



# Students Rise in Detroit: Leadership Lessons

# Feds: 12 Detroit principals stole \$1M in kickback scheme

[Tresa Baldas](#), [Kat Stafford](#), [Kathleen Gray](#) and [Ann Zaniwski](#), Detroit Free Press

Published 10:49 a.m. ET March 29, 2016 | Updated 4:36 p.m. ET March 31, 2016

# Detroit Public Schools will be completely broke by June. Here's how things got to this point.

By Tara Golshan | Updated May 2, 2016, 11:57am EDT

The New York Times

*Crumbling, Destitute Schools  
Threaten Detroit's Recovery*

## Detroit teacher sick-out closes 94 schools

[Lori Higgins](#) and [Keith Matheny](#), Detroit Free Press

Published 6:01 a.m. ET May 2, 2016 | Updated 2:41 p.m. ET May 2, 2016

## Detroit worst in math, reading scores among big cities

**Shawn D. Lewis** The Detroit News

Published 12:01 a.m. ET Oct. 28, 2015 | Updated 4:40 p.m. ET Oct. 28, 2015

## DPS inspector's report reveals more theft, fraud cases

[Christine Ferretti](#), The Detroit News

Published 4:04 p.m. ET Aug. 31, 2016

## Snyder signs \$617M DPS bailout

[Jonathan Oosting](#) and [Shawn D. Lewis](#), The Detroit News

Published 3:39 p.m. ET June 21, 2016 | Updated 5:53 p.m. ET June 21, 2016

# VISION

The Future We Want

All students will have the knowledge, skills and confidence necessary to thrive in our city, our nation, our world.

# MISSION

The Work We Do

We educate and empower every student, in every community, every day, to build a stronger Detroit.



**Transformative  
Culture**



**Outstanding  
Achievement**



**Whole Child  
Commitment**



**Exceptional  
Talent**



**Responsible  
Stewardship**



## Transformative Culture

- Established PTAs and SACs across schools
- Added a Parent Outreach Coordinator role at each school
- Introduced a consistent process for volunteering and increased volunteerism
- Brought in Faith-Based partnerships to schools
- Introduced Parent Academy reaching hundreds families per year
- Created a family resource center
- Launched Let's Read to bolster community involvement in classroom
- Adopted Anti-Racist and Sanctuary District resolutions
- Revised the Code of Conduct with stakeholder input and a focus on behavioral supports and restorative practice
- Introduced Parent Listening sessions and 5 Things Weekly Newsletter to make direct connections with families
- Built a student and staff Hub (intranet) to share knowledge and information



## Outstanding Achievement

- Outperformed State, County, and City Charters on M-STEP Improvement in 2023
- Achieved highest literacy proficiency in over a decade, including the highest ever College and Career Readiness rate in ELA
- Exited 35 schools from state Partnership status
- Improved graduation rate post-pandemic
- Expanded access to accelerated courses, including AP and Dual Enrollment courses available across schools
- Expanded access to Gifted and Talented Education
- Launched a dedicated Newcomer program
- Invested millions of dollars annually on high quality curriculum materials and classroom libraries
- Added Academic Interventionists, structured intervention programs and tutoring funds across schools



## Whole Child Commitment

- Restored and maintained Art or Music and Physical Education in all schools
- Restored recess
- Expanded athletics programming K-12 and participation in Special Olympics
- Offered mental health services at all schools
- Added counselors and nurses to every school
- Made vision and dental screening available at all schools
- Introduced a Student Leadership Council with two Student Board Seats
- Expanded access to STEM and Social Studies Enrichment, like oratorical and debate
- Introduced Cultural Passport and reinvested in Evening of Fine Arts
- Increased breakfast and lunch participation districtwide
- Expanded school gardens and farm to table food programs



## Exceptional Talent

- Added hundreds of school-based positions while drastically reducing vacancies, including at hard to staff schools
- Increased all staff salaries, including teacher salaries by an average of ~20K and \$15K bonuses for ESE teachers
- Built a grow-your-own certification program, On the Rise Academy, responsible for 125 new teachers
- Introduced teacher leadership roles, including Master Teachers and New Teacher Mentors
- Launched a professional development catalog with tens of thousands of unique enrollments each year
- Received national and state recognition for excellence via the CGCS Urban Superintendent of the Year, MI Teacher of the Year, and MI Social Worker of the Year



