



# TAKING OWNERSHIP

Our Pledge to Educate All of Detroit's Children



EXCELLENT  
SCHOOLS  
DETROIT

Excellent Schools Detroit represents a broad and diverse cross section of Detroit's education, government, civic and community, parent, organized labor, and philanthropic leaders who are committed to ensuring that all Detroit children receive the great education they deserve.

This citywide education plan reflects months of discussions and deliberations by coalition members, as well as a series of six community meetings in November and December, youth focus groups, small group discussions with multiple stakeholders, and other outreach efforts. We appreciate the thoughtful recommendations from the many Detroiters who are as passionate as we are about the need to prepare all students for college, careers, and life in the 21st century.

Reports on the community meetings, youth focus groups, and other background material can be found at [www.ExcellentSchoolsDetroit.org](http://www.ExcellentSchoolsDetroit.org).

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March 2010

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## TO THE COMMUNITY AND OUR FELLOW DETROITERS:

Our coalition is a diverse group, made up of people with different backgrounds, experiences, and political perspectives. We also are united.

**We are united** in believing all children can learn at high levels.

**We are united** in our commitment to make sure that all Detroit children receive an excellent education.

**We are united** in our outrage at the academic catastrophe that we have let happen.

**We are united** in our conviction that Detroit must take bold and dramatic steps to ensure that every single student is in a high-quality school by 2020.

**And we are united** in our optimism that Detroit is uniquely positioned to become the first major city in the United States to fulfill this pledge.

Only 3 percent of Detroit's 4th graders and 4 percent of its 8th graders meet national math standards; experts say that our students could have done about the same if they'd just guessed on the test. Only 2 percent of Detroit's high school students are prepared for college-level math and 11 percent for college-level reading.<sup>1</sup>

Enough. It is time to do better.

Ensuring every child has access to an excellent school is a moral imperative and an economic necessity ... for them and for us. A quality education is how all children get a shot at success — on the job and in their communities. Every day that a child loses in a failing school makes it much harder to catch up. Too many Detroit children have lost years, not days.

Going forward, members of our coalition will:

- ♦ **Focus on students, not institutions.** This is a citywide plan to help all children, whether they happen to attend a traditional public school, public charter school, or an independent school. Every Detroit child should be attending an excellent school. For too long, too much of the focus in Detroit has been on adults — who has power, who doesn't, who gets to hand out jobs and contracts, who doesn't. Enough. It's time for children's interests to take center stage. When we create an environment of healthy competition that rewards schools with high achievement and provides timely information about school quality, programs will respond to the needs of students. If not, students will go elsewhere.
- ♦ **Move quickly and boldly.** Because the city's children are so far behind, Detroit must improve its schools faster than any other city has done. The ground is shifting beneath us, whether we like it or not. The truth, however, is that we control our own destiny. This is our community's chance to shape those changes; we must do it now for our children.
- ♦ **Hold all schools in the city accountable for meeting high standards.** Every school should provide a quality education — regardless of whether that school is overseen by an emergency financial manager, mayor, school board, state agency, charter authorizer, independent school trustees, or education management organization.

Parents must have the information they need to choose schools based on academic performance. Schools should compete, and persistently low-performing school programs should close. No more excuses. No more delays.

- ◆ **Bring in new talent.** Children will not thrive unless we can hire the most talented school leaders to run our schools and great teachers to teach in them. We need many more talented educators, whether they're from Detroit or not. Our children deserve the best.
- ◆ **Most important, step up and take responsibility.** Previous reform plans have focused on telling others, mainly Detroit Public Schools, what to do. By contrast, our plan focuses on spelling out what we, as leaders, are committed to do through our own organizations.

We are inspired by schools in which students are engaged, enthusiastic, learning, and optimistic about their futures. There are dozens of schools like these in Detroit and hundreds of them across the country. We need many more of them. And we are collectively committed to reaching that goal. The children are counting on us.

Please join us.

Sincerely,

- ◆ The Honorable Dave Bing, Mayor, and Sue Carnell, Group Executive, City of Detroit
- ◆ Clark Durant, Founding Chair, Cornerstone Schools
- ◆ Ralph C. Bland, CEO of NEW PARADIGM FOR EDUCATION and Superintendent of Detroit Edison Public School Academy
- ◆ Sharlonda Buckman, Executive Director, Detroit Parent Network\*
- ◆ Robert C. Bobb, Emergency Financial Manager; Barbara Byrd Bennett, Chief Academic and Accountability Auditor; and Robert Boik, Chief of Staff, Office of the Emergency Financial Manager, Detroit Public Schools
- ◆ Greg Handel, Senior Director, Workforce Development, Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce
- ◆ Rip Rapson, President, and Wendy Jackson, Program Officer, Kresge Foundation
- ◆ C. David Campbell, President, McGregor Fund
- ◆ Louis Glazer, President, Michigan Future, Inc.
- ◆ Shirley R. Stancato, President and CEO, and David Gamlin, Director of Education, New Detroit
- ◆ Doug Ross, CEO, New Urban Learning
- ◆ Carol Goss, President and CEO; Tonya Allen, Vice President, Program; and Kristen McDonald, Senior Program Officer, Education, The Skillman Foundation
- ◆ Daniel S. Varner, CEO, Think Detroit PAL
- ◆ Michael J. Brennan, President and CEO; Michael Tenbusch, Vice President, Educational Preparedness; and Kelly Major Green, Executive Vice President, Key Operations and Strategy, United Way for Southeastern Michigan
- ◆ Sterling K. Speirn, President and CEO, and Gregory B. Taylor, Vice President for Programs, W.K. Kellogg Foundation

\* *Organizational name used for reference only.*

# DETROIT'S PROMISE

Our goals: By 2020, Detroit will be the first major U.S. city in which **90 percent** of students graduate from high school, **90 percent** enroll in college or a quality postsecondary training program, and **90 percent** of enrollees are prepared to succeed without needing remediation. For students to be able to compete in the 21st century, quality education beyond high school is a necessity, the new norm.

Some think these goals are too ambitious, others think that we need to move more quickly. The reality is that when we reach these goals, we will have improved education faster than any other city in the country.

Reaching these goals means we are collectively committed to ensuring that every Detroit child is in an excellent school. In addition, we will take steps to make sure they are making progress every step of the way. For instance, we want to make sure that:

- ◆ Students entering kindergarten are ready to learn;
- ◆ Every 3rd grader is reading and doing math at grade level; and
- ◆ 8th graders have the knowledge, skills, and work habits to succeed in high school.

We will establish a citywide Standards and Accountability Commission to set specific indicators for each of these milestones and publish an annual report showing how well each school in the city is making progress toward the goals, year by year. We know from our work that finding the right assessment to set these standards is a challenge. For a discussion of this topic, see “Setting High Standards,” page 7.

