



ON THE ISSUES WITH MIKE GOUSHA,
DISTINGUISHED FELLOW IN LAW AND PUBLIC POLICY

“Who’s Running the Schools: A Discussion of Alternative
Methods of School Governance”

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Transcript*

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MIKE GOUSHA

Hello and welcome to Marquette University Law School. I'm Mike Gousha. I think it was on Friday in the Business Journal of Greater Milwaukee that Mayor Tom Barrett said, "It's time for us to have a serious discussion about school governance in this community, about the way our schools are run here." And that's our goal tonight: to have that serious discussion. But before we get to that - and we'll introduce you to a very distinguished panel - before we get to that, what we'd like to do is just take a couple of moments to talk about where we are today and to also tell you about the results of a new study that was done very recently. It's a study that looks at how some other big city school districts are running their schools, what form of governance have they undertaken.

So what I'm going to do now is ask the people in this room to direct your attention right over here to the screen. We're going to put up a series of graphics, and I'll read through this with you, and I'll talk about with - I guess we'll begin with some truths. Maybe that's the best way to put it.

First of all, the Milwaukee Public Schools district is the largest in the state. It faces big financial and academic challenges. District students, many of whom are poor, many of whom have special needs, consistently fall far short of the state averages in academic subjects. The district's portion of property taxes climbed by over 14 percent last year. The state school-aid-funding formula penalizes districts like MPS. Looming health care and pension costs could approach an

additional 100 million dollars in coming years.

And a recent survey of likely voters in the spring election feel that one in four felt that MPS is headed in the right direction. Just one in four.

Just three in ten voters approve of the job the MPS school board is doing, according to that survey. Some have questioned if the current board can handle the many complex issues facing MPS.

Now, because there has been so much attention on this issue, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation commissioned a study to find out what happens when cities or states step in to run school districts. The Public Policy Forum looked at five school districts that are somewhat similar to Milwaukee, where there has been school governance reform. The cities we're talking about are Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Detroit, Cleveland, and Omaha, Nebraska. In most of these communities, the mayor has been involved in appointing at least some members of the school board. The school district governance reform study does not make specific recommendations. It does, however, note several major findings, and let's go over those findings.

First, school governance reform happens over years, and it may occur in several incarnations. The ability of a mayor to achieve improvement is dependent on outside factors, including state policy and labor contracts. Governance reform does not happen in a vacuum, and it's influenced by political conditions, other educational reforms, and larger policy initiatives.

There are nearly as many models for school governance as there are districts that have attempted governance reform. The impact of governance change on a school district's fiscal stability are positive to mixed. And the last finding of the study: governance change can result in some improvement in student performance, but not across the board.

If you'd like more information on all of this you can read the full report: "School District Governance Reform: The Devil is in the Details" report. You can see the website there, GreaterMilwaukeeFoundation.org.

Well, that's the backdrop to tonight's conversation here at Marquette Law School. What I'd like to do now is introduce to you the folks who will be taking part in our conversation. I'm going to do that from right to left, so we'll start down here at the end.

Joining us tonight is Representative Polly Williams. Many of you are familiar with Representative Williams. She's a long-time lawmaker from the City of Milwaukee, and she is also the chair of the Assembly's Committee on Education Reform. Thanks for being with us.

Next to her is Tim Sheehy. Tim Sheehy is the president of the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce. Thanks for being with us.

Next to Tim Sheehy is the Common Council President, Willie Hines. Thank you for being with us.

Next to Willie Hines is Dennis Oulahan. He is president of the MTEA. That's the

Milwaukee Teachers Education Association, of course, the teachers' Union. Dennis, thanks for being with us.

Next to Dennis Oulahan is Jennifer Morales, long-time member of the Milwaukee School Board. Might say you're not running for re-election, so you're free to say whatever you want to say tonight and not worry about the consequences.

Next to Jennifer is Howard Fuller. He's a former Milwaukee Public Schools superintendent, currently a Distinguished Professor of Education at Marquette University, director of the Institute for Transformational Learning here at Marquette. Thanks very much for being with us.

And next to Howard Fuller is the superintendent of the Milwaukee Public School, Bill Andrekopoulos.

Thanks very much to all of you for joining us tonight. I'm now going to start in alphabetical order, and I'll ask each of you the same question. Aren't you lucky that I determined that? You're thinking I'm a lucky guy and I always liked the fact that my name started with an "A."

Let me begin with this. You've had a chance to look at the report that looked at these five cities and you know about the experiences of other cities like Boston or Chicago. Based on what you know, based on what you've seen, is it time for Milwaukee to look at governance change?

WM. ANDREKOPOULOS In looking at the reports, I think I didn't see anything that was different.

I think the conversation a lot in Milwaukee is about the governance issues, and I think the report points out something that I think is extremely important. Just having those deep conversations about governance doesn't get to the most important thing that a school system is there for: to improve the performance of children.

So I think I would like to see this community really have a serious conversation about the intensity of poverty in this community where 98 percent of our children go to schools that are high level of poverty and what impact that has on children's education. So I think governance alone is not the answer to improve the academic performance of our children.

MIKE GOUSHA

I'll have the former superintendent, Howard Fuller, weigh in on this.

HOWARD FULLER

You know, I think any of us who are sitting here who think that there's some silver bullet in governance that's going to improve education in Milwaukee, we really - it's a pipe dream. It's an illusion. And so, from my standpoint, any kind of governance can work, if it has the right support and the resources that are needed to be successful, and if we really want an instructionally effective system. Clearly you need leaders who are competent and decisive. You need people who have, I believe, autonomy at the local level to both hire, to develop and to fire staff, to develop budgets. I think you need effective teachers. And the research is very clear that quality teachers mean everything. But you need those quality teachers to be with kids for at least three successive

years or else you lose the impact of it.

You need smart assessments so that people can make data-driven decisions. You need the type of human-resource system that hires people at the right time, places them in the right positions. And you need true accountability where there are actually rewards and sanctions for what does or does not happen with student achievement.

And finally, in my opinion, you need to have parent choice and empowerment. And irrespective of what the governance is, if these things are not in place, we're not going to be successful.

MIKE GOUSHA

We've heard from the first two panelists, Jennifer Morales, that governance is not a silver bullet. What do you think? Should we be looking at a change in governance in this community?

JENNIFER MORALES

The great thing about the democratic system is that there is a change in governance. Every four years the City of Milwaukee has the opportunity to elect their representatives. And I would encourage the members of the City of Milwaukee voting population to do so. I think that the number of candidates who bring themselves forward for consideration is too small. I think the number of incumbents who go without a challenge is too small - I mean, it's too large. Excuse me.

And I really feel that the opportunity to change governance is in the hands of the Milwaukee voters, and it has not been used to great effect.

MIKE GOUSHA

Dennis Oulahan, same question.

DENNIS OULAHAN

I think we talk about style, and we sort of ignore substance when we talk about these issues. I think about different initiatives that we've undertaken during the time I've been with Milwaukee Public Schools. The neighborhood schools initiative was about buildings and how we get kids to them. It wasn't about what happens to children when they get inside those buildings.

We talk about a system of schools or a school system. It's really about an organizational structure - it's not what happens inside that structure. We talk about small high schools. That's about the size of the program, not what happens or the quality in the program. And now we're talking about the way our school board is chosen instead of talking about what we can do to make our schools work better.

I think this is an instance of more style, no substance, and in my experience those conversations don't get us anywhere. And we desperately need to get to a different place, to a place where kids are doing better in school.

MIKE GOUSHA

President Hines, your thoughts on this.

WILLIE HINES

Well, first of all, I think that persons - people leave your city for a couple of reasons, two or three reasons. One, they leave your city because of crime, the perception of crime. They leave your city because of - we'll say, because of taxes or the delivery of services. And then they leave your city because of schools, whether or not your schools are performing.

And so from that perspective I firmly believe that the mayor and the City of Milwaukee in some capacity should have some say-so, some influence, some input in the decisionmaking that takes place at Milwaukee Public Schools.

The reason I believe that is to be the case is simply, again, whereas we have controls over some other issues, we have absolutely limited - it's not no - control over what happens over at MPS. Now, once again, I'm not espousing or putting forth an entire mayoral takeover, but I do believe that it is important for us to look at governance.

As indicated, it's not a silver bullet. And while you're looking at the governance, that's the top side, you must look at the top down as well as the bottom up. And so you must have room to deal with the curriculum, to ensure that character building and equipping our kids with the necessary skills to perform beyond school is important as well. So I think it's a combination of factors.

MIKE GOUSHA

You issued a press release this afternoon and said that, you know, the city should have some skin in the game. In other words, maybe there should be some school board positions that are appointed and some elected. Is that what you're talking about, something of a hybrid model of a school board?

