

VOICES OF YOUTH: METROPOLITAN DETROIT STUDENTS SPEAK OUT ON THEIR SCHOOLS

**Barry Checkoway and Jaimee Marsh with
Adriana Aldana, Taylor Bowerman, Bridget Christian,
David Edwards, Patrice Gaitskill, Mina Hong, Jessica Houpt,
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Jordan Rimsa, Shirisha Thota, Jenna Tully, Karltonio Jones,
and Oliver Lipscomb**



**Prepared by the
Metropolitan Detroit Youth Policy Leaders
Youth Dialogues on Race and Ethnicity
Michigan Youth and Community Program**

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Students should participate in educational policy decisions that affect their lives. They should have seats at the table, identify problems and issues that concern them, and formulate policies and initiatives to address them.



They should participate because it draws upon their special expertise and improves decisions which affect them. It increases their involvement at a time when adults alone cannot solve the problems. It prepares them for their roles as citizens, and enables them to exercise their rights in accordance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child.

Metropolitan Detroit is the nation's most segregated metropolitan area, resulting in institutional inequalities and social injustices. Recent reports indicate that Detroit fourth- and eighth graders had the

lowest mathematics scores in the 40-year history of a national test, with the expectation that they will be lowest in reading - whereas suburban school officials boast of the nation's most resourceful schools, only a few miles away.

The Michigan Youth and Community Program prepares metropolitan youth policy leaders to address educational problems and create community change. Its Youth Dialogues on Race and Ethnicity in Metropolitan Detroit, originated by the University of Michigan and the Skillman Foundation, enable them to join together from neighborhoods and suburbs, participate in intergroup dialogues, and speak on the issues. Please see www.youthandcommunity.org

We assume that youth participation is good for young people, for their schools, and for their communities. Thus, as part of the citywide education plan for Detroit led by the Excellent Schools Detroit Partnership, we conducted focus groups with young people, and are pleased to provide the following findings, in the words of the participants themselves.

PURPOSE AND PROCESS

We gathered information and ideas from students about their present and future schools, in coordination with community meetings and group discussions of the education planning process.

We conducted neighborhood discussions in the Rosedale Park-Brightmoor area and at Youthville Detroit on Woodward Avenue.

Youth policy leaders from the Michigan Youth and Community Program recruited their peers to participate in the process. The first meeting combined students from public schools with students from a parochial school in the neighborhood. They were entirely African-American students.

The second meeting represented the following schools: Renaissance, Communication and Media Arts, Southwestern, Northwestern, Detroit School of Art, Cass Tech, and Martin Luther King. They too were all African-American.

For comparison, we conducted two small group discussions in the suburbs of Farmington Hills and in Allen Park. The suburban students also were recruited by the youth leaders, and were predominantly European-American.

University of Michigan facilitators guided the discussions, which invited students to speak openly, with confidentiality, about their experiences in school, and to explore creative possibilities for the future. Students answered questions about the curriculum, teachers and principals, safety and discipline, pathways after school, facilities and environment, and diversity. Following are some of their responses.

DETROIT STUDENTS SPEAK OUT

Educational Excellence

- We want the basics. We want literature, reading, writing and grammar, math and science, and also computer literacy.**
- Ideal schools would have small classes, rather than the present large classes, which makes learning difficult.**
- We want to learn foreign languages to prepare us for the world in which we will live.**
- Schools should have extra curricular activities, such as clubs, teams, and bands.**

- Many students need afterschool support and tutoring. Schools should have programs to prevent them from dropping out, such as second chance programs, alternative schools with hands-on learning activities, online classrooms, night schools and weekend schools, and prizes for completion. They need sympathetic adults to serve as their mentors.
- We want classes that will expose us to real life situations and help us explore career options, such as business, architecture, engineering, fashion design, and cooking.

