



# MPS 'voucher tax' statement OK'd

## Private school cost will be listed on taxpayers' bills

By [Erin Richards](#) of the Journal Sentinel

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A proposal to make more transparent the tax that citizens pay for private-school vouchers was approved Thursday night by the Milwaukee School Board.

The board voted 9-0 to have the administration and the Office of Board Governance work with City of Milwaukee officials to break out the "voucher tax" from the Milwaukee Public School tax on documents sent to city taxpayers each year.

The board voted to set aside up to \$5,000 to pay for extra copies or extra postage that might be necessary to make that happen.

The issue has been raised over the years by those associated with MPS because on property tax bills, the tax impact of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program is rolled into the property tax for Milwaukee Public Schools.

The issue gained steam under a resolution proposed by School Board member Larry Miller after legislation expanded the scope of the voucher program.

The legislation opens the program to more middle-class families, drops the enrollment cap and allows private schools outside Milwaukee to accept a publicly funded voucher for qualifying students.

Miller proposed informing taxpayers of the cost of the voucher program as a separate tax.

His resolution states that in 2010, if the "voucher tax" would have been broken out and ranked under "levy by unit of government" on the documents taxpayers receive, the voucher program would have been placed just behind the Milwaukee Area Technical College and ahead of the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District.

MPS levied more than \$50 million in taxes in 2011 to subsidize schools in the voucher program, which last year enrolled about 20,300 students.

MPS legislative policy manager Chris Thiel said that next year the expense is expected to grow to \$53.4 million.

Jim Bender, president of the state's largest voucher-school advocate group, School Choice Wisconsin, said Miller's proposal missed the mark on accuracy because the voucher program saves taxpayers money per student in comparison to MPS.

"According to the nonpartisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau, the (voucher program) actually delivers substantial savings compared with MPS," Bender said. "If the MPS Board was truly interested in transparency, a more accurate proposal for them to take up would list the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program section as the school choice voucher credit."

With the adoption of the resolution, the Office of Board Governance and the district administration will work with Milwaukee officials to improve fiscal transparency related to funding the voucher program.

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