## Responsible Stewardship

- Reduced FRC Oversight
- Achieved 0 Audit Exceptions
- Adopted a balanced budget for 7 consecutive years
- Recognized as a model district for COVID relief funding
- Allocated \$840M for facilities investments
- Went from 6:1 to 1:1 on student to device ratio
- Invested \$61.5M in security systems, PA systems, and network improvements
- Reduced average vendor payment from 90 days to ~20
- Adopted new data systems, including an upgraded Student Information System, best in class data systems and new data collection mechanisms to assess progress
- Introduced innovative district vehicle program to serve homeless and ESE students while reducing costs

# Approach to Driving Improvement

- If you set ambitious, reasonable, and highly measurable common goals for school improvement with aligned accountability frameworks (Strategic Plan and Metrics);
- And if you centralize and optimize the budget and allocation plan to align with that framework;
- And if you aggressively pursue fully staffed status;
- And if you adopt and develop teachers using highly aligned instructional materials;
- And if you build capacity in the principalship to implement and monitor well-defined school improvement strategies;
- **Then performance will improve.**

# Leadership Play 1: Clarify and Define Success

- Our state lacks a clearly and defined definition of success with coherent accountability standards for educators and families; Superintendents must move beyond this if they hope to align their district's activities to achieve results
- Have a clear, well-rounded point of view for what you want for your students and communicate that point of view
- Build your own, easy to calculate accountability framework and help schools and central offices set unambiguous annual goals to improve on that framework



# Leadership Play 2: Staff, Staff, Staff

- Be unapologetic that the most important role in moving student achievement in your District is your teaching core; build an HR team that understands this and a labor strategy that allows you to be competitive. If you can't win on salary, win on working conditions.
- Teachers perform – and stay – because of their school leader. Meaningfully invest in the capacity of your principals. Believe what the data is telling you and move underperformers out of the role.
- Adding capacity in central offices is not politically popular, but without the right district leaders who know how to build systems and processes, develop capacity; work will not move (or will fall apart when one person leaves).
- Surround yourself with staff who are as smart or smarter than you are, who believe in your vision and will drive toward results in their areas.



# Leadership Play 3: Build System Coherence

- This took us some time; at first, our departments had to “dig out” from the legacy of EM and operated in siloes. Now, this is core to our work.
- Don’t leave your school teams guessing about what strategies you expect them to implement to improve results; use common strategies and clear language, including the implementation of high-quality curriculum, across schools that help everyone gain a “shared depth of understanding about the purpose and nature of the work in the minds and actions individually and especially collectively” – this is Fullan and Quinn’ definition of coherence. Allow school leaders to earn autonomy through results on non-core issues.
- Ensure your communications and professional development experience in every role help people execute on those strategies
- Obsess about continuous improvement and data!



# Leadership Play 4: Maximize Every Dollar

- Get crystal clear on what you need to fund to support success and which of these investments need to reoccur – and what can be funded with one time money
- Create a culture that embraces measured strategic abandonment
- Do not leave any money on the table; use your budget variances and underspent accounts at budget amendment time to make one-time investments
- One of the most strategic ways you can invest one-time money is in technology and facilities – not just end user devices, but infrastructure, and importantly, systems to make your work more efficient



# 6 Solutions for Funding Equity

1. Increase the base funding for all Districts to \$13,072.
2. Release limitations on how restricted dollars can be used.
3. Fully fund high schools.
4. Fully fund special education.
5. Reimburse school districts for transportation costs.
6. Fund adequate school facilities.



# New Detroit program puts support staff on the fast track to become teachers

By Lori Higgins | Oct 13, 2021, 7:17pm EDT

DETROIT

## Detroit Renaissance High School becomes home to national chess champions

 **Marina Johnson**  
Detroit Free Press

Published 2:38 p.m. ET April 7, 2023

Detroit Public Schools Community District Restores Art Programming at Detroit School of Arts and Feeder Schools

*In partnership with 24 Detroit-area organizations, DPSCD is investing in the arts – and setting the Detroit School of Arts on a path to becoming the premier performing arts school in the tri-county area.*



Students Rise. We All Rise.

NEWS > COMMUNITY CONNECTION



## Detroit Public Schools Community District students did better than expected in the M-STEP testing

Detroit Superintendent Nikolai Vitti named nation's top urban educator

By Lori Higgins | Oct 20, 2022, 9:00pm EDT

## Detroit's Candice Jackson Named Michigan Teacher of the Year

## Detroit Public Schools get two-notch upgrade to Ba3

## Detroit students improve reading, math scores across all tested grades



**Thank You**



**[Detroitk12.org](https://detroitk12.org)**