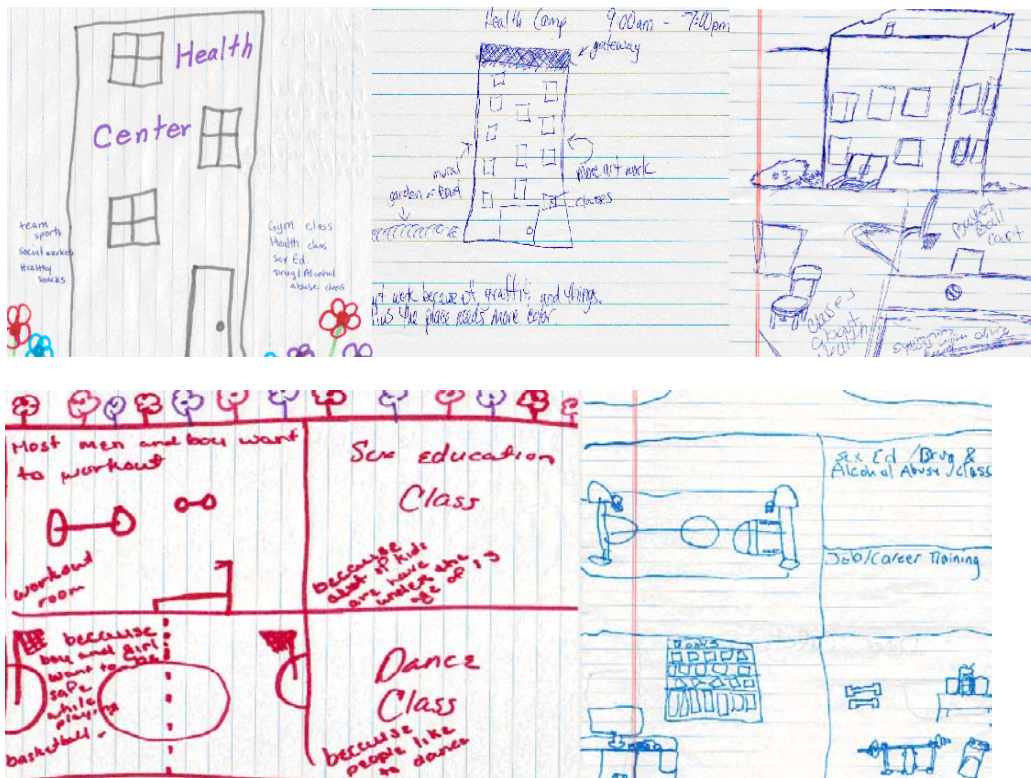
Teachers and Principals

- Some teachers don't want to be there, but I also have a teacher who comes to school at 6 a.m. to serve breakfast and leaves at 9 p.m. after helping with homework.
- I want more teachers that I can relate to and that come from our area so they know where we're coming from.
- There's a possibility for greatness in anyone, but we need teachers who love students and help them become the best they can be.

Safety and Discipline

- There is someone near the gas station who robs students on the way to school.
- There is a mentally ill person who wanders around our building. She is always drunk, and no one tells her to leave.
- Students from other schools are a danger.
We worry about them jumping us while walking to school.
- Schools should be safe havens for students, yet we are kept standing outside in the cold rather than entering the building.
- Some students are taking drugs and having sex in the hallways.
- We need stricter safety rules and enforcement by security guards that can handle problems inside and outside the schools. Guards should coordinate with the police department for surveillance of nearby neighborhoods.
- I can be expelled from school for being late, but public transportation is not reliable and there is nothing I can do about it.





Facilities and Services

- It is hard to concentrate when schools do not have heat in the winter or air conditioning in the summer.
- The floor of the cafeteria is always covered with trash, and the food is unhealthy.
- We have unsanitary bathrooms. Toilets are filthy, there is no hand soap or toilet paper, and there are no doors on the stalls. The plumbing doesn't work, and the floors are covered with water and waste.

Preparing for Life After School

- I want advanced placement courses to prepare us for college, and help with writing college applications and getting financial aid.
- I want people to talk to about making decisions for our futures, but our counselors are too busy with scheduling.
- There should be vocational programs to expose us to various fields and prepare us for work, such as cooking, architecture, and engineering.

Diversity

- Our school lacks racial diversity; we are all African-American, except for one Asian person. The Asian person is our diversity.
- In our school, we have a few students who are not African American, but do not interact with them.
- We could have school exchanges with suburban schools, open enrollment options with them, and bussing that allow us to attend their schools.
- We need courses and co-curricular programs that teach about cultural diversity and intergroup dialogue, and technology that enables us to communicate outside the neighborhood.

SUBURBAN STUDENTS SPEAK OUT

We asked similar questions in Farmington Hills and Allen Park, with the following responses.