WILLIE HINES

Well, the conversation has exclusively been centered around one or the other.

MIKE GOUSHA

A takeover?

WILLIE HINES

The current configuration or a takeover. I'm a firm believer that the voters should have a voice and I think

an elected component makes that possible. Also, I believe that the mayor should have some at-large appointees. That way, he can very well be involved in some of the activities and the operations that go on over at MPS.

MIKE GOUSHA

Should we be looking at a change in school governance, Tim Sheehy?

TIM SHEEHY

Well, I want to start out by agreeing with Director Morales on this issue. First of all, I think a governance change is inevitable. Whether that comes through a change in the school board, a change in the date in which school board candidates are elected, a mayoral takeover, or the governor stepping in and taking over the system, I think you're going to see some type of governance change. We have a governance system that we don't use. The elections for school board in the City - not the candidates, but the elections - are pathetic.

This community doesn't participate in the election of its leadership right now, and I think that's led to a number of problems. But what I think makes this discussion timely and inevitable has a lot to do about educating kids. There are a lot of people on this panel that are a lot sharper on that than I am. But I can tell you the fiscal time bomb that we're all sitting on in terms of the unfunded liabilities, the 2.4 billion dollars to start with of unfunded liabilities, are going to force us into a discussion about governance. Because if we can't fix this problem, somebody is going to fix it for us, either at the state level or the city level. It's just in my view inevitable.

MIKE GOUSHA

Representative Williams.

POLLY WILLIAMS

Thank you, and I'm very happy to be on the end of this, because everyone has said all the things that I want to say. I also - I agree with Dr. Fuller on what he says, so I couldn't say it any better. But what I just want to ask here, and make sure, that whoever is going to be making all these decisions - just make sure it's not the same folk that made this decision [holding up map]. This is one of the reforms of the '80s. This is a reform of the '80s, and this was supposed to have been best for the children in the city of Milwaukee. These lines that you see are all African-American students that are being bused out of their neighborhoods to the fringes of the city and this was done under the guise - it's upside down? I'm sorry. Oh-oh. Now I see it.

HOWARD FULLER

It looks the same.

MAN

It looks as bad.

MAN

With the upside down, right side up.

MAN

Every which way.

POLLY WILLIAMS

And it's that kind of a guise - that this is best for the children and they're going to get educated. So I just want to make sure that whoever is going to make that decision - and I hope that I'm a part of this - I've been around for a long time. I've been in the legislature since 1980. I've seen all these changes. I've witnessed all these suggestions and recommendations that are supposed to help our children and yet our children are still not making it, and it's not the children's fault. But it's those people who make decisions like this

that put my child on the bus and send them all over to West Hale or whatever, but it does not apply to their children.

So make sure those people who are making those decisions, that it's people who are going to have to live with the decision.

MIKE GOUSHA

Let me talk about this very briefly from a fiscal standpoint. I don't hear a great deal of support for a change in governance. I hear a couple of people say that it's something that we think is going to come at some point in some form. But let me ask this: Given what we face down the road in legacy costs in this district, and given that some of these other communities who have gone to a different form of governance have seen some improvement in their fiscal situation, isn't it a responsible thing for a community to look at that possibility? And I'll have anybody who wants to jump in. I'll throw it on the floor and let - go ahead, please.

JENNIFER MORALES

I would like to state - I would encourage people to take time to look at the full report because one of the key themes throughout the report is the idea that most of the school districts studied had serious fiscal mismanagement problems or they had serious underfunding problems. I would say that MPS under its current governance structure has one of those, and that is the state finance system is failing us. And I'm very happy to see Representative Pasch here and Representative Williams here to hear this yet again, that our state school finance system is failing school districts across the state.

Underfunding is a consistent theme in this report.

Fiscal mismanagement is not an issue in MPS. Our audits come out very clean. We are audited up and down, left and right, in and out on a regular basis. Those reports are completely available to the public. They are produced at taxpayer expense. So I encourage taxpayers to take a look at them on a regular basis. We do a really good job managing your money. The question is, does the finance system and does the expectations that were set up, for example, for benefits 20 years ago mean an unmanageable system in the very near future? And I agree, but that's a separate question from governance. Managing the pension obligation is a separate question from governance.

DENNIS OULAHAN

Just a little bit on fiscal costs. I think, you know, this term "legacy costs," you hear it everywhere now, and the story usually is, well, MPS is just so expensive and all these post-retirement healthcare costs and so forth.

There was a study done by the Public Policy Forum in 2005 that compared the 51 school districts in southeastern Wisconsin, in terms of actual costs. And in that study, MPS came out 51st in terms of salary, 36th in terms of benefits, and 50th overall. The only school district in southeast Wisconsin that was lower was the Norris District, which is actually a residential treatment center.

The point is, our costs are not what they are on paper necessarily. The real costs are much lower, and the reason is that people don't stay. People don't

stay in the Milwaukee Public Schools long enough to take advantage of those costs.

The other only thing I'd say is, when you look at the tax structure and what we spent, don't ever forget that we are not only, you know, supporting the Milwaukee Public Schools with the MPS portion of our levy. We are also supporting a 20,000-student school district within the bounds - within the jurisdiction of the city of Milwaukee.

When we had the tax levy battle last time around, 4.5 percent of that levy was for the Milwaukee Public Schools. An extra 10 percent was to support the voucher system within Milwaukee. And 4.5 percent is actually well within the average for districts within southeast Wisconsin.

MIKE GOUSHA

Yes?

WM. ANDREKOPOULOS

I have a weigh in a little bit on this discussion. Our healthcare costs in our district are going up at a rate of about 9.7 a year. So if you calculate that out five years from now, we will be spending 100 million dollars more on healthcare. The legacy costs that Dennis talks about, we currently are spending a [unclear] for our retiree healthcare. That's 42 million dollars we're paying for our retirees right now for healthcare. That number in five years will be close to 80 million dollars. That is going up at a rate of a little over 10 percent.

We have a financial crisis in our school system. There's no question about that. We have a situation where the cost to continue is far outpacing the revenue that's coming in and we're

having a cost-shifting between the state paying a large proportion and the local property taxpayers. So when we talk about a 14 percent tax increase - or as the mayor pointed out we've had 11 percent tax increase over the last five years - that doesn't mean that our spending is going up at 11 percent. That means that the local property taxpayers are paying more of their share.

The president in - our new president who in his inauguration said, "The time is now ripe to step up to the plate and make the hard decisions" - if we don't make the hard decisions in our school system, the school system will look quite differently in five years from now. It may be a school system where the question of governance may not even be relevant if we don't tackle and deal with the hard issues that we face financially.

We have a lot of money. We certainly can use more resources, but we also have to look at how we're spending those resources. And that takes hard, hard decisions by all of us and making decisions that are right for our children.

MIKE GOUSHA

It's interesting. You've mentioned President Obama, but the man he named as education secretary is the school superintendent - or the former CEO, I should say - of the Chicago school district, which has implemented a very - a big change in governance over the last 15 years or so.

Is that an example that's being set for the rest of the country, or what's your response to that?

WM. ANDREKOPOULOS It's another model. I think Arnie Duncan did an excellent job in Chicago. He implemented a lot of performance management things that we're looking at doing, very similar things. I think he's tried a lot of innovation and creative ideas. He's had a board that's been very supportive. I think that board has led to his longevity. In Milwaukee, I've been the superintendent eight years, which is a long time for a superintendent of urban America, and we've had an elected board.

So I think a lot of it has to do with the circumstances and the individuals. And I agree a lot with what Tim is saying and that Jennifer talked about is the public coming out and supporting the school district?

My issue with the whole school board and school policy governance issue is, when you have special-interest groups taking over the discussion, generally that discussion is about the adults. My role as superintendent is the children in the school system, and I can think of many examples, examples where special-interest groups control the school board, make decisions for the school board. And that can happen both in a mayoral appointed school board or an elected board. There's many examples of that across the country.

MIKE GOUSHA Let me go down to -

HOWARD FULLER Could I say this?

MIKE GOUSHA Go ahead.

HOWARD FULLER You know, Dennis slipped something there that I can't let go by and -

DENNIS OULAHAN It's my job.

HOWARD FULLER

Yeah, and it's my job to respond so we both have jobs.

You know, the fact of the matter is that right now, with the way that the poverty aid was put into law, it now costs less for Milwaukee taxpayers to fund a child who is in - using - the Milwaukee school-choice program than it does for a child that's going to Milwaukee Public Schools. I think Dennis knows that. I just want to make sure you all know that.

