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Number 1

Welcome to the American Federation for Children's Myth Busters, a weekly brief setting the educational choice record straight.

MYTH:

"Milwaukee private choice schools don't perform any better than Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS)."

AMERICAN FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN MYTH BUSTERS:

This myth is based solely on a snapshot results comparison of choice students and MPS students on the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination (WKCE). (Another myth, incidentally, is that choice students don't take the same tests as public school students. In fact, they both take the same state exams.)

Snapshots aren't as informative as longitudinal studies. In order to understand the impact of private school choice on students over time, the Republican Legislature and Democratic Governor Jim Doyle enacted an independent longitudinal study (School Choice Demonstration Project) via 2005 Wisconsin Act 125 that compared achievement between a sample of Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) and MPS students.

- [The results](#) from the final School Choice Demonstration Project report: Students attending private schools through the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program graduated high school, got accepted to college, and *stayed* in college at rates 4 to 7 percentage points higher than their MPS peers.

Also, the parents of 25,500 students in Wisconsin's private school choice programs cannot be wrong. They send their children to private choice schools because they have high expectations for their children and for a number of other reasons, including small class sizes, a safe learning environment, and a faith-based education.

- The truth is there are high-performing MPS institutions and MPCP schools. Policymakers should examine the high-performing ones and ask their leaders how they are transforming lives and how we can help them expand. Below are just a *few* of the high-performing MPCP schools:
 - ✓ [Eastbrook Academy](#) (K4-12) is perhaps one of the most diverse schools in all of Milwaukee and also boasts some of the most impressive academic achievement and attainment numbers in all of *Wisconsin*.

- *The Washington Post's* “High School Challenge” study selected Eastbrook as the top-ranked high school in Wisconsin
 - About 50 percent of students are African American & 40 percent are white
 - 91.6 percent and 92.7 percent of its choice students scored advanced or proficient in reading and math, respectively, on the state’s 2011 exams
 - Eastbrook Academy High School boasts a 100 percent graduation rate, 100 percent college entrance exam participation (Class of 2010 posted a 29.3% average ACT score), and 100 percent college acceptance rate
 - Read more: <http://www.jsonline.com/news/education/164159746.html>
- ✓ [St. Marcus School](#) (K3-8) serves 670 predominantly low-income African American children.
- 70 percent of them live in a single woman household
 - The school’s test scores absolutely buck conventional wisdom with regards to low-income students and academic achievement. As the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* pointed out in 2011, “St. Marcus School, with 89% of its students on vouchers, saw 86% of them score proficient or advanced in reading and 78% score proficient or advanced in math. Both of these percentages are above the state average.”
 - 96 percent of its students have graduated, or are on track to graduate, from high school in four years, and 90 percent of its eighth-grade graduates in 2007 were admitted into college.
 - Read more: <http://www.jsonline.com/news/education/171941071.html>
- ✓ [HOPE Christian Schools](#) (K4-12) students typically arrive testing two or more grades behind where they should be.
- 2011-12’s eighth-graders gained nearly 3.5 years of growth in just two years, according to their TerraNova 3 test results
 - More than 95 percent of HOPE’s students qualify for free and reduced price meals and are enrolled there because of the MPCP
 - HOPE embodies the belief that just because a student has low-income parents doesn’t mean that student cannot achieve: the high school’s last two senior classes each achieved a [100% college acceptance rate](#)
 - Read more: <http://www.jsonline.com/news/education/83850302.html>

They do all of this with just \$6,442 for each student (\$4,207 in state aid and \$2,235 from the MPS levy), compared to over \$15,000/student in MPS.

Finally, in addition to studies and test scores, policymakers should also consider how parents (constituents) feel about their schools’ performance.

- According to RPCP parent surveys, 96.9 percent of parents with children attending private schools thanks to the Racine Parental Choice Program (RPCP) are either completely (89.1 %) or mostly satisfied (7.8%) with their child’s new educational environment. In contrast, a May 2011 poll found that only 1.6 percent of Racine voters with children under the age of 18 gave the district’s public schools an ‘A’, while nearly a quarter (24.4 percent) gave them a ‘D’ or ‘F’.