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

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

* Public schools are tuition free and funded by public tax dollars. They are run by local school districts and follow state and federal regulations.
* Charter schools are also tuition free and funded by public tax dollars, but they are independent from local school districts. They are run by private organizations and have more flexibility and autonomy in their curriculum and operations. Public charter schools are an instrument of a public school district. They have a Governing Board but are held accountable to a contract with the Board of Education of the public school district. The contract can be cancelled if established goals are not met. Students must usually apply to attend a charter school as enrollment is limited.

For more information on charter schools in Wisconsin, go to: [Charter Schools in Wisconsin | Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction](https://dpi.wi.gov/parental-education-options/charter-schools)

* Private schools are not funded by public tax dollars and charge tuition fees. They are run by private individuals or groups and do not have to follow state and federal regulations. They may have religious or other affiliations.

**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](https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&&p=b1789394a69443d7JmltdHM9MTY5NjU1MDQwMCZpZ3VpZD0wNDRlYjA3YS1lOTg0LTY4NDYtMWMxOS1hMjFiZTg2MjY5MjcmaW5zaWQ9NjAxNg&ptn=3&hsh=3&fclid=044eb07a-e984-6846-1c19-a21be8626927&psq=homeschooling+in+wisconsin&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuaG9tZXNjaG9vbGluZy13cGEub3JnL2ZhcXMvbmV3LXRvLWhvbWVzY2hvb2xpbmcv&ntb=1) [and provide 875 hours of instruction each school year](https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&&p=3e316306f1a07102JmltdHM9MTY5NjU1MDQwMCZpZ3VpZD0wNDRlYjA3YS1lOTg0LTY4NDYtMWMxOS1hMjFiZTg2MjY5MjcmaW5zaWQ9NjAxOQ&ptn=3&hsh=3&fclid=044eb07a-e984-6846-1c19-a21be8626927&psq=homeschooling+in+wisconsin&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cudGltZTRsZWFybmluZy5jb20vaG9tZXNjaG9vbGluZy93aXNjb25zaW4v&ntb=1). [They must also teach the required subjects and provide a sequentially progressive curriculum](https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&&p=ab2d79465196b61dJmltdHM9MTY5NjU1MDQwMCZpZ3VpZD0wNDRlYjA3YS1lOTg0LTY4NDYtMWMxOS1hMjFiZTg2MjY5MjcmaW5zaWQ9NjAyMw&ptn=3&hsh=3&fclid=044eb07a-e984-6846-1c19-a21be8626927&psq=homeschooling+in+wisconsin&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuaG9tZXNjaG9vbGluZy13cGEub3JnL2ZhcXMvd2hhdC1pcy1ob21lc2Nob29saW5nLWluLXdpc2NvbnNpbi8&ntb=1). [Homeschooling teachers do not need to be certified](https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&&p=3026d9ca8bfa1508JmltdHM9MTY5NjU1MDQwMCZpZ3VpZD0wNDRlYjA3YS1lOTg0LTY4NDYtMWMxOS1hMjFiZTg2MjY5MjcmaW5zaWQ9NjAyNg&ptn=3&hsh=3&fclid=044eb07a-e984-6846-1c19-a21be8626927&psq=homeschooling+in+wisconsin&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly9ob21lc2Nob29saW5nLmZ1bi9ob3ctZG8taS1ob21lc2Nob29sLWluLXdpc2NvbnNpbi8&ntb=1) [and homeschooling families can decide their own schedule, curriculum, testing, and record keeping](https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&&p=bfd24e773407e4fdJmltdHM9MTY5NjU1MDQwMCZpZ3VpZD0wNDRlYjA3YS1lOTg0LTY4NDYtMWMxOS1hMjFiZTg2MjY5MjcmaW5zaWQ9NjAyOA&ptn=3&hsh=3&fclid=044eb07a-e984-6846-1c19-a21be8626927&psq=homeschooling+in+wisconsin&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuaG9tZXNjaG9vbGluZy13cGEub3JnL2ZhcXMvbmV3LXRvLWhvbWVzY2hvb2xpbmcv&ntb=1)[.](https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&&p=b8babcc947671b6dJmltdHM9MTY5NjU1MDQwMCZpZ3VpZD0wNDRlYjA3YS1lOTg0LTY4NDYtMWMxOS1hMjFiZTg2MjY5MjcmaW5zaWQ9NjAyOQ&ptn=3&hsh=3&fclid=044eb07a-e984-6846-1c19-a21be8626927&psq=homeschooling+in+wisconsin&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuaG9tZXNjaG9vbGluZy13cGEub3JnL2ZhcXMvbmV3LXRvLWhvbWVzY2hvb2xpbmcv&ntb=1) Homeschooled children can participate in two public school classes as well as extra-curricular activities.

