



# The Public Schools All Detroit Children Deserve

## COMMUNITY PLATFORM

Dear Community Member,

Decades of disinvestment in the Detroit Public Schools and top-down policies—like the emergency manager law—have created the current crisis in our city’s public schools. These policies have been forced on our communities, creating ill feeling among natural allies and driving them to point fingers at one another. These misguided and misdirected interventions have worsened racial and economic inequity in our schools, our neighborhoods and our city.

As students, parents, educators, community members and labor leaders, we have come together to form the Detroit Education Justice Coalition in order to claim our right to a high-quality education.

We believe we have a shared responsibility to reject policies that harm youth of color or their families. We seek to collaborate and take action to ensure that *every* child and *every* family has access to a high-quality neighborhood public school—regardless of race, socio-economic status or ZIP code.

We know that improving struggling schools and neighborhoods requires comprehensive and coordinated reform, not isolated, unproven interventions. After surveying educators, holding town hall forums and engaging members of communities across Detroit, we have developed the following proposals for change. We believe the implementation of these proposals can put us on the path toward healing and restored hope in our city.

We invite you to join us in the fight for the schools that ALL of our children deserve.

In solidarity,

**Detroit Education Justice Coalition**

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



Source: "The Choice is Ours: Road to Excellent for Troubled Michigan Schools Begins in Detroit." Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren.

**"Teacher vacancies can be directly related to the lack of teacher support. Politics and the lack of educators making policy have reduced education to filtering out the 'good' students from the 'bad' students, with the latter being discarded in the same manner businesses discard defective parts on an assembly line."**

**WILLIAM WEIR, TEACHER**  
SCHULZE ACADEMY FOR  
TECHNOLOGY AND THE ARTS



## **1 Full, Fair Funding and Democratically Accountable Governance**

Detroit schools have been short-changed for too long. Our students and educators are expected to do more with less, and there are few opportunities for community members, parents and educators to provide input on policies that affect our neighborhood public schools. Now is the time to invest in our schools.

### **Our students, educators and community members deserve:**

- Properly resourced and debt-free public schools;
- A democratically elected and empowered Detroit school board;
- A cap on for-profit charter schools and an end to efforts to privatize school services; and
- Meaningful opportunities for parents, community members and educators to help shape policies and decisions about our schools, including financial systems, evaluations, planning and accountability.

## **2 Schools that Educate and Support the Whole Child**

All children deserve to attend safe, supportive schools. Students, especially those who are most disadvantaged, need holistic supports—including services to meet their social, health and emotional needs—to help them reach their full potential and achieve their dreams.

### **Our students, educators and community members deserve:**

- Safe, well-maintained school buildings that are tested, evaluated and monitored regularly for air and water quality;
- Essential classroom resources and supplies, including textbooks, technology and basic materials;
- A rich curriculum that includes

instruction in art, music, dance and physical education; and

- Adequate in-school student supports like counselors, social workers, librarians and health workers (nurses).

## **3 Supported Educators**

Ensuring that all classrooms are staffed with well-prepared, well-supported educators is key to creating successful learning environments and positive outcomes for students.

### **Our students, educators and community members deserve:**

- Quality orientation and ongoing support for new teachers;
- Mentoring and relevant, research-based professional development designed by teachers;
- Competitive salaries for all educators; and
- Additional qualified support staff.

## **4 Manageable Class Sizes/ Caseloads**

The current teacher shortage in the Detroit Public Schools has reached crisis level. Students and teachers struggle in overcrowded classrooms, and some classrooms lack a teacher altogether. Teachers are being forced to teach subjects outside of their certification areas. Both students and teachers deserve smaller classes to enable better, individualized instruction and improved relationships between teachers and students.

### **Our students, educators and community members deserve:**

- Fully staffed classrooms, especially in hard-to-staff subject areas; and
- Thoughtful school staffing that is based on an assessment of needs.



“City of Detroit inspections of 11 public schools—conducted as part of a district-wide review in response to mass teacher sick-outs—revealed widespread code violations, including multiple instances of rodents, mold, damaged roofs and broken glass. City inspectors found 152 violations, an average of nearly 14 for each school.”

*Detroit Free Press, Jan. 25, 2016*

(<http://www.freep.com/story/news/2016/01/25/city-inspections-detroit-schools-find-rodents-mold/79311004/>)

## 5 Welcoming, Safe and Inclusive Schools

Great public schools are ones that provide safe, welcoming and caring learning environments for all children, including those with special needs. Schools that underserve the most vulnerable students and treat parents as intruders cannot succeed in creating strong learning environments. Our neighborhood public schools must strive to provide an environment where students, parents, educators and residents feel welcome and respected as valued members of the school community.

### Our students, educators and community members deserve:

- A voice in school policies, procedures and decisions;
- School discipline policies that are enforced fairly and create supportive learning environments for all students; and
- Improved school appearance and increased efforts to create safe school grounds.

## 6 Culturally Relevant Curriculum

To provide a world-class education for all children, our schools must ensure that all curricula are culturally inclusive, accurate and relevant. Detroit is a racially, linguistically, culturally, economically and ethnically diverse city, and our students deserve a rich curriculum that reflects that diversity.

### Our students, educators and community members deserve:

- Greater opportunities for parent participation in school activities;
- A curriculum that is centered around students' culture and experiences; and
- Opportunities to build cross-cultural respect.

## 7 Equitable Special Education Services

Our public schools have a legal obligation to provide appropriate educational services for children with special needs and learning disabilities. Insufficient funding and ongoing school closures have undermined the quality and availability of services provided to our special education students. Special education students, just like general education students, need high-quality learning opportunities and academic support to fulfill their potential.

### Our students, educators and community members deserve:

- Fully resourced special education services;
- Proper training for all educators, including those who teach students with special needs; and
- Proper training and support for parents, students and schools on special education laws.

“Class sizes are huge, and sometimes it seems impossible to function. Books are a scarcity, and teachers are scarce as well. The result is, my education suffers. I deserve better.”

**IMANI HARRIS**

SOPHOMORE

RENAISSANCE HIGH SCHOOL

“When I opened history books in high school, I didn't see my struggles. I didn't see my ancestors. I didn't see people who looked like me. I didn't see my story, and that's not fair.”

**EDGAR GOMEZ**

ALUMNUS

WESTERN HIGH SCHOOL



**M**oments of crisis can present opportunities to engage community members to work for real improvements.

The Detroit Education Justice Coalition presents this platform to give voice to the urgent cry from educators, students, parents and our community for the public schools all children deserve and the strategies to help us get there.

This platform will be used as our guiding vision as we work together to improve education for our students.

**Detroit Education Justice Coalition**

Detroit Federation of Teachers • Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength (MOSES) •  
ACLU of Michigan • 482Forward • Detroit Branch NAACP • AFT Michigan • Mothering Justice