The second thing I want people to be very clear about is, when you start talking about the voucher program, let's not forget the history that brought us to the voucher program. And it began with that document that Polly put forward. But it was more than that, because what it was was the inability or unwillingness or the - whatever it was - that would not allow the Milwaukee Public Schools to educate poor black children.

So we need to be clear here, when we start talking about some of this stuff, legacy and this and that, there's a legacy of what has happened to poor black children in this city and continues to happen to poor black children in this city.

So the struggle for choice was a struggle around, if you're not going to educate us, you're not going to let us create our own district, then you need to give us some capacity, some ability to be able to choose a different arrangement for our children.

So I just don't want that not to be said. And I understand a few may disagree with it, but it has to be on

the table. Otherwise, we'll just sort of go on and say this voucher thing as it gets responded to without understanding the history of how we got here from that type of governance now.

MIKE GOUSHA

I'm going to go back down to this end of the table. Representative, you wanted to say something.

POLLY WILLIAMS

Well, I was just going to respond to the lack - someone mentioned about elections and that how people don't come out to vote, and I think this last election November 4th clearly shows that our people will vote if they feel that the person that's running really is going to make a difference in their lives.

It's on the candidates to bring the people out. And if you're not interested enough or saying what the people want to hear to make them want to come out, that's the candidates' fault. It's not the fault of the people for not voting because our people will vote. They've demonstrated it. They believe in President Obama. They came out for them and they will come out in these school board elections if they felt like that was - the election was going to make a difference in their lives. And most of the time people don't feel that whoever gets elected to office is going to make a difference in their lives. Their children still have problems in the system no matter who they get elected to the board.

MIKE GOUSHA

President Hines.

WILLIE HINES

Mike, you talked about earlier about should we be looking at governance as a possible method to addressing some of the issues in our public education. And

I think we'd be irresponsible if we didn't. Now, the solution may not be exclusively laid in the governance area, but it definitely is one that we must exhaust and must examine, must look at. The report and study talked, you know, probably mixed - somewhat mixed - reviews in that there were some that were successful, there were others that weren't. But again I think we must look at it to determine whether or not we can help prepare our kids for the future.

But again, what we must not lose sight of is - it really is about the kids. That was indicated earlier. We can't lose sight of that. The change in governance is one thing. To be able to ensure that our kids are prepared academically is a separate entity, but I think it's incumbent upon us to look at both.

MIKE GOUSHA

Tim Sheehy, let me have you - we'll kind of segue into that because you raised a point that there is a fiscal crisis and that we're going to face some serious, serious decisions down the road. But I guess the big question here is student achievement really. When it comes down to it, are the kids going to perform better if we change the governance model for the city of Milwaukee? What do you have to say to that?

TIM SHEEHY

That's the \$64,000 question. I mean, I think there's no question, and the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance just put out the most recent study that the Milwaukee Public School system compared to its peers and most other districts is a high-spending district. I don't find that a bad public policy, but I think we have to acknowledge the fact

that we aren't going to solve these fiscal problems by raising spending alone. And it really comes back to - and I think this is the dissatisfaction in the community, the business community, the African-American community, the city in general - is we're not getting the kind of results for the kinds of dollars that we're spending.

And you don't need me to tell this group this: This is a very group of challenged young people. And for all I know MPS may be doing a very good job with the resources that they have. But what we have right now is a community that gives parents the ability to choose. We have choice. I don't want to see any change in governance get in the way of that issue.

The fiscal issue, though - I think, if you look at the numbers, it's so overwhelming that unless this school board or the next elected school board does something about it - and I think this is a case where elections do have consequences. We have traditionally low turnout elections. We have one group - and you think I'm going to criticize them, I'm actually going to praise the teachers' union - we at least have one group in this community that pays attention to school board races. It's about the only way you can get elected to the school board. But I don't think that, long term, has led to sound fiscal management or good governance of this school system.

So I think that the fiscal issues are going to drive an inevitable change, and I don't know what it is, whether it's the mayor, the governor, the common council, whether we change the

date of the school board elections, but I see - there's no way to get out of this hole that we're in, fiscally.

MIKE GOUSHA Is there a model you like? Do you like Boston? Do you like Chicago? Do you like any of the five that we saw in this report that was done?

TIM SHEEHY You know what, Mike, there's such a simple out for this answer. I like the model that's going to deliver high-performing schools. That's the model I like. I think that's the model everybody likes here. The question is what's in - what barriers are in the current governance system or what barriers would be in any governance system that we change to that would keep us from getting to that discussion.

You can see in this panel there's a wide disagreement of whether - of how the resources are being used, whether there's enough resources in the system. And so I'm not sure what governance system is going to allow us to wrestle those questions to the ground.

MIKE GOUSHA Is there an appetite in the state legislature for a change in governance in Milwaukee, Representative?

POLLY WILLIAMS Is there? Well, there's some discussion.

MIKE GOUSHA What if - hypothetically -

POLLY WILLIAMS There have been some discussions. I've gotten some feedback particularly from some legislators who live outside of Milwaukee. I've heard that someone is looking at legislation that would break up Milwaukee or -

MIKE GOUSHA Ted Kanavas, seven districts. Right.

POLLY WILLIAMS - dissolve or - you know, they're talking about it, but it hasn't come through my committee, so - and that's probably why they haven't talked to me about it.

MIKE GOUSHA Well, let me toss this out as a hypothetical. What if the governor were to say, you know what, I'm not happy with the performance of MPS, and I think we need a change in governance? And the mayor said, I'm not happy about the performance of MPS and we need a change in governance.

POLLY WILLIAMS Well, what would that governance be? What's this change - what change are they talking about?

MIKE GOUSHA Well, let's say they proposed a hybrid model, for instance, or they propose the mayor takes over control, or they say the mayor will appoint, you know, most of the board members, and the governor will appoint one or two.

POLLY WILLIAMS No.

MIKE GOUSHA Any of the above?

POLLY WILLIAMS No, no, no.

MIKE GOUSHA So it wouldn't make any difference if they proposed that?

POLLY WILLIAMS No, because I think - I haven't read the study but I've just listened to news - news accounts of those five schools - I mean, five cities that have the governors or the mayors running the schools, it seems that it's not working because what they're doing is targeting the children that's already doing well and putting more resources with those children and the ones that really need it the most, they're not getting it.

So I don't see that a takeover by anyone is what MPS needs. Of course, I have other recommendations. I think that we could have a full-time school board with salary and staff. I think we could have an elected superintendent of the Milwaukee Public Schools. I know Milwaukee is a city of the first class, the only one in the state that has the first-class status, so I think we could come up with some other kind of recommendations for the Milwaukee Public Schools that would apply to what Milwaukee needs, as opposed to what other folks outside of Milwaukee think.

MIKE GOUSHA

Dennis Oulahan, would it make any difference to you if the governor and the mayor together said, this is the direction we think we need to go? Would that make any difference to you and your membership?

DENNIS OULAHAN

I believe in democracy, and I understand it's messy. I mean, I have spent many nights sitting in that auditorium watching the school board, but you could say the same about the Common Council, about the assembly, any legislative body. It's just messy. But whatever is in second place doesn't come close. It just doesn't. And where would it stop? You know, should we have an appointed mayor?

WILLIE HINES

Let me say this, though. Some places are messier than others, though, and that's not to take any swipe at MPS, but I have to defend the council in some capacity.

DENNIS OULAHAN

Sure. But it - well, I don't know. I - there's been some messes in the Common Council lately, you know, involving the district attorney -

WILLIE HINES Whoa, whoa, not in the council. Not in the council.

DENNIS OULAHAN - that we don't see on the school board. It just is messy, and I think - and while I respect the governor, I respect the mayor, and I understand that everybody is trying to respond to what's really a crisis, I think it distracts us from the real issues. We know what works. We know what helps kids learn better: smaller class sizes, qualified educators, remediation, focused curriculum, parental involvement, community involvement. How would an appointed school board affect that? How can you say to somebody, we want you involved in these schools where your children are but we don't trust you to elect the -

MIKE GOUSHA And if we know what's working, why isn't it working?

POLLY WILLIAMS There's no will to make it work.

MIKE GOUSHA Go ahead.

JENNIFER MORALES You know, one of the things that that lack of involvement in the elections is emblematic of is a lack of attendance in all senses of the word by the public in the public schools. And I really would love to see that auditorium every Tuesday and Thursday night filled with people. But they're not there. And you would hear the very serious conversations that we are having, the very deep, slow, grueling work that is happening in MPS. We are doing things. I'm just going to take a couple of quick examples because the student-achievement argument is one of the key arguments that's raised about why a governance change might be valuable.