The community will not have to wait until 2020 to see real progress.

## By the end of 2010, we will have:

- ◆ Established a broad-based organization to advocate for the sweeping changes recommended by this plan.

- ◆ Created a Standards and Accountability Commission to set citywide goals for every school and help parents make better choices for their children.
- ◆ Secured commitments from national foundations and leadership organizations to come to Detroit.
- ◆ Initiated a citywide “community schools” effort to provide more non-academic supports to students.

## By 2015, we will have:

- ◆ Published our 4th annual report card to help parents choose the best school for their child.
- ◆ Opened 40 new high-quality school options.
- ◆ Closed or replaced at least half the failing school programs in the city by pressuring DPS, charter authorizers, the state’s Reform School District, and independent school boards to act.
- ◆ Attracted and developed enough high-quality school leaders to open the new schools and turn around failing ones.

## By 2020, we will have:

- ◆ Ensured that every student in Detroit is in a quality school.
- ◆ Become nationally known as the fastest-improving urban school district in the country.

Although this citywide plan focuses specifically on Detroit students and schools, we believe our work inside the city will have important implications for the entire metro area. It is time for our entire region and state to rethink how we deliver education to children, and Detroit is glad to model a new approach.

## WHAT IS AN EXCELLENT SCHOOL?

Excellent schools have several core attributes, including strong leaders, excellent teachers, high-quality curriculum and instruction, and safe and supportive learning conditions that create a culture of trust, respect, and academic achievement among students, teachers, and parents.

An excellent school has a culture of high expectations such that every adult does whatever it takes to make sure that students have the opportunity to thrive. We recognize that many Detroit children have physical, social, economic, and emotional barriers to learning. Sixty percent of Detroit children live in families where no parent has a full-time, year-round job. Forty-six percent of children live in poverty. Current supports are insufficient; for example, there are only 2.3 full-time guidance counselors for every 1,000 students in DPS.<sup>2</sup> However, there are excellent schools in Detroit, often working with community partners, to overcome these challenges; albeit there are too few of them.

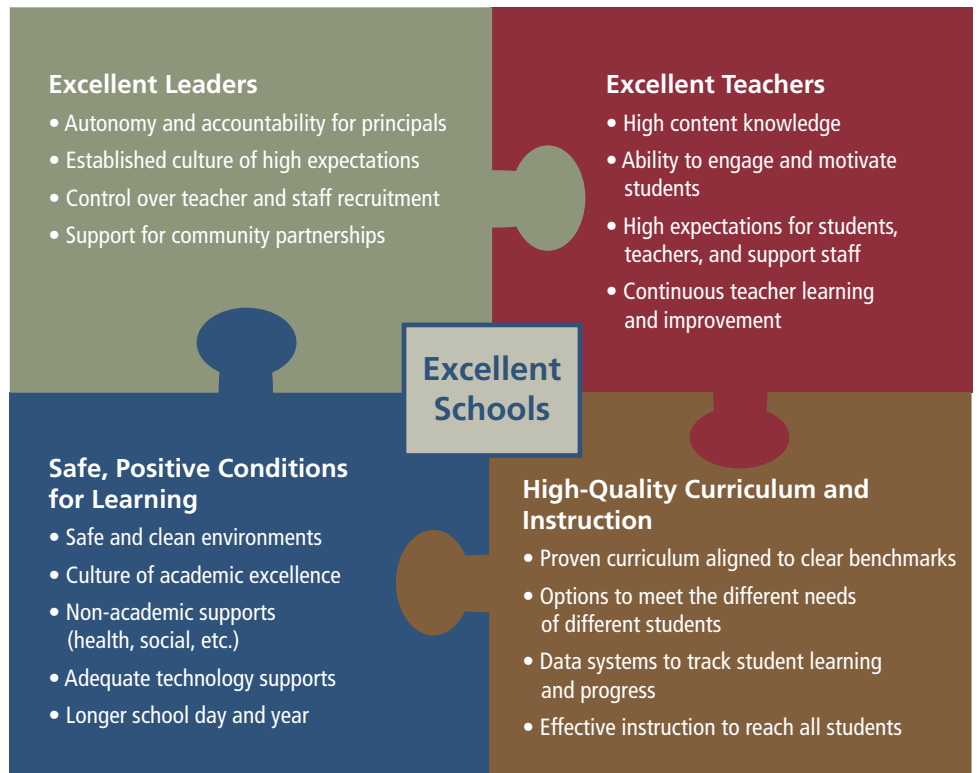
This plan is about changing the conditions within Detroit that will spur the creation of many more excellent schools — so that every child can attend one.

## OUR CURRENT REALITY

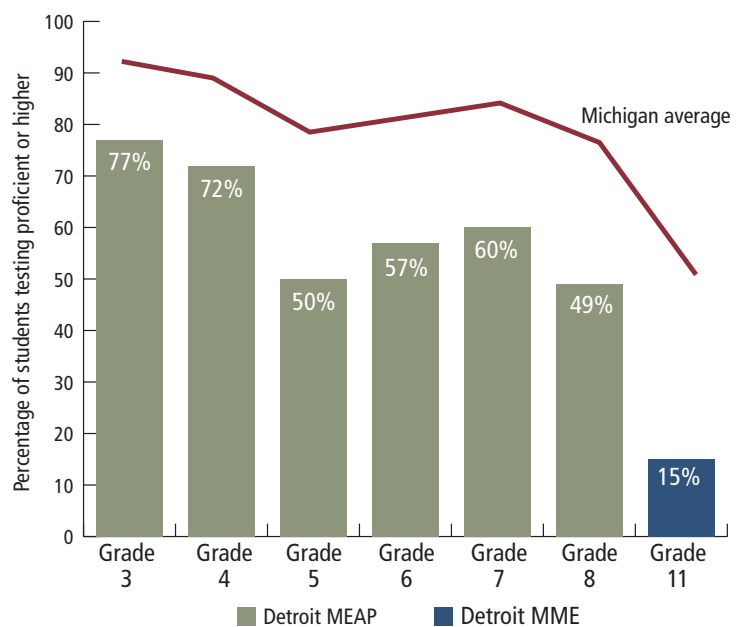
Many Detroit schools have a long way to go to meet this challenging goal. Not only do Detroit students score far below the Michigan and national averages, but students also fall further and further behind as they move through the system. Only 58 percent of DPS students and 78 percent of public charter school students graduate from high school in four years. Fewer than one in four of those students enrolls in college. And minuscule percentages of Detroit’s high school students are prepared for college-level math and reading.<sup>3</sup>

Faced with facts like these, we must be very bold. Any lingering belief that incremental changes can fix the city’s schools is about as realistic as picnicking on Belle Isle in the middle of January.

