

1980

Integration Challenges for the 1980s: Long Range Plans for School Facilities

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Recommended Citation

Quinn, Lois M. and Robinson, Kenneth, "Integration Challenges for the 1980s: Long Range Plans for School Facilities" (1980). *ETI Publications*. 176.

https://dc.uwm.edu/eti_pubs/176

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INTEGRATION CHALLENGES FOR THE 1980's: LONG RANGE PLANS FOR SCHOOL FACILITIES

The Milwaukee School Board is currently considering a 1980-90 School Building and Sites Plan which recommends policies for school closings and construction projects for the 1980's. This report discusses the proposals of the School Building and Sites Commission and provides analysis of the three factors which the Commission stated were most important in planning school closings: impact on desegregation, declining enrollments, and budgetary constraints.

SUMMARY

The Commission's proposals would:

- Close 40 schools and rebuild another 12 at a cost of \$59.5 million. Total capital improvements proposed would cost \$149 million.
- Demolish rather than modernize older buildings in areas of the city with the heaviest concentrations of public school students.
- Eliminate schools in Black and Hispanic neighborhoods although minority student populations continue to increase in the public schools.
- Maintain schools with resident student populations less than 40% of building capacity in white neighborhoods, necessitating one-way busing of black and Hispanic children into these schools.
- Close specialty schools which are successfully integrated.

The Metropolitan Integration Research Center recommends:

1. The Commission plans should be rejected as racially unequal, unnecessarily costly, and damaging to central city neighborhoods.
2. New plans should be developed based on the present and projected distribution of student populations throughout the city.
3. Buildings should be closed in neighborhoods whose student populations cannot support existing facilities and who have not contributed to two-way integration.
4. All school proposals should provide detailed analysis of their impact on existing educational programs and long-range school desegregation.
5. All school closing plans should be widely publicized allowing public input prior to Board action.

COMMISSION PLAN WOULD CLOSE 40 SCHOOLS, REBUILD 12

Long-range school closings are precipitated by the dramatic decline in student enrollments since the peak in 1970. Lower birth rates, an end to Milwaukee annexations of suburban areas in the 1950's and 1960's, and decreasing city populations have contributed to this decline.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total School Enrollment</u>	<u>Percent Minority</u>
1970	133,606	29.7%
1975	114,180	39.9
1979	91,940	53.3
1984 projection	76,515	65.0*

*The Commission's report assumes that the minority population will stabilize at 65%. In federal grant applications, MPS projects a minority student population in 1984-85 of 68%.

The Commission plan calls for the closing of 40 school buildings, including 5 citywide specialty schools, and rebuilding 12 elementary schools. Age of building was a decisive factor in the selection process. All of the elementary schools built before 1910 are to be closed. Eight schools constructed between 1910 and 1936 are also identified for closing.

PLAN'S IMPACT ON RACIAL INTEGRATION IS NEGATIVE

The enrollment trends have varied significantly among racial groups and by neighborhoods within the city. While the white student population has dropped by 1/2 since 1970, the black student population has increased by 20% and the Hispanic population by 33% since 1970, reflecting higher birth rates, a younger age population, and a commitment to public schools in the city. As a consequence, the need for educational facilities has increased in minority and integrated neighborhoods, while it has decreased substantially in predominately white areas.

<u>Year</u>	<u>White Enrollment</u>	<u>Black Enrollment</u>	<u>Other Minority Enrollment</u>
1970	89,318	34,355	4,029
1975	68,671	39,250	6,259
1979	43,009	41,530	7,401
1983 proj.	27,571	43,457	7,747

The Commission report gives lip service to desegregation as "the dominant factor in decision-making" for school facilities. However, the plan's impact on integration efforts is negative. The proposals will intensify the largely one-way busing movement that has marred Milwaukee's desegregation efforts, will create a vacuum in educational facilities in many minority neighborhoods, will disrupt several

successful specialty school programs which have attracted white student volunteers, and will displace Hispanic children now dependent on bilingual educational programs in their neighborhoods.

1. The plan would displace nearly 8,000 black students and 1,400 other minorities (primarily Hispanics), compared to 3,000 resident white students, based on 1979-80 school statistics.
2. Although the black and Hispanic student populations have increased since 1970 and are expected to remain stable through the 1980's, the plan proposes permanently closing 14 schools in black neighborhoods, and 6 schools in integrated (black and white or Hispanic and white) areas. By contrast, the white student population has decreased by 54% (over 1/2) since 1970, yet only 10 schools in predominately white neighborhoods are scheduled for closing.
3. Successfully integrated specialty programs at Elm, Golda Meir, Garfield and Hawley Road will be relocated, but no recommendations are provided regarding where they will be placed. (In addition, Lloyd Street school will be closed and rebuilt.) Philipp elementary school, a 75% black school which has developed one of the outstanding educational programs in the system, is slated to be torn down. At no time was the quality of educational programs identified as a major concern in developing long-range plans for school facilities.
4. Six of the 10 bilingual elementary programs in the system will be affected by the closing and school replacement recommendations. Forest Home, 27th Street and Vieau are scheduled for closing; Cass, Kagel and Longfellow are recommended for reconstruction. The Commission provides no plan for continuation of bilingual-bicultural programs or analysis of the busing impact of these decisions on Hispanic children.

