

For more information:

For immediate release

Rob Henken, President

rhenken@publicpolicyforum.org

414-276-8240

or

Anneliese Dickman, Research Director

adickman@publicpolicyforum.org

414-276-8240

Annual public schools analysis shows no progress in narrowing region's racial achievement gap

Improvement in some areas, but urban districts remain far behind suburbs

MILWAUKEE, Wisconsin – Tuesday, September 15, 2009 – The Public Policy Forum's annual analysis of data on southeastern Wisconsin's public schools indicates gains in ACT and AP test scores, but a continued lack of progress in narrowing the region's racial achievement gap. Scores on state reading and math tests show the region's gap nearly matches the statewide gap in all grade levels and has remained virtually constant over the past five years.

"The size and stability of the regional achievement gap certainly is cause for concern," says Forum President Rob Henken. "Southeastern Wisconsin's school districts are a reflection of the state. And we know from national tests that our state, unlike nearly every other, has made no progress in narrowing the racial achievement gap."

The report indicates, for example, that 85.8% of the region's white 4th grade students performed at a proficient or advanced level in reading during the 2004-05 school year, compared to 58.8% of African-American 4th graders. Five years later, the region's white 8th graders made progress

with 89.4% scoring proficient or advanced in reading, while African-American reading proficiency remained at 58.8%.

Similarly, the region's math achievement gap over the past five years grew slightly, although both white and African-American math proficiency improved during that time. The statewide reading and math achievement gaps also grew slightly from 2004-05.

Other trends showed progress for the districts in the seven-county region. Regionally, scores on ACT tests remained high and more southeastern Wisconsin students successfully passed AP exams than in the rest of the state. In addition, with the exception of Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), truancy and dropout rates improved across the region. Finally, the gap between state standardized test scores in the region versus the rest of the state narrowed again this year, indicating the region may soon catch up to the state's other districts.

“Standardized test scores in certain subject areas show that continued academic improvement among the region's students could soon bring the region into parity with the rest of the state,” says Henken. “It will be difficult to get there, however, without significant improvement in MPS and other large urban districts, which continue to lag suburban districts on test score performance and college preparation measures while maintaining much higher truancy and dropout rates.”

The Forum's schools report was funded by Cardinal Stritch University, Multiple Listing Service, Northwestern Mutual, Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance, Stifel Nicolaus, and the Waukesha County Technical College. A copy can be downloaded at the Forum's web site, www.publicpolicyforum.org

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 public policy issues.

#####