

Research Brief

Slight decline in use of private school tuition vouchers in 2010-2011

Loss of schools results in fewer students

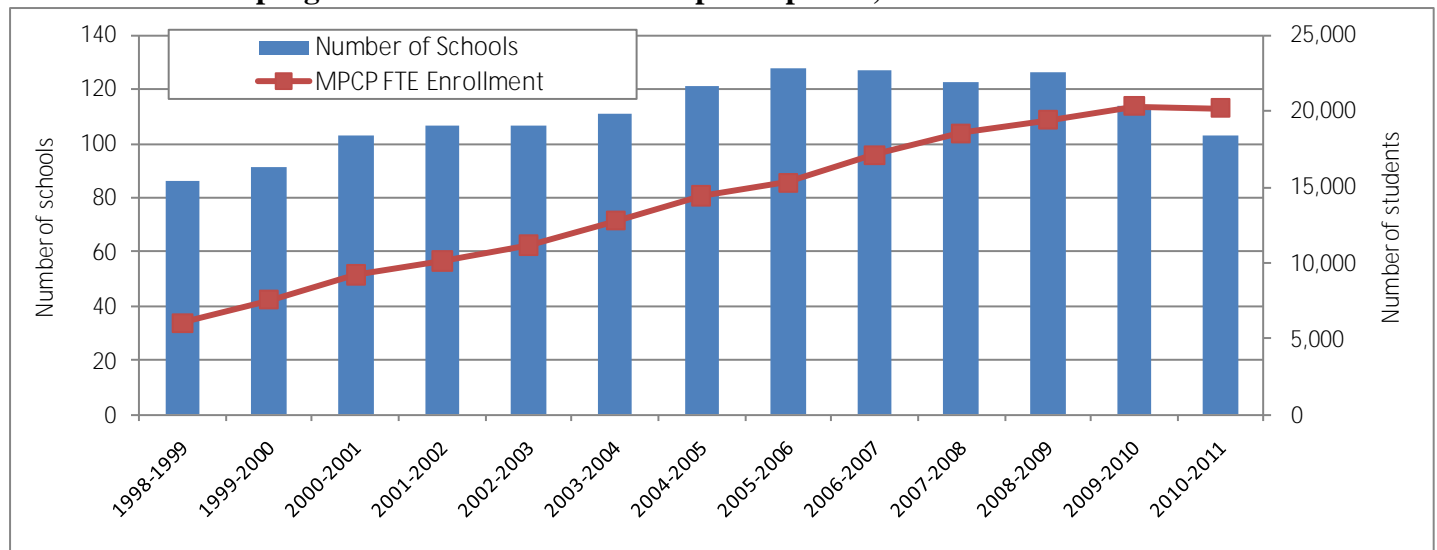
For the first time since its 1998 expansion to include religious schools, enrollment in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) did not grow in the 2010-2011 school year. Currently, 20,996 private school students receive taxpayer-funded tuition vouchers (of \$6,442 per pupil), a decrease of 66 students over last year.

Chart 1 shows program enrollment since the 1998-1999 school year, as well as the number of participating private schools. The data suggest the slight decline in voucher use is related to a decline in the number of MPCP schools. In fact, 103 schools participate in the program this year, compared to a high of 128 schools in the 2005-2006 school year.

The decline in schools results from fewer new schools joining the program, as well as a significant number of schools leaving the program or closing altogether. Over the past decade, an average of 10 new schools joined the program each year, compared to four new schools in 2010-2011. In addition, 12 schools no longer are participating in the program as of 2010-2011, and two Catholic schools have merged in the past year (**Chart 2**).

The four new schools have a total enrollment of just 66 voucher students, which fails to offset the loss of 1,801 voucher seats from school closings and school withdrawals from the program. Voucher use data are collected in the aggregate and do not indicate how many individual students may have left the program and been replaced by students new to the program since the last school year.

