

# OUR SCHOOLS

# OUR MOMENT

DECEMBER 2017



Coalition for the Future  
of Detroit Schoolchildren



## Stepping up so Detroit kids get the education they deserve

6 PRIORITIES WE CAN ACT ON NOW

# DEAR FELLOW DETROITERS:

This is *NOT* another report about how low-performing Detroit's public schools (traditional and charter) are. We have had plenty of those.

This *IS* a report about Detroit leaders from all sectors uniting to act now on six priorities that are within our reach. It *IS* a report about how we Detroiters will build on what's working in *some of our schools* and make sure these successes spread to *all of our schools*.

**Our goals are clear: All Detroit children receive a world-class education, giving them the confidence, creativity, and know-how to support their families, advance their communities, and compete in an ever-changing world.**

**This isn't someone else's job; it's our job – educators, civic and business leaders, organized labor, elected officials, philanthropists, and families.** In particular, we need to support parents and caregivers with quality information, encouragement, and multiple opportunities to have a real say in school priorities.

We're in a long-term fight to improve education for our children. Two years ago, we won a major battle when Lansing agreed with almost all of our recommendations. We helped stabilize Detroit Public Schools by retiring its long-term debt. We won back local control of our schools. We returned the Educational Achievement Authority to Detroit Public Schools Community District. We built civic, political, and policy might. That was the *triage* phase of our fight.

We are now in the *transition* phase, with a real chance to take advantage of all the positive changes sweeping Detroit to jump-start the most important and doable local school reforms.

**We need to make sure more Detroit students attend school every day.** It's not acceptable that more than two-thirds of DPSCD students miss more than 10 days of school a year. You can't learn if you don't show up.

**We need to get more Detroit students enrolled in Detroit schools.** There's no excuse for other districts to be educating our kids — some estimates indicate upwards of 25,000 students are educated outside of our city every day.

**When students are in school, a top priority must be to teach them to read so that they can then read to learn.** Students who can't read well by the end of third grade will be playing catch-up for the rest of their school careers ... and lives.

**Teaching reading requires great teachers who, in turn, have every right to expect to be working in schools led by great principals.** Let's use Detroit's renaissance as a sales and marketing tool to help recruit, support, and retain talented educators who are committed to *our kids*.

Accomplishing these top four priorities will be a lot easier if:

- **DPSCD, charters, and the community advocate that state and federal governments provide their fair share of funding for special education services.** Every year, DPSCD alone has to shift \$40 million from general education to pay for services that the state and federal government should be covering. This is a statewide issue that hurts all city students.
- **DPSCD and public charters cooperate more.** The city's students would benefit greatly from more coordinated planning, more consistent standards, and greater accountability. The mayor is in a unique position to make this happen.

## Thankfully, We Don't Have to Start from Scratch

The good news is that many of these priorities are mutually reinforcing. Each one enables the others. And in many areas, great work already is happening on the ground.

**This report focuses on what's possible.** It is organized around five sets of priorities where Detroit can make significant progress on our own. The sixth proposal requires Lansing and Washington, D.C., to provide adequate funding for special education. Many schools and organizations already are doing great things for kids. If they can do it, why can't we? Starting now.

When implemented, these improvements will set the stage for *school transformation*, the third and final phase. That's when we return all Detroit schools to the levels of excellence that educated many generations of residents ... and made possible the boom years of the past century.

Our return to excellence will not be short-lived or easy. It requires long-term commitment, tenacity, and persistence. It also requires credible data, timely information, and doable proposals that activate a broad range of stakeholders.

It will take all of us, including the leaders listed on page 11 who developed the recommendations in this report.

## Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren

### CO-CHAIRS

**Tonya Allen**, President & CEO, Skillman Foundation

**Rev. Wendell Anthony**, President, Detroit Branch NAACP

**David Hecker**, President, AFT Michigan/AFL-CIO

**John Rakolta, Jr.**, CEO, Walbridge

**Mark Reuss**, Executive Vice President, Global Product Development, Purchasing, and Supply Chain, General Motors Corp.

**Angela Reyes**, Executive Director, Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation

### EXTENSIVE RESEARCH AND OUTREACH

This report is based on extensive research conducted by eight leadership teams, and hundreds of educators, parents, and leaders of businesses, civic and faith-based organizations, organized labor, government agencies, and philanthropic foundations. The initial recommendations were shared with Detroiters and Detroit educators during five community conversations held across the city in November 2017. The final report benefits from their insights.



