

# Ohio Educational Choice Scholarship Program

Policy and Procedures Manual

Updated May 2007



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*Prepared by the Center for School Finance*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION

This manual was developed as a resource guide to ensure compliance with the Ohio Revised Code, Ohio Administrative Code, and all departmental policies and procedures related to the Ohio Educational Choice Scholarship Pilot Program.

The manual identified the policies and procedures of the Ohio Educational Choice Scholarship Pilot Program and is divided into the following sections:

- Section I      Educational Choice Scholarship Program Overview
  
- Section II     Program Participation by Chartered Nonpublic Schools
  
- Section III    EdChoice Scholarship Application and Award Process
  
- Section IV    Termination of EdChoice Scholarship Awards
  
- Section V     Verification of Applicant Family Income
  
- Section VI    EdChoice Program Dispute Resolution Process

Section VII    Access and Utilization of the Statewide Student Identification (SSID) System

Updated forms related to the Educational Choice Scholarship Pilot Program referenced within this manual are maintained and accessible on the program Web site at <http://EdChoice.ohio.gov>.

Ohio Revised Code and Ohio Administrative Code sections are referenced to identify the authority for an identified action or to reference statutory mandates.

This manual will be updated as necessary and an updated copy will be maintained and accessible on the program Web site at <http://EdChoice.ohio.gov>.

# Ohio Educational Choice Scholarship Program

## Policy and Procedures Manual

Updated May, 2007

### Section I – Educational Choice Scholarship Program Overview

The State of Ohio can provide up to 14,000 eligible students with scholarships to attend the participating private school of their choice. Students from schools that have been in Academic Watch or Academic Emergency, the lowest categories on the state's school rating system, for two of the past three years are eligible to apply.

The Educational Choice Scholarship program is established in Ohio Revised Code (ORC) Section 3310.02. ORC sections 3310.01 through .17 provide the program statutory guidelines. Program administrative rules are contained in Ohio Administrative Code (OAC) Sections 3301-11-01 through -15. The program policies and procedures as specified below further define program implementation.

### Section II – Program Participation by Chartered Nonpublic Schools

Ohio Revised Code                    3310.16 and other specific sections as cited below

Ohio Administrative Code    3301-11-11 Participation by Chartered Nonpublic Schools  
and other specific sections as cited below

#### Chartered Nonpublic School Registration

Chartered nonpublic schools that wish to participate in the EdChoice scholarship program must complete the Chartered Nonpublic School Registration form. The original, signed form must be submitted to ODE. EdChoice staff will verify that the nonpublic school has a current charter issued by the State Board of Education and that the school is in compliance with the Operating Standards for Ohio Schools. Upon receipt of program registration from a chartered nonpublic school, ODE EdChoice program staff will enter the school into the EdChoice system as a participating school. A list of all registered schools will be posted and maintained on the EdChoice web site. This list is updated as new schools join the program.

Chartered nonpublic schools shall annually complete or renew their program registration to maintain participation in the EdChoice scholarship program.

#### Site Visits to Participating Chartered Nonpublic Schools

ODE EdChoice program staff will conduct site visits at a selected number of participating chartered nonpublic schools each year in accordance with OAC 3301-11-11. The purpose of these site visits is to ensure that the EdChoice-participating schools are complying with the Operating Standards for Ohio Schools and with the requirements of the EdChoice Scholarship program. Items to be reviewed by EdChoice staff during site visits

include:

- Files and documentation for EdChoice Scholarship students;
- Teacher and staff certification;
- Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation background check documentation;
- Documentation for required health and safety inspections;
- School handbook and related policies per OAC 3301-11-11 (A)(12)(b); and
- School curriculum per ORC 3301.07, 3313.60 and 3313.602.

In most instances, selected private schools will be notified at least ten days prior to a site visit. However, ODE reserves the right to visit schools without prior notification.

Site visits are typically conducted on site and in person by a member or members of the EdChoice program staff. EdChoice program staff may also conduct desk audits of participating chartered nonpublic schools to allow schools to demonstrate compliance with Operating Standards and with the requirements of the EdChoice Scholarship Program by providing documentation to ODE in lieu of an in-person site visit.

Within 30 days following a site visit or the completion of a desk audit, schools will receive a review notification from ODE specifying any areas of noncompliance. The principal of the chartered nonpublic school must sign and return a statement indicating that all noted areas of noncompliance have been addressed within 90 days of the notification and the principal must provide documentation of compliance when requested. In some cases, scheduled and/or unscheduled follow-up reviews by ODE staff may be conducted to ensure that deficiencies are being addressed. If areas of noncompliance are not addressed within 90 days, ODE will require the principal of the chartered nonpublic school to submit a corrective action plan, as outlined below. If deficiencies persist, ODE may remove the school from participation in the EdChoice scholarship program.

