and dated during the 2021 calendar year.
 - Foster children are automatically income eligible for the Choice Scholarship Program and do not require household size and income. Supporting documentation of foster care must be provided at the time of application.