



# Fulfill the Promise

*The schools and communities  
our children deserve*



It is time to fulfill the promise of *Brown v. Board of Education* and of equal opportunity for all.

We commit ourselves to a revitalized civil rights movement, recognizing the inherent links between **strong public schools, healthy communities,** and a **multiracial democracy.**



Sixty years ago, on May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court issued the most important decision ...



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... of the 20th Century. The unanimous *Brown* decision is best known for upholding equal opportunity and outlawing school segregation policies. Equally important, it overthrew the Jim Crow “separate but equal” doctrine upholding segregation in all aspects of life, from jobs, to buses, to drinking fountains.

Today, this country is witnessing a New Jim Crow that fosters both racial and economic inequities. Segregated schools and housing are the norm. Voting rights are under attack. Mass incarceration is destroying families and communities. Deadly “stand-your-ground” and “castle doctrine” laws are proliferating. Deportations and anti-immigrant prejudice are on the rise.

In education, the Milwaukee region has long ignored *Brown’s* proclamation that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” We’ve also taken the abandonment of *Brown* to a new level. We are abandoning the very institution of public education.

We all know that our public schools can, and must, do a better job educating all children.

But we must never forget that the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) remains the only education institution in this city with the capacity, the commitment, and the legal obligation to educate all children.

Today, Milwaukee’s future cannot be viewed solely through a black-white prism. In line with national trends, Latinos are the fastest-growing non-white community. Milwaukee is also home to a significant Hmong population, and to immigrants from across the globe, from Somalia, to Myanmar, to Sri Lanka.

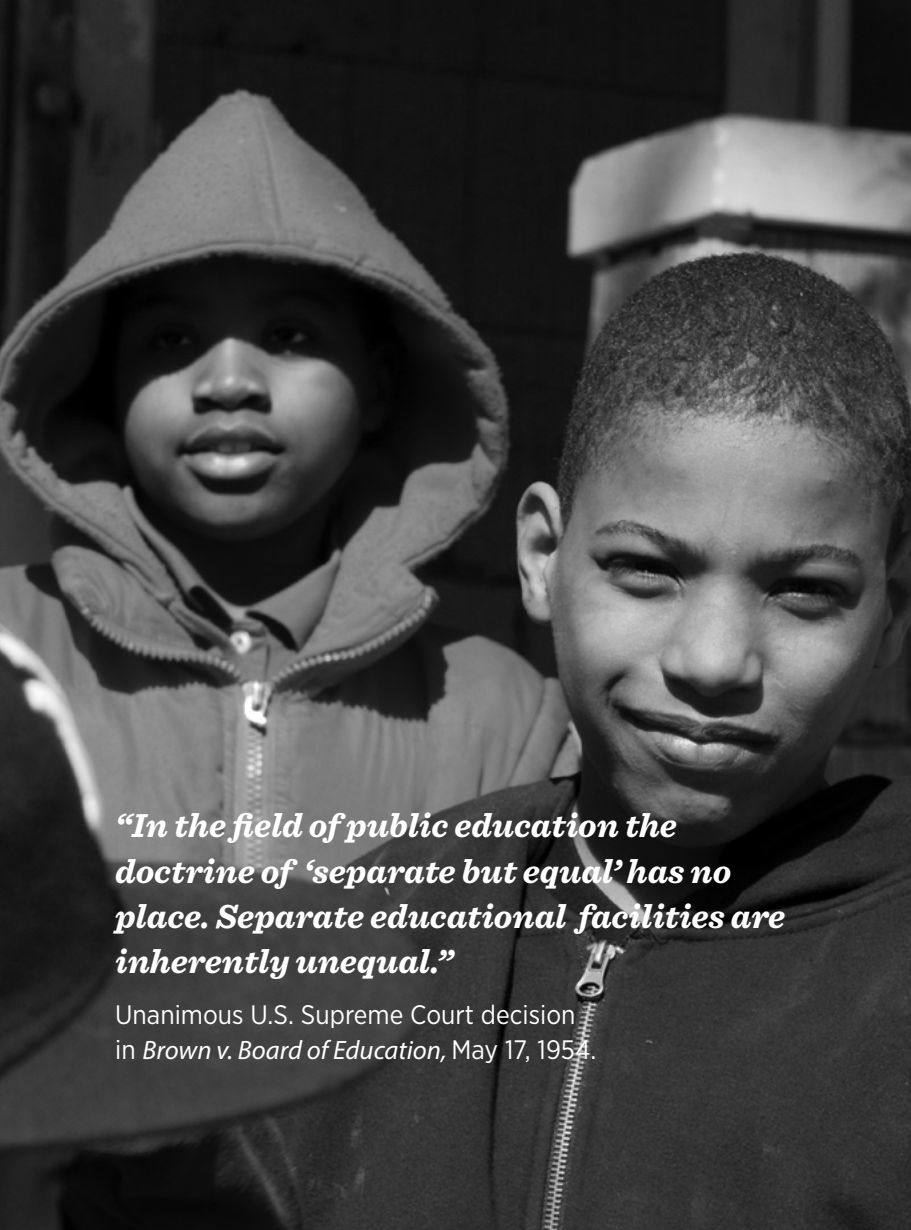
More than ever, Milwaukee’s future is linked to the entire region. Segregation and inequities undermine the common good throughout our metropolitan area.

