

# Research Brief

## After a decade of choice, voucher schools look like MPS

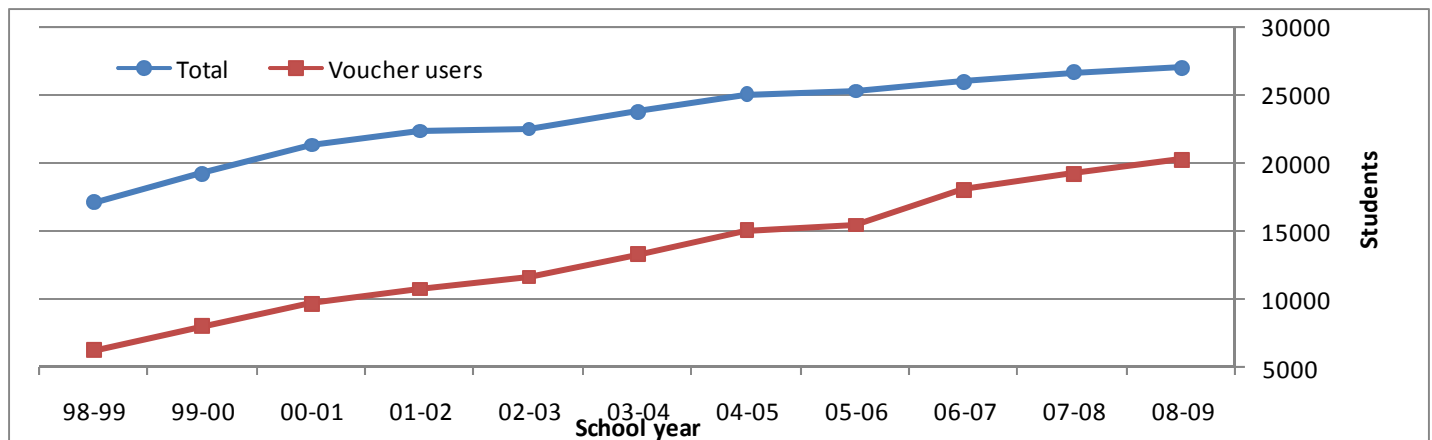
The number of students using vouchers to attend private schools in Milwaukee under the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) has grown from 6,194 in 1998-99 to 20,244 today. The value of a voucher also has grown during this time, from \$4,894 to \$6,607 per full-time pupil, resulting in an increase in the annual cost to fund the program, from \$28.2 million to \$129.1 million over the past decade. Not surprisingly, the total enrollment in the private schools in the program has also grown, by a hefty 58%. So, after more than 10 years of growth, are the characteristics of MPCP schools markedly different from Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS)?

Our annual census of participating schools indicates that in many ways, the answer is no. Today, schools participating in the MPCP have an average voucher use rate of 78% of enrollment. Because only low-income students are eligible to use a voucher, MPCP school enrollments are likely to be at least 78% low-income, while the average MPS school is 77% low-income. In addition, MPCP school enrollments are now 85% minority students, compared to an average of 88% minority students in an MPS school. Student-teacher ratios at the average MPS and MPCP schools are also similar, at 15.6 students per full-time teacher in MPCP and 14.9 students per full-time teacher in MPS.

While MPS and MPCP schools have become similar in these important characteristics, differences do remain. Most MPCP schools provide religious instruction, with 81% of all voucher students enrolled in a religious school. MPCP also appears to retain high school students more successfully than MPS, with a “drop-out” rate of 36% for the MPCP class of 2008 compared to 62% for MPS. And while all MPS students must take the same state standardized exam under state and federal law, of 114 MPCP schools using standardized tests, less than half (53) administer the state test.

In this 11th edition of our annual census, we focus on long-term trend data, highlighting the following subjects: enrollment, school characteristics, accreditation and achievement tests, and teaching staffs. For the complete 2008-09 data and a directory of all participating schools, please visit the Forum’s website at [www.publicpolicyforum.org](http://www.publicpolicyforum.org).

### Enrollment growth in private schools participating in MPCP, 1998-99 to 2008-09



### Key Findings 2008-09

- Total voucher use grew 5% over last year (1,011 students), the second smallest annual growth since religious schools joined the program. Overall enrollment in the private schools participating in MPCP grew less than 2% (368 students).
- Schools receive accreditation from 15 different accrediting agencies. Twenty-seven schools reported being accredited by more than one agency.
- Most schools in MPCP are religious (101 schools) and 81% of voucher users attend religious schools.
- On average, 78% of an MPCP school's students use vouchers.
- Most schools (114 schools) administer standardized tests. The most commonly used test is the same state test used in public schools, the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam.
- A third of MPCP schools (46 schools) have teaching staffs too small for each grade level to have a full-time teacher.
- Student enrollment at an average MPCP school is 85% minority students. The average full-time teaching staff is 42% minority.

