

THE CHOICE

IS OURS



Road to excellence for troubled Michigan schools begins in Detroit

MARCH 2015

Coalition Members

CO-CHAIRS

- Tonya Allen, President & CEO, Skillman Foundation
- Rev. Wendell Anthony, President, Detroit Branch NAACP
- David Hecker, President, AFT Michigan/AFL-CIO
- John Rakolta, Jr., CEO, Walbridge
- Angela Reyes, Executive Director, Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- Sandy Baruah, President & CEO, Detroit Regional Chamber
- Charlie Beckham, Group Executive for Neighborhoods, City of Detroit
- Ralph Bland, CEO, New Paradigm for Education
- Mike Brennan, President & CEO, United Way for Southeastern Michigan
- Sharlonda Buckman, CEO, Detroit Parent Network
- Dr. Stephanie Burrage, Chief Reform Officer, School Achievement Services, Wayne RESA
- David Carroll, Vice President, Quicken Loans
- Richard DeVore, Regional President, Detroit & Southeast Michigan, PNC Financial Services Group
- Clark Durant, Co-Founder and Former CEO, Cornerstone Schools
- Sherry Gay-Dagnogo, State Representative, District 8
- Stephanie Griffin, English Teacher, Brenda Scott Academy
- Steve Hamp, Chair, Michigan Education Excellence Foundation
- Ponsella Hardaway, Executive Director, MOSES
- Tashaune Harden, Science Teacher, Cesar Chavez Academy Middle School
- Arlyssa Heard, Education Activist and Parent
- Ines de Jesus, Community Schools Coordinator, Southwest Counseling Solutions
- Bert Johnson, State Senator, District 2
- Lamar Lemmons, At-Large member, Detroit Board of Education
- Faye Nelson, President, DTE Energy Foundation, and Vice President of Public Affairs, DTE
- Rev. James Perkins, Greater Christ Baptist Church
- Lisa Phillips, Principal, Detroit Cass Technical High School
- Julia Putnam, Co-Founder and Principal, James & Grace Lee Boggs School
- Edna Reaves, Teacher, Detroit Public Schools
- Mark Reuss, Executive Vice President of Global Product Development, Purchasing, and Supply Chain, General Motors
- Mayowa Reynolds, Dean of Arts, Accountability and Recruitment, Detroit School of Arts
- Roy Roberts, former Detroit Public Schools Emergency Manager
- Jimmy Settles, Vice President, UAW
- Larry Simmons, Executive Director, Brightmoor Alliance
- Shirley Stancato, President & CEO, New Detroit
- Alice Thompson, CEO, Black Family Development
- Dan Varner, CEO, Excellent Schools Detroit

Contents

Key Points	2
One State. One City. One Standard: Excellence	4
Choosing Academic Excellence	6
Choosing a Citywide System That Works for All Students and Families in Every Neighborhood	10
Choosing Equitable Supports for All Students and Families in Every Neighborhood	14
Choosing Fair and Sustainable Funding for All Students and Families in Every Neighborhood	18
The Implications of Choosing Well	22



Key Points

The Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren has laid out a comprehensive plan to make quality schools the new norm for Detroit families. Completed in a little over three months, it's a first step on the long road back to excellence.

Detroit, in many ways, is the canary in the coalmine. We believe that much of what is contained in this report is applicable in other failing school districts across Michigan. Our state used to be a national leader in education, but now, sadly, we rank near the bottom.

The choice is ours. If we want quality schools for all Detroit schoolchildren, and quality schools across Michigan, we must make education a priority again and level the playing field for all schools — traditional public as well as public charter schools. We need one shared standard that all schools will be measured by so that all kids can attend quality schools.

Detroit schools — like many other school districts in Michigan — need significantly better coordination and financial stability to provide real, quality choices for schoolchildren and families. Schools also need a set of strong academic and social supports to prepare kids for success.

Leveling the playing field will require shared responsibility by the governor and state lawmakers, by an elected Detroit Board of Education, by public charters, by educators, by the mayor, by the community, by parents, and by students.

We need Lansing to return control of Detroit schools to Detroiters. We need the elected Detroit Board of Education to pivot the system so that children come first and to make realistic projections and plans for a shrinking student population. We need educators to run schools and come together to find new ways to reach kids and lead change. We need public charter schools, which serve roughly half of Detroit students, to accept more transparency and coordination so that families come first. We need the mayor of Detroit to help bring coordination and order to the school landscape so that quality schools are available in neighborhoods across the city. We need parents and caregivers to be engaged in every aspect of their children's education. We need students to study hard and show up for school so that they are prepared for lives as successful adults. And in a city badly shaken by years of economic decline and instability, we need Detroit's civic groups, nonprofits, government agencies, and businesses to pull together to invest in wraparound services that help poor kids stay in school, work hard, and reap the benefits that high-quality schools bring.

The Coalition recognizes that traditional public schools and public charter schools will continue to serve

thousands of Detroit students for years to come. We believe it is essential that all schools in Detroit be run by skilled principals and caring teachers. They must be valued for the vital roles they play in shaping the futures of Detroit schoolchildren, which is the reason this Coalition exists.

This report is narrowly focused on the most-pressing issues holding Detroit schoolchildren back. It is not meant to be the last word but rather the beginning of a most-urgent discussion.

The Coalition recommends:

- **Return governance of Detroit Public Schools (DPS) to an elected school board.** DPS should transition from emergency management and follow a course set out in state law. It's time for Detroit to take back responsibility and put the district on a path for success.
- **Charter authorizers and charter school boards should improve transparency, focus more on quality, and better coordinate all charter schools.** We also believe that changes to state law or local

“The group that came together to develop these recommendations gave incredible effort, and the diversity of thought and experience is something to behold. I am thankful that each of us brought our best to this effort, and I am certain the framework will serve as a foundation to return our schools to the excellent standard that our children deserve.”

Mark Reuss General Motors





“ I’m hopeful that our recommendations are thoughtful enough and strong enough to be heard. A lot of people believe that the important thing is to fight. But I believe that the most important thing is to build. This coalition is about building the future.”



Julia Putnam James & Grace Lee Boggs School

practice must be made to ensure that charter schools adopt best practices for charter authorizing as suggested by National Association of Charter School Authorizers, and that authorizers should ensure independence of charter boards from educational management companies.

■ **The state should assume the DPS debt.**

Moving forward, the district and state both have a responsibility to ensure that finances are properly managed on behalf of children and taxpayers. Detroit is facing many challenges including growing poverty, a declining population, and an inability to reduce fixed costs as enrollment declines. State policies created an unfair playing field for DPS, such as the cost of paying for an expensive retirement system it did not design. The state is liable for the debt, much of it accumulated while the state was in charge of the district. The longer we let it fester, the more expensive the debt will become.

- **Create a new nonpartisan entity, the Detroit Education Commission (DEC), to coordinate and rationalize citywide education functions in partnership with Regional Councils to incorporate neighborhood-level input.** Serving as a nonbiased and transparent oversight body, the DEC will primarily be a gatekeeper for opening, closing, and siting all new schools in Detroit. It will hold all local schools to the same high academic standards while not interfering with school decisions about hiring, budgets, and curricula. The DEC could also play an important role in coordinating citywide services that help parents take advantage of their options such as transportation, enrollment, and special education.
- **Establish advisory School Leadership Teams** that include parents, staff, and students so that all schools create a culture of shared responsibility.

- **Empower and fund the State School Reform Office (SSRO) and State School Reform District (SSRD).** The SSRO/SSRD should inherit the Education Achievement Authority (EAA) central administration and execute its responsibilities. The inter-local agreement between the DPS Emergency Manager and Eastern Michigan University should be terminated. The SSRO should audit and assess EAA schools in Detroit and create a plan to responsibly transition those schools back to DPS, using one of the established reform strategies identified by state law.
- **Create shared systems of data, enrollment, and neighborhood transportation.** These improvements will help solidify school choice in Detroit by making it easier for parents to learn about the quality of their options when enrolling their children. Choice will also be strengthened by ensuring that all kids have a safe and reliable way to get to school.

One State. One City. One Standard: Excellence

Sharing responsibility for turning around Detroit schools

The schoolchildren of Detroit are suffering — still.

Fifteen years after the state took over our school system, three years after the Education Achievement Authority (EAA) took control of the city’s lowest-performing schools, academic achievement remains tragically low, by far the worst of any big city in the country.

While these educational challenges are most acute in Detroit, they are shared across the state. Michigan children are among the lowest performing in the country; the state’s 4th grade African-American students are dead last. Detroit is just the proverbial canary in the coalmine.