It is time to reaffirm the inherent link between strong public schools, healthy communities, and a multiracial democracy.

**It is time to fulfill the promise of *Brown*. ■**

***“The movement for African American civil rights began long before the Brown decision and continues long after. Still, the defeat of the separate-but-equal legal doctrine undercut one of the major pillars of white supremacy in America.”***

Smithsonian, National Museum of American History, web-page on “Separate is not Equal, *Brown v. Board of Education*.”



***“In the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.”***

Unanimous U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, May 17, 1954.

# Milwaukee's "Claim to Shame"

**T**raditionally known for our beer and bratwurst, Milwaukee has a new reputation: The country's most segregated metropolitan region.

To cite one chilling example of the New Jim Crow: the incarceration rate for African-American men in Wisconsin is the highest in the United States — in a nation that imprisons more people than any other country in the world.

Due to racial and economic segregation,

our schools are increasingly segregated. Due to funding disparities, they are both separate *and* unequal.

If the Milwaukee region is serious about equal opportunity for all, we must dismantle the region's racial and economic segregation. It will require a broad-based effort involving transportation, housing, economic development, criminal justice, voting rights, and school enrollment policies.

**But it can be done. ■**

## Milwaukee's New Jim Crow

*"We're No. 1."*

### Black-white residential segregation

The Milwaukee region is the most racially segregated among the 102 largest metropolitan areas.

### Residential segregation based on poverty

Poor people in the Milwaukee-Waukesha-West Allis region are the most segregated among the country's largest metropolitan areas.

### The well-being of African-American children

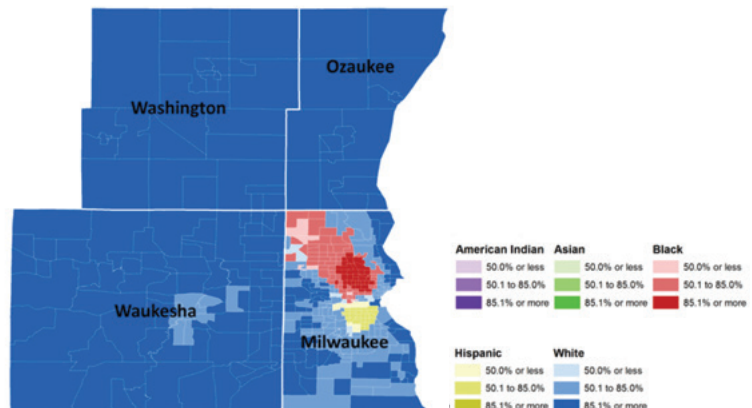
Wisconsin is the worst among all 50 states, based on 12 key indicators. (Most of the state's African Americans live in Milwaukee, driving statewide numbers.)

### Achievement gap between African-American and white students

Wisconsin has the widest gap in the nation in every test category, based on results from the National Assessment of Education Progress.

### Mass Incarceration of African-American men

Wisconsin locks up a higher percentage than any other state, and twice the national average.



### Disparity in African-American/white employment

Milwaukee's disparity of 32.4 percentage points for men is the widest gap among the top 40 metropolitan areas. The gap of more than 20 percentage points for women is the widest in the country.

### Number of Latino-owned businesses.

Milwaukee's rate, based on businesses per 1,000 residents, is worst in the nation among 36 benchmark metropolitan areas.

# Public Schools, Vouchers and Charters:

## *What's the Difference?*

**The Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS)** is the only educational institution in the city with the capacity, commitment, and legal responsibility to educate all children. MPS is overseen by a democratically elected school board, and all children in Milwaukee have the right to attend an MPS school.

Milwaukee also has a growing number of private voucher schools and privately run charter schools. These voucher and charter schools do not have to accept all students.