One key thing that we're doing is we're looking at kids who get to high school and don't have the credits to graduate in the four or four-and-a-half-year time frame that is ideal. Those kids need specific interventions. We're designing those interventions. We have some of our very successful smaller high schools. We have our transitions program which brings in kids who are coming back to the district out of adjudicated situations or other situations. Those are tough cases. Kids who get to be, you know, 17 years old and have two credits. What do you do with that kid meaningfully?

We're enhancing our GED programs. We're enhancing our AP offerings for kids who want more accelerated programs. This is slow hard, hard-to-see work, and if you don't show up and watch, you miss it. That is so key, having the public watch what is happening. Because I have to give Superintendent Andrekopoulos some praise here, and, you know, you'll remember I was one of the board members who did not choose him - and I was vocal about not choosing him. And now I am one of his biggest backers, because I have seen that this is a man who is willing to dig in and get at those small questions that have big impacts on kids' lives, kids that we are failing.

The answers to those kids' situations is not something that's going to make the headlines. It's not something flashy. Talking about the GED program is not flashy, but that's changing kids' lives.

So we are making differences, but it's not flashy work and it - the silver bullet is a great image because the

governance changes that's, you know, pachoo [sound] that's a nice flashy old-West kind of, you know, vision but -

MIKE GOUSHA

Trying to get a sense here. We've heard from Dennis. We've heard from you. Would it make any difference in the overall scheme of things if the governor and mayor threw their weight behind a change in governance in this community? Howard Fuller?

HOWARD FULLER

It could. It would depend on what they come up with. I mean because, first of all, I read this study closely. There's stuff in here I don't agree with. I just want to say that right off the bat. But, you know, to me, let's assume for a moment the mayor took it over. If you don't have a mayor who gets up every day and is like this - I want to be held accountable for whether or not this is successful - if he or she doesn't have it like in their belly, and they don't hire somebody who is equally willing to go up against the stuff that you go up inside that district every day, it's not going to make any difference.

So I mean to me the issue becomes, does this community, the community of Milwaukee, do we really believe that we can educate all of our children? Do we honestly believe that? Are we willing to do whatever it takes to make that happen? And I believe at the end of the day, whatever is going to work, it's going to have a mixed-governance model, and it's going to have to include a variety of different options, and it's going to have to include enough resources to - and those resources have to be used as well in order to make this work. And I think the problem,

Mike, comes - and this is just me speaking - is we all - I think everybody in this room - would like for us to do well with our kids, but we're not willing to face in a real way those things that you can point to that tell you if we continue doing this we're not going to get there with our children.

We always talk about whether or not we know enough. Yeah, we do know a lot about what happens or what it takes to educate kids. But on a day-to-day basis, we're not willing to surrender power if that's what's necessary in order to make it work for our children. Until we get to that point, we'll have - there'll be another group of people in a panel at the Marquette Law School 20 years from now discussing this same question.

MIKE GOUSHA

Superintendent, give me your impression of what life would be like for you if you were working as a superintendent at the whim of a mayor. How would that affect you? Would it be a good thing or a bad thing?

WM. ANDREKOPOULOS

I think if I was - if I was working directly for a mayor, obviously our philosophy and ideologies and concepts would all be worked out whether I was hired for - with - someone. So I think that that working relationship would be good if those things aligned just like in working with the school board. I think that's extremely important and making sure that I put forth a lot of effort, a lot of reform efforts, a lot of changes both in the classroom, financial changes in the district, a lot of those. Almost every one of those has been supported by the school board, so hopefully that same arrangement would happen with the mayor.

I think the mayor and the governor and their role could be to look at the district, especially the governor's role as holding the purse strings, so per se, at the state budget tomorrow we're going to hear an announcement and what his announcement is or a governor's announcement would be on the budget.

I think the governor and the mayor's role could be looking at the district and making sure that we are fiscally responsible and making the hard decisions. There's this McKinsey report that people are working on, and it will be interesting to see what happens in that report. But from my understanding of the report, there will be some hard decisions that we can make to take resources and put them into the classroom. Those are decisions that the school district has to make in order for our district to survive.

So I think all of this has to do with having the courage - as Howard talked about - having the courage to stand up and do what's right for kids. I believe that the expectation sometime is our own limit on success, that if we can have higher expectations for all of our children both in the community and both internally in the district, we'll see our performance increasing.

We're working hard on a lot of reform efforts that really change what happens in the classroom, because the classroom is the most important place. It is about quality instruction each and every day, day in and day out, and having the will to make a difference in the classroom. That's what we're working on. We're not working on just increasing test scores and just

teaching to the test, but we're working on fundamentally changing the course of what teaching and learning looks like in the district.

You will see test scores improving. You're seeing now the graduation rate increasing. And as we continue to move forward over the next few years you will continue to see the increase in achievement. It's gone up at the eighth-grade level. It's gone up at the fourth-grade level. We've been flat at the tenth-grade level, and that's our big challenge for us, and we're really focusing on it. I'd be surprised if we didn't see some movement this year on our tenth grade scores going up.

MIKE GOUSHA

Do you think progress is being made?

WM. ANDREKOPOULOS

Progress is being made, but it's being made too slow. We need to accelerate that progress because our children aren't learning to the degree that's necessary for them to compete in the global economy.

MIKE GOUSHA

We'll move down - Go ahead. Real quickly and then we'll come down.

HOWARD FULLER

Just - I'm sorry. No, I was just going to - look, if - no matter who takes it over, if you don't change contracts, for example, and I'm not - and I think there ought to be contracts, let me just say, I mean, I understand why unions exist and people think I'm anti-this or that. It's not that. The question is if you change the governance at the top, but you don't change anything that's going on within the body of the district itself that prevents good practices from occurring, whether those are contracts, whether there are state rules and regulations,

federal rules and regulations, whether it's not that we continue to get teachers coming into a district that are not prepared to teach the kids that they have before them, if you're - if we can't address all those kinds of issues, it is an illusion to think you can just have some new top thing working.

MIKE GOUSHA

Right.

HOWARD FULLER

And you're not going to address any of the other things that actually make a district work or not work, it's not going to happen.

MIKE GOUSHA

Representative, hold that thought. I would like to give Dennis Oulahan a chance to respond to that.

DENNIS

I - write it down, somebody - I agree with Dr. Fuller. Absolutely. You know, we can dance around and change the topic as much as we want. The people who do the work have to drive the change, and there are things we can do. You know, earlier somebody said, well, we know what works, why isn't it happening? One of the big reasons is that people don't - people are just hanging on by their fingernails. I mean, they really are.

The educators in the Milwaukee Public Schools or all the schools in Milwaukee are right at the vortex of some very powerful social forces. You look at the unemployment rate, 60 percent among African-American men, these are the - those men, their children are the children who go to the Milwaukee Public Schools, and they don't have the wiggle room to say, yeah, let's try something new because they're - it's such a risk. You know, they're just trying to hang

on to what they've got and survive another day. And we haven't given them that space to say, let's try some of these things that research show works that will move achievement in this district.

MIKE GOUSHA

Representative, I promised I'd come back to you. Go ahead.

POLLY WILLIAMS

You know, I'll say what I'm going to say later, because I don't want to just -

MIKE GOUSHA

Okay.

POLLY WILLIAMS

- kind of - they should - the conversation that's going on between Mr. Fuller and Mr. Oulahan, I think it would continue. I can probably say mine at a later time.

MIKE GOUSHA

Okay. That's fine. Tim?

TIM SHEEHY

Mike, I'll jump in. Just listening to this conversation - if I think about this now - Milwaukee probably has the most powerful democratic governance system of any major urban district in the country. And that power and that democracy is when parents have choices. And if we actually increased the amount of resources that went with the parents when they made decisions, we have a governance system that's going to steer us in a direction, because if parents are unhappy with the schools, or the schools aren't delivering and there isn't the right mix, then parents have choices.

Right now the Common Council has the choice, if they want, to expand the number of charter schools. We have an option to expand the number of choice schools. We have all sorts of options and MPS to deliver education. I think

what at least I'm seeing from a distance is we have more high-performing schools today than we've had in the past. So we have a governance system, and I don't want us to overlook the one that we have.

It may not - it may be messy, as Dennis said, but it's working. And my concern is that we don't step forward with a new governance system that crushes, I think, the opportunity to drive some innovative new schools and to increase student performance across the city.

At the end of the day, sitting here representing employers, we're big customers of the system, not only taxpayers but users of the young talent that's coming out of the school system. And I think it's the most important thing that we can do to turn Milwaukee's prospects around, are to make sure that we have more high-performing schools. There are a lot smarter people up here to figure out how we do that, but I see a governance system right now that has some hope that it's actually going to deliver on that promise.

