

DECEMBER 2014

WHAT IS THE MILWAUKEE K-12 SCHOOL SYSTEM?



A comprehensive overview of the educational options open to Milwaukee parents



Research by:



Public Policy Forum

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ABOUT THE PUBLIC POLICY FORUM

The Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum, established in 1913 as a local government watchdog, is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the effectiveness of government and the development of Southeastern Wisconsin through objective research of regional public policy issues.

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report is intended to provide citizens and policymakers with useful statistical information regarding the K-12 education system in Milwaukee. We hope this report's findings will be used to inform education discussions and policy debates at the local and state levels. This report is one of two reports that are designed to provide broad perspective on the educational system in Milwaukee. The other report, released simultaneously, can be found on our website: publicpolicyforum.org.

We would like to thank the Greater Milwaukee Foundation and Northwestern Mutual Foundation for their generous support of our education research. We also would like to thank the Herzfeld Foundation for its generous 100th anniversary gift, which also helped make this report possible.



THE MILWAUKEE K-12 SYSTEM :: 2013-2014



THE MILWAUKEE K-12 SYSTEM :: 2013-2014

SCHOOLS IN THE CITY OF MILWAUKEE

Overall Characteristics

Schools	292
Students.....	117,199
Teachers*	6,432
Student-Teacher*	18.0

School Type (% enrolled)

Early Education (10)	1.0%
Elementary (50)	15.6%
Middle (10)	3.7%
Middle/High (12).....	3.6%
High (48)	20.1%
K-8 (143)	46.9%
K-12 (18)	9.1%
(school count in parentheses)	

Racial Breakdown (% enrolled)*

African American	55.0%
Hispanic	24.4%
White	14.0%
Other.....	6.7%
Minority.....	86.0%

*Does not include non-MPCP private schools



Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS)

Overall Characteristics

Schools	165
Students	78,516
Teachers	4,263
Student-Teacher	18.4
Special Ed	20.6%
Econ. Disadv.	82.8% ¹

School Type (% enrolled)

Early Education (5)	1.1%
Elementary (43)	21.7%
Middle (8)	5.0%
Middle/High (9)	5.0%
High (33)	22.7%
K-8 (64)	41.1%
K-12 (3)	3.3%
(school count in parentheses)	

Racial Breakdown (% enrolled)

African American	55.3%
Hispanic	24.1%
White	13.7%
Other	7.0%
Minority	86.3%

Academic Achievement

WKCE Reading	15.7% ²
WKCE Math	20.3% ²
Graduation	61.3% ³

Non-MPS Charter Schools

Overall Characteristics

Schools	22
Students	7,969
Teachers	473
Student-Teacher	16.9
Special Ed	9.9%
Econ. Disadv.	77.3% ¹

School Type (% enrolled)

Early Education (2)	2.3%
Elementary (2)	7.3%
Middle (0)	0.0%
Middle/High (1)	0.9%
High (3)	8.4%
K-8 (13)	69.1%
K-12 (1)	12.1%
(school count in parentheses)	

Racial Breakdown (% enrolled)

African American	63.7%
Hispanic	27.7%
White	6.2%
Other	2.4%
Minority	93.8%

Academic Achievement

WKCE Reading	20.4% ²
WKCE Math	32.0% ²
Graduation	90.5% ³

Private Schools

Overall Characteristics

Schools	105
Students	30,714
Teachers*	1,697
Student-Teacher*	17.4
Special Ed	n/a
Econ. Disadv.*	84.8% ⁴

School Type (% enrolled)

Early Education (3)	0.3%
Elementary (5)	2.2%
Middle (2)	1.1%
Middle/High (2)	0.8%
High (12)	16.5%
K-8 (66)	55.8%
K-12 (14)	23.2%
(school count in parentheses)	

Racial Breakdown (% enrolled)*

African American	51.3%
Hispanic	24.2%
White	17.4%
Other	7.1%
Minority	82.6%

Academic Achievement*

WKCE Reading	11.7% ²
WKCE Math	15.2% ²
Graduation	n/a

*MPCP only

MPS (NON-CHARTER)

Schools	136
Students	67,263
Early Education (3)	0.8%
Elementary (37)	22.5%
Middle (7)	5.6%
Middle/High (8)	5.5%
High (25)	23.3%
K-8 (54)	40.2%
K-12 (2)	2.1%
African American	55.8%
Hispanic	24.6%
White	13.7%
Other	5.8%
Minority	86.3%
Special Ed	21.4%
Econ. Disadv.	82.9% ¹
WKCE Reading	15.5% ²
WKCE Math	19.7% ²
Graduation	62.2% ³

INSTRUMENTALITY CHARTER

Schools	14
Students	5,075
Early Education (1)	3.3%
Elementary (4)	26.6%
Middle (0)	0.0%
Middle/High (0)	0.0%
High (5)	30.0%
K-8 (4)	40.1%
K-12 (0)	0.0%
African American	45.7%
Hispanic	22.7%
White	25.0%
Other	6.6%
Minority	75.0%
Special Ed	21.6%
Econ. Disadv.	76.4% ¹
WKCE Reading	22.7% ²
WKCE Math	31.9% ²
Graduation	52.7% ³

NON-INSTRUMENTALITY CHARTER

Schools	15
Students	6,178
Early Education (1)	3.3%
Elementary (2)	8.8%
Middle (1)	3.2%
Middle/High (1)	3.5%
High (3)	10.6%
K-8 (6)	52.0%
K-12 (1)	18.6%
African American	56.9%
Hispanic	19.9%
White	3.7%
Other	19.5%
Minority	96.3%
Special Ed	11.2%
Econ. Disadv.	87.3% ¹
WKCE Reading	11.0% ²
WKCE Math	19.0% ²
Graduation	48.4% ³

CITY-CHARTERED

Schools	10
Students	3,219
Early Education (0)	0.0%
Elementary (2)	18.1%
Middle (0)	0.0%
Middle/High (1)	2.1%
High (1)	6.2%
K-8 (5)	43.7%
K-12 (1)	29.9%
African American	80.4%
Hispanic	12.4%
White	5.2%
Other	2.0%
Minority	94.8%
Special Ed	10.9%
Econ. Disadv.	77.9% ¹
WKCE Reading	14.1% ²
WKCE Math	21.7% ²
Graduation	82.4% ³

UWM-CHARTERED

Schools	12
Students	4,750
Early Education (2)	3.8%
Elementary (0)	0.0%
Middle (0)	0.0%
Middle/High (0)	0.0%
High (2)	9.9%
K-8 (8)	86.3%
K-12 (0)	0.0%
African American	52.4%
Hispanic	38.0%
White	6.9%
Other	2.7%
Minority	93.1%
Special Ed	9.2%
Econ. Disadv.	76.9% ¹
WKCE Reading	23.8% ²
WKCE Math	37.6% ²
Graduation	96.0% ³

