



A PROGRESS REPORT:

School Improvement In The Detroit Public Schools

Progress Report Recommendations and Detroit Public Schools Responses

October 2003

**This report was commissioned by New Detroit
with financial support from The Skillman Foundation**

**The research contained in this report is the product of
Michigan State University Urban Affairs Programs
and the Department of Family and Child Ecology**



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Letter to the Community

FALL, 2003

Since its inception, New Detroit as a race relations coalition, recognized education is a fundamental ingredient in establishing equality between the races.

New Detroit's involvement has taken many forms. Most recently, with the support of the Skillman Foundation and the research assistance of Michigan State University, we have released a series of three Progress Reports. These reports have sought the input of stakeholders involved with Detroit Public Schools. The goal of these reports has been to measure the District's and the community's progress in achieving the objectives set forth in the School Improvement Plan.

This report, the final in this current series, lists the recommendations that New Detroit established within each of the proceeding documents and provides an assessment of the District's response to these recommendations.

Our findings indicate that the most notable progress has been made in the District's systemic reorganization. A stringent audit system is now in place. Significant cost savings have occurred as a result of changes in the Transportation and Food Service areas. And new and renovated schools are evident throughout our community.

Our findings also demonstrate that real efforts have occurred to expand and improve the in-house training opportunities for principals and teachers. Measurable improvements in school cleanliness and safety are also apparent.

Further, research demonstrates that the environment of our schools both internally and externally have an impact on the performance of our young people. We are, therefore, delighted to note that more of our community groups, churches and corporations are taking an active role in the life of our public schools.

Challenges still facing the District require continued attention. This report identifies concerns that remain in the areas of communications, staffing, technology and class size.

All of this data underscores one resounding message; we have only begun to engage in the type of concerted community effort that is required to ensure that our children receive quality educational opportunities.

New Detroit intends to continue to engage in this struggle. We count on the partnership of each of you in this extended process.

Sincerely,
Shirley R. Stancato
President and CEO

Progress Report History

In 2001, New Detroit commissioned Michigan State University consultants to research progress achieved toward implementing the Detroit Public Schools' state mandated School Improvement Plan. The MSU team headed by Robert L. Green, Ph.D., produced three reports (January 2002, November 2002, and June 2003) designed to benchmark progress.

The January 2002 Progress Report examined progress from the perspective of Detroit Public Schools leadership. Interviews were conducted with DPS board members and chief executive officer. The report also included results of a comprehensive survey completed by an overwhelming majority of DPS executive directors and school principals. The report also contained an analysis of Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) test results for the period 1998 –2001.

The November 2002 Progress Report explored progress from the vantage point of DPS teachers. Over 50% of the District's 8,000 teachers completed an extensive survey. The results provided teacher insights on a wide range of issues including: staff development; testing; discipline; school and District level leadership; teacher accountability; and parental and community involvement.

The June 2003 Progress Report looked at external and internal factors that influence high and low performing schools. 12 high and 12 low performing neighborhood schools were examined for their common traits. The report also provided a view of progress from the standpoint of parents/caregivers. Nine Parent/Caregiver Focus Group sessions were conducted to elicit responses regarding testing, parental involvement, school leadership, and discipline.

Each report included several recommendations designed to:

- Provide Detroit citizens with objective benchmarks for gauging progress made toward overall school improvement, and
- Assist the District in its efforts to improve the academic performance of Detroit Public School students

*January 2002 Progress Report Recommendations
and
Detroit Public School District Responses*

IMPROVE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

1. Improve, support and reinforce a comprehensive curriculum within the Detroit Public School system that mirrors the goals of an achievement-oriented school system. The responsibility for formulating a uniform curriculum should rest with central administration curriculum experts who should be evaluated regularly, based on specific achievement goals.
 2. Continue to strengthen curricula related to the teaching of basic subjects, i.e., reading, science, mathematics, and writing.
 3. Implement a strong in-service training program that will increase teacher competence, particularly in the areas of reading, science, mathematics, and writing.
- *The District signaled the first phase of its new comprehensive strategy to improve student academic performance by investing over \$19 million dollars in the Open Court Reading curriculum. This system is research based and has proven effective in other large urban school systems. DPS principals and teachers received intensive Open Court training during the 2002 summer recess.*
 - *The District also established a CEO District, which consolidated 24 of the system's lowest performing elementary and middle schools into one cluster. This structure provides the selected schools with additional resources for staff development and classroom instruction focused on improving the academic achievement of their students.*
 - *The reading curriculum was officially implemented at the start of the 2003-2004 school year. One hundred thirty Instructional Specialists/Coaches were also employed to support teachers in the implementation of the Districts new instructional strategies.*

