



SCHOOL CHOICE
Advisor

JULY 22, 2002 VOL. 1, ISSUE 5

A Briefing for Legislative Candidates: The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program

Following recent legislative deliberations and the U.S. Supreme Court's decision on educational vouchers, this issue of the *School Choice Advisor* provides background on the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), the nation's largest and oldest school voucher program for low-income families.

Constitutionality

In 1992 and 1998 the Wisconsin Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the MPCP. On June 27, 2002 the United States Supreme Court upheld voucher programs, such as the MPCP, that let parents choose among non-religious and religious private schools.

Cost

In Wisconsin, the cost of K-12 education is shared by the state treasury and local property taxpayers. On average, the state pays two-thirds of K-12 costs, with the actual percentage varying among communities. For example, in Milwaukee the state pays 55% of MPCP costs — less than the statewide average of two-thirds. By comparison, the state pays 85% of the cost of students who attend the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS).

Fiscal Impact of Ending the MPCP

Ending the MPCP would:

- transfer thousands of students to MPS;
- increase state costs; and
- shift state aid to MPS from all 425 districts outside Milwaukee.

To deal with the lost aid, non-Milwaukee districts could raise property taxes or cut school budgets.

Regulations

State law requires private schools in the MPCP to:

- Comply with non-discrimination provisions of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

- Randomly admit eligible students.
- Follow health and safety codes that apply to public schools.
- Follow uniform accounting standards established by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI).
- Submit an annual financial audit to DPI.
- Allow students to "opt out" of religious activity.
- Provide a "sequentially progressive curriculum" in reading, language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, and health.

Results

University of Wisconsin Professor John Witte, the state's official MPCP evaluator from 1990 to 1995, said in a 2000 book:

"Choice can be a useful tool to aid families and educators in inner city and poor communities where education has been a struggle for several generations If programs are devised correctly, they can provide meaningful educational choices to families that now do not have such choices. And it is not trivial that most people in America ... already have such choices."

MPS Superintendent Spence Korte and a majority of elected MPS board members believe school choice has had a positive impact on public schools. A report by citywide MPS Director John Gardner shows that conditions in MPS have improved during a time of rapid expansion of educational options.

Harvard economist Caroline M. Hoxby analyzed MPS test scores in schools with the most students eligible for vouchers. She compared those results with scores at other MPS schools and with a control group of other Wisconsin public schools not exposed to vouchers. She concluded:

"Overall, an evaluation of Milwaukee suggests

continued on page 2



Meet Dorothy Smith: Grandmother Raising 7 Children

Dorothy Smith has been a foster parent for 20 years. Currently, she is raising seven children. All of them are enrolled in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP). They attend the non-sectarian Marva Collins Preparatory School and non-sectarian Urban Day School.

Smith talks about how the MPCP, which provides low-income families with a taxpayer-funded voucher to attend the participating private or religious school of their choice, has affected her family:

"If I have a foster child at the beginning of the school year, I always put them in a choice school because they are usually far behind and need the extra help."



Smith with LaTosha on her lap and Shakera, Eddie and Robert.


"In the public schools, the kids needed more attention than they were able to get. I felt the children were never challenged. They didn't have homework. Now, they have an hour or two hours of homework a day. It's mandatory that they read every day. The curriculum says 20 minutes but I have them do

an hour. The kids complain. I can understand why they don't want to read. It's because they really don't know how. They've never really been encouraged to read."

"At the private school, if you have a problem, you can nip it in the bud right away. You can see the teacher right away and address it. The teachers spend so much time with the children. And I do whatever is necessary to get my kids what they need to become productive citizens."

"I've seen a difference in Robert because of the vouchers. He has blossomed. He is more in tune about what he wants to do with his life. He is more focused. He knows what high school he wants to go to. He knows what college he wants to

go to. He knows he has to maintain his grade point average to achieve what he wants to achieve."

"The key is that the parents have to be involved. The vouchers force you to choose the best school for each child." 

Milwaukee Choice Program Improves Public Schools, *from page 1*

that public schools have a strong, positive response to competition from vouchers.... [S]chools that faced the most potential competition from vouchers had the best productivity response."

Among MPCP students, a separate Harvard research team found statistically significant math and reading test score gains. A Princeton study found math gains similar to those identified by the Harvard research. The Princeton study did not find reading gains. Witte did not find gains.


Use of State Tests

In 2001, MPCP opponents in the Wisconsin Senate defeated a proposal for a long-term program evaluation that would have included state standardized tests. A coalition of MPCP schools had volunteered to administer the state exams given to

students in third, fourth, eighth, and tenth grade. The Milwaukee school choice coalition continues to support such a long-term evaluation.

More Information

Additional information is available at www.SchoolChoiceInfo.org. The website is maintained by the American Education Reform Council, Marquette University's Institute for the Transformation of Learning, and the Black Alliance for Educational Options.

Information also is available from DPI, which administers the MPCP. DPI's website for MPCP information is www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dfm/sms/choice.html. 