MILWAUKEE PARENTAL CHOICE PROGRAM (MPCP)

Schools	94
Students	29,560
Early Education (2)	0.3%
Elementary (4)	2.2%
Middle (1)	0.9%
Middle/High (2)	0.8%
High (10)	16.9%
K-8 (62)	55.0%
K-12 (13)	24.0%
African American	51.3%
Hispanic	24.2%
White	17.4%
Other	7.1%
Minority	82.6%
Special Ed	n/a
Econ. Disadv.	84.8% ⁴
WKCE Reading	11.7% ²
WKCE Math	15.2% ²
Graduation	n/a

NON-MPCP

Schools	11
Students	1,154
Early Education (1)	1.8%
Elementary (1)	4.2%
Middle (1)	6.9%
Middle/High (0)	0.0%
High (2)	6.6%
K-8 (4)	76.2%
K-12 (1)	3.3%
African American	n/a
Hispanic	n/a
White	n/a
Other	n/a
Minority	n/a
Special Ed	n/a
Econ. Disadv.	n/a
WKCE Reading	n/a
WKCE Math	n/a
Graduation	n/a

1. Economically disadvantaged percentage based on percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch.

2. WKCE score is combined percentage of students scoring at or above proficient in all grades tested.

3. Graduation data are from the 2012-13 school year. These data refer to four-year graduation rates.

Note: Special education and graduation rate data not available for MPCP schools.

Racial demographic data collected from survey of 79 MPCP schools that reported data.

4. Economically disadvantaged percentage is based on percentage of students participating in MPCP.

Note: Racial demographic, special education, economically disadvantaged, WKCE, and graduation rate data not available for non-MPCP private schools.

OVERVIEW

Throughout much of the nation, parents have a clear-cut choice of where to educate their children – in a public school, at taxpayer expense, or in a private school, at the family’s expense.

In Milwaukee and some other cities, however, that line is not so clear. Here, students can attend public schools operated by private organizations and private schools that receive public funding, in addition to traditional public and private schools.

This report presents a comprehensive overview of the educational options open to Milwaukee elementary and secondary school students, both as a guide to parents seeking to navigate the often-confusing range of options, and as background for policymakers and other interested parties who wish to familiarize themselves with the basics of the city’s educational landscape.

Schools in Milwaukee can be grouped either by their format – as public schools, charter schools or private schools – or by their governing authorities – the Milwaukee School Board, other public entities, or private organizations.

Public schools are usually operated by the local school district (in this case, the Milwaukee Public Schools) with school district staff, under the supervision of the elected School Board, funded primarily by taxpayers, subject to all state and federal regulations, and open to all resident students free of tuition (although some other fees may be charged). In the 2013-14 school year, Milwaukee had 136 such schools with 67,263 students, representing 47% of all schools and 57% of all students in the city. This includes neighborhood schools, specialty schools, and alternative schools. (See the “MPS Options” section for more details.)

Charter schools are also public schools, with taxpayer funding, open to all resident students without tuition. But unlike traditional public

schools, charter schools operate outside many normal government rules, an exemption that advocates say is intended to give them the freedom to pioneer innovative educational approaches. Charter schools must be non-sectarian and may be operated either by school district staff or by outside organizations – either not-for-profit agencies or for-profit businesses – that negotiate contracts, or “charters,” with local school boards. In Milwaukee, schools also may be chartered by the Common Council, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, or Milwaukee Area Technical College, although MATC has not exercised this authority.

Thus, **the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS)** include not only the traditional public schools, but also two types of charter schools: Those that are directly operated by MPS staff, as “instrumentalities” of the district, and those that are managed and staffed by other organizations but are ultimately accountable to the School Board as their chartering authority.

Of Milwaukee’s 51 charter schools in the 2013-14 school year, 14 were **MPS instrumentality charters**, with 5,075 students; 15 were **non-instrumentality MPS charters**, with 6,178 students; 12 were **chartered by UWM**, with 4,750 students; and 10 were **chartered by the city**, with 3,219 students. In all, 19,222 students, or about one in six schoolchildren educated in Milwaukee, attended charter schools in the city that school year.

While many charter schools are public schools under private management, religious and other private organizations also operate more than 100 **private schools** in Milwaukee. In much of the country, private schools rely largely on tuition charges and other forms of private funding, select their own students, and operate outside most government regulation.

But in Milwaukee, through the **Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP)**, the state provides public funding to cover

DATA USED IN THIS REPORT The analysis of public schools and private schools outside the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) in this report primarily utilizes data obtained from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI). The data were obtained from the DPI District Report Cards, Wisconsin Information System for Education Data Dashboard (WISEdash), and other DPI sources. Unless otherwise noted, the data are from the 2013-14 school year, which is the most recent year for which complete data are available regarding public schools. The Milwaukee Public Schools also provided some data and information for use in this report.

Data for MPCP schools were from our 16th annual census of MPCP schools. Surveys were conducted from November 2013 through January 2014. Schools initially were mailed a survey to complete and return; schools that failed to do so were visited to ensure a survey participation rate as close to 100% as possible. Although we extended data collection by two additional weeks, 13 Milwaukee schools declined to participate in our census. Seventy-nine of the 94 MPCP schools in the City of Milwaukee reported racial and demographic data on their surveys.

Additional information was obtained from the websites of the Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau; the Education Writers Association; the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools; the Wisconsin Family Assistance Center for Education, Training, & Support; the Wisconsin Parents Association; U.S. Census Bureau; the staffs of the St. Francis and Maple Dale-Indian Hill school districts; and, where footnoted, articles published in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and EducationNext.

OVERVIEW

Students can attend public schools operated by private organizations and private schools that receive public funding, in addition to traditional public and private schools.

at least part of the tuition of lower- and middle-income students attending private schools. Schools that accept public funding cannot use grades or test scores to decide which publicly-funded students to admit, and must comply with certain state requirements. Also, religious schools cannot require publicly-funded students to participate in religious activities.

The Milwaukee choice program, the nation's oldest and largest such program, started with non-sectarian private schools in 1990 and was expanded to religious schools in 1995. Of the city's 105 private schools, 94 participated in the choice program in 2013-14. These schools had 29,560 students, of whom 25,062 participated in the MPCP. By contrast, only 11 Milwaukee private schools, with 1,154 students, operated entirely outside the choice program.

Both the public and private school student totals include some suburban residents who have chosen to attend school in the city. And, in addition to the brick-and-mortar schools within the city limits, some Milwaukee students attend public or private schools in the suburbs; study online through virtual charter schools; or are educated at home by their parents. (See the "Other Choices" section for more details.)

The variety of schools offers Milwaukee parents a wide array of educational options for their children. But it also poses some challenges.