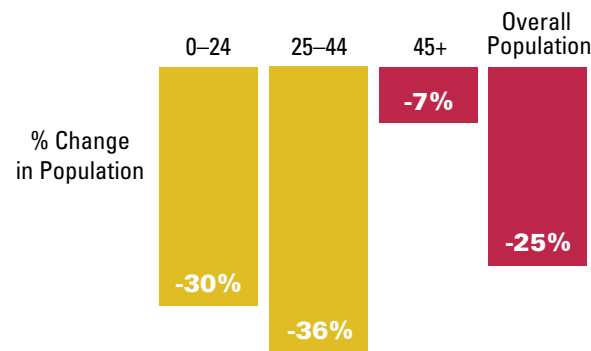
(See page 7 for academic achievement data for Detroit and the state.)

The stakes could not be higher. The city cannot continue to rebound without strong schools serving new generations of families. But families in particular have been voting with their feet, accounting for a huge percentage of the city’s recent population loss. On the other hand, reversing this migration by strengthening our schools will have major benefits for every Detroiter. For example, increasing the high school graduation rate will produce an *additional* \$120 million in annual earnings, \$299 million in annual home sales, and \$28 million in tax revenues to pay for public services (see charts below).

We are not asking for a bailout. We are not asking for special treatment. *We are* asking for an investment. We *are* asking for a level playing field, a fair shot that gives our children the same opportunities as schoolchildren elsewhere in Michigan and in the United States:

- A coherent system of neighborhood schools with a consistent and transparent set of rules.
- Basic student supports that most others take for granted — adequate transportation; an application and admission system that makes sense for families; and wraparound services that promote the social, emotional, and physical health of our children.
- Fair student funding that does not penalize current and future generations of schoolchildren for the past mistakes of the state.
- Funding parity so that Detroit Public Schools (DPS) is not unfairly burdened by a disproportionate share of students with special needs, higher building maintenance expenses, and other fixed legacy costs. And public charters have access to public facilities.
- Local decision-making so that those elected by the people of Detroit set the policies that drive what

For Detroit to thrive as a city, we need to stop losing population, especially among families (ages 0–24, 25–44), where declines were staggering between 2000–10.



Source: 2000 and 2010 Decennial Census

Improving educational outcomes in Detroit will have a huge economic impact.



Source: The above projections for the Detroit-Warren-Livonia, MI metro area were generated by the Alliance for Excellent Education using an economic model developed by Economic Modeling Specialists, Inc.

happens in our schools and are held accountable for results.

- That those closest to the kids — teachers, staff, principals, and parents — are empowered to make key educational decisions at the school level about hiring, budgeting, and programs.

Detroit has a choice: continue accepting the status quo or take bolder steps to better educate our children. Lansing has a choice, too: create the conditions that allow us to manage our own schools or continue to be burdened with the responsibility of running our schools and, worst case, of paying off DPS's \$2.1 billion accumulated debt.

Our coalition represents a very diverse group of stakeholders — white, black, and brown; rich and poor; Democrats and Republicans; principals, teachers, business and labor, civic leaders, parents, and grandparents. But we are united by a set of shared values (see sidebar, Guiding Values), the first and most important of which states: *"The interests of students receive first priority."*

Our recommendations are driven by the values you see here. And our work over the past three months has been driven by faith: faith in our local leaders and hope that those who now control the future of our schools from Lansing will make the commonsense choice, the smart choice, and the responsible choice.

Then it is up to us, the people of Detroit, to step up and take responsibility — students, parents, educators, business, labor and civic leaders, and all who support our city's schoolchildren. In the process, improved schools will undoubtedly contribute to Detroit's renaissance. If we get this right, Detroit is poised to become a model for other urban school systems around the state and across the country.

One city, with shared goals and standards, and a workable, coherent system of school choice that provides a great education to every schoolchild in every neighborhood.

GUIDING VALUES

We believe that public education plays a fundamental role in creating healthy communities, strong economies, and vibrant democracies. Today, Detroit needs a lot from its schools. We need schools to both serve as assets to our community and produce graduates who are prepared for postsecondary education, and to then become skilled workers, educated voters, and conscientious community members. We commit to basing our recommendations about the future of public education in Detroit on the following shared values:



STUDENTS FIRST: The interests of students receive first priority and fair weight when the different needs and purposes of public education conflict with one another.

COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY: Parents and other caregivers have a unique role and responsibility in creating student success. Students, teachers, administrators, public officials, residents, and business owners share that responsibility. All of us must be both collaborators and critiquers who can ask tough questions and hold each other accountable.

LOCAL VOICES MATTER: All Detroiters should be able to contribute to the design of public education in Detroit and participate in its decision-making in meaningful ways.

AUTONOMY AND ACCOUNTABILITY: Educators at the school level should have the support and freedom to run great schools; and parents, students, and the community should have formal and meaningful mechanisms to hold schools and the public education

system accountable to the community's values and need for results.

PUBLIC FUNDING REQUIRES TRANSPARENCY: Timely information about the performance and finances of schools has to be readily accessible to the public that funds public education.

SCHOOL CHOICE: Students and their families must have real access to enroll in and attend any school in Detroit, including a strong neighborhood school.

ADEQUACY AND EQUITY: The educational system has to serve ALL students well. Accordingly, all schools must receive enough funding to educate students effectively, and the system must strive to create equal opportunity by providing additional resources to students with unique needs, including language.

INNOVATION: Public education in Detroit must be free and encouraged to innovate in ways that are likely to, or have been proven to, enhance the education of our children.

Choosing Academic Excellence

We Detroiters have been living with mediocrity in our schools for far too long. We choose to change that. We choose excellence.

We have good schools, just not enough of them. We have talented teachers, principals, counselors, and other staff. We have smart, talented students, too. But too many of them — adults and children — are trapped in a system that is not working. We choose to change that.

Despite decades of interventions by the state, far too few Detroit schoolchildren are being prepared to succeed in college, careers, and life. But despite pockets of

excellence, by any measure, academic achievement in the city is abysmal and not improving very much.

Only five schools serving Detroit students exceed the state average in reading and only seven schools in math. The vast majority do not. These are DPS schools, public charter schools inside the city, EAA schools, and the 25 suburban schools where Detroit schoolchildren represent 75 percent or more of enrollment. And Michigan's average is not a high bar: Only about one-third of the state's students are proficient in reading and math, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (see sidebar, A Struggling City in a Struggling State).

Meanwhile, in the national context, all other urban districts are performing much, much better. Only four percent of Detroit's students are meeting the NAEP standard, compared to 13 percent in Cleveland (the next lowest ranked large city) and more than 30 percent in places like Atlanta; Washington, DC; Houston; New York; and Miami.

Worse, only about 40 percent or fewer of the city's students are making measurable annual progress on the state's tests in reading and math. Again, that's true across the board: DPS, EAA, public charter schools, and suburbs.

And of those students who manage to graduate, the vast majority are not prepared for college or careers that



A Struggling City in a Struggling State

The educational crisis extends well beyond the city of Detroit. Educational outcomes in Michigan have been declining steadily for years.

4TH GRADE

Reading Proficiency

31%

Math Proficiency

37%

8TH GRADE

Reading Proficiency

33%

Math Proficiency

30%

HIGH SCHOOL

Meet ACT Benchmarks

20%

Do Not Graduate in 4 Years

23%

Ranks 35th in the nation in reading proficiency.

African-American students score **dead last** among all 50 states, a dramatic fall from 28th just eight years earlier.

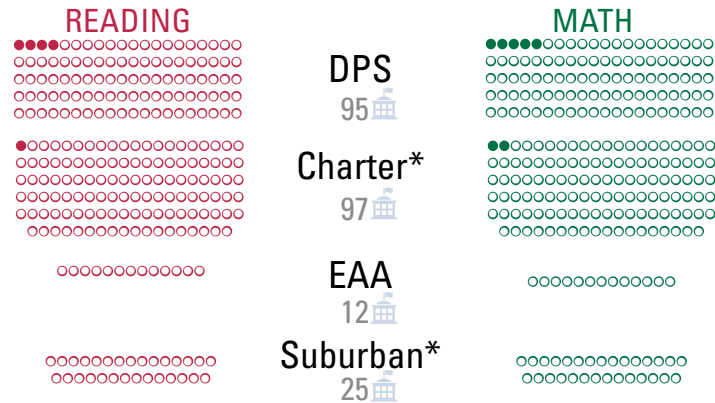
41 percent of the state's high school students are not proficient in reading.

Only 29 percent of African-American students are proficient in reading.