Educational Excellence

- We need smaller classes.
- There should be less stress and pressure for getting into college. Parents and teachers emphasize college, students compete among themselves, and good grades are always in mind.
- We should increase language learning at the middle school level. Only French and Spanish are available at the present time, and an introduction to more languages will provide information before making a commitment.
- We should give students more freedom to take courses that truly interest them. In addition to math, science, history, English, and languages, students should have more choices and electives.

Teachers

- Teachers should give more time to students. I want teachers who spend time with you and help you understand, unlike others who come late and leave as soon as the bell rings.
- Don't just teach us, engage with us. Develop a relationship that goes beyond teaching. You don't need to know everything about our personal lives, but it's nice when we feel like you actually care about us as a person.
- The best teachers have the Honors classes. There is a sense that moving to an Honors class is a "promotion" for them.

Safety and Discipline

- Safety is not an issue in our school or community.
- I am driven to and from school, and always feel completely safe inside and outside the building.
- Our suburb ranks high on the list of safe communities.
- Some students speed their cars through the parking lot, and there are not always enough parking spots for all of the cars.

- There are always discipline issues, but they are minor, such as eating in the hallways, dress codes, junior prom.

Student Voice

- Administrators claim that we have voice, but we do not. They do not seek out opinions, they have no way of knowing how students feel about issues, and the principal always has an excuse for why something is not possible.
- I disagree. I am a member of the student council, and believe that if you use the proper channels then you can have a voice.
- If you really want to make a change, you'll find a way to make it happen.

What could be done to strengthen student voice?

- Comment boxes or surveys for student feedback.
- An advisory committee for the principal that is open to everyone, not just the selected few.
- Students should get together and organize their own groups to make something happen. Until this happens, administrators will not take students seriously, and nothing will change.

Preparing for Life After School

- I get good pre-college advice from my parents, teachers, and students already in college. Our counselors are too busy to talk about our future.
- We need afterschool program to gain hands-on experience and learn about different employment opportunities. We already have Autoshop and PreMed, and these should be expanded.
- We need more "real life" experiences to help students prepare for careers.
- We need better preparation for college, including preparation for the SAT and ACT exams and other standardized tests.

When suburban students were asked about the future, they responded:

- I plan to major in education.
- I want to attend medical school.
- I'm going to become a neonatal nurse practitioner
- I want to attend a school of veterinary medicine.
- I plan on going to a university for microbiology and pathology, and my AP classes prepare me for this.
- I want to be a marine biologist.

Diversity

- Asians and Indians are in advanced classes, but African-Americans are not.
- In our school, Asians stick together, Indians stick together, Black people stick together, White people stick together.
- Students never make derogatory comments about race or ethnicity, but think it is perfectly fine to yell things about being gay or lesbian.
- Discrimination is everywhere. If you are first generation, or speak a foreign language, or get good grades, then you experience discrimination. Students try to hide differences about themselves that are not easily visible, such as economic status and sexual orientation.
- Our school has cliques along many dimensions, not just race. People separate because of sports, clubs, dress, grades, appearance, weight, and quiet or loud.
- Teachers need training for handling sensitive situations.
- Instead, too often teachers want it “out of the classroom.”
- We need a more diverse student body.
- We should organize dialogues or discussions after school.
- There is a diversity club, but it’s small and no one participates. People sign up because they think it looks good on college applications.
- Parents need dialogues of their own. They are the ones who encourage what you think.
- Switch the seating chart around.
- Have a buddy school.
- Mix It Up at lunch.
- Pose challenging questions for discussion during class.

MOVING FORWARD

Four focus groups are insufficient for drawing broad generalizations, but it is possible to make the following observations.

Detroit Students

Students want teachers that are “genuinely interested in teaching.” They know and appreciate teachers and staff at their schools who take extra time to ensure that students are engaged in learning, understand the material, and receive help with assignments. However, students report that some teachers do not instruct nor maintain order in the classroom. Rather, these teachers read books or rely on worksheets to pass the time.

Students cannot relate to some teachers, especially one who are not from their neighborhoods. They suggested that teachers be mentored by community members to learn more about the culture and challenges. They are weary that their teachers are unequipped to handle conflicts and discussions about diversity in the classroom.

