

# The Detroit College Promise

*You've got to believe* 



## **Program Summary**

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## **Introduction**

The Detroit College Promise is a tax exempt nonprofit organization modeled on the well-known and successful Kalamazoo Promise. Its mission is to get families excited about education by offering them a financial incentive simply for enrolling in Detroit Public Schools (DPS) and living in Detroit. It also seeks to strengthen DPS and the City of Detroit. The financial incentive is a scholarship that can be used at any Michigan public college or university within 10 years of high school graduation. Students register starting in kindergarten, but must register by December 1 of grade 9 to be eligible.

The Detroit College Promise is unique in that it awards scholarship certificates to students in the 9th grade or earlier. This certificate provides hope, vision and direction, and creates early college awareness. The Detroit College Promise then supports students in college readiness. Each month, students and their parents/guardians are informed by newsletter about resources relating to academic assistance, college readiness, financial aid and other scholarships.

## **Background**

Due to the loss of thousands of manufacturing jobs in Michigan, the need for Detroit's students to graduate high school and obtain a higher education is critical. Unfortunately, the Detroit Public Schools has a high dropout rate and a low percentage of students with college readiness. To allow this situation to persist will greatly amplify the existing problems in the City and region. There are no easy solutions; to wait until other problems have been solved is unacceptable. We have to start now by changing the perception and the street culture towards higher education in Detroit.

The Detroit College Promise is working towards this goal. Our program is based on The Kalamazoo Promise. In Kalamazoo, anonymous donor or donors created a scholarship fund and promised students that if they graduated from Kalamazoo Public Schools and lived in Kalamazoo at least from 9<sup>th</sup> grade through graduation, they would be offered a scholarship to any Michigan public college or university. The amount of the Kalamazoo Promise scholarship varies based on the years of continuous enrollment from kindergarten through graduation.

The Kalamazoo Promise was economically motivated. Although its purpose was to provide students with a goal to graduate and go to college, it was also designed to keep families living in Kalamazoo, and to encourage people with children to move back into Kalamazoo to realize the financial benefit of a "free" or almost free college education.

It worked. Kalamazoo was one of the few areas in Michigan to actually increase in population during 2005 to 2009. Test scores have increased, graduation rates have increased, and a higher percentage of students are attending college. The Kalamazoo Promise has become an educational and economic development model for other communities. As in Kalamazoo, The Detroit College Promise endeavors both to keep existing families in Detroit and in the Detroit Public schools, as well as to encourage young people who are attracted to urban life to move back into Detroit.

## **The Program**

For students who have parents that aspire for their child to go to college, there are many avenues that parents can choose to pay for college education, including savings, loans and other scholarships. However, many

Detroit students live in unstable homes, and often have people telling them that they won't make it and are foolish to aspire to such lofty goals. Even without these disincentives, these students may not consider college, because the financial challenges seem unsolvable.

These are the students that the Detroit College Promise is trying to reach. They are the ones that need to become aware of and recognize that higher education is the road to a better life.

The Detroit College Promise "incentive" scholarship is different from other scholarship programs. Students apply for the scholarship in kindergarten through ninth grade. To date, **over 17,000** DPS students have applied. Students can apply at school or online. The application process is very simple: students fill out a one page form or the online equivalent. They pledge to stay in school, be the best student they can be, and when successful, return to DPS to help other students. Once they are registered, both students and parents/guardians receive a monthly email newsletter which provides a broad range of information to help students and their families prepare for college, including programs by other organizations, information about financial aid and scholarship details.

Students who register receive a scholarship certificate in grade 9. It gives the student who has been thinking about college an incentive to work towards their goal and the assurance that they can get there financially. It gives students who may not have considered college due to financial restraints the opportunity to do so. It provides hope and an incentive to graduate to students who had given up academically, because they saw no tangible benefit to graduate. The scholarship also motivates parents to be supportive, even if they saw college for their child as financially unattainable. The students also receive Letters of Encouragement, with their scholarship certificate, from President Obama, former Governor Granholm, and many others who want to encourage these students.

## Scholarship Details

Our program began with the class of 2009, with scholarships offered to graduates of Cody High School in Detroit. For the class of 2010, we expanded the program to graduates of Cass Tech, Central, Cody, Douglass, Pershing and Trombly High Schools. For the classes of 2011 and beyond, we offer scholarships to **all** DPS students at **all** DPS high schools.

For the **classes of 2011 to 2014**, the only requirements for the scholarship are that the student:

- (a) apply by December 1, 2010,
- (b) enroll in a DPS high school and live in Detroit continuously from December 1, 2010 through graduation, and
- (c) send us completed paperwork on time (one page scholarship acceptance form, copy of high school transcript, copy of financial aid letter from college / university attending)

For the classes of 2015 and beyond, students must apply by December 1 of their 9th grade year.

The scholarship award is based on the balance due, if any, for tuition and mandatory fees at any Michigan public college or university, after application of FAFSA related grants. For the class of 2011, we will pay up to \$500 for one year. If FAFSA related grants pay 100% of tuition, we pay \$100 towards a book stipend. For the class of 2012, we plan to increase the award to two years, then three years for the class of 2013 and four years for the class of 2014. For the class of 2015, we hope to increase the maximum scholarship to \$10,000 per student (\$2500 per year for 4 years), and eventually we will offer up to full tuition for four years.

