



From Rust to Renaissance

A Moment of Opportunity for Detroit?

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A Donor's Toolkit for Urban School Reform: *Seven Essential Tools*

Donors ready to build an open market of high-quality schools have an array of tools at their disposal, many of which have been proven successful in other urban centers. These include developing charter school networks, attracting talented teachers and principals, engaging parents in the schools' work, and promoting school choice and advocacy. Panelists at this session will offer the nuts and bolts of urban school reform, from raising capital and acquiring facilities to attracting students and overcoming opposition.

Strategy A: Accelerate the Creation of High-Performing Schools

IDEA #1: Understand the role and capacity of charter school authorizers in ensuring that existing and new charter schools are of *high quality*.

Jim Goenner

Executive Director, Center for Charter Schools, Central Michigan University

In the 16 years since Michigan adopted a charter school law, authorizers have served as catalysts for transforming public education by chartering new schools. Michigan charters now serve more than 105,000 students—and at least 50,000 in Detroit. Authorizers have learned how to review charter applications effectively, support school start-ups, and oversee compliance.

Authorization is an unavoidable component of charter schooling, so it is essential for donors to understand the process of authorization to ensure that these new schools are prepared to succeed from the start. By working with authorizers to plan and start a school, donors minimize risk and help prevent the myriad details from derailing student learning.

Although authorizers are responsible for holding charter schools accountable, not all authorizers are equally focused on students' learning results. While there are some excellent schools, there are far more mediocre schools—and some schools that should be closed. Authorizing can and must move beyond the hit-and-miss establishment of new schools, and the regulation-driven, compliance-based accountability that is the hallmark of public education. Instead, authorizing needs to become more proactive and resolutely performance-based. Donors can play a critical role here by working with authorizers that incorporate bold educational goals, like a 90 percent graduation rate, into a school's charter contract and ensures the school's mission, curriculum, and assessments align with that goal.

For more information, visit www.thecenterforcharters.org or contact Jim at JGoenner@thecenterforcharters.org.

IDEA #2: Fund intermediaries to provide technical assistance and start-up capital to start new high-performing schools.

Lou Glazer
President, Michigan Future, Inc.

Over the last 10 years, the most promising results in urban education have come from small, open-enrollment schools where high performance is demanded and college attendance is expected. Nationally, school networks operated by KIPP, Green Dot, High Tech High, Cristo Rey, and others have demonstrated that high student achievement is within reach for low-income urban students.

The best investment to provide Detroit children with a high quality K–12 education will be in supporting the creation of new quality schools. This “incubator” approach consists of a variety of investment opportunities: building capacity to choose and support those most likely to operate high quality schools, providing start-up assistance to the schools, creating a facilities financing fund for charters, and supporting the development of quality school leaders and teachers.

One such incubator is Michigan Future’s High School Accelerator, which is designed to found open-enrollment high-performing high schools in Detroit and nearby suburbs. The ultimate goal is to create an alternative system to large failing high schools operated by the Detroit Public Schools and its inner-ring suburban counterparts. The accelerator will act as a third-party intermediary to provide financial support, training, and direction to founders, principals, teachers, and board members who wish to launch high-performing high schools. When all these high schools are offering full programming for grades 9–12 in 2020, the intermediary will have helped launched quality high schools serving around 14,000 students.

For more information, see www.michiganfuture.org, www.excellentschoolsdetroit, or contact Lou at lou@michiganfuture.org.

IDEA #3: Understand the often-overlooked complexities of starting new high-performing schools and the importance of ongoing charter school support services.

Daniel L. Quisenberry
President, Michigan Association of Public School Academies (MAPSA)

Creating new schools requires the development of an infrastructure, as well as community and parent awareness of and support for the type of change required. Solid infrastructure is required in order to substantially increase the number of quality schools serving metro Detroit. New school founders must know about authorizers, application expectations, laws, facility or financing availability, marketing for enrollment, special education services, and where to find talented teachers and school leaders.

This infrastructure must include advocacy for new school creation; outreach efforts to identify, select, recruit and support the launch of new high-performing schools; and communications with parents so that they can make good choices.

For more information, visit www.charterschools.org or contact Dan at dquisenberry@charterschools.org.

Strategy B: Build a Human Capital Pipeline

IDEA #4: Develop a plan to recruit and develop excellent school leaders and teachers.

