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CFPA Policy Snapshot

School Choice Vouchers in Green Bay:

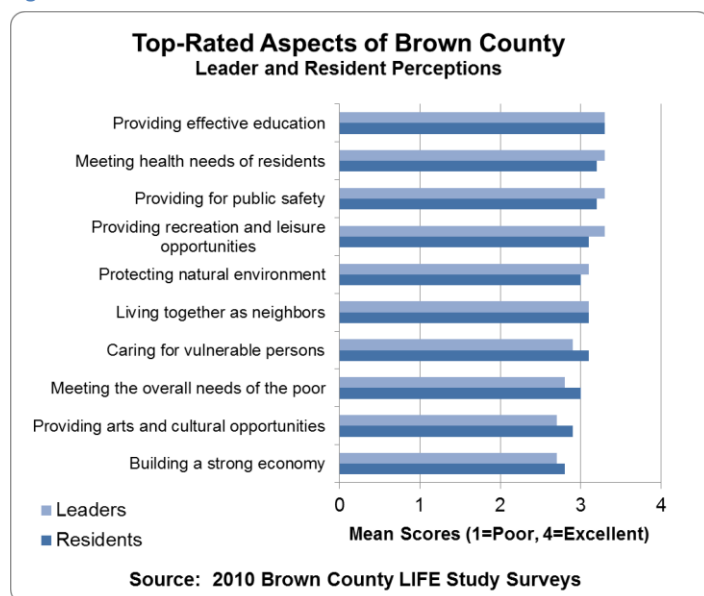
Factors to Consider

March 2013

Introduction and Purpose

Education is highly valued in Brown County, and highly regarded. According to 2011 LIFE Study surveys,¹ residents and leaders gave education the highest score among the ten quality of life sectors examined (Figure 1). On average, community residents rated as “Good” the area’s ability to meet their family’s education needs and the quality of public and private schools in Brown County.² How should Brown County maintain this quality in education? How can the community ensure that every child has the opportunity for a good education? What policies should be implemented so that this feature of our area’s lifestyle remains strong?

Figure 1



With \$73 million in new state funds over two years, Governor Scott Walker has proposed to expand the school choice voucher program to other metropolitan areas in Wisconsin, including Green Bay.³ It would be phased in over time, and initially would make 500 vouchers available statewide in its first year. If

implemented, this policy would be a major change in local education, with many dollars in current and future state funding at stake. What issues should leaders consider in making this significant decision? At this time, the decision will be made by state legislators, as the proposal is part of Governor Walker’s budget.⁴

The goal of this report is to help area decision-makers and residents understand factors related to the need for, and potential impact of, a Choice program in Green Bay. With this Snapshot Report, the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay Center for Public Affairs (CFPA) provides an unbiased assessment of key aspects of our local education system and how the school choice voucher proposal might impact it.

We have utilized existing, publicly-available data to analyze the following topics:

- What is a “School Choice Voucher Program”?
- What can be learned from the existing Choice program in Milwaukee and Racine?
- How well are students performing in Green Bay Area Public Schools?
- What private school opportunities are available in the Green Bay area, how well are students performing, and what impact would the Choice program have on private schools?
- How might the Choice program impact the Green Bay Area Public School district?
- Does Open Enrollment currently provide students with a viable option to change schools if they so desire?

We have obtained information from the GRACE Catholic school system and Green Bay Area Public School District when needed to clarify the information we present. All other information that we present here is available from existing public sources. Our conclusion outlines what we believe are key factors for the Green Bay area to consider about the school choice voucher proposal.

¹ Warner, Lora & Wegge, David. 2011 *Brown County LIFE Study*, 2011,7. Surveys conducted in fall, 2010, prior to the 2011-2013 WI budget debate. The LIFE Study was funded by the Brown County United Way, the Greater Green Bay Community Foundation, and the Green Bay Area Chamber of Commerce.

² Ibid, 53.

³ Bauer, S. *Walker’s plan: Expand school voucher program to Green Bay*. Associated Press, February 18, 2013.

⁴ WI Department of Administration, *Summary of GPR Appropriations*, 2013.

What is a “School Choice Voucher Program?”

Below, we describe who is eligible and how the program works.

Who is eligible?

Eligibility for the Choice program is calculated using the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Initially established for low income students, eligibility has been expanded to middle-class families earning up to three times the Federal Poverty Level (or 300% of FPL) in Milwaukee and Racine. Last year, in Milwaukee and Racine, a family of four could earn up to \$69,801 and be eligible for Choice,⁵ compared to \$29,965 for Free and Reduced Lunch program eligibility.⁶

In the Governor’s current budget proposal, new voucher recipients must be selected on a random basis among all applicants. The private school can give preference to “pupils, or siblings of pupils, who attended the private school during the school year prior to [when] the application is being made,”⁷ and also to siblings of students who attend the private school.⁸ In 2011 and 2012 in Milwaukee, as the income-eligibility threshold increased, most of the new voucher users already attended a private school. The same was true in Racine as the program began.⁹

Aside from eligible private school students, if the eligibility criteria utilized by Milwaukee and Racine were applied in Green Bay, many families that reside in the Green Bay Area Public School (GBAPS) district would qualify. According to the most recent U. S. Census estimates, in the City of Green Bay, the median income for families with children was \$50,793.¹⁰ Therefore, based on family income, considerably more than half of all Green Bay families with children would earn below the 2011-2012 cut-off of \$69,801 and would be eligible for School Choice vouchers to attend a private school.

How does the Choice program work?

According to the Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau,¹¹ “under the choice program, state funds are used to pay for the cost of eligible children to attend private school” of their choice. Currently, a Choice school receives up to \$6,442 for each student who enrolls using a voucher.¹² The Governor’s 2013-2014 budget proposes to increase the amount of each voucher to \$7,050 for students through eighth grade and \$7,856 for high school.¹³

In addition, if the child previously attended a public school, the public school district receives less state funding for that child, although it still receives federal and local funding. Moreover, the public school district does not count voucher recipients in its aid equalization formula, resulting in further funding reduction. The district may receive special aid allocation from the state.