In addition, all DPS graduates who complete the requirements listed above, regardless of what college / university they attend or where they live, are invited to a reception and receive a gift package of clothes, office supplies and other items donated by sponsors.

## **Financial Aid**

Our award, although currently modest, motivates students to fill out the FAFSA form, which provides substantial dollars. For the 2010-2011 college academic year, 28 of 44 (64%) of students who completed our paperwork had 100% of their tuition paid for by FAFSA-related and other grants, including our award. For the others, most had over half of their tuition paid by these grants. These 44 students received \$408,964 in grants from all sources, averaging \$9295 in grants per student. The average grant per student varied from \$9965 for those attending a university to \$5050 for those attending a community college. Once students apply for our scholarship, and are told they have already gotten their first scholarship, they have more confidence to fill out the FAFSA and apply for other grants.

For the 2011-2012 college academic year, our program is open to all DPS high schools. We project that we will award 125-150 scholarships, and that these students will receive \$1 million or more in grants from all sources.

## **Website**

The Detroit College Promise website at [www.DetroitCollegePromise.org](http://www.DetroitCollegePromise.org) contains comprehensive information about our program. It includes an online application, all forms and flyers, information about individual DPS schools, frequently asked questions (FAQ), online contribution forms and organizational news. The **Links** page contains relevant articles and references. All pages are updated regularly.

## **Executive Director**

Nat Pernick, M.D., a pathologist and attorney, founded The Detroit College Promise in February 2008. The Detroit College Promise is sponsored by his business, PathologyOutlines.com, Inc. Pernick is a third generation Detroitier who served as a Board Member and Vice-Chair of the Oakland County Community Mental Health Services Board during 1988 to 1994. His father, Larry Pernick, of blessed memory, was an Oakland County Commissioner for 29 years, through 1997.

Pernick has had careers in computers, law and medicine. He has worked as a computer programmer/consultant since 1974 for the University of Michigan Hospitals, the National Institutes of Health and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan. As an attorney, he ran his own law practice for over 20 years, focusing on commercial litigation and collections. From 1990 to 2008, he served as a Special Assistant Attorney General, representing the State of Michigan under Attorneys General Frank Kelley, Jennifer Granholm and Mike Cox. Pernick is also a board certified pathologist in anatomic and clinical pathology. In 2001, he started a business involving free online reference textbooks which he wrote for pathologists ([PathologyOutlines.com](http://PathologyOutlines.com)). The textbook is continuously updated, and are entirely supported by advertising. This business is sponsoring the charity in its early years, and serves as a model for accomplishing the important but ambitious task of changing the education culture in Detroit - by starting small, overcoming obstacles, and growing over time in a fiscally responsible manner. Pernick also does research trying to relate the laws of complexity and self-organization to cancer.

## **Board of Directors**

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**Jennifer Wallace**, Outreach Manager, Financial Aid Programs - Michigan Education Trust (State of Michigan)  
**Angela Wilson**, Communities in Schools, Director of Innovation and Enterprise

## Relationships With Other Organizations

**Arise Detroit:** assists in networking with other organizations and publicizing Detroit College Promise programs.

**City Year Detroit:** its corp members assist students in registering and provide mentoring.

**Communities in Schools:** works with DCP at various high schools - facilitates college preparedness activities.

**Detroit Parent Network:** collaborates in supporting parental involvement in education for Detroit students.

**Detroit Public Library:** provides free computer use for students, computer related courses, ACT preparation materials, other college readiness activities, and assistance in promoting our programs.

**Detroit Public Schools:** collaborates to help administer and publicize our programs.

**Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce:** facilitates networking with other organizations, helps us promote The Detroit Compact.

**Detroit Urban League:** administrates a College Club, which helps prepare high school students for college.

**Michigan Area Health Education Center (AHEC):** helps promote our program, and helps our students learn about health related careers.

**Michigan's public colleges and universities:** coordinates aspects of the program, supplies members to our Advisory Board, and donates college related items for our scholarship applicants.

**United Negro College Fund:** provides a member to our Advisory Board and assisted in setting up the DCP program.

**Youth Development Commission:** acted as fiduciary prior to DCP's receipt of tax exempt status.

## Organizational expenses

To date, all organizational expenses have been paid by sponsors, primarily PathologyOutlines.com, Inc. This includes staff, rent, utilities, fundraising costs and other office expenses. Additionally, Dr. Pernick has contributed \$30,000 towards funding the Detroit College Promise scholarships.

## Financial standards

The Detroit College Promise adheres to the highest standards of financial accountability, and is audited annually. The Board of Directors has two financial experts. Donors and other funders should note that scholarship dollars are paid directly to colleges and universities, not parents, students or DPS.

## Contributions & Grants

The Detroit College Promise is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit. Contributions are welcome from individuals, businesses and nonprofits, as are contributions to expand our endowment. Income from the endowment will be used to fund the "promise" on an ongoing basis.

## Additional information

To encourage and generate excitement about reading among DPS students and parents, the DCP website contains a Books page, which lists various award winning books. Included are also "favorite books" by local celebrities.

For additional information, please contact the Executive Director, Dr. Nat Pernick, at 248/646-3269, or visit [www.DetroitCollegePromise.org](http://www.DetroitCollegePromise.org).