

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

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ROBERT G. DONOVAN

Alderman, 8th District

September 22, 2008

Mayor Tom Barrett
City Hall, Room 201
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear Mayor Barrett:

Both you and I -- and most other elected officials -- would agree that three key characteristics of a healthy, thriving city are: 1) a low or decreasing crime rate that gives area residents, businesses and visitors a feeling of safety in the community; 2) a property tax rate that is affordable to local property owners, yet funds a high level of quality municipal services; 3) a well-regarded public school system that produces an educated workforce. In the area of public safety, while Milwaukee still suffers from a crime rate that is far too high, the arrival of Police Chief Flynn and his initiatives, including the Neighborhood Task Force, have contributed to hopeful signs of improvement in Milwaukee crime trends. In the first 6 months of this year, violent crime in the city dropped over 19%, while property crime fell over 4%. The city is currently on pace to experience its lowest number of murders in 22 years. And while the City continues to face serious budget challenges, over the past 4 years, you and the Common Council have worked together to reduce the City's property tax rate from \$9.72 to \$8.01 per \$1,000 assessed valuation, a decrease of 18%.

However, improvements in the area of public education have been few and far between. A failing school system continues to harm the community -- socially, economically and financially. While Milwaukee Public Schools has its success stories, it seems that each step forward is countered by two steps back. **The problems of MPS are grave, numerous, far-reaching and widely-known. They include:**

Budget

- State aid to MPS is expected to fall more than \$18 million for the 2008-09 school year, necessitating a property tax levy increase of 14.9%.
- MPS is faced with \$2.2 billion in unfunded post-retirement benefits for its employees.

Taxes

- The MPS tax rate has fallen just 1% over the past 4 years and actually increased almost 10% in the last budget cycle.

- Unless new funding sources are found, the approved 2008-09 MPS budget will require a 14.9% property tax increase.

Neighborhood Schools Initiative

- Beginning in 2001, \$102 million was spent on a building expansion/construction program aimed at enticing families to send their children to neighborhood MPS schools. However, as recently reported in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, many building additions now sit empty and enrollment at new schools is much lower than anticipated or has actually decreased. Test scores have also decreased at many of the new schools. Busing costs have actually increased as well. Only 31% of K-8 MPS students attend neighborhood schools.

Enrollment

- Despite a proliferation of new schools and programs (e.g., small high schools), MPS enrollment continues to decline and this decline is, in fact, accelerating.
- Enrollment fell 14.3 % over the past 10 years and 10.8% in just the past 5 years.
- MPS projects that this September's enrollment will be 4.1% lower than a year ago.

Test scores

- The performance of MPS students on state standardized tests is dismal and has not improved in recent years.
- Last school year, at the 10th grade level, only 28.7% and 39.0% of MPS students were rated as proficient or above on the WKCE/WAA math and English tests, respectively (compared to 69.4% and 74.6% of all Wisconsin 10th graders). In 2003, the MPS figures were 29.8% and 36.4%.
- The average 2008 ACT test score for MPS students was only 17.5, compared to a state average of 22.3.

Attendance/Graduation

- According to a recent report by the state Legislative Audit Bureau, 46% of MPS students were habitually truant (5 or more unexcused absences in a semester) during the 2006-07 school year. This compares to a statewide average of 9%.
- In the 2006-07 school year, 5.9% of MPS students in 7th-12th grades dropped out. The comparable statewide figure was 1.6%.
- Two studies released earlier this year indicate that MPS has a graduation rate in the range of 46% to 58%.

Clearly, MPS is in a state of crisis, and has been for some time! **Milwaukee's taxpayers, businesses, parents and, especially, children have waited long enough for real, sustained improvements in the quality of the city's public school system.** We need to address MPS' myriad problems with decisive, innovative actions, just as we have the City's budget/tax rate and crime problems. And, for the sake of this city's future, **we need bold leadership** to take these actions. That is why I'm calling on you, as Milwaukee's chief executive, to be the leader in putting forth and implementing a comprehensive plan for improving Milwaukee Public Schools.

Tom, the condition of Milwaukee's public education system is a problem that needs to be addressed now! For years, I and others have called for drastic changes within MPS, even dissolution of the system. Now at least 6 School Board members feel that's the direction the system may be headed, including one member who said, "We have ample evidence the current model is going to move us to ruination sooner or later."

