



**MILWAUKEE  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**Michael Bonds, President**  
**Milwaukee Board of School Directors, District 3**

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January 18, 2010

Governor Jim Doyle  
Office of the Governor  
115 East State Capitol  
Madison, WI 53702

Dear Governor Doyle:

As President of the Milwaukee Board of School Directors, I am writing to express my disappointment with your cynical statement regarding Wisconsin's Race to the Top (RTT) application. In your release, you predict that the application will fail because it does not include mayoral control of the Milwaukee Public Schools District (MPS). You also argue that the Legislature's refusal to adopt your mayoral control proposal in Milwaukee will cost other school districts millions of dollars.

Since mayoral control is not a requirement for Race To the Top dollars, your statement can only be interpreted as a political attempt to turn the rest of the state against MPS and to intimidate legislators who oppose mayoral control into supporting your proposal.

The facts are as follows:

Facts:

1. The Race to The Top program (RTT) guidelines DO NOT require a change in MPS governance structure (mayoral control) as a condition for RTT funding.
2. President Barack Obama has never called for mayoral control of MPS. Even in his visit to Madison, Wisconsin, in 2009 to promote education reform, he never mentioned mayoral control of MPS.
3. In a letter to Congresswoman Gwen Moore, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan was unequivocal in stating that mayoral control is not a criterion for RTT applications.
4. In 2009, Secretary Duncan specifically called for a mayoral partnership in Milwaukee rather than a mayoral control. He urged partnership, rather than mayoral control, in three cities: Milwaukee, Los Angeles, and Detroit. I wrote Mayor Tom Barrett about such a partnership, and he did not bother responding to me. Instead, he stated in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* that he was not interested in shared governance with the MPS Board.



**Milwaukee Board of School Directors**

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5. State Senator Spencer Coggs and State Representative Tamara Grigsby have proposed legislation that institutionalizes the very partnership Secretary Duncan called for by recognizing the important governing role of Milwaukee's elected school board while establishing significant mayoral oversight. Their proposal gives the mayor more power with MPS than in any time in the City's history. Governor Doyle, you have refused to even consider this proposal.
6. The Race to the Top application is a statewide application impacting all 400+ school districts in the state. Yet MPS is the only school district being asked to change its governing structure for the RTT application, even though several other school districts have larger racial achievement gaps than does MPS.
7. The *New York Times* ranked all 50 states on their odds of receiving RTT dollars based on the RTT criteria. Wisconsin ranked at the bottom. That suggests that Wisconsin's chances of receiving these funds are slim to none.
8. The Gates Foundation provided funds to the 15 states that it identified as most likely to receive the RTT funds to assist them in preparing their RTT applications. Wisconsin was not among them. The states awarded the grants were mainly from the South and East with large blocks of electoral votes.
9. The Race to The Top (RTT) application requires innovation and partnership with other states. Wisconsin's RTT application does not include such partnerships or innovation.
10. Most of Wisconsin's education unions did not sign the memorandum of understanding (MOU) because the state provided only a partial application for review. In effect, the state asked local school teacher unions and local school districts to sign a lease without providing the terms of the lease until it was signed. Unions were unable or unwilling to sign on, as they were unable to determine how the application terms might affect their contracts and bargaining positions.
11. Given that most of Wisconsin's education unions did not sign the memorandum of understanding (MOU), the state's application has a much smaller chance of succeeding, as it will not get the review points available for those signatures. Also, the lack of endorsements from the education unions illustrates the state's failure to work with all stakeholders in developing this application.
12. There is no simple solution to improving urban education. Recent studies on districts under mayoral control in Chicago, New York, and Washington D.C. indicate little or no academic improvement and that test results are often tampered with.
13. In a federal test that has been used to document Milwaukee's low levels of student achievement, students in mayoral controlled districts performed at the same level or worse than do Milwaukee's students.
14. The advocates of mayoral control have not provided any educational plan for improving student achievement.

15. Despite numerous public meetings, including one by the Wisconsin Senate Education Committee in Milwaukee, where the public overwhelmingly opposed the mayoral takeover, you continue to insist that mayoral control is non-negotiable. If any other community in the state had voiced such strong opposition to a similar proposal, the issue would have been dropped months ago!!!
16. The current MPS Board has been working with MPS Administration and its teachers union to deal with its unfunded liability. And the current MPS Board started taking actions (prepaying pension obligations, implementing a hiring freeze, implementing health awareness and prevention programs for its employees, funding the Seager Report that studied MPS fringe benefits and pension issues, and so forth) to deal with the unfunded liability which the current MPS Board inherited in 2007.
17. The current MPS Board has duplicated successful academic programs and expanded other academic programs (increased math and science requirements for graduation, tripled the number of Project-Lead-The-Way Programs [STEM], required ACT testing for 11th-graders, standardized reading programs, etc.) in the district since 2007.
18. The current MPS Board has redirected between \$115 and \$130 million back into the schools since 2007 for a variety of programs (driver's education, safety, nursing services, arts, music, sports, parental involvement, universal breakfast, early childhood education, etc.).
19. The MPS Board started the process of searching for a new MPS Superintendent in July 2009, nearly seven months ago. It hired a nationally recognized superintendent search firm, Ray & Associates, to assist with the search.
20. Despite the cloud of a mayoral control over MPS, 44 people from around the nation completed the application for MPS Superintendent. MPS has three nationally recognized educators as its final three candidates for MPS Superintendent.
21. The MPS Board president personally invited Milwaukee's mayor to provide input into the MPS superintendent search process. The Mayor submitted seven criteria that he wanted to see in a superintendent. Those seven criteria were included in the job description for MPS Superintendent.
22. Milwaukee's mayor had an opportunity to interview MPS's three final candidates for the MPS superintendent position as part of a broad and diverse 13-member community stakeholder group. He interviewed all three candidates as part of that process last week.

Governor Doyle, your effort to scapegoat the Wisconsin Legislature and MPS for Wisconsin's predicted failure to secure Race to the Top Dollars and to turn people around the state against MPS is the worst kind of demagoguery. It will not help to improve educational achievement in Milwaukee, nor build the kind of partnerships between the people of the state's largest city and your administration that are needed to turn our troubled school system around.

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Despite your cynical press release, the MPS Board of School Directors wants to partner with you, the Legislature, and the Mayor in crafting policies that will improve the academic performance of Milwaukee's children. We urge you to work with us rather than against us.

If you have any concerns or questions regarding this matter, please contact me.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Bonds". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael Bonds

President, Milwaukee Board of School Directors

cc: Mayor Tom Barrett  
All Common Council Members  
All Wisconsin State Legislators (Senate & Assembly)  
U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan  
Milwaukee Board of School Directors Members  
MPS Superintendent William Andrekoupoulos