### Documentation for Student Files

Appropriate records must be maintained for all EdChoice students. For students who have accepted an awarded scholarship, attendance will be monitored through the online system. Documentation maintained in the student file at the nonpublic school should include, but is not limited to:

- EdChoice Scholarship Request/Renewal form completed by the parent/guardian;
- EdChoice Scholarship Acceptance form signed by the parent/guardian;
- Student's original chartered nonpublic school enrollment application or registration documentation;
- Proof of current address of student and parent/guardian;
- A copy of the birth certificate for the student and/or any applicable documentation of student custody or guardianship;
- State Achievement Test results for students completing grades 3 through 8, and 10;
- Any written documentation regarding excused absences for the current school year and the school year immediately prior to the current school year;

### Teacher and Staff Certification/Licensure

All teaching staff at participating chartered nonpublic schools must be appropriately licensed or certified.

During site visits, EdChoice staff will review staff employee files for documentation of certification or licensure. Each teacher providing instruction at a participating chartered nonpublic school must be licensed through rules adopted in accordance with ORC 3319.22 or certified in accordance with ORC 3301.071, certification of teachers and administrators in nontax supported schools. Verification of certification or licensure must be maintained in the teacher's personnel file at the chartered nonpublic school. If an EdChoice-participating school is unable to provide documentation of teacher licensure or certification during the site visit, the school will have 90 days from ODE notification to provide documentation of a the teacher's licensure or certification to ODE.

### Staff Background Checks

All teachers and staff members of nonpublic schools participating in the EdChoice Scholarship program must undergo a mandatory criminal background check. ORC 3319.39 requires public and chartered nonpublic schools to conduct criminal background checks on individuals applying for any position that maintains care, custody or control of a child. In addition, ORC 3319.31 requires the State Board of Education to conduct criminal background checks on any individual applying for teacher certification or licensure.

Criminal background checks are performed by the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation and Identification (BCI). The Ohio Department of Education has a list of locations that school staff members can go to in their area to get their background checks conducted. This list can also be viewed at:

<http://www.webcheck.ag.state.oh.us/webcheckcommunity.htm>.

Participating nonpublic schools must ensure that criminal background checks have been conducted for all employees. If an EdChoice-participating school is unable to provide documentation of a background check on a teacher or staff member during the site visit, the school will have 90 days from ODE notification to provide documentation of a completed background check to ODE.

It is the policy of the EdChoice Scholarship program that participating chartered nonpublic schools ensure that criminal background checks are conducted for all staff members at least every five years. Criminal background checks are the financial responsibility of the school or the individual employee; ODE does not provide funding for the purposes of conducting or updating background checks at EdChoice participating nonpublic schools.

All criminal background checks should be maintained on file at the participating nonpublic school. If the school is part of an organizational hierarchy and files are maintained at a central location, the school shall notify ODE of its filing system and allow ODE to review files for EdChoice-participating schools at the central location. Background checks that note any criminal offenses must be forwarded to the EdChoice Scholarship program staff at ODE. EdChoice program staff will consult with the ODE Office of Professional Conduct to review the information and make the final determination as to whether or not the staff member can be employed by the chartered nonpublic school.

Participating private schools receiving a site visit or desk audit during the current school year will be required to allow EdChoice staff members to review background check documentation for all school staff members. Schools that are not reviewed by EdChoice staff during the school year will be required to annually submit a signed attestation form acknowledging that all staff members have had or are in the process of having a criminal background check performed and that this information will be kept on file.

Please note that staff employed through a public school district or educational service center that are located at a chartered nonpublic school through Auxiliary Services, Title 1 or other state or federal program must have background checks documented through their district employer. In such instances, ODE EdChoice staff may request the nonpublic school to provide a list of such employees. If requested by ODE, such list should include the employee name and date of birth, the public school district of employment, and the program through which the employee is funded.