We cannot afford to devote more time to studies -- **we need action!** Attached you will find a multi-faceted proposal for improving Milwaukee Public Schools that is based on the experiences and successes of other big cities, as well as months of discussion with civic leaders (both within and outside MPS) and a great deal of common sense. I would hope that you will support the majority of the ideas in this proposal and, using your role as city leader, begin "selling" them to MPS, other elected officials and the community so that they can be implemented as soon as possible.

Given your many duties and already-full schedule, I would suggest that you create a position of "Chancellor of Education," appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the Common Council, whose full-time duty would be promoting implementation of this plan. The Chancellor would be responsible for overall coordination of all components of education in Milwaukee, including the public school system, charter and choice schools, parochial schools and even institutions of higher learning.

This plan is first and foremost a starting point, a framework for getting the conversation started and the "ball rolling." Its implementation will certainly require new and innovative funding sources. And I have no doubt that the proposal will have its naysayers, who will seek to dismiss or discredit many or all of its components. But if not this plan, then what? And if not now, when?

With every crisis, there are opportunities. The latest MPS struggles represent an opportunity to energize and galvanize the community around fashioning a school system that is second to none among major U.S. cities.

Thank you for your consideration of this all-important matter. Please contact me if you have any questions. I look forward to working with you and other Milwaukee leaders to give our community a public school system it can be proud of.

Best Regards,



Robert G. Donovan
Alderman, 8th District

c: Milwaukee Common Council
Milwaukee Board of School Directors

Superintendent William Andrekopoulos
Milwaukee County Executive Scott Walker
Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
Greater Milwaukee Committee
Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce
Public Policy Forum

MILWAUKEE PUBLIC SCHOOLS IMPROVEMENT PROPOSAL

1. GOVERNANCE

- Create a “Chancellor of Education” position within City government. This would be a cabinet-level position appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the Common Council.
- The Chancellor would be responsible for promoting implementation of the various components of this proposal.
- The Chancellor would be charged with the duty of overall coordination of all components of education in Milwaukee, including the public school system, charter and choice schools, parochial schools and institutions of higher learning.
- Revise ch. 119 of the Wisconsin Statutes to change the composition of the “board of school directors” in a first-class city.
- All 9 members of the School Board would be appointed by the Chancellor (in consultation with the Mayor) and confirmed by the Common Council.
- 5 School Board members would be appointed on a geographic basis (to represent 3 contiguous aldermanic districts each); the other 4 would be appointed as “at-large” representatives.
- School Board members would have to meet minimum qualifications, including:
 - At least 2 shall be parents of children enrolled in MPS at the time of the appointment.
 - No member may hold any other public office at the time of appointment.
 - At least 2 members shall have significant expertise in education, at least 2 members shall have significant expertise in public finance and at least 2 members shall have significant expertise in business management.
- New York, Chicago, Boston and Cleveland have varying degrees of mayoral control of their public school systems.
- Mayoral control (or as proposed, Mayoral and Common Council control) has a number of advantages over an elected School Board. The Mayor and Council hold positions of natural authority that School Board members do not. The electorate generally knows who the Mayor and local Council member are and demands a certain degree of accountability from them. Conversely, the Mayor and Common Council members are generally more in tune with the needs and desires of their constituents (and have mechanisms for ascertaining those needs and desires) than are School Board members. The electorate has much less interest in and familiarity with the School Board (as demonstrated by the low turnout for School Board elections) than it does the Mayor and Council. The Mayor and Council are also more experienced at rallying the support of the business community, which often proves critical in making school-system reforms.

2. ADMINISTRATION

- Revise ch. 119 of the Wisconsin Statutes to change the method by which a “superintendent” is selected.
- Nominees for the position of Superintendent would be provided by an 11-person “MPS Superintendent Nominating Panel” consisting of the following persons:
 - 3 parents of current MPS students, appointed by majority vote of the

school board.

- 2 persons appointed by the Mayor.
 - 2 persons appointed by the Common Council President.
 - 1 person appointed by the collective bargaining unit representative of MPS teachers.
 - 1 MPS principal elected by MPS principals.
 - 1 representative of the business community, appointed by the Greater Milwaukee Committee.
 - 1 president of a public or private institution of higher learning, appointed by the state superintendent of public instruction.
- The Superintendent would be appointed by Chancellor, in consultation with the Mayor and using nominees provided by the Nominating Panel, and subject to confirmation by both the School Board and the Common Council. The Superintendent would be appointed for a 4-year term (similar to police and fire chief appointments). If the Chancellor does not support a particular nominee, he or she would ask the Nominating Panel to make another nomination.
 - Although appointed by the Chancellor and confirmed by the Common Council, the School Board and the Superintendent would retain their current respective duties – i.e., the Board sets policy, and the superintendent implements that policy, in the areas of curriculum, operations, budget, personnel, labor negotiations, facilities, purchasing, etc.
 - The newly-reconstituted School Board and newly-appointed Superintendent shall be required to participate in on-going leadership training provided by the Wisconsin Association of School Boards based on the findings and recommendations of the 2000 Iowa Lighthouse Study. This training shall emphasize the “seven conditions for school renewal” identified in the Iowa study, including shared leadership, continuous improvement and shared decision making, ability to create and sustain initiatives and community involvement.