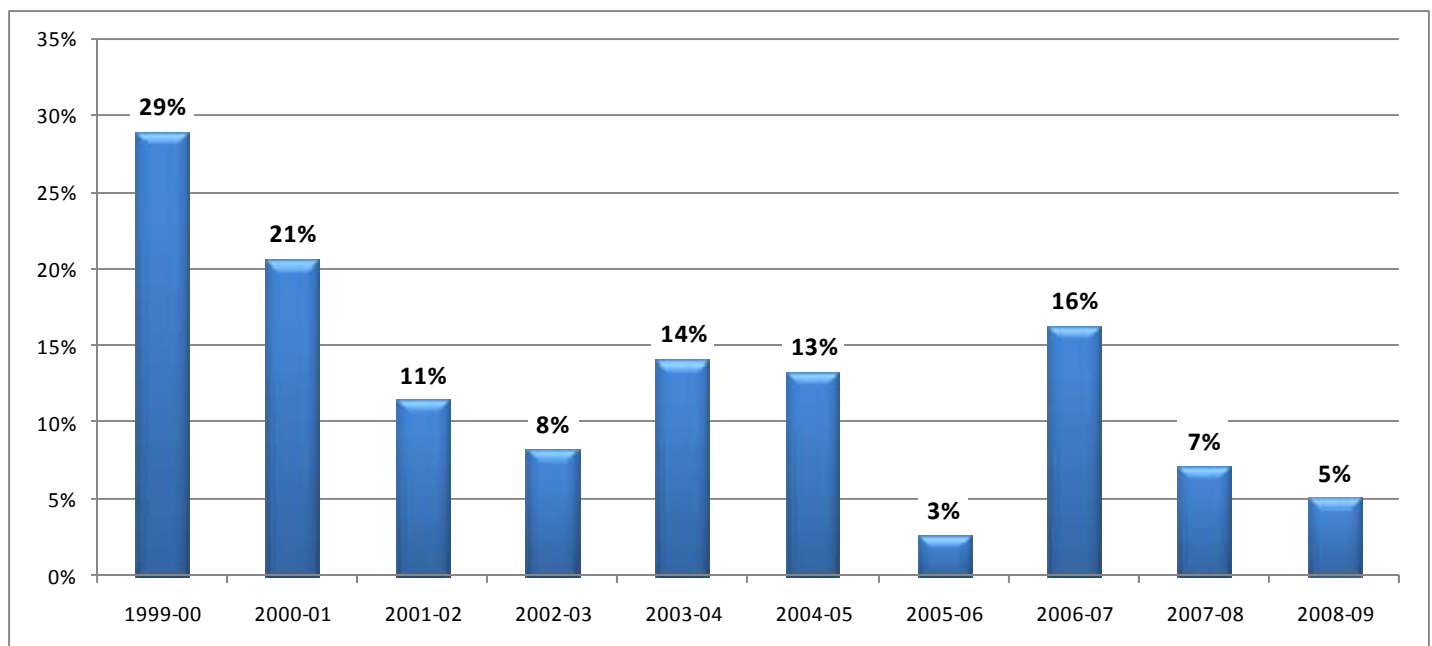
### Enrollment trends

Ten years after the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) expanded to include religious schools, enrollment has soared to more than 20,200 students using taxpayer-funded vouchers to attend private schools. The year-over-year growth in enrollment, however, was the second smallest increase since the 1998-1999 expansion, as shown in Chart 1.

Schools participating in MPCP are required to annually provide the state Department of Public Instruction with an estimate of the number of returning and new voucher users for the following school year. Should the number of applicants for vouchers that school year exceed the estimated number of seats available, the estimates would be used by DPI to ration voucher seats proportionally among the schools. Thus, schools have an incentive to over-estimate the number of voucher seats needed at their school the following year, so as to minimize the numbers of seats lost should a rationing plan be used. Using these optimistic estimates, we calculated the predicted number of new voucher users in 08-09 at each school. This calculation is the sum of the new 08-09 voucher users plus the number of voucher users needed to fill seats of non-returning 07-08 voucher users. This predicted gain in voucher users can be compared to the actual change in voucher users from 07-08 to 08-09 (see Table 1).

As Table 1 shows, most schools dramatically over-predicted the number of new voucher users they would have this school year. Twenty-five schools predicted their voucher enrollment would more than double in size for

**Chart 1: Annual percentage growth in MPCP program enrollment**



**Table 1: Accuracy of school enrollment estimates**

Number of 07-08 MPCP schools predicting 08-09 voucher use	113
Number of schools predicting a loss of voucher users from 07-08 to 08-09	4
Number of schools with an actual loss of voucher users from 07-08 to 08-09	39
Average predicted number of voucher users gained	79
Average actual number of voucher users gained	9
Average predicted rate of growth in voucher users	127%
Average actual rate of growth in voucher users	19%

the 08-09 school year. Four schools did, in fact, double the number of voucher users enrolled: Trinity Christian Academy, from 73 to 145 voucher users; Mustard Seed International School, from two to 16 voucher users; New Holy Ghost Tabernacle Preschool, from four to 14 voucher users; and the Institute of Technology and Academics, from 53 to 138 voucher users.

A handful of schools had more realistic estimates. Four schools predicted a loss of voucher users: Bessie M. Gray Prep School, Pius XI High School, Mount Lebanon Lutheran School, and Marquette University High School. The schools with the most accurate estimates tended to be those with a smaller percentage of their student body using vouchers. The schools enrolling 25% of their students as voucher users erred in their estimates by an average of eight students, while the schools with 100%

voucher use erred by an average of 103 students.

Five schools ended up enrolling more new voucher users than they had predicted: Wisconsin Lutheran High School, which predicted a gain of five voucher students and saw a gain of eight; Mount Lebanon Lutheran School, which predicted a loss of 35 voucher students, but gained four; Travis Technology High School, which predicted a gain of 48 and saw a gain of 65; Sharon Junior Academy, which predicted a gain of four and saw a gain of 19; and Risen Savior Lutheran School; which predicted a gain of 45 voucher students and saw a gain of 48.