Chart 1: Voucher program enrollment and school participation, 1998-1999 to 2010-2011



Major findings

The Public Policy Forum’s 13th annual census of Milwaukee Parental Choice Program schools finds:

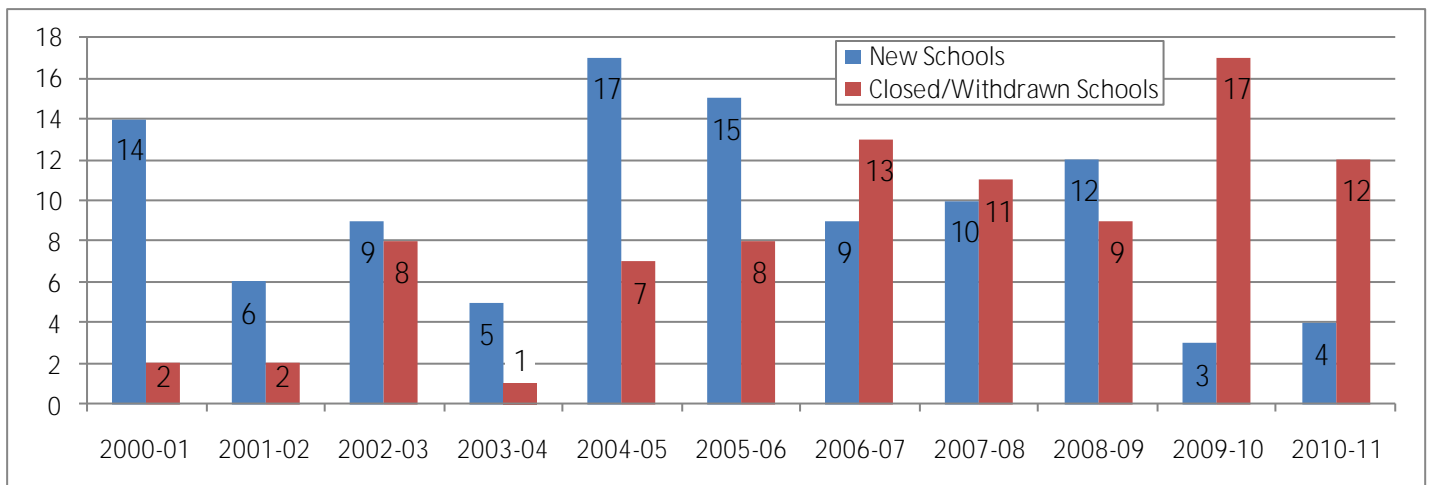
- MPCP enrollment decreased by 66 students to 20,996. This is the first decrease in voucher use since the program was expanded in 1998-1999.
- The per-pupil voucher amount remains the same as in 2009-2010 at \$6,442. The total cost of the program in 2010-2011 based on full-time voucher students in September 2010 is \$130 million.
- The four schools new to the program in 2010-2011 enroll a total of 66 voucher users. Twelve schools closed or left the program after the 2009-10 school year, resulting in a loss of 1,801 voucher seats.
- Total enrollment (voucher users plus other students) in the private schools participating in the program decreased 15% from 2009-10 to 2010-11, a reflection of the decline in participating schools.
- Seven grade levels had a decrease in voucher student enrollment from 2009-10 to 2010-2011, while the largest grade-level increase was in K4.
- The 10 largest schools in the program accounted for 35.5% of the total enrollment.

Table 1: MPCP by the numbers, 2010-2011

	Number of schools	Percent of MPCP enrollment
Schools	103	--
<i>Elementary schools</i>	11	2.6%
<i>Kindergarten through 8th grade</i>	64	57.3%
<i>Middle schools</i>	1	0.6%
<i>Middle through high schools</i>	1	1.1%
<i>High schools</i>	12	12.9%
<i>Kindergarten through high schools</i>	14	25.6%
New schools	4	0.3%
Religious schools	76	84.4%
<i>Catholic</i>	25	33.2%
<i>Lutheran</i>	25	25.5%
<i>Christian, non-denominational</i>	15	12.9%
<i>Other religion</i>	11	12.8%
Non-religious schools	14	15.6%
Accredited	84	96.1%
Working toward accreditation	17	8.5%
Schools with independent boards	83	73.0%
Standardized tests	95	95.4%
<i>WKCE</i>	84	88.5%
<i>ITBS</i>	32	36.2%
<i>Other</i>	26	24.0%

Last year, we found the new, more stringent accreditation requirements for participating schools were having an impact on the number of schools in the program. This year, we find the reduction in participating schools has resulted in a slight decrease in overall enrollment and voucher use. Meanwhile, the largest MPCP schools continue to gain market share, with the 10 largest schools now enrolling more than a third of the city’s voucher students.

