

**BRIEFING SHEET**[Report 19-11](#)

July 2019

State Auditor[Joe Chrisman](#)

Opportunity Schools and Partnership Program

Background

2015 Wisconsin Act 55, the 2015-17 Biennial Budget Act, established the opportunity schools and partnership program. Student achievement and other factors determine whether public schools in a given school district are eligible for transfer into the program as opportunity schools. Statutes include separate eligibility criteria for Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) and for all other school districts. An opportunity school is managed and controlled by a program commissioner selected by the applicable county executive. Statutes prohibit a school from being transferred out of the program for five consecutive school years. Beginning in 2017 and biennially thereafter, statutes require the Legislative Audit Bureau to prepare a performance evaluation audit of the program.

Key Findings

We found:

- No schools have been transferred into the program to date, and no schools will be transferred into the program for the 2019-20 school year.
- MPS could have schools eligible for transfer into the program for the 2020-21 school year. The Madison Metropolitan and Racine Unified school districts could have schools eligible for transfer into the program for the 2021-22 school year.
- 2017 Wisconsin Act 209 modified from October 15 to November 30 the deadline for the State Superintendent to annually identify the MPS schools eligible for transfer into the program. The State Superintendent notified the MPS superintendent and the Milwaukee County Executive on December 20, 2018, that no MPS schools were eligible for transfer into the program for the 2019-20 school year.
- Statutes require the Milwaukee County Executive to select a program commissioner, even if no MPS schools are in the program, and to notify the Governor and the Milwaukee mayor if the commissioner position becomes vacant. The Milwaukee County Executive has not notified the Governor and the Milwaukee mayor that the commissioner position has been vacant since June 2016.
- 2017 Wisconsin Act 59, the 2017-19 Biennial Budget Act, modified how the schools of certain unified school districts are eligible for transfer into the program. This modification affects schools of the Madison Metropolitan and Racine Unified school districts.

Recommendations

We recommend:

- the State Superintendent comply with statutes by annually notifying by November 30 the superintendent of MPS and the program commissioner selected by the Milwaukee County Executive about the eligibility of schools for transfer into the program; and
- the Milwaukee County Executive comply with statutes by notifying the Governor and the Milwaukee mayor that the program commissioner position is vacant.

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