



Milwaukee's School Choice Programs Spark \$99.3 Million Capital Commitment

Thanks to educational choice programs, nearly \$100 million in completed and planned investments will help build and renovate schools in Milwaukee neighborhoods, according to a report from the American Education Reform Council (AERC).

“Tens of millions in private capital – some spent in partnership with public funds – have been used to build new schools and expand existing ones,” according to “Schools That Choice Built.”

Most projects are in Milwaukee neighborhoods where, according to 2000 Census data, half or more of the residents have an income below 175% of the federal poverty level.

“The projects help stabilize these neighborhoods and take tremendous fiscal pressure off the Milwaukee Public Schools and its taxpayers,” said AERC President Susan Mitchell.

“Schools that Choice Built” identifies sixty-five schools, enrolling 16,748 students, where investments of \$76 mil-

lion are completed and an additional \$23 million in spending is planned. (See related graphic on page 4.)

Completed and planned investments total \$99,308,254, ranging from \$1,000 to \$8,200,000. The average investment was \$1,527,819, with the median investment at \$350,000. Twenty-one projects cost more than \$1 million, accounting for 90% of all investment.

The report reflects an AERC survey of 133 privately operated Milwaukee schools participating in three programs – vouchers, charters, and partnership schools – that the Wisconsin legislature has created to expand educational options in Milwaukee.

Of 133 schools surveyed (106 private voucher schools, 15 independent charter schools, and 12 private schools in partnership with the Milwaukee Public Schools), 104 responded.

The report, “Schools that Choice Built,” can be found at www.SchoolChoiceWI.org.

Doyle Budget Provides Modest Growth in Choice & Charter Funds

Governor Jim Doyle's 2003-2005 budget proposal treats Milwaukee's choice and charter programs in a manner similar to changes proposed for K-12 schools statewide.

The Governor proposed a one percent increase in K-12 school aid for 2003-2004 and an additional half-percent increase for 2004-05.

For the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), the Governor also proposed increases of one per cent for 2003-04 and one-half percent for 2004-05. Based on this year's maximum per pupil voucher amount of \$5,783, this means a \$55 per pupil increase in 2003-04 and another \$28 per pupil increase in 2004-05.

For charter schools sponsored by the Common Council and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, the Governor proposed annual per pupil increases of \$55 and \$28, respectively. Based on this year's payment of \$6,951 per pupil, these per pupil figures amount to an increase of 0.8% in 2003-04 and 0.4% in 2004-05.

As anticipated, Doyle's proposed funding level for K-12 programs represents reduced growth in comparison to prior years. Doyle justified this by the need to address the state's budget deficit and noted that the limited growth in K-12 funding compares with absolute reductions in several other areas.

Before the budget was released, representatives of Milwaukee's choice and charter coalition had urged the Doyle Administration to not treat K-12 schools statewide differently than choice and charter programs.



Wisconsin Newspapers Report the True Cost of School Choice

Using data from the state's nonpartisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau, several Wisconsin newspapers have reported recently on the fiscal impact of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP).

As the new Legislature and Governor address the state's budget deficit, two key themes emerge from this media coverage:

- Educational vouchers do not cut school aid to districts outside Milwaukee.
- Ending the MPCP could mean higher state education costs and a reduction in school aid to districts outside Milwaukee.

In the past, controversy over the MPCP has resulted from confusion and misinformation about the program's fiscal impact. The recent media coverage has helped set the record straight.

Newspapers covering this issue recently have included: the Wausau Daily Herald; the Wisconsin Rapids Tribune; the Racine Journal Times; the Oshkosh Northwestern; the Beloit Daily News; the Manitowoc Herald Times Reporter; the Marinette Eagle Herald; the Marshfield News Herald; the Watertown Daily Times; the Superior Daily Telegram, and the West Bend Daily News.

The newspapers' coverage of the fiscal impact of the MPCP is outlined in an upcoming report, "For the Record: School Choice Saves Money," by the American Education Reform Council.

