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THE K-12 SCHOOL SYSTEM IN MILWAUKEE



How has it changed and how does it measure up to peers?



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Authored by:

Doug Day, Researcher
Joe Yeado, Senior Researcher
Jeff Schmidt, Data & Technology Director

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.



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Doug Day, Researcher
Joe Yeado, Senior Researcher
Jeff Schmidt, Data & Technology Director

Rob Henken, President

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INTRODUCTION

For the past two decades, Milwaukee has been considered an epicenter for experimentation and innovation in K-12 education. Home to the country's oldest and largest school choice program, a large and growing network of charter schools, and a public school district that has placed a premium on student choice and specialty schools, Milwaukee was cited by *Newsweek* in 2010 as one of the five cities that "always come to mind" when education reform is examined.¹

But just how different is the K-12 education system in Milwaukee when compared to other similar-sized cities across the country? And, perhaps equally important given the regularity with which major reform efforts have been pursued, how different is Milwaukee's K-12 system today from the system that existed a decade ago?

This report seeks to provide insight into those questions through a detailed analysis of school data from local, state, and federal sources. It complements a companion report released the same day, entitled "What is the Milwaukee K-12 School System?" That report provides a broad overview of the education landscape in Milwaukee, both as a guide to parents and as background for policymakers and other interested parties who wish to familiarize themselves with the basics of the city's K-12 "system."

In this report, we take a deeper dive. First, using data on school enrollment, school size, types of schools, and student demographics, we explore how the education landscape described in our "What is the Milwaukee K-12 School System?" report compares to the landscape that existed in 2003-04. Then, to analyze how Milwaukee's education landscape contrasts with other large urban areas, we select a group of 10 "peer" cities and use national data sources to make a similar comparison.

We find, first of all, that the rate and degree of system change have been substantial – so substantial, in fact, that we ask whether the astonishing number of school closings, openings, and restructurings – as well as the accompanying high degree of student mobility – has served students well. We also illuminate the extent to which Milwaukee's public school district now educates a shrinking share of the city's students, and we show how the student bodies of private schools now mirror those of MPS schools with regard to socioeconomic backgrounds and race.

We also find that while Milwaukee's education landscape makes it unique in the State of Wisconsin, it is similar to many of its peer cities nationally in terms of student demographics and its variety of schools. Yet, we also confirm that in several respects – including the size of the city's private school choice program, its greater number of schools per resident, and its fewer students per school – Milwaukee is distinctive.

¹ Wingert, Pat, "Best and Worst Cities for School Reform," *Newsweek*, August 24, 2010. Accessed at: <http://www.newsweek.com/best-and-worst-cities-school-reform-71481>

Putting these two comparative analyses together yields several policy questions that are ripe for further analysis. Those include:

- What is the impact of school closings and school restructurings on staff, students, and planning?
- Does the greater number of schools in Milwaukee and the continuous school turnover mean that finding, developing, and retaining school leadership is more difficult here than in other cities?
- Do parents and students receive the kinds of information they need to make a well-considered choice in school selection?
- Why has there been an increase in the number of single race/ethnic schools in Milwaukee and what might be done to alter that trend?
- Does the increasing similarity of students across school sectors suggest that more cooperation and coordination is needed among Milwaukee schools?

We acknowledge that this report generates more questions than answers. Yet, we also hope that this research will be valuable as a source of information for citizens and those engaged in ongoing school improvement efforts in Milwaukee. This report sets the stage for a longer-term research effort by the Forum to dig deeply into the distinctive features of the city's education framework, to explore how those features truly impact academic performance and school finance, and to identify best practices that could improve student learning in our city and region.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA

This report provides important perspective on the distinctive and changing features of Milwaukee's K-12 education landscape. We conducted two comparative analyses of Milwaukee schools. The first, a trend analysis, traces how Milwaukee schools have changed in the past decade. The second, a peer analysis, shows how Milwaukee schools compare to schools in 10 peer cities throughout the United States.

Rather than breaking down the data into separate categories for public, private, and charter schools, the report strives, when possible, to present the data in a format that provides an overview of all Milwaukee schools. Without this perspective, overall progress at times can be difficult to track for various educational measures. For example, with enrollment changes exceeding 20% in each sector over the past decade, it is hard to know the general trajectory of total enrollment for all Milwaukee schools. While state and federal databases have less information about private schools than they do about public schools, the data are rich enough to present a citywide schooling perspective in a number of instances.

It is also important to note that our focus is on the characteristics of schools located in the City of Milwaukee, as opposed to the characteristics of school-age children who live in the city, nearly 10,000 of whom are educated in neighboring jurisdictions.

Much of the material in the report comes from databases maintained by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) as well as federal sources from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the Census Bureau.

The "peers" are drawn from a 2012 Public Policy Forum report on the finances of the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), *Passing the Test, But Making the Grade?*, and have been used by MPS for management analyses. For analytical purposes, we extracted data via the NCES search tools to create a comprehensive file on all public, private, and charter schools within each peer district. The information on student test scores comes from the NCES database for the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

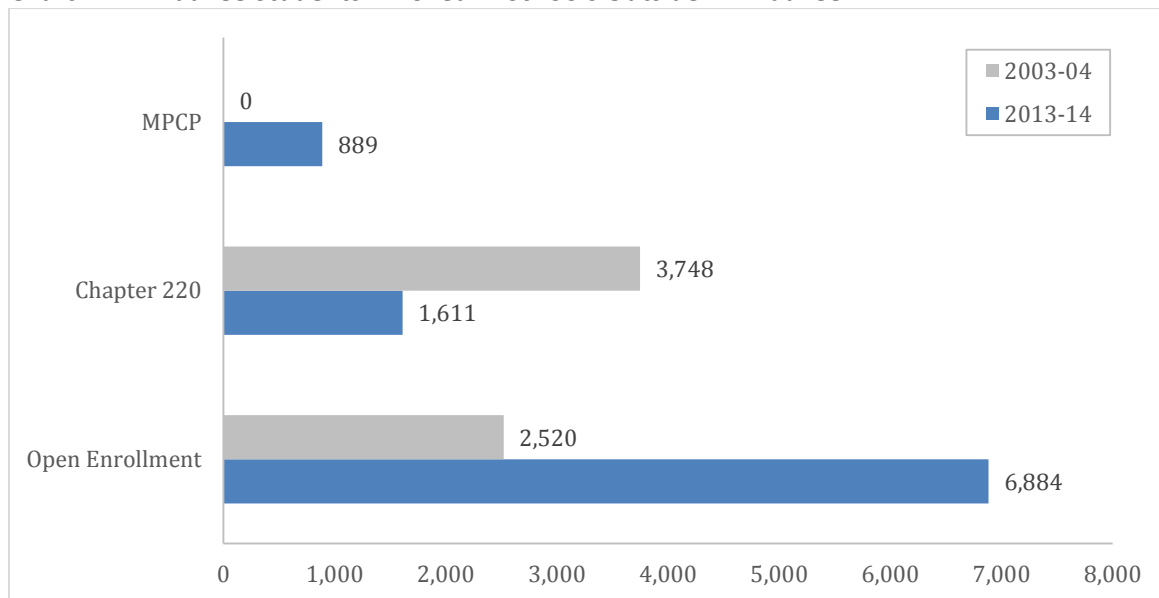
This data-driven report offers a bottoms-up approach exploring trend and peer data to identify distinctive traits and patterns. Other information is called upon, when needed, to provide context and explanation.

TREND ANALYSIS: 2004-2014, A TIME OF CHANGE

A Modest Decline in Total Enrollment

Total enrollment at Milwaukee schools dropped from 125,409 students in 2003-04 to 117,199 students in 2013-14, a decrease of 7%, or 8,210 students. This decline occurred even though the city's population remained stable. Two major factors, one demographic and one educational, were likely responsible. First, the number of school-age children in the city fell (i.e. the population between the ages of 5 and 19).² Second, as shown in **Chart 1**, an increasing number of Milwaukee youth are being educated in schools outside of the city through the Open Enrollment, Chapter 220 Voluntary Student Transfer, and Milwaukee Parental Choice (MPCP) programs, as well as through home schooling.

Chart 1: Milwaukee Students Enrolled in Schools Outside Milwaukee



Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Open Enrollment – by far the largest program educating Milwaukee students outside the city – is offered statewide and permits students to attend public schools in another district if space is available. Milwaukee schoolchildren comprise about one in every six students participating in Open Enrollment across the state. MPS also benefits (though to a far lesser extent) from the transfer of students into the district from outside of the city. Not shown in the chart are 732 Open Enrollment students who transferred into MPS in 2013-14.

² The annual Milwaukee school census estimates the number of children between 5 and 19 years of age living in the City of Milwaukee. While these estimates can fluctuate considerably, they show a steady decline over the past decade in school-age children, from 164,641 in 2004 to 144,870 in 2013. Milwaukee Public Schools, *Comprehensive Annual Financial Statement, Appendix, 2013*.

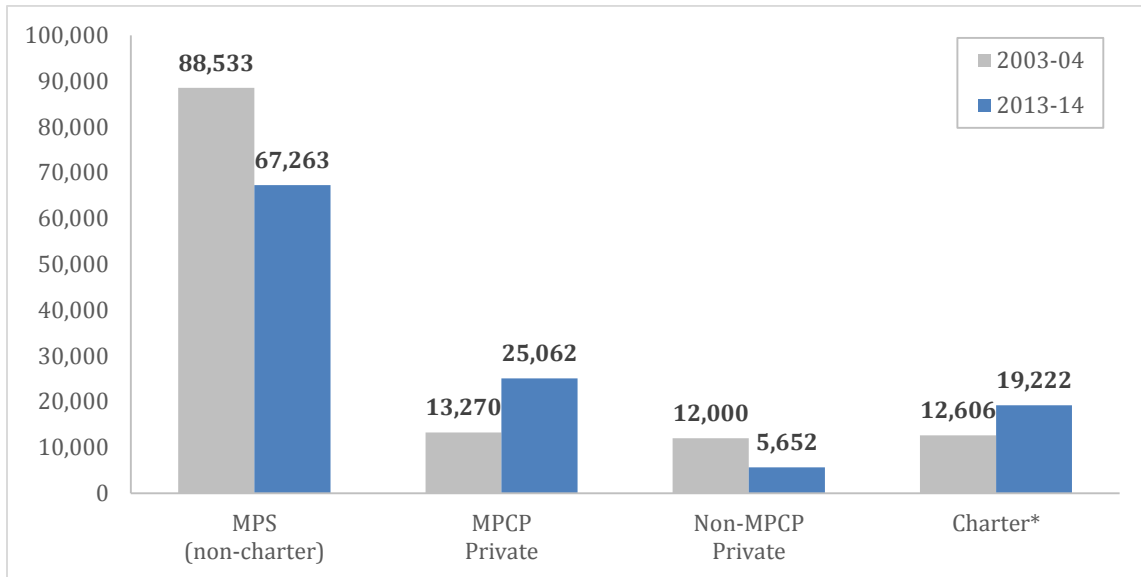
The Chapter 220 program was established by the state legislature in 1975 to encourage racial balance within and among school districts. It allows minority students from Milwaukee to transfer to predominantly white suburban schools, and white students from the suburbs to transfer to predominantly minority city schools. The number of students participating in this program has declined over the past decade. Not shown in the chart are 236 Chapter 220 students who transferred into MPS in 2013-14.

The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program also plays a role in the transfer of students outside of the city. The MPCP was expanded by the state in 2011 to permit Milwaukee students to attend one of 17 suburban private schools in Milwaukee County currently participating in the program.

Large Enrollment Swings Among All School Sectors

While overall Milwaukee student enrollment declined slightly in the past decade – at a rate of less than one percent per year – each major school sector (private schools, charter schools, and MPS) saw dramatic enrollment shifts. As shown in **Chart 2**, private and charter school enrollment climbed throughout the decade even though total Milwaukee enrollment was declining. MPS non-charter schools felt the full impact of the drop in school-age children and also lost students to private and charter school competition.

Chart 2: Enrollment at Milwaukee Schools



* Charter schools include both MPS charters and non-MPS charters

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Private school enrollment rose by 22%, largely due to the expansion of the MPCP, which grew from 13,270 students in 2003-04 to 25,062 students in 2013-14 (89%). Statutory changes facilitated program growth and included: expanding income eligibility from 100% to 300% of the federal poverty level; broadening school eligibility from City of Milwaukee schools to Milwaukee County schools; and eliminating program enrollment caps. After the Wisconsin Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the choice program in 1998, religious school enrollment pushed steadily higher. As a result, Milwaukee private schools did not experience the drop in enrollment that private schools did in many other cities, where rising costs led some families to enroll their children in public schools.