The difficulty in accurately predicting voucher enrollment may be due to the high mobility in the student population. Although DPI no longer collects data on voucher users' previous schools, as recently as 2006 the aggregate

**Table 2: Schools gaining and losing most voucher users, 2007-08 to 2008-09**

School Name	Years in MPCP	2007-08 Headcount	2008-09 Headcount	Change in voucher users	Change in payment
<b>Greater Holy Temple Christian Academy</b>	6	528	717	189	\$1,248,723
Salam School	11	328	424	96	\$ 634,272
Institute of Technology and Academics, Inc.	2	53	138	85	\$ 561,595
Trinity Christian Academy for Nonviolence*	3	73	145	72	\$ 475,704
Young Minds Preparatory School	4	72	139	67	\$ 442,669
Travis Technology High School*	3	77	142	65	\$ 429,455
Milwaukee Lutheran High School	4	233	286	53	\$ 350,171
<b>Destiny High School</b>	3	184	233	49	\$ 323,743
Risen Savior Lutheran School	9	154	202	48	\$ 317,136
LaBrew Troopers Military University School	6	199	244	45	\$ 297,315
Clara Mohammed School, Inc.	11	206	185	-21	\$ (138,747)
Early View Academy of Excellence*	11	304	281	-23	\$ (151,961)
Blessed Savior Catholic School*	8	652	626	-26	\$ (171,782)
Pius XI High School*	11	231	204	-27	\$ (178,389)
Messmer Preparatory Catholic School	9	394	365	-29	\$ (191,603)
Victory Preparatory Academy	10	48	15	-33	\$ (218,031)
Excel Academy	5	234	195	-39	\$ (257,673)
Bessie M. Gray Prep Academy	13	115	42	-73	\$ (482,311)
Dr. Brenda Noach Choice School	8	174	87	-87	\$ (574,809)
Ceria M. Travis Academy, Inc.	12	371	278	-93	\$ (614,451)

**Bold** indicates was in top ten for gaining voucher users last year as well.

\*indicates was in bottom ten for gaining voucher users last year.

mobility in the program was 25%. Table 2, which shows the 20 schools gaining or losing the most voucher students over last year, further illustrates the variability in voucher enrollment year-to-year, as two of the top 10 schools gaining students this year were among the 10 schools losing the most students last year: Trinity Christian Academy for Nonviolence and Travis Technology High School. Two other schools, Great Holy Temple Christian Academy and Destiny High School, remain among the top gaining schools for the second year in a row.

Table 3 lists the 12 schools new to the program in 2008-09, which enroll a total of 612 voucher students, or 3% of all voucher users in the city. Note that the nine schools that closed since 2007-2008 enrolled 633 voucher users. Because the schools new to the program enroll a similar number of students, the overall growth in the program since last year has been in continuing schools. In previous years new schools had much larger enrollments, which may help explain the relatively small total enrollment growth this year (see Chart 1).

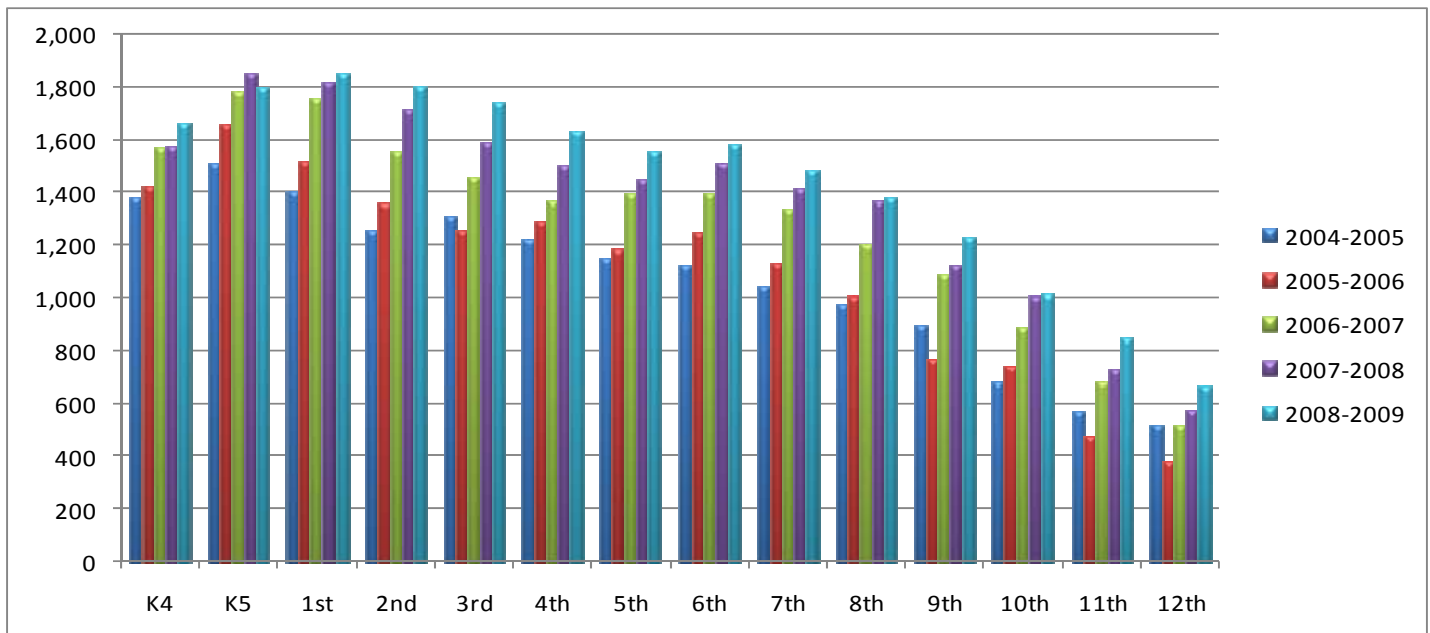
Chart 2 demonstrates the distribution of voucher users across grade levels. As always, the largest portion of enrollment is in Kindergarten and lower grades, but this year continues the trend of the past two years of increased enrollment in the high school grades. This increased use of vouchers in high school is likely related to the trend seen over the past three years of voucher use growth exceeding total enrollment growth, indicating that many new voucher users are not new to private school.