Chart 2: Annual turnover in MPCP-participating schools, 2000-2001 to 2010-2011



Enrollment trends

Chart 3 shows the total school enrollment (voucher users plus other students) reported to us by the MPCP-participating private schools. Total enrollment decreased 15% from 2009-2010 to 2010-2011, while voucher use decreased 0.3%. On the aggregate, 81% of students in the MPCP schools use vouchers.

The decreases in total enrollment and voucher use both are more likely related to the reduced number of participating schools than to a decline in private school enrollment in general. In fact, the total number of Milwaukee children ages four to nine attending private schools is estimated to have grown slightly in the past year (**Chart 4**).

Chart 5 shows the number of voucher students by grade level as compared to the number of schools offering each grade level. Seven grade levels saw a drop in the number of voucher students since 2009-2010. The largest increase in voucher use was in four-year-old Kindergarten, which saw an increase of 159 voucher students.

The variance in voucher use by grade level is mostly related to the number of participating schools offering that grade level. The smaller number of high schools participating in the voucher program, combined with Milwaukee’s general decline in enrollment at older grade levels, causes the high school grades to have the fewest voucher students.

Chart 3: Total enrollment vs. voucher use

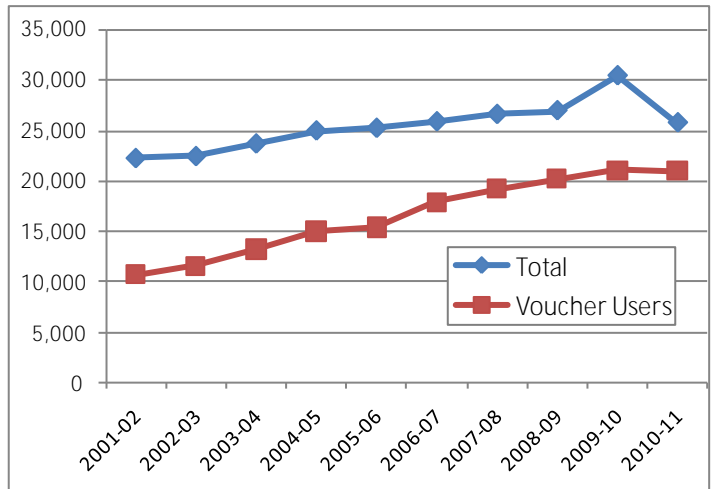
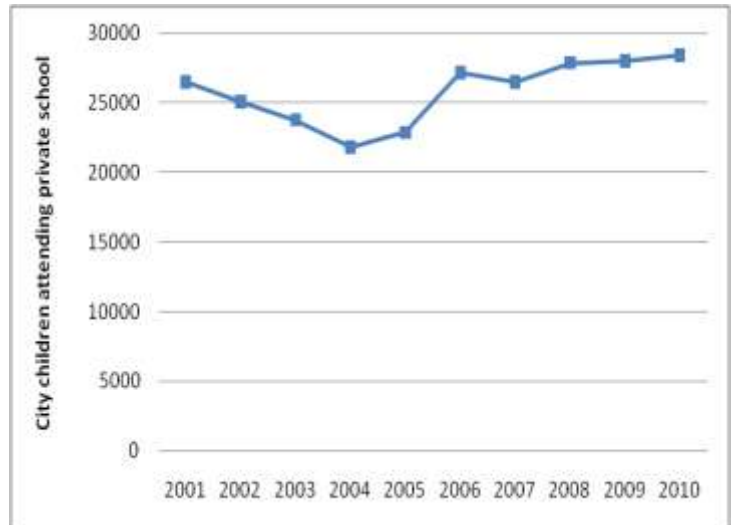


Chart 4: Milwaukee children attending private schools



Source: Annual MPS Child Census, children ages 4-19

Chart 5: MPCP by enrollment by grade level and number of schools offering each grade level