Schools with different types of programs have different enrollment processes, meaning that parents may find themselves filling out separate applications for several different schools at the same time – even within MPS. Those different types of schools receive public funding in different amounts and through different methods, and the details of that funding have raised questions of equity over the years. Such questions often have been compounded by the comparatively high concentration of special education students in MPS-staffed schools. (See the "Getting Started," "Paying the Bills" and "Not So Special" sections for more details.)

In other cases, the various types of schools face similar challenges. All of them are racially segregated, in different ways and to differing degrees. All of them serve student populations that are more than 75% economically disadvantaged. And, in one way or another, all of them struggle with academic performance below state averages. (See the "Separate But Equal?" and "Making the Grade" sections for more details.)

In attempting to provide a concise picture of the Kindergarten-12th grade education landscape in Milwaukee, we used publicly available data from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and from schools and school districts themselves. Unfortunately, in many instances that are documented in this report, the data are limited.



St. Marcus Lutheran School is a Milwaukee choice school serving students from K3 through 8th grades.

ELLEN COOK, PHOTOGRAPHER

GETTING STARTED HOW ARE STUDENTS ADMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF THEIR CHOICE?

Having a choice of schools is one thing, but getting into the school of your choice is something else altogether.

With the proliferation of educational options in Milwaukee, parents who want to take advantage of those options must navigate multiple admission processes. Somewhat like the college application process, many parents will find themselves filling out multiple applications in order to ensure their child obtains a seat in at least one of their preferred schools. And because some schools' admission processes operate on different schedules, parents would be well-advised to familiarize themselves with those admission schedules as much as a year in advance of the date they expect their child to enter or transfer into a new school.

For two-thirds of the 165 Milwaukee Public Schools, parents must apply through the MPS Three Choice Enrollment process, available online, at any MPS school and at the district's Parent Resource Centers. (Those who want their children to remain in the same school don't need to reapply.) The Three Choice process – which, as its name suggests, allows parents to list their top three choices of MPS schools – runs through much of February for the following school year.

Somewhat like the college application process, many parents will find themselves filling out multiple applications in order to ensure their child obtains a seat in at least one of their preferred schools. And because some schools' admission processes operate on different schedules, parents would be well-advised to familiarize themselves with those admission schedules as much as a year in advance of the date they expect their child to enter or transfer into a new school.

If the number of applicants exceeds the number of seats available for new students in a given school, MPS assigns the available seats through a lottery that gives priority to those with siblings already attending that school and to those who live in the school's neighborhood or region of the city. MPS notifies parents in March of the school in which their child has been enrolled. For those applying after the Three Choice process ends, MPS assigns any remaining seats on a first-come, first-served basis.

Parents can use the Three Choice process to enroll their children in all neighborhood schools, most specialty and some alternative schools, and all instrumentality charter

schools. But even within MPS, some schools use different enrollment processes. Those exceptions are:

Early admissions: Six specialty schools (Rufus King, Reagan and Riverside high schools, Milwaukee High School of the Arts, Meir, and Morse-Marshall) use an early admissions process that starts in October. Parents must apply directly through the school and students must meet specific criteria, such as academic achievement or passing an audition. Any seats remaining after the early admissions process closes in November may be assigned during the Three Choice process.

Charter schools: Although all of the 14 MPS instrumentality charter schools use the Three Choice process, the 15 non-instrumentality schools chartered through MPS have their own enrollment processes, starting in February. Parents need to inquire directly to the schools of their choice for more information about admission criteria and procedures.

Alternative schools: Students who are judged to be at risk of dropping out of middle or high school can be assigned to one of the district's 17 alternative schools, through a process that starts in February.

February also is when Milwaukee parents can start applying to private schools participating in the **Milwaukee Parental Choice Program**, although some schools may have later application deadlines. If the number of MPCP applicants exceeds the number of seats available in a school, state law requires the school to select students through a lottery.

Schools chartered through either the city or the University of Wisconsin-

Milwaukee have their own admission processes, as do **private schools** for students not participating in the MPCP. Parents interested in these options need to contact those schools directly.

Milwaukee parents who would like their children to attend **suburban public schools** or **virtual charter schools based outside the city** can apply through MPS for the **Chapter 220** voluntary integration program, or contact the school district of their choice for the **open enrollment** program. Both of those processes start in February.

MPS OPTIONS HOW MUCH CHOICE DO STUDENTS HAVE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

Even without choice and charter schools, the Milwaukee Public Schools offer students a wide variety of options.

Parents and students can choose among neighborhood schools; specialty schools that focus on specific academic areas; and alternative schools designed for at-risk youth.

Most MPS schools are **neighborhood schools**. At the elementary level, these schools give first priority to enrolling students from their neighborhood, or attendance area, but they are also open to students from the same region of the city. Similarly, comprehensive middle and high schools use attendance areas but are open to students from outside those areas.

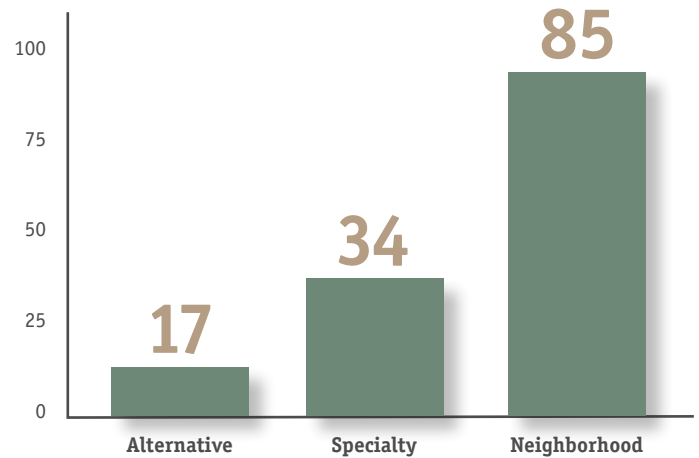
In the 2013-14 school year, MPS had a total of 85 neighborhood schools. Of those, 75 were attendance-area elementary and K-8 schools, serving 33,896 students; one was a comprehensive middle school, with 605 students; eight were comprehensive high schools, serving 7,993 students; and one was a combined comprehensive middle-high school, with 907 students. Together, neighborhood schools accounted for 55% of the student population.

Parents and students can choose among neighborhood schools; specialty schools that focus on specific academic areas; and alternative schools designed for at-risk youth.

Excluding charters, about one-quarter of MPS schools are **specialty schools**. These 34 schools have a particular academic focus, such as language immersion, career training, or the arts; or a specific educational approach, such as employing the Montessori philosophy, teaching for the International Baccalaureate test, or serving gifted/talented.

In 2013-14, MPS had 27 citywide specialty schools (six high schools, five middle schools, two combined middle-high schools, two K-12 schools, five K-8 schools, six elementary schools and one early childhood

2013-14 Number of MPS Schools by Type*



* This chart does not include charter schools authorized by MPS.

education center) that were open to all students and six neighborhood specialty schools (five K-8 schools and one early childhood center) that gave first priority to students in their attendance areas but were open to other students if space was available. Also, one early childhood education center was operated by an outside agency under contract. Together, these schools had 22,394 students, representing 29% of the student population.