## Required Health and Safety Inspections and Emergency Procedures

Participating chartered nonpublic schools must maintain school facilities that are safe and healthy environments. To that end, ODE will verify that emergency procedures are properly implemented and that health and safety inspections are up-to-date. Procedures and inspections to be reviewed during the site visit include:

- The most recent fire inspection report by the fire marshal per ORC 3737.22;
- Records of fire and tornado drills completed per ORC 3737.73 and OAC 1301:7-7-04;
- Emergency procedures posted in classrooms per ORC 3737.73, 3313.536 and OAC 3301-35-06(I)(2)(c)(v);
- School safety plan adopted per ORC 3313.536 and OAC 3301-35-06(I)(2)(c)(vi)
- Kitchen range hood suppression unit inspection in compliance with OAC 1301:7-7-06(J)[M], 4101:1-9-04.2.1;
- Current food service operation per ORC 3313.81, license per ORC 3717.41, and inspection per ORC 3717.47 and hair restraints and gloves per OAC 3717-1-02.3 (C), 3717-1-02.2;
- Pest control license per OAC 3717-1-07.1;
- Maintenance, Furnace/Boilers and School Environment per ORC 3707.03, 3707.26, and OAC 3301-35-06 and boiler certification per OAC 1301:3-5-05;

## Removal of School from Program Participation

Any chartered nonpublic school that does not fulfill its obligations under the EdChoice Scholarship Program may be disallowed from program participation per OAC 3301-11-11 (B).

If areas of noncompliance are identified during a site visit or desk audit performed by ODE EdChoice program staff, ODE will notify the participating school's principal regarding any areas of noncompliance noted during the review and provide 90 days for the school to correct any issues prior to entering a state of corrective action. If a chartered nonpublic school fails to address areas of noncompliance identified during a site visit or desk audit conducted by EdChoice program staff within 90 days, the EdChoice program administrator will require the school to create and institute a corrective action plan.

If areas of noncompliance are identified by another ODE program oversight office and if such areas of noncompliance have been communicated to the principal of a chartered nonpublic school by that oversight office, the oversight office may forward its findings of noncompliance to the EdChoice program administrator. If the principal of the chartered nonpublic school has failed to provide documentation to the respective ODE oversight office to demonstrate that all identified areas of noncompliance have been rectified, then the EdChoice program administrator may require the school to create and institute a corrective action plan.

The EdChoice program administrator shall notify the principal of the necessity to institute a corrective action plan and the date by which the plan must be drafted and delivered to ODE. Such plan shall be completed and signed by the principal of the chartered nonpublic school and delivered to ODE by the date established by the EdChoice scholarship program administrator. The corrective action plan must specify the actions to be implemented to rectify all areas of noncompliance noted by the EdChoice program staff, the date by which each action will be implemented, and the documentation that will be submitted to ODE as verification. The corrective action plan and any subsequent amendments to the plan must be approved by the EdChoice scholarship program administrator and must satisfactorily address all deficiencies noted by ODE.

If EdChoice program staff note persistent and unresolved deficiencies that place the school out of compliance

with the Operating Standards for Ohio's Schools per OAC 3301-35, the EdChoice program staff shall notify the appropriate ODE office charged with chartering nonpublic schools.

Review of the chartered nonpublic school's compliance with the Operating Standards for Ohio's Schools by the ODE office charged with chartering nonpublic schools may proceed simultaneously with the review of the school by the EdChoice scholarship program. In such cases, the corrective action plan implemented for the purposes of correcting deficiencies noted by EdChoice program staff may also serve as the corrective action plan or remediation plan to be implemented to resolve issues regarding compliance with the Operating Standards.

If the school participates in other ODE-funded programs, such as the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program (CSTP), then the appropriate ODE oversight offices must also approve the corrective action plan. If the chartered nonpublic school has a corrective action plan in process to rectify deficiencies noted by another ODE oversight office or program, such as CSTP, then that plan may also serve as the corrective plan for the EdChoice scholarship program if the plan addresses all issues identified by the EdChoice program staff. All ODE offices involved with approval and/or funding of programs at the chartered nonpublic school may coordinate review efforts to ensure that all deficiencies are resolved in accordance with the approved corrective action plan. If additional deficiencies are noted by other ODE oversight offices during the corrective action process, then the chartered nonpublic school principal shall amend the corrective action plan to address the additional deficiencies noted.

EdChoice program staff shall maintain close contact with the school's principal to ensure that the approved corrective action plan is implemented in accordance with the approved timeline. During the corrective action process, ODE may take action to prevent the chartered nonpublic school personnel from entering additional EdChoice applications for new students into the online system.

If a school fails to submit a corrective action plan by the date established by the EdChoice program administrator, or if the EdChoice program administrator finds that a submitted corrective action plan does not adequately and fully address all identified areas of noncompliance, or if the school fails to complete the implementation of each action in an approved corrective action plan in accordance with the approved timeline, ODE shall notify the principal of the chartered nonpublic school of ODE's intent to remove the school from participation in the EdChoice scholarship program. Such notice to the principal of the chartered nonpublic school shall inform the principal of the right to a hearing in accordance with section 119 of the Ohio Revised Code. Notice shall be given by registered mail, return receipt requested, and shall include the reasons for the proposed removal from EdChoice participation. The principal of the chartered nonpublic school shall have 30 days from the time of the mailing of the notice to request such hearing. Such notice shall meet all requirements of ORC 119.07.

