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We Win!: Court Says Yes! To Milwaukee School Choice! And Privately-funded Efforts Thrive, Too.

Choice IS constitutional, says the Wisconsin Supreme Court today, in a decision that is expected to draw national attention once again to the program "that made Milwaukee famous." First instituted in 1991 for 1,000 children in non-sectarian schools it was upheld by the courts shortly thereafter.

In 1995 the program was expanded to allow up to 15,000 children access to parochial schools, too. The legislature's bold move — and parental demand — led the Milwaukee Teachers' union— with national NEA backing — the ACLU and others to sue, and finally, the program reached the WI Supreme Court where it heard oral arguments in early March.

The Justices today ruled that the program "...does not violate the Establishment Clause because it has a secular purpose, it will not have the primary effect of advancing religion and it will not lead to excessive entanglement." "The propriety of providing educational opportunities for children of poor families in the state goes without question."

The landmark decision could pave the way for more legislative action on school choice, as many policymakers have slowed their efforts while awaiting the expected legal rulings.

Court decisions are still pending over choice in Cleveland, OH, and century-old voucher programs in Vermont and Maine. The Ohio Supreme Court's decision is expected sometime this summer.

School choice boosters in Milwaukee and across the nation are elated that the Court has found in favor of giving low-income children a chance to be educated at a school of their choice. Now 15,000 children have the green light to a better future; the next few months will no doubt be filled with anticipation and excitement as Milwaukee schools prepare to offer children a choice.

More in Choice News: Newspapers this morning are filled with praise for another boost to poor children everywhere. An unprecedented scholarship fund has been created that will serve at least 50,000 children in the fall of 1999. The Children's Scholarship Fund has initiated a \$200 million national fund to assist cities such as LA, Chicago and Jersey City, NJ in offering children a choice of schools. Call 1-800-444-9662 for more information.

[The Center for Education Reform is a national non-profit research and advocacy group working for reform on behalf of thousands of civic groups, policymakers, schools and parents. The Center filed an Amicus Curiae brief on behalf of a dozen prominent groups in support of the WI program. Call (202) 822-9000 for information and other national and local contacts on this case.]

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