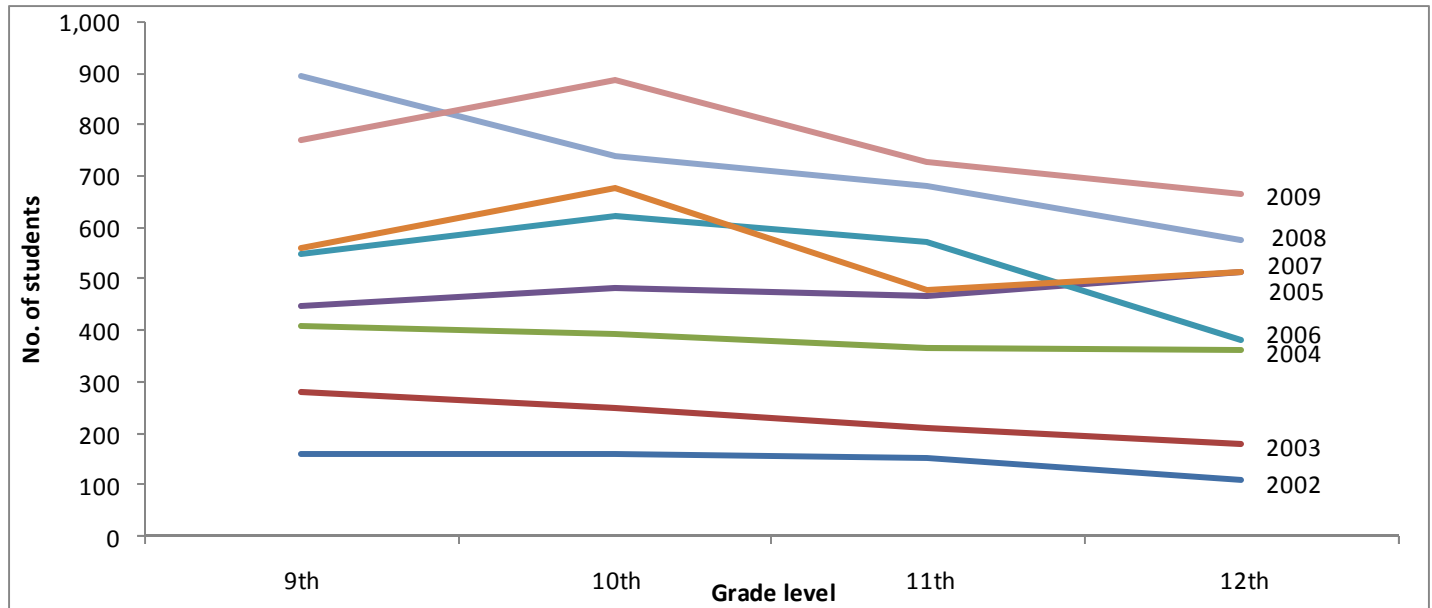
**Table 3: New MPCP schools, 2008-09**

School Name	Voucher users
The Way and the Truth Christian Academy	165
Mills Christian Academy	149
Outlook University Independent School Network	116
Tuskegee Aviation Academy	55
The Margaret Howard Christian Leadership Institute	40
LifeSkills Academy	39
The Young Women's Institute for Global Studies	19
Life 101 "THINK" Institute	11
Calvary's Christian Academy, Inc.	6
Jackson Preschool Learning Academy	5
Grisby's Academy for the Gifted and Talented	5
More Than Conquerors Pre-School	2
<b>TOTAL NEW SCHOOL ENROLLMENT</b>	<b>612</b>

Voucher use over the high school years does drop off: tracking a cohort of students over their four years of high school indicates that a graduating class is typically smaller as seniors than as freshman (see Chart 3). The resulting four-year cumulative “drop-out” rate (it is unknown whether these students actually drop out of school or just leave the voucher program) varies over the years, from a low of 1% to a high of 42%, but is significantly smaller than the corresponding MPS drop-out rate, which was 62% for the class of 2008.

**Chart 2: MPCP enrollment by grade level, 2004-05 to 2008-09**



**Chart 3: MPCP high school cohort enrollment, by graduating class**


### School characteristics

Despite the 227% growth in the number of voucher students since 1998-1999, the average size of participating private schools has grown just 5%. In 1998-1999, the average MPCP school enrolled a total of 201 students, while today the average school enrolls 211 students. The increase in the number of schools helps to explain this finding, as does the fact that schools do not necessarily attract new incoming students when voucher use grows, but can see an uptake in voucher use among existing students.

In fact, the average size of the voucher student population per school has increased dramatically since 1998-1999, when the average school's enrollment was 34% voucher students. Today, the average school's enrollment is 78% voucher students. Ten years ago, the majority of MPCP

schools enrolled less than 50% of their students as voucher users, while today the majority of schools enroll at least 88% of their students as voucher users.