Safety and discipline are hot issues. Stricter enforcement and effective security guards are needed to protect students and keep unauthorized persons away. The journey to and from school is dangerous, and gangs and students from other high schools might jump them on their way to and from school.

However, some students feel empowered to take matters into their own hands, one of them claiming that “It’s up to the students to be accountable for making their schools safer, but they need tools such as conflict management skills.”

In addition to lacking basic resources such as books, desks, and school supplies, students report that schools lack proper facilities, such as working plumbing, clean bathrooms and lunchrooms, and heat in classroom. One student said that his school’s discipline policy that would not allow jackets and sweaters despite the fact that the building lacks heat.

Students from urban schools said that dropout rates are a problem. One said that not all dropouts are bad, but must support their families. This student said “You’d be surprised at the people who end up on the streets. They should have been on their way to Yale or Princeton.” Recommendations were made to support students to stay in and re-enter school, such as more accessible night classes and work-study with federal funding.

Suburban Students

Students want teachers who are qualified for the situations that they will actually face. They want teacher observations and better hiring procedures, to ensure that only the best teachers and substitute teachers engage students in learning and keep the classroom under control are hired.

Recognizing that the quality of teachers seems to increase as the level of the course increases, they believe students in general classes deserve equally as competent and dedicated teachers as students in advance placement and honors courses. Teachers should be conscious of how their attitudes affect the classroom environment.

Although students feel pressure to go to college and know what career path they want to choose, they have few resources to assist them with making these decisions. They say that their counselors are often so busy managing a high student load that they are unable to focus on more than scheduling. So, they often turn to fellow students, family, teachers with whom they share a personal relationship, or make these major life decisions on their own. They want more elective and afterschool classes to expose them to career opportunities.

One of the two suburban schools prides itself on being diverse - the other is 96 percent white. Students notice that there is too little interaction between races at school. Students in the school with more students of color recognize that there are not many African-American students in advanced placement courses.

Beyond race, people are outspoken about sexual orientation: “Some people would never yell out derogatory comments about race or ethnicity, but they think it is perfectly fine to yell things about being gay or lesbian.” Students also note that people “hide” other kinds of diversity that are not physically apparent, such as economic status, religious preference, and sexual orientation, because they do not want other people to know or discriminate against them.

When asked about opportunities for their voices to be heard, suburban students had mixed reactions. Students who are not involved in student council feel very disenfranchised, commenting that, “The administrators are so disconnected from the students and the teachers that they have no way of knowing how people feel about issues.”

Other students who do participate in student council felt that channels to provide student feedback exist and must be utilized in order to be effective. Another group of students believed that although channels for student voice exist, that administrators still do not care about their opinions. Some felt that administrators always have an “excuse” for why an idea is not possible to actualize.

Students want connection between themselves and the administrators, and suggested comment boxes, advisory committees, and an environment where administrators take students seriously. They believe in the power of student activism stating, “If you really want to make a change, you’ll find a way to make it happen. I don’t get the vibe that they are completely against us.”

URBAN AND SUBURBAN

In general, students from both urban and suburban schools want an excellent education. They want small classes with standard content, AP classes that prepare them for college and vocational classes that prepare them for work.

Both groups also want a wider variety of courses with more foreign languages. They agree about wanting curriculum that current and hands-on to help them learn more job and life skills to make better informed decisions about their career paths. They desire more funding to enhance and diversify extracurricular activities such as sports and clubs. They want more variety and healthier food on the lunch menu.

Students want stronger commitment to education from students, teachers, and staff. They desire dedicated teachers who are engaging and genuinely interested in teaching. They want to form personal connections with teachers through smaller classes and more individualized time. They recognize the great teachers and want to recognize them for their hard work, but report that, “It only takes one or two teachers who are bad to make it seem like everyone is bad.”

In regard to diversity, Detroit students describe their schools as segregated, students from one suburban school also describe their school as segregated, whereas students from the other suburban school report a measure of diversity, yet even among diversity there is discrimination. They want to communicate with people who are different from themselves, through intergroup dialogue inside and outside the classroom, and activities that bridge boundaries that separate them.

Suburban students feel safe inside and outside their school, mentioning only automobile traffic making them feel unsafe. Meanwhile, students from urban schools are distracted by constant threats to their safety both in school and walking to school, including unauthorized persons entering the building, gang violence, and ineffective security and discipline measures.

