



# Research Brief

## Why not lift the cap?

*Unfettered enrollment in voucher program not likely to cause big impacts*

During the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program’s (MPCP) 15<sup>th</sup> year, the statutory cap on voucher enrollment was finally met. For the first time, the voucher program enrollment surpassed 15% of MPS enrollment. Hitting the cap has triggered a fierce political debate. Should the cap be lifted to accommodate increasing demand?

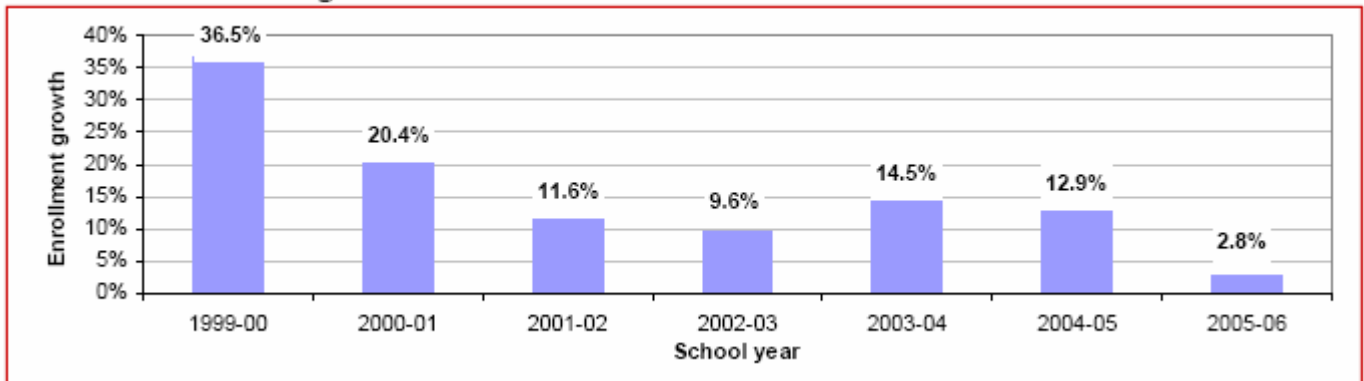
Voucher advocates argue that denying students accessibility to voucher schools is cruel and detrimental to their education. Opponents argue that lifting the cap would increase total costs for K-12 education in the city and would negatively impact the public schools.

The data indicate that neither scenario is very likely. Demand for vouchers has never outpaced the availability of voucher seats and enrollment growth is decelerating. The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) calculates that only six voucher schools enrolled as many students this fall as they predicted last February. In addition, between

September 2004 and September 2005, more than 4,000 students opted not to renew their vouchers, the largest in the program’s history. Overall enrollment growth in the program slowed considerably the past two years, to a current rate of 2.8%. (Chart 1) Finally, the traditional source of growth in the program – new schools – may be reaching its saturation point. Last year nearly all growth in the program was attributable to new schools; this year new schools enrolled a total of 412 students — making up less than half of the 1,024 seats lost due to school closures or terminations from the program.

In short, the data trends suggest that lifting the cap would not result in large numbers of new students joining the program. So why not lift the cap? Keeping the cap in place only creates a false sense of demand; removing it would more accurately demonstrate the program’s level of success in the marketplace.

**Chart 1: Percent change in total MPCP enrollment**



## Enrollment growth slows

There were 15 new schools that joined the MPCP in 2005-06, one less than last year. The total number of schools in the MPCP is now 128, seven more than last year. Despite eight schools dropping out of the program after the 2004-05 school year, enrollment grew 2.8% to 14,825. However, the enrollment growth from last year to this year is ten percentage points lower than last year's growth and the lowest since the program expanded in 1998-99.

More than half of the schools, 66, grew mostly in full-time enrollment from last year to this year. The eight schools with a combined enrollment of 1,024 students that dropped out of the program probably accounted for the minimal growth. The 15 new schools had a combined enrollment of 412 students this year.