“My hope is that all children will consider education an important part of their lives. It’s absolutely necessary to their success. And not just for college readiness but just in life. You have to be educated, you have to read in order to do most things.”

**Affrecia Reeves-Cummings**, PTSA President, MLK High School

# Get Serious About Attendance

## Students Have to Show Up to Learn

### What We Know

Students who do not regularly attend school are less likely to learn, less likely to graduate, and less likely to succeed as adults in terms of jobs, health, staying out of jail, and other indicators of well-being.

For example, more than 30,000 DPSCD students (over two-thirds of the students) missed 10 or more days of school in 2015-2016, which was considered to be chronically absent at the time. You can't learn if you don't first show up.

### Missing School 10 Days or More a Year

**30,000+** | DPSCD students  
(68% of student population)

**400,000+** | students statewide  
(27.4% of student population)

**We want to make sure students, families, teachers, and the full community see the importance of attending school every day as our top priority, demonstrated by drastically reducing the “chronic absence” rate (students missing 10 percent or more days of school for any reason).**

### TACTICS:

- If students don't go to school, they can expect a bleak future. Thus, our community must own responsibility for this issue and execute a broad-based attendance campaign to eliminate chronic absenteeism among Detroit students.
- The local data required to devise targeted solutions are lacking. Make data more consistent and reliable by:
  - Using a single definition (above) for measuring chronic absence. This should be used and enforced statewide.
  - Creating a citywide data system to create a single source of student data across governance types for all appropriate parties. Data should include reasons for absences.
  - Conducting Detroit-specific research on chronic absence and persistent attendance.
- Improve school climate and culture so that kids want to stay in school. Train all school staff in restorative practices as an alternative to “zero tolerance” discipline policies that push students out of school. Reduce the number of out-of-school suspensions/expulsions.

- Increase public and private funding for proven school-based health interventions that help keep students in school, including making school nurses, school mental health providers, and school-based health centers available to all students through strategic partnerships as part of a broad set of school-based health services, community schools, and wrap-around services that address obstacles to attendance.
- Enlist parents and caregivers to help prevent avoidable student absences, making sure Detroit's students are in school every day. Parents and caregivers are critical to the success of this and all our priorities.

“Student absence is a big issue. Schools need a better system on taking attendance to assure parents that their children are in school and learning.”

**Jaylin Harris, MLK High School student**  
(pictured)



## Choose Detroit

## Getting Students and Educators to Our Schools

### What We Know

Schools receive funding based on enrollment. When so many Detroit students attend schools outside the city, funding declines, which undermines every program. Increasing the number of highly qualified teachers and improving school leadership are the two most impactful steps schools can take to improve student learning. But Detroit schools have a hard time competing with neighboring districts to recruit and retain the best teachers and principals.

For example, in the past 25 years, DPSCD enrollment has dropped 73 percent. About 25 percent of Detroit students are now educated *outside* the city; neighboring suburban schools have been active in recruiting our city's students.

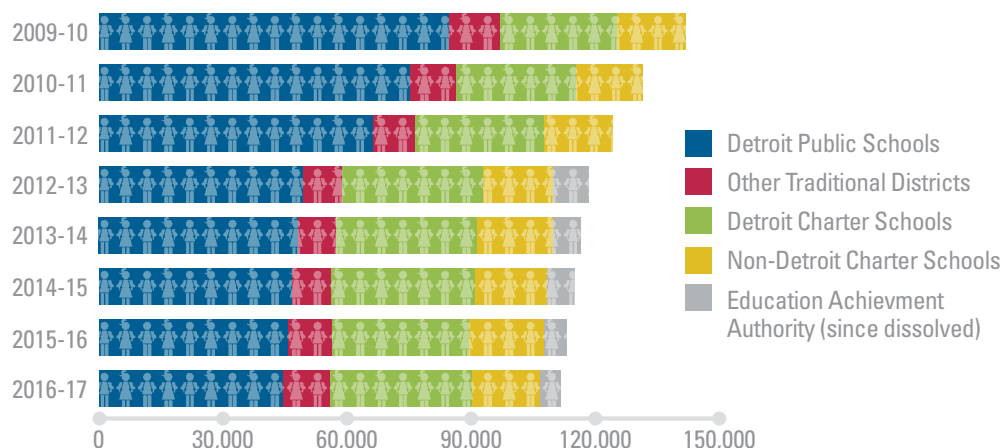
As for the adults, interest in teaching careers is declining all across the country; high-poverty, urban schools are especially impacted. Hundreds of teacher vacancies in Detroit mean many students are taught by substitutes day after day. The lack of common data collection and analysis by DPSCD and charters hobbles systemic, citywide approaches. Inadequate induction and mentoring efforts contribute to significant turnover of new teachers and leaders. Professional learning opportunities and career pathways are uneven.

