



Evidence: With More Choices, Milwaukee's Public Schools Are Stronger

The academic achievement of Milwaukee public school students has improved during a time of rapidly expanding educational options, according to new data from an elected member of the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) Board of Directors.

A report from MPS Director John Gardner shows that the percent of students scoring proficient on state tests grew in all 15 grade and subject categories between 1998 and 2001. The gains came even as MPS educated more students who live in poverty or come from racial and ethnic minority groups. During the period of these gains, Milwaukee experienced rapid growth in tax-supported school voucher and charter school programs.

Gardner's report, *Milwaukee's Public Schools: The Untold Story of America's Newest Democratic Revolution*, provides other evidence contradicting predictions that expanded school choice would hurt public schools. For example, MPS per pupil spending has grown, not declined and its enrollment is up, not down.

Reacting to the new report, two longtime school choice critics acknowledged that MPS has responded positively to expanded choice.

Wisconsin State Representative Christine Sinicki, a Democrat from Milwaukee, told *The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, "If John Gardner believes the school district has improved, the public can believe it...I really hate to say this because I'm not a choice supporter, but I do think that the threat of choice did force the public school system to make...changes." Sinicki is a former member of the MPS School Board.

MPS teacher Bob Peterson, a *Rethinking Schools* editor and school choice critic, told Wisconsin Public Radio that, like Sinicki, he believed choice had been a factor encouraging positive change at MPS.

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

Gardner's findings are consistent with independent research by Harvard economist Caroline Hoxby, who has found a positive public school response to voucher and charter programs in Milwaukee, Michigan, and Arizona. A separate analysis by *USA Today* also has found improvements in the academic achievement and fiscal condition of Milwaukee's schools.

The Gardner report is posted under Hot Topics at www.SchoolChoiceInfo.org. The site also contains information on the Hoxby study and the USA Today analysis.



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