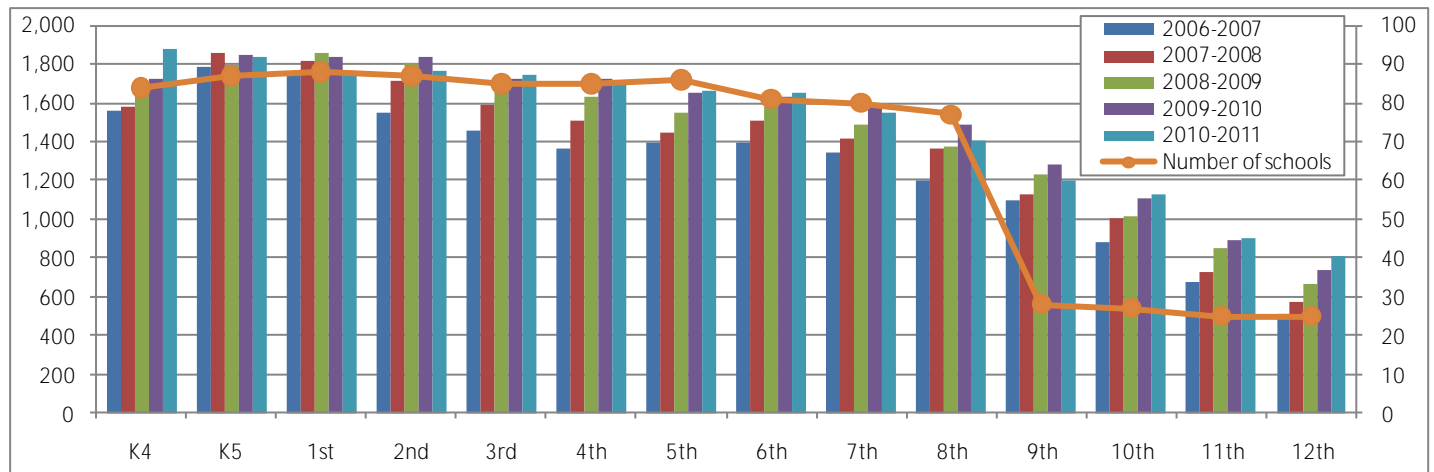


Table 2: Schools gaining and losing most voucher users, 2009-10 to 2010-11

School Name	Years in MPCP	2009-10 Headcount	2010-11 Headcount	Difference	Change in payment
Ceria M. Travis Academy, Inc.	14	401	659	258	\$ 1,662,036
St. Anthony School	13	1,277	1,476	199	\$ 1,281,958
Atlas Preparatory Academy, Inc.	10	814	966	152	\$ 979,184
HOPE Christian School: Fortis	6	166	276	110	\$ 708,620
Emmaus Lutheran School	13	145	235	90	\$ 579,780
Sherman Park Lutheran School/Preschool	13	103	169	66	\$ 425,172
Salam School	13	517	573	56	\$ 360,752
Texas Buffkin Christian Academy	13	81	136	55	\$ 354,310
The Margaret Howard Christian Leadership Inst.	3	54	107	53	\$ 341,426
Siloah Lutheran School	11	166	216	50	\$ 322,100
Yeshiva Elementary School	13	158	142	-16	\$ (103,072)
Pius XI High School*	13	183	167	-16	\$ (103,072)
Greater Holy Temple Christian Academy	8	751	734	-17	\$ (109,514)
HOPE Christian High School	7	326	307	-19	\$ (122,398)
Travis Technology High School	5	231	208	-23	\$ (148,166)
St. Joan Antida High School	13	303	270	-33	\$ (212,586)
St. Catherine School*	13	177	141	-36	\$ (231,912)
Parklawn Christian Leadership Academy	14	263	197	-66	\$ (425,172)
Mills Christian Academy	3	150	45	-105	\$ (676,410)
Dr. Brenda Noach Choice School	10	170	62	-108	\$ (695,736)

Bold indicates was in top ten for change in voucher users last year.