Students using a voucher could be transported to their Choice private schools by the public school district. By law, public school districts are required to provide transportation for students who live in the district and attend private schools in that district.¹⁴

What can be learned from the Choice program in Milwaukee and Racine?

The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) began in 1990 in order to provide better educational opportunities for low income students who were attending poorly performing public schools. It has grown to nearly 25,000 students (larger than all but two Wisconsin school districts--Milwaukee and Madison), with \$154.8 million flowing to Choice schools through vouchers.¹⁵ Racine, where the program began in 2011, enrolled the maximum 520 students this year at a cost

⁵ Bauer, S. 2013.

⁶ WI Department of Public Instruction. http://fns.dpi.wi.gov/fns_fincou1#ig

⁷ 2013 Assembly Bill 40,

<https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2013/related/proposals/ab40.pdf>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Dickman, A. and Schmidt, J., 2013.

¹⁰ State and County Quick Facts, Brown County, U.S. Census.

¹¹ Russ Kava and Layla Merrifield, *Informational Paper 24: State Aid to School Districts*, Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau Report, January 24, 2013, 15.

¹² Bauer, S. 2013.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ WI Statute 121.51,

<http://docs.legis.wi.gov/statutes/statutes/121.pdf#page=8>.

¹⁵ Dickman, A., Schmidt, J. *Choice Schools have much in common with WPS, including student performance*. Public Policy Forum 101(1), 2013, 12.

of \$3.2 million, which, again, went to Choice schools rather than Racine Unified School District.¹⁶

What kinds of schools participated in the Choice program in Milwaukee and Racine?

One-hundred thirteen private schools participated in the Choice program in Milwaukee in 2012-2013, 85% of which were religious, and 59% of which were grades K-8.¹⁷ Private schools that participate vary widely in size: two schools enrolled fewer than 10 students and another enrolled almost 1,300 students in 2010-2011.¹⁸ This year, according to the Public Policy Forum in Milwaukee, “a major contributing factor to this year’s [enrollment] growth is voucher use in schools *new to the program*”¹⁹ (italics added). The Public Policy Forum found that Choice schools “are serving high concentrations of poor, low-performing, minority students,” similar to the situation in Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS).²⁰

Is student achievement better in Milwaukee and Racine Choice schools than in public schools?

Results are available only for recent years: until 2010-2011, Choice schools did not participate in Wisconsin standardized achievement tests. Results of last year’s Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE) were just released for students in grades 3-8 and 10. Figure 2 shows district level combined scores for 2011-2012. As a group, Choice students in Milwaukee and Racine performed lower than their Milwaukee Public School and Racine Public School peers on Reading and Math achievement tests. To compare, GBAPS district-level combined scores were 75% Proficient or Advanced in Reading and 77% in Math.²¹

According to the Public Policy Forum, for the years 2010-2011 and 2011-2012, “[Choice] students earned

¹⁶ Dickman, A., Schmidt, J., 2013, 13.
¹⁷ Ibid, 1. Readers should note that a large percentage of students were not tested since not all grades were tested; many voucher recipients are in early grades.
¹⁸ Dickman, A. and Schmidt, J., *Significant Growth in School Choice*. Public Policy Forum, 2012, 4.
¹⁹ Ibid, 7.
²⁰ Ibid, 9.
²¹ Wisconsin Information Network for Successful Schools, 2011-2012.

Figure 2

Reading and Math Achievement Scores of Choice and Public School Students in Selected Districts ²²		
Student Group	Reading Proficient/Advanced	Math Proficient/Advanced
Milwaukee Choice Program	57%	41%
Milwaukee Public Schools	60%	50%
Racine Choice Program	56%	53%
Racine Public Schools	70%	62%
Wisconsin average	82%	78%

proficient scores at a lower rate than MPS students in [math and reading], with the exception of 8th grade reading, where the rates were nearly identical.”²³ The report presents a listing of achievement test results in all Choice schools, and one can observe wide variation in student proficiency rates across Choice schools.

Similar results were shown in Racine. “The aggregate Choice proficiency rates are lower than the aggregate public school proficiency rates,”²⁴ (although in Racine, the number of Choice students tested was very small).

A five year, comprehensive evaluation of Milwaukee’s Choice program was released early in 2012. It found that newly-enrolling Choice students were academically behind when they began. If true, it might explain why the Racine Choice student scores are so far below the public schools. However, it cannot be used to explain the current lower scores of Choice students in Milwaukee, where the program has existed since 1990. In both Choice and public schools in Milwaukee, students that were tested included students that were new to the school as well as those who had previously attended.

²² Dickman, A. and Schmidt, J., 2013, 3.
²³ Ibid, 3.
²⁴ Ibid, 13.

The comprehensive evaluation also found that students in the Choice program were 4% to 7% more likely to graduate from high school and go on to attend college than a similar group of their peers who remained in the MPS. It compared achievement test scores of a matched sample of Choice students and MPS students, finding no conclusive difference in student achievement.²⁵

How did the Choice Program affect private and public schools in Milwaukee and Racine?

In 2012-2013, 113 schools are participating in the Milwaukee Choice program for the entire year, earning \$154.8 million in state funding through vouchers.²⁶ With no cap on Choice enrollment and expanded eligibility for middle class students, many Choice schools in Milwaukee have experienced significant increases in enrollment and resulting revenues. In Racine, the program will remove all limits to enrollment beginning in 2013-2014, so the same pattern is likely.²⁷

Each year, many *new* private and charter schools participate in the Choice program: almost half of new Choice students this year (47%) were in *new* Choice schools, which had just begun accepting vouchers.²⁸

In its 2013 Research Brief, the Public Policy Forum in Milwaukee reported that for the two most recent school years combined, 21 private schools began participating in Milwaukee's Choice program, while 11 discontinued.²⁹ Over the past 10 years on average, 10 private schools joined Choice while another nine discontinued each year. Eight of the nine schools that had closed in 2012-2013 had been in existence four years or less. Discontinuations were mostly due to closure of the school, failure to comply with testing requirements, or withdrawal from the program.³⁰

The five-year, comprehensive evaluation examined a sample of participating private schools to study the impact of the Choice program. The evaluation found that:

- Many Choice students entered the new school significantly behind academically;
- Choice schools varied in the resources available, leadership, and teaching quality: those that were more successful tended to have been in existence longer and have larger enrollment;
- Participation in the Choice program over time had changed the demographics of the student bodies at Choice schools, making them more diverse, approaching the make-up of that of the area's public schools.³¹

The evaluation did not address how the Choice program impacted MPS, an important consideration in evaluating the policy's overall efficacy. Figure 3 shows that MPS has decreased staffing levels since 2004, with a 30% decline in teaching staff and a 20% total FTE decrease.

