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ROBERT G. DONOVAN
Alderman, 8th District

February 17, 2009

The Honorable Governor Jim Doyle
Office of the Governor
115 East, State Capitol
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Governor Doyle:

I am writing to you because I believe you have the power and authority to help the City of Milwaukee at a critical moment. Specifically, I am asking you to help the city make drastic changes to the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS).

As a lifelong resident of the City of Milwaukee, I have witnessed the slow decline and deterioration of MPS. While the district has many good teachers and programs, the bottom line is that students are not excelling and achieving at a time when we desperately need to be giving them a first rate education that will provide our city and state with a bright, well-educated workforce. The problems of MPS are many, including:

- MPS students are performing poorly on standardized tests at a shocking rate, including 28.7% and 39% of MPS 10th graders rated as proficient or above on key math and English tests, respectively (2007-2008), compared to 69.4% and 74.6% of all Wisconsin 10th graders.
- The average 2008 ACT test score for MPS students was 17.5, compared to the state average score of 22.3.
- Two studies released last year indicate that MPS has a graduation rate in the range of 46% to 58%.
- Declining enrollment and state aid have walloped city taxpayers, including a more than 14% MPS tax levy increase for 2008-2009.
- More than \$100 million was spent on a building expansion/renovation program aimed at enticing families to send their children to neighborhood schools, yet many of those same buildings sit empty.

One particularly troubling situation involves the spiraling condition of Bradley Tech High School, which has seen a series of serious fights, assaults, and disruptive incidents in recent years. Once one of the jewels of MPS, the former Boys Tech and Milwaukee Technical and Trade High School has become a dumping ground for students who can't seem to stay out of trouble, and two full-time Milwaukee police officers (officers who could be patrolling Milwaukee neighborhoods if they weren't "babysitting") are assigned to

help keep order at the school. Tragically, very little technical instruction and learning actually takes place at Bradley Tech, at a time when Milwaukee desperately needs well-trained and technically savvy workers.

Therefore I strongly urge you to withhold stimulus money for MPS and Bradley Tech until some serious changes are made. Specifically, I am urging that MPS close Bradley Tech at the end of the school year and reopen next year with a new curriculum centered on technical instruction and training. Prospective students would be required to take an entrance exam, and the “new” Bradley Tech would enforce strict discipline reinforcing the true privilege students are afforded to attend the school.

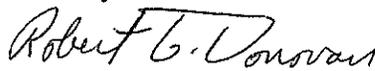
I have received dozens of positive and encouraging phone calls and emails since publicly calling last week for the closing and reopening of Bradley Tech. Strangers have walked up to me and thanked me, many of them proud Tech alums who want the school restored to its proper status as a top technical and trade school. In the end most of them also told me they want this to happen not for themselves, but for the children of Milwaukee who will benefit from a “new” Bradley Tech.

For the record, I am asking directly for your help because the local leadership – including the mayor – seems frozen in indecision. The public has zero confidence in the MPS board, its superintendent, and its bloated administrative bureaucracy. As a matter of fact, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* editorial board has referred to the school board as “dysfunctional” and “dithering.” As it relates to MPS, the collective leadership in Milwaukee is, with few exceptions, the emperor who has no clothes, naked before us and revealing nothing but shortcomings.

This MPS madness must end, and I believe you can make it end and help bring about a new start. And, I’m confident that that new start will help resurrect Bradley Tech, which has become the poster child for what’s wrong with MPS.

Please help restore (Bradley) Tech to its former greatness – we owe it to our children, our grandchildren, the school’s alumni, and to the memory of her generous benefactor – Jane Bradley Pettit.

Sincerely



Robert G. Donovan,
Alderman, 8th District

cc: Mayor Tom Barrett
Superintendent William Andrekopoulos
Common Council Members
Board of School Directors