Aaron Brenner
Founder, KIPP SHINE Prep, Houston, Texas

In charter schools, as in all schools, teachers and leaders are absolutely essential to student success. In fact, recent research has confirmed what many educators have long suspected: teachers matter more to student learning than anything else schools do. Yet Detroit's public and charter schools face shortages of highly effective teachers and leaders, and have lost many former leaders to other cities.

Since building the best schools possible requires strong, dynamic leaders and teachers, it is essential to build an established teacher and leader pipeline so schools can draw upon top-notch talent. Otherwise, the effort to create new schools will lose momentum and the children of Detroit will remain trapped.

Bringing talented and committed individuals to the city of Detroit to turn around, found, and lead excellent schools for children depends on the identification, recruitment, selection, and development of outstanding leaders. An established human capital system, such as Teach For America or New Leaders for New Schools, will not only attract leaders from across the nation, but will also encourage local talent to remain in Detroit.

For more information, contact Aaron at abrenner@kipphouston.org or visit www.teachforamerica.org, www.kipp.org, and www.nlms.org.

IDEA #5: Get outside the system to incentivize school leaders and teachers

Joseph Lehman
President, Mackinac Center for Public Policy

There are only three types of education reform: changing the rules, changing the resources, or changing the rewards. Endless extra rules and vastly more resources have failed to improve the Detroit Public Schools. The only remaining reform is rewards. Leadership and teaching talent flows toward entrepreneurial opportunity and professional rewards. If Detroit's schools offer more of these than other locales, talent will flow to Detroit. If Detroit offers less of these, talent will be repelled.

Two types of organization are historically resistant to rewards-based work environments: government and labor unions. Conventional public schools are ruled by both. Public charter schools are typically free of unions. Within a framework of rewards, there are four specific ways to attract the best school leaders and teachers to Detroit:

- Flexible and professional work environments
- Merit pay
- Alternative certification
- Virtual schooling

An education system is only as good as its leaders and teachers. Effective reforms built around rewards and other incentives for these leaders and educators have proven to work in charter-school environments and outside the government-run system altogether.

For more information, contact Joe at lehman@mackinac.org or visit www.mackinac.org.

Strategy C: Cultivate a Reform-Friendly Environment

IDEA #6: Acknowledge that political involvement is necessary for school reform success.

Harrison Blackmond
State Director, Michigan Democrats for Education Reform

In order for Detroit's recent efforts to be successful in the long term, Michigan's K–12 education sector needs a reform-friendly policy environment that includes knowledgeable and supportive policymakers as well as knowledgeable and supportive voters. The following strategies could ensure such an environment:

- Establishing a non-partisan Michigan education policy institute dedicated to developing a 21st-century K–12 education policy framework for Michigan and providing policymakers and the public with the best thinking about education issues
- A non-partisan voter education program will arm voters with information needed to make informed decisions about candidates and their views on education initiatives

The objective would be to improve existing initiatives, such as legislation in support of the state's Race to the Top application, and develop new, innovative solutions to current and future education challenges. Examples on the national level include the Institute for Educational Leadership and Education Sector. The general public's sense of what constitutes real education reform is generally limited to funding—and possibly lowering—class size. A non-partisan voter education program could broaden the public's knowledge, increase interest in education, and encourage accountability.

For more information, contact Harrison at harrison@dfer.org or visit www.dfer.org.

IDEA #7: Provide parents the information they need to choose schools for their children based on academic performance.

Sharlonda Buckman
President, Detroit Parent Network

Although parents in Detroit have exercised choice in number of ways (moving away, charter schools, private schools), the biggest challenge is that there are not enough good choices for parents. As Detroit donors build on this moment to transform education for the long term, parental involvement at all levels is critical, and requires intentional philanthropic investment.

Parents can ensure that their children get the best education possible by:

- Becoming better shoppers. To make better decisions, parents must be educated and engaged on what quality education entails. Too often, parents make decisions based on a school's new building or safe appearance and not educational outcomes. Accurate and accessible information and performance data on every school serving Detroit's children is an essential first step in engaging parents.
- Actively advocating for their children. As parents become more knowledgeable about quality education, they will be motivated to advocate on behalf of their children for the expansion of quality schools and the closure of failing schools. Well-organized parents can ignite serious reforms.
- Partnering in their children's education. The research is clear: when parents are engaged, students are more likely to attend school, earn better grades, have better social skills and behavior, and graduate from high school. Many proven programs, such as family nights and resource centers, help parents stay connected and engaged.

For more information, contact Sharlonda at sbuckman@detroitparentnetwork.org or visit www.detroitparentnetwork.org.