

Milwaukee Jewish Council Position on
Public Education Issues

The Milwaukee Jewish Council recognizes that our community's educational system is in a state of crisis. Every child is entitled to a high quality education regardless of where their home may be. Today and for years to come, many children will receive neither a quality nor an integrated education unless substantial steps are taken by both city and suburban school districts to change that intolerable situation. The unique promise of this nation has been our commitment to a superior education for all - not just some - of our children, so that each of us can become a self-sufficient and productive citizen.

That a crisis exists is self-evident: high drop-out rates, low grade point averages and test scores, and rising numbers of suspensions are among its indicators. As the heart of the discussion in Milwaukee are two fundamental issues: integration and quality of education. We believe that any resolution to the crisis must address both issues.

The Milwaukee Jewish Council re-affirms its goals regarding education in our school system as follows:

Public schools should provide quality education:

School quality results from a commitment to excellence and equity in a first-class system that provides all students with equal access to successful schools. A successful school would meet the following criteria:

1. Measures of students' academic achievement must be high relative to state and national norms.
2. Students' performance must be at a consistently high level over a period of years.
3. The achievement of and educational expectations for students must not differ between socio-economic strata, races and sexes. These expectations include high school graduation.
4. School integration occurs when people of different social and racial backgrounds interact and work cooperatively for a common goal. Integration implies unity. It is more complex than desegregation (which aims simply to place black and white children in the same schools) and it takes place in schools when members of a community wish to give all children a common and equal educational experience.

We believe that excellence in education for some children cannot be made available at the expense of other children. Excellence without equity is incompatible with the goals of a democratic society. We recognize that many children need extra help to attain levels of learning to which they are capable. Indeed, because of early learning deficiencies, some poor children need sustained help throughout their schooling in order to compete successfully with their more advantaged peers. We support those initiatives at the local, state and federal levels of government to provide continued attention to improving the quality of education for all students, especially those programs designed to keep "at risk" students in school - and learning.

In addition to academic excellence, a crucial goal of education in our diverse community must be to educate students to be fully participating citizens in a pluralistic society. We believe that segregated education - be it all black or all white - cannot achieve that objective. The integration of teaching staffs and administration throughout the metropolitan area, is an essential part of an integrated education.

The Milwaukee Jewish Council concurs with the decision of the United States Supreme Court which dictates that "separation of race in schools is inherently racist and unjust." We believe that current integration policy is not sufficient. Any desegregation plan or educational system must permit its participants to have real influence in the decision making process. We believe that the disproportionate burden that has been placed on minority school children under the Milwaukee school desegregation plan indicates that participating minorities do not have such influence. This problem must be corrected not only to successfully achieve integration but also to provide an adequate education for minority students. We support efforts to further metropolitan integration through the strengthening of the Chapter 220 Program. We call for the exploration and implementation of voluntary methods to achieve strengthened integration goals prior to resorting to mandatory participation. However, if voluntary metropolitan goals are not implemented, we support mandatory participation. We believe that integration goals must include targets for Hispanic, Native American and Asian students as well as black and white students.

Milwaukee cannot afford to leave underdeveloped the talents of thousands of children who happened to be born disadvantaged by virtue of race, language, income status or the location of their home. The entire community has a stake in creating the highest quality integrated education opportunities throughout the Metropolitan Milwaukee area.

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