Figure 3

Milwaukee Public School District Staffing Levels, 2004-2012 FTE Staff by Category ³²			
Classification	2004 FTE	2012 FTE	% Change
Administration	421	357	-15%
Aides	1,707	1,186	-31%
Pupil Services	418	508	22%
Teachers	6,150	4,310	-30%
Other	2,571	2,639	3%
Total	11,268	8,999	-20%

While reducing staffing is a significant way to cut the costs of public schools, many other fixed costs, such as facilities, transportation, technology, and others, cannot be reduced by a district. No information could be found whether public schools in Milwaukee have closed due to the Choice program.

²⁵ Wolf, Patrick J. *The Comprehensive Longitudinal Evaluation of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program: Summary of Final Reports*. School Choice Demonstration Project, Department of Education Reform, University of Arkansas, 2012, 2.

²⁶ Dickman, A. and Schmidt, J., 2013, 12.

²⁷ Bauer, S., 2013.

²⁸ Dickman, A. and Schmidt, J., 2013, 7.

²⁹ Dickman, A. and Schmidt, J., 2013, 8.

³⁰ Dickman, A. and Schmidt, J., 2013, 4.

³¹ Stewart, T., Jacob, A., Jensen, L. *School Site Visits: What can we learn from choice schools in Milwaukee? Executive Summary* School Choice Demonstration Project, Department of Education Reform, University of Arkansas, 2012, 2.

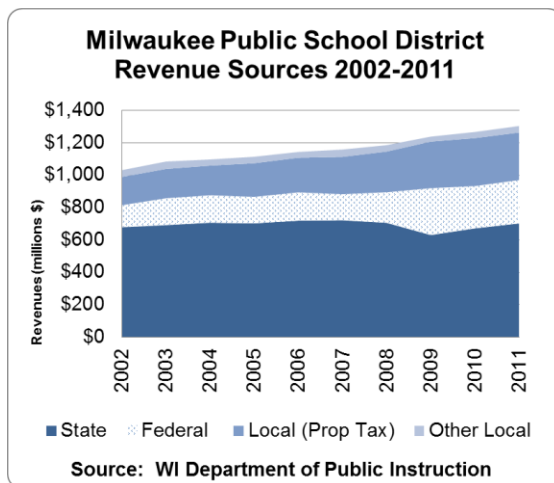
³² Wisconsin 1202 School Staff Report, Public School District 2013.

How did the Choice program impact taxpayers in Milwaukee and Racine?

The comprehensive evaluation cited earlier reported that *Wisconsin* taxpayers have saved money with the Milwaukee Choice program: “the size of the voucher [i.e., state funding] is considerably smaller than per-pupil [funding] allocated to MPS under the revenue limit formula.”³³ While the state provides \$6,442 in funding for each Choice student, it provides \$7,723 for each MPS student. (This does not include consideration of school equalization funding, which is based in part on enrollment.) However, school districts can levy taxes to offset reductions in state aid.³⁴ As a result, *local* property taxes have increased: Milwaukee taxpayers continue to fund a portion of public schools through these levies, providing approximately \$2,300 per MPS student in 2011-2012.³⁵

Funding sources for the Milwaukee Public School District are shown over the past 10 years in Figure 4. In general, revenues have grown, but the sources of the revenue have changed. The solid lower area reveals the relatively flat state funding (due to the Choice program), while the upper, expanding dark area shows the increasing revenues from local sources.³⁶

Figure 4



³³ Costrell, R. *The Fiscal Impact of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, Executive Summary*, School Choice Demonstration Project, Department of Education Reform, University of Arkansas, 2010.

³⁴ Kava, Russ. *Milwaukee and Racine Parental Choice Programs*. Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau. January, 2013.

³⁵ Richards, E. *Tough decisions lie ahead for Wisconsin's school voucher program*. Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, January 30, 2013.

³⁶ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, *School Performance Reports, 2002-2011*.

The state has begun to limit the extent that public school districts can increase revenues: in 2012-2013, state law allowed districts to increase revenues by just \$50 per student.³⁷ The current budget proposes no increases in revenues for public school districts.

Overall, much can be learned from Milwaukee's (and to a lesser degree, Racine's) experiences with the Choice program. First, although four-year graduation rates may be higher for Choice students than their MPS peers, academic achievement is worse among Choice students at this point in time. Student performance seems to vary widely at Choice schools, with some seeing outstanding results and others not.

Second, the Choice program clearly saved *state* taxpayers money (but not *local* property taxpayers). The state portion of funding for MPS has declined through the years, and MPS has increased local property tax levies in order to make up for revenue shortfalls due to Choice. School districts will be much more restricted in their ability to increase revenues under recent and proposed revenue-limiting legislation.

In addition, the program clearly impacted private schools that participated: while new revenues accrued to them, many private schools have had difficulty in participating in Choice, revealed in many incoming and exiting schools each year. This could create an unstable situation in a community.

How well are students performing in Green Bay Area Public Schools?

