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African Americans' Continuing Struggle for Quality Education in Milwaukee, Wisconsin

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This article summarizes African Americans' ongoing struggle for quality education in Milwaukee, Wisconsin by utilizing school district data and secondary sources. The historic integration effort in the Milwaukee Public Schools system is outlined and the impact of sustained segregation, in the midst of significant changes to Milwaukee's social and economic context, is discussed. The historic integration movement and the social and economic context are used to contextualize and critique current racially segregated choice programs, which have been touted as remedies for inferior educational opportunities in Milwaukee.

> Theoretically, the Negro needs neither segregated nor mixed schools. What he needs is education. What he must remember that there is no magic either in mixed schools or in segregated schools. A mixed school with poor and unsympathetic teachers with hostile public opinion and no teaching concerning Black folk is bad. (Du Bois, 1935, p. 335)

The desire for equal educational opportunity is a long-standing feature of African American communities (Anderson, 1988; Walker, 1996). Unfortunately, their quest for equal educational opportunity has not been realized. From legally segregated schools that offered inferior facilities and resources to modern-day resegregated schools that also offer subpar facilities and resources, African American children have continually faced unequal opportunities to learn (Anyon, 1997; Caldas & Bankston, 2007; Mirel, 1993; Orfield & Eaton, 1996). In spite of its good intentions, the implementation of the decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which ordered the dismantling of the legal system supporting the segregation of schools, did not lead to sustained integration of most school systems and, ultimately, much of its early impact has been negated by White resistance and White flight from the central cities of large urban metropolitan areas (Caldas & Bankston, 2007; Orfield & Eaton, 1996). Without resolving the problem of unequal educational opportunity, the educational vestiges of urban school districts' segregationist pasts continue to invade its contemporary school systems (Anyon, 1997; Farmer-Hinton, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Weiler, 1998).

The inability to effectively address educational vestiges is particularly harmful considering the impact of deindustrialization and concentrated poverty on urban communities (Anyon, 1997; Farmer-Hinton, 2002). In fact, Ladson-Billings (2006) argued that our generational divestment of equal schooling opportunities, equal school funding, social justice, and social responsibility from African American communities is the core reason for current achievement disparities. She goes on to argue that the continual refusal to acknowledge the impact of this generational divestment will only lead to further misguided attempts to provide educational opportunities for African American communities (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Market-based school reforms, which use choice and competition as the basis to improve schools, are reflective of these misguided reforms that mask the inherent problem of educational vestiges and unequal educational opportunities (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Wells, 2002). In this article, the authors draw on school district data and secondary sources to discuss the on-going struggle for equal educational opportunity in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This study is organized by three themes that reflect this struggle. The first theme is the perpetuation of school segregation, which summarizes the historic integration effort in the Milwaukee Public School (MPS) system. The second theme discussed is the changing Milwaukee

landscape, which reflects how the shifting social and economic conditions further complicated the historic lack of educational opportunity in Milwaukee. The third theme discussed is veiled opportunities, which outlines and critiques current school choice policies that are disguised as opportunities for African American students.

THE PERPETUATION OF SCHOOL SEGREGATION

On the heels of the *Brown* decision, African Americans in Milwaukee fought to desegregate MPS in the early 1960s. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Milwaukee United for School Integration Committee (MUSIC) organized a series of protests, sit-ins, demonstrations, as well as blocked school buses and school construction projects, in an effort to end segregated schools within MPS (Dougherty, 2004; Stolee, 1993). Integration activists cited five key areas as evidence of the segregationist policies and practices operating within MPS (Dougherty, 2004; Stolee, 1993). First, MPS used a neighborhood attendance policy in which school attendance boundaries followed the city's racially segregated housing patterns, leading to racially segregated schools. Second, MPS used the practice of intact busing to maintain racial segregation (Dougherty, 2004, Peterson, 1998). Entire classrooms of African American students were bused to predominantly White schools where they were not allowed to interact with the other students during class time, recesses, or lunch periods. Third, African American teachers were hired to teach only African American students while White teachers taught both African American and White students (Dougherty, 2004; Stolee, 1993). Fourth, the MPS transfer policy allowed White students to transfer out of predominantly African American schools with little difficulty, whereas African American students faced challenges trying to transfer from predominantly African American schools to White schools. Finally, MPS used segregationist practices by building schools in newly annexed and populated White areas, while older, declining schools in African American areas were expanded using existing infrastructures (*Amos v. Board of School Directors*, 1976; Dougherty, 2004; Stolee, 1993).

