

We Must Close the Funding Gap for High Schools

High schools set students up for success. Yet high schools that participate in Wisconsin's parental choice programs receive far less than their public school counterparts despite producing better results. They must raise private funds for each student they accept, a model that is unsustainable.

What's the problem?



We're going to have to cap our freshman enrollment and could be cutting 20 to 30 seats in the future based on the current funding numbers. Our cost is a little over \$12,000. We're getting \$9,045. We have a full time mission advancement director and an assistant. I work on that team, too. All of our time is spent trying to fund the gap.



Paul Scriver, President
Shoreland Lutheran High School (Kenosha)

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It's becoming unworkable. We had double the loss of teachers this summer. We need to raise \$2 million a year to close the gap. We are going to constrict seats in several areas. We're at 1,200 systemwide. We're probably going to dial it back.



Jim Piatt, President
Messmer Schools (Milwaukee)

DPI ranks Messmer highest among North Side Milwaukee public and private schools serving low-income children.

High schools like Shoreland and Messmer put students on a path for success. Because their results surpass most public high schools, they have waiting lists of families.

Many high schools in Wisconsin's parental choice programs must raise millions each year to cover actual costs. Without relief, they too will limit or reduce available seats, cutting a lifeline for K-8 students.

One exemplary Milwaukee high school already has closed. HOPE Christian School High School served under-privileged students. But despite proficiency rates twice as high as some MPS high schools and twelve consecutive years in which all graduating students were accepted into college, the school closed in 2022 because of inadequate state funding.

milwaukee journal sentinel
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Milwaukee's HOPE Christian High School, a voucher program that excels in enrolling grads in college, to close



Scan the QR code to read more.

Why high schools cost more

More teachers, special programs, larger buildings, athletic facilities – it just costs more to operate a high school.

| EXPENSE | HIGH SCHOOLS | ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS |
|---|--------------|--------------------|
| Core course offerings are taught by teachers with specific areas of expertise and require more teachers | ✓ | ✗ |
| Advanced course options (STEAM, PLTW, Advanced Placement, IB programs) | ✓ | ✗ |
| Athletic options, facilities, staffing, equipment. | ✓ | ✗ |
| Students Services to plan graduation, college career readiness | ✓ | ✗ |

What do we have to lose?

In short: opportunity and results. **If funding were increased, nearly 20,000 students would be able to attend a school in grades K-8 or 9-12 that best fits their needs.** That estimate, from a survey conducted by School Choice Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty, is on the low end. Narrowing the funding gap could mean greater opportunity.

Choice produces results. Students in Wisconsin parental choice programs outscore public school students on the college-readiness ACT test.

In Milwaukee, 82% of students attend high schools that meet, exceed or significantly exceed DPI Report Card expectations. Conversely, nearly 80% of high school students are in MPS schools that meet few or fail to meet expectations.



In Racine, all private high schools meet or exceed expectations. In the Racine Unified School District, fully 75% of students attend schools that meet few or fail to meet expectations.

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Technology, reading and math support, mental health services and Advanced Placement and STEM programs – these all increase the cost of education but have significant benefits to students. Closing the funding gap would allow us to invest more in innovative programs and resources for more students.



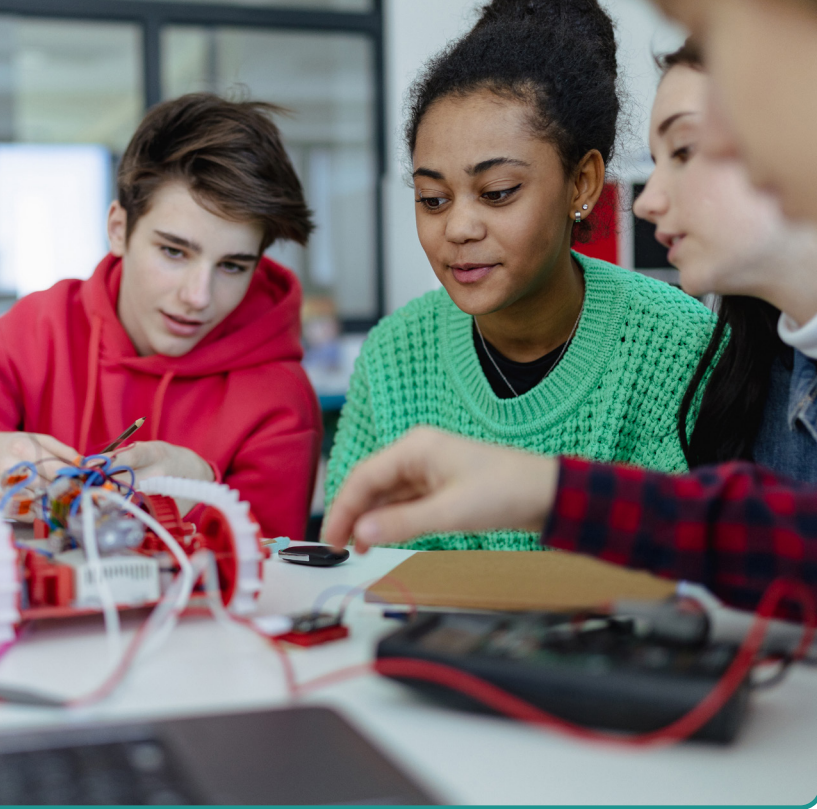
Donna Bembenek, President
Waukesha Catholic Memorial High School

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The voucher amount has failed to keep up with the rising cost of education and has forced St. Thomas More to limit how many students we can serve. Increasing the voucher would allow St. Thomas More to expand our outreach, offering even more young people a better opportunity to flourish as adults.



John Hoch, President
St. Thomas More High School



What does other research show?

Peer-reviewed research shows that Milwaukee school choice students are more likely to be successful in life. Compared to MPS students, choice students are:

- More likely to graduate from high school;
- More likely to seek post-secondary education;
- In safer schools; and
- Less likely to commit crimes.

Narrow the Funding Gap

Wisconsin students deserve support, no matter what type of school they attend. But right now, as the chart to the right shows, students in the choice programs **receive less than 60% of the taxpayer support for public school students.**

The Coalition for Education Freedom proposes to reduce that gap by half by increasing average payments to \$11,800.

Private and charter schools would continue to get less support than traditional public schools but would have the funding they need to hire and retain teachers and expand seats.

School choice works for families. They want more.

