

Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren

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Detroit coalition recommends comprehensive changes to improve education landscape for all students

Key recommendations include returning DPS to local control, and creation of new coordination body to help bring stability

DETROIT — The Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren releases its recommendations for improving Detroit schools in a nearly 30-page report titled, “The Choice Is Ours,” at a press conference today at Fellowship Chapel on the city’s northwest side.

The recommendations come after the Coalition spent 100 days researching the issues leading to poor academic results in Detroit and across Michigan. Dozens of experts met with the Coalition to share data and information. Hundreds of Detroiters were engaged in the process, including teachers, students, parents, and leaders from all sectors.

“The last 100 days have been intense and difficult, but ultimately very productive and promising,” said co-chair Tonya Allen. “We believe that these recommendations represent the best way forward to level the playing field of education in Detroit. We also believe these recommendations can help other troubled school districts in Michigan.”

“Detroit will never again be a world-class city if we don’t fix the schools,” said fellow co-chair John Rakolta Jr. “These recommendations preserve choice for families and are bold and comprehensive. They will get the DPS debt resolved and raise the standards of excellence for all schools in Detroit.”

Added co-chair David Hecker: “The Detroit Education Commission will stabilize the educational environment, and provide a foundation for improving Detroit schools. This will

ensure that we have a coordinated system of schools that adhere the same standards, benefits from shared services, and compete on a level playing field.”

“It’s time to return control of Detroit Public Schools to Detroiters,” said co-chair Angela Reyes. “Emergency management has proven to be a failure in Detroit. The state, as set out in state law, needs to responsibly transition control of DPS back to an elected school board.”

The report includes detailed recommendations for improving education not just in Detroit but also across Michigan. The full report, official recommendations, and video testimonials from many of the Coalition members is available at <http://choiceisoursdetroit.tumblr.com>.

“Detroit’s children deserve the best, but years of mismanagement have created a school landscape that is among the nation’s worst,” co-chair Rev. Wendell Anthony said. “But this is reversible. If our leaders come together now and listen to these recommendations, we can change the way schools work in Detroit and across Michigan.”

Key recommendations include:

- **Return governance of Detroit Public Schools to an elected school board.**

DPS should transition from emergency management and follow a course set out in state law.

- **Charter authorizers and charter school boards should improve transparency, focus more on quality, and better coordinate all charter schools.**

Changes to state law or local 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 the difficulty of reducing 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 statutorily liable for the debt, and it is culpable because much of it accumulated while the state was in charge of district.

- **Create a new nonpartisan coordination entity, the Detroit Education Commission.**

The DEC will 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 primary function of the DEC will be to serve as 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 preserving choice and coordinating citywide services that help parents take advantage of their options such as transportation, enrollment, and special education.

- **Establish School Leadership Teams.**

Improve school autonomy with teams that should include parents, staff, and students, so that all schools create a culture of shared accountability and responsibility.

- **Empower and fund the State School Reform Office (SSRO) and State School Reform District (SSRD).**

The SSRO/SSRD should migrate the Education Achievement Authority 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.

- **Creation of shared system 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 school options when signing up children for school. Choice will also be strengthened by ensuring all kids have a safe and reliable way to get to school.

- **Allocate funding based on student need.**

The State fund and accelerate the adequacy study so that it is complete by December 2015, and used to inform budgeting decisions in the 2016-17 school year, such that student funding is weighted by need, not by school governance type.

- **Recruit and retain the best education talent for Detroit children.**

A strategy be developed to recruit, develop, competitively compensate and retain high-quality educators across all schools in Detroit.

The Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren formed in December 2014 and was made up of a diverse cross-section of leaders representing Detroit's education, civic, philanthropic, business, religious, and community sectors. The Coalition formed independently of any government body, and included a 36-member Steering Committee, as well as six sub-committees.

Five co-chairs lead the Coalition: Skillman Foundation President & CEO **Tonya Allen**; **Rev. Wendell Anthony**, Fellowship Chapel and president of the Detroit branch of the NAACP; **David Hecker**, president of AFT Michigan/AFL-CIO; **John Rakolta Jr.**, CEO of Walbridge; and **Angela Reyes**, executive director of Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation.

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