- *The District also completed the alignment of its K–12 curriculums with State standards.*
- *In 2002 the District developed and implemented an instructionally based test called Measuring Instructional Progress (MIP). The test, which measures mathematics and reading skills, is given to all students in grades 1-8 and 10. The MIP test is directly aligned with State curriculum standards and administered in the early fall and late spring of each year. Teachers use the test results to adjust their instructional programs to target the specific needs of their individual students.*
- *The District is finalizing its selection of the Comprehensive Intervention Program Accelerated Mathematics. The program provides an individualized assessment system and generates a prescription based upon the assessment for each student. A computerized library of materials accompanies the program personalizing the instruction. Science is scheduled for study this year with implementation the following year.*

4. Expand identification and recruitment of bilingual personnel.

- *Bilingual teachers and staff are recruited and nurtured through structured Alternative Paths Programs and Limited License to Instruct initiatives. There continues, however, to be a need for bilingual staff. This is a critical shortage area nationwide.*

5. Review, assess, and as appropriate, eliminate, modify, or strengthen the various whole school reform models.

- *During the period covering 2001 – 2003, there have been 99 schools participating in whole school reform projects. Only 19 of these schools will continue participating in a whole school reform project during the 2003-2004 school year. The number of whole school reform models was reduced to provide greater uniformity of operations and instruction throughout the District.*

6. Expand initiatives designed to increase parental involvement and support of academic goals.

- *The District hired 13 Parent Liaisons to encourage parents and community members to be involved in the decision making process that effect school and classroom settings. Specifically, they work to support student achievement, increase school enrollment, improve school policies, procedures and programming, relay information from the community back to the District, recruit volunteers during school activities, identify resources and services from the community that strengthen school programs, maintain a community resource, address and work to resolve parent concerns and work closely with student support services.*
- *SRA/McGraw-Hill has provided over 2,400 parents/caregivers with training to assist their children with reading.*
- *The District has re-established a City Wide Parent Committee. The committee is tasked with aiding the District in the design of a new Parental Involvement Policy. The policy will be used to establish District level and school level goals to ensure greater parental involvement.*

TRANSFORM THE DISTRICT INTO AN EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT ORGANIZATION

- 7. Continue developing the professional leadership abilities of all: central office administrators, executive directors, and principals. Develop measurable objectives attached to the personnel evaluation process.**
- 8. Continue the development of training programs, such as the Principals' Academy, and organize development opportunities to ensure that each principal has an opportunity to attend and to receive mentoring assistance as required.**
- *The District has worked aggressively to develop professional leadership abilities of central office administrators, executive directors, and principals. The District's Department of Training and Staff Development provided instructional, non-instructional, and central office employees with over 20 skill-enhancing programs during the 2002-2003 academic year. Additionally, principals received skill-enhancing assistance through the District's new Principals Leadership Academy.*