Sources: National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2013; ACT and Michigan Department of Education, 2014

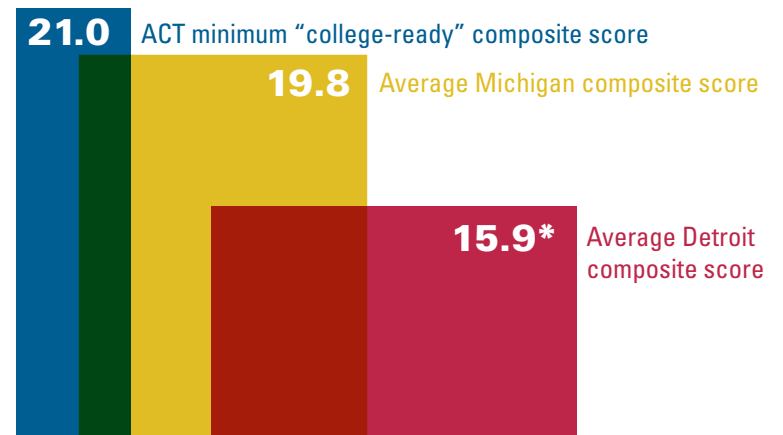
Now: Student achievement is low ... and not improving much.

Only 5 public schools serving Detroit students top the state average in reading ... only 7 in math.



Source: Michigan Department of Education *Charter includes public school academies in Detroit in which at least 75 percent of the students are from Detroit. Suburban includes suburban traditional district schools and public charters in which 75 percent of the students are from Detroit.

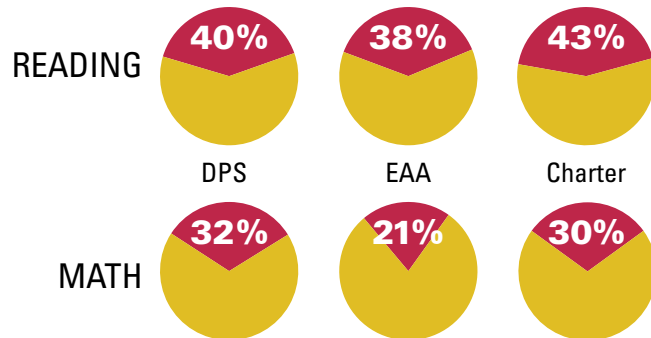
Very few students are prepared for college.



*Includes data from all Detroit schools. Source: ACT, 2014

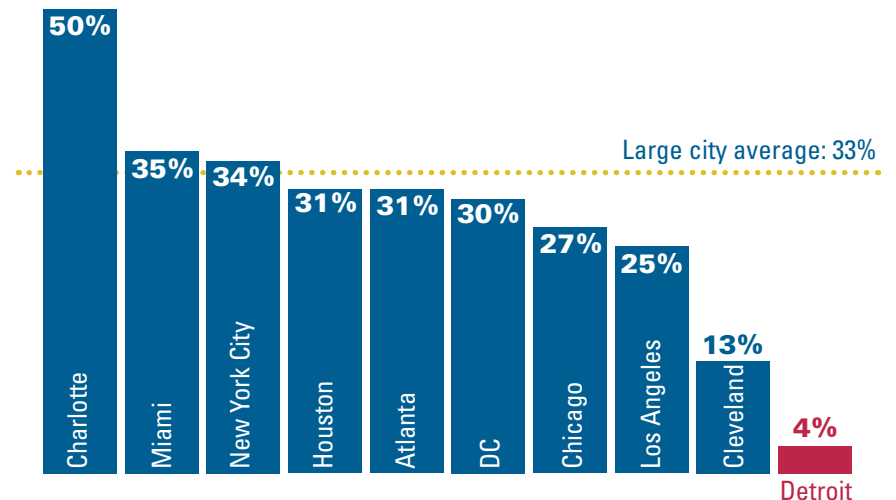
Despite major "reforms," students are not making much progress.

% of Detroit students making measurable annual progress on MEAP, 2012-13 (All Detroit schools, broken down by type)



Source: Michigan Department of Education, Michigan Educational Assessment Program

All other urban districts are performing much better.



Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress, % proficient or above, 2013

pay a living wage. That is a significant (and increasing) barrier to success, given that a projected 70 percent of all new jobs in Michigan by 2020 will require some kind of

Recommendations

We came together as a Coalition to turn around these realities. We did not get to this point overnight, and we will not recover overnight. The first steps are to (1) recognize the reality; (2) set shared goals for success; and (3) offer bold solutions.

What we want is a clear, common set of outcomes for all students. We do not want to dictate the pathway for each school to meet those outcomes. We want teachers and principals to have autonomy. We also recognize that while metrics are important, over-testing is bad for teachers and for students.

OUR GOALS

All Detroit schools will provide a world-class, rigorous, and relevant education with high expectations in the aspirational spirit of Detroit. Diverse support services will meet the needs of each child. Every high school graduate will be prepared to excel in college, a career, trade, or the military. Our schools will support this vision.

That will require creating 150 high-performing schools in the next 15 years. High-performing schools have a comprehensive curriculum aligned to state standards. They have essential supports, small classes, and quality

“For all the great work that’s happening in Detroit, unless we successfully shift our education system so it trains and teaches high-performing kids to become high-performing adults, it’s all a waste of time.”



Larry Simmons Brightmoor Alliance

postsecondary education or training: industry certificate, two-year degree, four-year degree, or military training.

staff that are generally retained over time. Stakeholders (parents and community) are integrally engaged.

High-performing schools are defined as those where at least:

- 80 percent of students show one year’s growth every school year.
- 80 percent of students read at or above grade level.
- 80 percent of students demonstrate grade-level proficiency in writing.
- 80 percent of students demonstrate grade-level proficiency in math.
- 90 percent of students attend school every day.
- 90 percent of students graduate from high school.
- 70 percent of students are ready for college or careers (as evidenced by a 21 on the ACT or 1540 on the SAT).

This will require:

- Protecting or starting **high-performing** schools that meet college- and career-ready standards.
- Improving **middle-performing** schools.
- Reforming, turning around, or closing **low-performing** schools.
- Strengthening **early childhood education** so that all children are ready for kindergarten and are reading by the end of 3rd grade.
- Ensuring that schools receive **essential supports, qualified staff, a comprehensive curriculum** aligned to state standards, and **effective literacy and math interventions**.



- Investing in and retaining our **talent** (teachers, principals, counselors, etc.).
- Coupling strong **supports** with strong **accountability**.
- Welcoming, strategically **engaging, and reinvigorating stakeholders** (parents, community members, and others) through mechanisms such as School Leadership Teams and Regional Councils.

Give all local schools equal freedom over programs, scheduling, hiring, and budgets.

All schools in the city will be held to the same high standards for student achievement. But each will have the freedom to decide the specific pathway to achieve these goals. We cannot unleash the talents or hold school leaders and teachers accountable for gains in student achievement unless we also give them the chance to choose their teams and instructional programs. On a phased-in basis, based on the school’s ability to take advantage of this flexibility, this recommendation will give DPS schools the school-level autonomy similar to what public charter schools currently enjoy.

Giving all local schools autonomy over key functions will flip the current paradigm, where most decision-making power resides in the central office.

Create a citywide strategy to recruit, develop, compensate, and retain high-quality teachers, school leaders, and other staff for all schools in Detroit.

Research shows that having a strong principal managing every school and an effective teacher leading every class are the two most important steps school systems can take to improve student achievement. We also know that the quality of administrators varies in Detroit schools and that we are competing with every community in the state

and every urban area in the country to attract and keep the very best. This competition produces a scarcity of talent that has been exacerbated by the decline of young people choosing to teach; enrollment in teacher prep programs has fallen 10 percent nationally between 2004 and 2012, and some Michigan programs have decreased by up to 50 percent.

Solving this challenge will require several coordinated, cost-effective steps.

First, build a citywide system of professional training for teachers that spans their careers. Their training should be coherent, continuous, collaborative, and focused on helping them master the academic content of their subjects. Training will be aligned with professional teaching standards, and teachers will be evaluated with a judicious use of assessments that promote a growth culture in schools. Individual schools can choose whether to opt in to this training, but offering them the opportunity to take advantage of this shared resource is a cost-effective solution to a challenge shared by every school in the city that impacts the quality of instruction for our kids.

Second, and similarly, develop a Leadership Academy to prepare educators to become school leaders, with specific training on improving achievement at low performing schools. Turning around chronically failing schools demands a specialized set of skills. We cannot afford for each school to try to do this on its own.

Third, the city's schools will establish stronger partnerships with local colleges and universities to identify training, certification, endorsement, and professional development opportunities for specialized teachers (in areas such as special education and STEM). This will help improve the quality and consistency of the training.

Fourth, Detroit will make its compensation for teachers and staff competitive with local, regional, and national school districts. Again, winning the race for talent is the best way to improve instruction for schoolchildren. Getting more funds into schools and classrooms is essential, but

“Talent is a crucial part of business, especially with technology and the new economy. We are going to face a significant problem, not only in Detroit, but all over the country, if we don't improve our education system.”