Part of being bold means ending what does not work. Closing schools, even when they are not succeeding, is an emotional process. We understand that. But we also believe that the status



The Performance Gap in Math Between Detroit Students and All Other Michigan Students Increases with Grade Level, 2008



Source: Michigan Department of Education



quo is indefensible. Without dramatic changes, we won't be doing students any favors. And this citywide plan is about them — and their futures.

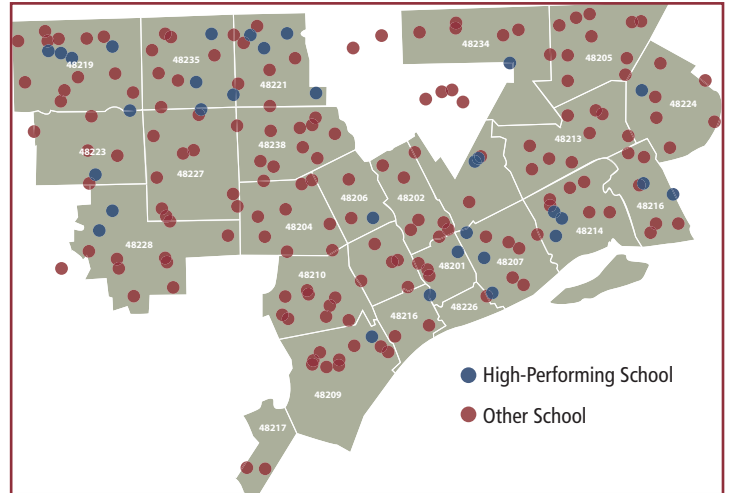
### WHY WE ARE HOPEFUL

There are high-performing schools throughout the city. Thirty-two schools are considered excellent, using the Skillman Foundation's "High-Performing Schools" definition (see map).

For example, we are greatly encouraged by schools such as:

- ♦ **Garvey Academy**, where all 3rd graders meet or exceed state standards in reading and math, 76 percent of 8th graders meet or exceed state standards in reading, and 89 percent of 8th graders do so in math ... even though 86 percent of students are low income.
- ♦ **Carstens Elementary**, where 98 percent of 3rd graders meet or exceed state standards in reading and 95 percent do so in math ... and 87 percent of students are low income.

### 32 Detroit Schools Are Considered High Performing



Source: Skillman Foundation 2008 Good Schools Guide

- ♦ **Clippert Academy**, where 76 percent of 8th graders meet or exceed state standards in reading and math ... and 93 percent of students are low income.

## SETTING HIGH STANDARDS

Our plan sets out to make Detroit's children competitive with students across the world. To do that, we must set our standards high and then provide the instruction and supports that allow our children to reach them.

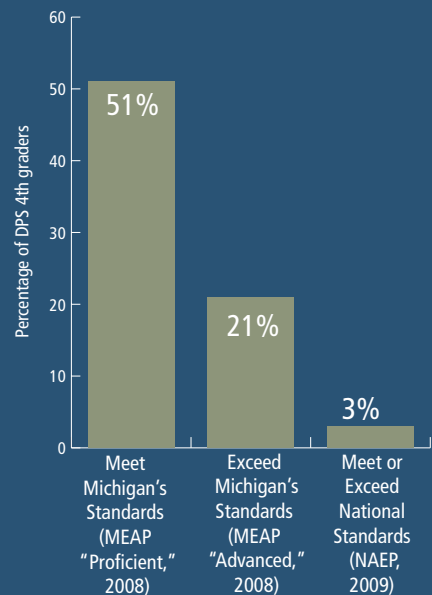
One of the first challenges facing the new citywide Standards and Accountability Commission will be to determine what constitutes quality standards for our children. Currently, all schools in Michigan are held to the same standards on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) exam. However, Detroit's poor performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) math exam has made it clear that the MEAP standards are inadequate if we want Detroit's children to be nationally and globally competitive.

In 2008, using the standards set by MEAP, 51 percent of DPS 4th graders were rated "proficient" and 21 percent were rated "advanced." Compare that to Detroit's performance on the NAEP exam in which only 3 percent of DPS 4th graders were rated "proficient" in math and zero students in the district were rated "advanced." It is shocking to think that Michigan considers almost three-quarters of Detroit's children to be at or above proficient levels when only 3 percent are considered proficient by national standards. Clearly, if we want to prepare our students for a 21st-century economy in which they compete for jobs against others across the country and the world, we need to strengthen the standards for schools and students.

There is an encouraging effort under way to create a set of common national standards that will be much closer to those set out by NAEP and much higher than the current Michigan standards. But in the meantime, the MEAP (MME for 11th graders) exam is the only reliable assessment with results for all Detroit schools. Lacking a short-term alternative, we believe that evaluating schools based on the MEAP "advanced" standard is a much better measure for how well schools prepare children ... and we encourage the Commission to use that as its starting point.

### Current Michigan Assessments Fail to Provide National-Level Standards

Percentage of DPS 4th grade students meeting or exceeding state and national math standards, 2008 and 2009



Source: Michigan Department of Education; National Assessment of Educational Progress — Trial Urban District Assessment, 2009

- ◆ **Detroit Edison Public School Academy (DEPSA)**, where 85 percent of students meet or exceed state standards in math and 81 percent do so in reading ... and 54 percent are low income.
- ◆ **University Prep High School**, where 100 percent of students graduated in June 2008 and 94 percent of that class went on to college (71 percent to four-year colleges) ... and 72 percent are low income.
- ◆ **Communication and Media Arts High School**, where 98 percent of low-income students graduate in four years and go on to college or postsecondary education.<sup>4</sup>

Schools such as these have high standards and real accountability, strong leadership, good teaching, safe and supportive learning conditions, and challenging curriculum and instruction.

Around the country, there are hundreds of high-poverty, high-performing schools — schools where large majorities of their students are learning at high levels.

Schools like these provide inspiration and hope. They show what's possible. If these schools can help children succeed, all of us should expect the same from all of Detroit's schools.

## THE PAYOFF: FOR STUDENTS AND FOR DETROIT

In the new, more hyper-competitive global economy, education and training after high school are fast becoming a necessity. Low-skill, high-wage jobs are gone forever. Even factory workers need advanced math, problem-solving, and communications skills. The Southeast Michigan region is re-inventing its economy to focus on the knowledge-based jobs of the future. We need to make sure the city's children are prepared for these opportunities.

When 90 percent of Detroit students graduate and go on to succeed in college or careers, the entire community will benefit.