**STUDENTS: We want to attract the 25,000 Detroit children who attend schools in the suburbs and to enroll them in a high-quality school in the city.**

### TACTICS:

- We acknowledge we must increase the number of city schools that include strong academics, sports, arts, safety, and culture, so that parents and students choose DPSCD schools and Detroit-based charters over suburban schools.

### Detroit Resident Public School Student Enrollment by Type of District, 2009-10 to 2016-17



SOURCE:  
Center for Educational Performance and Information and MISchoolData.org  
(Student Count for All Districts and for Nonpublic schools, Non-Resident File)

- Produce a citywide guide for families with simple, accurate, and accessible information on schools and early education opportunities. The guide will profile program offerings, provide enrollment information, and highlight the Detroit Promise Scholarship.
- Implement a well-coordinated “ground game” that includes an enrollment hotline, enrollment hubs within the community, and enrollment fairs to help families choose Detroit schools.
- Launch a #DetroitProud marketing campaign, including all DPSCD and charter options, to highlight and promote the success of Detroit students (current and alumni) and reinforce a positive image of the immense talent and success within our city.
- Locate and stabilize schools in Detroit neighborhoods to strengthen the city's recovery. Attracting students to Detroit schools will result in approximately a quarter-billion dollars reinvested annually in Detroit communities through our schools.

## Getting Students and Educators to Our Schools

**EDUCATORS:** We want to make schools in Detroit so attractive that the most promising and accomplished educators in our region and nation – including those already here – choose to work in Detroit and offer high-quality instruction to our students.

### TACTICS:

- Create a compelling narrative about Detroit and launch “TEACH DETROIT,” a citywide portal and recruitment and outreach campaign for current and new teachers and leaders, similar to other cities’ efforts across the country.
- Treat teachers with respect and appreciation. This means increasing compensation, benefits, and “voice” for current and new teachers and principals, including financial incentives (e.g. Land Bank housing or car discounts) and recognition (e.g. awards and supports to schools).
- Support new teachers and principals with a comprehensive, fully funded mentoring program to support their development.
- Help local candidates (e.g. current substitutes, paraprofessionals, youth workers, and career-changers) get high-quality, alternative teaching certifications to fill vacancies and sufficiently staff schools.
- Create a citywide teaching center, with a portfolio of professional development opportunities for DPSCD and charter educators, including practice-based teacher training, teaching resources and tools, and opportunities to learn local and national best practices.
- Launch a citywide principal’s academy to grow the pool of qualified school leaders who are instrumental in attracting and retaining great teachers to our schools.



“There have to be way more resources provided to parents who are bilingual, in English and Spanish, and that has sparked me to think about different ways that I can help be an advocate for parents in this community.”

**Cindy Gamboa, Parent**

# Learn to Read, Then Read to Learn

## Reading by Third Grade Is Essential

### What We Know

Early literacy is essential for future student success. Before third grade, students are learning to read; after third grade, they are reading to learn, not just in English class but in every subject. If students cannot read at grade level by the end of third grade, they are more likely to drop out of school and have behavioral problems, less academic success, lower lifetime earnings, and higher unemployment and incarceration rates.