- *Available courses include: Literacy Coach Training Level 1; Expanding Profession Development for Counselors; Parent Facilitator Training; Financial Management; School Improvement Plan Training; High Performing Teams; Effective Instructional Strategies for Special Education; Contracting and Procurement Training; Second Step Violence Prevention Training; Technical Training for Building Engineers; Food Safety and Sanitation.*
 - *With the assistance of The Skillman Foundation, the District has also implemented its “Pathway to Principalship” program. This program provides training for selected assistant principals and other District instructional staff who have an interest and show potential for becoming effective principals. Over 80 District employees are enrolled in the program.*
- 9. Expedite the overhaul of the Detroit Public Schools data management system. Serious consideration should be given to making all data available on one database and from a single source.**
- *Providing teachers with timely and detailed test data for their individual students is vital for improving academic performance. The District has always provided detailed records of students test score data to schools based on the classroom groupings at the time of the test. Summarized student data is posted for each student on the District's AS400 computer.*
 - *Recent computer upgrades, allow the District to readily provide detailed test score data for each student and classroom group based on up-to-date classroom rosters. For example, tests taken in 2002-03 were reported back to schools, teachers, parents and students during the 2002-03 school year. Now, in addition to those reports, the results from the 2002-03 school year can quickly be regrouped so that teachers in 2003-04 can see exactly how their new groupings of students performed in the prior year.*
 - *The District has also obtained a federal E-Rate grant that will enable 148 schools to be wired for the internet by the end of 2003.*
- 10. Continue efforts to ensure that Board of Education meetings highlight the achievements of both staff and students.**
- *The Board and the CEO have established a time of Special Recognition at the start of board meetings to highlight accomplishments of students and successful programs operating within the District. For example, at a recent board meeting, two students were acknowledged for winning a national creative writing contest. Additionally, students were acknowledged for their ongoing involvement in the District's new Work And Career Enhancement Program.*

ENHANCE COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

11. Expand marketing strategies to orient staff, students and the community to an agenda that emphasizes academic achievement and provides mechanisms for involvement by the entire community at the local school level.

- *Orientations were provided for all DPS employees to outline the District's comprehensive strategy for improving student reading skills. 80% of the District staff participated.*
- *The District also provides students with agendas to keep track of their assignments, academic progress, and school calendar. The agenda is also intended to be a resource that parents/caregivers can use to keep abreast of their child's academic performance.*
- *The District utilized billboards across the city to encourage and promote a community focus on students developing their reading skills.*

12. Collaborate with the administration of the city of Detroit to provide after-school educational and recreational activities.

- *In 2003, the District hosted the first annual "Back to School Rally" in collaboration with the Mayor's Neighborhood City Halls and the Council of Baptist Pastors of Detroit and Vicinity.*
- *Detroit Public Schools in collaboration with Communities In School of Detroit, Inc.; Youth Sports and Recreation Commission; City Connect Detroit, the After School All-Stars and a host of other community faith based organizations supports, The Mayor's Time Initiative for After-School Programs. This support includes grant awards from Federal, State and local agencies that focus on the District's main goal "student achievement." In doing so community/parental involvement has been strengthened and safe places for children have been provided during the non-school hours. Over the next months plans are developing to showcase all After-school programs during the National celebration of "Lights on After-School."*

13. Continue to collaborate with business, corporate, church and community Organizations, willing to adopt school(s) or participate in school initiatives.

- *The office of School Partnerships was established to facilitate links between individual schools and local businesses, community and faith-based organizations. These partnerships in education are designed to: promote student academic achievement, improve student attendance, improve career planning, preparation, and job placement, expose students to the cultural, industrial, corporate, and historic presence in Metropolitan Detroit.*
- *Partnership examples include:*
 - *Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church that partnered with Webber Middle School to provide students with money management training.*
 - *The District is also utilizing its relationships with vendors to provide learning and employment opportunities for DPS students; for example, Aramark annually hires and trains 21 students.*
- *Another important partnership was developed between the District, Detroit Renaissance and The Skillman Foundation. The District utilized funds provided by these organizations to establish the Principals Leadership Academy and Pathway to Principalship professional development programs*

14. Provide parents with specific information that allows them to effectively support the school's goals and their child's academic achievement.

- *The District has created a new Parent Handbook for the 2003-04 school year. This manual includes important forms and information parents/caregivers need to register their children for services like free and reduced lunch and transportation. Although these documents and information were available previously, the manual simplifies the process for parents/caregivers to access services for their children.*
- *The District took an initial step to respond to parental concerns by hiring 13 Parent Liaisons to engage parents and community resources. The Parent Liaison job description is currently being reviewed with the intent of improving their capacity to meet parental needs and expectations.*
- *The District moved its annual enrollment fair from Martin Luther King High School to Ford Field to provide more parents/caregivers with access to information on each school within the District and supplemental services.*

