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## Bobb: Why parents matter

DPS aims to engage them, guardians in school transformations

*ROBERT C. BOBB AND SHARLONDA BUCKMAN*

The transformation of Detroit Public Schools over the next five years into one of the nation's top-performing districts will require not just a vision of excellence, but the community's collective commitment to making that vision reality.

We cannot achieve our goals without the help of parents and guardians, whose children are at the center of every decision we make. That's why Detroit Public Schools and the Detroit Parent Network, an independent non-profit organization, launched Parent and Community Engagement 2.0, a Title I initiative to involve many more parents and guardians in their children's learning by fostering collaborative support and community interaction.

Doing this is critical given the challenges we face. Unfortunately far too many students don't have the parental role models they need to help them be successful in school. Studies show that active parents make a difference from the most basic -- getting kids to school everyday -- to helping with homework and praising them for doing well.

We also all know that illiteracy and parental absenteeism are problems and contribute to why we're pushing for greater involvement. But parents often also are afraid of change or are suspicious of those coming in to help. That's got to change because the problems facing DPS are too big to let continue.

It can happen. Good schools don't exist without parental involvement -- and good students need both. Those connections are essential to this plan's success.

We understand the challenge is significant, but DPS and the Detroit Parent Network can affect change. By 2015, the district will increase from 31 percent of schools meeting Adequate Yearly Progress to 100 percent; the district will move from 58 percent of students graduating to 98 percent graduating; and the percentage of students being accepted to postsecondary institutions will jump from 35 percent to 100 percent.

The DPS Academic Plan is ambitious, but the standards are attainable. It can only work, however, if parents and guardians become active in helping their children succeed. At a minimum, they must ensure their children get a good night's sleep and arrive at school on time. Every day.

Further, parents and guardians are our children's first teachers. From the outset, they must have high expectations for their academic performance and behavior. They must create the kind of environment where our children can flourish after they exit DPS each day.

Together, we can make Detroit a model of improvement for our students and for school systems nationally. Detroit deserves that. Our children deserve it. Our parents demand it. We must make it happen.

DPS is working with the Detroit Parent Network to improve parental involvement throughout the city by providing the resources, training and support parents and guardians need to help the children. An effort of this magnitude is unprecedented in the city. We are reaching out to engage parents so they communicate to us the assistance they need.

## Parent Resource Centers

Parent and Community Engagement 2.0 was developed with input from parents, guardians and community leaders, and includes the creation of seven new Parent Resource Centers that will be located inside DPS schools throughout the city. Set to open in April and May, they will provide one-stop shopping to help parents and guardians overcome barriers that can hamper their children's academic performance.

Planned services at the centers include child care, GED support, job training, support groups, MEAP support and coffee talks on parent engagement. We hope to have evening and weekend hours so the centers become true community centers.

For issues that cannot be handled directly at the centers, staff will refer parents to agencies that can help.

## Parent, guardian input

We too often hear from parents who tell us they need more ways to talk to each other and to get engaged with schools. School leaders will invite more parents to be part of the conversations.

The Citywide Education Plan that was announced recently brought together a broad coalition of people who care about raising the bar for all of Detroit's children, and we are excited to take part. While much attention is paid to governance models present and future, the success of the DPS and citywide academic plans ultimately depends on parents demanding only the highest academic standards and high-achieving programs in excellent facilities.

With parental input, the citywide plan as a guide and the new Standards and Accountability Commission as a watchdog, we can single out and force closure of schools that fail.

Every school in the city, whether charter, private or DPS, should aim for the same high standards. The viability of the city and the region depend on it.

## Additional Facts

About the authors

**Robert C. Bobb** is emergency financial manager for Detroit Public Schools.

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