The average American with just two years of college or postsecondary training earns about \$16,000 more per year than the average employed dropout. An extra two years of college adds \$12,000 more of additional income every year, up to \$1 million over an average person's working career.

According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, if the Southeast Michigan region had cut the dropout rate for the class of 2008 in half, we would have:

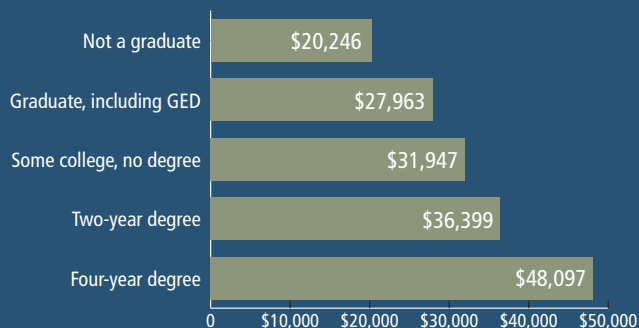
- **\$145 million** in increased earnings
- **\$98 million** more spending and **\$36 million** more investing
- **\$417 million** more home sales and **\$11 million** more auto sales
- **\$24 million** of state and local taxes that now pay for social services for the less fortunate that would be freed for other investments<sup>5</sup>

These estimated benefits come just from a single class in a single year. Consider the huge multiplier effect when we decrease dropouts by this much over many years — not just for the class of 2008, but for the classes of 2010, 2011, 2012, and beyond.

The gains go far beyond dollars and cents — they impact the quality of life in every Detroit neighborhood. Adults with more education are more likely to have a job, stay out of prison, head a two-parent family, own their own home, vote, volunteer, pay taxes, and be in good health.

In other words, when Detroit's children grow up and prosper, we all do. As our children would say, it's a no-brainer.

**More Learning Translates into Higher Earnings**  
Median U.S. yearly earnings, 2008



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2008; Educational Attainment — People 25 Years Old and Over, by Total Earnings in 2008, Work Experience in 2008, Age, Race, Hispanic Origin, and Sex

# 1

## ENFORCE REAL ACCOUNTABILITY

We will hold all schools and programs, no matter who controls them, to the same standards of excellence. Parents, students, and the public have the right to know which schools are succeeding and which are not.

### WE WILL CREATE A CITYWIDE STANDARDS AND ACCOUNTABILITY COMMISSION FOR ALL SCHOOLS AND PRE-K PROGRAMS

#### WHY CHANGE?

Students in Detroit attend more than 250 schools, which are governed by many different masters with differing expectations and results. The divided authority makes it too easy to finger-point and too hard to make the tough decisions that are needed to ensure every child is in a high-quality school.

Detroit Public Schools (DPS) currently manages 172 schools. Some serve their students well; most do not.

Meanwhile, nine independent authorizers (Central Michigan University, DPS, Eastern Michigan University, Ferris State University, Grand Valley University, Lake Superior State University, Oakland University, Saginaw Valley State University, and Wayne RESA) monitor the nearly 70 public charter schools

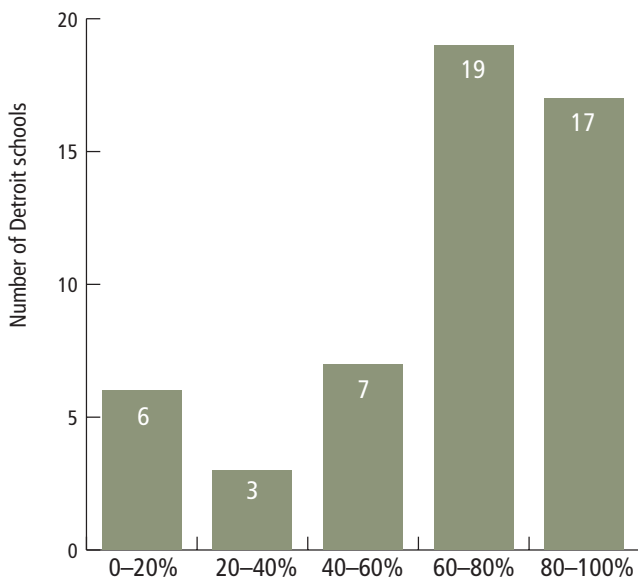
(public school academies) operating in the city. Again, some serve their students well; many do not.

Detroit also has more than 30 independent schools, which set their own standards and have varied results. Meanwhile, Detroit has a wide variety of public and private child care centers and school-sponsored pre-K programs, none required to meet standards of quality. We need to ensure that our youngest children also have access to high-quality educational experiences.

In addition, recent legislation has given the state the authority to take control of the lowest-performing 5 percent of public schools in the state, including up to 74 Detroit schools (68 DPS schools and 6 charter schools).<sup>6</sup>

Each of these school governing bodies has different standards of success. They also have weak or no definitions for failure — allowing chronically failing programs to stay open for years. This mishmash makes it impossible for parents to get credible, easy-to-understand information about which schools are helping students and which are not. They need that information to make good choices for their children.

High School Graduation Rates Vary  
Four-Year Graduation Rates, 2008



Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information

#### WHAT WE WILL DO

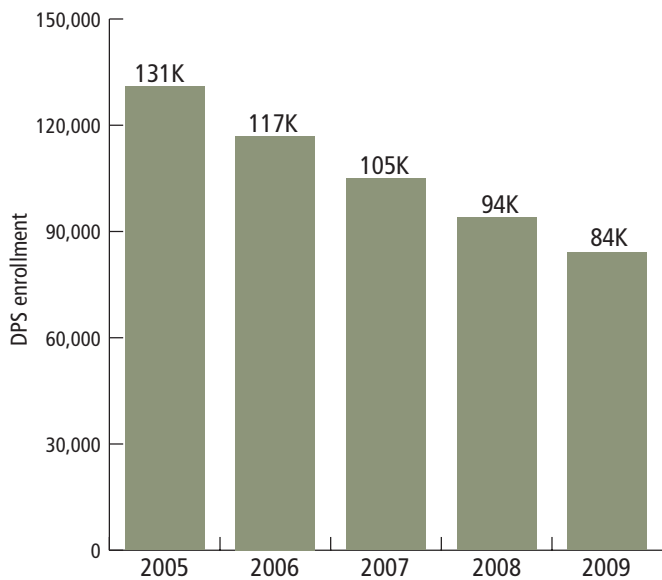
Decisive action starts with being clear about expectations and holding organizations and individuals publically accountable for meeting them. And informed parent choice requires that we collect and distribute much better and more consistent information. Specifically, we will:

- ◆ **Create an independent citywide Standards and Accountability Commission.** This broad-based watchdog organization will:
  - establish quality academic standards and measurable goals for all schools and pre-K programs in the city;
  - collect high-quality and timely performance information from multiple state and local sources to monitor all schools and pre-K programs against these citywide goals;

- clearly identify the highest-performing schools and pre-K programs for praise and the lowest-performing ones for closure;
- publish and widely distribute annual, easy-to-read report cards to help parents choose the best schools and pre-K programs for their children and help all citizens hold programs accountable;
- keep the “heat” on DPS, charter authorizers, the Reform School District (see following text), independent schools, and pre-K operators to close chronically failing schools and programs;
- explore developing more rigorous measures, such as a Detroit version of a highly regarded national test such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (commonly considered “the nation’s report card”), to monitor the progress of the city’s students; and
- monitor the financial performance of each school program to ensure fiscal integrity and that every dollar spent on education helps children.