**Charter schools** are nominally public schools. They have their roots among progressive educators in the 1990s that wanted to experiment. However, the charter movement has changed significantly since then. A growing number of charters are privately run, and the public has little to no input. There are also “McFranchise” charter chains — one-size-fits-all, low-cost operations.

Milwaukee is home to one of the most ambitious “McFranchise” chains — Rocketship, based in San Jose, Calif. A Rocketship school opened on Milwaukee’s South Side this year, and a total of eight Rocketship schools are planned in Milwaukee.

Rocketship’s expansion plans are jeopardized by growing concern. School boards in San Francisco, Oakland, and East Palo Alto, California, and in San Antonio, Texas, have rejected Rocketship’s applications to open schools. In San Francisco, the board found that the Rocketship proposal “presents an unsound educational program.”

The Economic Policy Institute in Washington, D.C., recently released a report on school privatization proposals in Milwaukee, with a particular look at Rocketship. Among its findings:

- The Rocketship model relies on young and inexperienced teachers and replaces teachers with online learning for a significant portion of the day.
- On average, almost 30% of Rocketship teachers leave every year — a rate more than twice as high as MPS.
- The Milwaukee Rocketship school has no dedicated art classes nor certified art teachers. The school has no music education of any sort.

**Voucher schools** are private schools, and do not have the same legal responsibilities as MPS to educate all children. For instance:

- Voucher schools do not have to provide the same level of special education services.
- Voucher schools do not have to provide bilingual or English Language Learner services.
- Voucher schools do not have to provide services for homeless children.
- Voucher schools do not have to hire certified teachers.
- Voucher schools can set their own criteria for expelling a student. ■



# The message from the grassroots:

## *Stop school privatization*

People throughout Wisconsin are deeply concerned about efforts to privatize our public schools. In Milwaukee, the issue slightly tops the importance of smaller class sizes. Statewide, it is overwhelmingly the top issue.

These conclusions are based on a survey by member organizations of Schools and Communities United. The respondents were parents, students, teachers, or community members with a relationship to the public schools. The highest percentage was parents.

Some 1,234 people completed the survey between Feb. 24 and April 2. Just under half were from the Milwaukee area.

Asked their top priority for ensuring quality education, Milwaukee respondents answered “stopping efforts to privatize public schools” (29%), and “smaller class sizes” (27%).

## *Smaller classes make a difference*

Ask a parent: do smaller class sizes matter? Invariably they will answer “yes.”

That view, it turns out, corresponds with academic research.

The National Education Policy Center, based at the University of Colorado-Boulder, released a research brief this February summarizing the academic literature on class size. It found that smaller class sizes positively affect a range of student outcomes, from test scores to life opportunities years later.

“Smaller classes are particularly effective at raising achievement levels of low-income and minority children,” the brief said.

Wisconsin has an initiative to promote smaller class sizes in five-year-old kindergarten through third grade, known as the Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) program. The program remains underfunded, however, and state aid does not pay all additional costs. As a result, many schools are forced to forego the program.

## *The rights of children with special needs*

Latoya Silas did her homework before choosing a school for her son Jaquan, who has cerebral palsy.

She looked at private schools, she looked at public schools. She ultimately chose Gaenslen, an MPS K-8 neighborhood school in Riverwest that also serves students with significant cognitive and physical disabilities. She also knew that private schools are not obligated to provide all necessary services.

Silas has this advice for parents: Do your research and visit the school. Don't rely on hearsay. ■



***“For me, I wouldn't take my child out of MPS. Most of the private schools, they don't offer the services needed for a child who might be behind.”***

**Latoya Silas, MPS parent.**



# Moving Forward:

*Organizing for a better future,  
rebuilding our public schools*

**“Honesty  
compels me  
to admit that  
the school  
[segregation]  
problem cannot  
be solved  
permanently  
until the housing  
problem is  
solved.”**

**Martin Luther King, Jr.**,  
at a Milwaukee press  
conference on Jan.  
27, 1964, discussing  
demands to desegregate  
Milwaukee’s public schools.

**M**ilwaukee and Wisconsin have a rich history of popular struggle, from the abolitionist movement to women’s suffrage, labor rights, civil rights, immigrant rights, and protecting the environment.

Today, we are in the midst of a conservative backlash. But a new era of popular organizing has emerged, one that links essential issues.

To promote equal opportunity, family-supporting jobs are essential — most immediately, we must raise the minimum wage. Defending the most basic of democratic rights, the right to vote, is crucial. Ending mass incarceration and the record-setting pace of deportations is a matter of basic human decency, and of survival for individuals and communities alike.

Schools and Communities United is committed to defending and improving our public schools as part of such a progressive agenda.