3. LOCAL SCHOOL COUNCILS

- To stimulate school-level participation in the school governance process, each MPS school would have a “local school council” consisting of the principal, parents, neighborhood residents, teachers and, at the high school level, student government members (the exact number of each type of representative shall be established by the School Board).
- Local school councils shall be given responsibility for selecting principals, writing performance contracts for principals, helping to create school budgets, formulating school improvement plans and spearheading teacher recognition activities. The council’s role in some of these activities (e.g., hiring a principal or setting a school budget) may be advisory, as the School Board sees fit.
- Chicago and New York have used local school councils to ensure continued parental influence in the education process, even as the school boards in these cities have gone from being elected to mayor-appointed.

4. “MILWAUKEE GUARANTEE”

- In a nutshell, the “Milwaukee Guarantee” would guarantee each MPS high school graduate either full-time employment at a Milwaukee-area business or paid tuition at a

state university or technical college. The success of this effort would hinge on the support and participation of local businesses and development of a large, self-sustaining tuition fund.

- Jobs Component Under this initiative, participating Milwaukee (or Milwaukee-area) businesses would agree to provide summer jobs to MPS high-school students and to provide full-time employment to MPS high-school graduates (for all high schools or as a pilot project at selected schools). However, the provision of employment opportunities would be conditioned upon the academic performance of the students/graduates: if certain standards are not met (e.g., low GPA, poor attendance), there would be no guarantee of employment. Also, once hired, an MPS graduate would be subject to the same personnel policies on promotion, discipline, termination, etc. as other employees.
- The consortium of businesses operating and participating in the Milwaukee Guarantee would monitor MPS performance (discipline rates, test scores, truancy, graduation rates, etc.), and could curtail or terminate the program if improvements are not made in these areas.
- College Tuition Component Modeled after the famous “Kalamazoo Promise,” this component of the Milwaukee Guarantee would promise to pay full tuition for 4 years at any University of Wisconsin campus or 2 years at any technical college in the state for any MPS high school graduate who is admitted to that college and was an MPS student from kindergarten through 12th grade. (The percentage of tuition paid would be reduced on a sliding scale for students who entered MPS after kindergarten, falling to 65% for those who entered in 9th grade, with no financial assistance for those entering after 9th grade).
- The Kalamazoo Promise, created in 2005, has been credited with creating a number of benefits for its namesake community, including attracting hundreds of new families to the school district, increasing enrollment in the school system, raising graduation rates, stimulating home buying and home construction, and, in general, providing concrete evidence to local businesses and outsiders alike of the community’s commitment to developing a well-educated workforce.
- Participants in the college-tuition component of the Milwaukee Guarantee would be required to maintain a grade point average of 2.0 to maintain eligibility for continued tuition payments.
- The success of the college-tuition component would hinge in large part on the ability of the community to create a large pool of funds – from major businesses, foundations and philanthropists – to establish the program and keep it going from year to year.

5. MPS PERSONNEL POLICIES

- Review, and revise if necessary, the policies of MPS regarding the assignment of veteran, less-experienced and novice teachers and principals to district schools. These policies should strike a balance that ensures that not all veteran teachers are assigned to high-performing schools and not all novice teachers are assigned to new or challenging schools.
- Analyze per-pupil teachers spending at all schools in the district and make necessary adjustments (i.e., budget and staffing) to reduce differences among these schools. Above-average spending on teachers typically indicates that teachers at a school are more experienced, have more credentials, have higher education levels and have had more

professional development. To ensure that all MPS students benefit from qualified, experienced teachers, teacher-spending gaps between schools should be reduced.

