



# BOB DONOVAN

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 84<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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March 25, 2024

Joint Legislative Audit Committee  
Co-Chairs Representative Wittke and Senator Wimberger  
Wisconsin State Capitol, Madison, WI

Co-Chairs Wittke and Wimberger,

[National data](#) has shown that the Milwaukee Public School District (MPS) test scores are well below average and continuing to decline when compared to other large city school districts across the country. State testing results on the Forward Exam show MPS students significantly underperforming compared to statewide results. Only 15.8% of MPS students are proficient in English and Language Arts and 11.5% in Math in the most recent available data.

Chronic absenteeism continues to be an issue at MPS. Students are determined chronically absent if a student misses more than 10% of the possible attendance days in a school year. As a district, MPS recorded [58% of students](#) as chronically absent. These numbers are staggering, but according to WISEdash data, fifteen schools recorded chronic absenteeism rates greater than 90%.

As MPS enrollment continues to decline, efforts to properly adjust the districts physical footprint has been an afterthought. This has resulted in schools being both underutilized and over capacity. In total, [43 school buildings](#) are using less than two-thirds of school space while 21 schools were determined to utilize under half of their space. Additionally, 17 schools are overcrowded as they are one-third over their stated capacity.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, federal funds have flowed into Wisconsin's public education in the form of three installments (ESSER I, II, and III). In total, MPS received \$772 million in emergency funds for the COVID-19 response and to mitigate learning loss. As of December 22, 2023, MPS still has [\\$63,373,749.72](#) in unencumbered funds.

Despite this excess of funding, MPS has decided to send a referendum question to voters on April 2<sup>nd</sup> to generate \$252 million in funding over the next four years. This would amount to homeowners paying an additional \$216 in property taxes for a \$100,000 home in the first year. This is a major decision for voters considering they already approved an \$87 million referendum in 2020.

The citizens of Milwaukee deserve a clear vision on how any referendum will improve student outcomes in a time where results have fallen short. The lack of clear goals and desire to break the status quo have resulted in my letter to you today. **I am formally requesting an audit of the previous four fiscal years of the Milwaukee Public School District.**



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The audit parameters are as follows:

- Investigate and independently categorize the allocation and use of ESSER I, II, III funds for the district.
- Investigate how much of the ESSER I, II, III funds were used for increasing student academic success and preventing learning loss in relation to the total funds allocated.
- Determine how the district is attempting to manage systemic chronic absenteeism effecting the district in relation to learning loss.
- Determine how the district is attempting to track data on absent students beyond the 10% threshold.
- Determine how the district is monitoring learning loss and academic achievement in relation to chronic absenteeism.
- Determine how the district is monitoring average daily attendance in schools and the relation to chronic absenteeism.
- Determine the utilization of district space for both administrative and school property.
- Investigate how much of the ESSER I, II, III funds were used on construction projects for schools that were underutilized.
- Determine how the district managed revenue from the previous 2020 revenue limit adjustment referendum.
- Investigate the overall fiscal standing of the district as it relates to current operational costs and debt.

For these reasons, I am asking you to consider this audit as a means to find potential waste, fraud, or abuse within the Milwaukee Public School District. I appreciate your time and efforts as you consider this proposal.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert B. Donovan". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Representative Bob Donovan  
84<sup>th</sup> Assembly District