In June 1965, Attorney Lloyd Barbee, president of the Milwaukee NAACP and a civil rights activist, filed a lawsuit against MPS charging it with intentionally segregating the school system (*Amos v. Board of School Directors*, 1976). Federal Judge John Reynolds ruled on January 19, 1976 that MPS had intentionally created a segregated school system that was unconstitutional (*Amos v. Board of School Directors,* 1976; Stolee, 1993). After several years of legal appeals to the 1976 ruling, a federal court consent decree settled the MPS lawsuit in 1979. The decree required the desegregation of teachers' school assignments. It also required that at least 75% of all students within the MPS district be enrolled in racially balanced schools (defined as between 25% and 60% African American enrollment at the high school level and between 25% and 60% African American enrollment at the middle and elementary school levels, Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau, 2005). At the time of the 1979 Federal Court consent decree, only 9% of Milwaukee's public schools met those racial balance standards (Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau, 2005).

While touted for the lack of violence associated with school desegregation efforts, Harris (1983) critiqued the Milwaukee desegregation plan for maintaining *de facto* segregation within MPS. For example, after the settlement, sixteen schools that served over 8,000 students remained predominantly African American. Harris suggested that student achievement continued to lag in those schools due to inferior facilities and resources—an achievement gap which was revealed in test scores that were the lowest of all MPS schools. The desegregation of top administrative staff also failed to occur, leaving Milwaukee Public Schools' superintendents, department heads, and other administrators 90% White (Harris, 1983). Furthermore, although the settlement resulted in pupil reassignments, voluntary pupil transfers, and the creation of magnet schools, the reassignments, transfers, and magnet school programs benefited White students more than African American students (Cullinan, 1980; Dougherty, 2004; Harris, 1983; Stolee, 1993).

By the early 1980s, the African American student population outnumbered the White student population, making MPS a predominantly African American student school district. With very

few equitable learning opportunities, the vestiges of a segregationist past continued to impact MPS. These on-going unfair educational practices were met with a changing economy. While inequitable learning situations have always negatively impacted students' educational attainment, MPS students had the option of being absorbed into an eagerly awaiting job market for low-income and semi-skilled workers. However, deindustrialization in Milwaukee led to high rates of joblessness among African Americans; a labor pool educationally underprepared for the shifting economy.

THE CHANGING MILWAUKEE LANDSCAPE

Similar to most northern industrial cities, Milwaukee became home to African American southern migrants who fled the South for better paying job opportunities in the North (Anyon, 1997; Farmer-Hinton, 2002; Gurda 1999; Wilson, 1996). While African Americans have been members of the Milwaukee community since the 19th century, the African American population tripled in response to the industrial job market from just more than 21,000 African American residents to 62,000 African American residents between the years 1950 and 1960 (Schmid, 2004a). Employment options in the railroad, brewery, tannery, manufacturing, and automotive industries were numerous, and African American workers and their families found that their new lives in Milwaukee would result in social mobility (Schmid, 2004a). By the 1970s, African Americans in Milwaukee experienced a median family income of $33,246, which was the seventh highest median income for African Americans in the U.S. (Schmid, 2004b). It should be noted, however, that their social mobility rarely included housing integration. The growing migration of African American southern migrants sparked racialized housing policies and practices that restricted African Americans from renting or owning homes in White neighborhoods (Murphy, 2004; Schmid, 2004b).

Milwaukee's African American community changed with a combination of two realities: deindustrialization and housing segregation. Between the late 1970s and the late 1980s, the manufacturing sector deteriorated (with manufacturing job losses in Milwaukee close to 83,000), leaving a previously thriving community of African American workers and families without economic security (Binkley & White, 1991; Gurda, 1999; Norman, 1989; Orum, 1995; Schmid, 2004b). Massey and Denton (1993) argued that widespread joblessness such as the rates that occurred in Milwaukee were not damaging solely due to the disproportionately higher rates of unemployment, but also due to the segregationist housing policies and practices that restricted African Americans to certain neighborhoods, leading to an "increase in the geographic concentration of poverty" (p. 126). For example, in the 1970s, the poverty rate in two of the city's predominantly African American neighborhoods (Halyard Park with 37.3% and Garfield with 20.6%) was more than two to four times higher than the city's poverty rate of 8.1% (Edari, 1977).