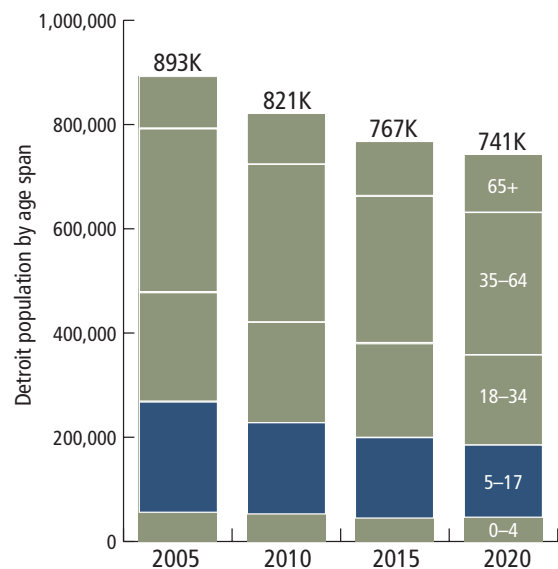
- ◆ **Help parents become “smarter shoppers” and make more informed choices.** We want to help parents judge schools and pre-K programs primarily on the quality of their academic program, in addition to their size, safety, location, and other factors. The report cards published by the Standards and Accountability Commission will be an important first step. We also will support groups such as the Detroit Parent Network, local PTAs, Local School Community Organizations (LSCOs), and neighborhood groups to launch a sustained campaign to help parents understand and act on this information.
- ◆ **Build public support for a Detroit Reform School District to manage the city’s lowest-performing schools and insist that these schools also meet the citywide standards.** State legislation passed in December 2009 gives the state superintendent of schools the power to appoint a State Redesign Officer to take over the state’s worst schools. We encourage the state to act quickly and work with us locally to establish a plan for Detroit and conduct a national search for the highest-qualified leader.

**DPS Enrollment Declines, 2005–09**



Source: Wayne RESA

**Overall Declines in City Population Forecasted to Continue, 2005–20**



The number of school-age children (5–17) in Detroit is expected to decline by 37,000 between 2010 and 2020.

Source: Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG)

## ***BUILD PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR A SINGLE POINT OF ACCOUNTABILITY FOR DPS***

### **WHY CHANGE?**

DPS educates two-thirds of the students in the city. Although we are strongly encouraging healthy competition, we cannot significantly improve educational opportunities in the city without a strong DPS. Leadership matters, especially to help DPS cope with the massive enrollment losses that are accelerating its budget deficits to unsustainable levels. DPS's overall enrollment has declined by nearly 50,000 students since 2005.<sup>7</sup>

Without dramatic changes, DPS will continue to face the reality of declining population, with the city's school-age population falling by as much as 20 percent by 2020. With school funding significantly based on enrollment, this situation is financially unsustainable. Without bold improvements, DPS basically could go out of business. It is in everyone's interest that DPS succeed.<sup>8</sup>

The past governance structures clearly have not provided the necessary leadership, and Detroit's children are paying for it. DPS has had four superintendents in three years. The state's takeover succeeded only in turning a budget surplus into a deficit. The School Board has not been successful and often has been a divisive force.

In the past year, we have seen the benefits of strong leadership with a single source of accountability, thanks to the governor's appointment of an Emergency Financial Manager. But that

appointment is temporary (lasting only until March 2011), and his ability to take charge of the academic reforms has been hampered by an ongoing court battle with the School Board.

Detroit is debating two options — the state takeover and an elected school board — that have been unsuccessful; it's time to consider a third way. A single point of accountability for DPS offers the best hope for creating and sustaining significant improvements in the city's largest school system. Many cities with mayoral or strong centralized control (such as New York, Boston, New Orleans, and Chicago) have had strong academic gains in recent years. We should expect nothing less in Detroit.

### **WHAT WE WILL DO**

DPS will not be able to make and sustain the necessary reforms without a single source of credible leadership and accountability. Specifically, we will:

- ◆ **Help build public support for making the mayor accountable for Detroit Public Schools.** He or she would appoint the superintendent/CEO, who would be responsible for the day-to-day operations of the schools, including budgets, staffing, and programs. The School Board should be disbanded.

All city schools will be monitored by the citywide Standards and Accountability Commission, which will report on school performance and fiscal management. An outside watchdog organization such as this also will help monitor and limit any potential financial abuses of single source accountability.



# 2

## CREATE EXCELLENT SCHOOLS FOR EVERY CHILD

**We will create many more excellent school choices for students ... and have zero tolerance for schools that, year after year, fail to educate their students.**

### WHY CHANGE?

Individual schools are where the real changes must happen. Top-down, one-size-fits-all mandates have not been successful. The only way to “fix the system” is to create the conditions that allow hundreds of quality schools to flourish. That’s why this plan deliberately avoids prescribing the changes that must happen in the classroom and instead focuses on changing the conditions that will spur the creation of many more excellent schools, each with excellent classrooms. At a minimum, schools should have the flexibility and freedom to choose their own approaches for meeting the standards to which they are being held accountable.

Observing the test scores, graduation rates, and postsecondary enrollment of our children today, we know that many of our children are in schools that aren’t preparing them to stay on track for graduation, college, and college success.

To put this in perspective, more than 30 percent of our children are in schools that are in the bottom 5 percent of all schools in the state of Michigan. These schools don’t come close to meeting Michigan’s standards, much less the more challenging national and global standards that need to be our new measuring stick.

Low-performing schools	Number of Michigan schools	Number of Detroit schools	Number of Detroit students	Percentage of Detroit students
Bottom 5%	159	74	39,000	33%
Bottom 25%	801	193	94,000	81%

Source: Michigan Department of Education

The challenges are not only academic. Scores of community organizations are partnering with the schools to overcome children’s social, economic, emotional, and health challenges. But the efforts often are uncoordinated and disconnected from the schools’ student achievement goals. The distribution of these community resources varies greatly from school to school, and

in the absence of performance contracts, it is unclear which partnerships are succeeding.