*November 2002 Progress Report Recommendations
and
Detroit Public School District Responses*

TEACHER TRAINING

1. The District should take this opportunity to review desired traits for its “next generation” of teachers and may also wish to develop this “wish list” in conjunction with a review of teacher training institutions in Michigan, where the vast majority of Detroit teachers will continue to receive their education.
2. The District should review the quality of teacher training available, particularly in Michigan schools where the majority of Detroit teachers receive their training and work with teacher training institutions to identify areas in which programs might be improved in terms of preparing teachers for urban environments.
 - *Dr. Burnley is currently meeting with heads of Departments of Education at Wayne State, Eastern Michigan and Western Michigan universities regarding instruction for teachers in urban settings. This discussion includes a discourse regarding cultural competence and the development of skills needed to educate children within urban school districts.*

PARTNERSHIPS

3. The District should formulate and implement strategies for promoting the active involvement of key partners (Parents, Businesses, Community and faith-based organizations) in local schools.
 - *The District implemented a pilot program with five churches to help students improve their reading skills utilizing the Open Court Reading Program. Currently, the churches are Corinthian Baptist, Detroit Baptist Temple, Northwest Unity, Bethel Baptist and Pilgrim Baptist. SRA/McGraw Hill provided materials to the five churches at no cost. The District is currently exploring ways to support and expand the program.*

TESTING

4. The District should place primary emphasis on improving MEAP scores for all students, improving student scores on nationally standardized tests and continuing to boost pupil attendance rates.

- *The District continues to focus on this issue by investing in professional development to improve MEAP scores., \$4 million dollars has already been invested to assist teachers in their quest to meet achievement targets established by the “No Child Left Behind” legislation. Over 8,000 teachers have been trained in reading instruction.*

SERVICES

5. The Detroit Public Schools administration should placed an emphasis on improving the quality of food service, school cleanliness and emergency response services.

The District entered into a contract with Aramark Corporation beginning with the 2001-02, school year, to manage its food and custodial maintenance staff. Results of this arrangement include:

Food Service

- *The District’s kitchen facilities came into compliance with health and safety codes. The United States Department of Agriculture and the Michigan Department of Health conduct “Coordinated Reviews” of DPS food operations. These two organizations randomly select 22 schools to evaluate District compliance with health and safety codes. In 2002-03, 21 of 22 schools were found in compliance compared to only 4 of 22 schools in the 2000-01 assessments.*
- *Total number of meals served annually increased from 17.7 million meals for the 2000-2001 school year to 24.7 million meals in 2002-2003.*
- *Food Service operations, under Aramark provided the District a \$1.4 million revenue stream for the school year 2001-2002. This is in contrast with the District’s \$1.6 million deficit for the year 2000-01. This was accomplished in part by providing increased and efficient catering services, and collection of federal government payments for the District’s increased provision of free and reduced lunches.*

Facility Maintenance Services

- Overall 73% of principals rated the appearance and cleanliness of their school as “good” or “excellent”
- The District reorganized its maintenance operations into 3 hubs to provide more efficient response to routine and emergency requests for service.
- District maintenance staff increased their yearly work order completion rate by 10% during the period 2001- 2003.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

6. Professional development activities should focus on research-validated practices that have demonstrated classroom strategies focused on managing contextual/family concerns.

- A number of training seminars on parent and community involvement, classroom management and mathematics, etc. are offered year round.
- Additionally, trainers and specialists are brought in through the Teachers’ College to instruct teachers on contemporary methods that are seen as effective in educating children from varied backgrounds. This issue is also being addressed in discussions with area university Deans of Education.

7. DPS administrators and teachers should work together to develop and support rules that lead to positive educational outcomes, encouraging everyone to be responsible and accountable.

- Each school is now required to establish its individual school improvement plan consistent with the District’s School Improvement Plan. The individual school plans are developed in collaboration with staff and administrators. The plans include goals for improving the academic performance of students within each school.
- Additionally, all non-union leadership (i.e., Executive Directors, Principals, Assistant Principals) employment contracts were revised effective July 1, 2003 to clearly define satisfactory job performance.

