

Some places' integration seats vanish

Aid formula makes big players prefer open enrollment to 220

By [Amy Hetzner](#) of the Journal Sentinel
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Some of the biggest players in the Chapter 220 program will not accept new minority students for the coming school year, a move likely to continue the trend of declining participation in the school integration program.

School boards for Elmbrook, Menomonee Falls and Wauwatosa, which collectively enrolled more than a quarter of all Chapter 220 students last school year, have voted to not open up any new seats to the program in the 2011-'12 school year.

The action comes as districts have increasingly favored the state's open enrollment public school choice program as a way to attract out-of-district students - and increased state aid - to their schools.

"The reason is largely financially related," Elmbrook School District Superintendent Matt Gibson said.

While the money that districts collect for open enrollment students comes on top of the revenue limits allowed by the state, Chapter 220 aid does not raise extra revenue for school districts. Instead, the state aid that districts receive through Chapter 220 goes toward lowering district property taxes.

As a result, Menomonee Falls human resources director Patti Keller said, residents could see an effect on their property taxes if the school board's decision to not allow in new 220 students continues in future years.

"It probably will have an impact somewhere down the line," she said. "It probably will have an impact on taxes."

The impact is likely to be less noticeable in Wauwatosa, however, which had only allowed kindergarten-age siblings of existing 220 students to join the 220 program in recent years.

Chapter 220 started more than 30 years ago in response to a federal desegregation order for Milwaukee Public Schools. Under the program, minority students from Milwaukee can enroll in participating suburban districts and white students from suburbs can attend MPS.

Participation in 220 steadily dropped over the last decade, however, as the open enrollment program has grown and diversity in suburbs has increased. This school year, the Glendale-River Hills School District had no remaining 220 students and still has a minority population of about 40% of its enrollment, Superintendent Larry Smalley said.

All but five of the 24 Milwaukee area districts participating in the Chapter 220 program experienced a decline in non-resident 220 student enrollment between September 2006 and September 2009, according to

figures from the state Department of Public Instruction.

In those districts where the Chapter 220 enrollment grew, the gains were absorbed amid overall enrollment growth.

Oak Creek-Franklin School District Superintendent Sara Burmeister said her district's policy, after identifying the number of spots available for non-resident students, is to allocate one-third of those for the Chapter 220 program and two-thirds for open enrollment. Overall, only about 5% of students in the district's schools come from outside the district every year, she said.

"Our school district supported that voluntary integration," Burmeister said.

But residential growth also could lead to cutbacks in the admission of new students, especially if classroom space becomes a concern.

That's possible in the Greendale School District, which saw resident enrollment increase by 90 students this school year and is projecting the addition of 35 resident students next year, Superintendent William Hughes said.

"We're actually scaling back open enrollment too because of our resident enrollment surge," he said.

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