The learning ability of urban students is compromised by lack of basic resources. Suburban students are preoccupied with college preparation and future careers, want more advanced classes, and some of them feel stressed by teachers, parents, and fellow students with whom they compete.

Overall, students are adept at naming the issues in their schools and recommending solutions to these problems, and recognize that improving schools requires joint effort from students and teachers. Some of them feel empowered to take action for positive change than others, and there are suburban students who believe they can accomplish anything they want if they just organize and follow the proper channels.

Urban students lack basic resources and facilities such as books and heat, and live in fear for their safety to an extent that hinders their ability to think beyond survival and passing each grade. This is not to say that these students lack resources; rather, they have life experience and street smarts that enable them to navigate their schools and communities. Despite challenges, some students believe that: “There’s a possibility for greatness, but we need teachers who make the students what they should be, who love what they do.”



MORE CHAIRS AT THE TABLE?

Our metropolitan youth policy leaders are aware of the conditions in Detroit's public schools, and also of the discrepancies between schools in the neighborhoods and the suburbs. They have ideas about what should be done to create change, even though they themselves are not the cause of the problems which affect them.

They are prepared to discuss the decisions that shape metropolitan areas and create disparities between schools. They are painfully aware of these disparities from their everyday experiences, and believe that excellent education should be a right for all.

They want to participate in public policy. However, when they present their ideas, they notice that adults do not listen to them, even though they are experts on the schools they attend. Why not pull up a few more chairs at the table?



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Reflections by the Metropolitan Detroit Youth Policy Leaders

Following the focus groups, we invited Metropolitan Detroit Youth Policy Leaders to reflect on these questions: What is the most important problem? What should be done?

DAKARAI CARTER

I think that the main problem with the Detroit Public Schools is that the money in the schools is not being properly managed. There is not enough money to give students the things they really need. For example students lacking basic essentials like books, tissue, computers and things of that nature. As an effect of not having the proper money and supplies students are dropping out of school. This is the reason why DPS has the most dropout rates in the county. Money management and the lack there of is the main reason why we have a problem in DPS.

I think we can do a lot to solve this problem. We can start by contracting important people and explain to them what the problem is. We can also meet with people in the finance department to make sure money is being properly allocated in the school system. We can also try to break up schools into different districts so they are easier to manage. There should also be a monthly announcement telling students and parents how they are creating change in the public school system and charter school should work together with public schools to figure out some sort of solution to this problem.

PATRICE GAITSKILL

I've been a Detroit student for the past eight years, and I've never seen a school system in worse shape than it is now. Our funds are mismanaged, and our resources are at an all time low. Since this is happening students feel as though they are not a priority, and finding it hard to focus. I feel that it is ridiculous that the stalls in the bathroom have no doors or toilet paper. Even more egregious is the lack of resources in the classroom. There is no justifiable reason that every student does not have their own book, and has to gather information from photocopies. Another problem is, the teachers are uninspired, and show no interest in teaching. Uninspired teachers result in uninspired students.

I think the biggest concrete milestone of improvement would be, better standardized test scores. If the test scores in Detroit were to improve, it would be evidence of a progressive change in our education system, as well as school.

JOCELYN PYLES

I attend Detroit School of Arts which is a part of the Detroit Public School Systems.

I believe all our problems are self inflicted, caused by mismanagement. Money is spent towards the "wants" and not on the "needs" of the students - which is a problem when your school does not have enough toilet paper and soap to protect ourself from the common cold or H1N1. We need more dedicated teachers who like to teach and who can relate to us as the youth. We the students of DPS should have a say so in everything that has anything to do with us. So shouldn't we have a voice in what affects us as youth???

We the students should have a Detroit Public Youth School Board made up of about 25 which we the Detroit Public School Students to vote and elect on our youth to represent us. We would express our ideas and thoughts on what we think would be a benefit to us. Such as different programs that we would like to collaborate with. We need a Detroit Public School System that cares.

