



For more information:

Anneliese Dickman, Research Director
adickman@publicpolicyforum.org or

Rob Henken, President
rhenken@publicpolicyforum.org
414-276-8240

For immediate release

Slight Decline in School Voucher Program Enrollment
2010-11 figures halt long-term growth trend

MILWAUKEE, Wisconsin – *February 21, 2011* – In its 13th annual census of schools participating in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), the Public Policy Forum found that fewer low-income students are attending private schools in Milwaukee using taxpayer-funded tuition vouchers in 2010-2011 than in the previous school year. Currently, 20,996 private school students use taxpayer-funded tuition vouchers through the program, a decrease of 66 students from last year.

“Over the past two years, the choice program has seen more than two dozen private schools close or withdraw, while only seven new schools joined,” says Anneliese Dickman, Forum Research Director. “The reduction in schools has led to a slight decline in the number of voucher students.”

The Forum’s analysis found this is the first school year the program has not grown in enrollment since its expansion to include religious schools in 1998-1999.

“We’re seeing the impact of new state regulations requiring MPCP schools to be accredited,” notes Dickman. “Seven of the 12 schools leaving the program this year were not accredited. Interestingly, the accreditation rules may not only be causing some schools to close, but may also be allowing other schools to earn more per pupil by converting to charter schools. Two of the schools leaving the choice program since last year are operating as charter schools this year.”

This year’s Forum report also notes that 2010-2011 is the first year in which MPCP schools are required to administer state standardized tests to voucher students in 3rd, 4th, 8th, and 10th grades. Of the 103 schools in the program, 95 indicate they administer a standardized test of some kind, including 84 that administer the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE), which is used in all public and charter schools in the state.

“The new rule caused many schools to switch to the WKCE,” says Dickman. “It remains to be seen whether the 51 schools that administered the WKCE prior to this year will have an advantage when the test results are released in the spring.”

The report also includes updated data on enrollment trends, schools gaining and losing the most MPCP students, schools’ racial make-up, and the aggregate high school drop-out rate.

The full report, complete 2010-11 data, and a directory of all participating schools are available at 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.

####