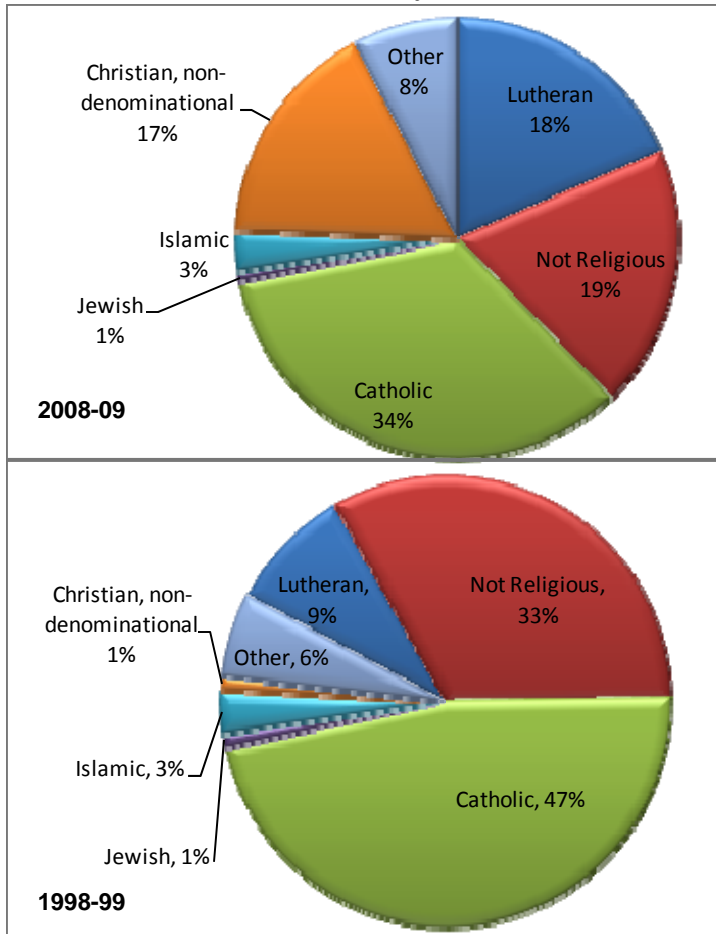
The concentration of voucher use across the program has not changed dramatically, however. Just as in 1998-1999, a fifth (20%) of today's MPCP schools enroll half (50%) of all MPCP students. In addition, currently the 10 schools with the largest number of voucher users represent 30% of total MPCP students, while the 10 largest schools in 1998-1999 enrolled 36% of all MPCP students.

While 55 schools have continuously participated in the program from 1998-99 to 2008-09, the 10 largest schools, enrolling roughly a third of all voucher users, have almost entirely changed (see Table 4). Of the top 10 schools a decade ago, only four remain in MPCP, as three have converted to charter school status and three have merged with other private schools.

**Table 4: Schools with largest MPCP enrollment, 1998-99 and 2008-2009**

08-09		2008-09	98-99		1998-99
Rank	School Name	MPCP enrollment	Rank	School Name	MPCP enrollment
1	<b>St. Anthony School</b>	1,021	1	<b>Urban Day School</b>	401
2	Atlas Preparatory Academy	759	2	Holy Redeemer Christian Academy	259
3	Greater Holy Temple Christian Academy	717	3	Harambee Community School	247
4	<b>Urban Day School</b>	679	4	The Woodson Academy	196
5	Blessed Savior Catholic School	626	5	St. Leo Catholic Urban Academy	195
6	Messmer High School	573	6	<b>St. Anthony School</b>	184
7	<b>St. Adalbert School</b>	473	7	<b>St. Adalbert School</b>	180
8	Salam School	424	8	St. Rose Catholic Academy	176
9	Prince of Peace	417	9	Blessed Trinity Catholic School	168
10	Messmer Preparatory Catholic School	365	10	Marva Collins Preparatory School	158

**Chart 4: MPCP enrollment by denomination**



The enrollment share of religious schools has grown over the years, from 67% of all MPCP students in 1998-1999 to 81% in 2008-2009. Catholic schools capture the largest share of MPCP students, enrolling 34% of all voucher users (see Chart 4). Ten years ago, Catholic schools enrolled nearly half (47%) of all voucher users. The largest growth in the program has been among non-denominational Christian schools, which now enroll 17% of all voucher users, compared to just 1% a decade ago.

The number of different denominations represented by the MPCP schools has increased slightly over the past decade, from eight to 10. The non-denominational Christian schools have seen the biggest growth, from 3 schools to 28. There are also 28 Lutheran schools now participating, up from 10 in 1998-1999. The decline in the number of Catholic schools from 41 to 32 is attributable to the mergers of several parishes. The number of non-religious schools has remained stable, with 25 in 2008-2009 and 26 in 1998-1999.

The diversity of schools across many religions and denominations belies the racial homogeneity of most of the participating schools. While no data are available regarding the racial demographics of voucher users, many schools provided us with breakdowns by race of their total student population.