Plus, compared to other major cities that have made attempts to adopt innovative best practices through the opening of new schools, Detroit has done very little to innovate by opening new schools in the past several years; for example, it has opened fewer than 10 new schools while Washington, DC, has opened about 50.<sup>9</sup>

Several efforts are under way to turn around school programs without closing the buildings, including Cody and Osborn High Schools, where nine new small schools have opened in these old high school buildings as part of a campus, and DPS’ High School Transformation, which has recruited four proven educational partners to significantly improve 17 high schools. These efforts should be given a chance to show academic progress; gains will have to happen quickly or more drastic steps will be needed.

### WHAT WE WILL DO

Detroit needs a citywide commitment to replace chronically failing schools with a portfolio of much more successful schools that offer more relevant and challenging options for students. Specifically, we will:

- ◆ **Build public support for closing the lowest-performing schools.** By closing, we mean replacing the academic program, not necessarily firing all the staff or shuttering buildings (although some will have to be closed because they have too few students).

And just so we’re clear: existing public charters and independent schools in Detroit that are not meeting standards cannot be justified and should be closed as well as DPS schools.

- ◆ **Help coordinate and speed the opening of more than 40 new schools by 2015 and 70 new schools by 2020.** These new schools will be managed by school leaders and/

or school management organizations with a proven track record of success. Successful schools will be rewarded for success and encouraged to expand. Optimally, these schools will control hiring, firing, budgets, and programs as long as they meet the new citywide standards.

Specific initiatives include Michigan Future’s High School Accelerator (which intends to help open up to 35 college-preparatory high schools in the Detroit metro area in the next several years), More Good Schools (working to create 25,000 high-quality openings in the next decade), the Greater Detroit Education Venture Fund (United Way’s effort to turn around Cody and Osborn High Schools with nine new small schools on the same campus), and efforts by the Detroit Federation of Teachers to open its own school. With efforts like these, Detroit already is fast becoming a national center of innovation.

- ◆ **Build public support for reducing the barriers to opening new schools**, especially working with government agencies and community organizations to help secure funding and facilities for all schools.
- ◆ **Work with underserved communities to identify educational needs and create new schools to address these needs.**
- ◆ **Launch an aggressive marketing campaign that showcases Detroit as a city that welcomes high-quality schools and recruits more high-quality school managers (home-grown and nationally) here.**
- ◆ **Develop a citywide “community schools” initiative.** Studies have shown that many children in Detroit don’t have the supports they need to overcome the barriers to learning associated with poverty, health, and family stability. Currently, city agencies, community organizations, and foundations spend hundreds of millions of dollars each year on countless programs to benefit children. Going forward, we can and will do a better job of managing and aligning these investments for student success.

## WHAT IS A “NEW SCHOOL”?

When we say we want to open 70 new schools, we are not talking about needing to build 70 new buildings. We believe new schools can operate in old buildings. Our emphasis is not on facilities, but on what happens with the school program. For us, a “new school” is defined as a new school program, which consists of effective teaching and learning, a culture of high expectations, a strong and new leadership team, a new, rigorous academic program, and a laser-like approach on student academic success.

Some of the new schools we are proposing might be in new buildings, such as those now being built by Detroit Public Schools with the 2009 school bond money or the private resources raised for new facilities by charters like Plymouth Educational Center, Henry Ford Learning Institute, University Prep, or DEPSA. Others will be located in existing buildings, replacing school programs that will be closed because of consistently low performance. And in some cases, several new schools might occupy the same building, such as the nine new small schools that have been created within the old Cody and Osborn High School buildings.

There’s no reason why schools should close at 3 p.m. weekdays and on the weekend, and there are multiple reasons to keep them open. Using the school as the neighborhood hub to provide a range of services (such as arts, music, afterschool programs, health clinics, mental health services, mentoring, and counseling services) will provide students with the non-academic supports they need to succeed in school.

Plus, using these facilities to offer additional services that help parents, such as adult literacy and job training, also will pay off. Co-locating city, school, and community services is an especially cost-effective strategy to combat city and school deficits.

This kind of strategy has been successful elsewhere. New York City has opened more than 400 new, small high-performing schools since 2002. This has coincided with dramatic increases across all performance measures, from elementary schools to high schools. In the new high schools, students graduate at a rate nearly 20 percent higher than that of existing schools, despite having greater proportions of their students in special education or classified as English language learners.<sup>10</sup>

Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, and New Orleans are using similar approaches to drive student achievement, improve graduation rates, and prepare their children to succeed in college.

## NEW HIGH SCHOOLS FOR A NEW ERA

The large comprehensive high schools that were the mainstay of the 20th century no longer work in Detroit or any other large urban area. Student achievement drops off significantly in high school: Using the state's tests, the most widely available measure, the percentage of Detroit students meeting standards drops from 56 percent in 8th grade to 33 percent in 11th and from 49 percent to 15 percent in math.<sup>11</sup>

Other cities have learned that replacing comprehensive high schools with one particular model does not work. They have learned that many different kinds of high schools are needed: theme schools such as those focused on health sciences or the arts, college-prep high schools, high schools that catch students up who have fallen far behind, "early college" high schools, and others. This kind of mix helps students find a school that works for them, keeping them engaged and motivated.

Detroit already is innovating — from the High School Accelerator that is creating new schools to the opening of new high schools inspired by nationally successful models, such as Cristo Rey, Big Picture Company, and High Tech High.

Going forward, we'll have to think even more outside the box. Students are online 24/7 these days, totally absorbed, engaged, and learning all the time. Why can't we develop schools that take advantage of video-gaming technology to teach reading and math? Or make it easier for Detroit's students to conduct science experiments with students from China or Brazil? Or use the entire region as the classroom so that we make learning more relevant to a generation of students who thrive on speed and multitasking?

# 3

## RECRUIT AND DEVELOP THE BEST SCHOOL LEADERS AND TEACHERS

Detroit’s growing portfolio of new schools will not be successful unless we can reward, recruit, develop, and keep enough talented new principals to lead them and enough excellent teachers to teach in them.