By the late 1980s, Milwaukee became one of the most hyper-segregated urban cities in the North, more racially and socioeconomically segregated than New York, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles (Massey & Denton, 1993). Between 1980 and 1990, the poverty rate among African Americans doubled increasing from 25.2% to 54.8%. Furthermore, Milwaukee had one of the largest increases in concentrated poverty where predominantly African American census tracts experienced 40% of residents living below the poverty level (Jargowsky, 1994). The old "ideal" of economic security without a high school diploma was met with the realization that the new economy of white-collar jobs was closed to a generation of African American workers needing employment. The new service economy did not offer comparative pay to previous industrial jobs (Schmid, 2004b). Additionally, low- skilled and semi-skilled jobs were increasing in Milwaukee's suburbs (a net gain of 33,673 manufacturing jobs between 1979 and 1987), resulting in a spatial mismatch in which the previously employed semi-skilled workers in Milwaukee did not live near needed jobs (Gurda, 1999; Schmid, 2004b; Wilson, 1996). Milwaukee's drastic social and economic deterioration combined with the vestiges of unequal learning opportunities in its schools created even greater challenges for a community still seeking a quality education.

VEILED OPPORTUNITIES

By the end of the 20th century, U.S. schools were rapidly resegregating at a pace that left urban public schools more segregated than they were 25 to 30 years ago (Caldas & Bankston, 2007; Orfield & Eaton, 1996). The decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974, 1977) limited desegregation remedies, in most school districts, to the legal boundaries of the central cities, leading many urban districts to rapidly become "majority minority" school systems. Due to deindustrialization, many urban communities lost their economic footing, leading to massive job losses that disproportionately affected African American families and revenue losses that affected the local tax base (Anyon, 1997; Wilson, 1996). As a result, urban school districts faced increased and concentrated poverty in its schools as well as decreased revenues to meet students' instructional and non-instructional needs (Anyon, 1997; Farmer-Hinton, 2002).

Milwaukee and its schools faced the same challenges of racial and socioeconomic segregation. In 1976, when MPS was found to have intentionally created a segregated school district, White students comprised the majority (57.1%) of MPS's total student population. Since then, the White student population has declined steadily over time (see Table 1). By the 2006-07 school year White students constituted only 16% of MPS's student population. During the same aforementioned time periods, the percentage of African American students in MPS increased from 36.8% in 1976 to 57.7% in 2006-2007, characterizing MPS as a "majority minority" school system with even more racially segregated schools than 30 years ago. A "majority minority" school system exists even though Milwaukee's African American community is only 37% of the city's total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007).

African American students in MPS not only attend highly segregated schools, but also highly impoverished schools. Levine and Zipp (1993) noted that "a growing poverty in the community has meant an increasingly impoverished MPS clientele" (p. 59). MPS defines its poverty rate in terms of the number of students that receive free or reduced lunch (Milwaukee Public Schools, 2003). Over time, the number of MPS students listed as being in poverty increased significantly from just over half of all students (55.8%) in 1982 to a large majority of students (78%) in 2006 (see Table 2). In fact, some predominantly African American school communities have extensive concentrated poverty with over 80% of enrolled students qualifying for free or reduced lunch (Levine & Zipp, 1985).

Though MPS is more segregated by race and class than ever before, current school reforms that focus on choice (e.g., charter schools, inter-district and intra-district transfers) are unresponsive to the social and economic context of Milwaukee. While these reforms were created or implemented by the state legislature to serve as remedies for inferior educational opportunities in Milwaukee, a closer investigation reveals that they lead to veiled opportunities for African American students.

Chapter 220 Program

The Chapter 220 program began in 1976 as an effort by the Wisconsin State Legislature to promote cultural and racial integration in education (Wisconsin Legislature Fiscal Bureau, 2005). It provides state aid for minority and non-minority students to transfer between MPS and its surrounding suburban school districts and to transfer between schools within a district if the transfers help to improve the racial balance within schools. Though the Chapter 220 program was implemented in 1976, a lawsuit led to an increase in the number of suburban districts involved in the program and, ultimately, to greater success in improving racial integration (Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau, 2005). MPS officials believed they could not desegregate its schools without greater involvement by suburban school districts in the Milwaukee metropolitan area. In June 1984, MPS filed a suit in federal court against the 24 suburbs of Milwaukee, the State Superintendent of the Department of Public Instruction, and the governor of Wisconsin (*Board of School Directors of the City of Milwaukee v. Thompson*, 1984; Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau, 2005). MPS asked the U.S. District Court of the Eastern District of Wisconsin to declare