The charter school program was created by the state legislature in 1993 as a strategy for educational reform. Charter schools are public schools, with taxpayer funding, open to all resident students without tuition. But unlike traditional public schools, charter schools operate outside many of the normal government rules. They 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 City of Milwaukee Common Council, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM), or Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC), although MATC has not exercised this authority. **Chart 2** shows enrollment figures for all Milwaukee-based charter schools.

Charter schools also exhibited substantial growth during the period, with enrollment increasing by 6,616 (53%) to more than 19,000 students. If Milwaukee charters were to form their own school district, it would constitute the sixth largest district in Wisconsin, trailing only Milwaukee, Madison, Kenosha, Green Bay, and Racine. In 2012-13, Milwaukee ranked 12th in the nation in total charter school enrollment and 14th in local market share according to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.³

Milwaukee’s rapid charter expansion is part of a larger national story. Charter school enrollment across the country has more than tripled in the past decade, increasing from 789,000 students in 2003-04 to 2.5 million students in 2013-14. The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools reports that across the nation, there are 920,000 students on the admission waiting lists of charter schools.

The one-two punch of MPCP and charter school expansion has been hard on enrollment at MPS. MPS’ total enrollment – including enrollment in charter and non-charter schools – dropped from 97,359 students in 2003-04 to 78,516 students in 2013-14.

In recent years, total MPS enrollment has fallen more slowly than the district’s traditional school enrollment because of MPS’ enhanced charter school commitment. District enrollment in 2013-14 actually experienced a slight uptick of 153 students from the 2012-13 school year, largely because of growth in MPS charter schools.

A Rapidly Changing School Picture

In the past decade, no more dramatic change occurred in Milwaukee education than the change in the structure of its public and private schools. There was a major contraction in school numbers, with Milwaukee having 90 fewer schools in the 2013-14 school year than 10 years before. As shown in **Chart 3**, the total number of schools fell from 383 in 2003-04 to 293 schools in 2013-14, a 24% decrease and far greater than the 7% decline in student enrollment. **Chart 4** breaks down the number of new, closed, or restructured schools by sector.

³ National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, *A Growing Movement: America’s Largest Charter School Communities*, Eighth Annual Edition, December 2013, pp. 7 and 10.
http://www.publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/2013-Market-Share-Report-Report_20131210T133315.pdf

School Tracking Methodology

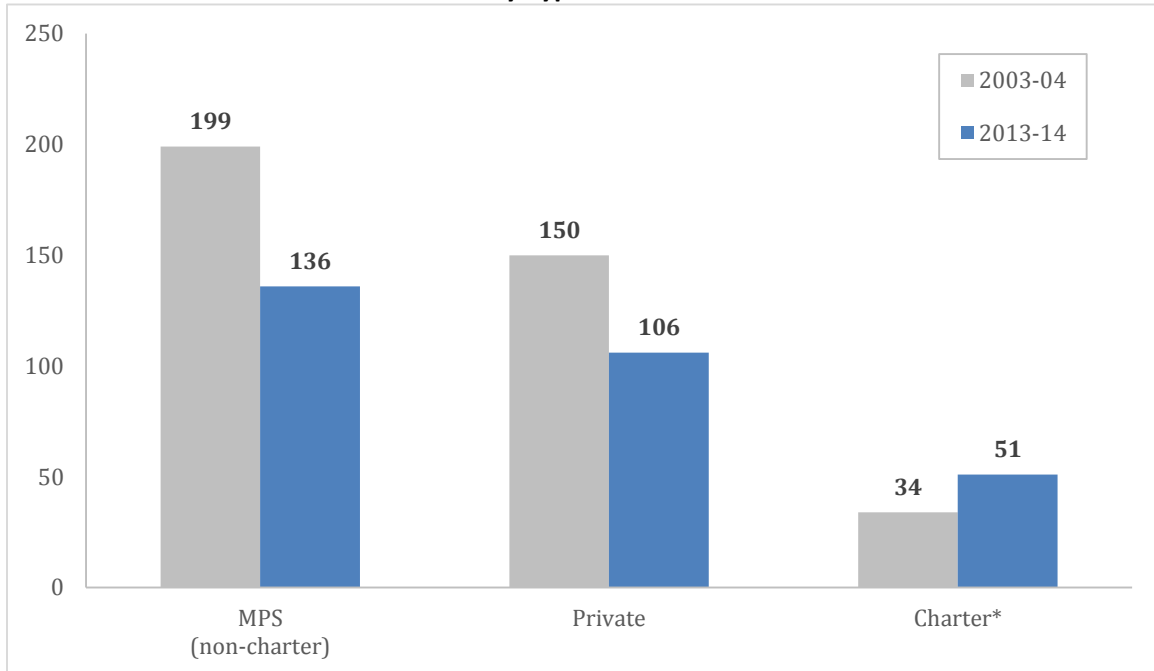
To calculate school structural changes we compared DPI and MPS lists of elementary/secondary schools in Milwaukee in 2003-04 with the list of schools in 2013-14. We then attempted to determine the reason a school did not appear on each list such as whether the school closed, merged with another school, changed its name, or significantly modified its scope of study (e.g. shifting from a K-8 to K-12 school). It was not always possible to identify causal factors.

Schools that simply changed their names were not counted as closing/restructuring. Also, if a school absorbed students from another school as part of a merger but made no other organizational or curricular adjustments, it was not counted as restructuring.

This methodology does not capture all types of major school changes. For instance, it does not identify schools that opened after 2003-04 and then closed before 2013-14, schools that moved from one location to another, or schools that were part of a “turnaround” restructuring. Additional information pertinent to some of these school changes is included in the text.

The structural changes were stimulated, at least in part, by the tide of student transfers from non-charter MPS to MPCP or charter schools, yet the structural reconfiguration went far beyond what might have been expected from enrollment shifts. The 90-school loss is a net figure that masks the actual scope of openings and closings. In fact, 173 schools – nearly half of the 383 Milwaukee schools open in 2003-04 – closed or restructured in the following decade, while 81 new schools were established.

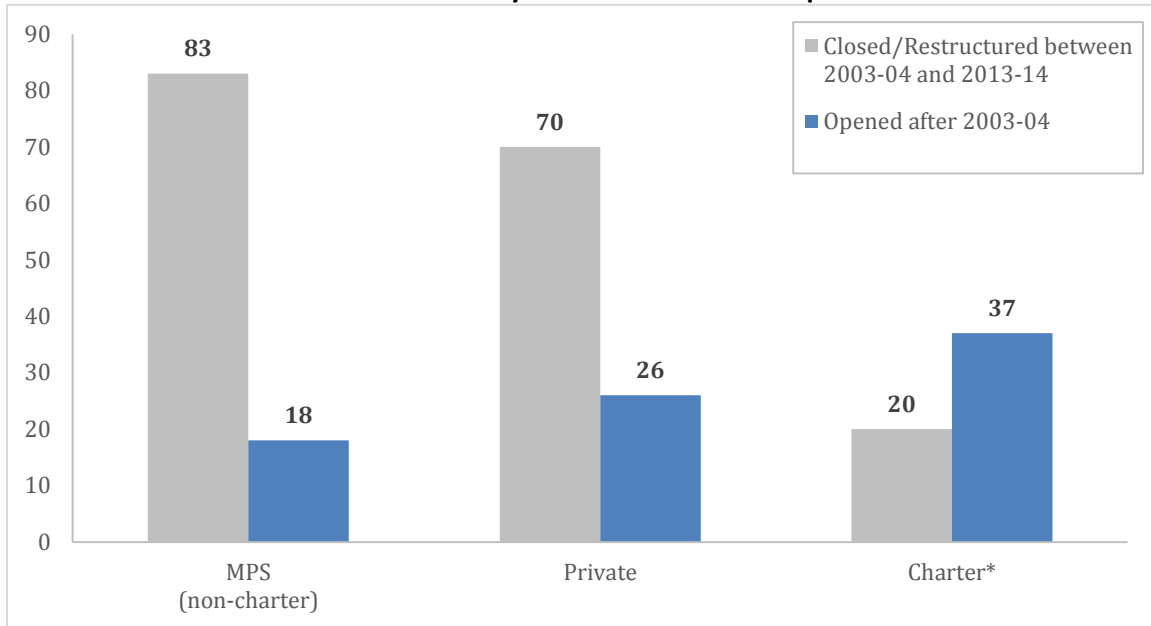
Chart 3: Number of Milwaukee Schools by Type



* Charter schools include both MPS charters and non-MPS charters

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Chart 4: Schools Closed or Restructured by 2013-14 and Schools Opened After 2003-04



* Charter schools include both MPS charters and non-MPS charters

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and Milwaukee Public Schools

Indeed, many changes in school structure cannot be explained by enrollment shifts. For example, as shown in **Chart 4**, MPS created 18 non-charter schools during the decade, even though this sector experienced a 24% enrollment drop. Among private schools, 70 of the 150 schools open in 2003-04 have closed despite a 22% enrollment increase in the sector. Most surprisingly, only 14 of 34 charter schools that were open in 2003-04 were still in existence in 2013-14, even though charter school enrollment climbed by more than 50% during the decade.

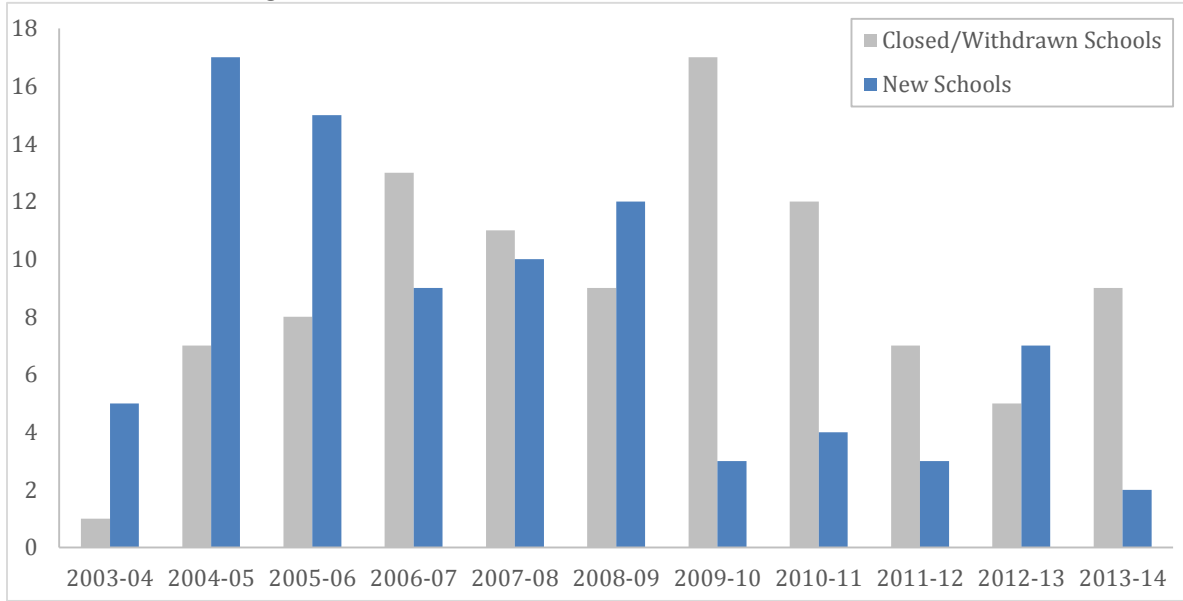
Private Schools

All MPCP schools are private, but not all private schools participate in the MPCP program. Despite enrollment growth in the sector, many non-choice private schools closed during this period. There were 39 non-MPCP private schools in 2003-04, and they represented one quarter of all private schools. Ten years later, 11 schools were non-MPCP and they represented 10% of all private schools. Seven of the 39 non-MPCP schools open in 2003-04 later became choice schools, including some well-established Lutheran schools such as Milwaukee Lutheran High School and Mount Olive, Salem Lutheran, and Northwest Lutheran grade schools.

Though choice schools accounted for a majority of the increase in private schools, they also comprised half of all private school closures. Most of these schools simply shut their doors and their students transferred to other private and public schools. A few schools merged, such as Saint Rose and St. Leo Urban Academies.

A distinguishing feature of private school activity was the amount of annual MPCP school openings and closings. As shown in **Chart 5**, in the past decade, there have been 87 new MPCP schools while 99 have closed. Between 2012-13 and 2013-14 alone, 11 MPCP schools, or 12% of all choice schools, either opened or closed.