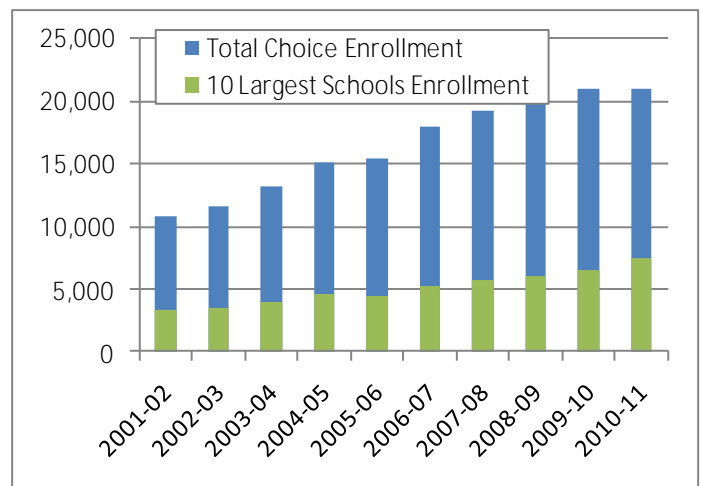
* Indicates was in bottom ten for change in voucher users last year.

School size

There is wide variation in the number of voucher students by school, ranging from a low of nine voucher students at two schools, to 1,476 voucher students at St. Anthony School. The 10 schools with the largest number of voucher students make up 36% of the total MPCP program enrollment in 2010-2011 (**Chart 6**). This “market share” is higher now than ever before.

Table 2 shows the biggest gainers and losers among individual schools in voucher students from 2009-2010 to 2010-2011. Three of the 10 largest gainers from last year were in the top 10 again this year (Ceria M. Travis Academy, St. Anthony School, and HOPE Christian School: Fortis), while two schools in the bottom 10 last year remained in the bottom ten again this year (Pius XI High School and St. Catherine School). Two schools that were among the top 10 gainers last year now are among the top 10 losers (Travis Technology High School and Dr. Brenda Noah Choice School).

Chart 6: Market share of largest MPCP schools



Ceria M. Travis Academy gained 258 voucher users in 2010-2011, the most of any school. The second largest gainer school, St. Anthony School, has enrolled the most voucher students for each of the past six years.

The average MPCP school enrolls 206 voucher users; 79% of the average school’s total enrollment uses vouchers.

Table 3: MPCP school meal programs

No. of schools	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner
Served in classroom	13	9	1
Served in cafeteria	49	76	2
Served in gymnasium	4	5	1
Served in other location	3	1	0
Do not provide	26	3	89
N=	95	94	93

School meal programs

For the first time this year, we asked schools in the MPCP about their school meal programs. Of the 95 schools responding to this question, 69 report serving breakfast to their students, with more than two-thirds serving breakfast in the cafeteria (**Table 3**).

School lunch also is available in most schools. Of the 94 schools that answered this question, all but three serve lunch. Lunch also is served most often in the school cafeteria.

In addition, we asked schools to report the number of students eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunch. Eighty-one of the 103 schools in the program answered this question. On the aggregate, 76% of the students in those schools are eligible for free lunch and another 7% qualify for reduced-price lunch. The percentage of students using vouchers in those schools is 95%, indicating that most of the voucher users also receive discounted lunch.

Finally, at the request of the Hunger Task Force, we asked school administrators to report the proportion of their students they have observed complaining about being hungry during the day. Of the 83 schools answering that question, 43% report none of their students complaining about being hungry, and 41% report about a quarter of their students complaining of hunger. One school reported that all students in the school are hungry during the day.

School Demographics

Ninety-two schools report the racial makeup of their student populations in our census. Those reports indicate that 85% of the students attending MPCP schools belong to a minority racial group. African-American students make up 56% of all students in MPCP schools, while Hispanic students comprise 23% and white students comprise 15% of the student population.

Table 4 shows that 67 schools report having student enrollments that are 90% or more minority. **Table 5**, however, indicates that the racial composition of the teaching staffs in MPCP schools does not mirror the racial composition of the student populations. In fact, 47 schools have staffs with fewer than 25% minority teachers. The 88 schools reporting the racial demographics of their teachers employ a total of 1,560 teachers, 393 of whom (25%) belong to racial minority groups.

