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New Poll: Milwaukee Voters Demand Urgent Reforms to Address MPS' Continued Shortcomings

Voters are rejecting Superintendent Jill Underly and DPI's excuses for failing to hold MPS accountable — and continue to support significant reforms to address the district's academic and financial challenges

City Forward Collective, along with our advocacy partners at CFC Action Fund, are sharing the first portion of findings from our poll of Milwaukee voters regarding K12 education issues. Today's release includes responses on Milwaukee Public Schools; CFC will release the second part of our findings, focusing on state-level issues, later this week.

Statement from Colleston Morgan, CFC's Executive Director:

"Milwaukee residents continue to send a clear and unmistakable message: they are deeply concerned about the continuing cascade of challenges at Milwaukee Public Schools. They've lost confidence in MPS and School Board leadership - and they're not buying Jill Underly & DPI's shifting of blame & abdication of responsibility for holding MPS accountable. They're ready for significant, structural reforms to get the district back on track, academically and financially. And, they're looking to the Governor and Mayor for leadership out of this seemingly never-ending crisis."

CFC surveyed 502 registered Milwaukee voters through Change Research between Feb 4 and 8 to gauge public sentiment on MPS performance and leadership. The purpose of this polling is to provide leaders with a clear, data-driven understanding of Milwaukee voter concerns and priorities, highlighting the urgent need for academic and financial accountability.

Key MPS-Related Findings from CFC's Polling:

- 1. Milwaukee residents remain deeply concerned about the ongoing challenges at Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS)**
 - a. 55% of respondents grade MPS at a D or F; only 11% grade it an A or B
 - b. 70% of respondents are paying some or a lot of attention to MPS' ongoing issues

- c. 64% of respondents do not believe DPI has done enough to address the challenges at MPS, vs just 15% who believe they have

2. School choice remains widely supported

- a. Milwaukee residents overwhelmingly see academic performance (59%) and financial mismanagement (58%) as the most pressing challenges facing MPS
- b. Only 25% of respondents identified students leaving for charter or private schools as a top concern—underscoring strong voter support for school choice options

3. A strong majority of Milwaukee residents are alarmed by both the academic and financial state of MPS

- a. Nearly 80% are very concerned about MPS’ failing NAEP scores, with just 9% of students proficient and Black students ranking worst in the nation.
- b. About three-quarters worry about declining academic outcomes, despite over \$1 billion in new funding since 2020 and a 30% property tax hike.
- c. More than half of residents are troubled by MPS’ failure to reinstate school resource officers, despite a state law requiring them.

4. Milwaukee Residents Trust the Governor and Mayor for Leadership but Lack Confidence in the Milwaukee Board of School Directors

Leader/Institution	Trust Percentage
Governor Tony Evers	58%
Mayor Cavalier Johnson	49%
State Superintendent Jill Underly & DPI	36%
Milwaukee Board of School Directors	32%

5. Milwaukee residents continue to express support for significant changes to MPS’ governance - while continuing to reject an outright takeover of the district

- a. We continue to find support for evidence-backed reforms to improve governance at the Milwaukee Board of School Directors, including:
 - i. Moving School Board elections “on-cycle” to the fall of even-numbered years to increase turnout (70-13)
 - ii. Moving to citywide “at-large” elections for School Board members, and reducing the number of district-based seats (48-31), and,
 - iii. Adding appointed School Board members alongside elected ones (43-42)
- b. Other governance reform ideas that have been circulated failed to find support, including
 - i. Breaking up MPS into smaller districts (39-44)

- ii. Eliminating the School Board in favor of direct Mayoral appointment of the MPS Superintendent (23-64), and,
- iii. Shifting to a fully-appointed School Board (18-70)

Methodology

Polling was conducted by [Change Research](#) between Feb 4 - 8, using Dynamic Online Sampling to attain a representative sample. Polling included 502 respondents from registered voters in the City of Milwaukee; post-stratification was performed on age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, and 2020 presidential preference. The margin of error for the full sample is 4.6%.

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City Forward Collective envisions a city where every Milwaukee child receives an excellent education that prepares them to thrive at a high-quality school of their choice. We advance our mission to secure Milwaukee's future through informing, engaging, and catalyzing transformation across Milwaukee's K12 school ecosystem. Learn more about our work at www.cityforwardcollective.org

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CFC Action Fund is a 501(c)(4) organization whose mission is to secure Milwaukee's future by electing champions and advancing policies to ensure that every Milwaukee child receives an excellent education at a high-quality school of their choice. For more information, visit our website at www.cfcactionfund.org

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