

Wisconsin Public Education Accountability Comparison — All Five School Types

Sources: LFB Papers 33 & 34 (Jan. 2025) · s. 118.40 & s. 118.60, Wis. Stats. (2023-24) · One City Advocates (2026)

This comparison chart maps the statutory and contractual accountability requirements for all five types of publicly funded schools in Wisconsin across four dimensions: academic accountability, financial oversight, organizational/compliance requirements, and consequences for underperformance. Sources: LFB Informational Papers 33 & 34 (Jan. 2025); One City Advocates Accountability Framework (2026); s. 118.40 & s. 118.60, Wis. Stats. (2023-24).

Legend

Yes / applies / required
Does not apply
Partial / conditional
N/A

Accountability dimension	Traditional Public Schools (all districts)	Instrumentality charters (district board-authorized)	Non-instrumentality charter (district board-authorized)	Independent charters (OEO/UW/city/tech college)	Private choice (voucher) schools ss. 118.60 / 119.23
Academic accountability					
DPI annual state report card	Required; published publicly	Yes; part of district report	Yes; included in district report	Yes; own school report card	Required if accredited; school must prominently link on website (s. 118.60(9m))
Automatic sanctions for low ratings	No automatic sanctions	No automatic sanctions	Possible via charter non-renewal	Yes — poor score contributes to non-renewal / revocation	No — poor report card rating carries no automatic sanction; school may continue participating
Must match or exceed peer / district averages	No comparative requirement	No comparative requirement	No comparative requirement	Yes — must match / exceed local district AND state averages	No comparative requirement
Specific subgroup performance targets	ESSA monitoring; no direct comparison required	ESSA monitoring applies	ESSA monitoring applies	Yes — specific targets for Black students & economically disadvantaged vs. local district	No — ESSA does not apply to private schools
Growth metric thresholds required	Growth in report card; no specific threshold	Growth in report card; no specific threshold	Growth in report card; no specific threshold	Yes — 50%+ of students must meet NWEA MAP fall-to-spring targets	No growth metric thresholds required
Mission-specific measurable goals	Not required; internal goals only	Not required externally	Not required externally	Yes — required by charter contract (e.g., Habits of Character)	No mission-specific goals required
State standardized assessments	Required (ss. 118.30, 121.02)	Required	Required	Required	Required under s. 118.60(7)(b)1. — must administer and report 5 yrs of scores to DPI; voucher pupils only, not all enrolled
Curriculum requirements	Full Ch. 115–121 curriculum statutes apply	Mostly applies as part of district	Exempt except where specified by contract	Exempt; Holocaust/genocide instruction required by contract for grades 5–12	Holocaust/genocide required if grades 5–12 (s. 118.60(2)(a)9.); must meet instructional hours; otherwise exempt from Ch. 115–121

Wisconsin Public Education Accountability Comparison — All Five School Types

Sources: LFB Papers 33 & 34 (Jan. 2025) · s. 118.40 & s. 118.60, Wis. Stats. (2023-24) · One City Advocates (2026)

Accountability dimension	Traditional Public Schools (all districts)	Instrumentality charters (district board-authorized)	Non-instrumentality charter (district board-authorized)	Independent charters (OEO/UW/city/tech college)	Private choice (voucher) schools ss. 118.60 / 119.23
Required instructional hours	437 / 1,050 / 1,137 hrs by grade band	Yes	Not required	Not required	Yes — 1,050 hrs grades 1–6; 1,137 hrs grades 7–12 (s. 118.60(2)(a)8.)
Financial accountability					
Annual independent financial audit	Required; findings reported to DPI	Covered by district audit	Required by contract	Required; findings impact performance rating	Required — s. 118.60(7)(b); must comply with AICPA standards; must include net eligible education expenses & fund balance
Specific financial ratio / viability thresholds	No ratio requirements; local board oversight	No ratio requirements	No ratio requirements	Yes — current ratio ≥ 1.1 ; debt-to-asset ≤ 0.9 ; scored annually	Audit must show no financial non-viability; new schools must show positive cash flow; no specific ratio thresholds as in OEO
Surety bond / financial security requirement	None	None	None	None	Yes — new schools must provide annual surety bond payable to state until meeting audit viability standard (s. 118.60(7m))
Budget submitted to external oversight body	Local board approves; state sets revenue limits	District board approves	Governing board approves	Budget submitted to OEO; revisions require notification	New schools submit anticipated budget to DPI (s. 118.60(ag)); established schools have no ongoing budget submission
Organizational / compliance accountability					
Teacher credential requirement	DPI license or permit required for all instructional staff	DPI license or permit required	DPI license or permit required	DPI license or permit required	Teachers: DPI license OR bachelor's degree from accredited institution (s. 118.60(2)(a)6.) — full DPI licensure not required
Accreditation requirement	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes — must achieve accreditation within 3 years; new schools must obtain pre-accreditation; must maintain continuously (s. 118.60(2)(a)7., (7)(ad))
Health and safety compliance	Full public school health & safety laws apply	Full public school health & safety laws apply	Required by statute and contract	Required by statute and contract	Must meet all health and safety laws or codes that apply to public schools (s. 118.60(2)(a)5.)