If the principal of the nonpublic school requests a hearing, then ODE shall immediately set the date, time, and place for the hearing and notify the principal in accordance with section 119 of the Ohio Revised Code

If the principal of the chartered nonpublic school does not request a hearing, or if the recommendation of the referee or examiner is that the school be removed from participation in the EdChoice scholarship program for the reasons cited by ODE, then the EdChoice scholarship program administrator shall order the school removed from the list of chartered nonpublic schools approved to participate in the EdChoice scholarship program for a period of time to be specified in such order or until such time as all areas of noncompliance have been satisfactorily addressed and documentation of compliance provided. Such order shall be served by certified mail, return receipt requested, to the principal of the chartered nonpublic school.

EdChoice scholarship recipients with students attending such school shall be notified of the necessity to transfer to another EdChoice-participating nonpublic school to maintain scholarship awards. Such notices to parents shall include information regarding OAC 3301-11-08, Transfer of scholarship.

Should an EdChoice-participating school be removed from program participation or cease to be chartered by the State Board of Education, ODE shall cease all EdChoice scholarship payments for students attending such school until such time as the student transfers to another EdChoice-participating chartered nonpublic school.

### **Section III – EdChoice Scholarship Application and Award Process**

Ohio Revised Code	3310.03
	3310.11
Ohio Administrative Code	3301-11-04 Eligibility for program participation
	3301-11-05 Application for program participation
	3301-11-06 Errors specified by public school district
	3301-11-07 Awarding scholarships
	3301-11-08 Transfer of scholarship
	3301-11-09 Termination of eligibility
	3301-11-12 Entities designated to file applications
	3301-11-14 Dispute resolution

ORC 3310.03, as amplified by OAC 3301-11-04, specifies student eligibility requirements.

The following students are eligible to apply for an EdChoice scholarship:

- Students currently enrolled in and attending EdChoice-designated public school buildings – schools rated in academic emergency or academic watch for two of the past three years;
- Students enrolled in a community school who would otherwise be assigned to one of the EdChoice-designated public school buildings, or;
- Students currently enrolled in a regular public school or community school who would be assigned to attend one of the EdChoice-designated public school buildings for the upcoming school year. This provision is generally for students moving from one level of school to the next. For example, public school students moving from elementary to middle school would be eligible to apply if the middle school that they would be assigned to in the fall is designated for EdChoice;
- Students eligible to enter kindergarten in the next school year who would be assigned to one of the EdChoice public school buildings.

The following section explains EdChoice scholarship submission, review, and award.

#### **Application Process and Data Entry**

If a student is eligible for the EdChoice Scholarship program, the first step is to apply for admission at a participating nonpublic school. Students must first be admitted for enrollment at a participating nonpublic school for the next school year and then apply for an EdChoice Scholarship.

The parent/guardian of the EdChoice-eligible student must complete the EdChoice Scholarship Request/Renewal form. Through completion of this form, the parent/guardian of an eligible student authorizes the

participating chartered nonpublic school to submit application data to the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) per OAC 3301-11-12. In addition to the signed Scholarship Request/Renewal form, the parent/guardian must submit the following documentation to the chartered nonpublic school:

- Proof of current address for the parent/legal guardian with whom the student resides. Acceptable proof of address documentation includes, but is not limited to, a current utility bill in the name of the parent/guardian, a current mortgage statement or lease agreement or a current pay stub that includes the parent/guardian's address.
- Evidence of legal guardianship. Acceptable documentation may include a copy of the birth certificate for the student, and/or applicable legal documentation of student custody or guardianship. Questions of legal guardianship, should such arise, must be resolved by the appropriate court with such jurisdiction.

Nonpublic school staff members that have authorization to enter student application data are assigned the role of "Nominator-EdChoice" by their school administrators or school hierarchy organizations in the Ohio Educational Directory System (OEDS). Once access is established, Nominators enter student application data into the online EdChoice Scholarship Application System during the application period specified by ODE per 3301-11-07 (B). Once the nonpublic school has submitted all required data into the online system, the review process begins. The online EdChoice Scholarship Application System will not accept the submission of incomplete applications.

### Public School District Application Review

Pursuant to Rule 3301-11-06 of the Ohio Administrative Code, "public school districts shall be afforded reasonable opportunity to specify errors in application and continuing eligibility information that would affect scholarship awards and payments."