MIKE GOUSHA

Do you see that same hope, President Hines?

WILLIE HINES

Well, I believe that it is occurring and it's happening. I think charter and choice and different options that parents have has forced some changes at MPS, and I think it's forced it for the betterment of it as well. Again, but when you're looking at governance, you have to look at not only the governance elements of it but many of the other issues that are within it. If it's maybe looking at a comptroller or looking at a CFO that will have a

better assessment in terms of tracking those dollars - are dollars being spent too heavy-handed one way and not into the classrooms or into the schools, what other roles will we have in terms of parents and what's happening in the environment?

I mean, I firmly believe that the teachers are dedicated. I think they're committed, but in the classrooms that I go in, even those where my kids attend MPS schools, the reality is I recognize that there are other students that are bringing significant amount of baggage to classrooms. They're bringing many of those social issues from dysfunctional settings, and those are some of the barriers and obstacles that MPS faces as it pertains to trying to educate the kids.

I firmly believe that they could educate and do a great job educating. I think they can do even better, especially if they had the additional assistance and the support there to help give our kids - to eliminate some of the challenges, to eliminate some of the barriers, to strip back some of the social/emotional challenges that we face, whereby the teachers can begin to just teach strictly - with many of those educational challenges, just dealing with the ABCs and not having to deal with many of those social issues that are impediments to learning.

MIKE GOUSHA

Dennis Oulahan?

POLLY WILLIAMS

But now you -

MIKE GOUSHA

Go ahead. Go ahead. That's fine.

POLLY WILLIAMS

Is that something that you feel could happen under the mayoral control?

WILLIE HINES

Well, first of all, I don't support a mayoral control. I said that earlier. I don't believe that. I do believe, though, again, that the mayor and the City of Milwaukee should have some role, some say-so, some skin in the game.

The reason I say that is, again, because I think people are leaving your city because of your public education. That's problematic, and I think a mayor cares deeply about that and would want to play a significant role in the educational fabric of this -

MIKE GOUSHA

Let me play the role of Director Bonds on the Milwaukee school board for just a moment. You know what he'll say? He'll say, well, the City of Milwaukee has its own financial problems. We've seen corruption at city hall in the past. Obviously you're excluded from that conversation, but we've seen that problem in the past. Milwaukee has five charter schools listed in the city. They're underperformers. Why should we trust you guys to do that?

WILLIE HINES

Well, again, I believe that when we've had to make difficult decisions, we've done so. No system is perfect, but we are willing to make the difficult decisions to right our ship. And that is something that - and I believe that MPS is committed to that, but I believe that there needs some additional support, some additional assistance to help them do just that.

And so from that perspective, I can say that despite the challenges that we may face at the city, the reality is, are you telling me there is no room for additional assistance at MPS? I don't believe that, and I believe that some

of those assistance can come to bear from city hall.

When we talk in terms of taxes, our taxes were raised by 3.6 percent. MPS's on the other hand was raised by 14, 15 percent. But when our constituents get the tax bill, what they end up asking me is, why is my taxes so high?

Now, of course, we understand the formula in Madison has impacted MPS in terms of what - they should raise it - but at the same token they should be able to have allies in Madison working in partnership with them. I am a firm believer that that could happen -

MIKE GOUSHA

That could -

WILLIE HINES

- through a different governance stance.

MIKE GOUSHA

You think the City of Milwaukee could help with that effort.

Dennis, you raised your hand; then we'll go to Jennifer Morales.

DENNIS OULAHAN

Yeah. I just wanted to say something about this idea of the marketplace in education and that competition from charter schools or voucher schools is helping MPS. There are places where the marketplace just doesn't work. Health care is an example. You build one hospital across the street from another, and the prices go up. They don't go down because they've got to match the equipment and so forth.

I don't believe that the marketplace works in public education. One of the basic tenets of the marketplace is there are winners and there are losers. In public education there can't be any losers. We can't afford losers. So I

know there are examples of excellent high-performing schools in the voucher system and the charter system within the Milwaukee Public Schools.

But we can no longer afford to have this system that creates islands of excellence. The purpose of public education is to provide that excellent education for every child, and that's the work that we should be -

MIKE GOUSHA How would you change that? How would you get rid of those "islands," as you refer to them?

DENNIS OULAHAN I wouldn't get rid of them. You know, I think you'd try to preserve them.

MIKE GOUSHA I mean, to spread the wealth is what I'm -

DENNIS OULAHAN I think that we need to think more to scale. I think we start - we need to start thinking in the chunks like in the 20 schools that we have in the NEA focus school program. We've made real progress in those schools. We need to - you know, rather than saying, well, we're going to create this school and sort of wall it off, no matter what system it's in or whatever iteration it's in, let's look at larger chunks of schools and let's start, you know, initiating these changes and providing the resources that are needed to make change on a larger scale.

I think ultimately what you do when you're working that way is you get to a point - you get to a tipping point - where people start to believe in the public schools again, and which is really where we all want to be.

MIKE GOUSHA I'm going to go down the list here. Jennifer Morales, down the line.

JENNIFER MORALES

Thanks. Yeah, on the point of the city not raising their taxes, I brought some of my recycling because it hasn't been picked up since Christmas. And I have some paper, too, but this is like one-sixteenth of it. I just want you to know. I wish the City would come and pick up my garbage. I really wish they would, and maybe if we hired more union truck drivers, we could make that happen, but here it is.

You know, I think that that's a big difference. The decisions about taxes have been very painful. I mean, there's no - it's never easy to raise somebody's taxes. but it is because we are dealing with children and not with my recycling that we have to do what we have to do. The school board in Milwaukee has one tool in its toolbox to raise money for MPS, and that is the property tax. The City of Milwaukee has multiple tools. They can raise a wheel tax. They can tell you, if you want your potholes filled in your alley, you can take up a collection in your neighborhood.

If I could do that for the sixth-grade science textbooks and, you know, go around, say, does this neighborhood want to buy their sixth-grade science textbooks and put a couple of bucks extra on your property tax, maybe I would do that. But I don't have that opportunity.

I also want to say MPS - when you look at your tax bill why is it so high? We've asked the city multiple times to break out that school tax bill, because a good chunk of it does go to the voucher program. That is just a fact. We can argue about what's the better

deal, but that chunk should be represented as a wedge on that pie.

We tax so that Scott Walker doesn't have to. We raise money for the public - the county transit system. We buy bus tickets. We raise the money to buy those bus tickets and put kids on the city - I mean, on the county - transit system.

We raise money. We raise your taxes so that we can educate children who have special needs. There are more children with special needs in Hamilton High School than there is in every private school combined in the City of Milwaukee. We educate. They're very expensive to educate, special-education-needs students.

We transport private school students. We raise your taxes so that we can transport private-school students. That little map there which has been seriously revised in the past 20 years, we've raised money to move those private-school students to school every day. So, you know, we need to be serious about what MPS is raising your taxes for.

HOWARD FULLER

Could I say, first of all, the map that Polly showed, that was not busing to any private schools. That was going to our avenue and sending kids to over 100 different elementary schools throughout the city. And the City of Milwaukee got money from the state for every one of those black kids that got on a bus, and that money did not follow the kids to those schools to improve academic achievement. And I didn't find all of that out until I improbably became superintendent and found a whole lot of memos that they thought in life I would

never see. So I want to be clear about that.

The second thing I want to be clear about is my fight for vouchers to go to private schools was not a market question. It was a social-justice question. And I want to be real clear about that. Because when you approach this from a social-justice perspective, it's a very different perspective than talking about markets. And I've been making an argument that I've been criticized for, that the voucher program should not be judged on whether or not MPS improves. It ought to be judged on whether or not we've given poor parents some options that they would not otherwise have had and that we're saving kids' lives, just as they're saving kids' lives inside of MPS.

So, I mean, I think because we say things - and I'm glad I just saw Michael come in. We say things about like underperforming charter schools in the City, and a lot of my disagreement frankly with this report is the whole discussion that they have in here about the city's charter schools and the data that they use and then they make assertions that, oh, by the way, we did not control for race, income, prior performance or any other demographic characteristics.

So I'm just saying, when you read some of this stuff, you need to read it very carefully in terms of what assertions people are making about this data and how it's used.

MIKE GOUSHA

I want to open this up. There are questions from the audience. Before I do that, very quick from each of you:

Is the current system sustainable?
Superintendent Andrekopoulos?