The major reason that a community would consider adopting a policy such as the Choice program is that it is concerned about the quality of its schools or the achievement of its students. However, the Green Bay community may not be able to make this decision: it will be decided at the state level if the current scenario holds true and Choice funding remains included in the Governor's budget. The Governor proposes expansion

³⁷ Kava, R. and Merrifield, L., 2013, 3.

of the Choice program to districts with 4,000 or more students where at least two school buildings have received low scores on the newly implemented School Report Card (SRC) system.³⁸

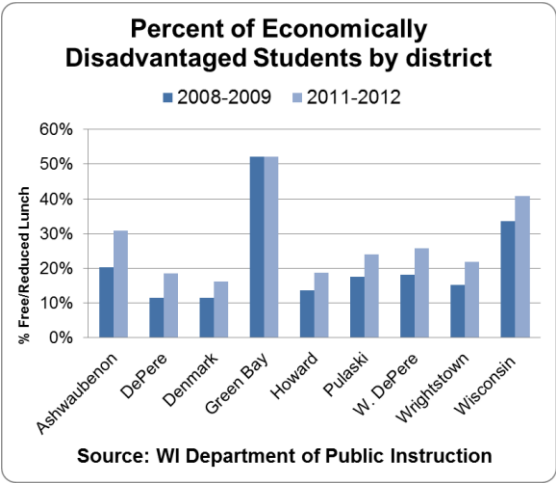
Green Bay Public School District meets these criteria, so this district becomes the focus of our analysis. The mission of the GBAPS district is “We ensure that all students are college, career and community ready, inspired to succeed in our diverse community.”³⁹

The following sections will:

- describe the demographics of Green Bay Area Public School (GBAPS) students
- review student achievement test scores and graduation rates
- describe the GBAPS results for their English Language Learning students (ELL)
- review the “School Report Card” system, the basis for earmarking GBAPS for the Choice program, and
- analyze the performance of low-income students, the focus for the Choice program.

In Brown County, there are eight school districts which, in total, enrolled 43,172 students in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade in 2011-2012. The GBAPS district is the largest in the county, enrolling about 48% of that total, or 20,636 students.⁴⁰

Figure 5



³⁸ Bauer, S. *Walker’s plan*, 2013.
³⁹ Retrieved from GBAPS website, www.gbaps.org, February 26, 2013.
⁴⁰ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, School Performance Reports, 2002-2011.

Figure 5 also shows that the GBAPS district enrolled the highest percentage of economically disadvantaged students in Brown County in 2011-2012, with 52.1% (10,751) of students meeting that classification.⁴¹

What are the achievement test results of GBAPS students?

The ability to read proficiently at a young age is a key learning milestone that contributes to a child’s future academic success. Figure 6 shows that in 2011-2012 (the most current data available), 73% of GBAPS students read proficiently, up from 72% in 2008-2009, but below Wisconsin’s average of 81%.

Figure 6

Achievement Scores of GBAPS and Wisconsin students Percent Proficient/Advanced ⁴²							
		Reading		Mathematics		Science	
		2008-2009	2011-2012	2008-2009	2011-2012	2008-2009	2011-2012
4 th Grade	GBAPS	72	73	77	80	67	69
	WI	82	81	81	80	76	77
10 th Grade	GBAPS	75	76	70	68	69	68
	WI	75	82	69	71	72	73

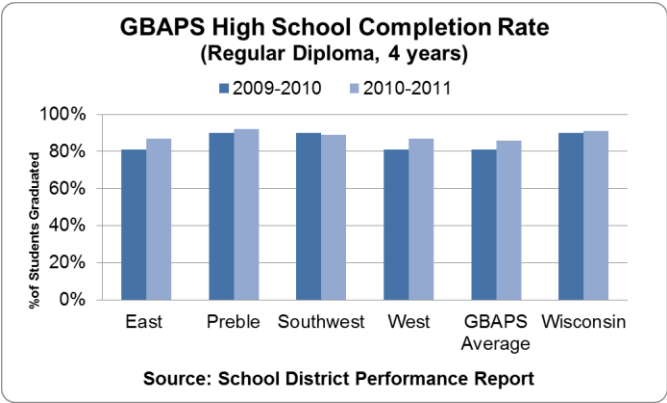
Figure 6 further illustrates that GBAPS fourth-grade math achievement scores matched the state averages in 2011-2012, while science achievement scores had increased but still fell 8% short of the Wisconsin average. For tenth grade, the percent of students proficient or better in reading, math, and science had stayed pretty much the same since 2008-2009, below the statewide average percentage.⁴³ Tenth grade GBAPS students were between 3% and 6% below state averages in Reading, Math, and Science in 2011-2012. Scores remained similar to their 2008-2009 levels.⁴⁴

Figure 7 presents data showing that in 2011-2012, 86% of GBAPS students graduated from high school on time, less than the state average of 91%, but improved since

⁴¹ Ibid.
⁴² Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction School Performance Report, 2008-2009 and 2011-2012.
⁴³ Ibid.
⁴⁴ Ibid.

2009-2010 when it was 81%.⁴⁵ (The method for calculating graduation rates changed in 2009-2010). Two high schools, Preble and Southwest, have four year graduation rates at the state average. Four-year completion rate is calculated for students who begin high school as a freshman and graduate as seniors. When a school experiences a high rate of transience, as is true of some schools in Green Bay, it is counted against the four year graduation rate. If “legacy” graduation rates are included (students that take more than 4 years to graduate), almost 90% of GBAPS students completed their degrees.⁴⁶

Figure 7



How well are students in the GBAPS English Language Learning program performing?

In 2011-2012, 78% of GBAPS students were classified as “English Proficient,” compared to 89% in 2002-2003.⁴⁷ Over 4,500 students are currently classified as “Limited English Proficient.”⁴⁸ State and federal education laws require separate accountability requirements for “English Language Learners,” or ELL students. The federal government sets several achievement targets for ELL student performance: 37% should be “Progressing in English Language Acquisition” and 8% should be “Reaching English Language Proficiency.” For the current year, 58% of GBAPS ELL students were “Progressing” and 30% of GBAPS students “Reached

⁴⁵ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Graduation rate reporting methods changed in 2009-2010, preventing comparison to earlier years.
⁴⁶ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, School District Performance Report, 2011-2012.
⁴⁷ Wisconsin Information Network for Successful Schools, 2011-2012.
⁴⁸ Provided by Green Bay Area Public School District, February 25, 2013.

Proficiency,” rates far surpassing the federal requirements.⁴⁹

How did GBAPS schools score on School Report Cards?

