



# Research Brief

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## *After One Year, Mixed Results from Push for Neighborhood Schools*

One school year after the implementation of the Neighborhood Schools Initiative (NSI) began, more Milwaukee public schools enroll more neighborhood students, a good first step towards guaranteeing every student a seat in his or her neighborhood school. This increase in neighborhood enrollment is not the result of capacity-building; in fact, fewer schools have the capacity to enroll all their neighborhood students than two years ago. In addition, due to growing numbers of non-African American minorities, the predicted resegregation of the city's schools has not emerged.

Our findings are what should be expected from the first year of an ambitious school reform—mixed. While some measures show immediate changes, such as an increase in the number of elementary schools with defined attendance areas, on other measures change is necessarily much slower. Therefore, our findings indicate areas in which NSI has yet to effect change, as well as areas in which reform has already begun.

*After the NSI legislation was passed in the 1999-2001 state budget, the Public Policy Forum released a report detailing the extent of busing within the city and outlining possible results should busing be eliminated. The data used in that report, *The Implications of Eliminating Busing: Considerations at the End of an Era*, were from the 1998-1999 school year. Now, with NSI in operation for a full school year, we update the original report with data from the Third Friday in September 2001 student count. Data are for elementary schools only. Research in this Brief was funded by grants from the Richard and Ethel Herzfeld and the Faye McBeath Foundations of Milwaukee.*

### Key Findings

- Not counting students attending citywide specialty schools, 35% of MPS elementary students attend their neighborhood school, up from 31% in 1998-1999.
- MPS elementary schools enrollments are, on average, made up of 42% neighborhood students, a 3 percentage point increase in two years.
- MPS now has 20 elementary schools without defined neighborhood attendance areas, down from 24 in 1998-1999.
- MPS has reduced the number of citywide specialty elementary schools that do not give preference in enrollment to neighborhood students from 24 to 12.
- In 1998-1999, 41 schools had enrollments larger than the student population in their attendance area, or, to put it another way, had the capacity for all their neighborhood students. Today there are 37 schools with such capacity.
- The number of racially-balanced elementary schools (schools enrolling between 30% and 70% minority students) has increased since 1998-1999, from 21 to 23, due to larger non-African American minority enrollments. There have also been slight increases in the number of elementary schools having majority white or African-American enrollments. The number of majority Latino schools has decreased.

## Fewer Citywide Schools, More Neighborhood Schools



As compared to 1998-1999, Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) now has more elementary schools with defined neighborhood attendance areas. Before the implementation of NSI, there were 24 elementary schools without attendance areas and currently there are 20 such elementary schools.

These 20 elementary schools include eight former citywide specialty schools, now classified as “neighborhood specialty schools,” a new type of specialty school created under NSI. These former citywide schools, Starns Discovery is one example, reserve an enrollment preference for neighborhood students with no transportation, although they do not have a defined attendance area. Vacant seats are then filled using citywide enrollment procedures and transportation guidelines. In addition to these eight schools without attendance areas, five other new neighborhood specialty schools have defined attendance areas.

The remaining elementary schools without attendance areas include 11 citywide specialty schools and a citywide charter school. These 12 schools are now the only MPS elementary schools that do not give preference to neighborhood students. In 1998-1999 there were 24 citywide schools with-

out neighborhood preferences.

Not only has the number of schools defined as neighborhood schools increased since the start of NSI, there are more schools enrolling more neighborhood students than in 1998-1999. In MPS elementary schools today, on average, 42% of the student bodies are students from the neighborhood. In 1998-1999 this average was 39%.

In addition, of all MPS elementary students attending schools with attendance areas, about 35% attend school in their own neighborhood. The total number of MPS elementary students who attend school in his or her attendance area is 18,086 out of a total MPS elementary enrollment of 52,308 in schools with attendance areas. In 1998-1999 about 31% of MPS elementary students attended their neighborhood school.

Therefore, it appears NSI has led to an increase in the number of elementary students attending their neighborhood schools, perhaps because there are more schools now defined as neighborhood schools.

The table below shows the number of schools enrolling certain threshold percentages of neighborhood students. At all levels, the number has increased or stayed the same since 1998-1999.

**MPS Elementary Schools with Attendance Areas**

Neighborhood Students as Percentage of Student Body	No. of Schools	
	1998-1999	2000-2001
= 30%	69	69
= 40%	44	48
= 50%	29	31
= 60%	15	16



## No Increase in Schools Having Capacity to Enroll All Their Neighborhood Students

While NSI appears to have increased the number of schools enrolling a majority of their students from the neighborhood, the Initiative has yet to have an impact on the number of schools having the capacity to enroll all the students residing in the school's neighborhood. In 1998-1999, 41 elementary schools had enrollments greater than their attendance area population. In other words, 41 schools could have enrolled all their neighborhood students without increasing the number of seats at the school. Today, 37 schools have that capacity. Only schools with this capacity are able to offer every student in their neighborhood the opportunity to attend their neighborhood school.