The report and other information on the financial impact of school choice, including links to Fiscal Bureau documents, will be available at www.SchoolChoiceWI.org.

More Evidence: Choice Improves Public Schools

Recent research on Milwaukee's public schools confirms that exposure to competition from the MPCP caused significant academic



improvements. "Controlling for demographic factors of race and income as well as for local school spending, public schools exposed to competition showed more improvement in student test scores than other public schools," Manhattan Institute researchers Jay P. Greene and Greg Forster have concluded.

The same report found similar public school gains in San Antonio, Texas, since a privately funded scholarship program began in 1998. These findings are consistent with previous research on Milwaukee, and in other cities with school choice programs.

MPS Spokesman Warns About Stagnation

"If we do not market ourselves, if we do not compete the way charter schools and Catholic schools compete for kids, we are dead in the water," said Milwaukee Public Schools spokesman, Don Hoffman, in a Feb. 3 Milwaukee Journal Sentinel article titled, "Schools chase the dollars open enrollment can bring; 'Marketing' enters the lexicon of public districts around the state."

Bookmark this New Web Site

Go to www.SchoolChoiceWI.org for the most comprehensive and up-to-date news on educational choice. This new website is devoted entirely to educational options in Milwaukee and their impact on the state. The site, sponsored by the American Education Reform Council, offers current data and background information on Milwaukee's voucher program, charter schools, and public school options. It features news articles, charts, graphs, maps, colorful reports and newsletters chronicling the explosion of school choice in Milwaukee.

Watch for "Choice" Lobbyists

The American Education Reform Foundation (AERF) has a new lobbying team making the rounds in Madison. Ed Eberle joined AERF recently after several years as a legislative staff member, most recently for Representative Dean Kaufert (R- Neenah). Debbie Greiveldinger, who has worked on school choice issues in Milwaukee for nearly four years, will assist Eberle as he directs legislative efforts on behalf of Milwaukee's school choice coalition.



Vivid TV Documentary Portrays Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, Families

All Lynn Wylie wanted for her second-grade son Billy was a school that would help him succeed.

“Billy was not doing well in school, he was not happy... Things were getting nowhere and I thought ... there’s got to be something better out there,” recalls Wylie.

Then she learned about the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP). Through the MPCP she found a school — Prince of Peace School on Milwaukee’s near south side — where Billy, now a fifth-grader, is improving.



Billy’s story, and that of two other MPCP students, is featured in a newly released documentary film, “Freedom to Choose: How School Choice Revitalized an American City.” The other featured students are Chronda, daughter of Tony Higgins, and Warithuddin, son of Debra Shareef. Chronda was graduated last year from St. Joan Antida High School and attends Alverno College on scholarship. Warithuddin is an 8th grade student at Clara Mohammed School.

The film tracks each student’s activities during the course of an academic year. Thanks to the openness of the students and their families, viewers get a close look at the struggles of low-income families seeking quality educational options.

The families’ personal stories are augmented by interviews with MPCP school principals, public officials, and school choice advocates. Their insights provide the historical and political context for the creation, expansion, and growing success of Milwaukee’s program.

“In every single [MPS] school there was a gap in achievement between black and white kids,” said Dr. Howard Fuller, former MPS superintendent.

“People couldn’t do basic math. It was really raising some serious question about the future of the city,” said former state Rep. Antonio Riley (D-Milwaukee).

“When the archdiocese talked about closing a number of inner city schools in my Assembly district, I went to this meeting and I was astonished at what I saw. There was not a single place to sit and I looked at that and I just sat at that meeting and I said, ‘no, this is more than just about education. This is about empowering parents. If school choice is gonna produce this kind of parental involvement what on earth could be wrong with giving parents these additional options?’”

The challenges facing Milwaukee are not unique.

“Inner city schools are some of the most expensive public schools on a per pupil basis in the United States. However, they are not great schools to which to send your child,” Harvard University economist Caroline Hoxby notes.