David Carroll Quicken Loans

DPS and public charter schools both face critical issues to overcome before this is possible.

Finally, it is clear that although believed to be by some, unions and collective bargaining are not a problem. Our coalition recognizes that in fact, unions have been advocates for meaningful, research-based education reform. Therefore, collective bargaining agreements must be honored where they exist, and the right of employees to unionize should not be undercut. Union or not, we must treat teachers with the dignity they deserve — and find ways to attract and retain the talent we need.

Create a citywide approach to help transform low-performing schools into high performers.

As a first step, the State School Reform Office (SSRO) (see page 13) will conduct a thorough audit of low-performing schools, using a range of benchmarks that include but are not limited to test scores.

Level the playing field so that all Detroit students can benefit from programs that promote high academic achievement, good character, and an understanding of American citizenship. Priorities include:

- A high-quality, universal early childhood program for preschool-age students, including a citywide reading program for our youngest children. Detroit has nearly 500 early childhood programs, but only 25 percent of these centers are subsidized by state or federal funding, and fewer than 50 have earned a high-quality rating from the state.
- Thematic (e.g., arts and STEM) high schools that prepare students for careers and college. Public

charter schools will gain access to the city's career and technical education (CTE) programs that they do not currently have.

- Partnerships with the state, civic institutions, and businesses to create a network of high-quality CTE schools that align with the needs of the economic market and prepare students for high-paying, high-demand careers.
- Classes in the fine and performing arts and physical education as a way to increase academic growth and success and ensure well-rounded graduates.
- A supportive school culture and climate where discipline is constructive and age appropriate. Specifically, we call for a moratorium on pre-K and kindergarten suspensions. Schools should work collaboratively with law enforcement, but police should be the last resort for student discipline.

Level the playing field so that all Detroit students can benefit from quality special education and bilingual services.

DPS is educating a disproportionate share of special education students, partly because individual public charter schools do not have the capacity to accommodate these students' needs. Going forward, a task force should determine whether Wayne RESA or another entity should provide citywide coordination and consolidation of special education and bilingual services across all schools in Detroit (DPS and public charter schools). Services must give equal access, offer an equitable funding model, and be provided at the neighborhood level when possible.

3 Choosing a Citywide System That Works for All Students and Families in Every Neighborhood

No other city in the country has a system of schools quite like that of Detroit. It is hardly a system but instead an uncoordinated hodgepodge of schools that are not educating Detroit's schoolchildren well.

The reality is that Detroit has 14 different districts and authorizers, each with its own set of standards and expectations, each with the authority to open and close schools whenever and wherever they would like, and all competing with one another for survival. And underneath those 14 are more than 50 individual charter operators and local education agencies. Each acts like its own district with its own data systems and community and student support offerings (including special education and transportation).

- DPS enrolls about 47,000 students in 95 traditional schools.
- EAA enrolls more than 6,000 students in 12 of the city's lowest-performing schools.

“These aren't easy issues. There are ideological divides among us. But we've figured out ways to talk to each other and work together. I believe these recommendations are strong.”



Dan Varner Excellent Schools Detroit

- 12 public charter authorizers (including DPS and the EAA) enroll about 36,000 students in 97 schools in the city. Plus, nearly 26,000 students leave the city to attend traditional public schools and public charter schools in the suburbs. Fifteen of these charters and 10 of these traditional schools rely heavily on Detroit kids, who account for 75 percent or more of their enrollment.

When so many are in charge, **there is no accountability.** Schools (DPS and public charters) that have performed poorly for years remain open without being held accountable for quality. In fact, some low-performing public charter schools are actively recruiting students and, in some cases, opening new schools. That is not good

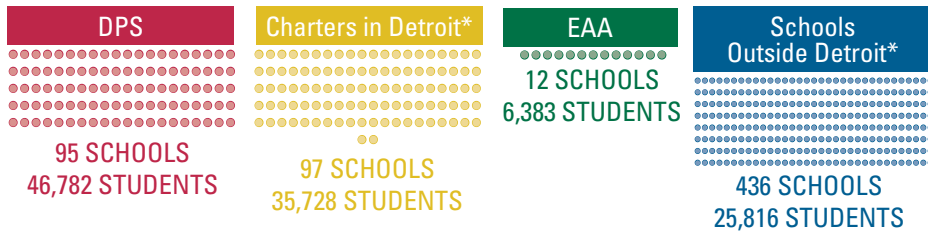
for kids and not good for the city. We need great schools that are striving for quality instead of low-performing schools competing for a shrinking pool of students. When the state legislature removed the cap on public charter schools, it exacerbated the public school funding and enrollment challenges of a city that continues to lose population.

There is no stability. All of these governing bodies have the power to open and close schools on their own, without any coordination. As a result, some neighborhoods have far too many schools, others have far too few.



Now: Detroit has 14 different authorizers and districts that can open and close schools, plus the suburbs. When so many are in charge, there is little coordination and no accountability.

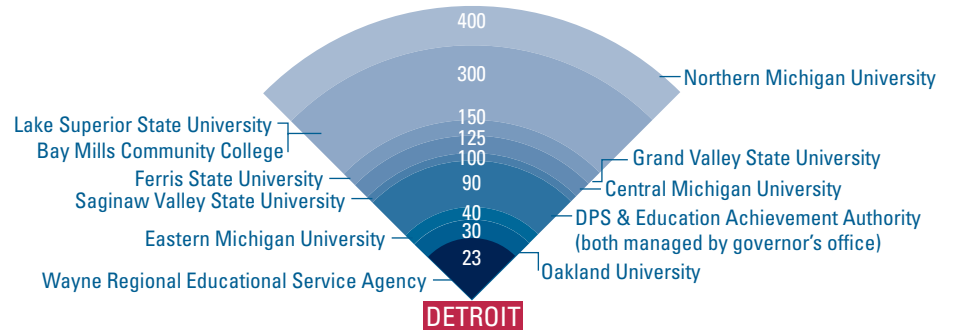
Detroit's 119,658 students attend hundreds of different schools, which are run by 14 different entities (authorizers and districts). These numbers don't even take into account the many suburban schools that enroll mostly Detroit students.



*Charters in Detroit include those authorized by DPS and EAA. Schools outside Detroit include any school that enrolls at least one Detroit student. In 25 of these schools (traditional and charter), Detroit students account for more than 75 percent of enrollment. Source: 2013-14 Nonresident Enrollment file from the Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI)

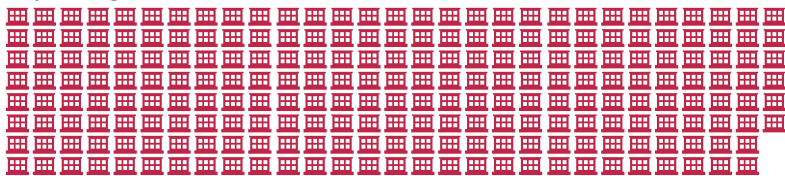
None of these authorizers is locally controlled.

Mileage from Detroit of the entities overseeing Detroit schools



All of these authorizers and districts have the power to open and close schools on their own, without any coordination.

Since 2000, more than **230** Detroit schools have been closed or reconfigured, impacting about **75,000 students** and their families.

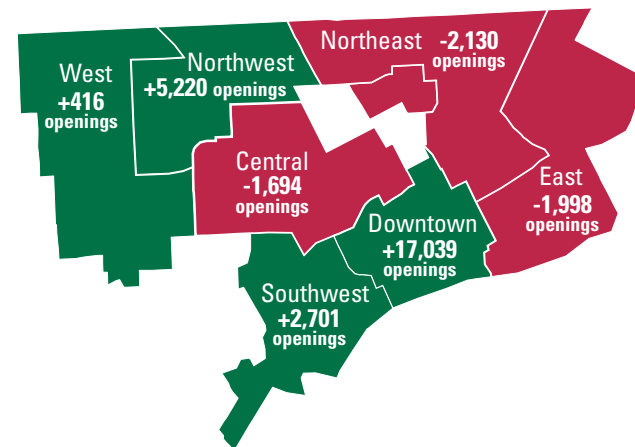


During the same time period, Detroit has had more than **100** schools either start new or convert from DPS-managed schools to public charters:



Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI)

Some neighborhoods have too many schools, others have too few.



Source: Data Driven Detroit calculation of seat over- or under-supply based on Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) 2015 population projections and Excellent Schools Detroit-provided estimates for school size: 800 students per high school and 85 students per K-8 grade, for all general education public schools located in Detroit (from Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI))

“Ultimately, we ought to get judged on how we changed the arc of academic achievement for children.”

