



Rep. Kessler Proposes Middle-Ground in Mayoral Control Dispute

MILWAUKEE – State Representative Frederick P. Kessler of the 12th Assembly District today proposed a middle-ground in the dispute over who will control Milwaukee Public Schools. Kessler’s plan contains the following provisions:

- All schools operating within the city and receiving public funds – including Milwaukee Public Schools, Charter Schools and private schools enrolling pupils under the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program – would have to receive a license from a new city agency whose chief would be appointed by the Mayor. The license can be revoked for failing schools
- The Board of School Directors would continue to be responsible for day-to-day operations and long-term planning for MPS, including hiring the Superintendent
- Neither private schools accepting students under the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program nor suburban schools accepting open enrollment pupils from Milwaukee would be allowed to discriminate against students based on special educational needs.

Further details of Kessler’s plan:

- School board retains primary responsibility for all aspects Milwaukee Public Schools: personnel, curriculum, policy and day-to-day operations.
- However, the Mayor gains the power to set and enforce standards of safety, fiscal responsibility, staff qualifications, and most importantly, educational results.
 - This authority is vested in a new Office of School Standards and Licensure, whose head is appointed directly by the mayor.
 - Every school that operates in the City of Milwaukee, and that receives public money, will be required to have a license from the Office of School Standards and Licensure.
 - If a school cannot meet the objective standards established by the Office, it will have to cease operations (though such a school may reapply for a license in the future to reopen).
 - “Every school” includes:
 - Milwaukee Public Schools
 - Charter Schools
 - Private Schools accepting pupils under the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program
- Private Schools accepting MPCP students, as well as suburban districts accepting open enrollment students from Milwaukee, would be forbidden from discriminating against students with special educational needs. Such schools must accept at least a ratio of 50% of the combined school district average of special needs students. The current level of state funding would follow the student to the school for whom educational services are especially costly.
- The plan would go into effect for the 2011-12 School year

“MPS will not be able to survive as a viable educational system if children whose parents are involved in their education continue to send their children to suburban schools under open enrollment or voucher schools, neither of which currently needs to accept kids with special needs,” said Kessler.

The percentage of students in Milwaukee Public Schools with special educational needs has been climbing. Almost twenty percent of high school students district-wide are identified as having special educational needs, with even higher numbers in some schools: Custer High School, for example, enrolls 33% special-needs students.

“We should not forget that MPS has some outstanding schools,” said Kessler. “Rufus King, Milwaukee School of Languages, and Riverside, for example, all serve their students extremely well, and are nationally recognized as top schools. In fact, Rufus King was ranked number 1 in Wisconsin by US News and World Report. But this educational quality is jeopardized if MPS must dedicate an ever-growing fraction of its resources to special education.”