Finally, MPS offers **alternative schools** for the students facing the greatest challenges: those who have serious behavioral issues, who are returning from expulsion, or who have been judged delinquent by the justice system. In 2013-14, the district had 17 alternative schools serving 1,468 students at the middle-school and high-school levels; of those, 14 schools were operated in partnerships with other agencies under contract.



MPS' Lincoln Center of the Arts serves students in 6th through 8th grades with an arts-based learning environment.

OTHER CHOICES ARE MPS, CHARTERS, AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS THE ONLY OPTIONS?

The educational choices for Milwaukee parents aren't limited by the boundaries of the city.

In addition to the options provided by MPS, charter schools, and private schools within the city, Milwaukee students can attend public or private schools in the suburbs, take classes online, or stay at home to be taught by their parents.

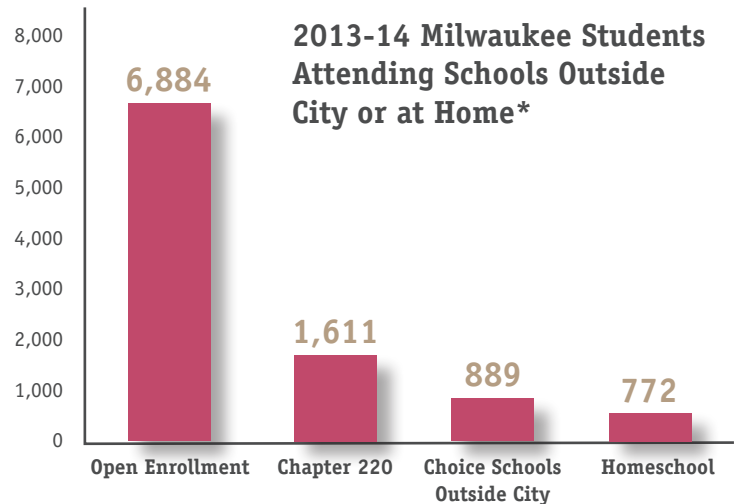
This report focuses primarily on the schools that are physically located within the Milwaukee city limits. But not all Milwaukee students attend those schools, nor are the schools themselves limited to serving Milwaukee students.

To fully understand the choices available for Milwaukee students, therefore, we must at least briefly consider the role of programs that allow Milwaukee schoolchildren to attend public schools in other jurisdictions; to enroll at suburban private schools; to be educated through virtual charter schools; and to be schooled at home.

Two types of interdistrict transfer programs are available to Milwaukee students: open enrollment and Chapter 220. **Open enrollment** is a statewide program that allows students from any public school district to attend a public school in another district if space is available.

Chapter 220 is a 1975 state law, adopted in response to a federal lawsuit that sought the desegregation of MPS. It allows minority students from Milwaukee to transfer to predominantly white suburban schools, and white students from the suburbs to transfer to predominantly minority city schools. The lawsuit settlement, which expired in 1995, required 23 suburban districts to participate.

Nine of those districts (Brown Deer, Cudahy, Glendale-River Hills, Greenfield, Nicolet, Shorewood, Wauwatosa,



* Virtual schools are not included in this figure because data were not available.

West Allis-West Milwaukee, and St. Francis) are no longer allowed to enroll new Chapter 220 students because they have reached the law's target threshold of enrolling at least 30% minority students. A 10th district, Maple Dale-Indian Hill, hit the 30% limit in the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years but will again be eligible in 2015-16. Another five districts (Elmbrook, Franklin, Menomonee Falls, New Berlin, and South Milwaukee) have chosen to stop accepting new Chapter 220 students, partly because the open enrollment program offers more attractive financial incentives.^{1, 2}

Endnotes

1. As school options expand, landmark Chapter 220 integration program fades," by Erin Richards, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Dec. 24, 2013.
2. The St. Francis school district reached the 30% minority threshold in 2012-13, after its school board had already decided not to accept new Chapter 220 students.



OTHER CHOICES ARE MPS, CHARTERS, AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS THE ONLY OPTIONS?

Aside from Maple Dale-Indian Hill, that leaves eight partners for MPS to send new Chapter 220 students (Fox Point-Bayside, Germantown, Greendale, Hamilton, Mequon-Thiensville, Oak Creek-Franklin, Whitefish Bay, and Whitnall). However, during the 2013-14 school year, most of the suburban school districts that were closed to new Chapter 220 students – except Brown Deer and Glendale-River Hills – still had some students who had enrolled through the program in previous years.

During the 2013-14 school year, 6,884 Milwaukee students attended suburban schools through open enrollment and another 1,611 went to suburban schools through Chapter 220. At the same time, open enrollment brought 732 suburban students into the city, while another 236 transferred into MPS through Chapter 220.

Milwaukee students also can attend **suburban private schools**, either through the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program or without it. In 2013-14, the choice program covered 889 students in 17 schools outside the city,

In addition to the options provided by the Milwaukee Public Schools, charter schools, and private schools within the city, Milwaukee students can attend public or private schools in the suburbs, take classes online, or stay at home to be taught by their parents.



including two boarding schools outside the metropolitan area. No figures are available on the number of city students who attend suburban private schools without using vouchers.

Finally, two more options allow students to attend school at their homes: virtual charter schools and homeschooling. **Virtual charter schools** provide all or part of their instruction online. They are public schools that are governed by the same rules as brick-and-mortar charter schools. Each virtual charter school is chartered by a specific school district, but through the open enrollment process, any Wisconsin student can attend any Wisconsin virtual charter school.

The state Department of Public Instruction's list of virtual charter schools includes one in the city: Milwaukee Community Cyber High School, an MPS non-instrumentality charter school with more than 200 students. On its own website, however, the school says it offers a "blended learning model" that includes face-to-face instruction.

Beyond that, figures were not available on how many Milwaukee residents were among the 7,188 students who attended virtual charter schools in Wisconsin in 2013-14.

By contrast, parents are usually the main instructors in **homeschooling**. Wisconsin law allows parents without teaching credentials to teach their children at home, provided that the instruction meets certain minimum requirements. Homeschooling parents can use courses provided by private virtual schools; enroll their children in public schools for up to two courses a semester; and join other homeschooling parents for special activities like field trips. Unlike some other states, however, Wisconsin does not permit homeschooling cooperatives, in which different parents teach different courses to groups of homeschooled students from different families. During the 2013-14 school year, 772 Milwaukee students were privately homeschooled.

MAKING THE GRADE HOW DO SCHOOLS COMPARE IN ACADEMIC QUALITY?