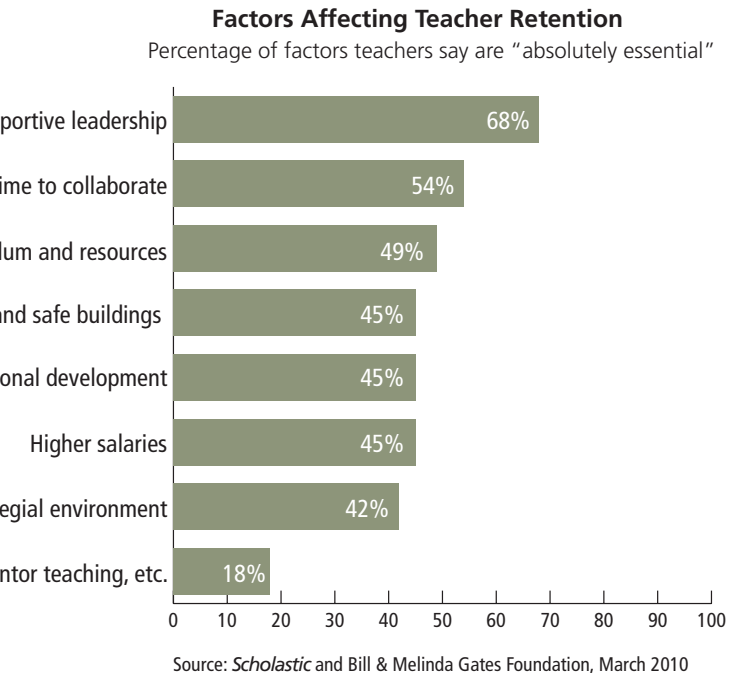
### WHY CHANGE?

Measuring the effectiveness of principals and other school leaders is difficult; years of service and levels of certification don’t tell much. What matters most is the performance of their schools; great leaders do what it takes so that their schools perform at high levels. They drive change and innovation and build a culture of quality that helps attract and support excellent teachers. The current student achievement data alone underscore that not nearly enough Detroit public schools currently have effective leadership; or, if schools do have great leaders, they’re hamstrung by bureaucratic rules that limit their effectiveness. Plus, there is no focused strategy to build and maintain the pipeline of leadership talent needed to open and manage additional high-quality schools. We intend to become an international center of educational innovation with multiple school models.

### WHAT WE WILL DO

Many communities are focused on improving the quality of their teachers, which makes a lot of sense since what happens in the classroom matters most for students. But Detroit has no chance of retaining the great teachers already here and attracting more of them *unless we first make sure* that every school is led by an outstanding principal. First things first. Quality attracts quality.

Great teachers repeatedly tell us that what matters most is the quality of leadership in their school — more than pay, benefits, schedules, or any other factor. Our goal is to ensure that every teacher can count on talented leadership — to motivate and inspire, organize useful professional development, conduct fair and constructive evaluations, and create collaborative environments in which teachers are treated as professionals.



In promoting diverse approaches to creating excellent schools, we also will promote diverse approaches to creating a leadership pipeline; one size does not fit all. We will craft a strategy that supports the diverse needs of schools by:

- ◆ **Identifying excellent leaders currently working within Detroit and providing incentives for them to serve the lowest-performing students.** The best leaders should be in schools whose students need them the most.
- ◆ **Establishing a Detroit Leadership Academy to provide the professional training programs that help leaders open new schools and turn around struggling ones.** This would serve all schools in the city, whether they’re managed by DPS, charter authorizers, independent trustees, or the

Reform School District. Schools would continue their own, customized professional development, and local universities must strengthen their preparation programs. But especially in an era of large budget deficits, it makes no financial sense for each school to have to reinvent the wheel.

- ◆ **Mounting a major national recruiting campaign to encourage the country's best school leaders to work in Detroit.** Detroit will need to offer real incentives to ensure the best and brightest stay here or come here and do not go to New Orleans or New York or Chicago or Miami or the other big-city districts that are competing for talent.
- ◆ **Advocating for increased school-based autonomy over staffing, budgets, and programs that will make Detroit an attractive place for the best and brightest school leaders to work.** Some public charters already have this level of flexibility. DPS has done this before and is likely to do so within the new Priority Zone, which is a significant step in the right direction.
- ◆ **Attracting alternative teacher programs.** These might include Teach for America, the Woodrow Wilson Michigan Teaching Fellowship Program, or urban residencies that give new teachers much more practical experience before they enter the classroom. Attracting highly qualified young people to Detroit, including their attitudes, expertise, and energy, also can help transform how schools are governed

and managed. This is especially important as more of the local teaching pool reaches retirement age. It's essential that we expand the pipeline of educators who feel passionately about urban education and have the talent to contribute to our students' success over the long term.

Efforts like these have worked elsewhere. In New York City, the education department's Principal Leadership Academy and New Visions for Public Schools have nurtured leaders who have opened hundreds of new smaller schools, which have significantly out-performed the schools they replaced.

Since 2001, New Leaders for New Schools has trained 550 principals, who are now leading urban high schools that have graduation rates substantially higher than district averages, and that have elementary and middle school students making faster academic gains than comparable students in their districts. In Chicago, schools with principals developed through focused preparatory programs, such as New Leaders for New Schools, tend to improve student test scores twice as fast over the first three to five years as schools with other new principals.<sup>12</sup>

In New Orleans, which has relied heavily on programs such as New Leaders and Teach for America to expand its talent pipeline, the percentage of students meeting standards has risen from 57 in 2005 to 70 today.



## THREE ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES

The strategies and action steps described previously are not meant to be comprehensive; however, we believe they are our strongest levers for change. Clearly, many more improvements will be needed to transform Detroit into the nation's first large city where 90 percent of students earn a high school diploma and make a successful transition to college or career training programs. In particular, our organizations remain committed to supporting innovative approaches in three areas:

### **Mobilizing more parents**

The research is clear: when parents are involved, students are more likely to attend school, earn better grades, have better social skills and behavior, and graduate from high school. One study suggests that schools would have to spend an extra \$1,000 per student to have the same achievement gains as an actively involved set of parents.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, too many Detroit parents are not involved.

Perhaps the most telling indicator of parent disengagement is the staggering number of days that Detroit students aren't even in school. The average DPS high school student misses about 46 days of school every year; that's more than one-fourth of the school year.<sup>14</sup> Students have little chance of learning if parents don't first help make sure they show up.

In addition to supporting new efforts to help parents become more knowledgeable and demanding shoppers (see page 10), we will continue to support and implement such promising programs as Development Center's Bright Stars program, Detroit Parent Network's Project Graduation, and the Coleman A. Young Foundation's Real Skills Program.

### **Strengthening community supports**

To help students graduate from high school and succeed in college or training without remediation, schools will need lots more help from the community. Mentors, internships, job shadowing, health services, counseling assistance, and more; these kinds of supports from community organizations must become more focused, more strategic, and more accountable for helping students succeed. In addition to supporting the creation of new community schools (see page 13), we will continue to support and implement such promising programs as offered by Big Brothers Big Sisters, DAPCEP, Mosaic Youth Theatre, Think Detroit PAL, and the Sphinx Organization.