COMMISSION PLANS CLOSE SCHOOLS WHERE THE MOST CHILDREN RESIDE

Student growth is still occurring in two city areas, the neighborhood around Rufus King High on the north side and the west side area between 35th and 60th Streets. The elementary student populations in the innercore areas on the near North and near South sides have decreased by 27% since 1970. However, due to the closing of 8 black neighborhood schools since 1975, the northside area has several thousand students who already cannot be accommodated in their existing facilities. (This does not include other black students who are required to move to make room for incoming white students under the desegregation plan.)

The most notable declines in student population have occurred on the far west and far south sides of Milwaukee. The elementary student populations dropped by about 60% in the neighborhoods around Marshall High (far west) and Hamilton (southwest). Resident students decreased about 50% in the Juneau, Pulaski/Sholes, and Bay View areas. The Milwaukee school system unfortunately overbuilt a large number of elementary schools in the Marshall, Hamilton and Pulaski areas in the 1950's and 1960's. By 1980 these schools can no longer be supported by resident students and already are dependent on large numbers of nonresidents for efficient operation. The only predominately white area of Milwaukee which has not lost significant student populations is the Vincent High neighborhood on the developing northwest side of the city.

What are the implications of student population trends on school facilities? A growing number of schools in outlying areas of the city cannot support the educational facilities in their neighborhoods. Should most of these buildings remain open (as the Commission has proposed), and MPS complete its conversion to K-5 grade structure for elementary schools, many of these buildings will require busing in of 60-70% of their students in order to run efficiently by 1985. The Commission's plan of closing needed innercity schools while retaining schools in sparsely populated white areas may require massive busing of minority students even after the total student population has reached 70% minority.

BUDGETARY CONSIDERATIONS: MODERNIZATION RATHER THAN NEW CONSTRUCTION

The 1980-90 School Building and Sites Plan presents an ambitious plan for reconstruction of 12 elementary schools, building additions to 4 elementary and 2 high schools, and upgrading of existing middle and high school facilities. The price tag for the recommendations is a staggering \$148,990,000. An estimated \$70.7 million could be raised without a voter referendum from local property tax levies in the 1980's. The remainder, about \$78 million, would require approval by city voters in a bond referendum. These costs include \$59.5 million for construction of 12 new elementary schools, including costs of expanding their school sites to two block areas.

Although the Commission document states that budgetary constraints were a critical factor in developing long-range plans, no cost figures are presented for alternatives to new construction. Age of buildings appears to be the sole criteria for which schools are to be closed. While facilities planning staff indicates that any future investment in the older structures is economically infeasible, no data is provided to substantiate this position.

We believe that costs of modernizing existing facilities should be prepared as alternatives to new construction. Several factors substantiate this need:

1. The capital improvements proposal to rebuild 12 elementary schools while closing other needed facilities places an unnecessary financial burden on the city. It disinvests in innercity neighborhoods which have been targeted by city planners for preservation and future revitalization. It also places a large fiscal obligation on a city which faces over \$1 billion in sewer construction costs in this decade.
2. The new buildings will not actually "replace" the schools torn down around them. School officials expect the new buildings, modeled after 21st Street School, to accommodate about 780 students. After demolition, the combined Auer-Clarke attendance area will have 2,470 children, the LaFollette-Fifth Street-Hopkins area 2,700 children, and the 37th Street-31st Street-27th Street area 3,500 children.
3. Failure to renovate older buildings in areas that need school facilities would increase transportation costs required to bus these children to outlying schools beyond the needs for school desegregation. This plan will insure large-scale (and one-way) transportation as a permanent feature in the 1990's.
4. The cost of maintaining and repairing school structures has no significant correlation to age, according to school personnel. One major difference is that new school buildings' consumption of energy exceeds those of many older structures. 1978-79 energy costs for buildings constructed prior to 1910 average about \$37 per pupil (based on building capacity figures), compared to costs of \$50/pupil in schools built after 1970.
5. Few buildings in the system (old or newer) have facilities that provide accessibility for handicapped children, as required by state and federal legislation. Conversion and renovation for accessibility would prove more economical than new construction.
6. Innercity neighborhoods targeted for the new two-block school sites may be threatened by housing displacement and large-scale urban renewal to the deterioration of the neighborhoods. School officials concede that the standard of 7-acre parcels for elementary schools was developed for schools in suburban and rural developing areas and is not uniformly applied by other urban school systems.

