

AMERICAN EDUCATION REFORM COUNCIL

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The Impact of School Choice on Racial Integration in Milwaukee Private Schools

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Four years after a major expansion of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), private schools in the program are more racially integrated than schools in the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), according to a report issued today. Milwaukee's experience contradicts suggestions that school choice programs would foster less integration.

In "The Impact of School Choice on Racial Integration in Milwaukee Private Schools," Howard Fuller and Deborah Greiveldinger compare racial isolation in MPCP and MPS schools. Based on a standard used by the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, Fuller and Greiveldinger define a school as racially isolated if enrollment is 90% or more minority or white.

According to 2001-02 enrollment data, 54.4% of MPS students attended racially isolated schools, compared to 49.8% of students at MPCP schools. The differences are more pronounced when racial isolation in MPS schools (54.4%) is compared to religious schools in the MPCP (41.8%).

Fuller co-authored two previous reports refuting claims that school choice would increase racial isolation in schools. In the current report, he and Greiveldinger conclude that the "history of the MPCP refutes predictions and claims by school choice opponents that the program's expansion to include religious schools would increase racial segregation. Indeed, the data suggest that including religious schools in a voucher program targeting low-income families has contributed to more integration in private religious schools than in the Milwaukee Public Schools system."