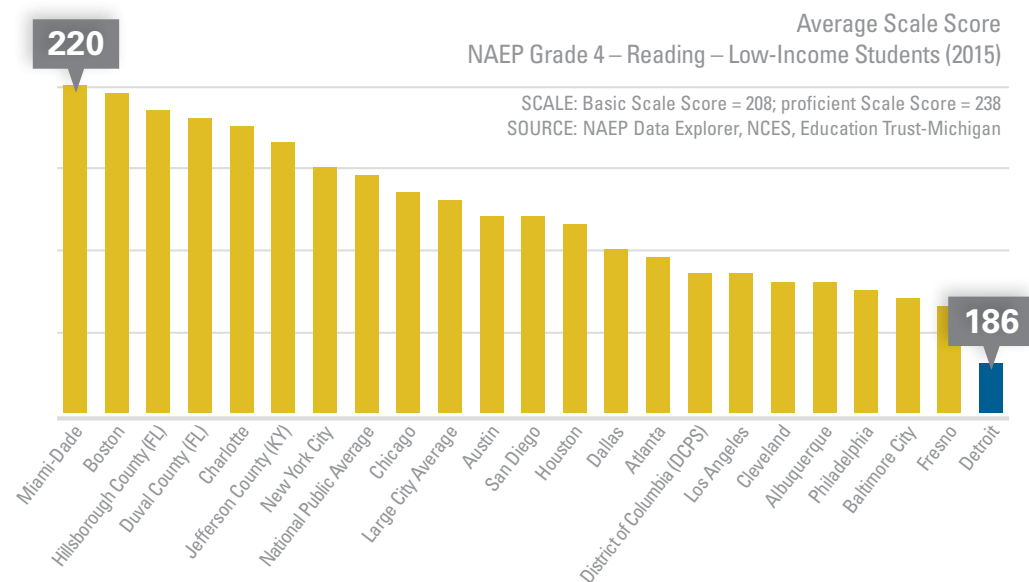
The challenges start early. Low-income students tend to start school far behind; by age 4 they have heard 30 million fewer words than their more advantaged peers. It is very difficult for them to catch up. This is exacerbated by the lack of mandatory kindergarten in Michigan. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Michigan was one of only five states with declining fourth grade reading achievement between 2003 and 2015. And Detroit is last in the nation in early literacy (fourth grade) for low-income students, significantly trailing even the second-to-last urban district.

**We want to create a year-round culture of reading so that all Detroit schoolchildren read at grade level by third grade.**

### TACTICS:

- Because literacy is the foundation of learning, Detroit's parents, community members, teachers, and school administrators will make Detroit a City of Readers, starting with:
  - Enable Detroit parents and caregivers to spend 20 minutes a day introducing language to their children by talking or reading with them from birth forward.
  - Orchestrate book drives and support libraries to ensure culturally relevant reading materials are accessible to African-American, Latino and Arab-American students and families.
  - Expand summer literacy programming in Detroit, to increase exposure to reading instruction and prevent summer learning loss among students, by partnering with youth development programs and other existing efforts.
- Increase adult education opportunities and offerings via two-generation strategies, so that parents have more work opportunities and students improve literacy.
- Prepare teachers in clinical training settings to implement best-in-class early literacy programs proven to be successful in urban settings.
- Hold an annual citywide Literacy Education Summit for K-3 and early childhood educators to learn and share best practices, interventions, and innovations to help low-literacy students and English Language Learners. Offer a cross-training model and aligned curriculum.
- Provide alternative ways for students to demonstrate reading proficiency (or meaningful progress) beyond a standardized, computer-based test. Implement a portfolio approach for grade-level advancement and help caregivers understand their legal rights to avoid student retaliation.
- Strengthen citywide early childhood system by implementing the Hope Starts Here recommendations, including a citywide kindergarten readiness assessment, more supports for caregivers, and more quality early learning and care, so students enter kindergarten ready to learn.

### Detroit Last in the Nation for Early Literacy for Low-Income Students



## Keep Pace with Detroit's Economic Recovery

### Give Students Multiple College and Career Pathways after High School



#### What We Know

Our local economy depends on well-educated graduates—to fill the available jobs, to help invent new ones, to earn enough money to support themselves and raise families, and to pay the taxes that allow Detroit to provide a range of public services to the community, from schools to police and firefighters. The benefits go beyond financial. Better-educated citizens are less likely to be arrested, more likely to vote, and more likely to be healthy.

Detroit needs more jobs and more graduates who are prepared for those jobs. Detroit has only one job for every three residents, far lower than comparable cities. Three-fourths of our jobs are held by nonresidents. Our employment rate lags Michigan and other U.S. cities. A better-educated workforce attracts employers, but the city's educational attainment is very low. Only 12 percent of Detroiters have a four-year bachelor's degree, although about 40 percent of jobs require one. And because a four-year degree isn't for everyone, we need to ensure more youth have access to industry-recognized degrees and credentials.

