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For immediate release

**New regulations impacting school choice program:
School closures up, number of new schools down**

MILWAUKEE, Wisconsin – *February 19, 2010* – In its 12th annual census of schools participating in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), the Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum found that recent regulation changes have had an impact on the number of schools participating in the program.

“Between the 2008-09 and 2009-10 school years, the program saw far fewer new schools join and many other schools close or drop out of the program,” says Anneliese Dickman, Forum Research Director. “Thirteen of the 14 schools that closed were not accredited, which was a new requirement that became fully phased-in last year.”

The Forum’s analysis also found that a rule put in place for the 2009-10 school year that requires schools new to the program to obtain pre-accreditation seems to have dramatically reduced the number of new schools this year.

“Over the past decade the program was averaging 11 new schools a year, but this fall just three schools joined the program. In addition, in prior years many, if not most, of the new schools were start-up schools, but the three schools joining the program this year are all established schools,” notes Dickman. “The pre-accreditation requirement, which was intended to ensure new schools have a solid operational and educational footing, seems to be having an impact.”

This year’s Forum report also examines the potential impact of new regulations requiring schools to administer state standardized tests and to report MPCP student test scores. Starting in the 2010-2011 school year, all MPCP schools will be required to administer to MPCP students the same state standardized tests as public schools.

“Nearly all schools in the program administer standardized tests and 37% of schools administer the Wisconsin state test. This rule will require the two-thirds of schools that use a test other than the state test to either switch tests or to add in the state test,” explains Dickman.

In addition, this August schools will, for the first time, be required to report MPCP student test scores to the state Department of Public Instruction. Of the 112 schools in the program this year, 102 administer at least one type of standardized test and are expected to be able to report test scores in the fall.

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.

For the full report, complete 2009-10 data, and a directory of all participating schools, please visit 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.

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