MIRC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOL CLOSINGS

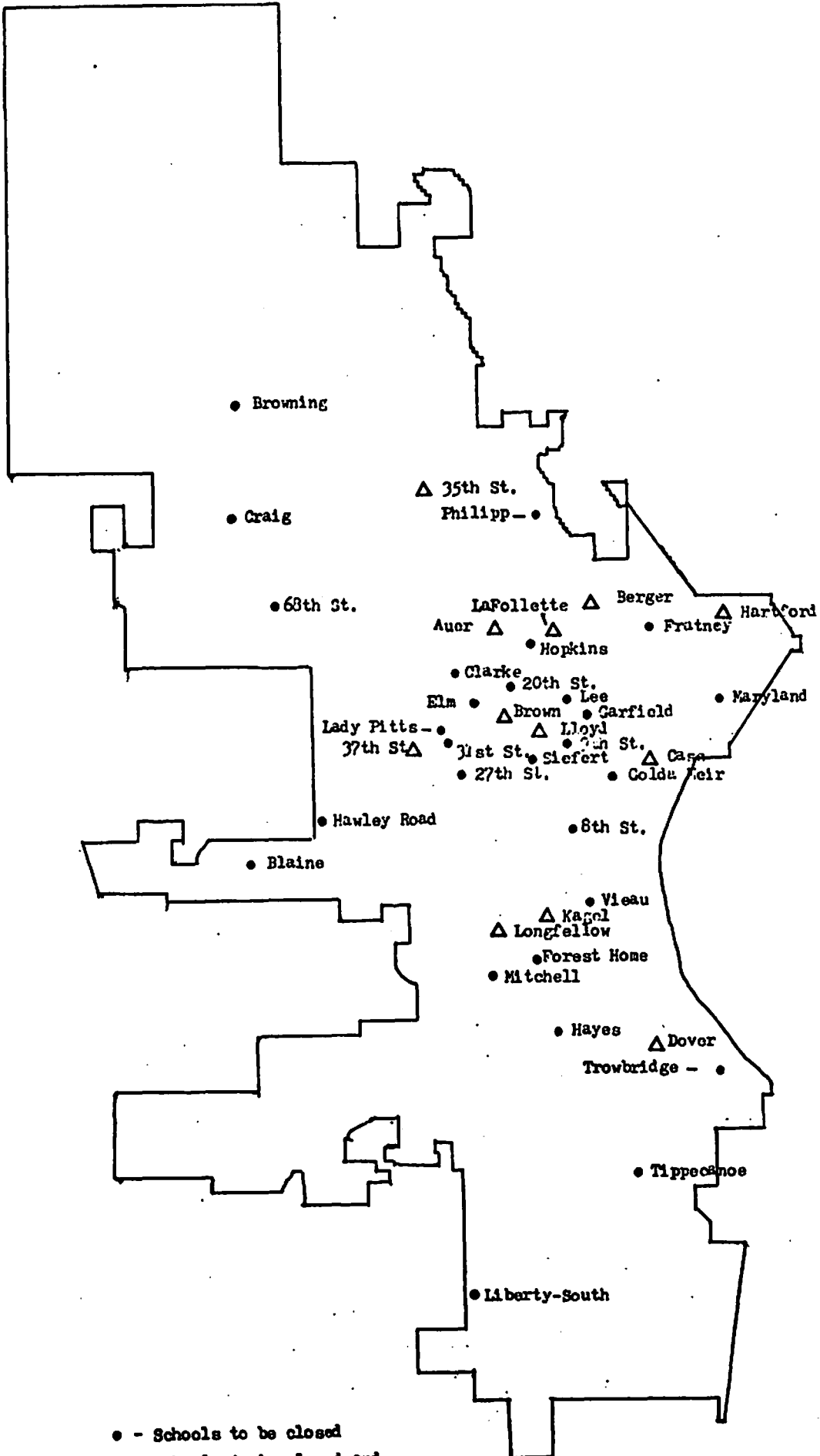
Based on our research findings, the Metropolitan Integration Research Center makes the following recommendations:

1. The plans prepared by the Building and Sites Commission should be rejected because they do not provide equity for children of all races in the city and are detrimental to the health of the city. We believe that black and Hispanic children should be rewarded, rather than penalized, for their loyalty to the public school system and their tradition of attending city schools in large numbers. In addition, the vitality of Milwaukee is dependent upon a strong central city with educational facilities which can adequately serve the present population as well as additional families who may relocate in central city neighborhoods as energy constraints force lifestyle changes in urban areas.
2. Buildings in neighborhoods whose student populations cannot support existing facilities and which have not contributed to two-way integration of schools should be targeted for closings.
3. The Administration should prepare alternative school closing plans which locate school facilities according to the distribution of student population (present and projected) throughout the city, thus insuring minimum and equitable transportation requirements for desegregation.
4. All Administrative proposals for school closings should provide an analysis of the impact of the recommendations on educational programs provided and on school desegregation in the city (including long-range goals for racial balance and transportation required).
5. All alternatives for school closings should be widely publicized to insure that the community has full opportunity to debate various long-range plans before School Board action is taken.

For a complete copy of the 1980-1990 School Building and Sites Plan, contact the Milwaukee Public Schools Department of Facilities Planning and Administrative Research (475-8242). For more information on the Commission plan's impact on desegregation programs, contact Kenneth Robinson or Lois Quinn at the Metropolitan Integration Research Center (263-2830).

August, 1980

SCHOOLS RECOMMENDED FOR CLOSING BY THE BUILDING AND SITES COMMISSION: 1980-1990



● - Schools to be closed
 △ - Schools to be closed and reconstructed