



Indiana Department of Education

Choice Scholarship Program Income Verification Rules 2025-2026

Schools are required to verify household income at the time of application. Under no circumstances should a student's application be submitted without verifying income eligibility and retaining the required documentation in the student's file.

Options for Establishing Income Eligibility

There are two options for establishing income eligibility for participation in the Choice Scholarship Program:

- Option 1:** Choice Scholarship Eligibility Verification System
- Option 2:** Household Size and Income

Option 1: Choice Scholarship Eligibility System

This eligibility verification option uses the Indiana Department of Education's (IDOE) database to verify a student's income eligibility. Students who are in the Choice Scholarship Eligibility System (CSES) do not need additional income verification documents. The database uses information from multiple State agencies to determine income eligibility for a student in the system.

Participating Choice schools access the system in the STN Application Center. A 'How To' document for Choice schools about how to use the Choice Scholarship Eligibility System can be found in the [Non-Public School Community](#) on Moodle.

When a student is found in the CSES, the Choice school administrator must print the CSES eligibility results screen. This should be kept in the student's file as documentation of income eligibility. The student must also satisfy the requirements of one of the eight eligibility tracks.

The reference ID number provided on the eligibility results screen is required to be entered on the student's Choice Scholarship application. It is important to submit the Choice Scholarship application immediately because the Choice Scholarship eligibility system is updated regularly and the reference ID number may no longer be valid.

There is no guarantee that any student will be found in CSES, even if that student receives public assistance. If a student is not found in CSES, Option 2, Household Size and Income, is required to be used to verify eligibility for the Choice Scholarship award.

Option 2: Household Size and Income

Proof of total household size and income must be accurate and submitted for each household member. It is the responsibility of the family to provide supporting documentation to the school. Schools should never submit a Choice Scholarship application without the supporting documentation on file.

Determining Household Size

The following special situations should be considered when determining household size:



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Foster Children and Foreign Exchange Student

- Foster children and foreign exchange students are considered to be members of the household in which they reside.

Divorce or Separation

- Children of divorced or separated parents are part of the household that has 50 percent or more custody.
- When joint custody has been awarded and the child physically changes residence, the child is considered part of the household where he/she resides for the majority of the year.

Emancipated Child

- An emancipated child living alone is considered a household of one.

Family Members Living Apart

- Family members living apart on a temporary basis are considered household members.
- Family members not living in the household for an extended period of time are not considered members of the household for purposes of determining eligibility, but any money made available by them or on their behalf for the household is included as income to the household.

Child Attending an Institution

- A child who attends, but does not reside, in an institution is considered a member of the household in which the child resides.

Child Away at School

- A child who is temporarily away at school (college or boarding school) is included as a member of the household.

Child Living with One Parent, Relative, or Friends

- In cases where no specific welfare agency or court is legally responsible for the child or where the child is living with one parent, other relatives, or friends of the family, the child is considered to be a member of the household with whom the child resides.

Deployed Service Personnel

- Any member of the armed services who is activated or deployed in support of any military combat operation is counted as a household member.

Determining Household Income

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 business and farms
- Strike benefits, unemployment compensation, and worker's compensation

Welfare/Child Support/Alimony

- Public assistance payments/welfare benefits



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- Alimony or child support payments

Child's Income

- Earning 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
- Regular contributions from persons not living in the household
- Cash or investment gifts
- Military pay that is received prior to the service member's deployment to or service in the designated combat zone
- Life insurance benefits
- Living allowance
- Housing 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 Reservations (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 earning received on an irregular basis (not recurring, such as payment for occasional baby-sitting or mowing lawns)
- Adoption subsidies

Verifying Household Size and Income

2024 Federal Tax Return

- The Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) on the 2024 Federal Tax Return should be used to determine income eligibility.
- If members of the same household filed separate 2024 Federal Tax Returns, the AGI and household sizes for each return should be added together to determine the total household income and size and complete the Household Summary Form.



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- If the household size on the tax return is not accurate, the parent/guardian must complete the Household Summary Form with supporting documentation.
- If the student applying for the Choice Scholarship is not listed on the tax return, the parent/guardian must complete the Household Summary Form with supporting documentation.
- A copy of the tax return(s) and the Household Summary Form, if applicable, must be kept in the student's file.

Documentation to use in lieu of a 2024 Federal Tax Return

In situations where the 2024 Federal Tax Return is unavailable, or if an event recognized by the IDOE has occurred and has caused a significant involuntary decrease in the expected amount of income, the Gross Income amount will be used to determine eligibility. In these cases the parent/guardian is required to provide documentation of household income. The list that follows provides some examples of documentation that can be provided, but is not an exhaustive list.

- W-2
- Unemployment compensation statement
- 1099 and/or statements from banks or other financial institutions showing interest earning
- Earning from investments, bonds, estates, or trust accounts
- Social Security statements
- Pension or annuity statements
- Military retirement benefits statement
- Employer statement on company letterhead

When the 2024 Federal Tax Return is unavailable, the parent/guardian must provide an explanation on the Household Summary Form.

