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For immediate release

After a decade of choice, voucher schools look like MPS

Report discusses 10-year trends of parental choice program

MILWAUKEE, Wisconsin – *February 9, 2009* – In its 11th annual census of schools participating in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), the Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum found that in many ways, MPCP schools look quite similar to those in MPS.

“In terms of low-income and minority enrollment and teacher-student ratios, the two sets of schools share remarkably similar characteristics,” says Anneliese Dickman, Forum Research Director. “That doesn’t necessarily mean they operate the same or perform the same, but it does mean that in general they’re both attempting to teach the same types of students with the same number of teachers.”

The Forum’s analysis found that schools participating in the MPCP have an average voucher use rate of 78% of enrollment (indicating that approximate percentage of low-income students), while the average MPS school is 77% low-income. In addition, MPCP school enrollments are now

85% minority students, compared to an average of 88% minority students in an MPS school.

Student-teacher ratios at the average MPS and MPCP schools also are similar, at 15.6 students per full-time teacher in MPCP and 14.9 students per full-time teacher in MPS.

This year's Forum report also focuses on long-term trend data. It highlights the significant growth in the program, from 6,194 students using vouchers in 1998-99 to 20,244 today, as well as the steep increase in program costs, from \$28.2 million to \$129.1 million over the past decade.

The report also indicates that while MPS and MPCP schools have become similar in some important characteristics, differences do remain. Most MPCP schools provide religious instruction, with 81% of all voucher students enrolled in a religious school. MPCP also appears to retain high school students more successfully than MPS, with a "drop-out" rate of 36% for the MPCP class of 2008 compared to 62% for MPS. And, while all MPS students must take the same state standardized exam under state and federal law, of 114 MPCP schools using standardized tests, less than half (53) administer the state test.

For the complete 2008-09 data and a directory of all participating schools, please visit the Forum's website at www.publicpolicyforum.org. The report was sponsored by the Fleck Foundation.

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.

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