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For immediate release

Southeast Wisconsin schools narrow gap with rest of state

Report finds progress in all subject areas

MILWAUKEE, Wisconsin – *October 13, 2008* – In its annual schooling report covering the 50 school districts of southeast Wisconsin, the Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum found that the region’s schools have improved relative to those in the rest of the state. The test score gap narrowed in all subjects at all grade levels—a marked improvement over last year, which saw the largest score gap in four years.

The report is an in-depth analysis of each school district’s enrollment, finances, participation, and performance and is accompanied by a companion poster ranking the school districts across each variable.

“Closing the score gap is important if the region is to successfully compete in an increasingly global economy,” says Jeff Schmidt, Forum researcher. “The region needs educated workers, both now and in the future. If our schools do not perform on par with

the rest of the state, we will have a hard time recruiting workers and businesses today and growing workers and businesses tomorrow.”

The report shows that the achievement gap in standardized test scores between students in southeast Wisconsin and those in the rest of the state ranges from three percentage points in 3rd grade reading to nearly eight percentage points in 8th grade science. Last year’s gap ranged from more than three points in 3rd grade reading to more than 15 points in 8th grade science.

The largest improvements came in science, where the gap between the region and the state was nearly cut in half in each grade level. However, despite these gains, science remains the subject area with the largest gaps.

“We don’t know at this point whether the large gap last year was an anomaly or whether this year’s improvements are the start of a new trend. But last year’s findings were certainly a wake-up call for some districts,” says Schmidt. “The improvements in the science scores are especially encouraging, as we know technical knowledge and skills will be increasingly important to the future workforce.”

In addition to narrowing the gap in state standardized test scores, southeast Wisconsin outperforms the rest of the state in both ACT and Advanced Placement (AP) test scores. These tests are taken by college-bound high school students and measure their ability to do college-level work. The region’s average ACT score was 22.6, compared to 22.2 for

the state. Nearly 11% of AP students in the region passed their AP exams, compared to 8.4% statewide.

On other measures, the region continued to lag behind the state. Students elsewhere in the state have lower truancy and drop-out rates and higher attendance rates than do those in southeast Wisconsin.

In addition, the number of schools in the region identified as in need of improvement under the federal “No Child Left Behind Act” increased from 37 to 43. Of those 43, all but five are located in Milwaukee County. The rest of the state has a total of 11 such schools.

The schooling report and poster can be downloaded from the Forum’s Web site at www.publicpolicyforum.org.

The 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.

This year’s schooling report was sponsored by Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin; Multiple Listing Service; Northwestern Mutual Foundation; and Stifel Nicolaus.

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