Table 1 shows the schools that gained or lost the most students from last year to this year. Atlas Preparatory Academy gained the most students for the second year in a row. In fact, since the school opened in 2001, it has gained 524 students, going from 30 to 554 students. According to the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, Atlas Prep has an extensive marketing effort, which could explain the rapid growth. Saint Anthony's School and Hope Christian School were also in the top ten in growth last year. Milwaukee Multicultural Academy lost 101 students from last year to this year, the most among the schools in the program. Woodson Academy was the only school to be in the bottom ten this year and last year. Early View Academy of Excellence was in the bottom ten in terms of growth last year, but is in the top ten in growth this year. St. Thomas Aquinas Academy was in the top ten in growth last year, but is in the bottom ten this year.

**Table 1: Change in MPCP students and voucher payments**

School name	Year school founded	Years in program	Change in MPCP students (FTE)	Change in payment*
<b>Atlas Preparatory Academy</b>	2001	5	136	\$862,466
The Hope School	2004	2	112	\$711,312
<b>Saint Anthony School</b>	1872	8	108	\$688,448
CEO Leadership Academy	2004	2	95	\$603,345
Institute for Career Empowerment Inc.	2004	2	59	\$374,709
Garden Homes Lutheran School	1928	6	59	\$374,709
<b>Hope Christian School</b>	2002	4	57	\$362,007
Christian Faith Academy of Higher Learning	2002	2	53	\$336,603
Early View Academy of Excellence*	1997	8	52	\$332,792
Milwaukee School of Choice	2001	6	48	\$307,388
Pius XI High School	1929	8	-20	-\$127,020
Saint Thomas Aquinas Academy**	2004	8	-23	-\$142,898
Saint Margaret Mary School	1958	8	-23	-\$146,073
Saint Catherine School	1924	8	-24	-\$151,154
Gospel Lutheran School	1918	8	-25	-\$158,775
Clara Mohammad School	1972	8	-39	-\$245,149
Jared C. Bruce Academy	2001	4	-41	-\$262,931
<b>Woodson Academy</b>	1995	11	-61	-\$384,236
Harambee Community School	1969	16	-87	-\$549,997
Milwaukee Multicultural Academy	1998	8	-101	-\$641,451

\*Based on \$6,351 per pupil

\* Was in top ten losing schools last year.

\*\* Was in top ten gaining schools last year.

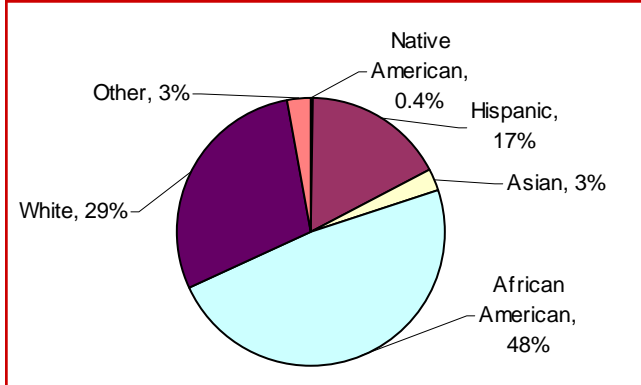
**Bold indicates the school was also in the top ten for gaining or losing voucher students last year.**

### MPCP schools more segregated

This year 119 MPCP schools provided us with information on student demographics. These schools represent 93% of the total MPCP enrollment. They reported the race of their total enrollment – both MPCP and other students.

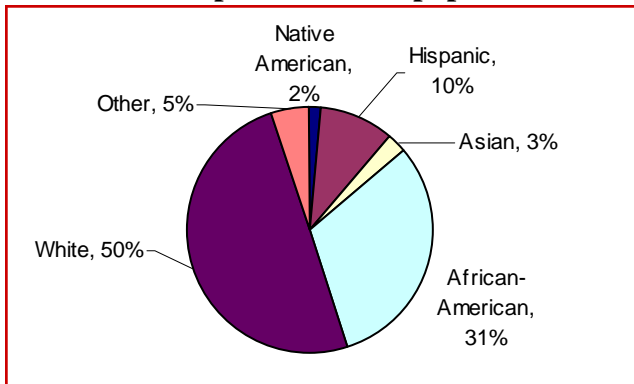
Of the 22,859 students attending these 119 schools, 48% are African-American, 29% are white, and 17% are Hispanic. (Chart 2) In com-