Mike Brennan
United Way for Southeastern Michigan



Worse, this Wild West landscape has a destructive and destabilizing effect on families and their children. Since 2000, more than 230 Detroit schools have been closed or reconfigured, impacting about 75,000 students and their families. At the same time, more than 100 schools have either started from scratch or been converted from DPS management to charter management, which is effectively the equivalent of creating a new school.

How can students learn in an environment that is so unstable, when they don't even know which school they will be attending next year? How can families make sense of a system where the expectations are so different, where what might be considered 3rd grade reading in one school is considered 5th grade reading in another?

There is no coherence or stability. Schoolchildren and families in most Michigan communities can count on some predictability and stability. They benefit from

a system of neighborhood schools where students progress from a certain elementary school to a certain middle school to a certain high school. Enrollment and financing tend to be predictable. Teachers tend to stay. Not in Detroit. Choice is good. Too much choice, with no accountability for results, is not.

There is no efficiency. Having different authorizers and districts — each with its own centralized bureaucracy and its own fixed costs — makes no sense financially or educationally. Our goal is to get more people and funding out of central offices and into classrooms.

There is no local responsibility or accountability. None of the entities in charge of Detroit's schools have local accountability. Authority for DPS and the EAA resides in Lansing, while charter authorizers are located as far as 400 miles away.

As a result, many Detroiters have become increasingly disenfranchised, disempowered, and disengaged. When people have a say, they are much more likely to step up and take responsibility — for example, to get their children to school on time, to hold educators accountable for providing quality learning, and to hold others accountable for providing students with the supports they need to succeed.

Parents in Detroit care deeply about their children. They desperately want to do the right thing for their kids. They take extraordinary steps to do so. But as local control dissipated over the years, many became frustrated about not having a voice and being shut out of decision-making. And they are exhausted by the ongoing challenge of navigating a broken choice system that doesn't work for their families.

At the school level, research shows that schools implementing comprehensive parent involvement programs that include parent participation in school management outperform comparable schools on measures of behavior, climate, attendance, and test scores. In addition, every successful and improving urban school district the Coalition reviewed has some version of school-based management with shared decision-making (School Site Councils in Boston, Collaborative School Committees in Denver, School Leadership Teams in New York). In our outreach, we talked to parents who would be eager to re-engage in a repaired system that they could trust.

Recommendations

The Coalition recommends creating a system of shared accountability that offers all Detroit's schoolchildren a fair chance to get a quality education in a neighborhood school of their choosing. While some may argue that governance does not directly impact the day-to-day learning happening in the classroom, good governance creates the conditions that allow quality teaching and learning to occur. Good governance should also safeguard against market

distortions. If academics is the seed, governance is the soil. We have to root out bad systems and bad actors to allow great schools to grow and flourish.

Transition out of emergency management, and return governance of DPS to an elected school board with all deliberate speed.

For 10 of the past 15 years, DPS has been run from Lansing, most recently through an emergency manager.

During that time, deficits and debt have ballooned. And student achievement remains tragically low. Centralized, top-down interventions have not worked. It is time for Detroit to take back responsibility for our own schools, just like other Michigan communities have.

This does not mean DPS will manage all of its schools from the top down. Just the opposite. One of our core recommendations empowers all DPS schools to

make their own decisions about hiring, budgets, and programming, to be phased in based on performance (see chapter two).

Maintain authorizer responsibility for Detroit public charter schools, but with more accountability for results.

Require authorizers (including DPS) to meet the Detroit Education Commission's (DEC) citywide performance standards. Limit expansion of operators to demonstrable high performers. And require charter authorizers to follow recommendations from the National Association of Charter School Authorizers, to increase accountability.

Create a new nonpartisan board/legislative body, the DEC, to coordinate and rationalize citywide education functions. Members will be appointed by the mayor of Detroit.

To ensure that all neighborhoods have quality schools, the DEC will serve as a gatekeeper for opening, converting, or closing schools. New schools will be selected on merit. Among other roles, it will conduct an annual analysis of demographic trends and school performance to identify where better schools are needed. It will annually collect and publish school performance and financial data. Based on those data, it will decide whether and where to (1) open a new school; (2) place a school on a watch list; or (3) close and potentially reopen a school with different leadership. In addition, the DEC potentially will oversee the shared citywide services that help parents take advantage of their choices, such as transportation, enrollment, special education, and wraparound services (see chapter four). The commission will be a lean, non-biased, transparent,

and community-based body that retains only the powers necessary to create a functioning choice system. It will also deeply engage the community in planning.

Fully fund the SSRO and State School Recovery District (SSRD) to take the lead in improving low-performing schools, and return the EAA schools to DPS with all deliberate speed.

The inter-local agreement between the DPS emergency manager and Eastern Michigan University that established the EAA will be terminated. The SSRO will audit and assess the schools and responsibly transition those schools back to DPS using one of the established reform strategies identified by state law. As provided by law, schools may be placed in the SSRD if these interventions are not successful. The SSRO/SSRD will absorb the EAA central administration to execute its responsibilities. Although the SSRO and SSRD were legislatively created in 2010, they were never adequately staffed or funded. It's time to scale these bodies and make them work. Priority schools in Detroit should use turnaround assistance from successful partner organizations. Assistance from the ISD should focus on supporting schools to prevent them from entering priority status.

Require all public schools in Detroit (DPS and public charters) to create advisory School Leadership Teams of parents, teachers, staff, the principal, students (where age-appropriate), and community members.

Members will be elected by their peers. Half of the teams will be made up of parents and community members, who will advise the school principal about the annual School Improvement Plan, budgets, and other proposals

that impact the school's community. Going forward, these advisory teams will become accountable for the School Improvement Plans.

The DEC must meaningfully engage the community in its citywide planning. To do so, it will:

1. Organize Regional Councils by City Council district. These councils will consist of representatives of School Leadership Teams that fall within that district. They will conduct hearings and engage in planning and any opening and closing decisions related to their districts, and generally inform the DEC on neighborhood needs, equity trends, and potential support services for every neighborhood. They will convene at least twice a year.
2. Hire a public advocate, who will serve as an ombudsman for Detroit families. As a nonvoting member of the DEC, the advocate will investigate complaints and patterns of violations. The advocate will build community capacity by training School Leadership Teams and other advocates.

Together, these recommendations create a culture of shared accountability and responsibility in Detroit. Parents and community members will have a voice and will be expected to step up. DPS school leaders will have control over key decisions in their buildings and be expected to step up if they want to earn and keep this freedom. Public charter school authorizers, boards, and education management organizations will retain their autonomy, but will be held more accountable for providing a quality education. The school board will regain its authority over DPS and, like its charter counterparts, will be held accountable for the performance of its schools. And the mayor will be held accountable for ensuring quality schools in every neighborhood, which is essential for the city's overall growth and prosperity.

“ We talked with experts from across the country. Everybody at the table, even though we had different opinions and came from different backgrounds, all care about children, and want to improve education in Detroit.”



Ines de Jesus Southwest Counseling Solutions

4 Choosing Equitable Supports for All Students and Families in Every Neighborhood

All families should have the right to choose a school. Detroit has more choice than every other U.S. city except New Orleans. But the practical reality is that choice is not working for most Detroit families and schoolchildren. Although about 60 percent of Detroit families report choosing a school, many have difficulty taking advantage of their options. And no one knows how all of our kids are doing.

Enrollment. All Detroit authorizers and school districts have their own enrollment policies, each with its own rules, admissions requirements, and deadlines. Parents are understandably confused. Nearly one in four say they are not sure which schools their child is eligible to attend. They struggle with application deadlines, the number of applications, and confusing paperwork.

Information. With such intense competition, families are flooded with marketing information. But it is often confusing or inconsistent. There is no shared data system across schools and school systems. Schools use very different metrics to track important indicators such as

suspensions and expulsions. There is little information about the availability or quality of early childhood, special education, and bilingual programs. Not surprisingly, 71 percent of parents say they are unable to get all the information they need to choose the best school for their child.

Transportation. Given the amount of choice occurring and the absence of high-quality neighborhood schools, transportation is a major barrier. The average Detroit student commutes 3.4 miles each way to and from school. Ten percent travel more than 6.7 miles each way. More than 75 percent of students rely on walking, city buses, or cars to get to school. But the bus system is sometimes unreliable, 25 percent of Detroit families do not have cars, and walking is not an option when schools are so far from home.

Currently there is no mechanism for all schools (DPS, EAA, and public charters) to financially support an equitable and practical transportation system. And the transportation we do provide is costly and inefficient. The Detroit Department of Transportation, EAA, and DPS duplicate services for families within the same communities, while only some public charter schools provide transportation to their students. DPS bears a disproportionate cost for transporting special education



students: an average of \$2,700 per student and up to \$15,000 for some. In all, DPS spends \$30 million a year to transport 19,000 students. Most schools do not cover transportation for extended day and after-school programs.

