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College aid sought for DPS students

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A Huntington Woods pathologist hopes to start a college tuition program for Detroit Public Schools students, hoping to draw residents back to the city.

Modeled after Kalamazoo Promise, Nat Pernick's program would provide some tuition to students who live in the district for at least four years. As in Kalamazoo, students who live in the district from Kindergarten through 12th grade and maintain at least a 2.0 grade-point average would receive 100% tuition coverage at a Michigan public university or community college.

Pernick is providing \$25,000 in seed money, hoping businesses, non-profits and community members kick in a total of \$500,000 to start funding the program.

He said he hopes to recreate the success of Kalamazoo's program in Detroit.

"I think it will make the region much stronger, and of course it will help directly the people who get the scholarship," Pernick said today. "But I think it will help all of us if we have a stronger central city."

Since Kalamazoo Promise began in 2005, about 750 students have received tuition, executive administrator Bob Jorth said today. The 11,250-student school district's enrollment jumped about 11% last year.

The school-based program seems to also have jump-started the local economy, Jorth said. "The donors had hoped it would be a catalyst community-wide, even outside of Kalamazoo Public Schools' boundaries," Jorth said. "We've

had new job announcements — about 5,000 in the last six months. It's not all directly attributable to the Promise, but it's certainly a part of the culture here now."

No one knows how much is currently banked by the Kalamazoo program's anonymous backers, known only as a small group of donors who funnel money through the non-profit corporation. Tuition payments are made from Kalamazoo Promise directly to the colleges, which has been proposed in Detroit, too.

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