- Analyze MPS' performance review procedure for new teachers. Ensure that reviews are not routine and that earning tenure is not automatic.
- Institute a bonus pay program for teachers and principals that ties bonuses to high academic performance and/or improvements in academic performance, as measured by state standardized tests. The highly successful St. Anthony Catholic School on Milwaukee's South Side has instituted a cash-payment incentive program for teachers whose students exceed academic improvement goals over the course of a school year.
- Provide principals with the opportunity to have greater autonomy in the areas of school budget, staffing and curriculum in exchange for agreeing to meet certain performance targets. Failure to meet targets could result in dismissal, demotion or return of the school to more centralized control.
- Contract with a public-policy think tank to conduct a study of MPS union contract provisions that might hamper school efforts to hire the best possible teachers when positions become available. Seek foundation funds to pay for this study. The Annie E. Casey Foundation funded a study by the New Teacher Project that exposed specific elements of union contracts that stymie school hiring. As a result, union contracts were modified in 4 major urban school districts – Baltimore, Memphis, New York and Washington.

6. TEACH FOR AMERICA

- Fund, with assistance from local foundations and the City if necessary, the proposed placement of "Teach for America" teachers in MPS classrooms. Teach for America is a national organization that places highly-motivated recent college graduates from various disciplines in classrooms in some of the nation's most challenged school districts. Teach for America participants have been well-received in other school systems and, according to one study, have contributed to significant improvements in math test scores.
- The financial commitment to Teach for America should be on-going. This would mean less upheaval in the schools, improve chances for success and create opportunities to study the long-term effectiveness of the program.

7. SINGLE-GENDER SCHOOLS

- Establish single-gender schools at the middle and high-school levels (or as 6-12 schools). These schools could offer rigorous academic programs and a full complement of extracurricular activities.
- These schools could be modeled in part after highly successful single-sex Catholic schools in Milwaukee (Nativity Jesuit (boys) and Notre Dame (girls) middle schools and Marquette University (boys) and Divine Savior Holy Angels (girls) high schools).

8. COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

- Develop one or more "community schools" in which MPS would partner with universities, major non-profit organizations, community centers and area businesses to provide a comprehensive set of activities for students, their families and residents of the surrounding neighborhood. These schools often provide health and dental care,

homework clubs, social services, adult education, early childhood education and after-school activities.

- The George Washington Community School in Indianapolis (formerly Washington High School) could serve as a model for community schools in Milwaukee. This school, which formerly had a 30% graduation rate, now has the highest graduation rate in Indianapolis Public Schools. Partnerships with more than 50 organizations, along with financial support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, provide the diverse array of services and activities for students, their families and area residents. White Center, Washington, a low-income Seattle suburb, has also introduced the community school concept at a number of its elementary schools.

9. BOARDING SCHOOLS

- Every day, MPS faces both societal challenges (teen pregnancy, single-parent households and the overall breakdown of the family) and environmental challenges (poverty, joblessness and crime) to its efforts to educate Milwaukee children.
- To counteract these challenges, MPS should establish several single-gender boarding schools for high-school-age students. A boarding school can provide the stable, structured and academics-focused home environment that is not currently available to many Milwaukee children.
- Boarding schools could be developed at existing MPS sites, particularly where unused or underutilized facilities exist and could provide space needed for the room-and-board component of the program. Alternatively, boarding schools could be developed in former, now-vacant parochial schools. The Anchor boarding school program in New York City – which uses renovated convent space next to 2 existing Catholic high schools to provide boarding accommodations for students of those schools – could serve as a model for a similar initiative in Milwaukee. The Anchor students are outperforming their peers, both in their schools and in their neighborhoods, and seats in the Anchor program are now highly sought-after by parents.

10. RE-EMPHASIZE VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

- Re-establish a true trade and technical high school that operates along the lines of the old Boys Technical High School. This school -- most likely but not necessarily a co-ed institution -- would emphasize strict discipline, a rigorous curriculum and training for specific trades (e.g., carpentry, welding, metalworking, mechanics). Entrance examinations for incoming students would also be required.
- (Re)introduce a trade and technical curriculum at a number of MPS middle and high schools that do not have it. Increase course offerings at schools that still have trade and technical instruction. Curriculum should be coordinated with courses offered by MATC and other vocational/technical institutions to create smooth career paths for MPS students.
- Milwaukee-area employers and business leaders continue to report an inadequate supply of skilled-trade workers. In some cases, this lack of workers is stifling business growth and local economic development.
- Increased emphasis on trade and technical education represents a realistic recognition that not all high-school students are college-bound, or should even be considered college-

bound, and that trade and technical occupations represent appropriate, decent-paying career choices for many MPS students.