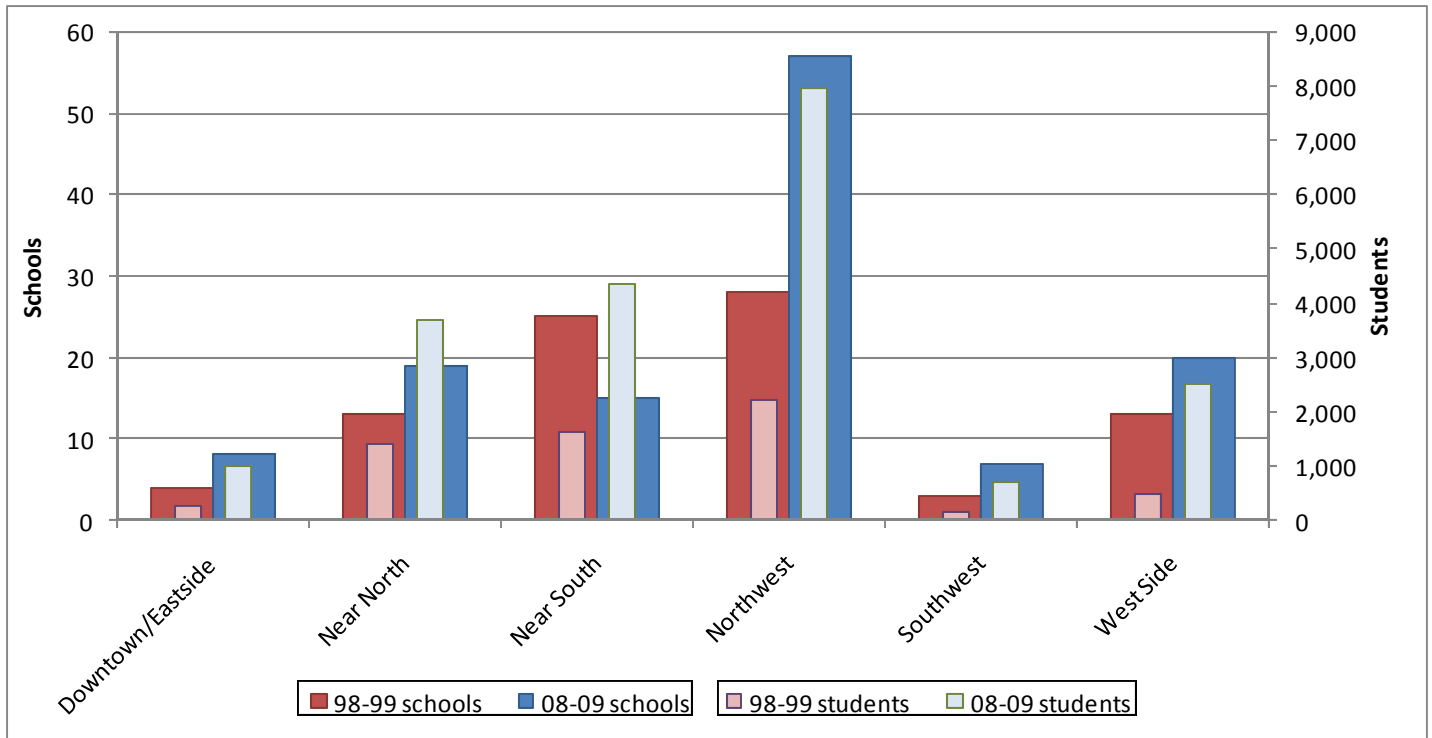
Of the 111 schools providing this information, 78 have enrollments that consist of at least 90% minority students. Thirty-five schools are 100% minority in their student populations, including 21 schools with 100% African-American students. Three schools are more than 80% white students. The average MPCP school enrolls 85% minority students, including 67% African-American students. As a comparison, the MPS district-wide student population is 88% minority, including 57% African-American.

While diversity within school populations is limited, diversity of school offerings is available across much of the city. However, families on the south side have seen their schooling choices decline over the past decade. The number of MPCP schools on the city's south side has decreased from 25 schools in 1998-99 to 15 today. This is likely due to the merging of several Catholic schools in the area. Today, 22% of voucher users attend school on the south side, compared to 27% in 1998-99 (see Chart 5). The greater numbers of students in fewer schools on the south side indicate that the schools serving that part of the city tend to be large. Indeed, half of the 10 largest MPCP schools are located on the south side.

**Table 5: Growth in schools by denomination, 1998-99 to 2008-09**

Religion/Denomination	Number of schools	
	2008-09	1998-09
Apostolic-Pentecostal	2	1
Assembly of God	none	1
Baptist	1	none
Church of God in Christ	3	1
Catholic	32	41
Christian, non-denominational	28	3
Islamic	2	2
Jewish Orthodox	1	1
Lutheran	28	10
Pentecostal	2	none
Seventh Day Adventist	2	none
Not religious	25	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>86</b>

**Chart 5: Location of MPCP schools and students, 1998-99 and 2008-09**



In contrast, schooling choices have nearly doubled on the northwest side. Close to half of the MPCP schools today are located on Milwaukee’s northwest side, and 39% of all MPCP students attend school in that area. In 1998-99, a third of the MPCP schools were on the northwest side and 36% of all voucher users attended those schools.

**Accreditation and Achievement**

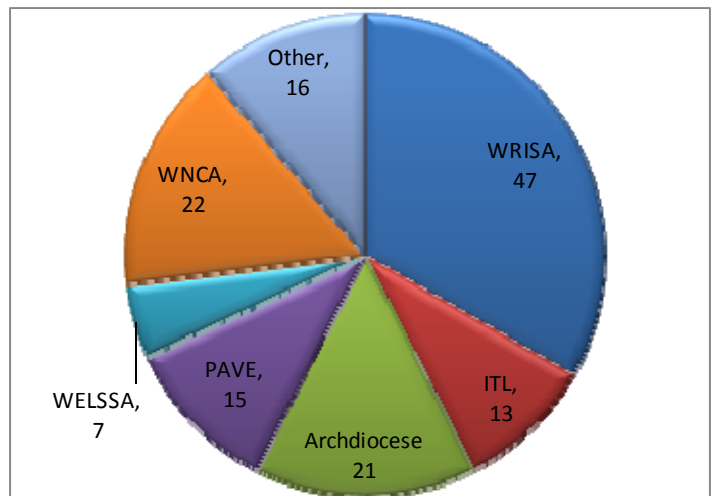
Act 125 signed in 2006 requires all schools participating in the voucher program to be accredited by the 2009-2010 school year (new schools have three years to earn accreditation). Of the 126 participating schools this year, 11 did not provide any information about their accrediting agency. The remaining 115 schools are working with a total of 15 different accrediting agencies. The largest number of schools is accredited by WRISA, the Wisconsin Religious and Independent Schools Accreditation agency (Chart 6). Last year, WRISA also worked with more schools than any other agency (40), while PAVE (Partners Advancing Values in Education) was cited as the accrediting agency of 20 schools. PAVE, which does not operate a formal accreditation program, has encouraged these schools to also seek accreditation from a more traditional accrediting agency, resulting in a five-school decrease in the number of PAVE schools.