8. Despite the stated belief in the ability of all children to learn and their own accountability for student performance, many teachers appear to be skeptical about the prospects of overcoming non-school barriers to student learning. This suggests that research-validated practices for accomplishing this goal should become a greater focus of future professional development activities.

- *The District is utilizing many of its own exemplary teachers and principals during professional development sessions to help address concerns regarding non-school barriers that inhibit student learning. These exemplary teachers and principals share their teaching and management strategies that have proven successful in educating Detroit students who are challenged by various non-school barriers.*

*June 2003 Progress Report Recommendations
and
Detroit Public School District Responses*

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

1. The DPS administration, particularly principals and staff within local schools should address the general cleanliness and overall atmosphere within the low-achieving schools.

- *The District's Facilities Maintenance Division has the overall responsibility for building upkeep. That division has been restructured to create 3 Facility Maintenance hubs to ensure more efficient service to school buildings.*
- *The District has also improved the atmosphere in every school facility as part of its Capital Improvement Plan. The following is a summary of improvements made District wide. Improvements were prioritized to address the most critical deficiencies in existing facilities. Completed projects include:*
 - *Replacement of ALL 19 coal fired boilers in the District; 103 roofing projects; 77 door replacement projects; 78 window replacement projects, 28 bathroom upgrades; 165 site lighting projects; 241 curb appeal projects, installation of 69 playscapes; and the upgrading of 168 kitchen.*
- *The District also made extensive improvements to: Cooley High, Kettering High and Hutchins Middle Schools to create better leaning environments for special education students. These facilities are now compliant with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act. Improvements included widening doorways, modifying restrooms, repairing pavement to provide students with easy access to the school building.*

2. Efforts should be made to assign only one principal to a school. In some low-achieving schools, principals had to oversee two schools.

- *There are currently only two principals responsible for more than one school.*

3. The District should support the role of parents/caregivers and continue to encourage them to establish high expectations at home regarding appropriate behavior and academic achievement.

- *The District has created a new Parent Handbook. The book provides parents/caregivers with vital information and resources to help facilitate their child's academic performance.*
- *The District also redesigned its 2003-2004 school year calendar with the theme, " I Am DPS". Important information contained in the calendar includes: standardized test dates; school closure and opening dates; phone numbers for schools and administrative offices; child healthcare information; fire safety tip; and information on the achievements of former DPS students.*

4. Teachers should be encouraged to involve themselves in more interactive teaching to engage students in the learning process rather than relying on bookwork.

- *The District has deployed 130 teacher coaches to observe and assist teachers with becoming more interactive while instructing their students in class.*

5. Those who set the tone within each local school must be sensitive to the atmosphere they create. Each school should implement a system that acknowledges the importance of parents/caregivers and other visitors.

- *The issue of parent/caregiver involvement is a high priority for the District's leadership. Guidelines for engaging parents/caregivers are currently being developed. The District's School Board has established a standing committee focused on this issue and the CEO has given his chief of sStaff the task of coordinating efforts to improve the District's relations with parents/caregivers.*

Continuing Challenges

The District must continue to focus energy on making improvements to its instructional and operational activities to ensure a quality education for Detroit students. The following areas remain a challenge to continued progress:

- Improving the process of recruiting, developing, and retaining exemplary district employees, including recognition of the need for additional bi-lingual staff.
- Reducing class size for students in classes above the third grade level.
- Completion of computer system upgrades.
- Continue efforts to involve parents/caregivers, including the further implementation of a communications strategy that engenders greater support from parents/caregivers and Detroit citizens as a whole.

The Mission of New Detroit

To work as the coalition of Detroit area leadership addressing the issue of race relations by positively impacting issues and policies that ensure economic and social equity.

“Every Community Has A Conscience”

It is an unspoken sense of right and wrong that people share:
a fair agreement about how people ought to be treated.
A community’s conscience knows that people are fragile, especially children.

Our community’s conscience knows that children ought to have schools
where they can achieve their best and learn how to succeed in life:
where hard work in school translates into a productive future after graduation...

But somehow or another,
our community has become disconnected from its conscience. Otherwise, we
could not tolerate such a gap between the way things ought to be and the way
they really are.