Wisconsin Public Education Accountability Comparison — All Five School Types

Sources: LFB Papers 33 & 34 (Jan. 2025) · s. 118.40 & s. 118.60, Wis. Stats. (2023-24) · One City Advocates (2026)

Accountability dimension	Traditional Public Schools (all districts)	Instrumentality charters (district board-authorized)	Non-instrumentality charter (district board-authorized)	Independent charters (OEO/UW/city/tech college)	Private choice (voucher) schools ss. 118.60 / 119.23
Nondiscrimination in admissions	Federal & state civil rights law apply	Required	Required	Required	Must comply with 42 USC 2000d (s. 118.60(2)(a)4.); random lottery if oversubscribed
Governance transparency / public records	Full open meetings and public records law (Ch. 19)	Full Ch. 19 applies	Open meetings law applies as public body	Open meetings law; 10 governance areas monitored by OEO	Must provide governing body names and nonprofit status to DPI and applicants; open meetings law does NOT apply — these are private entities
Regular external oversight visits / inspections	Occasional DPI visits for concerns only	No routine visits	Authorizer monitors compliance	Regular OEO site visits with classroom observations and record reviews	DPI may audit and investigate; no routine scheduled site visits required by statute
Must provide disclosure info to parents / applicants	Annual notifications required	As part of district	Via district and charter	School and district accountability reports required	Extensive disclosures: governing body names, nonprofit status, accreditation, suspension/expulsion policies, appeals process, credit transfer policy (s. 118.60(6m))
Consequences for underperformance / noncompliance					
Closure for academic underperformance	Not mandated in Wisconsin	Not mandated	Possible via non-renewal	Yes — score below 50% = non-renewal and closure	No — poor academic performance alone does not trigger removal from program; school may continue regardless of outcomes
Removal from program / non-renewal for noncompliance	State aid withheld for 20 standards violations	Via district; aid withheld for standards violations	Via charter revocation	Charter revocation for poor performance	Yes — State Supt. may bar / terminate for: financial non-viability, loss of accreditation, health/safety violations, fraud, or retained disqualified persons (s. 118.60(10))
Immediate / emergency closure possible	No immediate closure mechanism	No immediate closure	Authorizer may revoke	Yes — authorizer may revoke	Yes — State Supt. may immediately terminate if imminent threat to health or safety of pupils (s. 118.60(10)(b))
Payments withheld for noncompliance	Up to 25% of state aid withheld for 20 standards violations	Via district	Via contract	Performance affects renewal terms and payments	Yes — DPI may withhold payments pending audit compliance or investigation; overpayments must be repaid (s. 118.60(10)(d))

Wisconsin Public Education Accountability Comparison — All Five School Types

Sources: LFB Papers 33 & 34 (Jan. 2025) · s. 118.40 & s. 118.60, Wis. Stats. (2023-24) · One City Advocates (2026)

Accountability dimension	Traditional Public Schools (all districts)	Instrumentality charters (district board-authorized)	Non-instrumentality charter (district board-authorized)	Independent charters (OEO/UW/city/tech college)	Private choice (voucher) schools ss. 118.60 / 119.23
Automatic closure trigger	No automatic closure in Wisconsin	No automatic closure	Authorizer discretion	3 consecutive years of 'Far Below Standard' = revocation	Loss of accreditation triggers mandatory barment at end of school year (s. 118.60(10)(ar)); no academic performance trigger
Timeline for improvement before closure / removal risk	Up to 6 years under ESSA CSI before 'more rigorous interventions'	Up to 6 years under ESSA CSI	Contract-dependent	3 consecutive years before revocation	Accreditation within 3 years; financial cure period in some cases; no academic performance timeline
Subject to ESSA federal accountability	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes — plus additional OEO layer on top	No — ESSA does not apply to private schools; choice schools are exempt from federal education accountability

Key statutory principle: Except as otherwise explicitly provided, Chapters 115–121 of the Wisconsin Statutes do NOT apply to charter schools (s. 118.40(7)(b)). Traditional public schools are subject to all of Chapters 115–121. The voucher column reflects requirements under the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP / s. 118.60); Milwaukee and Racine programs (s. 119.23) have largely parallel requirements.