- WM. ANDREKOPOULOS I want to say that, if we don't do anything different financially, it's not sustainable. I think, from an educational point of view, the community needs to hold us accountable for our strategic plan that we're developing. In that strategic plan are the goals, the metrics, the strategies for us to improve the performance of our children. But, financially, unless we make some really hard decisions and we deal with the broken funding system that we have at the state level, we can't sustain ourselves for many more years. The community isn't going to allow us to raise taxes double digit in this time.
- HOWARD FULLER No.
- MIKE GOUSHA No? Jennifer Morales?
- JENNIFER MORALES I agree with Superintendent Andrekopoulos. It's changes at the state that have to happen that create the context that we're in.
- MIKE GOUSHA The change in the funding formula?
- JENNIFER MORALES Absolutely.
- MIKE GOUSHA Okay. Dennis Oulahan?
- DENNIS OULAHAN I think the current system gives us what it was designed to do, to be honest, and it needs changes, drastic changes, and I believe that certainly a change in the finance system and maintaining a democratically elected board of representatives should be part of that.
- MIKE GOUSHA President Hines?

WILLIE HINES

No, I don't think it's sustainable for the years to come.

Not sustainable, and there are lots of decisions that could be made by this school board or any other school board to make it more sustainable. I don't think those decisions are going to be made, so my answer is it's not sustainable.

MIKE GOUSHA

Representative Williams.

POLLY WILLIAMS

I would hate to be odd from the rest, but I guess when you talk - ask about that - does it mean, then, that we're going to have a new system? If it's not sustainable, then we're talking about a new system? And I have some concerns about what the new system would be. I don't see - it's just kind of hard to say that if we change the way things have been done now, the new change will make it any better. But, of course, I do. The thing that I didn't say earlier, I do have some recommendations for change in governance, and I mentioned it earlier about an elected school board with staff and salary, that people would be full time. See, we don't have a full-time school board right now.

And also, I think that the superintendent should be elected, simply because the way the system is set up now five people picked the superintendent. And we constantly have this battle, this - when election time come - who's going to be that fifth vote? Is it going to be people - four people with this interest, four people with that interest, and that fifth person is the one that then makes a decision about who will be superintendent. And I think, with a

budget of 1.2 billion dollars, it should be more than five people making the decision of how that money is spent. That money is greater than the City of Milwaukee's budget, and they have a mayor, and they have city council people that distributes that money. And we have five people that make the decision about 1.2 billion dollars.

MIKE GOUSHA

Let me open this up to the audience. There's a gentleman in here - there he is. His name is Jed. He has on a blue blazer. He's looking very dapper tonight. Jed has a microphone in his hand and what I'd like you to do is hold your hand up. If you have a question, please state your question briefly so someone on the panel can answer. You can state it directly to a member of the panel, or they can answer it in general. Please go ahead.

JERRY FALK

Hi. I'm Terry Falk and I'm on the school board. I believe that there's nothing new in education and anywhere else. If you look long enough, you're going to find a model that works. So my question to the people on the panel is, what school system is doing the best in this country right now? Now I advocate Cincinnati because it's the only school system I know with a graduation rate for black and white that's equal in this country. They decided to do it in five years. And my understanding is Dr. Fuller has looked at Cincinnati.

But others of you have looked at other school systems around the country. What are they doing, or is there no school system in this country urban district that's successful?

MIKE GOUSHA Thanks for your question. Somebody like to answer that?

DENNIS OULAHAN I think Cincinnati is a good example. Minneapolis - a lot of good things happening, Boston, Denver, New York, Rochester, New York. They're all school districts where there are good things happening, and in each instance there's a sense of collaboration between the union, the administration, the community.

MIKE GOUSHA What type of graduation rate? Do we know in those communities? What would be considered a good performing larger district?

OULAHAN What is it in Cincinnati, Terry? It's -

MAN It's about 85 percent and it's - black and white are equal.

OULAHAN And I'm not saying that all those districts ...

WM. ANDREKOPOULOS Atlanta's a school system we should take a look at. Atlanta public schools has made significant improvement. They have an outstanding superintendent. She's been there ten years. They've made significant improvement, not only in academic achievement, graduation rate, getting the community back around that school district. Their NAEP scores - that's the national test - have gone up significantly. But their focus is on the same exact things that we're working on. They've just had more time with it. It's focusing on improving quality in the classroom.

MIKE GOUSHA All right. We're going to have -

HOWARD FULLER I think we need to -

MIKE GOUSHA Go, please.

HOWARD FULLER - pay very close attention to New Orleans and the reason is because on any given day every one of us wakes up and say we ought to blow it up. I mean, just - and Katrina blew it up. One of the things we need to pay very close attention to is how is it being rebuilt and what is or is not working in rebuilding a school district that was actually blown up although none of us like the reason that - you know, that led to it being blown up.

MIKE GOUSHA Mm-hm. I'm going to come back here and then we'll come up here. Yes, sir.

WENDELL HARRIS Hi. I'm Wendell Harris, chair of the NAACP education committee. Two questions, real quick questions. Anyone on the panel support what's taking place in Washington, D.C. right now? And the change in governance and those cities that have the high graduation rates - Cincinnati - how do they compare to Milwaukee as far as academic conditions and other issues that we face in this community?

POLLY WILLIAMS Did you hear the question?

MIKE GOUSHA Anybody want to jump in?

DENNIS OULAHAN The first part of the question - what's happening in Washington, D.C. and there are a lot of different levels of that, mayoral control, the superintendent Michelle Rhee. I think I understand the depth of the issues - I mean, Washington, D.C. has been a struggling school system for many, many years - and the depths of the passions. I think that Michelle Ree, many of the things she's doing are, you know, just sort of beyond my understanding. She's asking people to give up their due process rights, you know, for larger salaries,

and that's always a bad idea. It's like asking somebody to give up their parental rights, you know, for some sort of benefit. And so I guess I would say I think that part of it is absolutely the wrong way to go about reform.

MIKE GOUSHA

Anybody else?

HOWARD FULLER

I think, you know, I understand what Dennis is saying, but it seems one of the things that Michelle is saying is you'd have a two-tier approach. And those people who would be willing to take a higher salary and have less restrictions in terms of being able to get rid of them if they're not being successful - I don't know that that's so un-American, if people would agree to voluntarily want to be in that process as opposed to the other.

The other thing, though, is when you look at D.C., you can't look at D.C. without also looking at what's happening in the charter sector, because of the type of overall reform that is going on within D.C., in the same way that you can't look at Chicago without looking at 2010 and look at Renaissance 2010 and looking at what Renaissance 2010 did to open up the system to a lot of new possibilities of creating new schools and having a mixed-governance model.

MIKE GOUSHA

Let me - Okay. We'll go back here then. That's fine.

POLLY WILLIAMS

Can't hear you.

MICHAEL BONDS

Oh. Michael Bonds from Milwaukee Public School board, and I have a question for the committee. I'm a strong opponent against mayoral takeover and my issues

are as follows: How can a government institution like the City of Milwaukee, which has its own fiscal problem, has a history of neglect and low-income and minority people, lack of infrastructure in terms and expertise and education and has a history of corruption among elected officials over the last 15 years, how can it be - how can that institution be expected to educate kids that are the very people it has historically neglected and discriminated against and continue to do the same?

MIKE GOUSHA

We kind of touched on that earlier, but go ahead.

WILLIE HINES

Yeah. I mean, what I can say, first of all, I don't support a mayoral takeover. I just don't do it. I do believe that there is room at the table for mayoral input or some activity. Why? Again, I believe that MPS and the route in which they're headed in can't be sustained. And because it can't be sustained, it needs additional allies at a variety of levels. And I believe that the mayor of the City of Milwaukee and having some particular involvement with it could help it.

MIKE GOUSHA

Mm-hm. Question, please.

JENNIFER MORALES

Can I throw something in there?

MIKE GOUSHA

Oh, sure, please.

JENNIFER MORALES

There are so many ways that the city leaders could be helpful in MPS, so many ways. One is simply to back things that help us do our job. We've - just a very recent failure of leadership, I feel, is the failure of the mayor and others to help defend the paid-sick-days ordinance, which was passed by 69

percent of the voters in the November election. That ordinance would allow parents to take children to doctors' visits, so that they could manage things like chronic asthma, which is with the high, you know, level of air pollution we have in the city of Milwaukee - kids are missing so much school because they aren't getting regular care for chronic conditions like asthma.

We could increase our attendance rate by leaps and bounds if we could address those issues. The City of Milwaukee could help defend the paid-sick-days ordinance. They also could help clean up the air. Those are two things. Just on that single issue: children breathing and their attendance at school. That would make a huge difference. And there are so many,,if people would just ask and ask board members directly what can we do to help.

MIKE GOUSHA

I'm going to take another question from the audience.

