

# Research Brief

## *Gradual Progress Found in MPS Reform Initiative Third in a Series*

The innovative MPS Neighborhood Schools Initiative appears to be making incremental progress towards its twin goals of increasing neighborhood capacity and reducing busing. Not every measure shows results, but there are encouraging trends in neighborhood attendance. However, not until after the plan has been fully phased in can we truly judge its effectiveness.

In the full report from which this *Brief* is excerpted, "Neighborhood Schools? The Jury is Still Out," we find mixed results. More encouraging are our findings regarding the potential unintended consequences of the NSI plan. Mobility and its related measure, stability, seem to be improving slightly, through the implementation of the plan. However, there is a real potential for mobility to increase as more neighborhood capacity becomes available and busing is reduced; the district must remain vigilant. Finally, those who warned of re-segregation have not been proven accurate soothsayers, but their warnings still need to be heeded. The current trend of increased majority white schools does not bode well for integration.

*The full report can be found on our website at [www.publicpolicyforum.org](http://www.publicpolicyforum.org). After the NSI legislation was passed in the 1999-2001 state budget, the Public Policy Forum released a report analyzing data from the 1998-1999 school year. The 2002-2003 school year was the third year of NSI's implementation. We have used 2002-2003 MPS data on student residence and enrollment for this report. Research in this Brief and the report was funded by grants from the Richard and Ethel Herzfeld and the Faye McBeath Foundations of Milwaukee.*

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### Key Findings

- Thirty-nine percent of all elementary and K-8 students attending schools with defined neighborhoods attend the school in their neighborhood. Before NSI, that figure was 31%.
- In the neighborhoods of the schools with the capacity to enroll all their students, over half (55%) of the students attend their neighborhood school or the school in the adjacent neighborhood.
- In 1998-1999 there were 15 schools enrolling more than 60% of their students from the neighborhood. Now there are 10 such schools.
- In 1998-1999 there were 41 schools with the capacity to enroll all the children living in the school's neighborhood. Now there are 34 such potential neighborhood schools.
- The percent of MPS elementary and K-8 schools enrolling mostly white students has increased since 1998-1999 from 13% to 16%. The percent of schools enrolling mostly Latino students has decreased during this time from 11% to 7%. The percent of schools classified as racially balanced has increased from 23% to 25%.
- Student mobility rates in the 28 NSI target schools have decreased since 1998-1999, from an average rate of 14% to 12% in 2001-2002, a decrease comparable to the overall district average mobility rates of 13% in 1998-1999 and 10% in 2001-2002.

## Schools are Enrolling a Smaller Percentage of Neighborhood Students



The overall goal of the NSI plan is to build capacity in neighborhood schools. More neighborhood capacity is needed due to the many densely populated neighborhoods in the central and northern areas of the city, as well as to the age of many of the city's school buildings. The NSI serves as a vehicle for the district to build new neighborhood seats in high-population areas and to update and renovate some existing classrooms.

When we first analyzed the MPS busing data, shortly after the passage of the NSI plan in the Legislature, in 1998-1999 school year, there were 41 schools that enrolled more students than there were students living in the neighborhood. We dubbed these schools "potential neighborhood schools" as they truly had the capacity to be neighborhood schools—they had enough room to enroll all the children in their neighborhood. At that time we expected the number of such schools, the potential neighborhood schools, to increase with the implementation of the NSI plan. However, in 2000-2001 the number of potential neighborhood schools dropped to 37. This year there are 34 such schools.

While the number of schools with the capacity to enroll all their neighborhood students has yet to increase, it does seem more children are attending their neighborhood school since the implementation of the NSI plan. On average, MPS attendance area schools now enroll 40% of their students from the neighborhood. This is a slight increase from 1998-1999 when the percent of a school's enrollment from the neighborhood was 39%. In addition, overall neighborhood enrollment has increased since 1998-1999. Before NSI, about 31% of MPS students attending schools with attendance areas attended their neighborhood schools. That figure increased to 35% in 2000-2001 and is now at 39%.

However, the table below indicates that, of schools with attendance areas, the number of schools enrolling greater than 61% of their student bodies from the neighborhood has decreased from 15 in 1998-1999 to 10 in 2002-2003. In addition, the number of schools enrolling more than 50% their student bodies from their neighborhoods has decreased from 29 in 1998-1999 to 27 in 2002-2003. See the full report for more information on these schools.

