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Special Letter: Parents key to Detroit's school revival

If we want to improve the Detroit Public Schools, we have to understand that the most important factor is the extent of parental involvement. Without sufficient parental involvement, school systems are likely to fail, whether in urban, suburban or rural areas.

Parents must be involved in many ways -- by telling their children (in word and deed) that education is important, by making sure their children attend classes and do their homework, and by attending parent teacher conferences and other activities. A sufficient number of parents must volunteer in the schools, support school fundraisers and participate in parent-teacher association meetings. At least some parents need to work regularly with the school principals and attend school board meetings.

Detroit has many parents who are actively involved in the public schools, but not enough. Many parents are frustrated and ready to give up on DPS.

To turn the Detroit school system around, we have to support and encourage the parents of Detroit students.

Some local organizations, such as the Detroit Parents Network and the Skillman Foundation, train parents how to be more successful and encourage them to be more active. I believe parents also are motivated, albeit indirectly, by programs emulating the Kalamazoo Promise, which provides the financial incentive of noncompetitive, easy-to-obtain college scholarships to students in public schools.

The scholarships also bring more parents into the community who value education. The new parents will work with existing parents to improve the schools their children are attending.

Our own local experience supports this theory about the importance of parental involvement. We need to ensure that parents are spending enough time interacting with the public school systems that they own.

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