The following changes in circumstances are currently recognized by the IDOE as events that would render the prior tax return no longer accurate:

- Involuntary job loss (permanent)
- Involuntary reduction in hours (permanent)
- Death of a household member
- Separation/divorce of the parents/guardians

Additional Information

The income verification rules for determining student eligibility for the Choice Scholarship Program are adopted in large part from the Eligibility Manual for School Meals: Determining and Verifying Eligibility, Child Nutrition Programs, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA, August, 2014. School administrators should seek guidance from the IDOE at ChoiceSchool@doe.in.gov if they encounter scenarios that are not covered in the above guidance or in the following Income Verification FAQ.



Income Verification Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Number	Question	Answer
1	To qualify for a Choice Scholarship, does the household income have to meet certain guidelines?	Yes, a student must be a member of a household with an annual income equal to or below 400% of the amount to qualify for the federal free or reduced-price lunch program (FRL). The household income guidelines are detailed in the eligibility track documents posted in the Student Eligibility section here .
2	Who verifies household income and household size and when?	Schools are responsible for verifying a student's household income and household size at the time the application is submitted. Copies of all documentation used to verify income eligibility must be kept on file at the school after the application has been submitted. Under no circumstances should the school submit an application without verifying the household's total income.
3	When is total household size determined?	The total household size reported on the student's application for a Choice Scholarship is the total number of people who reside in the student's primary residence at the time the Choice application is submitted.
4	How should a school proceed if the household size reported on a 2024 Federal Tax Return does not reflect the number of people who reside in the student's primary residence?	<p>The school must collect the 2024 Federal Tax Return and have the parent/guardian complete the Household Summary Form. The parent/guardian must indicate on the Household Summary Form why the household size reported on the tax return is not the same as the household size that is reported on the student's Choice application. All household members must be listed on the Household Summary Form. Any household members who are 18 years of age or older must sign the form.</p> <p>If the student is claimed by a parent in alternating years, supporting documentation explaining this agreement must be kept in the student's file.</p>
5	If a parent is pregnant at the time of application, should the unborn baby be included in the household size?	No, the total household size reported on the application is the total household size at the time of application. If the baby is born prior to the application deadline, the parent may submit or resubmit the student's Choice application and include the baby in the household size count.



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Number	Question	Answer
6	What will happen if the wrong income or household size is entered on a student's application?	Inaccurate reporting on a student's application may result in a reduction or forfeiture of the student's Choice Scholarship award.
7	Are one-time distributions from IRA, 401k, pension, or annuity accounts included in the total household income?	Yes, any distributions from an IRA, 401k, pension or annuity account that occurred in 2024 are included in the total household income to be reported on a student's Choice Scholarship application for the 2025-2026 school year.
8	Is overtime pay included in the total household income?	Yes, all earnings and payment for work, including overtime pay, must be included in the total household income.
9	Can medical and other recurring expenses be deducted from the total household income?	No, for the purposes of Choice Scholarship Program eligibility, medical and other recurring expenses cannot be deducted from the household income calculated in accordance with the Choice Scholarship Program Income Verification Rules.
10	The parent/guardian has informed the school that he or she has no documentation to verify income. How should the school proceed?	In instances where the parent/guardian can provide no documentation, the school must have the parent/guardian complete the Household Summary Form and the optional Income Assurance Form. The parent/guardian must provide a detailed explanation in the space provided on the forms.
11	A parent/guardian comes to apply but does not bring documentation to verify the household income. What should the school do?	Without required documentation, the school should not proceed with the application process.
12	A parent/guardian comes to apply and informs the school that he or she did not file a 2024 Federal Tax Return. How should the school proceed?	The school should collect documentation used to determine the household income and have the parent/guardian complete the Household Summary Form and Calculation Worksheet. The total household income reported on the Household Summary Form is the sum of the amount from the Income Calculation Worksheet. The parent/guardian must explain on the Household Summary Form why the 2024 Federal Tax Return is unavailable. Please see the Income Verification Rules for a list of recognized forms of income and financial documentation.



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Number	Question	Answer
13	When is the prior year tax return or other required income documentation provided by the household no longer an accurate picture of household income for purposes of the Choice Scholarship Program?	If an event has occurred that has caused a significant involuntary decrease in the expected amount of income to be earned in the current year (2025) compared to the previous year (2024), and it is an event that is recognized as an event warranting use of income other than the 2024 federal tax forms, the total household income reported on the application is calculated according to the Choice Scholarship Program Income Verification Rules. The qualifying event must have occurred by September 1 for period 1 Choice Scholarship applications and by January 15 for period 2 Choice Scholarship applications. The school must have the parent/guardian complete the Household Summary Form, provide documentation of the prior year's income, documentation of the event that occurred that caused the change in income, and documentation of any current income that resulted from the event.
14	What type of events would be considered to cause a significant involuntary decrease in the expected amount of income to be earned in the current year?	The following changes in circumstances are currently recognized by the IDOE as events that would render the prior year tax return no longer accurate: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Involuntary job loss (permanent)● Involuntary reduction in hours (permanent)● Death of a household member● Separation/divorce of the parents/guardians
15	May anticipated changes in household income (anticipated loss of overtime, commissions, bonus, etc.) be reflected in the total household income reported on the Choice Scholarship application?	No, the event that causes a significant involuntary decrease in the expected amount of current year income must be an event which has already occurred by the time of application. The reported household income cannot be adjusted based on the uncertainty of future circumstances. E.g., money received in the form of a bonus in 2024 must be reported even though it is uncertain if the parent/guardian will not receive the same bonus in 2024.

For additional information, please contact ChoiceSchool@doe.in.gov.