Table 4: Racial makeup of MPCP schools, 2010-11

% Minority	Schools
100%	31
90-99.9%	36
70-89.9%	8
50-69.9%	4
<50%	13

Table 5: Teacher vs. student racial demographics

Student Minority %	Teacher Minority %				
	0%-	25%-	50%-	75%-	100%
100%	5	5	4	7	7
75%-99.9%	25	5	7	3	3
50%-74.9%	4	0	0	0	0
0%-49.5%	13	0	0	0	0

Student Achievement

As of the 2010-2011 school year, MPCP schools are required to administer the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE) to all voucher students in grades 3-8, as well as grade 10.¹ The WKCE is the same exam administered by all public and charter schools in the state. There are 95 MPCP schools offering at least one of the grade levels requiring testing. Of these schools, 84 now administer the WKCE (**Chart 7**).

Until this year, schools could administer the WKCE at their option, but had to purchase the exam and were not required to report student scores to the public. In 2009-2010, 51 MPCP schools opted to give the WKCE to at least some of their students. In addition, in the past, many schools administered more than one type of exam. Use of exams other than the WKCE dropped this year with the start of the new testing rules.

MPCP schools have reported their fall 2010 scores to the state; the scores will be released along with public and charter school scores in the spring. For aggregate data on student achievement in the program, see the School Choice Demonstration Project website: www.uark.edu/ua/der/SCDP.html.

Student achievement also is commonly measured by high school graduation rates. While we do not collect graduation data, the attrition in student enrollment over the four years of high school can be measured, providing a sense of the maximum number of graduates that could be expected for a given class. The current class of MPCP seniors consists of 810 voucher students. Four years ago, there were 1,125 freshman voucher students among the class of 2011. Thus, the *aggregate* attrition rate

1. Not all schools indicate they have administered the WKCE this year, despite this requirement. Some may not offer the grade levels in which testing is required. In addition, individual students are allowed to opt out of the WKCE testing. There is no limit as to how many students per MPCP school may opt out. Thus, some schools may have seen all their voucher students opt out of the state tests.

Chart 7: Use of standardized tests, 2009 and 2010

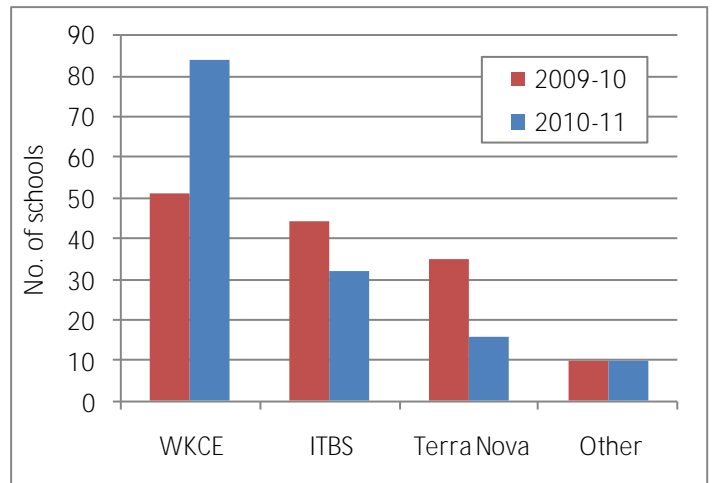
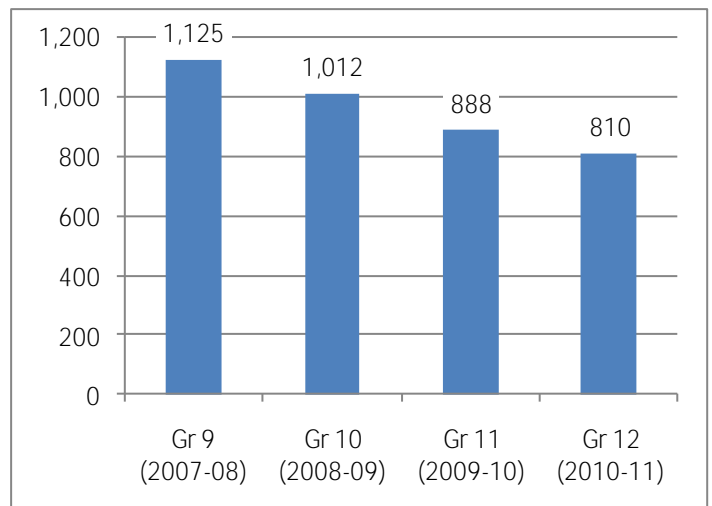


Chart 8: Attrition among class of 2011



among voucher students in high school for this class is 28%. (If individual students were tracked, the actual attrition rate might be higher.) The attrition rate reflects students who have dropped out of school, as well as students who have transferred to different schools and/or who are still in school but are no longer eligible for vouchers.