Chart 5: Annual Changes in MPCP Schools



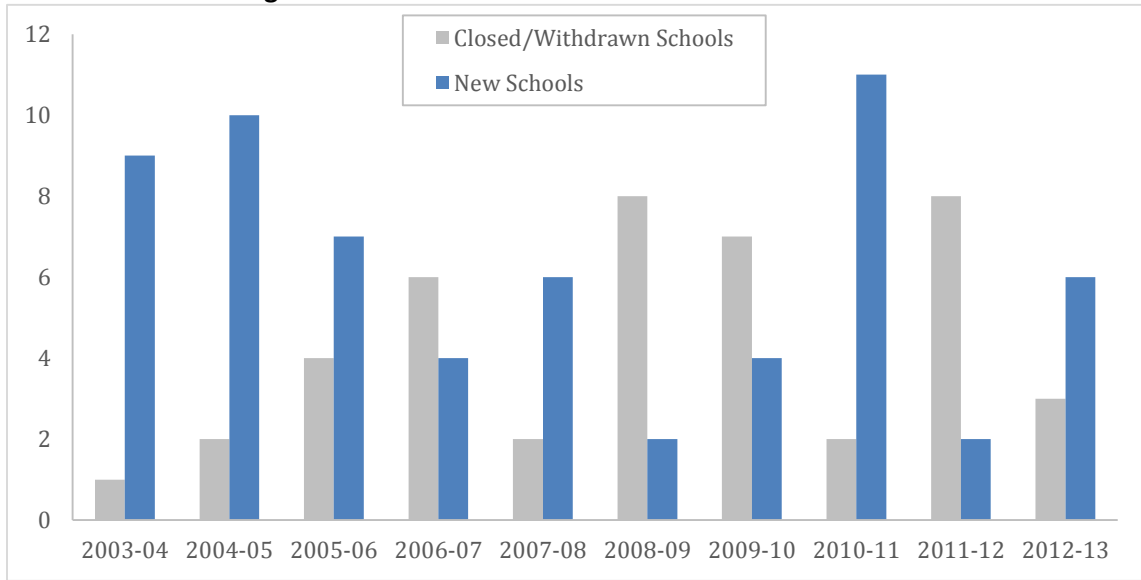
Source: Public Policy Forum, Annual Voucher School Survey

A few underlying factors likely contributed to the large number of private school closings and restructurings. Milwaukee schools operate in a highly competitive environment and many students move from one school to another each year. Moreover, many Milwaukee private schools are tuition-dependent, and a school that is unable to meet its enrollment target can quickly find itself in a precarious financial position. The size of the state’s per-student payment also may have had an impact on school openings and closings. The size of the payment – set by statute at \$7,210 for K-8 students and \$7,856 for high school students in 2014-15 – is large enough to encourage entrepreneurial activity, but may not be large enough to enable a new school to easily establish a firm financial footing. Additionally, the state legislature has implemented more stringent financial and academic accountability standards in recent years that may have contributed to closures of MPCP schools.

Charter Schools

Throughout the country, there has been some criticism that charter school authorizers have been reluctant to shutter under-performing charter schools. In Milwaukee, however, the list of charter school closings is especially long. As has been shown in **Chart 4**, 20 of the charter schools open in 2003-04 had closed or restructured by 2013-14. This statistic understates actual activity since it does not capture those charter schools that both opened and closed between these years. As shown in **Chart 6**, during these years, a total of 61 charter schools opened and 43 closed or restructured, with some schools reverting back to MPS management.

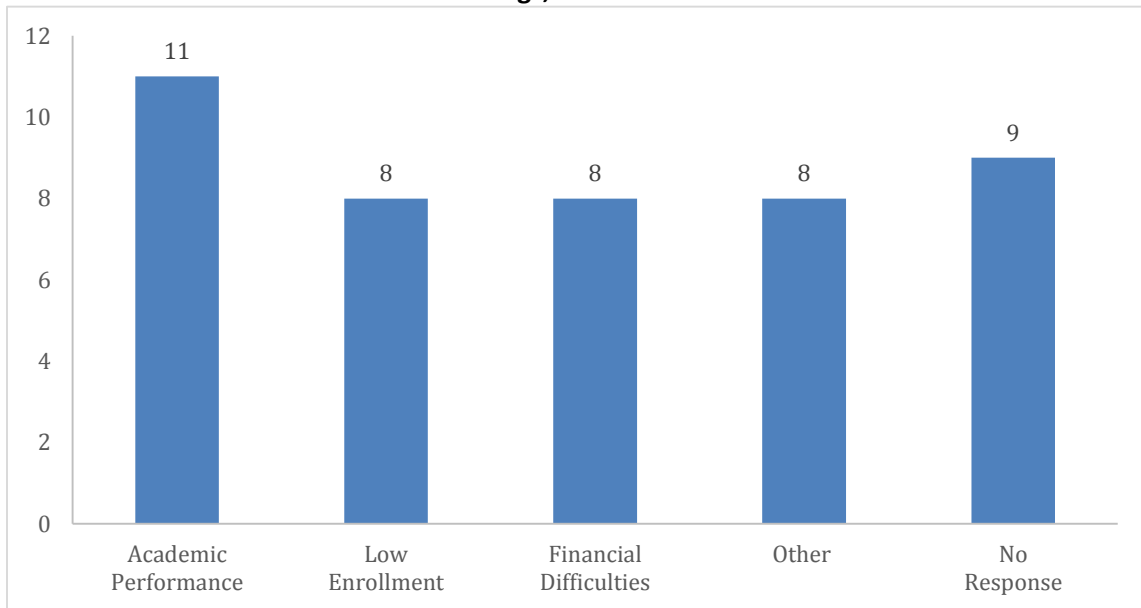
Chart 6: Annual Changes in Milwaukee Charter Schools



Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Chart 7 sheds light on some reasons for charter school closures, which include poor academic performance, low enrollment, and financial difficulty. Some closed because of school mergers and conversions to MPS-run schools, while others did not specify the reason for closing. These closures were not necessarily the result of action by the charter authorizer.

Chart 7: Reasons for Charter School Closings, 2003-04 to 2012-13



Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Overall, the long list of charter school closures may cause some to question whether charter schools have been established too quickly, without sufficient planning and preparation, and thus have been more susceptible to failure. Additional research is needed to explore such questions.

Milwaukee Public Schools

In the past decade, MPS has restructured many of its schools. Some of these changes occurred for familiar reasons, such as population shifts within the city. Others may have reflected the influence of outside pressures, such as new state and federal government rules and regulations like the No Child Left Behind Act. Cost considerations, enrollment losses, and pedagogical strategies also typically played a prominent role in school decisions.

Many school openings and closings were part of broad-based efforts to change school structure. For instance, in the early years of the decade, the district undertook separate, large-scale initiatives to establish more neighborhood schools, shift to smaller high schools, and expand the number of K-8 schools instead of relying on a K-5 and middle school combination.

The district's K-8 initiative was especially large in scope. As part of this school reconfiguration, MPS downsized the number of middle schools and expanded the grade range and physical footprint of many elementary schools. At the turn of the century, MPS had 11 K-8 schools. A decade later, the district had 64.

Also, in response to continued enrollment losses, the district incorporated school closings and restructurings into its new strategic and facility plans in part as a budget-cutting tool. The district's 2007-12 strategic plan set a goal of saving \$10 million in facility costs over three years by reducing space and closing schools. An April 2011 MPS Board item provides an example of how the district determined what schools to close:

[T]he Administration will first identify each building's vacancy rate. A more detailed analysis will be developed for all buildings with relatively high vacancy rates. The deeper analysis will take into account variables that include educational programming, special educational needs, and the building modifications that have reduced the amount of instructional space. An additional analysis of academic performance trends, with a focus on growth, will also inform the recommendation.

Structural changes took many forms as MPS sought to move forward with school improvement and meet federal and state expectations. Many reform efforts aimed to completely transform and reorganize "low-performing schools." Under state guidelines, the district pursued four large-scale reform strategies: the turnaround model, the restart model, the school closure model, and the transformation model. Consultants and outside experts often were brought in to advise and lead model implementation.

MPS has married efforts to "right size" with the expansion of schools of proven appeal. While MPS eliminated or restructured 83 non-charter schools between 2003-04 and 2013-14, it also created 18 new schools in this same time period. Some of these new schools were former charters, such as Audubon Technology and Seifert Elementary, which converted to MPS-run schools. King International Baccalaureate Middle School built on the name recognition and track record of King International High School. The Milwaukee Academy of Chinese Language and the Howard Avenue and MacDowell Montessori schools expanded types of specialty schools that have enjoyed considerable popularity in the district.

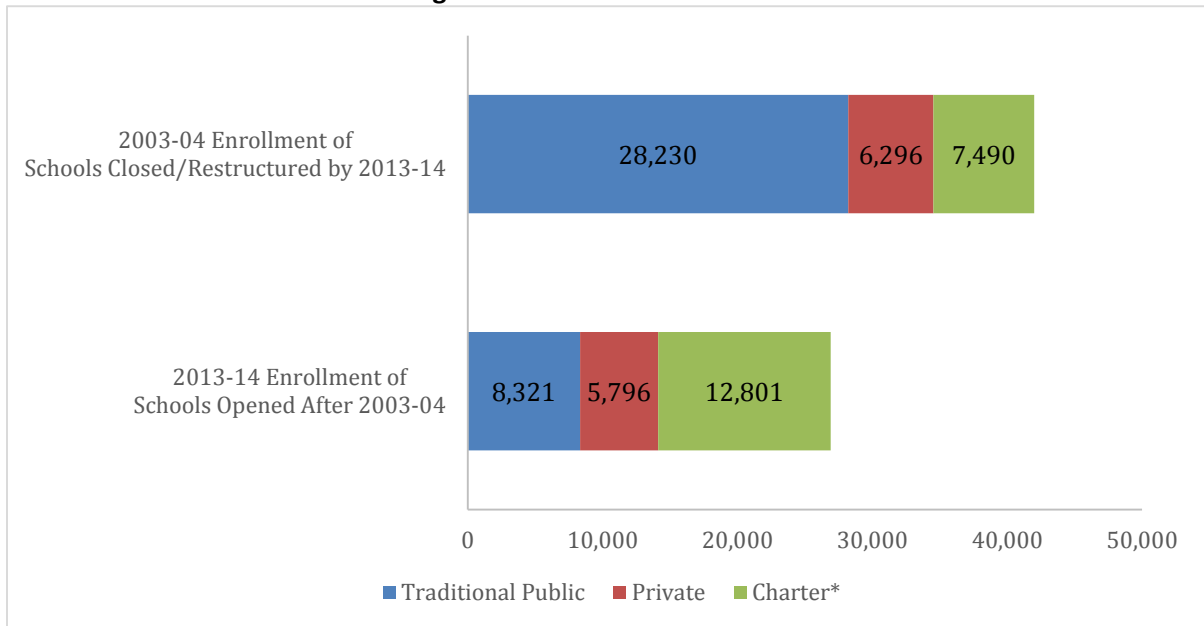
While traditional and charter schools are separated in this report for clarity of analysis, MPS often strategically coordinated school changes in tandem. An April 2010 MPS Board item

approving the renaming of Custer High School gives some sense of how such changes were structured:

MPS' Custer High School, at 5075 North Sherman Boulevard, will be renamed the Milwaukee Campus for Technology, Trades, and Media. The new name for the Custer campus is another step forward in the process to transform the school, using federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) dollars. The current high school program has been phasing out, and was limited to grades 10 through 12 this year, with a restart of educational programming to begin in September 2011. Two new charter schools will soon be proposed for the campus. One charter school will focus on career and technical education, and the other on media and communications.

Chart 8 gives some sense of the relative impact of changes in school structure during the past decade. The chart shows that in 2003-04 more than 40,000 students – or about one third of total school enrollment – attended a school that closed or restructured in the 10 years thereafter. Meanwhile, in 2013-14, nearly 27,000 students – or 23% of total enrollment – attended schools that opened in the previous 10 years.

Chart 8: Enrollment Effects of Changes in School Structure



* Charter schools include both MPS charters and non-MPS charters

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and Milwaukee Public Schools

Given the comprehensive nature of school restructuring in Milwaukee, several important policy questions emerge. For example:

- Have school openings, closings, and other changes been beneficial, increasing efficiency and improving long-term chances for school improvement?
- Or, conversely, have they been disruptive, overwhelming a school's capacity to absorb and move forward?
- At what point is the degree and rate of change simply too much?

School closings affect teachers, school leadership, long-term planning, and reform agendas. Their most immediate impact, however, is upon the students who must transfer to new schools.

