



An Education System "In The Public Interest"

Community leaders in Milwaukee are redefining what "public education" means. As a result, traditional barriers to expanded educational opportunity are disappearing, especially for low-income parents.

Milwaukee's story epitomizes a vision identified by Dr. Kenneth Clark, a towering figure in American civil rights history. More than three decades ago, he told a conference on equal educational opportunity that "public education need not be identified with the present system of public schools." Rather, Dr. Clark said, it "can be more broadly and pragmatically defined [as] an education system which is in the public interest."

To illustrate, the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) has a partnership with Holy Redeemer Christian Church to turn a vacant warehouse into a school with classrooms for both MPS and Holy Redeemer. The mostly African American students will share the gym, media center, swimming pool, and fine arts center. The plan includes a family counseling center and a Boys & Girls Club for after-school programs.

At La Escuela Principe de Paz, a private Catholic school in a largely Hispanic neighborhood, MPS is sharing the cost of an early childhood learning center. Had MPS built a separate facility, taxpayer costs would have been much higher. By collaborating, both parties came out ahead.

These partnerships produce schools "in the public interest." As the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* said in describing such developments, the "concept draws on something every adult is supposed to learn in kindergarten — sharing."

Such examples are everywhere in Milwaukee. Nearly a dozen community and faith-based groups have partnerships with MPS for new schools and expansion of existing facilities.

These include partnerships with such "private" community groups as the Silver Spring Neighborhood Center, Journey House, the Latino Community Center, Garden Homes Lutheran Church, Community Baptist Church, and the Lisbon Avenue Neighborhood Development Corporation.

State government plays a key role. Many schools working with MPS enroll students in Wisconsin's 11-year old voucher program for low-income families. Under a separate state program, city government and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee have chartered public schools that operate in partnership with groups such as the Urban League.

The net result is a substantial growth in educational options for Milwaukee parents. The Black Alliance for Educational Options salutes MPS, the City of Milwaukee, and the State of Wisconsin for creating these new choices. They truly are in the public interest.

Parental School Choice is Widespread — Unless You're Poor.



Black Alliance for Educational Options

For more information go to: schoolchoiceinfo.org or baeo.org