### MPS Elementary Schools with Attendance Areas

Neighborhood Students as Percentage of Student Body	No. of Schools		
	1998-1999	2000-2001	2002-2003
30-40%	25	21	27
41-50%	15	17	13
51-60%	14	15	17
>60%	15	16	10

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# Enrollment Close to Home



In order to create more neighborhood capacity by building more neighborhood seats, the district must simultaneously reduce the amount of busing throughout the city. The NSI plan relies on busing cost savings to offset the debt incurred by the many construction projects.

One way to figure out how to reduce busing is to look at how close to home MPS students are enrolled. While we cannot answer this question for every student, we do have interesting results for that group of students with the most capability of attending school in their neighborhood, those that live in the neighborhoods of the “potential neighborhood schools.” In these schools, in which, theoretically, every neighborhood student could be accommodated, there has been an increase since 1998 in the percentage of students enrolling in a school outside their immediate neighborhood.

This year’s 34 potential neighborhood schools would be the place where we would expect to see increases in neighborhood attendance, as they are the schools with the greatest capacity for neighborhood students. However, the data show that the portion of neighborhood enrollment in these schools has decreased since 1998, from 43% to 37%. In addition, the portion of students enrolled outside their immediate and adjacent attendance areas has increased from 42% to 45%. Thus, we see, for this group of students, an emerging trend of enrollment outside the neighborhood, and even beyond the adjacent neighborhood. Even so, over a third are enrolled in

the neighborhood schools and over half are enrolled in the neighborhood school or the school in the adjacent neighborhood. Most of these children are indeed attending school close to home.

Why more of these students, who have the most opportunity to attend their neighborhood school, have not chosen to do so is unclear. While the NSI plan focuses on overcrowded neighborhoods and not these potential neighborhood schools, one would guess that increasing neighborhood enrollment in the focus neighborhoods, accompanied by reduced busing in general, would result in increased neighborhood enrollment elsewhere. The district should investigate why, since the implementation of NSI, the expected result has not been seen here.

Overall, enrollment data indicates most MPS students are attending a school close to home. The exceptions may be those students who attend a citywide school. We define a citywide school as a school that does not have a defined attendance area. Traditionally, these schools have been the citywide specialty magnet schools designed to attract students from all over the city. In 1998-1999 there were 24 citywide schools, enrolling a total of 8,858 elementary and K-8 students. Today the total number of elementary and K-8 students in 23 citywide schools is 9,172. These 23 citywide schools drew students on average from 67 different neighborhoods, with the Wisconsin Conservatory of Lifelong Learning drawing from the most neighborhoods (106) and Starns Monumental from the fewest neighborhoods (27). See the full report for a complete analysis of citywide schools.

## 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 School
<b>1998-1999</b>	41	43%	58%	42%
<b>2000-2001</b>	37	40%	58%	42%
<b>2002-2003</b>	34	37%	55%	45%



## The Corollary Impacts of the Neighborhood Schools Initiative after Three Years

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In 1999, MPS embarked on a new policy to reduce busing and increase neighborhood capacity. Since then:

- The percent of MPS elementary and K-8 schools enrolling mostly white students has increased since 13% to 16%. The percent of schools enrolling mostly Latino students has decreased during this time from 11% to 7%. The percent of schools classified as racially balanced has increased from 23% to 25%.
- In 15 of the 28 targeted neighborhoods the mobility rate, or percent of students leaving the school during the school year, has improved. The largest decrease was at Siefert Elementary School, which went from 15% mobility in 1998-1999 to 5% mobility in 2001-2002.
- In all 28 NSI target schools, the average stability rate, or the percent of students enrolled in the school for two succeeding school years, increased one percentage point. The district stability rate as a whole remained steady between 1998-1999 and 2001-2002.
- Average attendance rates have also increased, from 90.9% to 92.6% in the NSI target schools and from 92.4% to 93.4% district wide.

For the complete report, "Neighborhood School? The Jury is Still Out," see our website: [www.publicpolicyforum.org](http://www.publicpolicyforum.org)

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