Each first-time student application can be reviewed by at least one authorized staff member at the public school district that oversees the EdChoice-designated public school. Authorized public school district reviewers are assigned the OEDS role of "Reviewer-EdChoice" by their public school districts. Reviewers must verify each student's application information against the information that the district has on file for that student. Ohio Revised Code 3310.11(B) also requires the public district reviewer to provide ODE with the student's state identification number (SSID). In the case of incoming kindergartners and students attending community schools, the district Reviewer verifies that students would be assigned to an EdChoice-eligible school based on the address listed on the application.

The district Reviewer has the opportunity to "flag" any information on the student application that does not match the information in the student's public school district file. If all of the application information matches the district's information, and the public school Reviewer marks that the application contains no errors, the student application moves to "Qualified" status. "Qualified" status indicates that the public school district agrees with the student information provided on the application. Qualified applications are eligible for scholarship award.

### Editing and Reviewing Applications

Any application that has been "flagged" as containing errors by the public school district Reviewer must be edited and then resubmitted by the nonpublic school. The nonpublic school Nominator has access to edit the application and must make any necessary corrections and verify any questionable information with the student's parent to ensure that application information is accurate.

Once the nonpublic school Nominator has edited the application, it is resubmitted to the public school district for review. The process of editing and reviewing the applications is ongoing until all issues regarding questionable information on the application have been resolved or until the conclusion of the review period

specified by ODE.

At the conclusion of the specified period for application review, ODE EdChoice staff review each outstanding application remaining in Submitted status. Outstanding applications are then either placed into “Qualified – ODE Review” or “Not Qualified” status. “Qualified – ODE Review” indicates ODE has reviewed the application and determined that sufficient information exists to verify that the student is eligible to receive a scholarship.

### Scholarship Award and Denial

Applications in both “Qualified” and “Qualified – ODE Review” statuses constitute the pool of applications valid for award. Once student eligibility has been determined, the scholarship award process begins.

Applications in “Not Qualified” status are those that have been determined as not eligible for EdChoice scholarship award. Such applications do not meet EdChoice eligibility requirements for one or more of the following reasons:

- Student has graduated from high school;
- Student has earned an Ohio GED High School Equivalence Diploma;
- Student is not a resident of the public school district listed on the application;
- Student did not attend the public school listed on the application during the current school year and would not be assigned to attend the listed school in the upcoming school year.
- For incoming kindergartners and charter school students, the student would not be assigned to attend the EdChoice-eligible school listed on the application; or
- Student is not age-eligible to attend kindergarten in the public school district.

Students with “Qualified” applications may be awarded an EdChoice Scholarship. Awards are made in priority order, by lottery if necessary, according to ORC 3310.02 as amplified by 3301-11-07. When the number of valid applications exceeds the number of scholarships available, those students not awarded a scholarship through the lottery are placed on a waiting list per OAC 3301-11-07(E).

Students with “Not Qualified” applications are denied an EdChoice Scholarship. Letters are sent to parents informing them of whether or not their child received a scholarship.

### Scholarship Acceptance or Request for Reconsideration of Application

Each parent or guardian of a student awarded an EdChoice scholarship must complete the EdChoice Scholarship Acceptance Form. This form confirms that the parent accepts the scholarship and that the parent intends to use the scholarship for tuition payments to the nonpublic school listed on the student’s application.

Once a parent has completed the acceptance form, he or she must deliver the form to the nonpublic school. The nonpublic school Nominator must then complete the scholarship acceptance process in the EdChoice application system. At this time, the Nominator must enter the tuition amount for each individual student. The acceptance form must be kept on file at the nonpublic school.

Each parent or guardian of a student denied an EdChoice Scholarship may submit a Request for Reconsideration to ODE. Each Request for Reconsideration must fully explain why the parent or guardian disagrees with the scholarship denial and must provide supporting documentation verifying eligibility. ODE reviews each Request for Reconsideration in accordance with OAC 3301-11-14. If ODE determines that a student’s application is eligible for award, the parent or guardian is notified of award or placement on a waiting

list, as applicable.

### Scholarship Transfer

If a parent or guardian of a student awarded an EdChoice scholarship chooses, he or she may transfer the scholarship to another participating chartered nonpublic school. The nonpublic school to which the student is transferring and the parent or guardian must complete a Request for Nonpublic School Transfer. This form must be signed by the parent or guardian of the student and the administrator of the nonpublic school to which the parent or guardian is requesting scholarship transfer and submitted to ODE in accordance with OAC 3301-11-08.

Students who withdraw or are expelled by a nonpublic school must transfer to another participating nonpublic school within thirty calendar days per OAC 3301-11-09. If a student withdraws or is expelled from a participating chartered nonpublic school and fails to transfer to another participating nonpublic school within thirty days, then the scholarship award is terminated.