**Chart 2: Enrollment in MPCP schools, 2005-06**



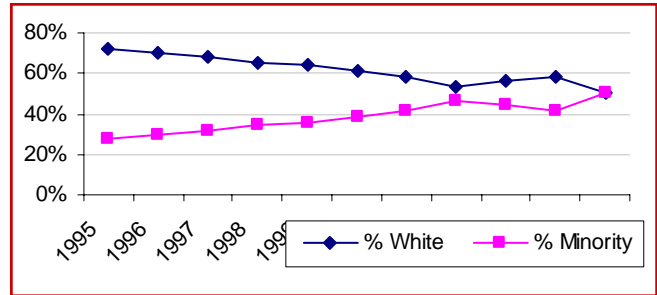
parison, 31% of all Milwaukee children attending private schools are African-American, while 50% are white and 10% are Hispanic. Thus, the student bodies of the schools participating in MPCP are not representative of the private school population as a whole. (Chart 3)

**Chart 3: Total private school population**



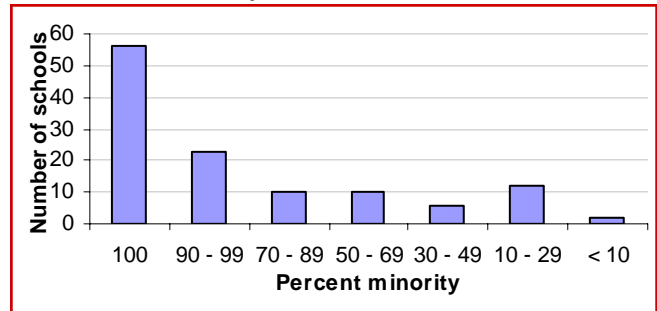
In 1998 there were 27,723 private school students and the portion of students who were white was 65%, while minority students made up 35%. Today, the percent of white students equals the percent of minority students in the total student population of 23,046. (Chart 4)

**Chart 4: Milwaukee children in private schools**



Many argue that the MPCP has thus resulted in more integrated private schools. While the total private school population is indeed integrated today, there are few individual MPCP schools that are integrated. There are 79 MPCP schools with enrollments of 90% or more minority students. There are 16 schools with enrollments of between 30% and 70% minority students, the typical definition of “integrated.” Two schools enroll less than 10% minority students. (Chart 5)

**Chart 5: Minority students in MPCP schools**



As a result, an African-American student in a voucher school has a 1 in 1.3 chance of attending a school that is more than 95% African-American, or what is often called “hyper-segregated.” A white student in a voucher school has a 1 in 27 chance of attending a school of 95% or more white students and a 1 in 70 chance of attending a school of more than 95% minority students.

Ninety-five percent of minority students in MPCP schools attend a school enrolling 50% or more minority students, and 82% of white students attend a school with 50% or more white students.

### High school enrollment down

The third Friday in September high school enrollment headcount decreased 11% from the 2004-05 school year to this year. This is the first decrease in high school enrollment since 1998-99. Last year the increase in high school enrollment was 32%.