**We want all Detroit students to graduate from high school with a career plan and to enroll in college and/or career programs with the skills to persist and graduate.**

#### TACTICS:

- Ensure every high school has a college and career pathway program, and expand the number of industry-aligned career and technical education opportunities available to Detroit students by increasing funding for equipment and removing barriers to participation.
- Engage employers to ensure students in all grades receive age-appropriate exposure to a variety of jobs and careers. Ensure all high school students experience real jobs in and out of school through co-ops, internships, summer jobs, and related efforts.
- Centralize information on co-ops, internships, summer jobs, and related efforts so that high school students are aware of workplace opportunities.

- Expand college and/or career counseling, by increasing the number of counselors and offering a summer institute for incoming DPSCD and charter school freshmen. Michigan's counselor-student ratio is less than half the national recommended ratio of 1:250.
- Establish a Higher Education Compact to strengthen the role of post-secondary institutions in student success. This effort will be led by Detroit Drives Degrees, a Chamber-led collective impact effort that aims to reach 60 percent post-secondary credential attainment in Southeast Michigan by 2025.

“Students need to come to school more often instead of skipping, going out, smoking, and things like that. I think that other students should tell their friends to come to class, we are trying graduate and do things with our lives.”

**Donte Love, MLK High School Student**  
(pictured)

# Fully Fund Special Education

## State and Federal Action Required

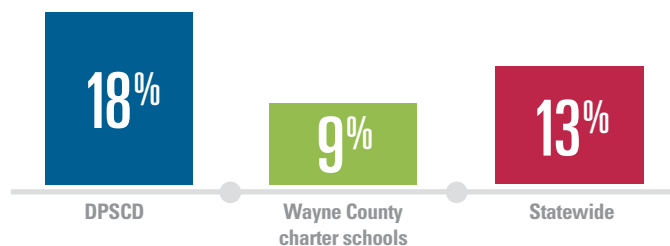
### What We Know

Children with special needs deserve to have those needs met. Unfortunately, Michigan's system for funding special education services is so inadequate that most districts must take revenues from their general education budget to provide special education services. Diverting funds in this way decreases funding for all other school programs. Plus, services for children with disabilities may not always meet best-practice standards given financial constraints.

This has created a major problem in DPSCD, which is diverting over \$40 million annually from its general fund to special education services. Statewide, school districts and charter schools are diverting \$692 million a year. Urban schools are especially hurt because of their low local tax bases.

### DPSCD Especially Impacted

Percentage of students who qualify for special education services



Average cost to educate a special education student: **\$40,000, higher in poor communities**

Statewide shortfall (2010): **\$692 million**

DPSCD shortfall (2016): **\$40 million**

**Michigan leaders must band together to advocate for state and federal policy change to fully fund mandated special education costs. This is needed to address the current condition where school programs must be reduced to all students because the funding provided for required special education programs does not cover the cost to provide these programs.**

### TACTICS:

- Build an advocacy coalition that includes: Lt. Governor's Special Education Funding Subcommittee; the Metropolitan Affairs Corporation / Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (MAC/ SEMCOG); the statewide School Finance Research Collaborative; and any other group that has studied special education funding to advocate for a better funding structure. We offer the following ideas to this coalition:
  - Establish a "weighted student funding formula," which recognizes the reality that students with special needs require additional resources, based on similar models from other states.
  - The federal government should cover 40 percent of special education costs as originally promised when the federal mandate for requiring special education services became law (it now covers less than 10 percent).
  - Medicaid reimbursements should be increased to allow for all school-related costs, including training (secretarial, CPI, EPI, parents), along with administrative costs and planning for 504 and IEP plans.
  - Pool efforts with other states as feasible.
- DPSCD serves a disproportionately larger share of special education students in Detroit. All schools (DPSCD and charters) should conduct an external audit around their special education practices to ensure program quality and efficiency.
- Review current Medicaid billing practices to increase funding, including helping schools take advantage of current allowable Medicaid reimbursements.