The attrition rate among the class of 2011 is lower than that of the class of 2010, which saw a 33% drop in voucher enrollment from 9th to 12th grade. Attrition among Milwaukee’s public school students is higher, with a rate of 39% in the MPS class of 2011.

Accrediting agencies

Schools participating in the MPCP in 2010-2011 are accredited by 14 different accrediting agencies. Six of the schools in the program did not answer the accrediting question on our survey, but of the remaining 97 schools, the Wisconsin Religious and Independent Schools Accreditation (WRISA) agency accredits 43. Half of all voucher users attend schools accredited by WRISA (**Chart 9**).

The next most common agency is the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, with 15% of all voucher users attending archdiocesan schools.

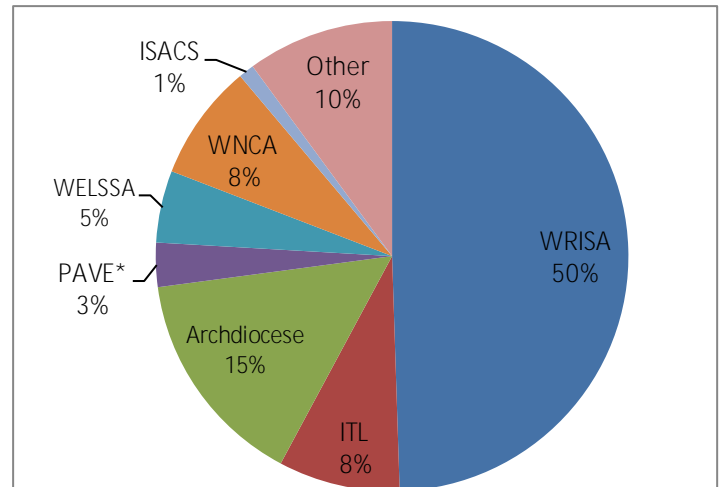
PAVE, an organization originally founded to provide scholarships to private school students, was listed as the only accrediting agency for seven schools in the program in 2010-11. PAVE is included as an approved accrediting agency in state regulations for those schools partnering with PAVE, but PAVE does not consider itself an accrediting agency and urges schools to seek accreditation from other agencies.

Thirteen MPCP schools report they are currently working toward accreditation. Under a relatively recent state law change, newly opened schools have three years to become accredited in order to continue participating in the MPCP. Of the 13 schools that left the program in the past year, seven had not yet achieved accreditation. The high number of schools leaving in 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 likely reflects the new, stricter accreditation requirements.

Total program costs

The voucher amount has not changed since 2009-2010 and remains \$6,442 per pupil this year. With 20,189 full-time students using vouchers as of September 2010, the total cost of the program this year will be an estimated \$130,060,115. Since the choice program's inception in 1990-1991, a total of 168,660 full-time students have received tuition vouchers, at a total cost of \$1.1 billion over the life of the program.

Chart 9: MPCP enrollment by accrediting agency



Methodology

The Forum's census questionnaire is mailed annually in October to all schools registered with the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) as participating in the MPCP. Follow-up calls and visits are made in an attempt to achieve a response rate of 100%. In 2010-2011, six schools refused to complete the census questionnaire: Atlas Preparatory Academy, Mustard Seed International School, Margaret Howard Christian Leadership Institute, Pius XI High School, Milwaukee Lutheran High School, and Right Step, Inc. Data for those schools were obtained from DPI, from prior census participation, or from newspaper articles.

In addition, to ensure reliability, to the extent possible, data provided by the schools are verified by comparison to DPI data. Where the data conflict, DPI data are used.

**For a directory of schools
participating in the program,
please go to:**

www.publicpolicyforum.org/2011voucherposter.htm