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New Study: Only Thirteen Percent of Milwaukee Public, Public Charter and Private School Students Are Enrolled in Schools Meeting Wisconsin State Standards

Almost 57,000 Seats in Performing Schools Required in Eight Milwaukee Areas

Milwaukee, WI – IFF released a new study today analyzing the performance, location, and enrollment of Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), charter schools and certain private schools participating in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) in 2008-2009. The study—*Choosing Performance: An Analysis of School Location and Performance in Milwaukee*—determined that most children do not attend or live near a school that meets the Wisconsin State Standard. The Wisconsin State Standard is 74 percent of students scoring proficient or better on the Reading portion of the Wisconsin Knowledge Concepts Examination (WKCE) and 58 percent of students scoring proficient or better on the Math portion of the WKCE.

The IFF study pinpoints for MPS, city leaders, and school reform stakeholders the “Top Eight” zip code areas in Milwaukee with the greatest number of school-age children but the fewest schools that meet state standards for academic performance. This study sets priorities for improvement by using the concept of “Tier I” and “Tier II” to measure the relative need for performing schools. Tier I schools are those that performed at state standard or better for 2008-2009; Tier II schools are those that performed at least at 75 percent of state standard.

IFF’s fundamental belief and the premise of this report is that all students should have the option of attending a performing school near where they reside. IFF has been studying the distribution of performing schools in urban school districts since 2003. Originally the research methodology and analysis was developed to identify which community areas in Chicago should be a priority when locating new schools, IFF has since applied it to inform the education reform efforts of school systems in St. Louis, Denver, and Kansas City.

Key findings from the report include:

- In 2008-2009, the 23 of 180 non-selective public and charter schools that met state standards (Tier I) could only serve 10.9 percent of the students currently enrolled in public schools (9,625 of 87,814).
- Fifty additional public and charter schools met 75 percent of the state standard (Tier II). Combined, the city’s Tier I and Tier II schools serve 42.3 percent of all students currently enrolled in public schools (37,168 of 87,814).
- The city requires 74,383 seats of Tier I capacity to serve all students currently enrolled in public and charter schools. When Tier I and Tier II capacity is compared with enrollment, 46,000 additional seats of capacity are needed.

- Almost all of the city's Tier I and Tier II capacity is in elementary schools. There are no non-selective Tier I public high schools in Milwaukee and only one Tier II charter high school.
- When we include the Tier I and Tier II capacity in those private schools participating in MPCP that report data, Milwaukee needs a combined total of up to 78,846 performing seats to serve all school-age children residing in the city. Together, Tier I and Tier II public, charter and private schools in MPCP can serve about one-third of Milwaukee's school-age population.
- Over two-thirds of the citywide need for a performing seat is in eight zip codes. Six zip codes on the north and northwest side, 53209, 53206, 53216, 53218, 53210 and 53224 and two on the south side, 53215 and 53204, comprise the Top Eight. Almost 57,000 school-age children residing in these eight areas are not able to attend a performing school near where they reside.
- Students in the six high-need zip codes on the north side are 60 percent more likely than students in the other 14 zip codes to leave their zip code to attend a Tier I or Tier II school.

“Two-thirds of Milwaukee children cannot enroll in a school that comes close to meeting state standards,” says **IFF Executive Vice President Joe Neri**. “IFF’s report highlights specific geographic areas for improvement, and provides community-level data that civic leaders, stakeholders, and families can use to begin to address the problem.”

Choosing Performance concludes that there remains both an opportunity and an obligation for Milwaukee leaders to move more decisively to reach the 56,000 to 78,000 school-age children who do not have the option to attend a performing school. Specifically, the report recommends:

- Focus on the eight areas of the city representing two-thirds of the need.
- Increase access to the as many as 4,400 vacant seats in Tier I and Tier II schools.
- Use the City's existing tools and authorities to drive school reform, including its ability to authorize new charter schools and the 11 currently vacant school buildings located in the eight high-need areas, which are a powerful incentive to help attract high-quality charter school operators to Milwaukee.
- Establish a method for responding to the test score data from the 100-plus private schools participating in MPCP coming out in the 2010-2011 school year. These private schools have the potential to meet nearly 25 percent of the need for performing schools.

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About IFF:

Founded in 1988, IFF (www.iff.org) is a nonprofit community development financial institution committed to strengthening nonprofits, their clients and communities through affordable financing, real estate consulting, and research and public policy. It serves nonprofits in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri and Wisconsin.