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What is the secret to successful public schools? Some people believe it is a strong principal or dedicated teachers. This is certainly important, but let me suggest something else the most important factor for a successful public school or school district is having a critical mass of involved parents. Parents pressure their school board to be effective and push the staff at their schools, and their children, to do their best. Roy Roberts, the emergency manager of Detroit Public Schools, has said that if you want to find a successful school, look for a filled parking lot on the date of a school activity.

What do parents need to do? We need to constantly tell our children that education is important, to make sure they go to school every day, on time, prepared to learn. We need to make sure they do their homework and get enough sleep. We need to go to parent-teacher conferences and school events. Some of us have to become involved in the PTA / LSCO and attend School Board meetings.

In Detroit, many parents are involved, but not enough. We need every parent to do more. Last year, I visited every DPS high school and many K-8 schools. Parental involvement is common at some schools, and these tend to be the most successful. At others, parents are scarce at award ceremonies or parent teacher conferences. For these schools, we need to find a way to get families more excited and involved with education.

As a physician, I know how difficult it is to change behavior. One of my patients at the Ann Arbor VA Hospital lost his larynx (voicebox) due to tobacco related cancer, but was still smoking through the tracheostomy hole.

Getting parents or other caregivers to change their priorities to make education more important is also difficult, but there are programs that seem to work. The [Detroit Parent Network](#) engages parents and empowers them to be more active. The [Skillman Foundation](#) promotes community activism in their [Good Neighborhood](#) programs. Detroit College Promise programs, which use the incentive of universal, non-competitive, place-based scholarships, increase school involvement and student success because every family wants to get their scholarship.

Detroiters have another challenge to take back control of DPS from the state. For Detroit to be successful, Detroiters must be able to run their own public school system. To do this, more Detroiters, whether parents, community activists or business people, need to be more consistently involved at each DPS school, to make sure they are run well. One place to start is with the Parent Teacher Associations and Local School Community Organizations.

The PTA is perhaps the most important organization in a school, but often parents don't have time to make it work. We need to help by adopting a PTA and helping to make it strong. We also need to work with the Detroit Board of Education to do what is necessary so that it consistently demonstrates the ability to manage a large school district, and so Detroiters reclaim their right to vote.

As a lawyer, I know that our federal and state constitutions grant sovereignty, or the ultimate power to rule, not to the president or Congress or other elected officials, but to those of us with the right to vote. But we have to use this right. If we don't tell our elected officials what we want or what we think,

they will use their own judgment, and that is not always best for us.

We can create a stable and strong public education system in Detroit, but that requires a renewed commitment by all of us to get more involved. What will you do?