### **Expanding early education programs**

A strong early start is critical to the academic success of children. Research shows that a child in a professional family has been exposed to 45 million words by age 4, compared to only 13 million words for a child growing up in poverty. Too many Detroit youngsters start school already too far behind. Only 66 percent of Detroit children ages 3–5 are enrolled in a nursery school, preschool, or kindergarten; there are only 100 Early

Head Start openings in the entire city for children between birth and age 3.<sup>15</sup> Too few settings, whether formal or informal, provide the approaches and consistent attention to early literacy and numeracy skills that ensure every child is ready for kindergarten. Once a student falls behind, the odds are very long that he or she will ever catch up.

Investing in quality early childhood education also is a cost saver. A recent study by the Wilder Foundation found that investments in early childhood in Michigan over the past 25 years saved the state \$1.15 billion in reduced costs for remediation and social services and increased earnings from students who were better prepared for kindergarten and carried their early success all the way to high school graduation.<sup>16</sup>

Moving forward, we will continue to support efforts such as the network of Early Learning Community Hubs (now managed by the United Way for Southeastern Michigan) located in Detroit neighborhoods, which are helping parents and caregivers build a strong foundation for reading. We will continue to advocate locally and in Lansing for more high-quality pre-K and child care programs in Detroit and develop a quality rating and improvement system to ensure our children are well served.

# WHY WE WILL SUCCEED THIS TIME

Detroit has had no shortage of school reform plans.

**This one is different.**

**First, there is a real desire for dramatic changes.** No one can credibly doubt the seriousness of our academic catastrophe or make the case that incremental changes will work. People understand that our students will be competing in a much faster-paced, technology-driven global economy, which puts a premium on high-level knowledge and skills. Low-skill, high-wage jobs are gone for good, and the schools must catch up with this new reality. There are many signs that Detroit is ready to act and rally around a common-sense set of ideas that can truly create more opportunities for children.

**Second, instead of trying to find the silver bullet or two that will fix DPS, we are taking a different approach.** Our path is to actively nurture the expansion of many quality options — including inside DPS — and then regularly and rigorously evaluate all programs; have the fortitude to close the worst programs; and make the financial commitment to attract the best school leaders from all over the city, region, and country to teach Detroit's children.

**Third, we do not have to start from scratch. We know how to educate poor urban children to high standards.** Great schools here in Detroit and across the country are doing just that. What we don't have yet is an example of a city that has created a critical mass of such schools so that every child is guaranteed a quality choice. We intend to be that city! Doing so requires both educational expertise and a political willingness to act. As a community, we can develop and attract the educational know-how. But it's up to us to generate and sustain the political will.

**Fourth, we members of this broad-based coalition are committed to do just that — to create enough heat, hope, and help to transform the city's schools, one at a time.** *Heat:* To keep the pressure on policymakers and political leaders to do the right thing. *Hope:* To spotlight the schools where great things are happening and encourage parents to choose programs like these and demand more of them. *Help:* To lead initiatives that will help enforce real accountability and help parents make better school choices for their children, incubate excellent schools, attract and develop successful school leaders

and teachers, and do whatever it takes to help this citywide education plan take root.

We are more hopeful than ever. In just one year, new DPS leadership has acted decisively to restore confidence. Several high-performing DPS and public charter schools continue to get great results. We have seen from the community meetings that parents are ready for change and eager for leadership. The more than 4,000 volunteers who have signed up for the DPS Reading Corps in the past few months show that citizens clearly are ready to roll up their sleeves to help. So are we. Specifically, we will:

**Establish an ongoing mechanism, Excellent Schools Detroit, to help coordinate our efforts and hold public and private leaders accountable for implementing these recommendations.** This collaborative, representing a broad cross-section of our leadership organizations, will:

- ◆ Help coordinate the multiple efforts by the schools and others to keep our efforts on track and aligned with the overall citywide goals.
- ◆ Keep the pressure on decisionmakers in the public and private sectors to do what they say they're going to do. That includes us. We will regularly monitor progress, celebrate success, and call out failure.
- ◆ Help engage and energize parents, citizens, educators, and others to rally around the plan and take specific steps to implement it. We will make all of our efforts transparent to the public and welcome ideas for improvement.
- ◆ Develop a plan to recruit and develop excellent school leaders.
- ◆ Seek national funding (public and private) that will supplement local investments and allow us to accomplish our goals.
- ◆ Closely evaluate the implementation of this plan's recommendations and adjust the strategies based on that research. We will not continue to support policies and programs that don't get results for children.
- ◆ Be bold and courageous. We will do what is best for children and not shrink in the face of adversity.

# IT WILL TAKE ALL OF US

It's time for **courage**, standing up to those who seek to maintain systems that clearly are not working for children. It's time to be **proactive**, aggressively making sure that every student is in a great school with the best principals and teachers. It's time for **accountability**, starting with us.

Many of the preceding recommendations coalition members can and will do on our own:

- ◆ Funding our recommendations. We project that implementation will cost an average \$20 million per year over the next 10 years. That is a drop in the bucket compared to the \$1.5 billion spent every year on the city's schools ... and well within our collective budgets.
- ◆ Grading each city school and pre-K program and letting parents know the results so that they can make smarter choices for their children and be more demanding school partners.
- ◆ Creating more than 70 new, high-quality schools to supplement those we already have. Two new schools will open in September 2010 and lots more in 2011.
- ◆ Attracting the nation's best education entrepreneurs and school leaders, home-grown and imported, to lead our schools and teach our children.
- ◆ Providing school leaders with world-class training that helps them open new schools or turn around failing ones.
- ◆ Creating a citywide command center to hold ourselves accountable for acting and keep the pressure on others to act where we cannot.

In areas where we do not have direct control, we will proactively build public support for others to act. In particular, we will collectively keep the heat on:

- ◆ DPS, charter authorizers, and independent schools to close failing schools. We cannot continue to strand thousands of children in school programs that we know don't work.
- ◆ The mayor to become accountable for DPS. Our educators, families, and children deserve a system that is stable and a leader who is willing to make tough decisions.
- ◆ The state to create a Reform School District whose schools will meet our citywide standards for performance.
- ◆ All city agencies and community organizations to better align their work with the needs of the schools. If we're serious about keeping the focus on children, we can't let bureaucracy become a barrier.

To reach our goal, we'll need everyone to step up — parents getting their children to school on time, students showing up and working hard, volunteers helping where they can, unions leading reform strategies in classrooms, and businesses and higher education institutions contributing as well.

And we'll need everyone to keep their eyes on the prize — becoming the first city in America where 90 percent of students graduate from high school, 90 percent of graduates go on to college or a quality training program, and 90 percent of enrollees are prepared to succeed without remediation.

The children deserve it. Our community's future depends on it.

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