TOM BALISTRERI

Hello everyone. I'm Tom Balistreri, former principal at Rufus King High School and member of the Milwaukee School Board, but above those titles I'm also a parent. And seven of my children - all attended Milwaukee Public Schools - are doing very well, so I know that the school system is able to do what they are commissioned to do.

I think the problem is we've had too many things in recent years. And I'm not talking about my kids graduating a long time ago - my last one just graduated last year - but you have to decide on one thing. What are we going

to do about having a passion for children? At Rufus King, the one thing that I tried to do, as I did at Bay View and 14 other schools, because I've been doing this for 14 years, is to put children's opportunities first. You have to find skills for these children or opportunities for them to go on to become a productive part of this community.

So I'm not going to give a speech except to say this: We have to be more transparent because we talk about things that confuse people. We say that we're measuring things by increasing graduation rates. I'm just going to make this point. The graduation rates mean nothing, because anybody can graduate or be given a diploma or have a diploma factory.

What matters is, are they prepared to go on to the next level? And when these kids go to the universities, especially UWM, they get dropped out after a year. They're not prepared. So when we graduate someone, they'd better be ready, they'd better have the opportunities. Thank you.

MIKE GOUSHA

Thank you. I'll go down here for this gentleman. There you go.

WILLIE JUDE

My name is Willie Jude, former deputy superintendent and also a parent of four students that graduated from MPS. I know MPS has many, many systematic problems. Governance is one that we're going to talk about tonight. Funding is another one that the board themselves can't do much about.

But the question I have I've noticed over the years - the inadequate uniform curriculum in MPS, in a district where

the mobility rate is very high. Many kids on the buses from school to school, and yet after years we do not have a unified, rigorous, consistent curriculum across the district. That's a problem. And we can talk about the governance model. We can talk about funding. But unless something happens on the inside, starting with what we are teaching our kids, what we expect from them, the question I'm raising to - when they answer - why can't we institute or establish a rigorous curriculum across the district to ensure consistency in all of our schools at all levels?

Therefore, when we do assessment, we know what we are assessing because we know what has been - what's been taught at each school at each level. At this point it doesn't happen. It happened in pockets, but not across the district.

WM. ANDREKOPOULOS

I guess I'm in the best position to answer that question. The board - we presented a position paper to the board or position statement about having a consistent aligned curriculum throughout the district. That's what we're working on. We're probably better in that in the area of math. We've just done an outside review on literacy in our district. We have 19 different literacy programs going on. That's just too great.

What's more important, though, we think than - having a consistent curriculum is important, but having teaching practices, consistently high-level teaching strategies in classrooms, from classroom to classroom, school to school is just as important. Having a constancy of purpose in our classrooms and a high level of practice in our

classrooms. So student engagement is extremely important. What we teach in the classroom is truly important.

In reading, for example, we spend ten years just teaching phonics to our children and really not having the high-level thinking skills and comprehension and deep-reading-comprehension skills for our children.

So our whole curriculum is under total revamping, both support at the central office, but also what's happening in the classroom. And that's what we're doing - a consistent professional development plan and really working hard. The components and systems that we have in place around a learning system for adult and children is really based on best practices and research and what these other leading districts are doing around the country, and we're moving those into the classroom at a good rate. It could be better, it could be quicker, but those are the things that we're working on, and that's really a big - the gut of our strategic plan, to make sure we have that greater consistency throughout our district.

MIKE GOUSHA

Let me move up here. There was a gentleman with his hand up before.

MAN

I'd like to direct this question to Jennifer Morales and also Superintendent Andrekopoulos. One of the things that I have such a problem with when I come to meetings like this - and probably the next time I hear it I will walk out - is the fact that we distinguish that because somebody is poor they have some type of learning disability or they don't learn in the same way. I'm really getting frustrated with that. This is the second time in a

couple of weeks that I've been to different forums, and we were supposed to be talking about today - the topic is, what, student governance - and yet and still it says the difficulty in teaching these poor black kids and minority kids.

It is, and I'm telling you that because I want to change this. I want a better school system. I'm Joe the taxpayer. I've got two kids left in MPS. I'm a product of MPS. I'm extremely frustrated with what's going on right now. I'm not sure whether or not we should change this to something else, but I know we must do something else. And as a community we have to find a way to work together. And if we're not ready to come to the table and have real discussions, how do we get there?

And the question that I want to ask from the board members is - the panelists is - can we get more of you all at the school board meetings where all these bad decisions are made so that some of these great intellectual ideas I have can be expressed there? Because Jennifer Morales said it so much so: I sit there night after night frustrated, asking, why doesn't the community come out and stand up and participate with these children?

What can we do to get people involved in the education? The fastest way out of poverty is through education. That's a fact.

JENNIFER MORALES

Well, I do have to give Mr. Harris some kudos for - he does show up on a very regular basis and not always to speak but just to listen and keep an eye out, and I appreciate that.

One of the key things that I would ask of our business community partners, especially those in the media, are helping us get the message out about the many, many ways that people can get involved in MPS. And this is a form of governance as well.

We have many community committees. We have our textbook selection committee we just empanelled a few days ago - or we started the process anyway, panel hasn't been empanelled yet - but those are places where the community can be involved. Our discipline systems. I don't - maybe the superintendent can give more examples. I'm drawing a blank on my usual list that I rattle off. But there are so many ways for people to be involved, and we need people like folks in the business community and in the media to help us promote those opportunities. It just doesn't happen. We can put all the press releases we want, but it's the choice of the community to respond to that.

MIKE GOUSHA

Representative, address this frustration, if you would.

POLLY WILLIAMS

I'd like to - why is it that the meetings are so late? That's one of the reasons - I know, a number of people told me - start at 6:30, and you may get home at 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning. No one have that kind of time, and I'm just wondering, why is this school board meetings so late? They're in the evenings, always in the evenings, and they go to 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning. No one would want to come to any meeting knowing that they're not going to get out till three o'clock in the morning.

JENNIFER MORALES I don't want to either. That's why I'm leaving the board. But I mean, it is a toss-up, and we're talking about people being involved. Mr. Harris can come to the meetings on a regular basis because, I believe, you have a 9:00 to 5:00 sort of job and you couldn't get there before 5:30 at the earliest. So it's kind of a trade-off.

I hear a lot of complaints about the way the Common Council does their committee meetings at 8:30 in the morning on a Wednesday. It's hard for a person who works a 9:00 to 5:00 job to come be involved in Common Council deliberations. So, you know, it really is a tradeoff. Making us more of - less of a quarter-time board might help. I don't know.

MIKE GOUSHA I'll take another question, but I just want to get an answer to his question. I hear him saying he's frustrated. He's tired of waiting. He wants changes. He wants positive changes. He's tired of it. What does anybody say to that?

HOWARD FULLER Well, you know, I - before we get to the tired part, I want to make sure we didn't miss the first thing that he said and that is - and I respect this man a great deal. But I want to tell Bill, I don't want us to go back to the days of Lee McMurrin, where the superintendent began every discussion about telling about how poor the kids are. And because the reality of it is that there are poor kids coming from so-called dysfunctional families that are being educated all over this country. So we cannot say that it cannot be done. We can say we're not doing it, but we cannot say that it cannot be done. That is not to say that the kids don't bring issues.

Like, for example, I chaired a board of a small Christian high school, CEO Leadership Academy. We have 188 kids. I teach black history every year, and so last week I taught four blocks, Monday through Friday, with my half-hour for lunch. And I can tell you - and I'm telling Dennis this -

DENNIS OULAHAN

You must have a good union at that school.

HOWARD FULLER

You mean, the half-hour lunch period?

But what I'm saying is that these kids are no different. If you come - anybody can come to our school anytime you want - these are the same kids that are in any other schools throughout the City of Milwaukee. And while these kids have issues, I believe deep in my heart, because I see it, they can be educated if we create the environments that will educate them. And you can't start out thinking that because you come - because you're poor and this and that - because the moment you start there we're not going anywhere. And the reality of it is - and I've told Dennis this before - when we leave here tonight the world ain't going to be fair, Barrack Obama's election notwithstanding. The people owed their mortgages before Barrack was elected, they're going to owe them now. And all of the conditions I see around our school will be there tomorrow. They're going to be there next week. They're going to be there the week after.

So what we have to tell our kids is: You know what? We know about these difficulties that you're having. But the world is not going to be fair. And nobody's going to feel sorry for you because you come from a poor family and

this and that. All they want to know is what do you bring to the table. And unless we go at these kids with that attitude, in my opinion, we're not going to be able to do it. I'm not - I know how Bill feels. I'm just trying to say, though, when you begin with this discussion about poor kids and blah, blah, blah, no matter what you think, it reinforces an attitude that's been prevalent in this community for decades, and the superintendent used to stand up and say that time after time after time. And it became an excuse not to educate our children.