Special education. Parents of students with special needs are particularly frustrated. Nearly half say they are confused about their school choices. As Detroit transitioned to a decentralized system of schools, no one made sure that high-quality special education services were equitably accessible, distributed, and paid for. Many special education services are too costly for individual public charter schools to provide. As a result, special education services are concentrated in DPS schools, which deepens the cost and capacity burden on DPS.

“ I am hopeful that people in Lansing, in Detroit, in our schools, and in our community realize these bold recommendations will make some people uncomfortable. But change often does.”



Alice Thompson Black Family Development

Now: 59% of families report exercising school choice. But families have a hard time taking advantage of their options.

BARRIER

1 Limited transportation

The average Detroit student commutes



29% of parents say that transportation is a problem.

DPS provides only limited transportation for students. Charter schools provide even less or none at all.

Over **75%** of students rely on unreliable public buses, walking, or cars to get to school, but ...



25% of Detroit families don't have cars

Sources: Commute – Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI); Parents – Center on Reinventing Public Education; Cars – 2013 ACS 1-year survey

BARRIER

2 Confusing enrollment

All Detroit school authorizers and districts have their own rules, requirements and deadlines.

This highly fragmented system confuses parents:

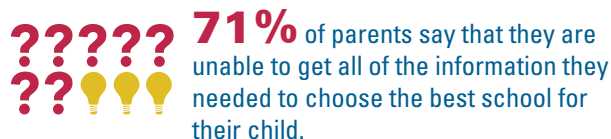


Parents struggle with varying enrollment deadlines, confusing paperwork, and a large number of school applications.

26%
Application deadlines

21%
Number of applications

18%
Confusing paperwork



Lack of an enrollment choice system means that schools struggle to plan for staffing and programming.



Teachers often have to switch schools within the first 6 weeks of the school year because enrollment is so unpredictable.

Source: Center on Reinventing Public Education

BARRIER

3 Special education

Parents of students with special needs are particularly frustrated.



As Detroit transitioned to a decentralized system of schools, no one made sure that high-quality special education services were equitably accessible, distributed, and paid for.



In 28 schools, more than **25%** or at least 130 students have an IEP.



In 82 schools, less than **8%** or fewer than 30 students have an IEP.

Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI)

“

We are not competing as a state, as a region, or as a city compared to the rest of the planet in terms of educational achievement. And until we fix that, our businesses are not able to recruit and have the talent that they need to compete and win in a global economy.”



Sandy Baruah Detroit Regional Chamber

Poverty. Finally, Detroit has more schoolchildren living in poverty than any other city. These children need special supports. But schools provide uneven wraparound services to respond to the unique developmental, social, emotional, and physical needs of students living in high-poverty communities. Data systems are inadequate for assessing students' needs and matching them to best practice providers. There is no citywide system for

measuring and reporting on program quality or for sharing information about the availability of services. For example, the Department of Human Services' (DHS) Pathways to Potential, which helps parents get jobs and provides supports to low-income families, is currently limited to only 88 DPS schools, 11 EAA schools, and one public charter school district.

“ I want Detroiters to know that we love them. And that this work is done out of a love and a commitment for the best.”

Mayowa Reynolds Detroit School of Arts



Recommendations

Create a citywide student data system to support equitable school choice and quality neighborhood schools.

Such a system will provide standardized and understandable information to families about the quality of all schools — DPS and public charters. It will include information about academic performance; suspensions/expulsions; and the availability of quality early childhood, special education, and bilingual programs. And a citywide system will normalize the process and timelines for applying to schools, which will level the playing field and help families navigate their choices to find the best fit

for their child. Parents will get their first choice when available. Overseeing the creation and operation of this system could be one responsibility of the DEC (see page 13).

Create a citywide system to improve student transportation in equitable and practical ways.

To ensure equity, all schools (DPS and public charters) will contribute funding. To strengthen neighborhood-based schools and reduce transportation costs, transportation will focus on serving students within geographic zones. To help ensure that students get the wraparound supports they need, the system will also serve before- and after-school programs. We recommend that at least two pilot programs begin in fall 2015. Again, overseeing the creation and operation of this system could be one of the DEC's responsibilities (see page 13).

Make a citywide commitment to provide high-quality wraparound services to support children's social, emotional, and physical needs.

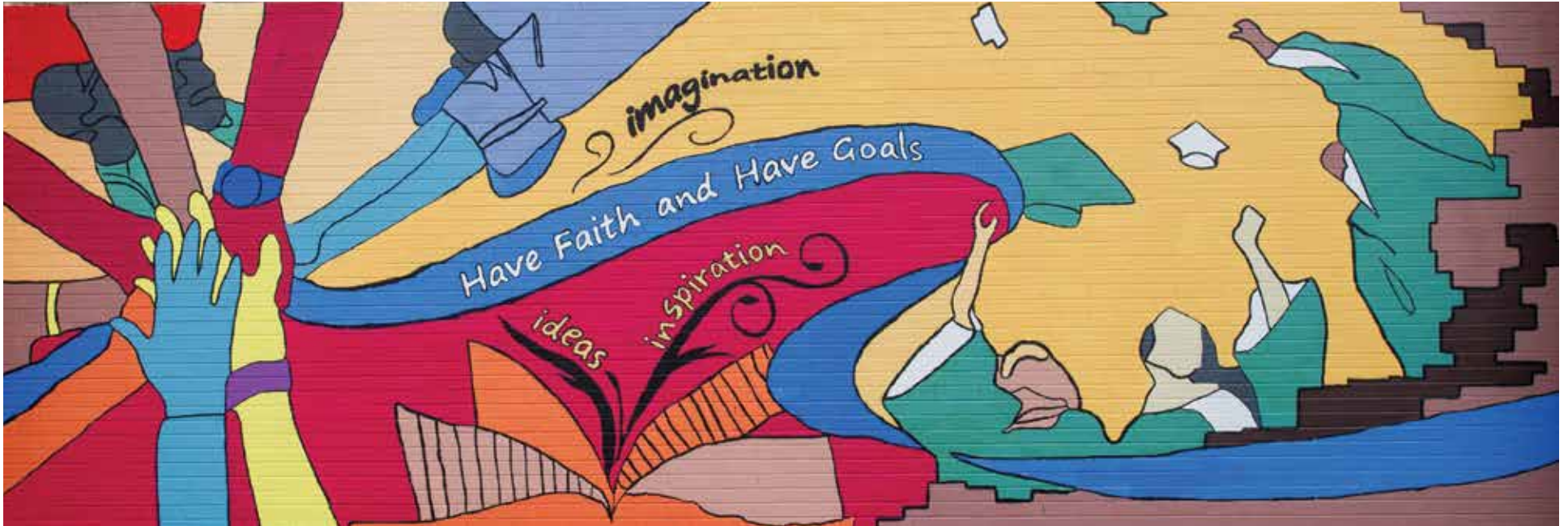
As part of its annual performance assessment, the DEC will measure the availability and quality of relevant services in each neighborhood. DPS and public charter schools will develop memorandums of understanding (MOUs) to share services and create a citywide directory, which will be a cost-effective way to better serve families. DPS and public charter schools also will establish compacts/MOUs with neighborhood public and nonprofit organizations that are providing quality wraparound services and with networks of corporations that are willing to help fund such services. Offer tax credits to encourage such public-private partnerships. In addition, DHS' Pathways to Potential program and other wraparound services should be expanded to meet the needs of all eligible students, including those attending public charter schools.

If we address legacy debt and achieve funding parity for public charters, these necessary and critical student supports can be provided from schools' budgets.

“ I'm excited about the process to get the community educated about what we've come up with.”

Ponsella Hardaway MOSES





“As a teacher this was my opportunity to have a voice and speak about my firsthand knowledge of things that are not quite working in favor of student achievement.”



Stephanie Griffin Brenda Scott Academy

“We came together in unity for a common purpose, which is to have more quality schools in Detroit. But now the real work begins, which is how do you find the best school leaders and best teachers to create the best schools to give kids a chance.”



Clark Durant Cornerstone Schools

5 Choosing Fair and Sustainable Funding for All Students and Families in Every Neighborhood

The key question: What financial policies are needed to ensure that all Detroit students have access to the resources they need to graduate from high school prepared for college, career, and life regardless of where they attend school? Today's students should not be stuck carrying the costs from the past. From long-term debt undertaken to cover past operating costs to maintenance of old buildings, far too many dollars are being taken away from what they are supposed to do — pay for educating Detroit's schoolchildren. Many factors have contributed to the crisis:

Declining population. The number of school-age children in Detroit has declined from 196,638 in fall 2002 to 119,658 in fall 2013, a nearly 40 percent decline, though the number of schools has not decreased proportionately. Costs associated with supporting the excess capacity of school buildings are drawing down from instructional spending.

