



**MILWAUKEE
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

5225 West Vliet Street
P O Box 2181
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53201-2181
Phone: 414.475.8258
Fax: 414.475.8261
TTI: 888.808.0914

**POTENTIAL MERGER OF 68TH STREET SCHOOL EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM AND
81ST STREET SCHOOL FOCUS GROUPS SUMMARY**

February 27, 2012

In response to the proposal to merge 68th Street School with 81st Street School, focus groups were conducted with teachers and parents of both schools, along with students at 81st Street and the Neighborhood Associations surrounding both schools. Attendees were asked a series of questions regarding their involvement in developing the merger proposal, the potential benefits and drawbacks to the merger, potential issues to be resolved, and how the merger would affect future plans and families. All focus groups were conducted at their respective school buildings, while the Neighborhood Associations were invited to Central Services.

Overall, results of the focus groups reveal a strong division between the two school communities. While staff, students, and parents at 81st Street articulated an appreciation for the ideas contained within the merger proposal, they expressed skepticism that those ideas would actually turn out as described in the proposal. In particular, while they liked the idea of a neighborhood school with strong specials (e.g. art, music, physical education, foreign language) funded by the reallocation of funds previously used for bussing, they worried that the school would fail to generate sufficient enrollment to remain viable into the future, especially with the loss of the middle grades and inclusion of the three-year-old program, which would generate no per pupil revenue for the school. All three groups indicated that they were concerned about the proposed elimination of the middle grades, noting that their day school and after-care program for middle-schoolers offered students a safe and secure environment that they believe is not typical in a larger, traditional middle school setting. Staff and parents noted that they had not been involved in the development of the merger proposal at all and were unhappy about the lack of collaboration, noting that information provided by 68th Street to “sell” the proposal was “biased.” In the words of one staff member, the 81st Street community was “left completely out of the process” and “it’s kind of sad how this whole thing was handled.”

Staff and parents at 68th Street School also expressed concerns regarding the process, but they were much more optimistic about the potential of the proposed merger. Noting that the idea of moving to 81st Street was “exciting” and “the idea of a true neighborhood school would be phenomenal,” staff suggested that MPS Administration mediate the current and unfortunate tensions between the two communities that have resulted from the proposal. Parents of 68th Street students who attended the focus group indicated they would not send their children to a K8 school because they prefer the more comprehensive programming of a typical middle school program, they don’t believe adolescents belong with very young children, and they believe it better prepares students for high school. None of the parents present said they were willing to enroll their children in a merged program at Kluge. As strong supporters of neighborhood schools, the parents noted the 68th Street program has much parent and community support because of its “excellent reputation” and that parents are “eager to send their children there” (to the merged program at 81st Street).

(ATTACHMENT 3)

FOLLOW UP AND ACTION ON A RECOMMENDATION TO MERGE THE SIXTY-EIGHTH STREET EARLY CHILDHOOD SCHOOL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM AND EIGHTY-FIRST STREET SCHOOL AT THE END OF THE 2011-12 SCHOOL YEAR



**MILWAUKEE
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

5225 West Vliet Street

P O Box 2181

Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53201-2181

Phone: 414.475.8258

Fax: 414.475.8261

TTI: 888.808.0914

Parents expressed their willingness to work with 81st Street parents/staff by noting, “if we worked together, we could collaborate and make a gradual shift” and “there’s got to be a way to work this out; communication is the key.”

A focus group was also conducted with the Neighborhood Associations surrounding 68th Street School and 81st Street School. The consensus of the attendees was that 81st Street School, in its current form, is not a true neighborhood school and that it lacks both academic standards and discipline in the middle grades; according to the participants, students have behavioral issues, including the use of inappropriate language and fighting. One representative was surprised by the anecdotal reports of young families that have moved or will move their family from the neighborhood before the child reaches kindergarten, often to another school district. While attendees did not want to cause harm or hurt any families from 81st Street that would be forced to select a different school, they noted that a neighborhood school would create a community center that would pull together neighbors, students, parents, and teachers. Attendees indicated that there is a lot of energy behind this proposed merger because people in the community immediately associate 68th Street School with quality and trust. These representatives indicated a desire to collaborate with 81st Street to pursue a resolution.