Across the U.S., large cities like Milwaukee have higher rates of student mobility – defined as the changing of schools for reasons other than promotion – and some have expressed concern about the impact of student mobility upon student learning. Studies have shown that students who transfer multiple times during their elementary and high school years have more academic and behavioral problems.⁴ While student mobility is often viewed as a by-product of urban poverty, purely school factors can influence it nearly as much.

A few cities, such as Chicago, Minneapolis, and Los Angeles, have established programs to reduce the rate of student transfer and help students “think strategically” about their school plans by postponing transfer until the end of the school year. Other programs have sought to ease student stress in the initial period of transfer, by linking transferring students to established students at their incoming school.

Current data limitations prevent analysis of student mobility at all Milwaukee schools. However, some studies have considered aspects of this topic. For instance, the Public Policy Forum’s most recent report on the MPCP found that more transfer activity occurs each year than is reflected in the program’s annual enrollment increase. The Forum noted that for the 2013-14 school year, “the number of MPCP pupils grew by 813 students, but this was the net effect of 2,212 students joining the ranks of already-certified schools, 363 pupils enrolling in new schools, 988 students leaving existing schools and a 744-student loss associated with schools no longer in the voucher program.”⁵

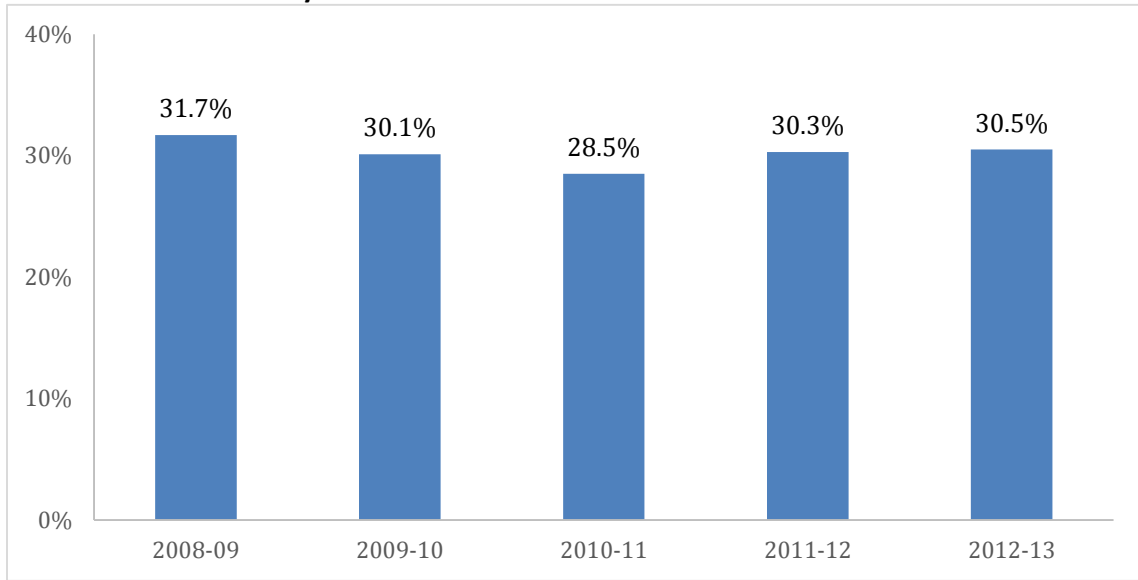
MPS tracks student mobility for the district as a whole and for individual schools. The 2011 Milwaukee District Report Card depicts extensive student movement. It notes that a recent district study found that only 16% of MPS students remained with one school from kindergarten to eighth grade, while 21% enrolled in four or more schools. Student mobility accelerates once students reach high school. The report card states “about one of every five high school students transfers to another school during the school year.”

MPS uses the term “student mobility” to refer to students who change schools during the course of a school year. In **Chart 9**, we use an expanded definition that also includes students who change schools from one year to the next. We find that nearly a third of MPS students typically attend a different school than the year before and that little change in the rate of student mobility has occurred in the past five years.

⁴ For example, see Linda Jacobsen, “Moving Targets”, *Education Week*, April 2001, <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2001/04/04/29mobility.h20.html>

⁵Public Policy Forum, Number of voucher schools relatively unchanged since 2003 while enrollment has doubled. April 2014.

Chart 9: Student Mobility Within MPS*

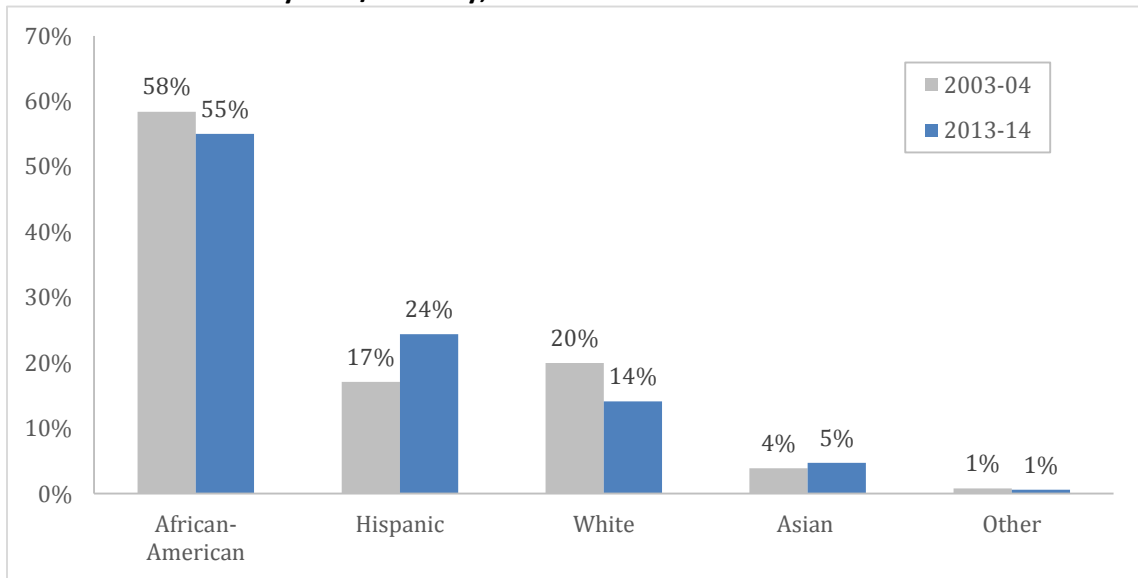


* Mobility defined as the percentage of MPS students who attend a different school than the year before
Source: Milwaukee Public Schools

A Changing Racial and Ethnic Balance

Milwaukee schools saw important changes in racial composition during the past decade. As shown in **Chart 10**, Hispanic enrollment grew substantially – from 17% to 24% of total enrollment in all Milwaukee schools – while white student enrollment decreased almost as dramatically and African-American enrollment showed a minor decline.

Chart 10: Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity, all Milwaukee Schools*

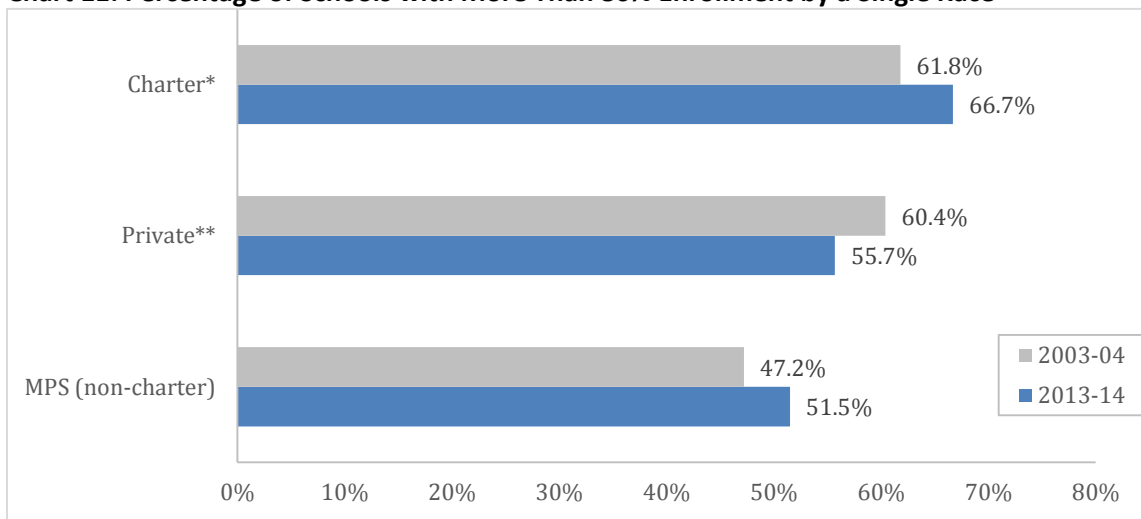


* Does not include non-MPCP private schools and MPCP schools that did not report
Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

MPCP schools experienced particularly large changes in racial makeup over the past decade. Remarkably, at a time when overall choice enrollment nearly doubled, the number of white students at schools participating in the MPCP dropped by 41%, or 3,123 students, while African-American and Hispanic student populations rose sharply. By 2013-14, these two groups represented 76% of total enrollment in MPCP schools, up from 60% in 2003-04. African-American and Hispanic students also comprised a large share of charter school enrollment (81%) and MPS enrollment (80%).

Chart 11 provides perspective on the lack of racial diversity in Milwaukee schools. More than half of the schools for which data were available had a student population in 2013-14 in which one race comprised more than 80% of the school population. Furthermore, the percentage of these single-race schools has increased slightly over the past decade.

Chart 11: Percentage of Schools with More Than 80% Enrollment by a Single Race



* Charter schools include both MPS charters and non-MPS charters

** Does not include non-MPCP schools and some non-reporting private schools

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Larger School Size

The average student in Milwaukee attends a school with more students than a decade ago. This trend is somewhat unexpected because public schools lost enrollment to private and charter schools, whose enrollment, on average, is smaller.

School size increased in each sector, as shown in **Table 1**. Private schools jumped from an average of 182 students to 293 students because of a reduction in the number of private schools and the influx of students attending through MPCP. MPS schools expanded from an average enrollment of 445 students in 2003-04 to an average enrollment of 495 in 2013-14, in part as a result of school closings. Even at this higher number, MPS has lower median and average school enrollment levels than most of its peers, as will be discussed in the next section of this report. Charter schools had the smallest growth in average enrollment, increasing from 362 to 377 students.

Table 1: Median and Average School Enrollments by Type

	2003-04	2013-14
MPS (non-charter) Schools		
Median Enrollment	397	428
Average Enrollment	445	495
Private Schools		
Median Enrollment	131	225
Average Enrollment	182	293
Charter Schools*		
Median Enrollment	227	305
Average Enrollment	362	377
Total		
Median Enrollment	243	322
Average Enrollment	339	401

* Charter schools include both MPS charters and non-MPS charters

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Time will tell whether Milwaukee’s rising per school enrollment is a positive or negative trend. Larger school size often brings cost efficiencies, and MPS has pursued school closings in part to attempt to generate savings, as noted above. On the other hand, both very small and very large schools can face obstacles in implementing school improvement strategies.

Four Transformations

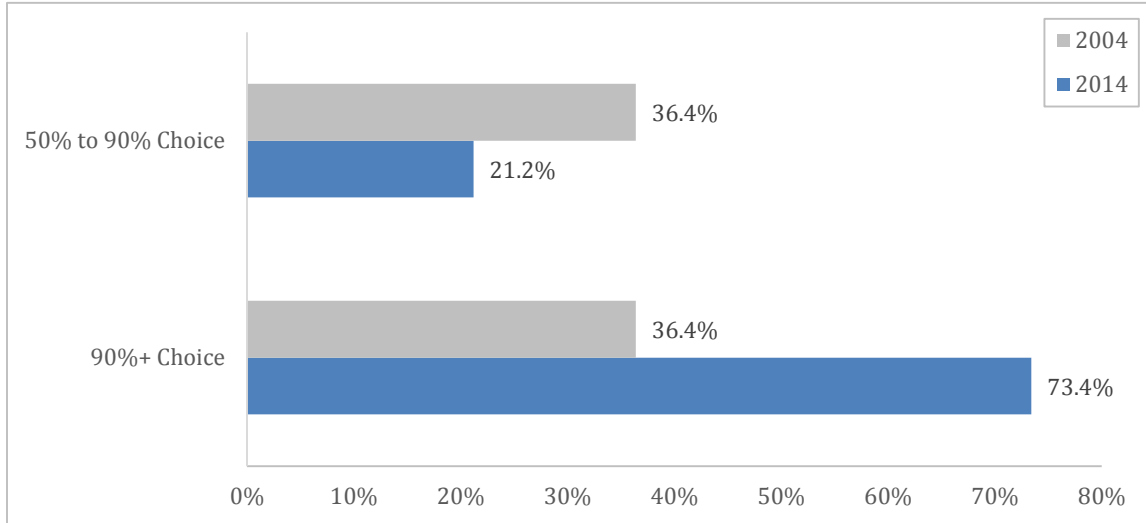
The past decade has seen four critical transformations in Milwaukee’s school structure. While these transformations began prior to 2004 and are still ongoing, they illustrate the degree of change that has occurred and how widespread and fundamental that change has been.