But the story of Milwaukee’s historic school choice program offers no quick fixes. It is candid in its depiction of the families’ situations and what the choice program can offer.

“In the neighborhood that we live in, there isn’t a lot of hope there,” says Wylie. “But that’s why I want them to know ... that you have potential now. I was the first one in my family that didn’t graduate from high school and it’s a stigma ... My kids aren’t gonna go through that.”

School leaders, such as principal Donna Schmidt at Prince of Peace School, make it clear the choice program is a partnership.

“Billy came to us as a student with a physical disability and a low self esteem,” recalls Schmidt.

“He had his ups and downs and he’s had his defiant times with us but every time he did, we called him on it and we called mom and said, ‘you need to come in here because this is what happened with Billy and it’s not okay.’”

Elsewhere during the film, Hoxby notes the important effect that creating parental options has had on the Milwaukee Public Schools.

“It’s worth remembering that even in the largest voucher programs in the United States, [most]students in the city will still be in the public schools. So, what happens to those students matters a lot. I found that the Milwaukee Public Schools showed rapid improvement in their students’ results. Math scores were growing by six national percentile points a year in my study.... These were much larger changes than I expected to see,” Hoxby says.

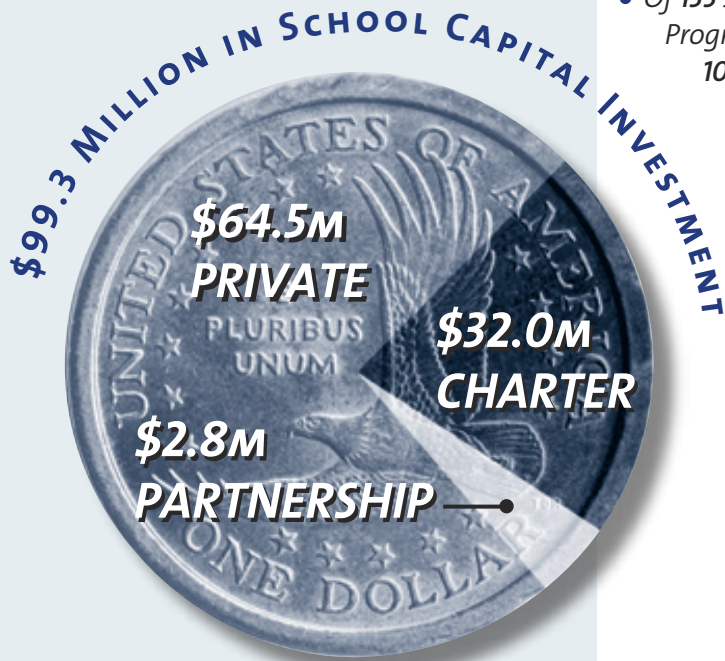
The 28-minute documentary was professionally produced and underwritten by the American Education Reform Council (AERC). Videotape copies of the documentary and permission to show them publicly can be obtained by contacting AERC.

Contact Information

The School Choice Advisor is edited and designed by Sharon Schmeling and Phil Norton of the American Education Reform Council.

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School Choice Sparks \$99.3 Million of Investments in Milwaukee's Poorest Neighborhoods



Private, Charter, and Partnership School Survey Data:

- Of 133 schools surveyed (106 Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, 15 independent charter, & 12 partnership schools), 104 responded.
- Sixty-five schools, enrolling 16,748 students, made capital investments.
 - Investments totaled \$99,308,254, ranging from \$1,000 to \$8,200,000.
 - The average investment was \$1,527,819, with the median investment at \$350,000.
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Private Schools:

Nonsectarian & religious schools in the MPCP

Charter Schools:

Independent schools chartered by Milwaukee Public Schools, the City of Milwaukee, and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Partnership Schools:

Privately run schools with MPS contracts

For more information about the survey, see story on page 1.

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