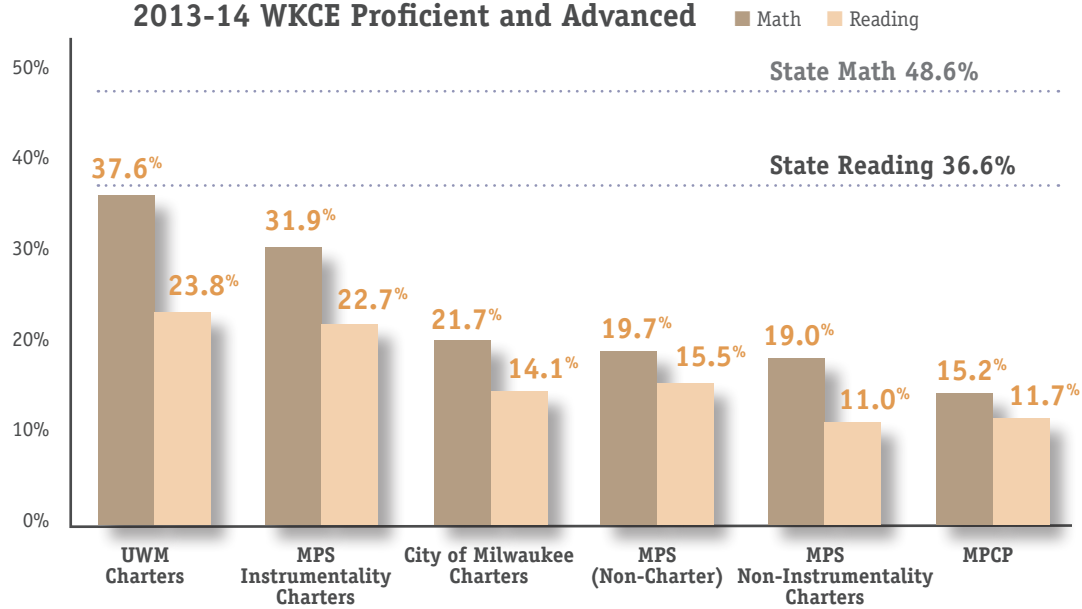
So which kind of school is the best? It is an inherently subjective question. And for many parents, the question is more accurately rephrased as, "Which kind of school is best for my child?" – the answer to which will vary from child to child.

Despite the subjective and individual nature of this question, extensive regional debate has focused on whether the Milwaukee Public Schools, choice, or charter schools can most effectively educate Milwaukee schoolchildren. To compare the different types of schools, we have several quantitative measures available, although each of these metrics has its own drawbacks.

The most comprehensive measure is the **annual report card**, compiled by the state Department of Public Instruction for each of Wisconsin's school districts and public schools since the 2011-12 school year. The report cards measure student performance on standardized tests; attendance, dropout and high school graduation rates; and progress toward closing academic achievement gaps between different groups of students. Those metrics are then combined into a score from 0 to 100, which yields a rating of "significantly exceeds expectations," "exceeds expectations," "meets expectations," "meets few expectations," or "fails to meet expectations." Schools that target at-risk students, or that are too new or have too few students to be rated on the regular report cards, are placed on an alternate scale and rated either "satisfactory progress" or "needs improvement."

On the 2013-14 report cards, MPS received both a district-wide score and scores for its individual schools. The district's score of 51.1 placed it in the category of "fails to meet expectations."

2013-14 WKCE Proficient and Advanced

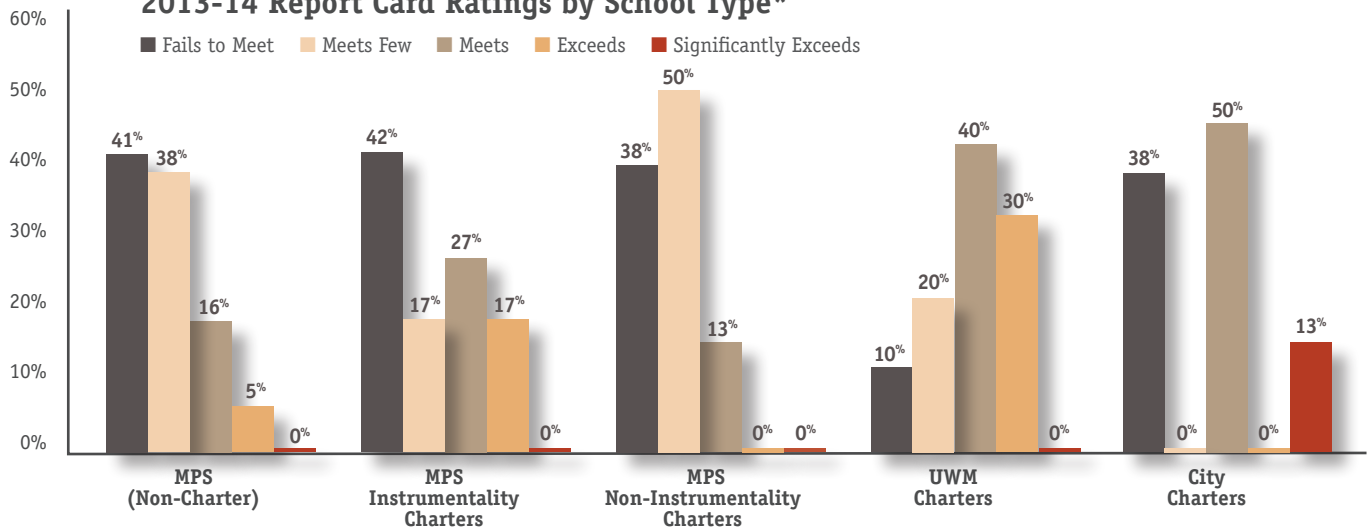


Most individual MPS schools also struggled, while performance levels varied among other school types.

On the alternate scale, two city-chartered schools, two UWM-chartered schools, five MPS non-instrumentality charter schools, and six MPS schools made satisfactory progress, while two MPS instrumentality charter schools and 13 MPS schools needed improvement. Four early childhood centers were not rated.

A narrower measure, but one that allows us to compare MPCP schools with MPS and charter schools, is **standardized test results**. Wisconsin has administered various forms of student tests since 1975. The version used in recent years, the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination (WKCE), has tested students on their reading and mathematics skills from 3rd through 8th grade, and again in 10th grade, as well as on language arts, science, and social studies in the 4th, 8th, and 10th grades.

2013-14 Report Card Ratings by School Type*



* MPCP and non-MPCP private schools are not included because they are not currently part of the DPI report card system.

MAKING THE GRADE HOW DO SCHOOLS COMPARE IN ACADEMIC QUALITY?

Starting in 2014-15, the Smarter Balanced Assessment replaces the WKCE in English and math from 3rd through 8th grades, although the WKCE science and social studies tests will remain in place for 4th, 8th, and 10th graders. Also starting in 2014-15, the ACT Aspire test in English, math and science is administered to 9th and 10th graders, while 11th graders are required to take both the ACT (a national college admissions test of English, math and science), and the ACT WorkKeys test, which measures how students apply their reading, math, and research skills in ways their future jobs may require.

