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## More city teachers than public pick private schools Union dismisses effort to draw conclusions from study

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Public schoolteachers who live in Milwaukee are more likely to send their children to private schools than city residents in general, according to an analysis of 2000 census data by researchers working for a foundation associated with conservative positions on education issues.

The new paper, issued by the Washington-based Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, says that 29.4% of public schoolteachers who live in the city said their children attend private schools, compared with 23.4% of all families in the city. The data come from answers given by people who were selected to answer the "long form" of the 2000 census questionnaire.

Nationwide, the authors said, 21.5% of urban public schoolteachers send their children to private schools, compared with 17.5% of urban families in general.

The data are similar to other reports going back to the 1980 census and touch on a sensitive aspect in debates about such issues as the need for major change in public schools or the merits of private school voucher programs such as the one Milwaukee has.

"We can assume that no one knows the condition and quality of public schools better than teachers who work in them every day," the paper's authors write. "If these teachers are more likely than the general public . . . to send their own daughters and sons to the public schools in which they teach, it is a strong vote of confidence in those schools.

"If they do not, then we might reasonably conclude that those in the best position to know are signaling a strong 'sell' about public education in their communities." They used the term "sell" to compare decisions made by teachers to the signals that a corporation's officials send when they sell their own stock in the company.

Sam Carmen, executive director of the Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association, dismissed any effort to draw conclusions from the data.

If the figures are accurate, that means 71% of teachers send their children to public schools, he said, a large majority vote in support of the schools. And there are reasons for picking a private school - religious convictions, for example - that do not necessarily reflect any judgment of public schools, he said.

"I don't think it is fair to draw any conclusion from those numbers," Carmen said.

Howard Fuller, former Milwaukee school superintendent and a leading advocate of voucher and charter school programs, said: "We support a teacher's right to choose a private school. We simply ask them to support the same freedom for low-income families."

The Fordham report says the city with the largest difference between the percent of public school teachers sending their children to private schools and the percent of the general public doing so was Rochester, N.Y., where 37.5% of teachers and 14.6% of the general public chose private schools.

On the other hand, in 21 of the 50 cities and metropolitan areas in the report, teachers were less likely than the general public to send their children to private schools.

The authors of the report are Dennis Philip Doyle, Brian Diepold and David Alan DeSchryver. Financial support for the authors was provided by the American Education Reform Council, formerly based in Milwaukee and now part of the Arizona-based Alliance for School Choice.