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New Study Finds Higher Graduation Rates For Milwaukee Choice Students

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Students in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program graduate at a higher rate than students in the Milwaukee Public Schools, according to a University of Minnesota expert on high school graduation rates.

In “Graduation Rates for Choice and Public School Students in Milwaukee,” John Robert Warren, Ph.D., analyzes four years of data for students in the Milwaukee school choice Program and the Milwaukee Public Schools. Dr. Warren’s report represents the most comprehensive review yet of graduation levels among school choice and public school students in Milwaukee.

“Students in choice program high schools are more likely to graduate from high school than students in public high schools,” according to Warren.

He added, “Overall, had public high school graduation rates equaled those for school choice students, the number of public school graduates would have been 14 per cent higher from 2003 to 2006.” Underscoring the importance of this finding, Warren’s report notes, “Decades of evidence from scholarship in sociology, economics, education, public health, political science and other disciplines makes plain that completing high school is a prerequisite for success in modern America.”

The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program is the nation’s oldest and largest to provide public support for parents to enroll their children in private schools. Through the program, 18,550 students this year attend one of 122 private schools in the City of Milwaukee.

For the classes of 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006, Warren reports the following graduation rates. In three of four years, rates for school choice students are higher than those in public schools. Warren believes the one exception — in 2003-04 — might be an anomaly.

	2003	2004	2005	2006
Milwaukee Public Schools students	48%	65%	52%	53%
School choice program students	62%	61%	61%	64%

- More -

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Page 2

About the Author and Report

John Robert Warren is an Associate Professor and Director of Undergraduate Studies in the Department of Sociology at the University of Minnesota—Twin Cities. Dr. Warren received his doctorate in 1998 from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Dr. Warren’s scholarship reflects extensive examination of issues associated with the accurate measurement of high school graduation rates. In “State-Level High School Completion Rates: Concepts, Measures, and Trends,” he validated a rigorous new method for calculating graduation rates (see *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, Vol. 13, No. 51, December 23, 2005 — <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v13n51/>).

Dr. Warren participates with scholars at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study (WLS), an extensive long-term research project involving graduates of Wisconsin high schools in 1957 (see <http://www.wisls.org/about.htm>).

Dr. Warren also is an expert in the emerging issue of state high school exit examinations.

“Graduation Rates for Choice and Public School Students in Milwaukee” was supported by a grant from School Choice Wisconsin, a nonprofit organization that seeks to ensure an honest debate about school choice by providing accurate information on the impact of school choice on families, communities, and schools.

The report can be viewed online at www.SchoolChoiceWI.org under the heading “Current Developments.”

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