

Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty: Study: Millions in taxpayer money spent on MPS' vacant schools crisis

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New MPS records reveal how MPS is hurting its budget deficit by refusing to sell facilities to charter, private schools

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August 1, 2018 – Milwaukee, WI — In about five weeks, Milwaukee Public Schools will start the school year with a projected deficit of \$38 million which is projected to reach \$100 million in the near future. Some teachers and administrators say the answer is a state bailout. But a new study by WILL documents how MPS has caused its budget woes by evading state law and refusing to take serious action on its vacant and underutilized school buildings. The full study can be found [here](#). The study provides an updated and comprehensive look at the vacant and underutilized schools issue by using new and previously unreported documents obtained by WILL, including a facilities report conducted by an outside consultant, for which MPS paid nearly one million dollars.

Highlights from the [WILL study](#), authored by CJ Szafir, Libby Sobic, and Cori Petersen, include:

- MPS currently has at least 52 buildings that are either vacant or under-utilized.
- The buildings are not vacant due to a lack of interested buyers. In the last two years, private and charter schools have offered to purchase 11 of the vacant school buildings, but they all still sit empty. The extent of this problem can be [understood on our map here](#).
- If MPS sold 9 of the buildings currently for sale at the appraised value, they would net \$5.89 million.
- MPS has 41 buildings that are currently operating at less than 70% capacity. Last school year, empty seats across the district cost MPS at least \$6.1 million.
- In the last 10 years, MPS has spent over \$10 million on maintenance and utilities for its vacant school buildings.

According to WILL Associate Counsel Libby Sobic, “We’ve known for some time how the City and MPS hurt Milwaukee education by refusing to sell buildings to high quality charter and private schools. But this new study shows how this obstruction has cost taxpayers big time and greatly contributed to MPS’ budget woes.”

The report calls on the state legislature to fix this problem once and for all.

“With the City blatantly ignoring state law and MPS refusing to responsibly sell buildings, it is up to the state legislature to make meaningful reforms to the state law to force the sale of these buildings,” says Attorney Sobic. “Both taxpayers and the people of Milwaukee deserve no less.”