The two accrediting agencies that are also religious denomination administrative or governance units, the Arch-

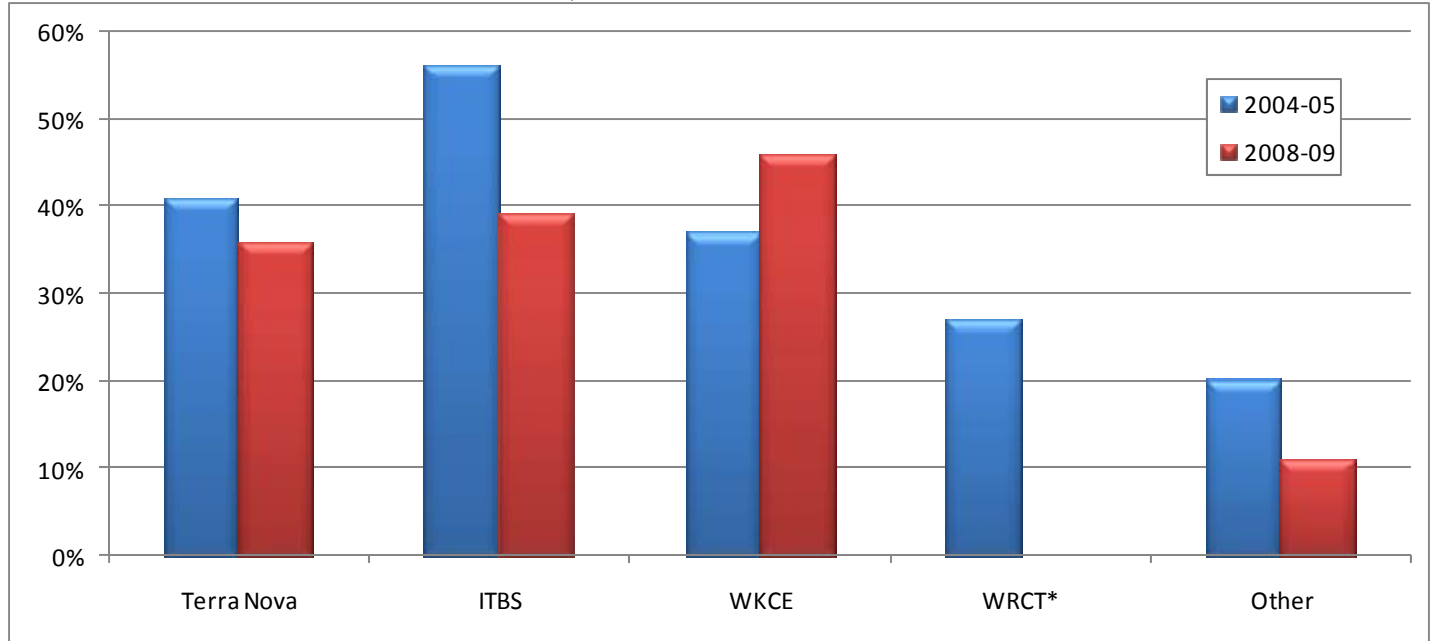
diocese of Milwaukee and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod School Accreditation (WELSSA), together accredit 28 schools representing 22% of MPCP students.

Act 125 also requires MPCP schools to administer a standardized test of their choosing to their MPCP students. The Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE), the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), and the Terra Nova standardized exam are the most commonly used tests. The WKCE is the same test taken by public and charter

**Chart 6: Number of schools by accrediting agency, 2008-09**



**Chart 7: Standardized tests administered, 2004-05 and 2008-09**



*\*Note: The WRCT (Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test), used only for 3rd graders, is no longer a separate test from the WKCE.*

schools in Wisconsin, while the ITBS and Terra Nova tests are commercially available exams used by public and private schools across the nation.

Prior to the passage of Act 125, in 2004-2005, more than half of the 111 MPCP schools that administered standardized tests used the ITBS. Today, the most commonly used test is the WKCE, which is administered by 53 schools out of 114 (see Chart 7).

The requirements of Act 125 and the voluntary participation of many schools in the longitudinal study of the School Choice Demonstration Project, which tracks MPCP student performance over time, seems to have resulted in the greater usage of the WKCE among MPCP schools. The number of different tests in use by the schools has also decreased, from more than 20 different types of standardized tests in 2004-05, to 13 types of tests in 2008-09. The number of schools taking multiple tests has decreased also, from 66 such schools four years ago, to 24 such schools today.

Interestingly, the type of standardized test used varies by accrediting agency. Chart 8 shows that schools accredited by the Archdiocese and WRISA are more likely to administer the ITBS, while the WKCE is more popular among schools accredited by the Wisconsin North Central Association (WNCA) and the Institute for the Transformation

of Learning (ITL). Schools accredited by WELSSA and PAVE utilize the Terra Nova test most often.