More information on home-based private education is available on the DPI website at: [Home-Based Private Education Program (Homeschooling) | Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction](https://dpi.wi.gov/parental-education-options/home-based)

**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 rather than sending the child to public school. 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](https://dpi.wi.gov/parental-education-options/choice-programs/student-applications): the [Milwaukee](https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/parental-education-options/Choice/Student_Application_Webpage/mpcp_2023-24_school_list.pdf) Parental Choice Program, the [Racine](https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/parental-education-options/Choice/Student_Application_Webpage/rpcp_2023-24_school_list.pdf) Parental Choice Program, the [Wisconsin](https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/parental-education-options/Choice/Student_Application_Webpage/wpcp_2023-24_school_list.pdf) Parental Choice Program and the [Special Needs Scholarship (SNSP) Program](https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/parental-education-options/SNSP/snsp_faq_rev._june_2022_parent.pdf).
* There are income limits which exist for a child/family to receive a voucher payment. Interestingly, it has been found that every single year, the number of private school kids who are new to the voucher program is bigger than the number of kids who come from public school.

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* 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](https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sfs/pdf/FY22-ChoiceOptionsFundingTable.pdf) 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.
* In the most recent biennium budget approved by the Wisconsin legislature, voucher schools received a major expansion of school choice funding. The plan, signed by Gov. Tony Evers, 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](https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/parental-education-options/Choice/Data_and_Reports/2022-23/2022-23_summary_mpcp_wpcp_rpcp_snsp.pdf) 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.
* Although private schools cannot deny admission to voucher students on the basis of LGBTQ+ identity, school policies apply once a student enrolls. There is no state law prohibiting LGBTQ+ discrimination against enrolled students. And 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.
* Students with disabilities lose a host of rights under federal law when they leave public schools. 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.
* 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. Beginning in the 2018-19 school year, Choice schools were required to conduct criminal background checks of its employees and exclude from employment anyone not permitted to hold a teaching license as a result of an offense or anyone believed to pose a threat to the safety of others. If a school fails to comply with this requirement, it may be terminated from the Choice programs.
* 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:
  1. Wisconsin Forward Exam for English Language Arts and Mathematics assessments in the spring for grades 3‑8.
  2. Wisconsin Forward Exam for Science in the spring for grades 4 and 8.
  3. Wisconsin Forward Exam for Social Studies in the spring for grades 4, 8, and 10.
  4. ACT Aspire™ in spring for grades 9 and 10
  5. The ACT® and ACT WorkKeys® in the spring for grade 11
  6. The state civics exam in high school.
* A[GOP bill signed by Gov. Tony Evers in 2021](https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2021/related/acts/89.pdf)created an 11-member advisory committee and called for a "financial information portal." The dashboard is designed to give taxpayers easy access to financial information about individual school and school district spending. It must include the total amount of local, state and federal funding received; cost per pupil; and how funds are distributed. The proposal for the dashboard also included information about the impact of voucher schools on public school including:  
  \*How much available revenue is spent on non-public school students;  
  \*how much of school district participants’ tax levy goes toward private voucher and independent charter schools; and  
  \*how much aid toward public school students is reduced, if at all. Despite Wisconsin’s private schools receiving more taxpayer funds than ever before, a coalition of groups is objecting to that public money being included in an online dashboard about school district finances.

For more information on the voucher system in Wisconsin, go to: [Voucher Transparency Toolkit.pdf - Google Drive](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BXefDtdfebHJWApWQmywzFSLD6X6mqCE/view)

For more information on how vouchers hurt students, schools, and communities, go to: [NCPE Voucher Toolkit (squarespace.com)](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/582f7c15f7e0ab3a3c7fb141/t/63d162c3ae7bc31595b41397/1674666706305/2023+-+NCPE+Voucher+Toolkit+FINAL.pdf)

# Note: The majority of information in this voucher section came from the DPI website and a May 5, 2023, article by Wisconsin Watch, “Considering a Wisconsin voucher school? Here’s what parents of children who are LGBTQ+ or have a disability should know.” *Private schools that accept taxpayer-funded vouchers have different rules from public schools.*

**Interested in discovering how much money your school district spends on voucher payments which could be used for students in your local school district? Contact the District Office of your school district and ask for a copy of the Proposed Budget which is presented at the Annual Meeting. There will be a line item which specifically denotes money being spent on the Private School Voucher Program. This will usually be found in the Non Salary Budget section under District Wide Programs.**