Private Schools are Reshaped by the Choice Program

In 2004, the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program was well-established in Milwaukee private schools, yet many schools and students were not participants. About one-quarter of all private schools did not participate in the MPCP.

Chart 12 shows that many of the schools participating in the MPCP are now almost exclusively serving choice students, as opposed to serving a more diverse mix of choice and non-choice students. In 2003-04, about three-quarters of schools in the MPCP had more than 50% of students attending through choice, including 36.4% of schools enrolling more than 90% choice students. In 2013-14, a full 94.5% of MPCP schools had more than 50% choice students with nearly three-quarters having more than 90% of enrollment through MPCP. There are now only 11 private schools that do not participate in the MPCP. These non-choice private schools are quite small with only three enrolling more than 100 students. As private schools increased their participation in the MPCP, many took on the characteristics of MPS schools in terms of single race predominance, high poverty levels, and low test scores.

Chart 12: MPCP Schools More Than 50% and 90% Choice Enrollment



Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Charter Schools Become More Independent

As discussed above, the charter school sector expanded dramatically in the past decade, with schools and enrollment growing by about 50%. At the same time, charter schools underwent three organizational changes that would make them more independent of MPS control.

First, the portion of charter schools authorized by MPS fell. In 2003-04, 71% of charter schools in Milwaukee were under MPS auspices. By 2013-14, MPS' share had declined to 57%. While the stable of MPS charters had grown from 24 to 29 schools, that growth was outpaced by Milwaukee's other authorizers. The number of UWM charter schools grew threefold and their enrollment doubled; meanwhile, City of Milwaukee charters expanded from six to 10 schools and their total enrollment nearly tripled.

Second, instrumentality charters have taken a back seat to more independent charter schools. Instrumentality charters employ MPS teachers and staff and are accountable to the MPS Board. Non-instrumentality charters also are accountable to the MPS Board; but by design, they have greater autonomy to employ their own teachers and staff. There is little difference in structure between a non-instrumentality charter school authorized by MPS and a charter school authorized by UWM or the City of Milwaukee, although differences may exist in authorization and monitoring practices and procedures.

In 2003-04, 54% of MPS charters were classified as instrumentality charter schools and they represented 38% of all charter schools in Milwaukee. By 2013-14, instrumentality charters comprised 48% of MPS charters and they represented 27% of all Milwaukee charters. During this period, instrumentality charter school enrollment dropped by 20%, while other charter school enrollment grew by 109%, as shown in **Table 2**. Taken together, the growth in non-instrumentality charters and non-MPS charters, as well as the decline in enrollment in instrumentality charters, reflect the emergence of a more independent charter school sector.

Table 2: Charter School Enrollment by Authorizer

	2003-04		2013-14	
	Schools	Total Enrollment	Schools	Total Enrollment
City of Milwaukee	6	1,259	10	3,219
UW-Milwaukee	4	2,219	12	4,750
MPS				
Instrumentality	13	6,383	14	5,075
Non-instrumentality	11	2,745	15	6,178
Total	24	9,128	29	11,253
All Milwaukee Charters	34	12,606	51	19,222

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Finally, many recently-established Milwaukee charters are part of national Charter Management Organizations (CMO) that operate schools in other regions of the country.

MPS Becomes More Market-Oriented

In recent years, MPS has created and strengthened various specialty schools in the hope of attracting more students. The program coverage of these schools is broad and they address many needs. According to the district website, “Milwaukee Public Schools offers a variety of high-performing, popular specialty schools, ranging from schools focused on the arts to bilingual education, Career and Technical Education (CTE), gifted and talented programming, full language immersion, International Baccalaureate, Advanced Placement and college preparatory programs. MPS is also home to the nation’s largest number of public Montessori schools.”⁶

This broad program diversity is reflective, at least in part, of efforts by MPS leaders to make the district more competitive with private and independent charter schools and to reduce or eliminate enrollment and financial losses. In addition, MPS has bolstered its arts, music, and physical education specialist positions in recent years, which similarly reflects a strategy to make its schools more attractive to parents and students.⁷

MPS also has streamlined and codified school selection to make it easier for families to engage in the application process. Those who want to choose a new school may apply either on-line or at select district offices during a 2½-week open enrollment, “three-choice process,” in February. While families are advised to “consider your neighborhood school first,” the district broadly publicizes its specialty schools and it sponsors a fair where officials from across the district talk to parents and students about their schools.

⁶ Milwaukee Public Schools Website, [http://mps.milwaukee.k12.wi.us/en/SearchResults.htm?Search_Keywords=specialty schools](http://mps.milwaukee.k12.wi.us/en/SearchResults.htm?Search_Keywords=specialty%20schools)

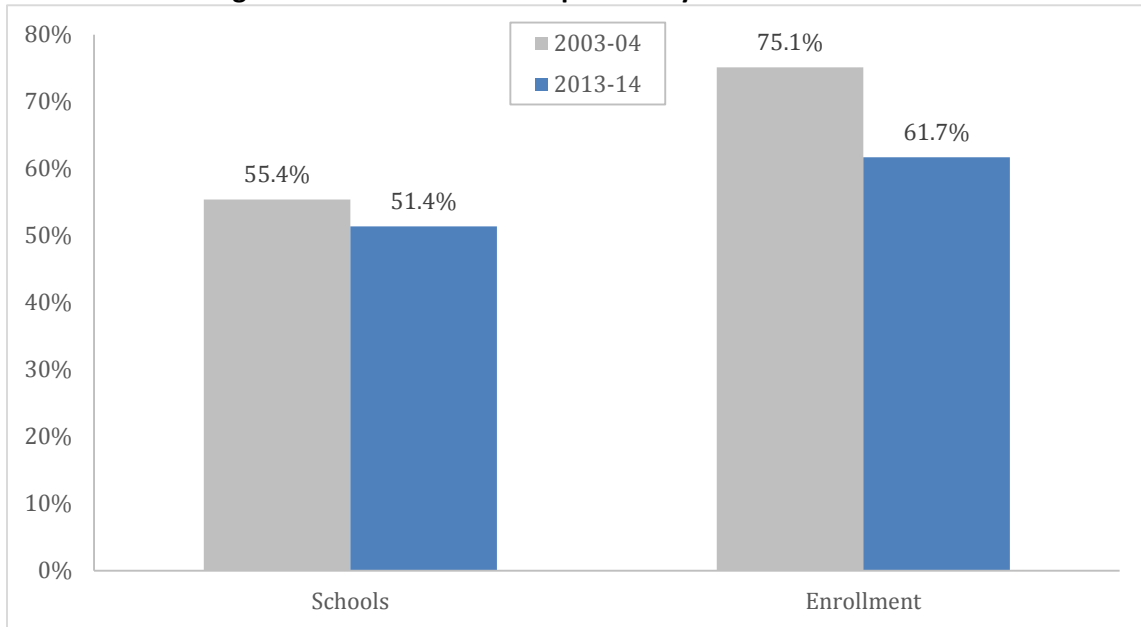
⁷ Toner, Erin, “To Boost Attendance, Milwaukee Schools Revive Art, Music, Gym,” WUWM Radio, June 23, 2014.

More Students are Served by Different Financial and Governance Mechanisms

Before the creation of the choice and charter programs, financial and governance structures were simple: public schools were operated by the public school district and funded overwhelmingly by state and local aids and federal grants, while private schools operated independently of public control and were funded by non-governmental sources.

Today, an increasing number of students attend schools that do not fit into this structural paradigm. **Chart 13** indicates that 62% of Milwaukee students are enrolled in MPS-operated schools, down from 75% in 2003-04. Put another way, 38% of Milwaukee students attend schools that are not accountable to a publicly-elected board.

Chart 13: Percentage of Milwaukee Schools Operated by MPS*



* Includes non-charter and instrumentality charter schools

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Another trend is the increasing number of private schools that are almost entirely dependent upon MPCP dollars. Only 10% of Milwaukee's private schools are entirely privately-funded, down from 26% in 2003-04. Although available data does not permit a thorough analysis, information collected by the School Choice Demonstration Project suggests that many MPCP schools have limited financial resources besides what comes in via per-student state funding.⁸

Declining MPS enrollment and the growth of choice and charter programs has meant more students have their education funded outside the traditional state funding formula. MPS receives the bulk of its revenue through a formula that appropriates state aid and establishes allowable per-student property tax amounts, which in 2012-13 resulted in an allocation of

⁸ Michael Q. McShane, Brian Kisida, Laura I. Jensen, Patrick J. Wolf, "Milwaukee Parental Choice Program: Descriptive Report on Participating Schools, 2010-11", *School Choice Demonstration Project, Milwaukee Evaluation Report #33*, February 2012, p. 6.

\$11,595 per student. Independent charters and MPCP schools receive state aid payments on a per-student basis, the amount of which is established by the Wisconsin Legislature (MPS funds its non-instrumental charters at this same rate). In 2014-15, charter schools receive \$8,075 for each student, while MPCP schools receive \$7,210 for each qualifying elementary school student and \$7,856 for each qualifying high school student.

MPS also receives substantial categorical and other aid for special programs and populations of students from the state and, especially, the federal government. In 2013-14, MPS received federal aid amounting to \$212 million.

Governance patterns in Milwaukee education also are changing. As more students attend privately-owned and operated schools, fewer are attending schools under the direct control of the MPS board. Meanwhile, the expansion of the publicly-funded MPCP program has had implications for private school operations, which are now subject to greater regulation than a decade ago. State statutes set broad standards for MPCP schools in areas such as financial audits and financial reporting, teacher and staff qualifications, hours of instruction, and academic testing and reporting.

Independent charter schools have their own governance model. The intention of the charter model is to clearly delineate the expectations and goals that a school is to meet. School responsibilities are laid out in a contract between the public authorizer and an independent, private managing entity. The contract generally covers financial and administrative operations, as well as the instructional program and student academic expectations and goals. This form of governance is attractive to some as it holds the managing entity accountable to meet specific goals and standards. However, information about how charter schools are doing in meeting their contractual obligations is sparse.

Trend Analysis Summary

The past decade has been a time of constant and substantial change for Milwaukee schools and their students. As a result, today's K-12 "system" in Milwaukee looks far different than it did 10 years ago. Schools compete more vigorously within this landscape and have larger and more ethnically diverse enrollments.

While Milwaukee schools, overall, experienced only a 7% decline in enrollment, the era was characterized by large numbers of student transfers, and the different school sectors were reshaped in size and character in the process. By the end of the decade, charter school enrollment had grown by 53% and private school enrollment by 22%, while MPS enrollment had fallen by 24%. Because of these shifts, there are fewer students under the authority of the Milwaukee school board today than in 2003-04, and more under private and charter school governance and funding mechanisms outside the general school aid formula.

One of the most notable and perhaps unforeseen changes of this period was the large number of school restructurings. A total of 173 schools either closed or underwent a significant organizational change, and 81 new schools were established. At the beginning of 2013-14, Milwaukee had 293 schools, which was 90 fewer than the 383 schools it possessed at the start of 2003-04.

In some cases, forces outside the school walls, such as population shifts within the city and legislative or budget changes in Madison, contributed to school closings and openings. In other cases, changes flowed from decisions made by school officials, such as the expansion of charter school activity by all three authorizers and MPS' reconfiguring of non-charter schools.

In sum, it is not hyperbole to say that the fundamental changes that have taken place have transformed elementary and secondary education in Milwaukee. Milwaukee's public school district does not have the same hold on education that it once did, while MPCP and charter schools have greatly expanded in size and influence. Schools in each sector look and act differently. In the end, these changes may have vast implications for education policy, a topic examined in the concluding section of this report.

PEER ANALYSIS: FEATURES AND CHALLENGES

The Peers

Milwaukee’s far greater number and types of schools – as well as its diverse student population – makes most features of its elementary and secondary education landscape much different from those of other Wisconsin cities and towns. Comparisons between Milwaukee schools and those in other parts of Wisconsin, therefore, are of limited value. To gain a better understanding of Milwaukee’s educational landscape and characteristics, it is more useful to compare it to cities of comparable size and character.

