

Milwaukee's school options have evolved to offer a wide variety of choices to families. Unfortunately, the policies governing them have not kept pace.

A critical piece of our three-part strategy to add 5,000 seats in high-quality schools by 2025 is to foster **a healthy and improving education ecosystem** with sustainable, high-quality opportunities in all three school sectors – MPS, public charter, and private Choice.

To accomplish this, we advocate for a holistic, community-informed policy agenda designed to address four key challenges that perpetuate educational inequities and hamper high-quality schools.



Inadequate and inequitable access to **resources**

Fair funding and equitable resources

- Provide adequate funding to meet the needs of diverse learners in all schools and sectors
- Ensure equitable per-pupil funding for all students regardless of their choice of school
- Responsibly steward publicly owned school facilities and maximize utilization by high-quality schools

Ineffective and fragmented **governance** structures

Modern, coherent city-wide governance

- Establish city-wide, cross-sector strategy and leadership
- Establish a one-stop shop for enrolling in schools
- Restructure the Milwaukee Board of School Directors and rebuild public confidence in Milwaukee Public Schools
- Improve the authorization landscape for public charter schools

Limited **accountability** for school performance and student outcomes

Clear reporting and accountability for outcomes

- Fix the state Report Card to give an accurate picture of student outcomes and school performance
- Intervene in schools that persistently fail to meet expectations, regardless of sector

Broken **talent** pipeline, especially for educators of color

Diverse and equitable talent pipelines

- Address the educator talent pipeline crisis
- Remove licensure barriers and modernize teacher and leader licensure pathways
- Collect and publicly present data on teachers

Fair funding and equitable resources

Funding for public education belongs to Milwaukee's students; all students should receive the funding and opportunities they need to thrive, regardless of their identity, their ZIP code, or their choice of school.

1 Provide adequate funding to meet the needs of diverse learners in all schools and sectors, including equitable funding for our city's vulnerable (disadvantaged or "at-risk") student subgroups based on their unique needs:

- a.** Provide for annual inflationary increases for all schools in the state budget.
- b.** Increase the state's special education reimbursement rate, currently the lowest in the country, to at least 50%.
- c.** Fully fund 4K for all economically disadvantaged (Title 1 eligible) students.

2 Ensure equitable per-pupil funding for all students regardless of their choice of school by closing the \$4,000-\$7,500+ per-student funding gap faced by students attending public charter schools, or using private school choice programs (vouchers)

- a.** For public charter schools, which must serve all students and follow all the same laws and regulations as district-run schools:
 - i.** Increase charter school per-pupil funding from its current level to the MPS district average per-pupil of \$13,344
 - ii.** Ensure students attending public charter schools receive a per-pupil allotment in any current or future tax increases (referenda) for K-12 schools

b. For private school Choice programs (MPCP), which serve predominately lower- and middle-income students but which are limited by law from receiving some revenues for public schools:

- i.** Increase MPCP per-pupil funding from current levels to at least the low-revenue district threshold of \$10,000

c. Ensure students attending charter + choice schools are able to fully access federal funds for which they're eligible.

3 Responsibly steward publicly owned school facilities and maximize utilization by high-quality schools.

a. Return full ownership rights for public school buildings to the city, and require the city to follow existing laws regarding vacant or underutilized facilities.

b. Provide high-performing public charter schools with a "right to remain" in an assigned publicly-owned school facility or to be compensated by the district if forced to move.

c. Address facilities access & funding disparities by ensuring high-quality schools are either able to access existing publicly-owned school facilities at reasonable rates and/or have access to additional facilities funding to offset the increased costs of privately-owned facilities.

Modern, coherent city-wide governance

Milwaukee needs a fresh, modern approach to governing K-12 schools that reflects the realities of how families access publicly funded education and that sustains a thriving, multi-sector approach to providing high-quality, equitable educational opportunities for Milwaukee students.