For this report, we present data on composite WKCE reading and math scores for the 2013-14 school year, citing the percentage of students whose performance was graded “proficient” or “advanced.” In all categories of Milwaukee schools in which the tests were administered, students’ scores were significantly below the statewide score of 48.6% proficient or advanced in math and 36.6% proficient or advanced in reading.

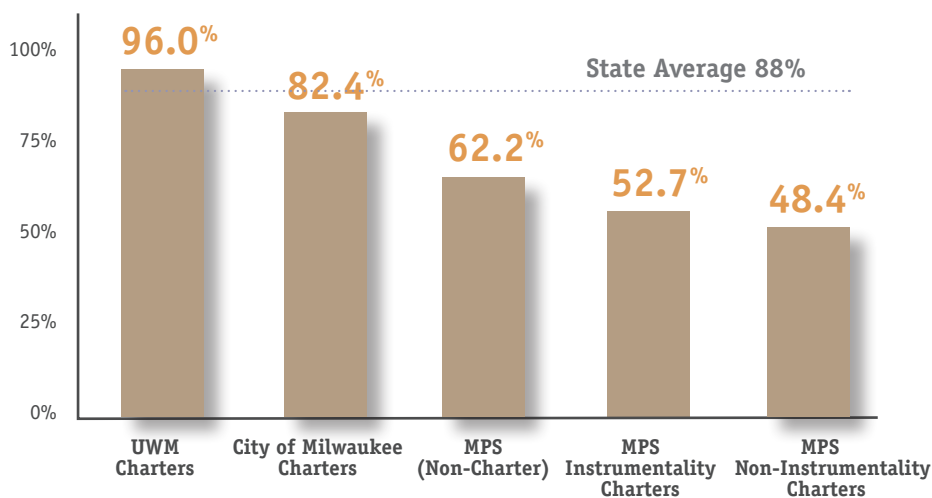
The best math proficiency percentages were posted by schools chartered by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (37.6%), followed by MPS instrumentality charters (31.9%), city-chartered schools (21.7%), MPS schools (19.7%), MPS non-instrumentality charter schools (19%), and Milwaukee Parental Choice Program schools (15.2%). For reading, the UWM-chartered schools again led, with 23.8%, followed by MPS instrumentality charters (22.7%), MPS schools (15.5%), city-chartered schools (14.1%), MPCP schools (11.7%), and MPS non-instrumentality charter schools (11%).

While these are composite results for each type of school, most individual schools’ results were also well below statewide averages and only a few were close to those averages. Just two MPCP schools, one city-chartered school, and four MPS schools (all of which were specialty schools) posted results that were significantly above average in both math and reading.

As previously noted, poverty is an important issue in assessing schools by standardized test scores. Critics also have voiced concern that an emphasis on testing leads teachers to “teach to the test,” rather than fostering critical thinking skills. In addition, choice proponents have argued that it is inappropriate to combine the test scores of all students who participate in the MPCP and cite their performance as if the schools they attend comprise one “district,” as they are actually a set of distinct schools with separate governance structures.

Graduation rate is another metric commonly used to assess school performance. In this report, we present 2012-13 data on graduation rates that define “graduation” as the percentage of ninth-graders who complete 12th grade four years later.

2012-13 Four-Year Graduation Rates*



* MPCP schools are not included in this chart because data were not available.

The two UWM-chartered high schools posted a composite 96% graduation rate, compared with 82.4% for three city-chartered schools, 62.2% for 35 MPS schools, 52.7% for five MPS instrumentality charter schools, and 48.4% for five MPS non-instrumentality charter schools. Within MPS, however, the graduation rate ranged from 81.6% at 10 specialty schools to 54.7% at nine neighborhood schools and 32.6% at 16 alternative schools.

No graduation rates are available for MPCP schools. Also, it should be noted that in light of the challenges faced by its students, MPS prefers to focus on the percentage of students who complete high school in six years, rather than the traditional four.

Unlike test scores and graduation rates, the **student-teacher ratio** is not a measure of students’ academic achievement outcomes. Still, we cite the data in this report because it provides a measure of the resources that the schools are devoting to educating students.

We find that the ratios are fairly similar among the different types of Milwaukee schools, ranging from 18.4 students to each teacher in MPS (both charter and non-charter schools) to 17.4 in MPCP schools and 16.9 in city- and UWM-chartered schools. However, this ratio is not a direct indicator of class size, because it covers all licensed faculty, including some who are not classroom teachers, such as reading specialists or speech therapists.

No student test results, graduation rates, or student-teacher ratios are available for private schools that do not accept MPCP funding, nor were such schools rated on state report cards.

SEPARATE BUT EQUAL? HOW DIVERSE ARE K-12 SCHOOLS IN MILWAUKEE?

Public funding had opened private school doors to urban minorities who otherwise might not have been able to attend. Charter schools have provided additional educational opportunities to that same population.

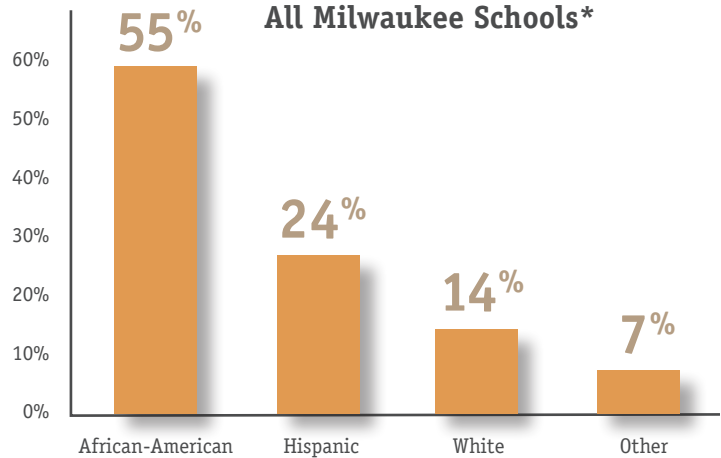
Yet, those changes have not produced a racially integrated school system. Instead, many schools are dominated by a single race, decades after the Milwaukee Public Schools were entangled in legal battles designed to prevent exactly that result.

Excluding those private schools that do not accept MPCP-funded students, and those MPCP schools that did not disclose demographic information to the Public Policy Forum, the city's school population was about 55% African-American, 24% Hispanic, and 7% other minorities – a total of 86% minority – in the 2013-14 school year. Non-Hispanic white students comprise the remaining 14% of the Milwaukee school population.

When considering only the population of students who attend MPS schools (not including MPS charters), we see demographic percentages nearly identical to the overall proportions cited above. In both cases, the proportion of minorities in the school population is significantly greater than in the city itself, where non-Hispanic whites constituted 37% of residents in the 2010 U.S. Census.