“The DPS debt issue is the elephant in the room that nobody wants to deal with. But it has to be dealt with.”



Richard DeVore PNC Financial Services Group

Further exacerbating this challenge, DPS saw increased competition and diminishing market share (from 85 percent to 42 percent), which amounts to a 70 percent decline in student population. Today's students are bearing the costs of past operating deficits and legacy expenses, and as of yet DPS has not been able to regularly operate in the black. While in recent years the number and compensation package of teachers and staff has been reduced significantly, DPS's central office remains overstaffed.

Growing poverty. Overwhelmingly the population loss came from the middle- and higher-income segments of the city, leaving the schools with a higher percentage of students in poverty, many of whom are identified to have special needs. While additional dollars are available both for students who live in poverty and for those with special needs, these are not currently sufficient to meet the costs in many schools. Our long-term strategy for addressing the impact of poverty is to improve the quality of education for students, but this will also require a commitment to creating good jobs and improved quality of life for those currently in poverty.

DPS has reported that it spends \$40.8 million over and above the dollars it receives to support special education costs, and this financial burden adds considerably to the deficit.

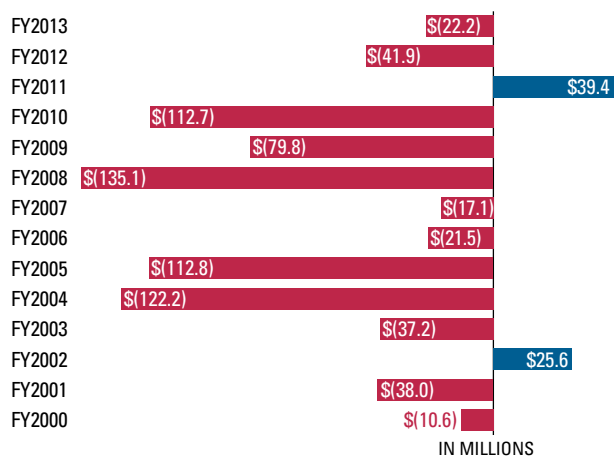
State policies that have created an unfair playing field. DPS is required to pay into a state retirement system and must provide transportation for K–8 students, though its charter counterparts carry no such requirements, creating additional financial costs on the district. On the other hand, public charter schools have no taxing



authority, meaning they have to pay for buildings out of funds that otherwise could go into classrooms. Charters also are allotted less in state foundational allowance than traditional districts, once the city millage to support school operations is taken into account. These policy differences are inequitable and not in the best interests of Detroit children.

Now: The financial playing field is not level.

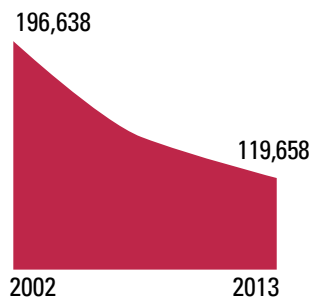
DPS has operated at a deficit for 12 of the past 14 years.



Source: William Aldridge (Chief Financial & Administrative Officer) pulling From DPS financial audits

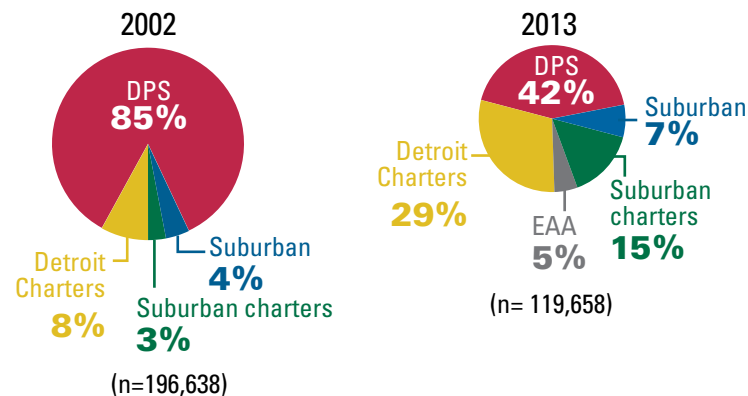
DPS debt challenges are exacerbated by two main factors.

Since 2002, the number of school-aged children in Detroit has declined about 100,000 overall.

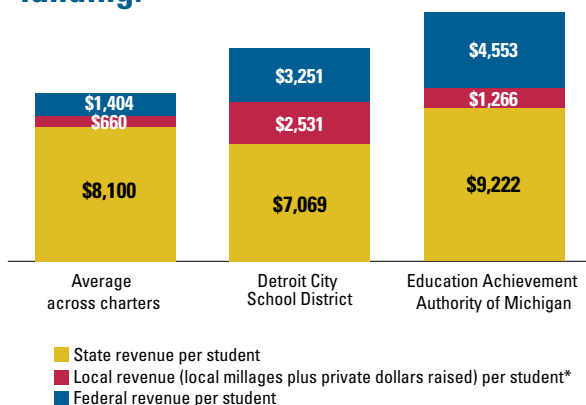


Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI)

And DPS' share of these students has decreased significantly.



Schools receive different levels of federal, state, and local operating funding.

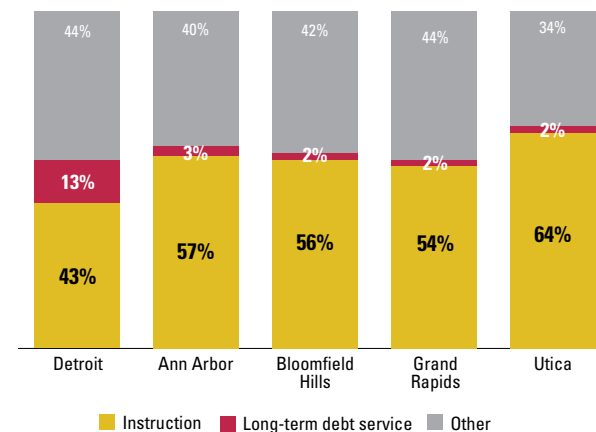


*This does not include dollars raised for capital costs, including DPS' local property taxing authority.
Source: 2014 Michigan Bulletin 1014, Michigan Department of Education

DPS pays \$53 million a year on debt service for its operating budget. That's \$1,120 per student before any instruction occurs.



Compared to other school districts, DPS pays far more on long-term debt service ... and far less for instruction.



Source: Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports for each LEA/District, FY14 (except Grand Rapids, which is FY13 as FY14 was not available at time of analysis)

DPS debt. DPS' owes approximately \$350.2 million in long-term debt notes. That includes \$53 million in debt service to cover past operating deficits plus debt to cover working capital for the current school year, amounting to \$1,120 per student in debt service. DPS also owes \$48.2 million in past due MPERS payments and \$59.4 million of accounts payable. And it has an additional \$174 million in capital debt (bonds that Detroiters are paying for from local millage), \$3,586 per student.

As a result of the large debt burden from past operations, DPS pays much more in debt service than other districts, impacting the percentage of dollars reaching classrooms. While other Michigan districts use two to three percent of their operating funds to pay for interest on their debt, DPS spends 13 percent. While other districts spend up to 64 percent of their operating funds on instruction, DPS spends only 43 percent.



“ The idea has been to leave personal opinions and adult issues at the door. Let us do what’s best for the kids of Detroit. And that’s what we have done.”

Steve Hamp Michigan Education Excellence Foundation

Recommendations

The state should assume the DPS debt, and DPS should transform its operations to improve academic performance.

Detroiters already are taking responsibility for paying \$174 million a year to settle the city’s *capital debt*. But today’s students are paying for past *operating deficits* with fewer students to share these costs, resulting in dramatically diminished instructional resources and support. The state of Michigan should take responsibility for past operating debt that occurred on its watch: \$53 million a year. Furthermore, the state should exempt Detroit from paying the legacy cost of retired DPS employees to the Michigan Public Schools Employees Retirement System (MPERS), as the state failed to sufficiently save to support the secure retirement of these teachers and staff and today’s student population is too small to carry the expense.

In return, DPS should immediately undertake an operational audit that identifies ways to adopt best

practices so that its funds better support student achievement. The audit should include a comprehensive top-to-bottom review of its administration, structures, process, work rules, hiring, and buildings. And its results should be presented to the Detroit School Board and made public. The state will provide appropriate financial oversight.

All public schools in Detroit, including charter authorizers and education management organizations, should be completely accountable and transparent, held to the highest operational standards.

Provide three-year funding projections.

Recognizing that declining student population is likely to remain a challenge, with projections that Detroit’s school-age population will decline through 2030, the state should provide traditional and charter districts with three-year funding projections based on demographic trends and offer step-down funding to districts with shrinking



enrollments. All districts in partnership with the state, should then be required to adopt budgeting practices that span multiple years and account for demographic realities. Districts cannot continue to overspend based on unrealistic assumptions.