The peers used in this report are the same used in the Forum’s December 2012 study, *Passing The Test But Making The Grade?* Each peer city has a large, urban school district and substantial numbers of private and charter schools. Each also has students with similar demographic profiles and socio-economic backgrounds, and each struggles to improve the learning and academic performance of its students. **The peer data are from the National Center for Education Statistics for the 2011-12 academic and 2011 fiscal years.** The data can differ at times from the trend analysis data presented in the previous section, which goes up to 2013-14.

Tables 3 and 4 display the number of schools and students, by sector, for Milwaukee and its peers. The tables show that Milwaukee had 306 schools in 2011-12, while only three cities – Baltimore, Denver, and Detroit – totaled more than 200. Milwaukee schools also enrolled more students than each of the peer cities. In fact, its student count of 116,541 was 13% greater than Detroit’s, the city next in line. A few cities, such as Oakland and Newark, had less than half of Milwaukee’s enrollment.

Table 3: Number of Schools by Type

	Public		Private		Charter		Total
	Schools	Percent of Total	Schools	Percent of Total	Schools	Percent of Total	
Milwaukee	139	45.4%	111	36.3%	56	18.3%	306
Baltimore	157	57.9%	76	28.0%	38	14.0%	271
Denver	133	55.6%	75	31.4%	31	13.0%	239
Detroit	129	54.9%	23	9.8%	83	35.3%	235
Fort Worth	144	73.1%	49	24.9%	4	2.0%	197
Cleveland	98	50.3%	38	19.5%	59	30.3%	195
Cincinnati	57	30.0%	103	54.2%	30	15.8%	190
Indianapolis	68	35.8%	91	47.9%	31	16.3%	190
Oakland	104	56.2%	50	27.0%	31	16.8%	185
Boston	117	80.1%	22	15.1%	7	4.8%	146
Newark	73	64.0%	24	21.1%	17	14.9%	114

Source: NCES, Private and Public School Universe Study, 2012

Compared with most peers, Milwaukee has a more even distribution of schools and enrollment across sectors. Public schools comprised slightly less than half of all Milwaukee schools and more than half of all Milwaukee student enrollments in 2011-12. In other words, Milwaukee had a greater proportion of private and charter schools and students than most peers. Milwaukee

ranked third in the proportion of private schools behind Cincinnati and Indianapolis. It also ranked third in the proportion of charter schools, trailing only Detroit and Cleveland.

Table 4: Total Enrollment by Type

	Public		Private		Charter		Total Enrollment
	Enrollment	Percent	Enrollment	Percent	Enrollment	Percent	
Milwaukee	66,430	57.0%	30,988	26.6%	19,123	16.4%	116,541
Detroit	65,573	64.5%	3,148	3.1%	32,911	32.4%	101,632
Baltimore	71,617	73.6%	13,043	13.4%	12,595	13.0%	97,255
Fort Worth	83,109	87.0%	10,987	11.5%	1,428	1.5%	95,524
Denver	71,218	75.1%	13,608	14.4%	9,945	10.5%	94,771
Cincinnati	32,154	44.9%	31,573	44.1%	7,830	10.9%	71,557
Indianapolis	31,112	44.1%	23,677	33.5%	15,810	22.4%	70,599
Cleveland	42,802	61.1%	9,691	13.8%	17,552	25.1%	70,045
Boston	54,827	89.5%	4,342	7.1%	2,088	3.4%	61,257
Oakland	37,568	67.9%	8,899	16.1%	8,839	16.0%	55,306
Newark	34,971	75.2%	3,713	8.0%	7,838	16.8%	46,522

Source: NCES, Private and Public School Universe Study, 2012

Public school districts in most peer cities lost enrollment over the past decade. As **Table 5** indicates, only Denver and Fort Worth did not follow this trend. MPS ranked sixth out of the eleven districts in the size of its enrollment decline. At a few districts, student numbers dropped off quite sharply. For instance, the Detroit Public Schools lost nearly half of its students, and the Cleveland and Cincinnati school districts lost about one third of theirs.

Table 5: Resident Population and Public Schools District Enrollment*

	Population			Public School District Enrollment		
	2000	2010	% Change	1999-00	2009-10	% Change
Detroit	951,270	713,865	-25.0%	167,124	90,499	-45.8%
Cleveland	480,725	399,046	-17.0%	76,559	48,392	-36.8%
Cincinnati	355,100	330,202	-7.0%	49,574	33,449	-32.5%
Baltimore	651,155	620,961	-4.6%	103,000	82,866	-19.5%
Indianapolis	328,785	296,715	-9.8%	41,359	33,372	-19.3%
Milwaukee	597,040	594,784	-0.4%	99,729	82,096	-17.7%
Oakland	399,545	390,785	-2.2%	55,051	46,099	-16.3%
Boston	589,140	617,594	4.8%	62,950	55,371	-12.0%
Newark	273,545	277,140	1.3%	42,101	39,463	-6.7%
Fort Worth	452,240	466,910	3.2%	78,654	80,209	1.9%
Denver	554,635	600,158	8.2%	69,693	77,267	10.9%

* Population residing in city school district boundary

Source: NCES, Census 2000 and 2010 School District Tabulation, and NCES, Common Core of Data, Local Education Agency (School District) Universe Survey, 1999-00 and 2009-10.

All peers have a clear majority of minority students, a common feature of many large cities across the United States. In two peer cities – Denver and Indianapolis – whites constituted more than half of the total population but a much smaller proportion of the under 18 population, as

shown in **Table 6**. Milwaukee had the third-lowest percentage of whites in the under 18 population and the sixth-lowest proportion of whites in the general population.

Table 6: White Population

	Whites as a Percentage of Total Population	Whites as a Percentage of Under 18 Population
Indianapolis	58.5%	45.2%
Cincinnati*	48.3%	34.8%
Denver	52.5%	31.4%
Boston	46.0%	26.4%
Cleveland	32.7%	20.1%
Baltimore	28.1%	17.8%
Oakland	28.0%	17.8%
Milwaukee	31.9%	16.3%
Newark	10.8%	6.7%
Detroit	8.5%	4.1%
Fort Worth	NA	NA

* Cincinnati data are from the 2011 ACS

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2011 and 2012

More Schools and Students

The peers vary in population from Detroit's 738,234 to Newark's 275,512. Milwaukee's population of 591,905 places it third among the group. To compare the education landscape across these various-sized cities, we have calculated schooling characteristics per 100,000 residents. Using that yardstick, Milwaukee ranked third among its peers in the number of schools and fourth in school enrollment, as shown in **Table 7**.

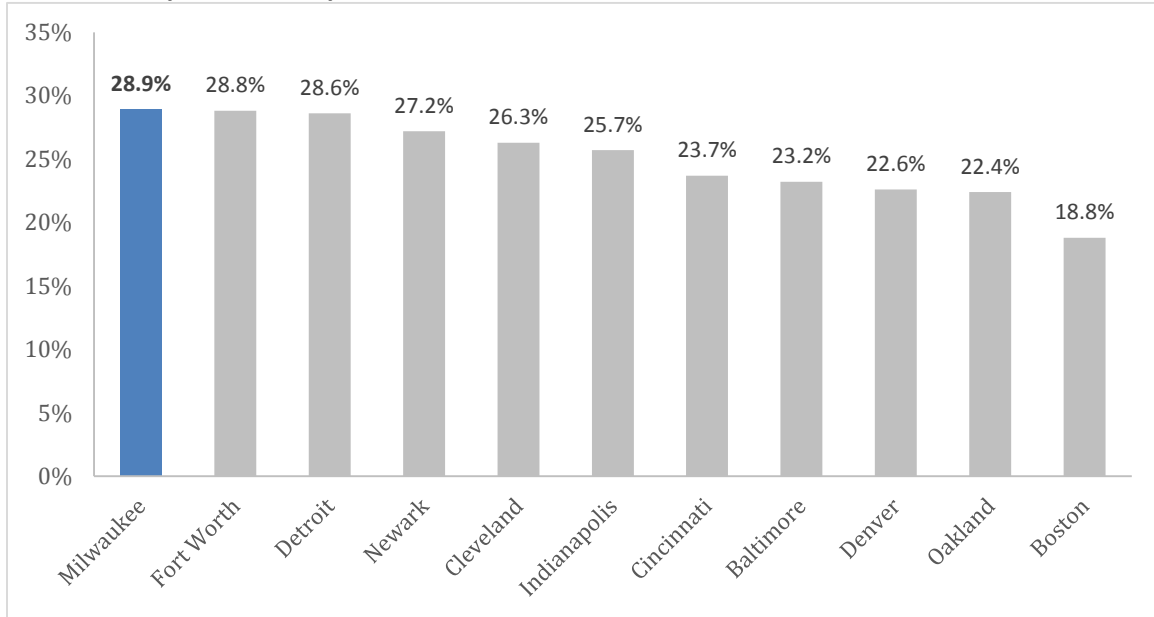
Table 7: Schools and Enrollment per 100,000 Residents

	Population	Schools	Total Enrollment	Schools Per 100,000 Residents	Enrollment Per 100,000 Residents
Indianapolis	295,893	190	70,599	64.2	23,860
Cincinnati	331,056	190	71,557	57.4	21,615
Milwaukee	591,905	306	116,541	51.7	19,689
Cleveland	405,482	195	70,045	48.1	17,275
Oakland	389,579	185	55,306	47.5	14,196
Baltimore	620,210	271	97,255	43.7	15,681
Fort Worth	459,668	197	95,524	42.9	20,781
Newark	275,512	114	46,522	41.4	16,886
Denver	590,507	239	94,771	40.5	16,049
Detroit	738,234	235	101,632	31.8	13,767
Boston	609,942	146	56,915	23.9	9,331

Source: NCES, Private and Public School Universe Study, 2012

The fact that Milwaukee has more schools and students than most of its peers is partly due to demography. As shown in **Chart 14**, Milwaukee has a higher proportion of its population under the age of 18 than any other peer city.

Chart 14: Proportion of Population under 18



Source: NCES, School District Tabulation, 2012

Milwaukee also has fewer students per school than most of its peers. As shown in **Table 8**, Milwaukee ranks second-lowest in median school enrollment, trailing only Oakland. One reason for Milwaukee’s comparatively small school size is the enrollment shift from larger public schools to smaller charter and private schools. Another factor is that median enrollment in Milwaukee’s public schools is lower than median enrollment in public schools among many of Milwaukee’s peers, as is also shown in the table.

Table 8: Median School Enrollment by Type

	Public	Private	Charter	All Schools
Fort Worth	542	123	382	481
Detroit	483	99	367	388
Denver	486	127	295	354
Newark	461	98	367	347
Cincinnati	563	197	241	345
Baltimore	380	88	323	342
Boston	387	199	225	333
Cleveland	399	186	270	324
Indianapolis	410	182	438	319
Milwaukee	406	207	260	315
Oakland	322	119	245	255

Source: NCES, Private and Public School Universe Study, 2012

The comparative data also demonstrate the size of Milwaukee’s private school sector. Only Cincinnati, with one of the nation’s largest Catholic school systems, and Indianapolis, have more private schools and students per 100,00 city residents, as shown in **Table 9**. Milwaukee has more than twice the private school enrollment per 100,000 residents of the remaining peers. This per-capita look underscores the size and impact of the private school sector in Milwaukee.

Table 9: Private Schools and Enrollment per 100,000 Residents

	Schools	Enrollment	Schools Per 100,000 Residents	Students Per 100,000 Residents
Cincinnati	103	31,573	31.1	9,537
Indianapolis	91	23,677	30.8	8,002
Milwaukee	111	30,988	18.8	5,235
Oakland	50	8,899	12.9	2,284
Denver	75	13,608	12.7	2,304
Baltimore	76	13,043	12.3	2,103
Fort Worth	49	10,987	10.7	2,390
Cleveland	38	9,691	9.4	2,390
Newark	24	3,713	8.7	1,348
Boston	22	4,342	3.6	712
Detroit	23	3,148	3.1	426

Source: NCES, Private School Universe Study, 2012

Milwaukee’s choice program likely contributes to its private school vitality. Only Cleveland among this group has another such program (although some peers participate in a broader state choice program) and Milwaukee’s program dwarfs Cleveland’s in size and scope. In fact, across the U.S., only Washington, D.C. has a choice program comparable to Milwaukee’s, though Indiana, North Carolina, and Louisiana have established large statewide choice programs in the past few years.

As discussed in the previous section, Milwaukee’s choice program has affected the racial and ethnic profile of its private schools, which now have a greater proportion of minority students than a decade ago. Milwaukee’s private schools also look quite different from those of most peers, as shown in **Table 10**. In 2011-12, African-American and Hispanic students represented two thirds of Milwaukee’s total private school enrollment. Detroit and Newark also had a majority of minority students in their private schools, but these cities are noted for their small percentages of white school-age children. In contrast, African-Americans and Hispanics comprised less than one third of all private school students in six peer cities.

