



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. Statutes include separate eligibility criteria for Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) and all other school districts. An opportunity school is [managed and controlled by a commissioner](#) selected by the applicable county executive. After a school has been transferred into the program, statutes [prohibit it from being transferred out of the program](#) for five consecutive school years. Beginning in 2017 and biennially thereafter, Act 55 requires 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 eligible for transfer into the program in the 2017-18 school year.
- In October 2015, the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) formally notified the Milwaukee County Executive that 65 MPS schools were [eligible for transfer into the program in the 2016-17 school year](#). Statutes required the commissioner to select at least one and not more than three MPS schools to be transferred into the program.
- In November 2015, the Milwaukee County Executive selected the first program commissioner for MPS schools. This commissioner [did not transfer any MPS schools](#) into the program. The commissioner resigned in June 2016, and the position has remained vacant since then.
- Even if no MPS schools are in the program, [statutes require the Milwaukee County Executive to select a program commissioner](#). Statutes require the county executive to notify the Governor and the mayor of the City of Milwaukee if the position becomes vacant. The Governor, the county executive, and the mayor are statutorily required to each appoint an individual to compile a list of nominees for the position, and the county executive is to select a new commissioner from this list. The county executive [has not notified](#) the Governor and the mayor of the vacancy in the position.
- In the 2018-19 school year, [MPS and the Racine Unified School District could have schools eligible for transfer](#) into the program.
- Statutes require DPI to annually publish the [School and School District Accountability Report](#) by September. DPI indicated that it is not possible to publish this report by September and did not publish the 2016 report until November 17, 2016.

Recommendations

We include recommendations that the [Milwaukee County Executive notify](#) the Governor and the mayor of the City of Milwaukee that the program commissioner position is vacant, and that [DPI either comply with statutes by annually publishing the School and School District Accountability Report](#) by September or again request that the Legislature modify statutes to provide it with additional time to publish this report.