11. BACK-TO-BASICS CURRICULUM AND TEACHING METHODS

- Emphasize curriculum basics -- math, reading, writing, phonics, science and social studies, including history, geography and civics.
- Teaching should be “instructivist” (teacher-led and focused on specific skills and knowledge, often imparted to students using drills and exercises), rather than “constructivist” (teacher leads children to develop their own abilities, do their own learning and draw their own conclusions). Schools should use classic teaching methods, such as memorization drills, reading out loud to the class and requiring students to maintain proper posture.
- Resist temptation to follow the latest trends and fads in curriculum and teaching techniques. Also, de-emphasize feel-good multiculturalism and re-emphasize instruction in English.
- St. Anthony Catholic School on Milwaukee’s South Side, which uses a back-to-basics curriculum, is now the largest elementary school in Milwaukee -- public or private. St. Anthony also uses an instructivist teaching style and provides all of its instruction in English, even though many of its students come from Spanish-speaking homes. St. Anthony’s classrooms are orderly, with a high degree of student involvement and a seriousness about education among both students and faculty.

12. TRUANCY- ABATEMENT MEASURES

- Create a “truancy hotline” that City workers out in the field, as well as all Milwaukee residents and businesses, can use to report truants. The hotline would be answered by the Milwaukee Police Department. An enhanced Truancy Abatement and Burglary Suppression police detail would respond to the calls in a timely manner.
- Work with the owners, managers and employees of businesses throughout the city -- but especially convenience stores and fast-food restaurants – to discourage them from serving truants during school hours. At the same time, encourage business owners, managers and employees to use the truancy hotline whenever possible.

13. DISTRICT-WIDE DRESS CODES

- To reduce distractions in the classroom and even violence in hallways and on school grounds, the following dress codes shall be in effect at all MPS schools:
 - All students in grades pre-kindergarten through grade 8 shall wear school uniforms. The School Board shall establish the specifics of the uniform policy.
 - Students in grades 9 through 12 shall not be required to wear uniforms, but shall not be permitted to wear hooded clothing, baggy or sagging pants, jeans, long T-shirts, shirts with slogans, headgear and any other items the School Board determines create distractions or discipline problems in schools or classrooms. The dress code should also require that pants be pulled up over hips and that shirts be tucked in.

14. SCHOOL FUNDING INITIATIVES

- The Mayor, as the City's chief elected official, shall lead a delegation of Milwaukee leaders to Madison to seek the changes to the state's school-funding formula necessary to restore Milwaukee Public Schools. This delegation should include the Chancellor of Education, Milwaukee representatives in the State Legislature, and leaders of the local education, faith-based, philanthropic and business communities.
- Take the steps necessary to assure both Milwaukee taxpayers and state legislators that MPS is the best steward of school tax dollars in this community. This would include evaluating the duties and workload of every MPS administrator and staff person whose responsibilities lie outside the classroom, streamlining MPS operations accordingly and eliminating positions where appropriate.
- Make an effort to re-open MPS union contracts with the goal of seeking cost-saving concessions from employees, particularly in the area of fringe benefits. A change in the residency requirement for MPS employees could be one incentive used to obtain these concessions.
- To reign in spending, consolidate MPS and City of Milwaukee functions and services where duplication or overlap exists. Areas of possible consolidation are purchasing, human resources and facilities maintenance.
- Explore all potential sources of funding for public education in Milwaukee. Emphasize the use of public-private partnerships, as well as national and local foundations that have a track record of support for public education initiatives.
- The Chancellor shall coordinate outreach to the philanthropic and business communities.
- At the national level, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Ford Foundation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation have been major contributors to efforts to improve public education. Locally, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, the Reiman Foundation and the Pettit Foundation offer grants for public education initiatives.
- If not already in effect, immediately establish a hiring freeze applicable to all MPS positions that work primarily outside the classroom (i.e., all positions other than teachers and educational assistants).
- Evaluate the current and potential future use of all buildings, facilities and land owned by the Board of School Directors to determine which properties are surplus to the needs of MPS. To generate revenue and reduce maintenance costs, sell all properties which are surplus to MPS needs.
- Explore the feasibility of consolidating the functions, programs and activities of the Milwaukee Public Schools Recreation Division with the Milwaukee County Parks Department and other public and private entities that provide recreational services (e.g., Milwaukee Public Library, YMCA, the Boys and Girls Club). The purpose of this investigation is to identify duplication of services and opportunities for cost savings.