1. Establish city-wide cross-sector strategy and leadership to improve K12 student outcomes, and a framework for cooperation/collaboration both across K12 education sectors and between schools and community partners.

a. Create a Milwaukee Education Commission of 7-15 members with broad representation of schools (all sectors) and community stakeholders in K-12 education. (e.g.: Baltimore, Boston).

b. Establish a city Office of Education, led by a senior-level official reporting directly to the Mayor (e.g.: Washington DC, Chicago, New York City).

2. Establish a one-stop shop for enrolling in schools by creating a city-wide common application and unified enrollment system to address the challenges faced by Milwaukee families in accessing school options.

a. Amend state law to permit Milwaukee-area schools participating in the MPCP (voucher) and/or open enrollment programs to align on a single timeline for families to apply and receive enrollment decisions.

b. Work with Milwaukee charter schools and their authorizers (City, UWM, and MPS) to adopt policies and align individual charter school application processes and timelines.

c. Work with Milwaukee Public Schools to align its existing school enrollment processes, and to participate in an independently-administered unified enrollment process.

d. Launch a unified enrollment program, managed fairly, transparently, and independently of any current school sector or operator (e.g., by city government or by a new third-party entity)

3. Restructure the Milwaukee Board of School Directors and rebuild public confidence in Milwaukee Public Schools, as a critical institution in our city's K-12 educational landscape.

a. Enhance the Milwaukee Board of School Directors' accountability to voters by:

i. Moving school board elections "on-cycle" to fall (November), in order to increase citizen participation and voter turnout, and/or

ii. Shifting at least some Board of School Director positions to appointed members.

b. Significantly expand the district's enrollment in instrumentality charter schools by adopting "innovation school" best practices that have been successful in increasing enrollment and student performance in similar urban school districts (e.g., Indianapolis, Denver, Camden).

In particular, empower instrumentality charter schools with necessary levels of self-governance (autonomy), by requiring that governing boards:

i. have hiring/firing authority for school leader & building staff (i.e., no Central Office ability to force transfers of district staff into or out of the school);

ii. directly recognize unions or voluntary associations and bargain at the school site level;

iii. hold votes among school community members (staff and/or parents/guardians) prior to imposing or changing any negotiated conditions of work.

4. Improve the authorization landscape for public charter schools, by updating existing state laws to clarify and strengthen autonomy and provide transparency in authorization practices.

a. Ensure clear, transparent, and consistent requirements for charter school contracts.

b. Make it easier for high-performing charter schools to grow and serve more students.

Clear reporting and accountability for outcomes

Every actor responsible for educating Milwaukee students should be responsible for ensuring high-quality schools and equitable student outcomes. Families and the community at-large must have timely, relevant, and transparent information on the performance of students and schools, in order to exercise their inherent agency, and to hold the education system to account.

- 1. Fix the state Report Card to give an accurate picture of student outcomes and school performance**, including a more balanced weighting of the Achievement (proficiency) and Growth components for Milwaukee schools.
- 2. Intervene in schools that persistently fail to meet expectations, regardless of sector** (those rated at the lowest level of the state report card for multiple years), that includes meaningful interventions and accountability.

- a.** For public schools (district and charter):
Transition to a new operator or closure/non-renewal.
- b.** For private schools in Choice programs:
restrictions on the ability for schools to receive public funds, and/or to enroll students, as is currently done for financial/operational performance issues.

Diverse and equitable talent pipelines

At every level of our public education system – from the classroom to the board room – Milwaukee students should see themselves reflected in and served by talented, effective educators who share their identities, backgrounds, and life experiences.

- 1. Address the educator talent pipeline crisis**, by strengthening and fully-funding entry pathways like “grow your own” programs, and by reducing regulatory barriers and increasing funding for alternative teacher and principal licensure pathways.
- 2. Remove licensure barriers and modernize teacher and leader licensure pathways**, eliminating ineffective barriers like FORT, and ensuring that all requirements support student learning and school performance outcomes.
- 3. Collect and publicly present data on teachers**, including demographics, experience, and effectiveness across all school sectors.

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