Healthy communities and a multiracial democracy require strong public schools. To build quality schools for all children:

- Stop the privatization of public education
- Fair funding for all public schools
- More teaching, less testing
- Teach the whole child
  - Active learning in all curricular areas, connected to students’ lives
  - Librarians and art, music, and physical education teachers at all schools
  - A culturally relevant curriculum that explicitly opposes all forms of discrimination
- Smaller class sizes
- Early childhood programs in all public schools, beginning at 3-year-old kindergarten
- Expand bilingual education; allow all students to learn two languages
- Develop schools as community centers
- A culture of collaboration and democracy at all schools
- In-state university tuition for all graduates of a Wisconsin high school
- Regional initiatives that dismantle school segregation
- A free public education, early childhood through college, in diverse institutions committed to the promise of *Brown* ■



# One mother's story

## *Civic responsibility, diversity, and the value of public schools*

In 1977, when Lynn Shaw was five years old, she got on a bus on Milwaukee's northwest side and went to MacDowell school in the central city as part of the district's desegregation plan.

When Shaw returned home, the family would often gather around the dinner table and listen to their mother on the radio. She was a regular at school board meetings, testifying about civic responsibility and the importance of integrated schools.

Today, Shaw and her husband Bill send their two children to MacDowell Montessori, a K3 through high school program at 65th and Mount Vernon. "People sometimes ask me, 'Why MPS?'" she says. "And I always say, 'Why not MPS?' They are public schools and they are part of my community."

The Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) has the country's strongest network of public Montessori schools. The Montessori philosophy, based on collaboration and respect for nurturing the entire child, was a definite factor for Shaw. "As a child, I loved MacDowell, and I loved Montessori," she says. "I remember crying in 5th grade because I didn't want to leave."

The Shaws' two children are African American, and she also wanted a diverse school for her sons. "I didn't want them to go to a school where they were the only African-American children, or where everyone is from the same socioeconomic status, or even where they would be treated like every other student. Montessori treats every student as an individual, wherever you are that hour, wherever you are that day."

The Montessori programs begin at K3, and the Shaw's children have been at MacDowell the entire time. One son is 7 years old, the other is 9 years old.

Asked if she has any regrets about sending her sons to MacDowell, Shaw doesn't hesitate.

"Not for a minute," she says. ■

***"People sometimes ask me, 'Why MPS?' And I always say, 'Why not MPS?' They are public schools and they are part of my community."***

**Lynn Shaw**, parent, and her son Jeremiah



# Fulfill the Promise

*The Schools and Communities Our Children Deserve*

## Who We Are

**Schools and Communities United is a coalition of community, educator, civic, student, labor and religious organizations. We are dedicated to defending and improving our public schools. We frame these issues as part of a broader progressive agenda, from voting rights, to equal opportunity, to an economy that works for all.**

*Members of Schools and Communities United include:*

9to5 Wisconsin  
American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin  
American Federation of Teachers, Local 212  
Centro Hispano  
I Love My Public School  
Institute for Wisconsin's Future  
LGBT Community Center  
Milwaukee Inner-City Congregations  
Allied for Hope  
Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association  
NAACP – Milwaukee Chapter  
Occupy Riverwest  
Overpass Light Brigade  
Parents for Public Schools – Milwaukee  
Southeast United Educators  
Voces de la Frontera  
YES (Youth Empowered in the Struggle)  
Wisconsin Jobs Now  
Wisconsin Voices  
Women Informed

## What We Want

We demand an end to the privatization of public education. Our children are not for sale.

We reaffirm the inherent link between our public schools, healthy communities, and a multiracial democracy.

The first and most essential of the Coalition's founding principles states:

***“Education is a civil right and public responsibility. A strong public education system is the foundation of our democracy, of equal opportunity, and of an economy that works for all.”***

***Hold fast to dreams***

***For if dreams die***

***Life is a broken-winged bird***

***That cannot fly.***

**Langston Hughes**



**SCHOOLS &  
COMMUNITIES  
UNITED**

**ESCUELAS Y  
COMUNIDAD  
UNIDAS**

## Please Join Us

*For more information on the coalition:*

**Visit: [SchoolsAndCommunitiesUnited.org](http://SchoolsAndCommunitiesUnited.org)**

**Email: [SchoolsAndCommunitiesUnited@gmail.com](mailto:SchoolsAndCommunitiesUnited@gmail.com)**

**Like: Schools and Communities United, on Facebook**

*This booklet is based on a 32-page report available at [www.SchoolsAndCommunitiesUnited.org](http://www.SchoolsAndCommunitiesUnited.org)*