## Expect Improved Cooperation and Accountability from Our Leaders

### Shared Responsibility Means All Schools Working Together

#### What We Know

All of the above priorities will be much easier to implement if DPSCD and public charter schools coordinate more. Enrollment, attendance, reading, talent, parent engagement, and special education funding are common challenges. **Having accessible, transparent, and comparable data for DPSCD and charters is essential to drive strategies and interventions.** Working together can better serve more Detroit children and families ... and help schools use scarce resources more efficiently.

Today, however, Detroit's fragmented system of schools does not serve all children well. Some neighborhoods have too many schools, others too few. Consistent quality, coordination, and accountability are lacking. Collaboration is inefficient. Parents and families are confused by their choices. The Coalition, with its *Choice Is Ours* campaign, wasn't able to convince Lansing lawmakers to establish a Detroit Education Commission to address many of these challenges. But we can fix this on our own voluntarily.

**We want Detroit leaders and educators, including those from DPSCD and charters, to put students and families first by working collaboratively to stabilize education in Detroit and sustain Detroit's recovery.**

#### TACTICS:

- In this era of great polarization across the country, this is the time for Detroiters to lead by example and find new ways of working together. Members of the Coalition, community and civic leaders, parents, educators, students, state and local lawmakers, and clergy need to own this agenda for Detroit schoolchildren.
- Ask the Mayor to work with Coalition leadership to facilitate education ecosystem planning for the City of Detroit and appoint highly credible Detroiters to:
  - Set school-quality standards for all schools, working with the Michigan Department of Education.
  - Work with DPSCD Board and Superintendent, and Charter Authorizers and Operators to voluntarily create a charter-district compact that reviews, discusses, and presents plans for better coordination and transparency about school openings and school closings, not approval, and opportunities for citywide collaboration in areas such as a centralized data system and a campaign to address chronic absences. This would not usurp the authority of the DPSCD School Board or charter boards.
  - Launch a citywide school planning process through which educators, parents, students, and community members can contribute to education plans for each neighborhood.
- Ask DPSCD and charter operators to commit to establishing and preserving School Leadership Teams or similar bodies with fidelity, to enable parents, teachers, and support staff to work collaboratively with principals to increase parent engagement and provide input on school programming, policy, and budget.

#### NEXT STEPS

Accomplishing the recommendations laid out in this report requires commitment from a broad range of stakeholders: school administrators, students, families, educators, school support staff, civic groups, nonprofit institutions, elected officials, and business leaders.

Business as usual will not get the job done for Detroit schoolchildren. The recommendations laid out in this report are doable – but only if we all work together. These recommendations require strong collaboration and collective action among community partners and stakeholders to achieve greater impact for students and families than we could ever achieve alone.

As outlined in this report, there are many promising and effective efforts under way on behalf of Detroit kids. Members of the Coalition are committed to bringing together multiple partners to tackle these efforts. Coalition members believe strongly that the work will not be successful if it is not highly aligned and mutually reinforcing.

Investment – public and private money, community action, and commitment from Detroit leaders – is essential. There is promising progress on this front from elected officials, private philanthropy, and a variety of corporate support.

In 2018 Coalition members will explore ways to formalize collective action to link efforts that impact Detroit children and families, from cradle to career. Detroiters, if united and pulling together, can do this for our kids.

**Our schools. Our moment.**

# Acknowledgments

**The Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren formed on December 11, 2014, as an independent, diverse cross-section of Detroit leaders who came together to make recommendations to improve the city's education system. Our first report (*The Choice Is Ours*) focused on how the state could help. Most of our recommendations were enacted. Now our priority is to focus on actions we can take as *Detroiters* to strengthen our schools.**

**The Coalition is made up of a Steering Committee, including six co-chairs, and eight leadership teams.**

## CO-CHAIRS

**Tonya Allen**, President & CEO, Skillman Foundation  
**Rev. Wendell Anthony**, President, Detroit Branch NAACP  
**David Hecker**, President, AFT Michigan/AFL-CIO  
**John Rakolta, Jr.**, CEO, Walbridge  
**Mark Reuss**, Executive Vice President, Global Product Development, Purchasing, and Supply Chain, General Motors Corp.  
**Angela Reyes**, Executive Director, Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation

## STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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**Sandy Baruah**, President & CEO, Detroit Regional Chamber  
**Charlie Beckham**, Group Executive for Neighborhoods, City of Detroit  
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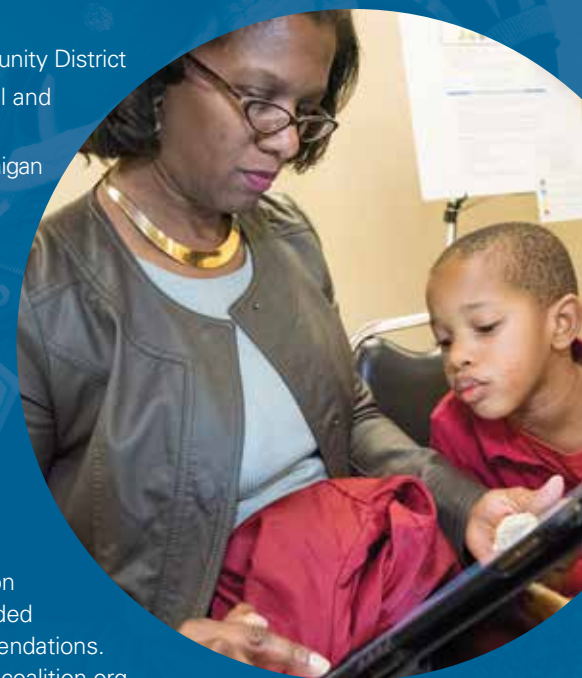
**Alice Thompson**, CEO, Black Family Development

**Dan Varner**, CEO, Goodwill Industries

**Dr. Nikolai Vitti**, Superintendent, Detroit Public Schools Community District

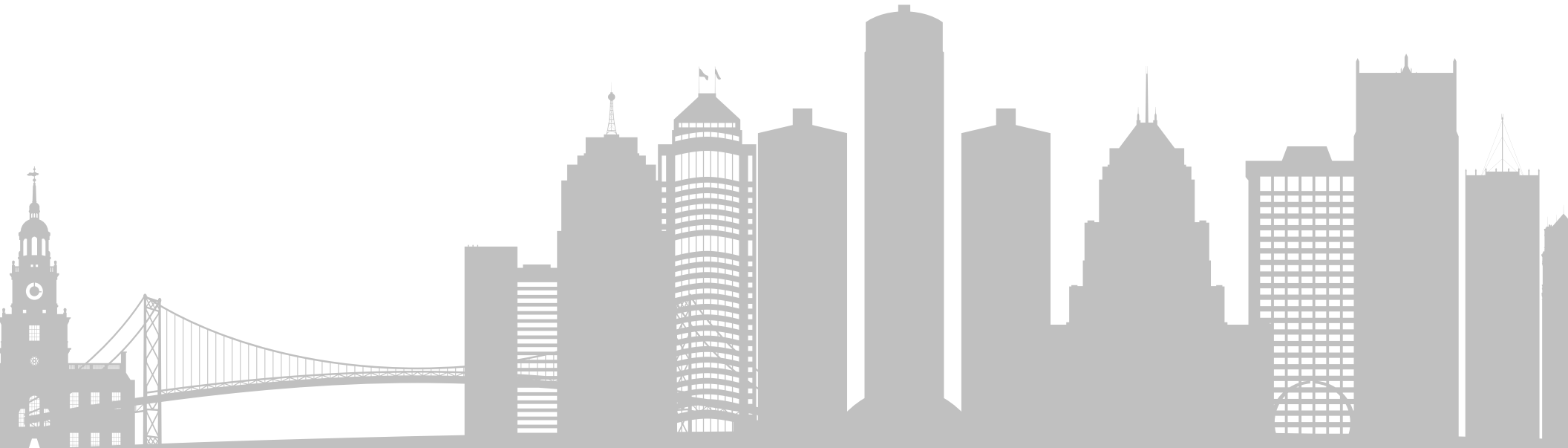
**Roy Wilson**, President, Wayne State University

Many professional staff from several of the organizations involved in the Coalition contributed greatly to the production of this report. Additionally, the eight leadership teams provided invaluable research and guidance in formulating all recommendations. Members are listed on the web site: [www.detroiteducationcoalition.org](http://www.detroiteducationcoalition.org). We appreciate their contributions.



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More information available at:  
[WWW.DETROITEDUCATIONCOALITION.ORG](http://WWW.DETROITEDUCATIONCOALITION.ORG)