Charter and MPCP school demographics diverge, however – and sometimes sharply. For example:

2013-14 Racial Breakdown: All Milwaukee Schools*



* This chart does not include non-MPCP private schools and MPCP schools that did not respond to a PPF survey.

- African-American students made up 80% of the student body at city-chartered schools but just 46% at MPS instrumentality charters, the only category of schools in which black students did not command a majority.
- Hispanic students occupied 38% of the seats in schools chartered by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, compared with only 12% at city-chartered schools.



The United Community Center, with a charter from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, operates Bruce-Guadalupe Community School, which serves K4 through 8th grades.

Many schools are dominated by a single race, decades after the Milwaukee Public Schools were entangled in legal battles designed to prevent exactly that result.

- Non-Hispanic white students accounted for just 4% to 7% of student bodies at independent charter schools, including MPS non-instrumentality charters, but 25% at instrumentality charters and 17% at MPCP schools.
- Asian-Americans made up more than 18% of students at MPS non-instrumentality charters, the only category of schools in which they both outnumbered non-Hispanic white students and approached the proportion of Hispanic students.

Even within MPS, some notable differences were seen. At specialty schools, enrollment was 19% non-Hispanic whites and 18% Hispanics, while the alternative school population was 77% African-American, 16% Hispanic and 6% white.

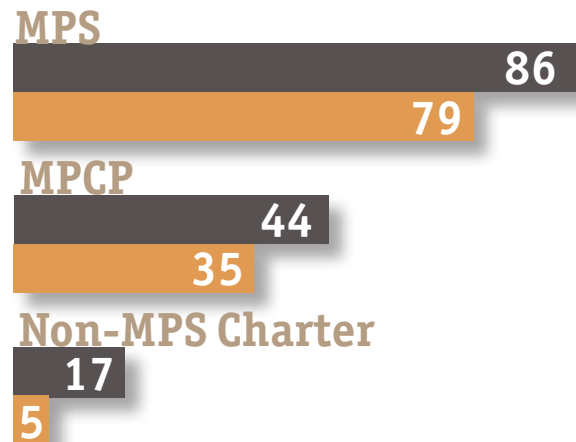
Perhaps more striking are the numbers of schools in which at least 80% of students were of the same race. African-Americans constituted 80% or more of the student body at 74 of the 165 MPS traditional and charter schools (45%), and 13 of the 22 non-MPS charter schools (59%). Of the 79 MPCP schools that provided demographic information, 35, or 44%, were at least 80% African-American.

All together, of the 266 schools for which demographic information was available, 147, or 55%, could be considered highly segregated. The number would rise to 210, or 79%, if we included the schools in which two or more minority races together constituted 80% or more of students.

Similarly, Hispanic students made up at least 80% of the student population at 11 MPS traditional and charter schools and four non-MPS charter schools, as well as nine of the MPCP schools that reported data. Asian students overwhelmingly dominated one MPS non-instrumentality charter school.

All together, of the 266 schools for which demographic information was available, 147, or 55%, could be considered highly segregated. The number would rise to 210, or 79%, if we included the schools in which two or more minority races together constituted 80% or more of students.

Highly Segregated (■) and Non-Highly Segregated (■) Schools by School Type*



* MPCP data reflect only the MPCP schools that responded to a PPF survey.

Several factors have contributed to this re-segregation. MPS policy decisions in past years reduced student busing – once a key tool in desegregation efforts – while re-emphasizing neighborhood schools.¹ Given Milwaukee’s racially segregated housing patterns, perhaps it should not be surprising that 72 of the 85 neighborhood schools were at least 80% non-white, and that of the remainder, five had a non-Hispanic white majority, two were majority Hispanic, and one was majority African-American.

Aside from busing, another major tool in the desegregation efforts of the 1970s was the establishment of MPS specialty schools. In other cities, specialty schools are called “magnet schools,” so named for their ability to attract and retain students – particularly white students from middle- and upper-income families who might otherwise choose to educate their children outside the minority-dominated urban public schools.

Some specialty schools are still playing this role to some extent. Overall, the specialty schools were slightly more diverse than others in MPS, trailing only MPS instrumentality charters in their percentage of non-Hispanic white students. Even so, 21 of 34 specialty schools, or 62%, were at least 80% non-white, while four others were more than 60% white.

By contrast, all of the alternative schools were at least 80% non-white, reflecting the disproportionate challenges faced by African-Americans and other minorities in Milwaukee.

Endnotes

1. “60 years after Brown vs. Board of Education, intense segregation returns,” by Erin Richards and Lydia Mulvany, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, May 17, 2014.

PAYING THE BILLS HOW ARE PUBLIC, CHARTER, AND MPCP SCHOOLS FUNDED?

As recently as 25 years ago, it was easy to tell the difference between public and private schools: Students attended public schools free of charge, at taxpayers' expense, while private schools charged tuition and didn't rely on government money.

Since the early 1990s, MPCP and charter schools have blurred that distinction. Now, almost all K-12 schools in Milwaukee receive public funding. However, they aren't all funded in the same manner or by the same amounts, and the way that some schools are funded can affect the funding streams of others.

Most of the public funding for K-12 education in Milwaukee still goes to the **Milwaukee Public Schools**. For the 2013-14 school year, the MPS operating budget relied on \$638 million in state aid, \$272.8 million from property taxes, \$211.7 million from federal aid, and \$8.9 million from other sources. That excludes the \$35.4 million construction budget, funded mainly by borrowing and property taxes, and the \$19.1 million extension budget for playgrounds and other community recreation programs, funded primarily by property taxes. When all funds are included, MPS received 54% of its revenue from state aid, 25% from property taxes, 18% from federal aid, and 3% from borrowing and other sources.

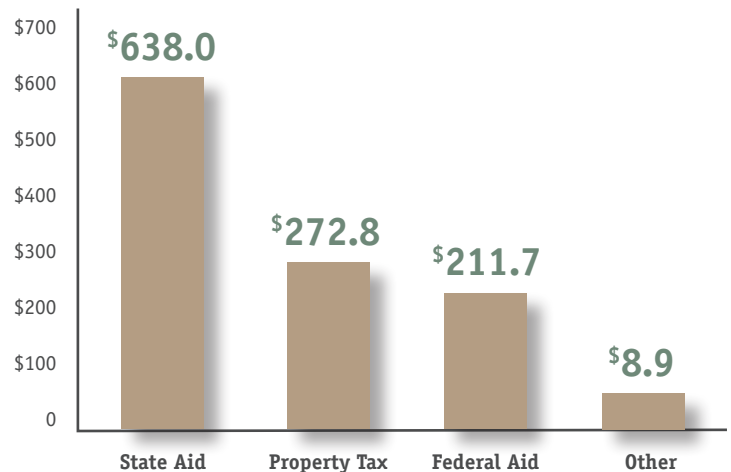
Almost all K-12 schools in Milwaukee receive public funding. However, they aren't all funded in the same manner or by the same amounts.