the public schools in the Milwaukee metropolitan area unconstitutionally segregated and to order a desegregation policy and procedure (Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau, 2005). In 1987, a federal decree settlement of MPS's 1984 lawsuit was reached. In return for MPS's dismissal of its legal action against the suburban districts, the suburbs agreed to important changes in the Chapter 220 program (Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau, 2005). The settlement led to increases in the number of suburban school districts participating in the Chapter 220 program from 12 suburban school districts to 23 suburban school districts. The settlement also led to other changes in the Chapter 220 program such as requiring MPS to reserve 10 percent of its seats in its specialty schools for suburban students and funding for minority families to purchase homes in the suburbs (Stolee, 1993; Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau, 1997a, 1997b, 2005).

Table 1

Milwaukee Public Schools Student Enrollment Counts and Percentages by Race, 1972-2007

Year	Total MPS Students	Total African American	% African American	Total White	% White	Total Hispanic	% Hispanic
1972-73	128,734	38,113	29.6	85,069	66.1	4,467	3.5
1973-74	123,233	38,498	31.2	78,987	64.1	4,500	3.7
1974-75	118,474	39,111	33	73,005	61.6	4,826	4.1
1975-76	114,180	39,250	34.4	68,671	60.1	4,808	4.2
1976-77	109,146	40,138	36.8	62,334	57.1	4,937	4.5
1977-78	101,184	40,448	40	54,080	53.4	4,843	4.8
1978-79	95,722	40,520	42.3	48,458	50.6	4,964	5.3
1979-80	90,952	40,619	44.7	43,387	47.7	5,150	5.7
1980-81	87,873	40,802	46.4	39,830	45.4	5,309	6.0
1981-82	86,312	40,783	47.3	37,404	43.3	5,509	6.4
1982-83	86,387	41,673	48.2	36,140	41.8	5,678	6.6
1983-84	86,481	42,709	49.3	34,589	40.0	6,017	7.0
1984-85	88,369	44,993	50.9	33,531	37.9	6,427	7.3
1985-86	90,392	46,829	51.8	33,065	36.6	6,685	7.4
1986-87	90,657	47,929	52.9	31,887	35.2	6,864	7.6
1987-88	91,648	48,976	53.4	31,362	34.2	7,286	7.9
1988-89	91,996	49,525	53.8	30,578	33.2	7,718	8.4
1989-90	92,061	49,853	54.2	29,855	32.4	8,057	8.8
1990-91	92,789	51,094	55.1	28,612	30.8	8,679	9.4
1991-92	93,519	52,584	56.2	27,216	29.1	9,163	9.8
1992-93	94,301	53,849	57.1	25,928	27.5	9,776	10.4
1993-94	95,271	55,355	58.1	24,653	25.9	10,282	10.8
1994-95	96,773	57,045	58.9	23,396	24.2	10,922	11.3
1995-96	98,380	58,834	59.8	21,946	22.3	11,859	12.1
1996-97	101,110	61,300	60.6	20,976	20.7	12,674	12.5
1997-98	101,963	62,258	61.1	19,958	19.6	13,239	13.0
1998-99	100,525	61,692	61.4	18,643	18.5	13,395	13.3
1999-00	99,729	61,034	61.2	17,552	17.6	14,161	14.2
2000-01	97,985	59,574	60.8	16,363	16.7	14,795	15.1
2001-02	97,762	58,590	60.3	18,447	18.9	15,739	16.1
2002-03	97,293	58,083	59.7	17,415	17.9	16,637	17.1
2003-04	97,359	57,481	59.4	16,841	17.3	17,525	18.0
2004-05	93,654	54,881	58.6	15,827	16.9	17,981	19.2
2005-06	92,395	53,886	58.3	15,152	16.4	18,151	20.1
2006-07	89,912	51,879	57.7	14,385	16.0	17,981	21.0

Note. From Milwaukee Public Schools. (2007g). *Students attending Milwaukee Public Schools, enrollment by ethnic categories*. Madison, WI: Author.