In late 2012, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction issued ‘School Report Cards’ (SRC) with a goal to help schools determine if their students are college, career and community ready when they graduate. The new scoring system, first used in Wisconsin in October, 2012, provides school data in five priority areas: student achievement, student growth, closing gaps, on-track and postsecondary readiness, and student engagement.⁵⁰ Each school is classified into one of five ratings that range from ‘significantly exceed expectations’ to ‘fails to meet expectations.’ Figure 8 shows the results of this scoring for the GBAPS schools. Specific school scores can be accessed on the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) website.⁵¹

Figure 8

Category	Score range	GBAPS schools
Significantly Exceeds Expectations	83-100	1
Exceeds Expectations	73-82.9	7
Meets Expectations	63-72.9	9
Meets Few Expectations	53-62.9	14
Fails to Meet Expectations	0-52.9	4

On February 20, 2013, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction issued a response to GBAPS SRC scores: “It is important to note that the 2011-2012 School Report Cards represent a new and significantly different accountability system for the state of Wisconsin. This first year of SRC should be considered a pilot year.”⁵²

⁴⁹ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, *District Profile Report: English Language Learners*, provided by GBAPS.
⁵⁰ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, *Accountability Reform*. Retrieved from <http://dpi.wi.gov/oea/acct/accountability.html>. Note: Student achievement scores for reading and math are calculated based on Wisconsin Student Assessment System (WSAS) results for a full academic year in those subject areas. They are given a point value each year and after 3 years, the points are averaged.
⁵¹ School scores are available at http://reportcards.dpi.wi.gov/rc_districts.
⁵² Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Statement, released February 20, 2013.

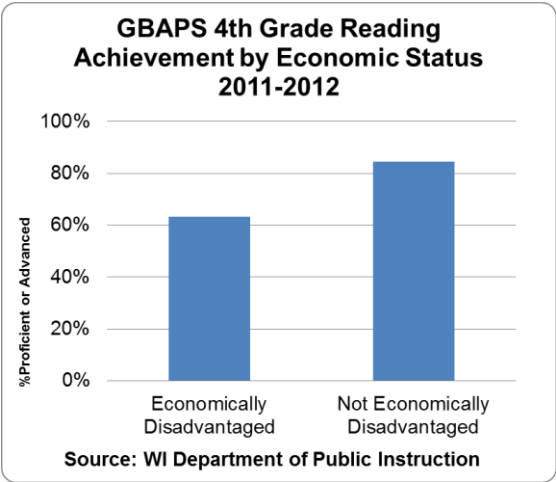
Four schools failed to meet expectations and another 14 met few expectations. Most of these schools received 10 point deductions due to a change in testing requirements for ELL students. DPI stated, “...we know that GBAPS has worked diligently to extensively address previous test participation issues...the district indicates that all students were tested in 2012-2013. As a result, no schools should receive a test participation deduction on their 2012-2013 SRC scores.”⁵³ If other elements of the score remain similar, then next year, GBAPS will have 5 schools in the “meets few expectations” category and none in “fails to meet expectations.”

What is the current performance of low-income students in GBAPS?

Originally, school choice voucher programs were designed for low income students. Over half of GBAPS students are from low-income families, a rate much higher than in surrounding districts or state averages.

In 2011-2012, GBAPS test scores showed a large gap in academic achievement between low income and other students in every tested subject. For example, Figure 9 illustrates that while 85% of non-economically disadvantaged students were proficient or above in reading, only 63% of low-income fourth grade students were proficient or above. This situation tends to exist nationwide and is known as the “achievement gap.”

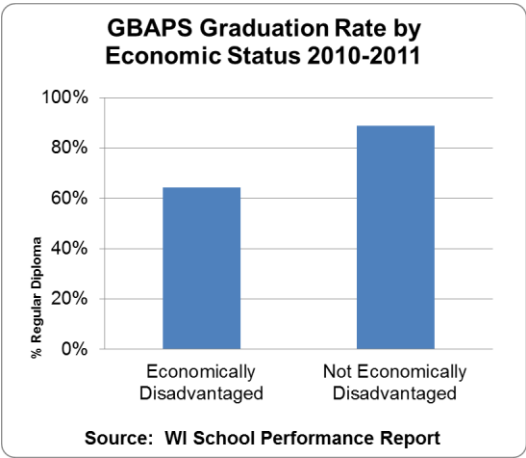
Figure 9



⁵³ Ibid.

Figure 10 shows a similar pattern for graduation rates, where 89% of non-disadvantaged students graduated on time compared to 63% of low income students.

Figure 10



What, in conclusion, do we know about how well students in GBAPS schools are performing? GBAPS student demographics have a huge influence on student performance scores overall. Based on the data, one major reason GBAPS district achievement levels fall below statewide averages is the make-up of the student population. The achievement of non-economically disadvantaged GBAPS students is similar to or above statewide averages. Yet, economic disadvantages face more than half of GBAPS students, and about one fifth of students are learning to speak English proficiently. Likewise, four-year graduation rates are below state average for the same reasons.

School Report Card scores are considered a pilot test this year and nonetheless have been used to determine which districts may be eligible for the Choice program. DPI has stated GBAPS schools will not receive the major deductions in SRC for the 2012-2013 year (that they did this year) as the testing requirements are being refined. The current SRC may provide misleading data about school performance.

What private school opportunities are available in the Green Bay area?

In the Choice program, vouchers provide funding (currently up to \$6,442, but proposed to increase) for a student to attend a private school in the area. A private school is an organization that has an approved educational curriculum administered by a private organization or entity, as opposed to a publicly managed entity. There is no state certification process for private schools, but certain “state statutes and administrative rules affect how a private school can administer curriculum, employee regulations and protections, student health services, facilities, enrollment reports, pupil records, special education, and transportation.”⁵⁴

Typically, a private school charges tuition for each student (unless a scholarship is given), and the organization is not eligible to receive certain state and federal funding. Private schools in Brown County are not required to conduct standardized testing and there is no mandate to report on student achievement. Nonetheless, some private schools have recently begun to report student scores on the achievement tests they have chosen to utilize (which are different tests than are used in public schools statewide).

