

Statement of Ald. Jim Bohl

September 12, 2008

The news release from Milwaukee Public Schools sent yesterday carried a headline of “**The Facts on Truancy, Attendance in MPS.**”

Aside from the Legislative Audit Bureau’s shocking revelation showing that 46% of MPS students are habitually truant, to me the release (and the headline) shows that MPS has its head firmly buried in the sand when it comes to “the facts” on truancy.

For example, the news release touted the district’s 15-year partnership with the Milwaukee Police Department’s TABS (Truancy Abatement and Burglary Suppression) program, which has two two-person MPD TABS squads combing the city for truant students. While chairing the city’s Truancy Abatement Task Force I was provided with MPS internal audit data that showed that the seven-year average for TABS student intakes was 19 students per day at both TABS locations. With an average of 4,000 MPS students unexcused and absent on any given school day, this means that TABS addresses .0025% of these absences.

The cumulative effect of having officers in two two-person units comb the entire city for truants is about as effective as handing two pails to two Titanic crewmen and saying “start bailing boys!”

I say TABS should really be spelled B-R-O-K-E-N.

The release also touted MPS involvement in the Milwaukee Alliance for Attendance – an almost inactive body that rarely meets – and it misleadingly referenced the 2006 state DPI target goal for attendance (85%) as if that’s evidence that it’s OK to suffer some level of truancy (although the state figure does not cover “habitual” truancy, which is rampant in MPS).

It’s time for MPS to stand up and admit that what’s being done to stop truancy isn’t working. It’s time to stop excuses. It’s time for some accountability.

Our children deserve nothing less.

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