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For immediate release

Region’s small-city schools showing weaknesses of big-city schools
Southeastern Wisconsin students lose ground to rest of state

MILWAUKEE, Wisconsin – (*Tuesday, October 30, 2007*) – Schools in southeastern Wisconsin’s smaller cities, like Delavan, Cudahy, and Whitewater, are beginning to show the same kinds of stress of schools in larger cities like Milwaukee, Racine, and Kenosha, according to the 2007 schooling report by the Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum. Also, the achievement gap between students in the region and those in the rest of the state continues to widen in all subjects and at all grades.

“We’re now seeing schools in smaller urban areas mimicking large-city schools with declining enrollment, less student engagement, and more poverty,” says Anneliese Dickman, Forum research director.

For example, Delavan-Darien, Lake Geneva-Genoa City, Williams Bay, Cudahy, and Mequon-Thiensville are among those experiencing declines in enrollment. Student engagement – based on attendance, truancy, and dropout rates – appears to be eroding in Burlington, Delavan-Darien, and Cudahy. And Delavan-Darien, Lake Geneva-Genoa City, and Whitewater are showing greater incidence of poverty based on the percentage of student enrollment receiving free or reduced-price lunches.

“The data indicate that large, urban school districts are not alone in their problems,” Dickman says. “The entire region faces similar issues and must tackle them together.”

In addition, student achievement gaps are expanding between southeastern Wisconsin and the rest of the state.

In the subjects tested – reading, math, and science – and at the grades tested – 3rd, 4th, 8th, and 10th – the gap widened – in some cases, dramatically. For example, in 2005-06, southeastern Wisconsin’s 8th graders scored 6.5 percentage points lower than the rest of the state in math; in 2006-07 the gap widened to 14.3 points. In 8th grade science, the gap is now 15.6 percentage points, up from 8.5 points the year before. In other areas, the gap also increased, ranging from 0.3 to 4.8 percentage points.

Student performance improves, however, when public schools in Milwaukee, Kenosha, and Racine are removed from the southeastern Wisconsin equation. In some subjects, it

even surpasses the rest of the state. For example, 4th and 10th grade reading, math, and science achievement levels all surpass those for the rest of the state.

“The increasing achievement gap is a big concern,” says Dickman. “Our region’s future is at risk if we are not performing at least as well as the rest of the state.”

Included with the report is a poster ranking all 50 school districts on a variety of measurements, including operations spending, student enrollment, free or reduced-price lunch rate, graduation rate, and the test scores of various grades.

The schooling research has been done by the Forum since 1987. This year’s report and poster were sponsored by Cardinal Stritch University, Multiple Listing Service (MLS), Northwestern Mutual Foundation, Stifel Nicolaus, and Waukesha County Technical College. The report and poster can be found on the Internet at www.publicpolicyforum.org.

Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum – which was 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.

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