Figure 11

Brown County Private School Enrollment 2012 ⁵⁷								
	Schools	Enrollment	Catholic Schools	Enrollment	Religious Non-Catholic Schools	Enrollment	Other Schools	Enrollment
Ashwaubenon	2	91	1	91	1	1	0	0
DePere	3	525	1	375	2	2	0	0
Denmark	2	188	1	104	1	1	0	0
Green Bay	19	3,495	8	2,357	10	10	1	32
Howard	1	325	1	25	0	0	0	0
Pulaski	1	104	1	104	0	0	0	0
W. DePere	3	464	1	235	1	81	1	148
Wrightstown	2	188	1	138	1	50	0	0
Total Private	33	5,380	15	3,729	16	1,471	2	180

Figure 11 shows that in 2012, there were 33 private schools in Brown County: 15 Catholic, 16 religious (non-Catholic), and 2 non-religious private. Most privately educated students in Brown County (69%) were enrolled in Catholic schools in 2012. Only three charterschools were listed in the Brown County area in 2012, enrolling 76 students.

Private high schools in Brown County (which are all religiously based) currently enroll just over 1,200 students.⁵⁵ Most private schools in Brown County (23 of 33) provide education from 4 or 5-year-old Kindergarten through eighth grade. Only two private high schools exist in Brown County (Notre Dame de la Baie Academy and NEW Lutheran High School), serving 865 students combined in 2012, compared to 931 in 2005. Two more institutions enrolled students in elementary school through high school (Bay City Baptist and Adventist Junior Academy), together enrolling another 340 students in grades 9-12.⁵⁶

Ten Catholic schools in the Catholic Diocese of Green Bay work together under the GRACE (Green Bay Area Catholic Education) system, “a ministry of our parishes ... [that] provide a foundational, Catholic-based, high quality education that inspires and equips students to become the next generation of informed and dedicated servant leaders in Christ.”⁵⁸ For 2013, tuition for K-8th

⁵⁵ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, *Private (Non-Public) Schools Enrollment Data*. Retrieved from http://lbstat.dpi.wi.gov/lbstat_privdata February 10, 2013.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, *Private (Non-Public) Schools Enrollment Data*. Retrieved from http://lbstat.dpi.wi.gov/lbstat_privdata February 10, 2013.

⁵⁸ Green Bay Area Catholic Education “GRACE”, retrieved from <http://www.gracesystem.org/the-ministry/>.

⁵⁴ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, *Private Schools*. Retrieved from http://sms.dpi.wi.gov/sms_estab, February 10, 2013.

grade GRACE students is \$2,150 for active Parish members and \$4,150 for persons “not in the system.”⁵⁹

What are some differences between public and private school educational programs?

Unlike public schools, private schools in the Brown County area are not required to conduct or report standardized testing results (in contrast, private schools that participate in the Choice program elsewhere are now required to do so). At this point, student achievement of private and public school students cannot be compared directly in Brown County.

Along with other schools in the Catholic Diocese of Green Bay, the GRACE system implements the Measure of Academic Progress standardized testing system (MAP). According to the Green Bay Press Gazette, “eighth graders at GRACE schools who took the MAP tests last fall were in the 89th percentile,” while “fourth-graders were in the 80th percentile for reading.”⁶⁰

Private schools are required by Wisconsin statute to provide “sequentially progressive” program of instruction in reading, language arts, math, social studies, science, and health.” According to the GRACE system, its schools are in the process of implementing the Common Core standards that are being adopted by Wisconsin’s public schools.⁶¹ The state does not require the school to teach any topic, concept, or practice that is in conflict with the program’s religious doctrines.⁶²

Private schools are not required to report teacher qualifications, so these data are not publicly available for many of the private schools in Brown County. The GRACE system reports that all of its teachers are DPI licensed and that its administration is working with CESA 8⁶³ to implement the same teacher effectiveness program that will be utilized by Wisconsin’s public schools to evaluate teacher performance.

Private schools cannot receive some federal and state funds for the provision of certain educational programs, such as special education. In contrast, public schools have mandates to provide special education services. As a result, private schools provide some support for students with special needs but rely on the area public school programs and staff to provide higher-end testing and educational planning for students that require greater support. The GRACE system reports having a support consultant available in each of its 10 buildings, but services for high-need students are not available.

Private schools are not required to provide transportation for their students. However, GBAPS is required to transport students that attend private schools in its district.⁶⁴ For students that reside in different public school districts than their private school is located, transportation may be provided by the private school or by parents of the student.

If the Choice program is implemented in Green Bay, what would the likely impact be on private schools?

If the Choice program were implemented just in Green Bay in 2013-2014 (with no vouchers going to other districts statewide), in the first year, 500 vouchers would be provided. In year two, when up to 1,000 vouchers would be available in Green Bay, many of the vouchers would be used by current private school students and their siblings. (A family can earn up to three times the Federal Poverty Level and be eligible for the program.)

A private school can give preference to “pupils, or siblings of pupils, who attended the private school during the school year prior to [when] the application is being made,”⁶⁵ and also to siblings of students who attend the private school.⁶⁶ In 2011 and 2012 in Milwaukee, as the level of income for Choice eligibility increased, most of the new vouchers were used for

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Zarling, Patti. *Uniform Standards*. Green Bay Press Gazette, January 20, 2013.

⁶¹ Franz, Kay, Curriculum Director, GRACE, February 8, 2013.

⁶² Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, *Private Schools*. Retrieved from http://sms.dpi.wi.gov/sms_estab, February 10, 2013.

⁶³ CESA 7 covers the Green Bay area, but the Catholic Diocese covers a much broader geographic area, including that covered by CESA 8.

⁶⁴ Wisconsin Statute 121.51.