Table 10: African-American and Hispanic Enrollment in Private Schools

	African-American	Hispanic	Total African-American & Hispanic Students
Newark	60.4%	29.4%	89.8%
Milwaukee	45.5%	21.8%	67.3%
Detroit	45.0%	11.4%	56.4%
Cleveland	35.0%	8.3%	43.3%
Oakland	22.6%	15.1%	37.7%
Boston	14.9%	13.7%	28.6%
Baltimore	25.7%	2.1%	27.8%
Denver	7.4%	19.6%	27.0%
Fort Worth	8.4%	14.0%	22.4%
Indianapolis	10.6%	5.0%	15.6%
Cincinnati	11.6%	1.3%	12.9%

Source: NCES, Private School Universe Study, 2012

With regard to charter schools, the NCES data show that Milwaukee ranked third in number of charter schools and fourth in charter school enrollment per 100,000 residents in 2011-12, behind Cleveland, Detroit, and Indianapolis. As **Table 11** shows, Boston and Fort Worth had the fewest charter schools per 100,000 residents. However, the rapid growth of charter schools could alter these rankings in a short period of time.

Table 11: Charter Schools per 100,000 Residents

	Schools	Per 100,000 Residents
Cleveland	59	14.6
Detroit	83	11.2
Indianapolis	31	10.5
Milwaukee	56	9.5
Cincinnati	30	9.1
Oakland	31	8.0
Newark	17	6.2
Baltimore	38	6.1
Denver	31	5.3
Boston	7	1.1
Fort Worth	4	0.9

Source: NCES, Public School Universe Study, 2012

One way that Milwaukee's charter schools are unique is that the city has independent charter schools—under the authority of UWM and the City of Milwaukee—as well as district-run charters under the authority of MPS. As **Table 12** demonstrates, none of the other peers have a real mixture of both types of charters. Among the peers, independent schools enroll about three quarters of charter school students.

Table 12: Charter Schools by Type

	Independent Charters		District-Run Charters		Total Charters	
	Schools	Students	Schools	Students	Schools	Students
Detroit	83	32,911	0	0	83	32,911
Milwaukee	18	6,684	38	12,439	56	19,123
Cleveland	59	17,552	0	0	59	17,552
Indianapolis	31	15,810	0	0	31	15,810
Baltimore	0	0	38	12,595	38	12,595
Denver	0	0	31	9,945	31	9,945
Oakland	1	314	30	8,525	31	8,839
Newark	16	7,266	1	572	17	7,838
Cincinnati	30	7,830	0	0	30	7,830
Boston	7	2,088	0	0	7	2,088
Fort Worth	4	1,428	0	0	4	1,428

Source: NCES, Public School Universe Study, 2012

Milwaukee ranks in the middle of the peers in the number of public schools and public school enrollment per 100,000 residents. Fort Worth, Newark, and Baltimore are ahead of Milwaukee on both counts. Because MPS operates both traditional and charter schools, MPS ranks higher than most peers in district enrollment as a percentage of the population, as shown in **Table 13**. Even though it has lost students to private and independent charter schools over the decade, MPS remains well-entrenched in the community in relation to public school districts in peer cities.

Table 13: Public School District Enrollment as a Percentage of Population

	Total Population*	2011-12 District Enrollment	Percentage of Population
Fort Worth	466,910	80,209	17.2%
Newark	277,140	39,443	14.2%
Milwaukee	594,784	82,096	13.8%
Baltimore	620,961	82,866	13.4%
Denver	600,158	77,267	12.9%
Detroit	713,865	90,499	12.7%
Cleveland	399,046	48,392	12.1%
Oakland	390,785	46,099	11.8%
Indianapolis	296,715	33,372	11.2%
Cincinnati	330,202	33,449	10.1%
Boston	617,594	55,371	9.0%

* 2010 census

Source: NCES, School District Tabulation, 2012

Financial Challenges

Many educational financial analyses begin and end with revenues and expenditures per student, yet these measures tell only part of the story. A more nuanced financial portrait emerges when overall demand for educational resources and taxpayer effort is considered.

School Revenue

Milwaukee is in the middle of the pack among its national peers for revenue per student. As **Table 14** indicates, MPS ranked seventh in state and local revenue and fifth in federal revenue for a total of \$16,196 per student. That ranked MPS sixth overall among the peer group in 2011.

Table 14: Public School District per Pupil Revenue, 2011⁹

	State & Local Revenue	Federal Revenue	Total Revenue
Newark	\$20,741	\$2,228	\$22,969
Boston	\$19,625	\$2,698	\$22,323
Cincinnati	\$16,564	\$3,303	\$19,867
Cleveland	\$15,955	\$4,213	\$20,168
Baltimore	\$13,863	\$3,333	\$17,196
Indianapolis	\$13,614	\$2,292	\$15,906
Milwaukee	\$12,918	\$3,278	\$16,196
Denver	\$10,394	\$2,067	\$12,461
Detroit	\$10,281	\$5,806	\$16,087
Oakland	\$9,785	\$1,888	\$11,673
Fort Worth	\$8,010	\$2,227	\$10,237

Source: NCES, Private and Public School Universe Study, 2012

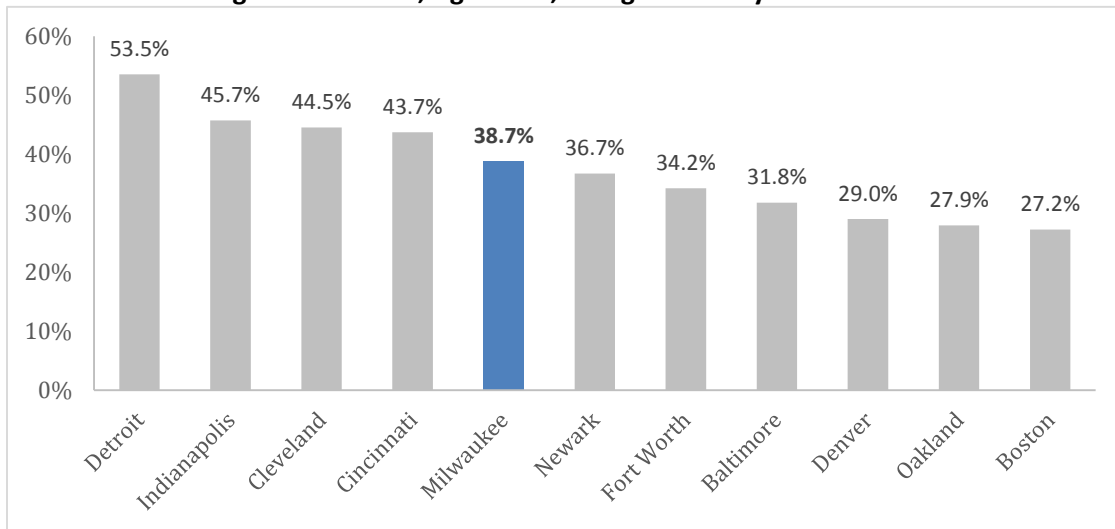
It is important to note that the above information does not allow for a true comparative analysis of public education dollars spent on the peer cities because it does not include the public revenues received by independent charter or private schools. If these sectors were included, Milwaukee's position on educational revenues would undoubtedly rise.

Financial Need

The amount of annual revenue that is generated for education in the peer cities is influenced by the characteristics of their schoolchildren. For example, Milwaukee has a large percentage of economically disadvantaged children, as shown in **Chart 15**. Many disadvantaged children need compensatory programmatic assistance to overcome the academic deficiencies commonly associated with entrenched poverty, which can generate higher expenditures and revenues.

⁹ Per pupil revenue can be calculated in different ways. We use NCES figures – which may differ from other sources – because the data offer a uniform approach to peer analyses.

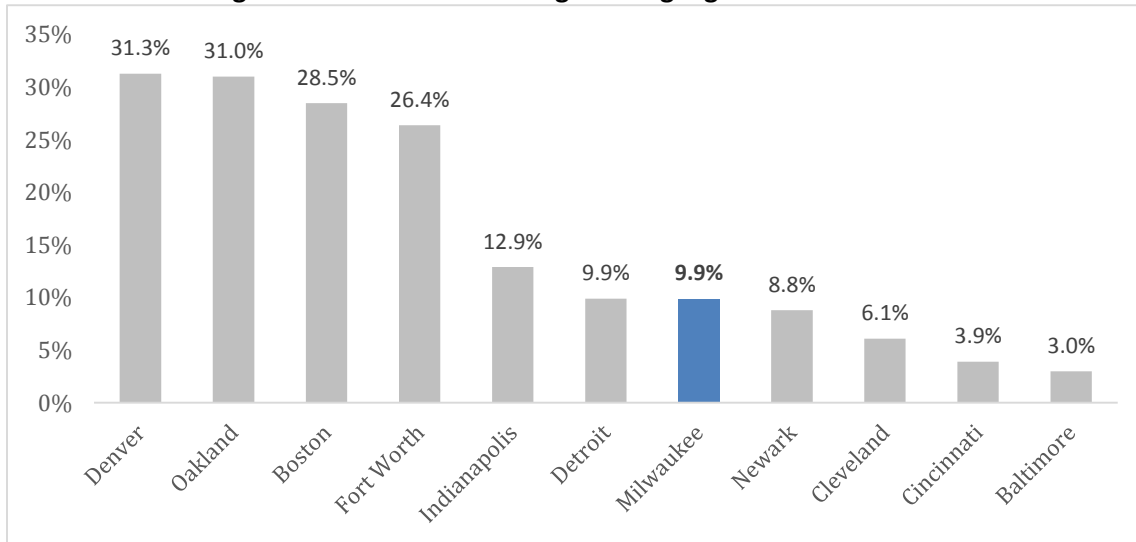
Chart 15: Percentage of Residents, Ages 5-17, Living in Poverty¹⁰



Source: U.S. Census, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, 2012

Milwaukee also has a large percentage of students who are English Language Learners (ELL) as well as students with academic disabilities. **Chart 16** shows that 9.9% of the students in MPS were ELL students, placing Milwaukee in the middle of the group in its percentage of ELL students. Additionally, roughly 20% of MPS students have an academic disability that qualifies for an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), ranking it fourth among peers, as shown in **Chart 17**.

Chart 16: Percentage of Students Who are English Language Learners

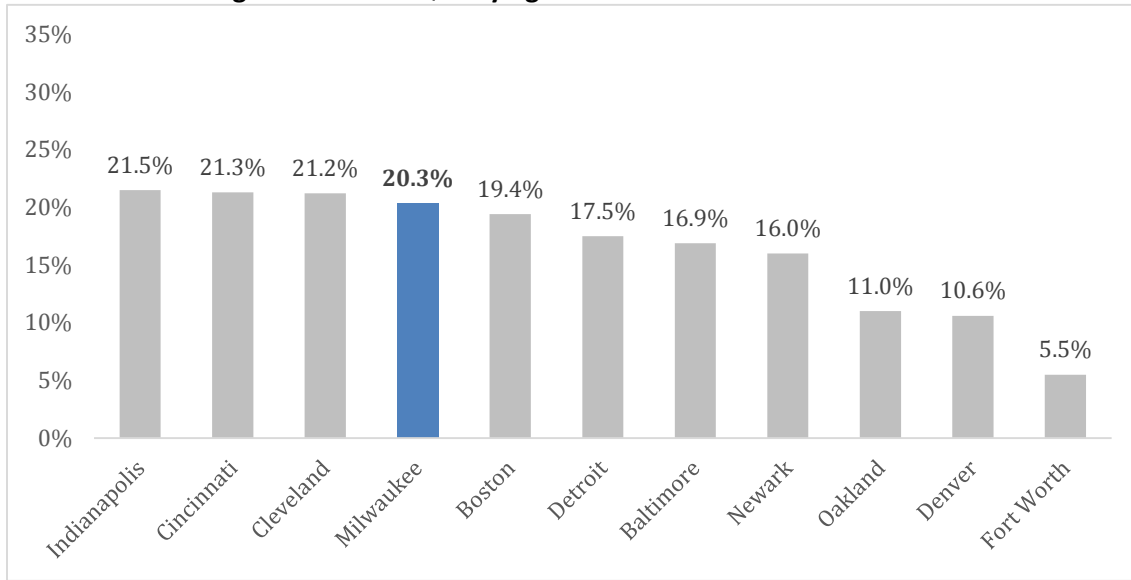


Source: NCES, Public School Universe Study, 2012

¹⁰ The federal poverty level for a family of four was \$23,050 in 2012.