How School Vouchers Help Children in Milwaukee

By Robert Rauh, Principal, Marva Collins Preparatory School

I was talking to a mother as she came to pick up her son from kindergarten one day this past school year. She was telling me about their plans to celebrate her son's birthday. I learned later that by the time they walked the few short blocks back home on 35th Street, their house was surrounded by yellow police tape and swarming with officers. The three young men who lived on the first floor had been slain.

Unable to get back into their apartment, where presents and cake were waiting, the birthday celebration was deferred.

I could fill pages with a litany of "dreams deferred" that some of our 300 children have endured due to family, health, social or economic situations outside of their control.

“Choice is improving the success of individual children and creating competitive tension that causes other schools in Milwaukee to improve. As a result, choice has been influential in creating positive changes for all Milwaukee children.”

Yet, our scholars are a resilient bunch. They come to school each morning in their neatly pressed uniforms, with their homework done and eager to start the day. It is an incredible tribute to them and their parents that they persevere in the face of adversity.

While our families are predominately low-income and African American, they are not drastically different than other families in Milwaukee. They share a universal dream of an outstanding academic experience in a safe and nurturing environment for their children.

The mission of those of us who have taken on roles as educators, policy-makers, or politicians is to work alongside parents to insure that the dream of these families is never deferred.

That's why I support the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. It provides more than 10,000 children from low-income families with an opportunity to select and attend a school of their choice. Eighty five percent of the children at our school are in the choice program.

During my nine years of work as an administrator at schools enrolling voucher children, there have been countless times when I have seen the dramatic impact of giving parents the freedom and ability to choose a school that is right for their children. Choice is improving the success of individual children and creating competitive tension that causes other schools in Milwaukee to improve. As a result, choice has been influential in creating positive changes for all Milwaukee children.

It is essential that we build a community of schools in our city that ensures the

academic dreams of our children are not deferred. During the past decade, the choice program has done just that. 🎓



Robert Rauh, Principal of Marva Collins Preparatory School of Wisconsin, has been working with schools enrolling voucher children for nearly 10 years.

Contact Information

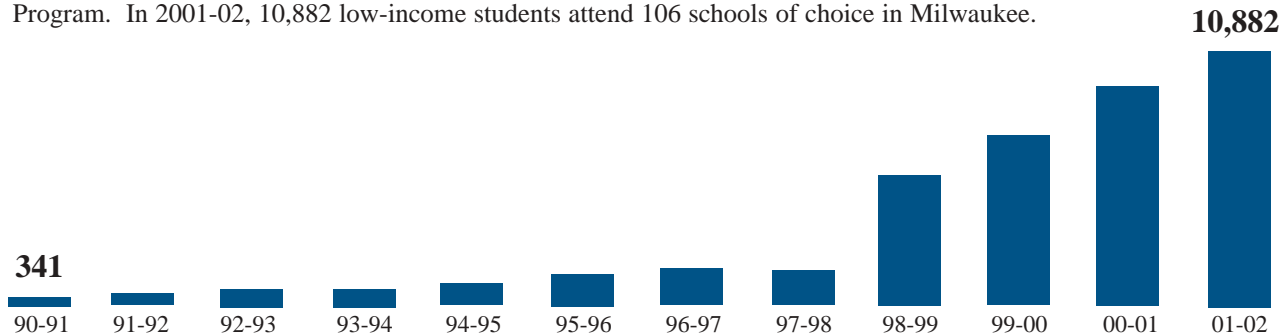
The School Choice Advisor is published periodically by the American Education Reform Council, Office of Research

You can reach us at:
 AERC
 2025 N. Summit Avenue, Suite 103
 Milwaukee, WI 53202
 Phone (414) 319-9160

Milwaukee Parental Choice Program – *Quick Facts*

MPCP enrollment growth, 1990-91 to 2001-02

In 1990-91, 341 students from low-income families participated in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. In 2001-02, 10,882 low-income students attend 106 schools of choice in Milwaukee.



- **Status**—The MPCP is the nation’s oldest taxpayer-funded program giving low-income families vouchers to enroll their children in non-religious and religious private schools.
- **Enrollment**—The program has grown from 341 students at seven schools in 1990-91 to 10,882 students at 106 schools in 2001-02. Enrollment may not exceed 15% of the Milwaukee Public Schools’ (MPS) enrollment, or about 15,000 students.
- **Student Eligibility**— Voucher recipients must live in Milwaukee and come from low-income families (household income at or below 175% of the federal poverty level—\$30,913 for a family of four in 2001-02).
- **Voucher Amount**—In 2001-02, the maximum per pupil MPCP voucher amount was \$5,553. In comparison, per pupil spending in the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) was \$9,926.
- **School Eligibility**—Participating private schools must be located in the City of Milwaukee.
- **Selection Criteria**—Private schools participating in the program must admit all eligible choice students and use a random selection process when applications exceed available space.
- **Regulations for Participating Private Schools** —Participating schools must follow laws that apply to all Wisconsin private schools. They must comply with health and safety codes and with specified federal civil rights laws. In addition, they must follow state accounting standards and file an independent audit.

The School Choice Advisor is published by the American Education Reform Council

PRESORTED
 FIRST CLASS
 US POSTAGE
PAID
 MILWAUKEE, WI
 PERMIT NO. 5654