### Renewal of Scholarship in Subsequent Years

ORC 3310.03(B) provides that a student who receives an EdChoice scholarship may renew the scholarship each school year through the completion of twelfth grade as long as the following apply:

- The student's resident public school district remains the same, or, if the student moves to a new public school district, the student would be assigned to an EdChoice-designated public school building in the new school district;
- The student takes each state achievement test prescribed for the student's grade level; and
- The student does not have more than twenty unexcused absences from school during a single school year. See section on Excused Absences below.

Students renewing their scholarships receive first priority in the awarding of scholarships for each school year in accordance with ORC 3310.02.

Parents wishing to renew their child's scholarship will be required to complete a Scholarship Request/Renewal form. Through this form, the parent may update any application information, such as address, from the previous year. Proof of address must be provided and maintained on file at the chartered nonpublic school. The parent must also provide both the nonpublic school and ODE, when requested, additional information and documentation necessary to verify the student's continuing eligibility to receive an EdChoice scholarship.

### Excused Absences

To maintain EdChoice Scholarship eligibility for future school years, a scholarship recipient student may not have more than twenty unexcused absences during a single school year. Any absence from school is unexcused unless it is for one of the following approved reasons. All excused absences must be documented as stipulated below. Documentation for excused absences must be maintained in the student file at the chartered nonpublic school.

An excused absence from school may be approved on the basis of one or more of the following conditions:

- Illness or injury of the child. The parent/guardian must provide documentation to the chartered nonpublic school. Any absence for illness or injury of the child which exceeds three days absent from school must be certified in writing by a physician or appropriate health professional.
- Illness in the family necessitating the presence of the child. The parent/guardian must provide documentation to the chartered nonpublic school stating the nature of the illness and the circumstances

which require the presence of the child. Any such absence which exceeds three days absent from school must be certified in writing by a physician or appropriate health professional.

- Quarantine of the home. The absence of a child from school under this condition is limited to the length of quarantine as determined and certified in writing by the proper health professionals.
- Death of a relative. The absence arising from this condition is limited to a period of three days and must be documented in writing by the parent/guardian of the student. Any absence for this reason in excess of three days must be approved by the Chief Program Officer of the Ohio Educational Choice Scholarship Program.
- Medical or dental appointment. The parent/guardian must provide documentation to the chartered nonpublic school. The chartered nonpublic school may require a written statement from the physician or dentist upon request.
- Observance of religious holidays. A child shall be excused for absences for the purpose of observing a religious holiday consistent with his/her truly held religious beliefs. The parent/guardian must provide documentation to the chartered nonpublic school detailing dates of all absences for religious holidays.
- College visitation. The parent/guardian must provide documentation from the college, university, or technical college verifying the date and time of the visitation.
- Emergency or other set of circumstances. The parent or guardian must provide documentation to the chartered nonpublic school detailing the emergency circumstances. Any absence for this reason in excess of three days must be approved by the Chief Program Officer of the Ohio Educational Choice Scholarship Program.
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#### **Section IV – Termination of EdChoice Scholarship Awards**

Ohio Revised Code            3310.03

3310.08

Ohio Administrative Code    3301-11-09 Termination of eligibility

#### **Termination of Eligibility During a School Year**

ORC 3310.08(B)(2), as amplified by OAC 3301-11-09, stipulates that ODE shall terminate scholarship payments for a student who withdraws from a chartered nonpublic school prior to the end of the school year.

Termination of eligibility for an EdChoice scholarship during a school year shall occur for the following reasons:

- If ODE determines that the application made for the program contained false information that led to scholarship award; or
- If the scholarship student withdraws from or is expelled from the nonpublic school, and fails to enroll in another EdChoice-participating chartered nonpublic school within 30 calendar days.

Written notification of scholarship termination will be sent to the scholarship recipient and will include the effective date of the termination.

#### **Termination of Eligibility to Receive Scholarships in Future School Years**

ORC 3310.03(B) stipulates the requirements for continued eligibility in subsequent school years. Thus, eligibility to receive scholarships in subsequent school years shall cease if any of the following circumstances occur:

- If the student’s resident public school district changes, that is, if the student moves outside of the resident district in which the student resided when the original scholarship was awarded and the public school to which the student would be assigned in the new public school district is not designated for EdChoice; or
- If the student fails to take the state achievement tests for his or her grade level; or
- If the student has more than twenty unexcused absences from school in a single school year.

Under these circumstances, the student will not be eligible for scholarship renewal, and, if the student has already submitted an application for scholarship renewal, such application will be denied.