<http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/12poverty.shtml>

Chart 17: Percentage of Students Qualifying for an Individualized Education Plan

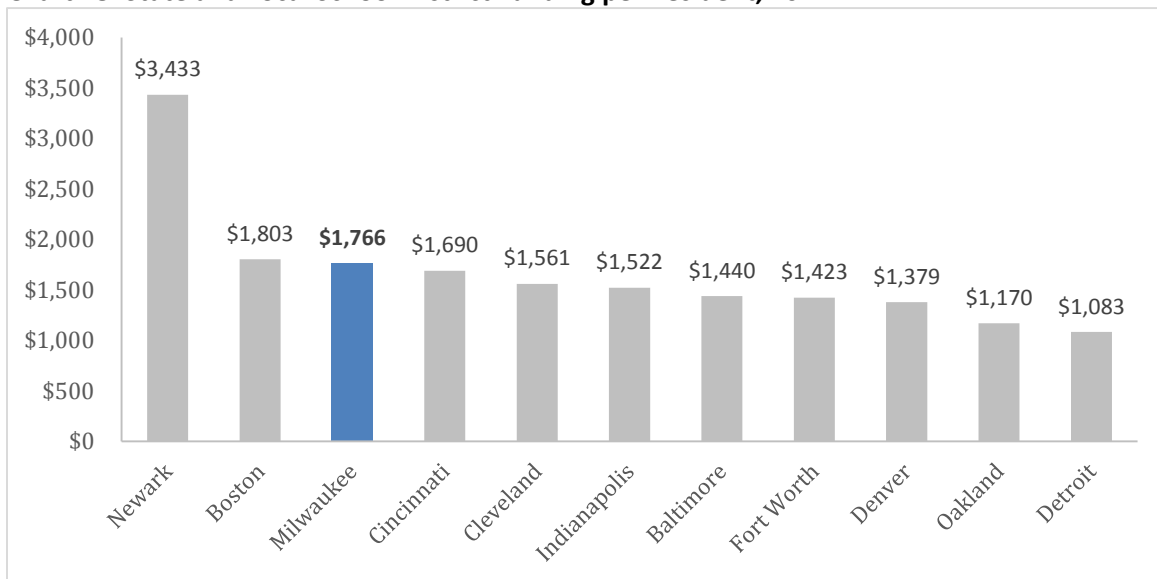


Source: NCES, Public School Universe Study, 2012; and Denver Public Schools

Taxpayer Effort

Milwaukee is near the top in local and state revenue on a per resident basis, as shown in **Chart 18**, following only Newark and Boston. To some degree, Newark – which far exceeds the other peers in local and state funding – is a special case since the New Jersey Supreme Court has mandated compensatory funding for districts in that state that have a large disadvantaged student enrollment.

Chart 18: State and Local School District Funding per Resident, 2011



Source: NCES, Public School Universe Study, 2012

Again, the limitation of the above approach is that it excludes local and state funding for independent charter and private schools. It should be noted that only three cities among the peers have significantly more independent charter schools than Milwaukee – Detroit, Cleveland, and Indianapolis – and, therefore, only those peers would be expected to appropriate more taxpayer dollars to independent charter schools than Milwaukee. In addition, \$161 million of state and local tax funds were allocated in 2013-14 to the MPCP, a sum that far surpasses the amount of public monies that flow to private schools in peer cities.

Academic Challenges

There is far less comparative national information on student learning and academic achievement than there is for the other topics discussed above. Consequently, in examining learning and academic metrics, we must use comparison groups that differ from the peer group used previously.

The single best comparative source of data on student academic achievement nationally is the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the so-called “Nation’s Report Card.” NAEP undertakes periodic assessments of what students know in various subject areas and it conducted its most recent assessments in 2013 in reading and mathematics. Under NAEP, a representative sample of public school students throughout a state is tested.

Since 2002, NAEP has conducted assessments in urban school districts under its Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA). In 2013, 21 urban districts participated in TUDA, including MPS. Other TUDA members represented some of the largest districts in the U.S., such as New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Houston, Philadelphia, and Atlanta, as well as districts from smaller cities such as Austin and Albuquerque.

Table 15 examines the most recent NAEP test results in reading and mathematics for 4th and 8th grade public school students in Milwaukee and the comparison groups. The table compares the percentage of students at or above proficiency at MPS (including instrumentality charter schools) with the entire nation and other large cities, and it also includes MPS’ ranking among the 21 TUDA members.

Table 15: NAEP Reading and Mathematics Results, 2013

	Reading		Math	
	At/Above Proficient 4th Grade	At/Above Proficient 8th Grade	At/Above Proficient 4th Grade	At/Above Proficient 8th Grade
Nation	34%	34%	41%	34%
Large Cities	26%	26%	33%	27%
MPS	15%	13%	18%	11%
MPS TUDA rank	16 of 21	18 of 21	18 of 21	19 of 21

Source: The Nation's Report Card, Trial Urban District Assessment

This examination shows that MPS compared poorly in reading with all groups at both the 4th and 8th grade levels. For example, only 15% of MPS students tested at or above proficient in 4th grade reading, compared with 26% in large cities across the U.S. MPS ranked 16th of 21 TUDA members in 4th grade reading and 18th in 8th grade reading.

The data also show lower NAEP test scores for Milwaukee students in mathematics, where only 11% of MPS students tested at or above proficient in 8th grade math, compared with 27% in large cities. MPS students ranked 18th of 21 TUDA members in 4th grade math and 19th in 8th grade math.

MPS has large gaps in NAEP proficiency levels between white and minority students, as shown in **Tables 16** and **17** (the gaps represent percentage point differences in proficiency levels). Generally, the gap between African-American and white students in Milwaukee was somewhat greater than the gap in large U.S. cities, while the gap between Hispanic and white students was smaller.

Table 16: White vs. African-American Achievement Gaps on NAEP, 2013

	Reading		Mathematics	
	4th Grade	8th Grade	4th Grade	8th Grade
Nation	26 pts	25 pts	25 pts	30 pts
Large Cities	32 pts	30 pts	31 pts	34 pts
MPS	33 pts	30 pts	36 pts	35 pts

Source: The Nation's Report Card, Trial Urban District Assessment

Table 17: White vs. Hispanic Achievement Gaps on NAEP, 2013

	Reading		Mathematics	
	4th Grade	8th Grade	4th Grade	8th Grade
Nation	24 pts	20 pts	20 pts	22 pts
Large Cities	30 pts	24 pts	24 pts	26 pts
MPS	22 pts	9 pts	19 pts	16 pts

Source: The Nation's Report Card, Trial Urban District Assessment

Test scores for Hispanics in Milwaukee were often closer to white test scores than was true across the nation. For example, in 8th grade reading, MPS had a 9-point gap compared to the average 24-point gap in districts in large U.S. cities. In 8th grade mathematics, MPS had a 16-point Hispanic/white gap compared to the average 26-point gap in large U.S. cities.

Peer Analysis Summary

In comparing Milwaukee's elementary and secondary schools and students to those of its national peers, we find that many of the features that stand out in the local setting fade into the background. While Milwaukee is one of a kind in Wisconsin, it is just one among many in its group of national peers regarding student demographic and socio-economic status, diversity of school types, and financial complexity.

Yet, the characteristics of elementary and secondary education in Milwaukee do differ in some key respects from those of its national peers. Some of these differences are well known and widely commented upon, such as the size of the city's private school choice program. Others receive little if any attention, such as the large proportion of school-age children in Milwaukee's overall population.

Our analysis of **NCES data** shows that Milwaukee contrasts with its national peers in the following ways:

1. A greater number of schools per 100,000 residents
2. A greater number of students per 100,000 residents
3. Fewer students per school
4. A greater proportion of charter and private schools and enrollment
5. A larger private school sector—with substantial public funding and a majority of minority students
6. A mixture of independent and district-managed charter schools
7. Stronger need for educational resources
8. Stronger financial effort as measured by state and local funding per city resident for elementary/secondary education
9. Very low student test scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress

Some of Milwaukee's differences reflect underlying demographic conditions, while others are a consequence of deliberate policy decisions, such as the city's mixture of independent and district-run charter schools.

Whether these differences represent positive or negative attributes is a subjective matter that others will have to judge. What is not subjective is the fact that these differences need to be understood and taken into account when developing public policy. Policymakers should take steps to adapt best practices to Milwaukee's unique educational landscape to ensure widespread adoption and success.

CONCLUSION

The information in this report shows K-12 education in Milwaukee is in a state of flux. The rate and degree of change are transforming Milwaukee's schools and the typical student experience, yet the policy implications associated with such change have not been fully studied, comprehended, or debated. Some policy questions arising from our findings are presented below for discussion and as a precursor to further review.

This report has offered a general picture of the changing features of Milwaukee education and its types of schools, school size, student enrollment, and student demographics. Comprehensive information about Milwaukee schooling, however, often has been lacking. In some cases, such as student test scores, trend analysis could not be conducted because comparable information was unavailable for a substantial time period.

On many subjects, the databases we consulted only had school district data. Yet, Milwaukee's public school district represents a shrinking share of the city's schools and students. Moreover, private schools educate large numbers of publicly-funded students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the very students for whom effective, data-driven education policy is arguably most critical.

In the future, the need for comprehensive information will become more acute as student movement across different types of schools yields diminishing returns from individual sector analysis. It is difficult to discern the meaning of a trend in a sector's student test scores, for instance, when sizeable numbers of students are entering and leaving that sector each year. Sophisticated analysis can attempt to address this and similar problems, but such studies have been performed sporadically, at best.

More information also is needed on some of the individual topics we examined. For example, one of the most notable findings in this study relates to the degree of structural reorganization that occurred in Milwaukee during the past decade. The number of school openings, closings, and restructurings was of a scale much greater than we had anticipated. Such changes took place in all three educational sectors and often had little to do with their enrollment trajectory. As has been shown, numerous private and charter schools closed even though enrollment within these sectors increased dramatically, and many new MPS schools were opened despite a steep drop in that sector's enrollment.

It is important to note that the approach we pursued identified some, but not all, major school reorganization. For example, our analysis focused on differences in the DPI and MPS school lists in 2003-04 and 2013-14, but it was difficult to precisely identify the schools that either had closed, undergone structural change, or were opened during these years. Also, because of data and time constraints, we did not examine the number of MPS schools that opened after 2003-04 yet closed before 2013-14, although the number of charter and choice schools that fit this definition suggests that there also may be many public non-charter schools of this kind. Reorganization also took less dramatic forms that our analysis did not capture, such as "school turnarounds."

This report – and our companion overview of Milwaukee’s K-12 education landscape – marks the start of a longer-term research effort by the Public Policy Forum to dig deeply into the distinctive features of the city’s education framework and to explore how those features truly impact academic performance and school finance. For now, we raise a series of policy questions; in future reports, we will strive to provide both answers and policy options to effectuate them.

Policy Questions Arising From This Study

School Reorganization

- How do the number of school closings, openings, and restructurings in Milwaukee compare to those occurring in other cities?
- What is the impact of school closings and school restructurings on staff, students, and planning?
- At what point, if at all, does the number of school openings, closings, and restructurings negatively affect school improvement efforts?

School Leadership

- Does the greater number of schools in Milwaukee and the continuous school turnover mean that finding, developing, and retaining school leadership is a more difficult challenge – yet also a more important one – here than in other cities?
- What processes are now in place to recruit, develop, and retain school leaders and how, if at all, might those processes be strengthened and improved?

Student Mobility

- Do parents and students receive the kinds of information they need to make a well-considered choice in school selection?
- How effective are school practices for welcoming and supporting transfer students?
- Might such practices be improved to reduce the rate of student mobility?

Race/Ethnicity

- Why has there been an increase in the number of single race/ethnic schools?
- Why are private MPCP schools losing white students and what, if any, are the consequences of a shifting racial imbalance at choice schools?
- What measures might be taken to reduce the number, or curtail the growth, of single-race schools?

Finance

- What is the true variance in the amount of per-student local, state, federal, and private resources received by charter, MPCP, and MPS schools?
- What are the purposes and outcomes of federal and state categorical aid programs and are those aids achieving the desired outcomes?

Information Reporting and Collection

- Does current information on school performance and student achievement enable policymakers to assess educational progress across the entire spectrum of Milwaukee schools?
- What kind of information is missing and what should be made available to the public on an annual basis?

Overall School Structure

- Does the shift in enrollment from public schools to private and charter schools, and the decreasing percentage of students under the control of the Milwaukee School Board, suggest that greater attention should be given to the issue of school accountability?
- Does the increasing similarity of students across school sectors, the large number of schools under development in each sector, and common challenges suggest that more cooperation and coordination is needed among Milwaukee schools?