JENNA TULLY

"I am DPS" has been the slogan for Detroit Public Schools for as long as I can remember. But how many students in Detroit or even DPS graduates can you find who are proud to say that? In the shape that the Detroit Public School system is in right now, the numbers aren't too high. There are a multitude of problems that are contributing to the DPS downfall but I'd say our main concern should be the quality of the education that our students are getting and whether or not that education is preparing them for the college and career atmosphere we are hoping to send them to. I believe that most Detroit Public Schools do not have the wide curriculum that will provide a student with the option to discover what interests them and explore different career paths. Upon entering college, how will a student have any idea what he or she wants to major in if he or she has never been exposed to life outside of the typical math, science and English classes?

As a graduate from Cass Technical High School, I am very proud to say that I am DPS. The reason I am so proud to say this is because I know at Cass Technical High School I received the best education in not only Detroit, but possibly in the state of Michigan. What makes Cass so different from the rest? Their various career based curriculums allow students to choose the path they want to follow, just like a college major, and take courses based on this path so that they can get a feel for what they want to do in life. For example, I was a student in the Manufacturing Technology curriculum at Cass. I took multiple drafting and CAD courses from 9th to 12th grade that taught me not only how to draft mechanical parts, but also how to design these parts with the latest CAD programs available.

I am now a freshman at U of M Dearborn studying Mechanical Engineering, and I can honestly say the drafting and CAD classes I took at Cass put me light years ahead of students who never had access to those kinds of classes at their schools. Cass also has a wide range of honors and AP courses that most Detroit Public Schools do not. Schools lacking these types of classes are taking away a golden opportunity that could potentially put their students ahead of the game in college.

In conclusion, I believe that all schools should develop career based courses that will give students the option to explore different career opportunities along with more AP courses that will give them the chance to earn college credit in high school. I realize that all schools do not have the funding to develop many different curriculums like Cass but I do believe they should make electives that are career based and give their students the option to take these courses as they wish.

JESSICA HOUP T

I believe the lack of preparation for life after school is the biggest problem. Teachers strictly teach information that pertains to a specific course; students are not taught how to prepare for their future. Students are taught to memorize state representatives and other officials, however not taught how to use them as resources. Knowing an official's name will help a student pass their government test, knowing how to make changes through an official will help a student in their future. Due to the fact that schools' curriculums are based on memorizing information, students are not informed on anything else. An example of this is how to apply for college. Students can fill out the basic name and address forms; however an application consists of more difficult information too. This other part of the application often confuses and discourages students from even applying.

Teachers should teach other information besides just out of a text book. They should teach students information they learned from experience, and inform students how to use the information they learn in real life situations. Also, consolors should help students plan for their future; not just schedule required classes. All in all, students need educators to not only teach them required information but help them prepare for life after they walk out of their high school on graduation day.

SHIRISHA THOTA

I personally believe that the most important issue we face today is the quality of education. As illustrated by this report, there are many disparities in our schools. I was raised to believe that education is one of the fundamental rights of life and the key to your future. To this day I believe that statement. America prides itself on equal education for all but that sometimes fails to prove itself in the actual classroom.

I attend Farmington High School, in a cozy sheltered suburb near Detroit. I would consider Farmington to be a privileged community. My friends in Detroit do not have access to the same resources/teachers/test preparation/technology that I have yet they are somehow expected to compete for the same universities students from Suburbs are. In some school in Detroit, when the teacher is not there for the day or is on a long term leave, whether it is for 2 weeks or half a school year, there is no substitute teacher. This means that students sometimes go through half the semester without a teacher and yes they are still expected to have the same test scores. While students in the suburbs are surrounded with brand new laptops at our homes, schools, libraries and internet even on our cell phones, our peers in the city do not have access to computers anywhere. And somehow we are still competing for IT jobs in the 21st century.

According to a jobs resource website about 90% of our jobs now require some sort of computer skills. So this is the promised equal educational for all? Also basic resources such toilet paper, bathrooms that aren't a health hazard, text books in classrooms, teachers, and a safe environment where students don't feel constantly threatened should NOT be luxury. These should be mandatory every school, in every community across the country. Students are being stripped of their basic dignity when they can't go to the bathroom because they are too ashamed. If these same conditions were present in an adult facility, they would not be tolerated, so how can we expect the same from our youth? Investing in our schools is investing in our future.