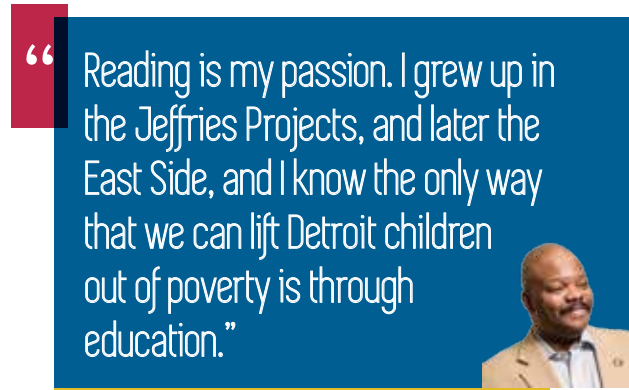
The state should fund the adequacy study and accelerate its completion to December 2015, so that its findings can inform school funding decisions beginning with the 2016–17 school year.

The study and resulting changes in funding should take into account the varying needs of students within and among all schools, such as English language learners, high-poverty students, students with special needs, CTE students, and the students' grade level (high school students cost more to educate than elementary school students). Such "weighted student funding" will more accurately account for students' different learning needs and provide needier students with the additional supports they need to succeed. Funding decisions should be based on student need, not the type of school governance (DPS or public charter).

In addition, special education financing needs to be reconsidered. Currently, DPS pays \$40.8 million above and beyond the dollars it receives to support special education costs (a result of the high-incidence population, not center-based supports). Special education funding should cover actual costs and services should be consolidated across schools of all governance type while improving the quality of supports.

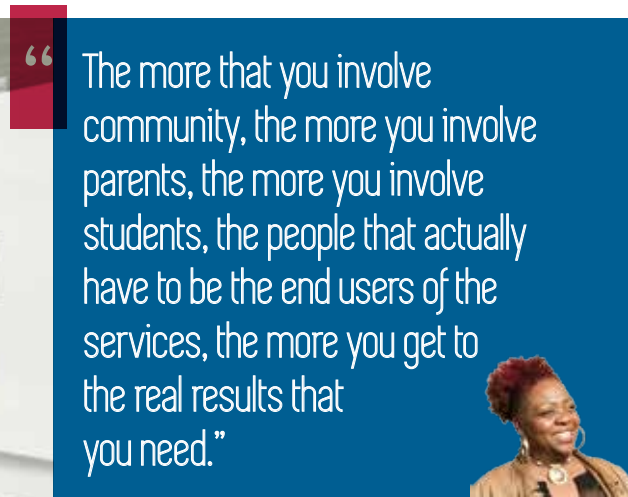
Provide all of Detroit's schoolchildren with equitable access to clean and safe school buildings that support their learning.

A task force should make recommendations that level the level the facilities playing field for all schools, whether DPS or a public school academy. Currently, DPS faces tens of millions of dollars in deferred maintenance costs on older, expensive buildings, while public charter schools are forced to pay all capital expenses out of their foundational grant or private philanthropy. The facilities issue is not working for any school governance type, and should be addressed in a way that advances increased equity and gets our buildings up to code. Furthermore,



Lamar Lemmons Detroit Board of Education

the task force should explore the possibility of using unused or underutilized facilities for early childhood centers, neighborhood amenities, and other wraparound services. Detroiters currently pay a capital/facilities millage that supports only half of our students.



Arlyssa Heard Education Activist and Parent

The Implications of Choosing Well

Implementing the Coalition’s core recommendations will have implications for everyone serving Detroit’s schoolchildren ... and the schoolchildren themselves.

Implications for the state

Pay off DPS’ debt to level the playing field for its nearly 50,000 students. This debt occurred during a steep population decline over the past 15 years while the state was in charge. The state must take responsibility for it so that current and future generations of students have a fair shot at a quality education. This is not just a Detroit issue, but a challenge facing cities across the state.

Make Detroit’s elected officials, especially the mayor, accountable for supporting the city’s schools. This does not mean mayoral control. But it does mean we need a single person accountable for all students in Detroit, whether they attend DPS or public charter schools. And it means that if schools are not improving citywide, we know who to hold accountable. It also means forming a

“I want Detroiters to know that all children in the city of Detroit was the mission of the Coalition. But we think the work applies to schoolchildren across Michigan, too.”



Ralph Bland New Paradigm for Education

citywide commission that will create a level playing field and rational approach for opening more good schools and converting or closing bad ones.

Return control of DPS to a publicly elected school board. The emergency manager model has not helped Detroit’s schoolchildren. Detroit is prepared to take responsibility for its schools but can do so only if the state relinquishes top-down control and lets citizens hold the school board accountable for results.

Fully fund and staff existing statewide mechanisms for turning around low-performing schools. The state’s top-down approach to turn around schools has not helped Detroit’s schoolchildren. It just created yet another bureaucracy when the state already had two entities with the same authority — the SSRO and SSRD. It’s time to fund them and support low-performing schools all across the state, not just 15 schools in Detroit.

Implications for elected officials and citizens

In stepping up to assess and help improve the city’s schools, the mayor recognizes that educational quality is key to the city’s current recovery and future prosperity. And we should hold him to his promise to include parents and community members in shaping policies that affect their children.

The DPS school board needs to be given back the responsibility and held accountable for improved student achievement in their schools, or face the reality that more schools will be converted or closed. DPS will be relieved of its debt but in return must get more resources into classrooms where they can most benefit schoolchildren.



Parents and community members will regain their voice on school matters as members of School Leadership Teams and Regional School Councils, but will need to share accountability for improved student achievement.

Implications for public charter schools, authorizers, and education management organizations

Public charter schools need to step up as they will be held to the same student achievement standards as other city schools but will continue to have freedom to decide how to achieve those goals.

Increased accountability for results will encourage the expansion of quality programs into neighborhoods with the greatest needs and close the worst.

Authorizers must step up and meet national best practice standards. They must ensure the independence of charter boards from educational management companies and be held accountable to best practice standards (including simplifying charter contracts).



“ This work is authentic. It came from the hearts of people who care about students in Detroit — not just DPS students, not just EAA students, not just charter students, but all students.”



Tashaune Harden
Cesar Chavez Academy Middle School

Public charter schools will help pay for and have access to many shared citywide benefits, such as facilities, transportation, enrollment systems, special education services, and CTE programs, among others.

Implications for the EAA

Its functions will be taken over by the entities that were created years ago specifically to help turn around chronically low-performing schools — not just in Detroit, but in communities all across the state.

Most important, implications for Detroit’s schoolchildren and their families

Students and families will benefit from an independent, data-driven, strategic approach for opening more good schools and converting or closing bad ones.

Students and families will benefit from stronger neighborhood schools, providing more quality choices closer to home.

Students and families will benefit from a school choice system that is much easier to navigate, with clearer, more consistent information and standards, application requirements, and deadlines that are more consistent and less confusing.

Students and families will benefit from support services, such as transportation, that help them take advantage of choice and wraparound services that help address students’ social and emotional needs.

Students and families will benefit from access to quality programs in early childhood, special education, bilingual education, and CTE, among others — no matter whether they choose DPS or a public charter school.

Our multiple recommendations share a common vision:

- Ambitious goals for academic achievement.
- A coherent citywide approach that recognizes that too many neighborhoods still lack quality schools.
- A level playing field for DPS and public charter schools.
- Plenty of choice, with better systems to help families take advantage of these options.
- Greater efficiency so that more funds get into schools and classrooms.
- And a laser-like commitment to make choices that serve the needs of schoolchildren, which will ultimately benefit all of us ... in Detroit and in the state. Today’s students will become tomorrow’s leaders and problem-solvers.

“ We are asking for a level playing field for all schools in Detroit. One shared standard that all schools will be measured by, so that all kids can attend quality schools.”



Tonya Allen Skillman Foundation

“ Those who serve our kids every day must respond to a higher calling. It’s time for us all to hear that call. We need everyone in the game – parents, teachers, the mayor, and the governor and the legislature.”



Rev. Wendell Anthony Detroit Branch NAACP

“ We need to bring order to the system, but govern in a way that allows teachers the autonomy to make decisions about what matters in the classroom.”



David Hecker AFT Michigan/AFL-CIO

“ We need an organized, financially stable system that measures the right outputs. This is the only way we will deliver real choice to families.”



John Rakolta, Jr. Watbridge

“ We have to involve the community in developing the solutions for the problems they face every day. We need a system that incorporates input at every level moving forward.”



Angela Reyes Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation





Coalition for the Future
of Detroit Schoolchildren



More information and Official Recommendations available at
<http://choiceoursdetroit.tumblr.com>.