As public schools, **charter schools** also receive public funding, but how they are paid depends on how they are chartered. For 2013-14, schools **chartered through the City of Milwaukee or the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee** received \$7,925 in state aid per pupil, or about \$60 million. That amount rises to \$8,075 per pupil, or about \$66 million, in the 2014-15 school year. Those charter schools also receive varying amounts of federal aid, earmarked for specific purposes.

By contrast, **MPS instrumentality charter schools** are included in the regular MPS funding streams. MPS uses state aid to pay its **non-instrumentality charter schools** the same per-pupil base rate as city and UWM charters, but they are eligible for additional state and federal aid for specific programs, such as services to special-needs students.

Yet another form of public funding comes through the **Milwaukee Parental Choice Program**, in which the state

2013-14 MPS Operating Budget Revenue (millions)



provides a payment, to cover the cost of tuition for each student attending a participating private school.

For 2014-15, the maximum value of the payments rises from \$6,442 for each K-12 student to \$7,210 for each K-8 pupil and \$7,856 for each high school student. The state spent more than \$161 million on the MPCP in 2013-14.

Like MPS, charter and MPCP schools may also receive grants and donations. But MPS and charter schools can't charge any tuition, and private schools can charge tuition to MPCP students only in very limited circumstances.

One controversial aspect of this funding setup is the impact of charter and MPCP schools on MPS funding. Because the state's school aid formula is based partly on enrollment, the number of students enrolled in MPCP schools or in schools chartered by the city or UWM affects how much state aid MPS receives (although MPS' costs also are lowered somewhat by the reduced enrollment).

MPS finances are more directly affected by the way the state funds MPCP and charter schools. For example, the state reduces its aid to every Wisconsin public school district by about 1.5% to cover the cost of state payments to schools chartered by the city and UWM. For MPCP schools, the state covered 35.2% of its 2013-14 voucher cost by reducing aid to MPS; that percentage drops to 32% in 2014-15 and will continue to drop by 3.2 percentage points every year thereafter until the state is paying the full voucher cost without aid reductions. Meanwhile, MPS is allowed to levy property taxes to compensate for the aid reduction. In 2013-14, state aid to MPS was reduced by \$65.5 million for MPCP and independent charter schools, with MPCP schools accounting for \$56.7 million of that total.

NOT SO SPECIAL WHERE CAN STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES BE EDUCATED?

“School choice” doesn’t mean the same thing to special-needs students as it does to their peers without disabilities. While other Milwaukee students have a dizzying array of educational options, those with physical or behavioral disabilities may have far fewer choices of schools.

Under federal law, students with disabilities are guaranteed a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive setting appropriate. That means public schools generally must educate students with disabilities alongside those without disabilities to the extent possible. Depending on the severity of the student’s disability, parents may ask school district staff to develop an individual education plan for their child to gain access to federally subsidized special education services, or a “504 plan” for the school to provide reasonable accommodations to level the playing field for a disabled student. Wisconsin state law echoes and sometimes amplifies the federal requirements.

Although nearly all Milwaukee schools receive some form of public funding, the special education scene varies dramatically among different types of schools.

All state and federal disability laws apply fully to the **Milwaukee Public Schools**. In both **MPS schools** and the **instrumentality charter schools** staffed by MPS personnel, more than 21% of students had disabilities that qualified them for individual education plans in the 2013-14 school year.

The same laws also apply in their entirety to the **MPS non-instrumentality charter schools**, while **schools chartered by the city and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee** are fully covered by the federal laws and differ only slightly in their obligations under state law. Yet, the proportions of disabled students in all three types of independent charter schools were only about half as large as at MPS-staffed schools.

For schools in the **Milwaukee Parental Choice Program**, the picture is murky. Under state law, those schools are prohibited from discriminating against students with disabilities, but they are not required to do

anything beyond minor adjustments to serve such students. Nor are they required to provide data on their disabled students.

A 2006-2011 study commissioned by the state estimated the proportion of disabled students in MPCP schools at between 7.5% and 14.6%, in the same range as the independent charter school population but significantly higher than the state Department of Public Instruction’s estimate of 1.6%, which was based on the number of MPCP students who reported having a disability when they took standardized state achievement tests.¹

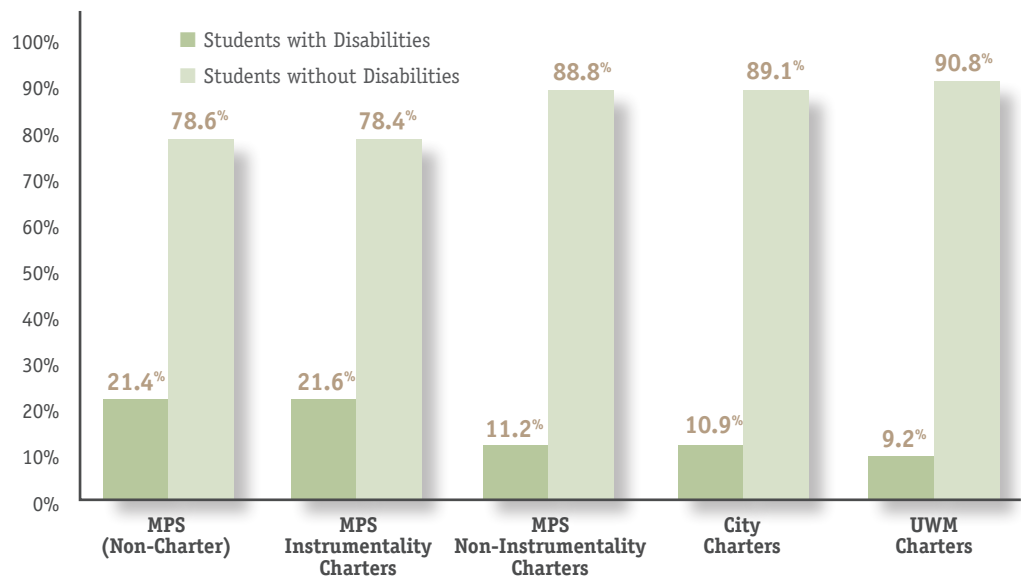
Private schools that do not participate in the MPCP are not required to enroll special-needs students or to provide them with any services. Federal law requires MPS to identify and evaluate all the special-needs students in the district – including those in MPCP schools and fully private schools, but not those in city- and UWM-chartered schools – but it does not require the district to provide any services to such students if their parents enroll them in MPCP schools or other private schools.²

Further study – and greater information-sharing – will be required to fully understand the differences between how special-needs students are educated in different types of schools.

Endnotes

1. “Special Choices: Do Voucher Schools Serve Students with Disabilities?” by Patrick J. Wolf, John F. Witte and David J. Fleming, Education Next, Summer 2012.
2. “Special Choices,” Wolf, Witte and Fleming.

2013-14 Students With or Without Disabilities





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