Table 2

Milwaukee Public Schools Students Eligible for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch, 1982-2007

Year	Total MPS Students	Total Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch	% Students Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch
1982-83	87,431	48,792	55.81
1983-84	87,624	54,375	62.05
1984-85	89,879	n/a	n/a
1985-86	92,555	n/a	n/a
1986-87	93,731	54,630	58.28
1987-88	95,428	55,159	57.80
1988-89	96,290	56,358	58.53
1989-90	97,085	57,430	59.15
1990-91	98,371	59,000	59.98
1991-92	99,233	63,394	63.88
1992-93	100,163	66,331	66.22
1993-94	101,189	67,531	66.74
1994-95	102,560	69,415	67.68
1995-96	103,676	70,782	72.00
1996-97	106,248	74,117	76.00
1997-98	107,043	73,627	72.00
1998-99	105,926	73,348	72.00
1999-00	105,374	71,173	74.00
2000-01	103,541	67,902	70.00
2001-02	103,397	68,129	72.00
2002-03	103,464	69,795	71.00
2003-04	103,769	73,676	71.00
2004-05	102,309	75,709	74.00
2005-06	100,262	73,191	73.00
2006-07	97,509	76,057	78.00

Note. Students who qualify for free lunch cannot have a family income that exceeds 130% of the federal poverty level. Students who qualify for reduced-price lunch cannot have a family income that exceeds 185% of the federal poverty level. These counts include all students in Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) and MPS student participants of intra-district transfer programs. From Milwaukee Public Schools. (2007h). *Students eligible for free-reduced lunch: 1982-2007.* Milwaukee, WI: Author.

The Chapter 220 program showed some success because several districts reached 20% minority enrollment and some districts reached 30% minority enrollment. Additionally, more minority families integrated communities with Chapter 220 schools and Chapter 220 students' graduation rates were comparable to their suburban peers (Milwaukee Public Schools Division of Parent Services, 2007). However, in recent years, the number of minority students enrolled in the Chapter 220 program has decreased from a high of 5,918 students in 1993-94 school year to 2,719 students in 2007-08, a decrease of 3,199 students or 54% (see Table 3).

Table 3

Number of Chapter 220 Students, 1976-2008

Year	MPS Student Transfers to Suburbs	Suburban Student Transfers to MPS
1976-77	323	10
1977-78	645	97
1978-79	798	102
1979-80	916	138
1980-81	959	140
1981-82	1,034	163
1982-83	1,044	200
1983-84	1,160	239
1984-85	1,518	470
1985-86	2,170	659
1986-87	3,082	769
1987-88	3,788	915
1988-89	4,304	1,021
1989-90	5,036	1,003
1990-91	5,582	983
1991-92	5,714	923
1992-93	5,862	861
1993-94	5,918	836
1994-95	5,787	724
1995-96	5,291	619
1996-97	5,142	554
1997-98	5,080	564
1998-99	5,120	545
1999-00	4,943	595
2000-01	4,716	841
2001-02	4,308	673
2002-03	4,033	543
2003-04	3,648	412
2004-05	3,423	426
2005-06	3,423	408
2006-07	2,865	422
2007-08	2,719	N/A

Note. The Chapter 220 program provides state aid for minority and non-minority students to transfer between MPS and its surrounding suburban school districts and to transfer between schools within a district if the transfers help to improve the racial balance within schools. From Milwaukee Public Schools. (2007c). *Milwaukee Public Schools Chapter 220 and Open Enrollment history*. Milwaukee, WI: Author.

The huge decline in the number of minority students can be attributed to both state and suburban district policies. For example, the number of suburban school districts taking new minority students under the Chapter 220 program is declining. Several school districts (Brown Deer, Glendale-River Hill, and Maple Dale-Indian Hill) have 30% or more minority students enrolled. According to the Chapter 220 legislation, once a suburban school district population becomes at least 30% minority, the school district does not have to accept any more minority students. Therefore, these districts have declined to continue to enroll MPS minority students for the 2007-08 school year (Milwaukee Public Schools, 2007a, 2000b, 2007c). Interestingly, these three districts were three of the top five districts with the most aggressive minority enrollment

goals. Furthermore, due to recent rulings by the U.S. Supreme court (see *Parents Involved in Community School v. Seattle School District 1*, 2007 and *Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education*, 2007) that race-based school admission programs were unconstitutional, several Milwaukee County suburban school districts are questioning the impact of this ruling on their participation in the Chapter 220 program and the continued legality of the program (Barnes, 2007; Borsuk, 2007; Hetzner, 2007; National School Board Association and The College Board, 2007).