**Save the Date**

**March 26, 2009 \* 7:30 am**

**Public Policy Forum  
Eye Opener Breakfast**

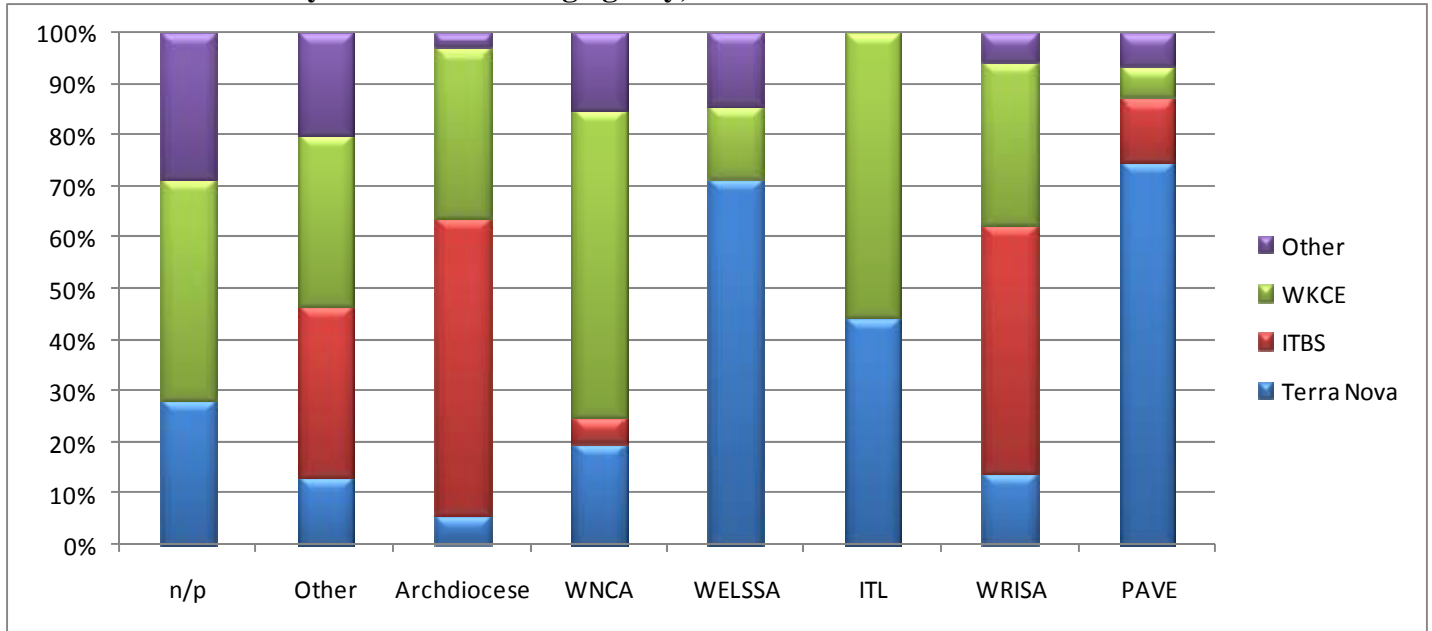
**Be the first to hear how voucher  
students are faring  
compared to MPS students**

**when the Forum hosts the release of the  
second year results of the  
School Choice Demonstration Project.**

**Featuring Dr. Patrick Wolf,  
Endowed Chair in School Choice  
University of Arkansas**



**Chart 8: Use of tests by school accrediting agency, 2008-09**



**Table 6: Diversity of teaching staff by diversity of student population, number of schools, 2008-09**

Student Minority %	Teacher Minority %				
	0%-24.9%	25%-49.9%	50%-74.9%	75%-99.9%	100%
100%	3	4	3	5	18
75%-99.9%	28	2	6	8	5
50%-74.9%	11	0	0	0	0
0%-49.5%	13	1	0	0	0

**Data and Methodology**

For this, the 11th annual Forum census of participating MPCP schools, we mailed surveys to 129 schools in October 2008. We received responses from 125 schools.

Two schools refused to participate in the census: Milwaukee Lutheran High School and Right Step, Inc. During the course of the survey collection, Collins Christian Academy had its payments withheld by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and dropped out of the program; therefore, the school is not included in our analysis. The fourth missing school, Family Academy, did not return a survey to us despite repeated mailings to the school. We attempted several

visits to the school but found the school empty each time. DPI has determined the school is not in operation and is taking steps to terminate Family Academy from the program. That school is not included in our analysis.

Because the official third Friday in September headcount numbers released in November 2008 by DPI include both Collins Christian Academy and Family Academy, the figures representing total MPCP enrollment in 2008-09 and changes in enrollment from prior years do include all four schools for which we lack census data. All other figures in this report do not include these four schools.

Visit the Forum’s website for a directory of all participating MPCP schools.

## Teaching Staffs

Not much is known about the teaching staffs of the private schools in MPCP. The MPCP statute, in the interest of preserving the autonomy of the participating private schools, imposes few regulations regarding teacher credentials and does not regulate class size. The School Choice Demonstration Project found that among 97 MPCP schools responding to a principal’s survey, nearly 30% of teachers held a master’s degree and two-thirds had at least five years experience. MPS data shows that 43% of MPS teachers hold a master’s degree and 56% have at least five years experience. (See SCDP Milwaukee Evaluation Report #3, Feb. 2008, at <http://www.uark.edu/ua/der/SCDP.html>.)

We do know that schools that have more white students tend to have fewer minority teachers, while schools with fewer white students tend to have more minority teachers. For example, of the 24 schools reporting enrollments consisting of less than 80% minority students, 23 report teaching staffs of less than 25% minority teachers (see Table 6).

In 2008-09, 120 MPCP schools report a total employment of 1,624 full-time teachers, for an average of 14 teachers per school. However, there is quite a bit of variability

among the schools in terms of the size of the full-time teaching staffs. Schools with smaller enrollments have, as expected, smaller teaching staffs, but schools serving only elementary grades (as opposed to K-8) are also more likely to have small teaching staffs, irrespective of enrollment.

In fact, many MPCP schools operate with full-time teaching staffs smaller than would be expected for the number of grade levels offered. Chart 9 illustrates this finding. More than half of MPCP high schools and K-8 schools have large enough staffs for each grade level to have at least one full-time teacher; however, fewer than half of the K-12, middle, and elementary MPCP schools have that level of staffing.

While Chart 9 does not include part-time teachers, the number of those teachers is probably small, as the 2008-09 average ratio of students to full-time teachers in MPCP schools is 15.4 to one. The comparable ratio of enrollment to full-time teachers in MPS was 14.9 to one in 2007-08. The private school ratio has decreased substantially since 1998-99, when the 86 MPCP schools averaged more than 17 private school students per full-time teacher.

**Chart 9: Size of full-time teaching staff compared to number of grade levels offered, 2008-09**