There are several reasons why, after the first year of the NSI plan, there has not been an increase in the number of schools with the capacity to offer this opportunity. One reason is that the NSI plan focuses first on the most crowded attendance areas. Many of these crowded attendance areas have too many children to fit in one building. Second, the NSI plan builds capacity through capital projects; thus, the newly constructed neighborhood seats will not be available for some time. Finally, MPS enrollment has increased since 1998-1999; more students now live in the attendance areas of the schools that have had capacity for all their neighborhood students over the past two years. Therefore, it is not surprising that there has not been an increase in the number of schools able to offer all neighborhood students the opportunity to attend school in the neighborhood.

What is somewhat surprising, however, is that of the schools that do provide the opportunity for all neighborhood students to enroll, the percent of students taking advantage of that opportunity has not increased. Whereas, two years ago 43% of the elementary students in the 41 neighborhood schools described above were enrolled in that neighborhood school, today that figure is 40% of the students in 37 schools. As illustrated by the table below, the overall distribution of students from these neighborhoods has not changed—most students do attend either the neighborhood school or a nearby school, but that rate did not increase during the first year of the NSI.

The NSI is foremost focused on building capacity in the 28 most overcrowded attendance areas, called the targeted neighborhoods. That there has not yet been an increase in the number of schools having capacity for all their neighborhood students should not be viewed as a shortfall of NSI. Nor should the fact that fewer students having the opportunity to attend their neighborhood school are doing so be viewed negatively. The NSI plan acknowledges that the first hurdle is building more capacity where it is needed; as this capacity grows, schools in less crowded neighborhoods should eventually see fewer students from other, crowded neighborhoods. The real test will come once the plan has been fully implemented and all construction has been complete. At that point there should be a dramatic increase in both the number of schools with capacity for all their neighborhood students and in the number of children in those neighborhoods taking advantage of the opportunity to choose their neighborhood school.

**MPS Elementary Schools Having Capacity to Enroll All Neighborhood Students**

	Number of Schools	Students Enrolled in Own Attendance Area School	Students Enrolled in Own or Adjacent Attendance Area School	Students Enrolled Beyond Adjacent Attendance Area or in Citywide Schools
<b>1998-1999</b>	41	43%	58%	42%
<b>2000-2001</b>	37	40%	58%	42%



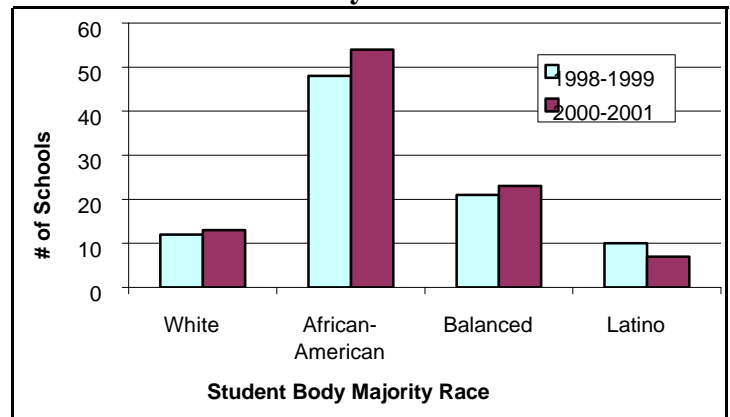
## Resegregation Fears As Yet Unfounded, Continuing Scrutiny is Required

When the NSI legislation was proposed in the 1999-2001 biennial budget, there were predictions that a return to neighborhood schools could result in an increase in segregation. When the Forum analyzed the 1998-1999 enrollment data, we found that if all MPS schools were to enroll only students from their attendance areas, there would be a sharp increase in the number of schools with a majority white student body and a decrease in racially-balanced schools. Now, after the first year of implementation, it appears that there has not been a major shift in the number of schools by race.

In 1998-1999 there were 48 elementary schools with majority African-American enrollments, 12 majority white schools, 10 majority Latino schools, and 21 racially-balanced schools (between 30% and 70% African-American). In 2000-2001 there are 54 majority African-American elementary schools, 13 majority white schools, and 7 majority Latino schools. There are also now 23 total racially-balanced schools; 15 African-American balanced (between 30% and 70%

African-American), 7 Latino balanced schools (between 30% and 70% Latino students) and 1 Asian balanced school (between 30% and 70% Asian students). Therefore, an increase in non-African American minority students has maintained the total number of racially-balanced schools. As a result, the first year of NSI has not led to resegregation of MPS elementary schools, but future changes in enrollment require this issue to continue to be closely monitored..

### Race of MPS Elementary School Student Bodies



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