Additionally, the Wisconsin legislature created the Open Enrollment program in 1997. The Open Enrollment program allows any student in Wisconsin to attend a school anywhere in the state, other than his or her home school district, if their home school district offers the same program as the school district with which the student wishes to attend. However, the program lacks a focus on cultural and racial integration and student busing. Suburban school districts are taking more students under the Open Enrollment program than the Chapter 220 program and the majority of the students in the former program are White (see Table 4). The Open Enrollment program is more attractive to suburban school districts because they receive state aid for the students in the same year that they accept the students into their districts as opposed to the next academic year with the Chapter 220 program) (Milwaukee Public Schools, 2007c).

Table 4

Open Enrollment Program Participation by Race, 1998-2008

Year	Total Student Enrollees	Native American	African American	Asian	Hispanic	White	Other
1998-99	62	0	0	0	0	52 (83.9%)	10 (18.1%)
1999-00	441	0	91 (21%)	3 (0.7%)	6 (1.4%)	331 (75.1%)	10 (2.2%)
2000-01	831	0	140 (16.8%)	6 (0.7%)	50 (6.0%)	625 (75.2%)	10 (1.2%)
2001-02	1,350	19 (1.4%)	261 (19.3%)	43 (3.2%)	82 (6.1%)	937 (69.4%)	8 (0.6%)
2002-03	2,138	26 (1.2%)	362 (16.9%)	67 (3.1%)	138 (6.5%)	1,518 (71%)	27 (1.3%)
2003-04	2,762	35 (1.3%)	466 (16.9%)	83 (3.0%)	215 (7.8 %)	1,931 (69.9%)	32 (1.2%)
2004-05	3,286	42 (1.3%)	591 (18%)	109 (3.3%)	262 (8.0%)	2,229 (67.8%)	53 (1.6%)
2005-06	3,662	53 (1. 4%)	623 (17%)	128 (3.5%)	332 (9.1%)	2,471 (67.5%)	55 (1.5%)
2006-07	3,719	63 (1.7%)	662 (17.8%)	115 (3.1%)	309 (8.3%)	2,497 (67.1%)	73 (2.0%)
2007-08	3,893	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Note. The Open Enrollment Program allows any student in Wisconsin to attend a school anywhere in the state, other than his or her home school district, if their home school district offers the same program as the school district with which the student wishes to attend. From Milwaukee Public Schools. (2007c). *Milwaukee Public Schools Chapter 220 and Open Enrollment history*. Milwaukee, WI: Author.

In addition to the state and suburban policies that limit minority student participation in the Chapter 220 program, the legislature also passed Act 9 in 1999, which has diverted state aid from MPS (State of Wisconsin, 1999). Act 9 provided MPS with $100 million of bonding authority under the Neighborhood Schools Initiative (NSI, a reform effort to be discussed later in the article). In exchange for the $100 million in bonds, MPS has to acquire written parental permission from 95% of parents or the district can no longer receive full state aid for the students'

transportation costs. As a result, MPS has lost over a million dollars in state aid (Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau, 1997b, 2005).

Milwaukee Parental Choice Program

The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) was enacted in March 1990 by the State of Wisconsin legislature (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2007a). The MPCP is a voucher program designed to provide more educational options for families with incomes 175% below federal poverty guidelines. Parents of each student participating in the MPCP receive an amount that is equal to the lesser of either MPS's state aid per student or the private school's per pupil operating and debt costs per student (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2007a). In the 1990s, the MPCP survived several legal challenges and the program expanded (see Farrell & Matthews, 2006 for an extended outline of the legal challenges). As a result of the MPCP expansion, the number of students in the MPCP increased dramatically from 341 students in 1990-91 school year to 17,126 students in 2006-07 school year (Milwaukee Public Schools, 2007a).

While this educational reform was designed to provide poor parents with more options and control over their children's education, it resulted in the resegregation of schools by race. Thirty-four MPCP schools that reported data have 100% minority enrollment and 23 schools have student minority populations ranging from 90% to 100% (Public Policy Forum, 2004). In addition, the MPCP has spurred growth in the development of local private schools—some of which solely rely on voucher payments as their income stream (Borsuk & Carr, 2005; Farrell & Matthews, 2006). These novice schools struggled to attract and retain quality staff and maintain financial viability whereas the more established private schools had fewer of these challenges, but those schools tend to use selective admissions and enroll fewer African American students (Farrell & Matthews, 2006). Teachers working in the MPCP schools do not have to be certified or have a teaching license. Moreover, schools participating in the MPCP are not required to administer standardized academic examinations (or report their scores if they do administer standardized exams) and they do not have to serve students with exceptional needs (Carnoy, Adamson, Chudgar, Luschei & Witte, 2007; Dunk & Dickman, 2003; Farrell & Matthews, 2006; Public Policy Forum, 2004).