⁶⁵ 2013 Assembly Bill 40,

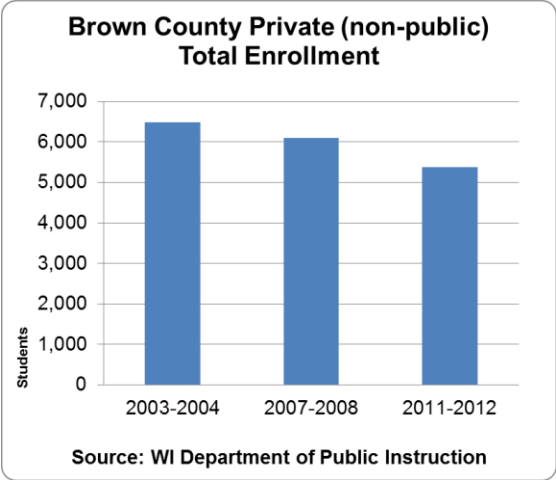
<https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2013/related/proposals/ab40.pdf>

⁶⁶ Ibid.

students that already attended a private school. The same was true in Racine as the program began.⁶⁷

Could private schools in the Green Bay area expand to meet the demand? In the first two years, it is likely that the private schools could readily increase enrollment. Enrollment in Green Bay private schools has declined slowly for a number of years (Figure 12), mostly due to fewer students enrolling rather than school closures.⁶⁸

Figure 12



With enrollment caps removed, it is likely that the Green Bay area would experience the greatest impact in the Choice program’s third year, when many, many more Green Bay students could enter the program. As we noted earlier, more than half of the families with children in Green Bay would earn below the cut-off of \$69,801 (in 2012 dollars) and would be eligible for School Choice vouchers to attend a private school.⁶⁹

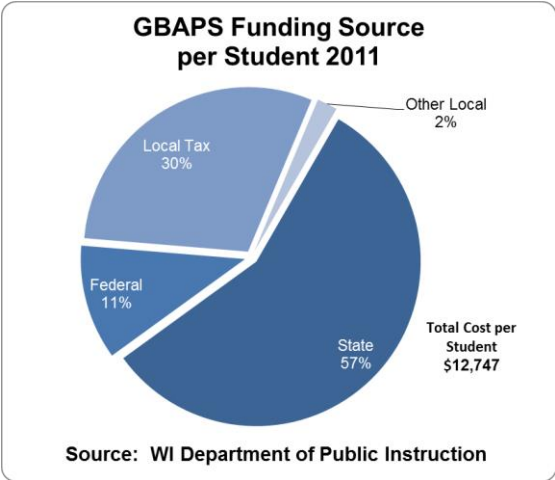
These private schools would experience increasing revenues from the additional voucher users. With no enrollment caps, it is likely that private school capacity in Green Bay would need to expand in other ways. In Milwaukee, a number of new private schools entered the market to accept vouchers. In the long term, this is likely to be the case in Green Bay since so many families would qualify for vouchers.

⁶⁷ Dickman, A. and Schmidt, J., 2013, 13.
⁶⁸ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, *Private (Non-Public) Schools Enrollment Data*. Retrieved from http://lbstat.dpi.wi.gov/lbstat_privdata February 10, 2013.
⁶⁹ *State and County Quick Facts*, Brown County, U.S. Census.

How might the Choice program impact the Green Bay Area Public Schools?

As we stated earlier, in the Governor’s proposal, many students that already attend a private school (and not GBAPS) would use the vouchers in the first two years of Choice, reducing just equalization funding to GBAPS. If the enrollment cap is lifted, and more existing public school students used vouchers, GBAPS would experience a significant decrease in funding.

Figure 13

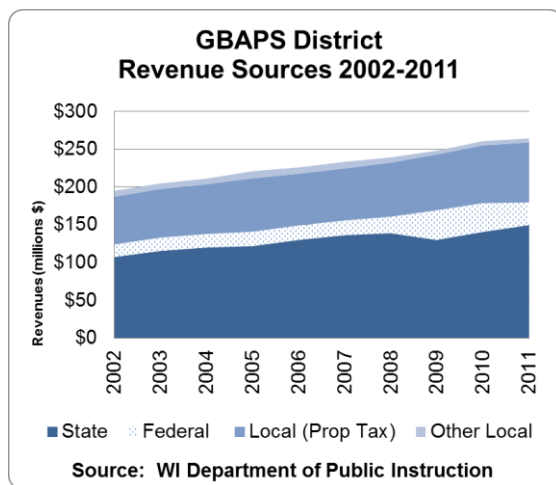


In 2011, it cost \$12,747 to educate every GBAPS student, with \$7,226 provided by the state, \$1,439 provided by the Federal government, and \$3,826 provided by local property taxes (with other local sources making up the balance (Figure 13).⁷⁰ Figure 14 shows how state and local funding sources for the GBAPS district have fluctuated over the past 10 years, with total revenues growing steadily.⁷¹

In 2011 and for many previous years, GBAPS has consistently received 55% to 58% of its revenues from the state based on a “per-student” funding formula plus equalization state aid.⁷² As costs have increased, the lowest dark area on the chart shows that GBAPS state revenues have grown. However, the legislature has imposed limits to revenue increases (\$50 per student in

⁷⁰ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, *School Performance Report*, 2011.
⁷¹ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, *School Performance Reports*, 2002-2011.
⁷² *Ibid.*

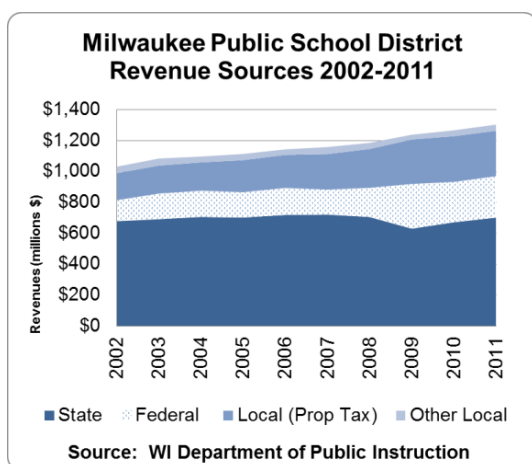
Figure 14



2012-2013, and no increase in the proposed budget).⁷³ Local property tax revenue provided 32% of GBAPS revenues in 2002, compared to 30% in 2011 (or \$3,826 per student from local property tax revenues), seen in the upper shaded area of Figure 14.

It is helpful to compare the trends in GBAPS funding to the same chart showing MPS funding (repeated here in Figure 15). In MPS, state funding remained level over the years as the Choice program grew and expanded as funds were diverted away from public schools to vouchers. During that time the state funding shortfall was partly being made up by local property taxes, which rose from 17% of funding in 2002 to 23% in 2011, or

Figure 15



from \$1,745 per student to \$3,477 in 2011. The total revenues of MPS continued to grow, mostly from non-state sources.