### **Section V – Verification of Applicant Family Income**

Ohio Revised Code	3310.02
	3310.13
Ohio Administrative Code	3301-11-01 Definitions
	3301-11-05 Application for program participation
	3301-11-07 Awarding scholarships
	3301-11-13 Qualified income verification agents

If the number of valid EdChoice scholarship applications exceeds the number of available scholarships, applicants with verified family incomes at or below two hundred percent of the federal poverty guidelines shall be given priority over those with incomes over that amount. Additionally, if the annual tuition at the selected chartered nonpublic school exceeds the maximum EdChoice scholarship amount for the student’s grade level, scholarship awardees from families with income at or below two hundred percent of the federal poverty guideline are not required to pay any excess tuition amounts.

At the time of scholarship application, the parent/guardian of the eligible student may request low income priority by marking the applicable box on the Scholarship Request/Renewal Form. If any scholarship application includes such request for low income priority, the parent or guardian of the student shall be required to provide documentation to verify the income of any and all members of the student’s family.

ODE shall annually enter into contracts with one or more qualified income verification agents to perform income verifications for the administration of the EdChoice Scholarship program.

#### **Process for Verification**

The family, for purposes of the Ohio Educational Choice Scholarship program, shall consist of one or more caretaker(s) and all of their minor children who reside in the same household. Adults other than the caretaker(s) who reside in the same household shall not be included in the family. A caretaker could be the father or mother of a child, an adult who has legal custody of a child or an adult who is the guardian of a child.

Earned and unearned income of all family members shall be included in the verification. The following income types are excluded from the family income calculation:

- 1) Combat Pay of a person actively serving in the military.

- 2) Foster Care maintenance payments.
- 3) Adoption Assistance payments.
- 4) Earned income of a minor if the minor is also a FT student.
- 5) Non-recurring lump sum payments.

Documents used to verify income should be representative of current income.

Acceptable documentation of all sources of income may include income tax returns, W-2's, 1099's, pay stubs, business records, correspondence from the Social Security Administration, Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation, Department of Job and Family Services and other providers of benefits. If the income received is in cash without a receipt, a contact with the employer is required. In order to obtain all pertinent information regarding family income, contact with individuals or agencies may be made by the verification company after obtaining a signed written consent from the caretaker.

All documentation used to verify income shall be copied and kept on file by the income verification company. The income verification company will enter verified annual income and family size into the EdChoice online application system. The determination of low-income status will be provided to the private school via the online application system.

## **Section VI – EdChoice Program Dispute Resolution Process**

Ohio Administrative Code 3301-11-14 Dispute Resolution

ODE is the final authority in the resolution of disputes arising in regard to any aspect of the EdChoice Scholarship Program. Those wishing to submit a complaint should send the complaint, in written form, to the Ohio Department of Education. Complaints should include supporting documentation. ODE may also gather documentation relevant to the complaint from chartered nonpublic and public schools or districts, when necessary.

The parent or guardian of a student denied an EdChoice Scholarship may submit a Request for Reconsideration to ODE. Consideration of such requests will be made in accordance with the program's dispute resolution process. Each Request for Reconsideration must fully explain why the parent or guardian disagrees with the scholarship denial and must provide supporting documentation verifying eligibility.

ODE will review all documentation provided, including ODE records as applicable, and make a final determination within thirty days of receiving the complaint. Determinations made by ODE regarding disputes related to the EdChoice scholarship program are final.

## **Section VII – Access and Utilization of the Statewide Student Identification System (SSID)**

Ohio Revised Code 3310.11

Ohio Revised Code Section 3310.11 allows the Ohio Department of Education to access and utilize the SSID system for the administration of the Ohio Educational Choice Scholarship Program (EdChoice). This access and use is necessary to ensure that the correct SSIDs are associated with EdChoice Scholarship awardees. SSIDs are used in EdChoice program administration:

- To ensure that EdChoice awardees are not also counted and paid in the ADM of another public school district or community school (concurrent enrollment checks); and
- To track student assessment records & data.

The procedures used by EdChoice program staff to appropriately handle SSIDs and personally-identifiable

student data is below. At all times, EdChoice program staff must maintain student privacy in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. EdChoice program staff will take necessary steps to ensure that ODE does not associate personally-identifiable student data and SSID information for any purpose other than the administration of the EdChoice Scholarship program.

### EdChoice Application Process

The EdChoice Scholarship web-based application has been designed to gather SSIDs from public school districts at the time that the public school district reviews a student's EdChoice application data. The EdChoice system requires that the public school district reviewer enter an SSID for each student applicant in grades 1 through 12 to submit a review found to contain no data errors. Therefore, EdChoice applications for students in grades 1 through 12 contain SSID data prior to scholarship award.