In addition, the MPCP funding scheme used by the state diverts aid from MPS. When the MPCP was first implemented, only one percent of MPS's total student population was eligible for participation in the MPCP and the state government paid $2,379 dollars per pupil in state aid. However, the cost of the MPCP rose dramatically as state legislation allowed more students to participate in the program, while per pupil expenditures also increased. By the 2006-07 school year, there were 17,126 students in the MPCP and the state paid up to $6,501 dollars per full-time equivalent student. The program cost approximately $110.5 million dollars. Unfortunately, these costs were related to lost revenue within MPS. Close to half (45%) of the yearly funding for the MPCP, came from a reduction in state aid to MPS (Farrell & Matthews, 2006; Milwaukee Public Schools, 2007a). With annual losses as high as $72 million dollars, the School Board of Milwaukee has recently approved a measure to explore the feasibility of suing the State of Wisconsin over this funding method (Milwaukee Public Schools, 2007a).

Charter Schools

In 1993, Wisconsin passed charter school legislation, which authorized ten school districts to establish up to a maximum of two charter schools. In 1995, the Wisconsin State Legislature expanded the charter school legislation by giving chartering authority to all the school boards in the state and eliminating the cap on the number of charter schools. By the year 2003, the Wisconsin State Legislature had given chartering authority to the city of Milwaukee, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM), Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC), and the University of Wisconsin-Parkside (Public Policy Forum, 2003a).

The Charter School program costs over $23 million dollars annually (Borsuk, 2003). However, charter schools in Milwaukee are racially segregated and they have not addressed the achievement disparities between White and African American students. As of the 2007-08 school year, there are 42 charter schools that enroll 12,731 students in which 59% are African American (Milwaukee Public Schools, 2007b). Charter schools are also highly segregated with close to one-half of them having African American student enrollments that exceed 80% (University of Wisconsin System, 2007). In addition, charter schools exemplify a similar test score gap found in regular MPS schools (Public Policy Forum, 2003a). For example, 77% of White charter school students were proficient in reading, but only 55% of African American and Hispanic students were proficient in reading; similar trends exist in mathematics (Public Policy Forum, 2003a). Furthermore, charter schools tend to fare worse than MPS schools on achievement tests, but this performance varies by the school's chartering agency and grade level (Public Policy Forum, 2002b). The Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination (WKCE) measures the proficiency level of students in reading, language arts, mathematics, science and social studies; however, among the schools chartered by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, charter students perform worse than MPS students through the fourth grade (University of Wisconsin Milwaukee Office of Charter School, 2004). By the eighth grade, UWM charter school students and MPS students are performing similarly (University of Wisconsin System, 2007). However, of the 17 high schools chartered by MPS, only three of those charter high schools exceed MPS's twenty regular high schools on the 10th grade WKCE proficiency tests (Milwaukee Public Schools, 2006).

Neighborhood Schools Initiative

In October 1999, the Wisconsin State Legislature voted to allow MPS to borrow up to $170 million for creating neighborhood school facilities. The Neighborhood Schools Initiative (NSI) was designed to enroll more students in neighborhood schools and to reduce the number of students bused from 70,000 students to 50,000 students. In August 2000, MPS Board of Directors approved the NSI by a vote of 8 to 0. The vote allowed MPS to borrow $98.4 million dollars for the NSI. The State of Wisconsin would provide $81 million of that borrowed total via state–backed long-term bonds and MPS would provide the remaining $17.4 million. This plan was expected to save $15 million a year in transportation costs for MPS and expected to provide new space for 7,500 students located in areas of the city where there are fewer seats than students (Borsuk, 2004a, 2004b; Public Policy Forum, 2002, 2003b).

NSI funds would provide construction for six new schools, and some schools would be expanded to accommodate more students. In addition, a few city-wide schools would be converted into neighborhood schools. Moreover, the NSI would provide for more day-long school programs for children before and after school or in community centers that could be run by non-profit groups that contracted with MPS. Finally, the NSI funding would result in the conversion of more than 30 schools to kindergarten through eighth grade (Borsuk, 2004a, 2004b; Milwaukee Public Schools, 2000; Public Policy Forum 2002, 2003b).