Total revenues of GBAPS were just over \$248 million in 2011. Using simple calculations based on 2011 numbers, the GBAPS would receive \$7,226 less for every student that left the system to use a voucher. If GBAPS experienced a decline of enrollment of 500 students, the district would see a loss of \$3.6 million in state revenues. If 1,000 students used vouchers and left GBAPS, the district would see roughly a \$7.2 million reduction in state revenues. The GBAPS would face additional reductions in state equalization aid, since enrollment would decline.⁷⁴

If enrollment limits on a Green Bay Choice program were removed, the financial impact on GBAPS would be very significant. Since so many Green Bay families with children have incomes below the eligibility threshold, many children could potentially exit GBAPS schools, moving to private schools with vouchers.

In addition, Governor Walker's current budget proposal requires public school districts to limit revenues to last year's level.⁷⁵ GBAPS will be faced with costs at levels similar to or higher than past years, with declining revenues due to loss of enrollment.

In conclusion, the Choice program could have a significant negative impact on the financing of GBAPS, especially in the third year, when the Governor proposes to eliminate the cap on the number of vouchers that can be offered in Green Bay. GBAPS could not increase revenues and would have to balance its budget through reductions and cutbacks. Since schools have many fixed costs (e.g., costs of occupancy, staff), this would pose a major challenge to the GBAPS.

⁷⁴ WI Department of Public Instruction, http://sfs.dpi.wi.gov/sfs_learn_equal

⁷⁵ Zarlring, Patti. *Area school leaders question governor's budget proposal*. February 21, 2013.

⁷³ Kava, R. and Merrifield, L., 2013, 3.

Does open enrollment currently provide students a viable option to change schools if they so desire?

Typically, students enroll in the public school district that serves their neighborhood. Under current Wisconsin open enrollment policy, however, a family may choose to enroll their child in a public school outside of their home district. According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI), “parents may apply to send their child to up to three nonresident public school districts.”⁷⁶ If more students apply than space allows, typically a lottery system is implemented. However, applications can be rejected by the nonresident district due to insufficient space, incomplete special education evaluation for the applying student, or if the student has been expelled or habitually truant in the previous year.

Figure 16

Net Student Enrollment Changes due to Open Enrollment, 2011-2012 ⁷⁷			
	Net Change # students	Total Enrollment	Change as % of Enrolled Students
Ashwaubenon	649	3,192	20.3%
DePere	141	3,956	3.6%
Denmark	65	1,509	4.3%
Green Bay	-954	20,636	-4.6%
Howard	159	5,845	2.7%
Pulaski	-17	3,760	-0.5%
W. DePere	-90	2,944	-3.1%
Wrightstown	43	1,330	3.2%

Figure 16 shows that in 2011-2012, a large number of Brown County students took advantage of the opportunity to attend a different public school. The open enrollment period extends from February to April for each upcoming school year. As this report was being prepared, several public school districts in Brown

County were placing advertisements in the Green Bay Press Gazette informing the community of the opportunity to enroll in their districts through the Open Enrollment option. Ashwaubenon School District reported a net gain of 649 students through Open Enrollment, making up 20% of its student body. Most other districts gain or lost a much smaller percentage of students through this program.

The current open enrollment activity in Brown County demonstrates that many families who wish to enroll their child in a different school can already do so. Since area public schools are advertising for students, the capacity for increased open enrollment seems to exist. Open enrollment also decreases revenues for the public school district that the student formerly attended.

Utilizing the open enrollment option requires that a family be able to easily transport their student to an outlying school. However, transportation issues may prevent certain kinds of students from using this option and may make the option less appealing for rural areas.

Conclusion

Education is a vital component of our way of life in Northeast Wisconsin. How can we keep it strong? A number of factors should be considered.

First, is there a need for it? What concern would it address? The new “School Report Card” system indicated several schools in the Green Bay Area Public School (GBAPS) district “meet few” or “fail to meet” expectations; yet this scoring system is untested and DPI has indicated that next year, GBAPS schools will not be penalized for procedural issues. GBAPS is a large, metropolitan district with more than half of its students from low income families and many English language learners. Our brief analysis of existing achievement test data found student scores and four year graduation rates are somewhat below state averages, with recent improvement. These scores relate strongly to the student demographics in the district. Because this was a “snapshot,” our data were limited to use of test scores. There is much more information available about GBAPS schools on the district website.

⁷⁶ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, *Public School Open Enrollment*. Retrieved from http://sms.dpi.wi.gov/sms_psctoc February 10, 2013.

⁷⁷ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction *Public School Open Enrollment Transfers and Aid Adjustments*. Retrieved from http://sms.dpi.wi.gov/sms_oeaid.

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Second, would private schools provide a better education for students than the GBAPS district currently does? Local private schools do not use the same student achievement tests as public schools do, so measures of student achievement cannot be compared. A non-partisan Milwaukee think tank concluded in February, 2013 that student achievement at Choice and public schools was very similar there, as in it has been in previous years. A comprehensive study found that Choice students have slightly higher four-year graduation rates. Local private schools currently serve a select group of students, have fewer mandates, and offer fewer services for students with higher needs.

Third, who should receive vouchers? Should it focus on students from low income families, or students from middle-income families, as is the case in Milwaukee and Racine? In the governor's proposal, many students that currently attend a private school (and their siblings) would be eligible (with family incomes of \$70,000 or less) and given preference to receive vouchers. In the third year of the program, with caps removed on the number of vouchers (as proposed), many more public school students would enroll.

Fourth, what might the longer-term impact of the Choice program be on GBAPS, and on the students that continue to attend Green Bay's public system? If the Choice program allows an unlimited number of eligible public school students to enroll in private schools, the loss of revenues by GBAPS will be significant yet the district will have little ability to generate more revenues. Current educational policies and revenue limits are already impacting public schools in Wisconsin, as costs continue to rise.

Finally, are there things the community could do to strengthen the GBAPS rather than diverting funding? Things could be done to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of any and all schools in this area. Have we explored these other options sufficiently? In conclusion, we hope that the community (and the state legislature, which will decide) looks thoroughly at this issue and chooses the approach that has the most promise to improve the education that's available to all children living in this area. We hope you will speak with other community members about this issue, and contact your legislator.

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