For improving the schools systems we need funding which is the number one problem for the Detroit public schools to obtain with the economy state and reputation on not outstanding scores in MEAP and other tests. To solve this, the DPS system need to make a plan and show that if the government gives them a specific amount of money what they will do with this money and how it will lead to positive results. For where the money should go the students should have an opinion too. If DPS claims that the students are the problem then we need to make sure that students are in the solution to improve the school systems. Once the money is obtained, improving the quality of education should be the first goal. First by improving the facilities for students and then making sure that with the right learning environment student can go much further in their scores. This is what I think should be done and is the most efficient way to higher the quality of education."

ASHNA KHANNA

"I think that the most important problem is the quality of education. For every school the most significant goal is to successfully educate the young minds of America today to their best extent. In achieving this goal America's future is brighter as the young citizens of today make up our future tomorrow. That is why the first problem that anyone should consider for improving the school systems is to first higher the quality of education. There are many different points that make up the quality of education. One of the first is to make sure that every school has the facilities needed to allow the student to successfully try their hardest in succeeding in their studies. For example every student should have the proper material to do well in the subject, as in books, resources

to computers, and anything else needed to achieve in the subject. In order to make sure that every student has the appropriate material, supervisors need to make sure that the money is being used in the right places and right ways. To also improve the quality of education we need to make sure that students have the right learning environment and right communication amongst their peers and teachers. Taking these few points into consideration and improving them, the quality of education for a student can go much higher and conclude with positive results.”

One of the biggest reasons for this is the mismanagement of funds. When tax payers are bearing the costs they deserve to know how their money is being spent. One of the first things that need to be done is making data available to public about how the money is spent. This can be done through databases or online spread sheets. A number of government agencies have already implemented this tactic. Also, schools and districts need to prioritize their issues. If a school is spending money on a new track field even though there is not a single computer in the building, the students and parents will now be able to view this database and protest. This transparency will lead to greater accountability. As of now, this has become a blame game, with no one owning up to the situation to the extent that students are now being blamed. If we are part of the problem then we have to part of the solution. We maybe young but we are not incompetent. The only this can be resolved is if we all work together.

Also basic resources such toilet paper, bathrooms that aren't a health hazard, text books in classrooms, teachers, and a safe environment where students don't feel constantly threatened should NOT be luxury. These should be mandatory every school, in every community across the country. Students are being stripped of their basic dignity when they can't go to the bathroom because they are too ashamed. If these same conditions were present in an adult facility, they would not be tolerated, so how can we expect the same from our youth? Investing in our schools is investing in our future.

KARLTONIO JONES

The most important problem is the school district of Detroit is “uniforms.” The reason why is because a lot of students don't concentrate and be comfortable enough when in the learning process. Administrators think that uniforms help students focus, but it doesn't. It doesn't really make too much of a difference and students don't like looking like one another. How come other high schools such as in the suburban areas don't have to wear uniforms? For Cass Tech to be a college prep school, it doesn't feel like fully because we all look alike.

So how can we as youth leaders solve that issue? What do we suppose to do? Well, what we can do is try wearing anything we want to school such as jeans, t-shirts, etc. Some teachers say that not being in uniform causes fights. It really doesn't because not everybody care about who wears what. People will be childish and try to steal someone's new shoes, but it's a 5% chance of that happening though. So, how about in the Detroit school district, let's go back to no uniform policy and see how it works.

JORDAN RIMSA

The most important problem facing education today is undoubtedly the quality of teachers. Students receive not only education from their teachers but motivation and roles to model as well. If a teacher does not want to be in the classroom teaching or teaches with no enthusiasm or encouragement, why would any pupil be motivated to learn? This may sound outlandish but I have personally encountered and been taught by numerous teachers that clearly do not want to be teaching. Quality teachers that are genuinely interested in the success of their students will drive the students to succeed. For example, teachers interested in said success will make an effort to be available to the student. If a student doesn't have his or her teacher available to him/her, how can the student be expected to learn? Of course, there are always external options available such as tutoring or other learning assist programs, but these are often costly and not readily accessible to the average student. After all, the teacher is being paid to teach as it is - but to what extent does "being paid to teach" go?

Furthermore, interested teachers will (generally speaking) turn out interested students, which brings parents into the process. If a student goes home every day and talks about how much they learned in class or even about school at all, this is more likely to get parents involved, which is also a critical part of the educational process. Motivation needs to come from home as well and by teachers doing their jobs, everything will ideally fall into place. Teachers need to dedicate themselves to their pupils to foster a motivational and successful learning environment.