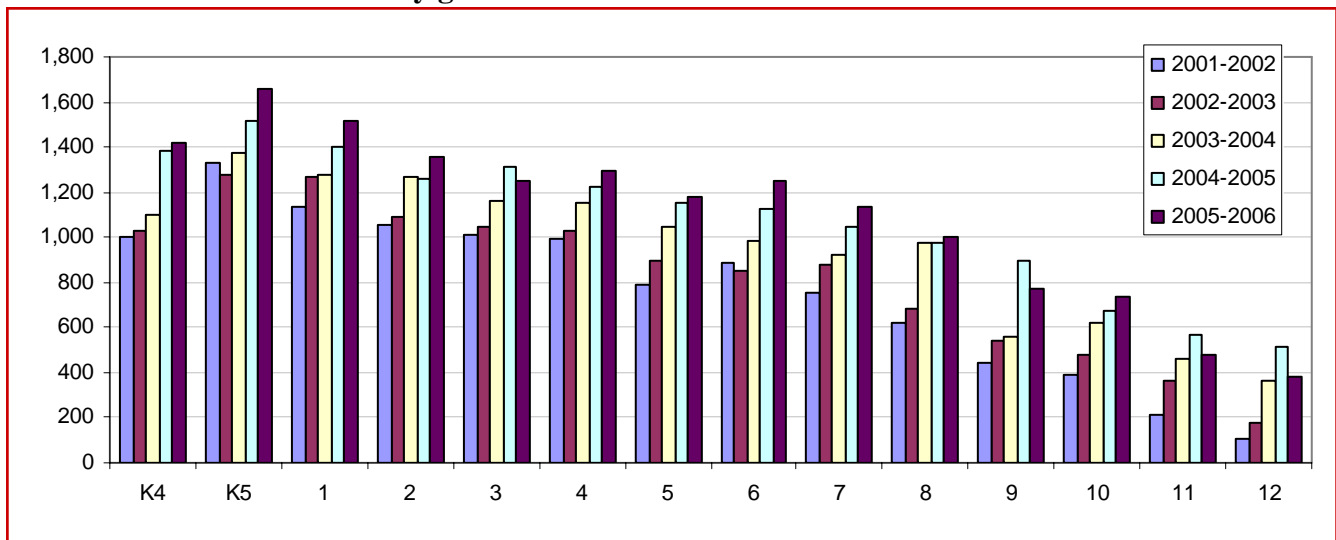
The overall headcount for MPCP increased 3% from last year. Kindergarten (K4 and K5) enrollment increased 7% and 1st through 8th grade enrollment increased 5%. In terms of individual grade levels, four grade levels decreased in enrollment from last year to this year: 3rd, 9th, 11th, and 12th. Twelfth grade enrollment decreased 26% from last year to this year, the most of any grade level. Five-year-old kindergarten, once again, had the largest number of students of any grade. (Chart 6)

Attrition from year to year is the difference between the number of students expected to ad-

vance to the next grade level and the actual enrollment of the grade level. There are 20% *more* students in K5 this year than there were in K4 last year, which is the lowest attrition rate of all grade levels. In contrast, 33% fewer students are in 12th grade this year than were in 11th grade last year, the largest attrition rate.

Graduation and dropout rates can be looked at by using the percent change between the 12th grade enrollment this year and the 9th grade enrollment three years ago. If the dropout rate is calculated this way, there is a high school dropout rate of 30% this year. This implies an estimated graduation rate of 70%. This method of calculating dropout and graduation rates does not account for student mobility. When the mobility rate is applied, the high school dropout rate becomes 15%.

**Chart 6: MPCP enrollment by grade level 2001-2005**



### More students not renewing vouchers

The mobility rate for MPCP students increased from last year to this year – 26% to 28%. The aggregate mobility rate is the number of students not renewing vouchers minus graduating seniors, divided by last year’s enrollment. Over 4,000 students did not renew their vouchers this year, the most since 1998. This is the second year in a row that there has been an increase in students not renewing their vouchers. Since September of 1998, 19,458 have not renewed their vouchers from one year to the next. Students do not renew their vouchers for many reasons including relocation to another city, ineligibility under the income guidelines, or dissatisfaction with the program. (Table 2)