MIKE GOUSHA

I'll give the superintendent a word on it.

WILLIE HINES

Yes, that was very good. The - you can never use poverty as the excuse why children aren't learning. I think that's quite clear. But the hurt that kids have that live in poverty and the needs that they have are so tremendous. As a school system we look at our mission of educating the children. We've invested money in school nursing because we don't have the proper public nursing system that we have in the city. We've spent a million dollars on free or reduced breakfast for all of our children. We're now looking in investing in universal free lunch for all of our kids because of the actual needs. The housing needs of our children - those are the type of conversations that I think we need to have in this community to really talk about the needs that our kids have. Can't use that as an excuse, but we have to focus on our energy on doing whatever we can to support our children and have the high expectations for our kids, that all of our kids can learn.

But we have spent a tremendous amount of resources based on what the community is not providing for our children, because without those things it has an impact on how our children learn.

I just looked at a chart today that I was presented that shows the level of intensity of poverty in southeastern Wisconsin. And it shows this gray area where all the schools are in Milwaukee and the significant number of children that live in poverty and the impact that that has in those children's lives each and every day. Our school system is a way out of poverty for those youngsters. But we have to have high expectations for our children and make sure that we really understand that the lack of resources around our kids does have an impact on our children when they come to school, and it's our role and responsibility to really turn their lives around by focusing on improving their quality and having high expectations of those children.

MIKE GOUSHA

Going to get to two or three questions very quickly here. I will get over there in a second. Let's do this real quickly and then we'll go over there, and then we'll come back here, and then we'll try and wrap it up.

MAN

This isn't a question but rather a comment. I agree with many of the things that have been said here tonight and specifically with what this gentleman has had to say. And there is not a doubt in my mind but that all of you on the panel and everyone in the auditorium here has nothing but the best intentions. But the truth of the matter is the system has failed. It has failed for 20 years. It has failed the

kids, which is the real disaster. That's probably 200,000 kids in that time frame. That can't go on. We can't make small changes and fix this.

It's failed the taxpayers. It's 2.1 billion underfunded, with the projection is it's four billion underfunded in the not-too-distant future. I believe that it's failed the teachers. The turnover. Nobody wants to work in a failed institution, whether that's a company, a school, whatever it is. That is no fun. That is drudgery to go there and do that.

Now, you know, I think we're missing the forest for the trees. In order to change something and to change the culture, to give something a shock, you've got to change that at the top. That does not work its way up from the bottom, and there is not a doubt in my mind that we have to change the governance and change the culture and push that down. We've got to have high expectations for the students. We've got to change some things with the teachers' union. We've got to get more money from Madison, but tinkering with it hasn't worked, and 20 years from now we'll be here at a meeting tonight saying, gee, what are we going to do with the system?

MIKE GOUSHA

Anybody want to give a quick comment on that? I only get two more questions. Anybody have anything to say? Very quickly, please.

JENNIFER MORALES

I would hate that my - that my words were misinterpreted to mean that we are doing small things. Every child's individual needs are different, and so to address them we have to design many small and large interventions. And so,

you know, that's difficult intricate work that is done by professionals, our teachers, and our support staff in the schools. And, like I said, it's not flashy. It doesn't get great silver bullet headlines, but it has - that's the level that has to happen, kid by kid.

MIKE GOUSHA

There's a question over here.

MAN

Hi. I guess my issue is how are we going to raise this whole discussion to a higher level? If we continue with politics as usual, well, we will be like this in 20 years. I think we have to have some solutions, and I ask everybody on the board. For example, Tim and Howard, when the issue of city charter or vouchers get raised, all of a sudden there's a defensiveness. There's not a transparency. Yes, it's transparent at every level, but we can't discuss vouchers. We can't discuss certain things because of - it's in - you know, it's in the shadows. I think that we have to get everything out on the table and have a real discussion among all the participants in this city, bar none. And everything has to be out there. I ask the question: Why can't we do this? This is a great event tonight, but why can't we do this.

MIKE GOUSHA

Thank you.

HOWARD FULLER

But I think we can, and actually there are people who are doing exactly that. It may surprise you to know I actually believe that we have got to have greater transparency in this community for all schools - Public schools, private schools, charter schools - and that we've got to develop standards that we all agree to, assessments that

we all agree to. I want the day to come when, instead of MPS delivering its report card and charter's delivering its, that we stand together and deliver it to the community with an agreed-upon set of standards and agreed-upon assessment and agreed-upon measures. I think that that's in our best interests, if we really want to create more high-performance schools and get rid of those schools that are not.

I want to explain to you the reason why I've been, quote, "defensive" is points have been raised that if they're not responded to they leave as a given. And I see it not so much as being defensive as much as trying to make sure that we have all of the information on the table to have just the discussion that you're talking about. I'm not afraid of that discussion, man. I want to have that discussion.

TIM SHEEHY

And I'm not -

MIKE GOUSHA

Let me - go ahead.

TIM SHEEHY

- either. I mean, I don't think we've been defensive. I think we've been offensive. And I think just what Howard said. I think putting in front of this community one way to measure graduation rates, no matter where you go to school, putting in front of this community one way to measure value add, one way to - you know, even if you take multiple tests to norm them so we can look at high-performing schools. Because I think - at the end of the day - I think what the community cares about are high-performing schools and kids getting educated, not this fight about which system the kid came through to get educated. I mean, that should be the least of our worries, and it

sometimes occupies most of our discussion.

So if I sound angry or offensive or defensive about it, it's because there's an incredible frustration in this community, all over the community, that we end up wrestling about how the kids are getting educated and not focused on the quality of education they're getting and what that means to this community.

WILLIE HINES

I think that the governor's and the mayor's audit right now will be very telling, and I think it will drive a lot of things. First of all, the state doesn't have a whole lot of money to give right about now, number one; second, nearly as a result of that, what's going to happen is, how much dollars will then come to MPS and then what additional support services will come to bear? I think they're going to be quite limited. And so the process has begun, and I believe that it will be very telling when that report is revealed.

MIKE GOUSHA

Dennis?

DENNIS OULAHAN

I think, you know, offensive, defense. I haven't found anything that Howard or Tim have said offensive tonight. Let's, you know, be clear on that. But I think the key is to stay away from the deficit perspective. I think oftentimes we look at what do we want to do, what would we like to accomplish, and the first thing we see are the barriers that are in the way.

I think when we see something that's valuable or we see something, we say, this is something good. What we should do is say, how do we get there, rather

than what are the barriers, you know, what are the things that have always worked, how do we get there? And granted, we all have principles, we all have sort of, you know, a stake in different areas of this whole thing. But I think if we start with that concept, is this something valuable and how do we get there, how do we make sure it happens.

MIKE GOUSHA I'm going to wrap it up here, and I'm going to wrap it up with one final question and it can be answered probably in a word or two from each of you. The theme of this tonight was governance. Should there be a change in governance. I'm going to ask you: five years from now, will there be a change in governance in the City of Milwaukee? I'll start with Representative Williams.

POLLY WILLIAMS Should there be change?

MIKE GOUSHA Will there be - not "should there" - will there be a change?

POLLY WILLIAMS It probably will be, yes.

MIKE GOUSHA You think it will be. Tim Sheehy?

TIM SHEEHY How about a big, fat I don't know?

MIKE GOUSHA That's all right.

WILLIE HINES I think there will.

MIKE GOUSHA You think there will.

DENNIS OULAHAN I don't know that there will be a change in governance. I hope there will be a change in the way we do business.

MIKE GOUSHA Jennifer Morales?

JENNIFER MORALES History is the greatest teacher. Last time Mayor Barrett tried to suggest this, a bunch of us sat down with him and told him in no uncertain terms it's not going to happen. It's not going to happen.

MIKE GOUSHA Howard Fuller -

HOWARD FULLER No.

MIKE GOUSHA Will it happen? No.

WM. ANDREKOPOULOS I don't know.

MIKE GOUSHA Don't know. All right. We'll leave it on that point. What I'd like to say, first of all, is thank you to all of the audience members who spent time with us tonight. We do appreciate their input. We appreciate their questions.

I would also like us all to give a round of applause to the panelists who joined us tonight. Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

MIKE GOUSHA Before we go, two other thanks. I do want to thank the folks from the Greater Milwaukee Foundation and the Public Policy Forum in Milwaukee who helped put this event together tonight. We're very grateful for their assistance. And I'd like to say thanks to all of you at home who stayed up late to watch this discussion.

I'm Mike Gousha. From Marquette University Law School, thanks very much for being with us.