To solve the issue of poor quality teachers, more rigorous standards need to be established for both current and incoming teaching staff. These standards would include a mandatory amount of time made available before or after school for students so that students can have a more personal and helpful learning experience and some sort of qualitative measurement on teacher motivation. This extra time should not necessarily include a pay increase as well. It is well known that public education is financially demanding and money is tight in such environments. Therefore, this requirement could be "strongly encouraged" by administration in buildings, with perhaps a reward of some sort (e.g. a raffle for a free lunch/dinner) for participating teachers.

For teachers to be more motivating to their students, they will need more than a workshop or seminar; it will need to be made a requirement. The only way to realistically make this happen is to repeatedly remind teachers of how critical a positive learning environment with encouragement and motivation is to learning. After doing so, administration could sit in on teachers' classes to see if any increase in motivation is taking place. If this requirement is made mandatory, it is extremely probable that teachers will change their methods, especially if it is in their job requirements.

ANONYMOUS

I think that the most important problem is safety and discipline along with the quality of facilities. The basis to a good education is a positive and healthy learning environment. If we are going to address any issue, this should be the 1st and most important one we should get into solving. No matter how good your classes and teachers are, how diverse your classrooms are, if there is not a clean cafeteria and bathrooms, and students are crossing their fingers to not getting jumped on the way to school, there is no way that any learning can happen. It is pitiful that students should have to go through all this stress and trouble while still being expected to maintain a positive attitude and get through school.

Drugs and tobacco in the hallways is something that is unheard of at my school and it makes me disgusted to realize that other students, just like me, have to see that in their school. You can just picture a kid in an urban school who asks the teacher to go use the bathroom during class hours—1st you have to walk through the hallways. There's a possibility that you'll meet a mentally ill drunk that is not permitted to be in the school. Then you might see some people doing crack in the corner of the hall. Then to enter that bathroom and have sewage and water around your feet is just depressing. Even there you might meet some guys that are smoking weed. All this just to go to the bathroom? That is horrifying; when I need to use the bathroom at my school, a suburban school, I don't even think of it.

I walk through the hallways in which there is a security guard monitoring almost every single one (and anyways they usually don't have to do anything) and just go to the bathroom where there is perfectly working toilets, and for the most part, they are pretty sanitary because they *are* cleaned every day, but it's really hard to keep it that way through an entire day. Also in our bathrooms there are always adequate amounts of toilet paper and hand soap. Along with that, we have hand sanitizer in every single class. And I have never ever had to worry about seeing a drunk and mentally ill person wandering the halls I do let alone seeing kids doing drugs. We once had a report on drugs, and the Dearborn Police Department was almost immediately at the school with K-9 dogs sniffing every single corner of the school and the suspect was found.

What should be done to solve the problem is speak out. No human is biologically better or superior to any other; therefore everyone deserves a positive and healthy learning environment. Basically, the only solution to this is going to be a bit of funding from Lansing. There will need to be hired fearless security guards who are paid decent wages in order for them to have incentives to work. The Detroit Police Department should be in alliance with the security staff at schools and should make an appearance if conditions reach a climax of seriousness. There should be a K-9 dog that should be picked up every day from the police station and the security guard should walk around the halls constantly and daily in order to find the source of drugs and eliminate it. Convicted students also should be cared for maybe the state sending them to rehab facilities in order to sober them up. There should be empathy towards them because even though drugs are never to any degree correct to use, these students that *do* use them most likely come from poor backgrounds and do not know any better.

And finally, for the bathrooms, what should simply happen is that a plumber is called. If the school district cannot afford this, Lansing is not going to go broke if they fund one school's plumbing systems. Janitors should be hired and given decent wages also in order to keep the cafeterias and bathrooms clean and healthy.

BRIDGET CHRISTIAN

If you are saying that students are part of the problem and then aren't we part of the solution then too. How can you fix a problem without talking to the problem? Why do Unions full of teachers get to negotiate with schools systems but students don't even get a voice at the table. Don't you have a job because of us? If the solution starts with us then you must talk to us, understand us, and engage us. We must be part of the solution. And what evidence do you have that our ideas and our energy will not be more productive than yours? Do you think we want to go to schools like these? We do not have all the answers and we know working with us comes with challenges but you will never get the change you really want to see until you let us be a part of the process of making our schools better.