**Table 2: Aggregate mobility rate**

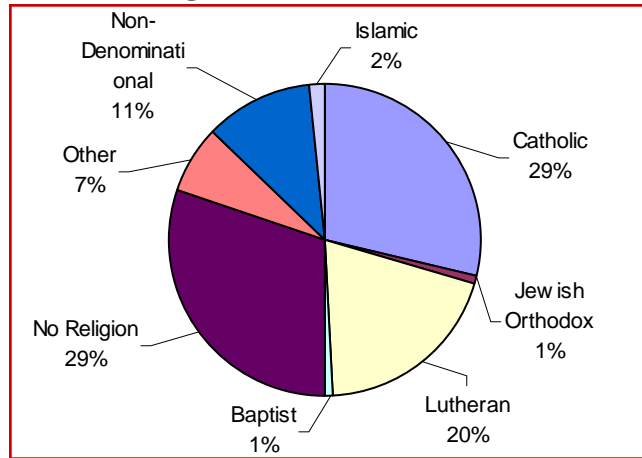
	Sept. 00 to Sept. 01	Sept. 01 to Sept. 02	Sept. 02 to Sept. 03	Sept. 03 to Sept. 04	Sept. 04 to Sept. 05
<b>Students Not Renewing Vouchers</b>	2,318	3,172	2,899	3,340	4,082
<b>% Mobility</b>	24%	29%	25%	26%	28%

### Most schools religious

The religious make-up of the schools in the choice program has not changed much since last year. Of the 126 schools that reported their religious affiliations, 88, or 70%, are religious schools. Last year 69% of the schools reported being religious schools. Chart 7 shows the religious affiliations of the schools in the program. Twenty-nine percent of the schools reported being Catholic. Thirty-eight schools reported being non-religious. Both the number of Lutheran schools and the number of Christian non-denominational schools increased from last year to this year.

Of the 16 new schools this year three of them are Lutheran, two are non-denominational, one is Baptist, and seven are non-religious. The remaining three did not provide their religious affiliation.

**Chart 7: Religious affiliations of MPCP schools**

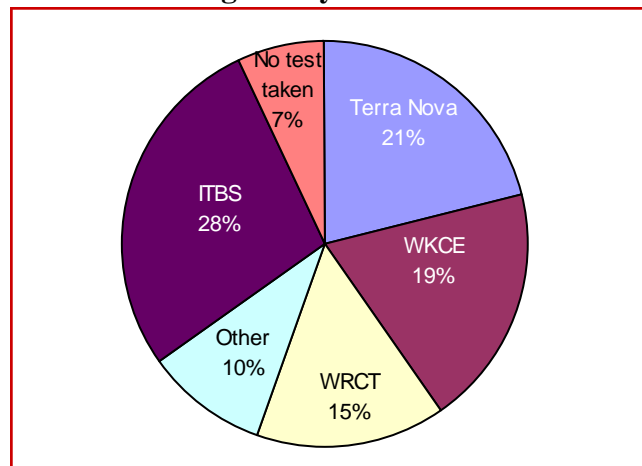


### Increase in schools not giving tests

This year 112 schools reported that their students take some sort of standardized test. Fourteen schools reported they do not give a standardized test, compared to 10 last year. Of those 10, seven were kindergarten or lower grade schools enrolling students too young for testing. This year only five of the 14 schools are kindergarten or lower grades (Chart 8).

The Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) continues to be the most utilized test in MPCP schools, with 57 schools taking it. The number of schools taking each type of test is down from last year for each test, except the Wisconsin Reading and Comprehension Test (WRCT).

**Chart 8: Tests given by MPCP schools**



## Highlights from 8th annual census of Milwaukee voucher schools

- Overall, the enrollment increased by 3%, the lowest growth since 1998-99. High school enrollment in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) decreased 11% from last year to this year.
- There were 15 new schools in the program this year bringing the total number of schools to 128. Eight schools dropped out or were closed after last year. Those eight schools had a combined enrollment of 1,024 students; the 15 new schools this year have a combined enrollment of 412.
- Milwaukee's percent of white students attending private schools is the same as the percent of minority students in private schools this year. In MPCP schools, 71% of the students are minority.
- The number of students that did not renew their vouchers from last year to this year is the most since 1998-99 at 4,082. The aggregate mobility rate from September of 2004 to this September is 28%.
- Seventy percent of MPCP schools are religious. Catholic schools make up 29% of the schools in the program. Lutheran is the next largest percentage at 20%. Eleven percent of the schools reported being Christian non-denominational.
- Fourteen schools reported they do not administer standardized tests to their students. Of these, only five are kindergarten and lower grade only schools. Last year, three schools with older students reported not giving tests.