ODE EdChoice staff also request that public school districts assign SSIDs to district-resident incoming kindergartners who apply for EdChoice Scholarships. If the public school district declines to assign SSIDs to incoming kindergartners, ODE will assign SSIDs to those incoming kindergartners without SSIDs following scholarship award in accordance with ORC 3310.11 (B). ODE will notify the student's public school district of residence annually when SSIDs are assigned to incoming kindergarten students. Public school districts may access the EdChoice online system to obtain SSIDs that are assigned to incoming kindergarten students.

### SSID Validation Process

To ensure that the SSID provided by the public school district during the application process is valid, ODE conducts a SSID validation process. Such validation ensures the integrity of the EdChoice data and identifies errors.

#### *Validation through Batch Processing*

Throughout the SSID validation process, ODE sends batch data to the SSID system in accordance with established SSID system procedures. This allows ODE to ensure that the correct SSID is matched to each individual EdChoice student. SSIDs validated through this batch process receive the student status code "SSID Validated" in the EdChoice application system.

#### *Online Review of Individual Student Data for Validation*

Those SSIDs that fail validation during the batch process are individually reviewed by ODE EdChoice program staff. This individual review utilizes the web-based Statewide Student Identifier System. Only the EdChoice Chief Program Officer and Management Analysts have the ability to access the web-based SSID system through password-protected log-on capability. EdChoice staff with access to the web-based SSID system shall not share personal passwords. Such misuse of system access will result in disciplinary action.

ODE EdChoice program staff use SSID system access to review data for EdChoice student SSIDs that fail to match during batch file processing. EdChoice staff compares data elements in the EdChoice application with data elements in the SSID system to determine why the match failed.

If, as a result of this review, it is determined that one or more required data elements is inconsistent between the EdChoice application and the SSID system, EdChoice staff contacts the nonpublic school to obtain documentation to determine the accurate data.

- When the EdChoice application data is found to be inaccurate, EdChoice staff correct the data in the EdChoice system using the student edit function. The record is then re-sent for validation as part of the next batch process.
- When the SSID system data is found to be inaccurate, EdChoice staff correct the data in the

SSID system. The student's EdChoice record is then marked to resend for validation as part of the next batch process.

- EdChoice staff maintains a record of each data element updated and communicate that information to the student's public school district of residence. Paper copies of documentation used to verify and correct data, such as student birth certificates, are kept of file at ODE for a minimum of six months and a maximum of one year and then destroyed to protect student privacy. Prior to destruction, documentation may be electronically scanned and maintained in a secure electronic file accessible solely to EdChoice program staff.

At no time shall EdChoice staff make changes or edits to the SSID system data without written documentation to prove the accuracy of such changes.

#### *Addressing Duplicate SSIDs*

As a result of EdChoice SSID validation procedures, it is likely that ODE will find that duplicate SSIDs exist for an individual student. In such instances, ODE shall take the following steps to ensure that only one active SSID is maintained in the SSID system for each student:

- Analyze which SSID has the most extensive and most recent EMIS data associated with it.
- Deactivate the older SSID if there is no EMIS data associated with it. If both SSIDs have associated EMIS data, contact the public school district or community school to determine which SSID should be maintained. In such instances, ODE will operate with the understanding that the default position should be to maintain the SSID with the most extensive and most recent EMIS data.
- Notify the public school district of residence with which the student has been most recently identified regarding which SSID has been deactivated and which SSID is maintained for each individual student.

#### Use of SSIDs by Nonpublic Schools

SSIDs are used by nonpublic schools for administration and tracking of student assessment data. Authorized nonpublic school personnel shall have access to the SSID through the EdChoice online system.

#### Maintenance and Handling of SSIDs and Personally Identifiable Student Information

Per Ohio Revised Code Section 3310.12, any EdChoice program document that contains both a student's name or other personally identifiable information and the student's data verification code shall not be a public record under section 149.43 of the Revised Code.

ODE EdChoice staff should, whenever possible, refrain from printing documents that contain both SSIDs and personally identifiable student data. If printing is necessary to perform work during the application review or SSID validation process, such documents may be kept on file at ODE for a maximum of one year and then destroyed to protect student privacy. Any documentation that is maintained in a student's EdChoice file as a record of eligibility determination must have SSID information redacted.

All EdChoice student records containing personally identifiable student data shall be maintained in locked filing systems.

EdChoice program staff with access to personally identifiable student data shall be trained annually regarding the proper handling of such information and such staff will be required to complete a nondisclosure statement approved by the ODE office charged with ensuring data security.