By August 2007, MPS had system spent $101.5 million dollars for the NSI, of which $74.4 million dollars was used to add 4,283 additional seats in predominately racially segregated neighborhood schools, and $27.1 million dollars was used to pay for 1,464 seats in partnership schools (community organizations that share facilities with MPS schools, Milwaukee Public Schools, 2007d). New specialty schools constructed with NSI dollars would be disproportionately placed in gentrifying neighborhoods (Peterson & Miller, 2000). Furthermore, since NSI dollars can only be used for school construction projects (versus improvements in curricular offerings or student support services), many schools affected by the NSI have not met academic performance goals under the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2002), and they are labeled as schools in need of improvement (Milwaukee Public Schools, 2007e, 2007f, 2007g, 2007h; Public Policy Forum, 2003b; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2004).

CONCLUSION

In the 1960s, African Americans fought against segregationist policies and practices operating within MPS such as racialized neighborhood attendance policies, intact busing, and an unbalanced transfer policy—all of which prevented African Americans from accessing a quality education. After legal battles forcing MPS to have racial balance in its schools, the school district became even more racially segregated as White resistance led to lower White student enrollments, making MPS a "majority minority" school system. With *de facto* segregation, schools that were historically segregated remained predominantly African American and continued to suffer from inferior facilities and resources (Harris, 1983). The generational divestment of educational resources under *de jure*, and then *de facto*, segregation was particularly harmful because deindustrialization forced the loss of 83,000 manufacturing jobs, leaving many African Americans jobless and educationally un-prepared for the burgeoning white-collar economy. Therefore, by the 1980s, African Americans were not only racially segregated from historic segregationist practices, but they were also living in disproportionately impoverished communities (compared to other Milwaukee communities). This concentrated poverty among African American Milwaukeeans happened as tax incentives spurred the movement of semi-skilled jobs to the suburbs; the suburban tax base gained wealth; and suburban schools' resources increased due to the state's school funding formula. MPS schools were not able to offer similar resources. In fact, when MPS was majority White, the district spent $127 less than the suburban average as compared to $1,254 when MPS became "majority-minority" (Barndt & McNally, 2001). *Board of School Directors of the City of Milwaukee v. Thompson* (1984) sought relief to segregated and under-resourced schools by suing suburban school districts. In a 1987 settlement, the Chapter 220 program became a remedy for unequal educational opportunities in MPS. Other "remedies" soon followed in the 1990s, such as, the MPCP voucher program and the charter school legislation. During this time period, African Americans in Milwaukee also created African American immersion schools (see Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000) and developed proposals for a separate Black school district (see Holt, 2000). However, as discussed earlier, these policies and programs proved to be veiled opportunities because,

- choice and charter schools have not increased student learning in Milwaukee,
- the legislative language and funding schemes of these reforms divert resources away from MPS, and
- legislative actions and recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings have reduced the effectiveness of busing programs (*Milliken v. Bradley*, 1977; State of Wisconsin, 1999).

These findings imply that moving students from one school to another within MPS or moving students from traditional public school settings to charter and choice school settings has not addressed the core problem of African Americans' inability to access quality schools in Milwaukee. In fact, African American Milwaukeeans have witnessed the disproportionate closure of traditional public schools in their neighborhoods, and many parents' "choices" are limited only to local charter schools and the local private schools that accept vouchers (Milwaukee Public Schools Board, 2007). Furthermore, even in some predominantly White neighborhoods (i.e., Bay View), African American children represent the majority racial group in those schools because White students have enrolled elsewhere. Since suburban communities are not funded appropriately for the Chapter 220 diversity program, 'White resistance' in Milwaukee reinforces racial segregation (even in predominantly White neighborhoods), and the market-based reforms divert resources away from MPS (and do not improve students' access to a quality education), the authors recommend a combination of legislative actions and district policies. Firstly, in order to encourage school and residential diversity, it is recommended that MPS and its activists pressure the legislature to rewrite Chapter 220 legislation so that suburban districts receive state aid in the same manner as the Open Enrollment program and acquire supplemental state aid as an incentive for their continued participation. Secondly, it is recommended that MPS and its activists pressure the legislature to revise Act 9 and the MPCP funding formula so that MPS does not continue to

lose state aid. The authors also recommend that MPS use judicial means to recoup the millions of dollars lost since the inception of Act 9 and the MPCP voucher program. Finally, it is recommended that MPS target the annual savings of $20 million dollars from its cessation of massive intra-district busing (see Kane, 2008) as well as any funds recouped from unfair state legislation to create and restore schools in African American communities where the cultural knowledge of Milwaukee's African American history is the core of curricular reform and the restoration of social support services.

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