

Executive Summary

OVERVIEW

The ESD Institute has engaged many issues since its beginnings only a few years ago. With a healthy sense of the risks associated with bringing stakeholders in conflict together, we have tackled many important topics ranging from economic development to rightsizing local governments. For our Youth Symposium, however, we decided to take the Institute to another level. As you will soon read, this effort proved to be one of our most exciting and inspiring challenges to date. The Future Detroit Youth Symposium was indeed a breakthrough in reaching voices often not heard. We are honored to have played a salient part in this empowerment of our future leaders.

For the Youth Symposium, we focused on the students learning to link methods to goals. In short, our process asked the students to connect the desired “end” with the best “means” of accomplishing it. Drawing on proven problem-solving methods, the goal of the Institute was to have each student learn by doing. Much like applied engineering tasks, we asked the students to define the problem and then figure out a consensus-based set of solutions that could be implemented in a real world setting. This required giving each student a voice and in return asking each student to assume a responsibility to think, participate and find common ground in a workgroup team environment. Easy to say but difficult to do for anyone, let alone middle school students who had just met each other for the first time!

BACKGROUND

As an important observation, we believe that our Youth Symposium builds upon an earlier examination of education in Detroit that we conducted in December 2009. At the request of a number of interested groups, the Institute convened a symposium relating to the creation of a “green” school entitled The Lean Green School Initiative. Our complete published report is available at our website, www.esdinstitute.net.

In the Lean Green School Initiative, we identified a continuum or process flow relating to education that was driven by internal and external forces, some within the control of the school, but many not. What was left unfinished from the Lean Green Symposium was learning how the students



themselves viewed their schools and education. The Youth Symposium became our vehicle to fill this gap.

To draw out our students, we decided to build on the core of energized student teams from the Detroit area that had competed in the Future City Competition. The result was that over 20 schools came together. Moreover, in our efforts to touch the largest possible audience of Detroit middle school students, we reached out to schools that had not competed or completed the formal Future City Competition who wished to benefit from the opportunity offered by our symposium’s inclusive, collaborative, problem-solving process.

To help our students focus, we challenged them with the following Mega Question:

If you were envisioning “Future Detroit,” what would it look like and how would you accomplish it?

To jumpstart thought and creativity, our youth brainstormed around this question first and then voted on their favorite ideas before breaking into workgroups. Better education, less crime, more entertainment/talent were the big winners. The youth were randomly placed into workgroups to continue to discuss and offer ideas on the issues raised in the brainstorming session. Importantly, the workgroups were then asked to deal with perhaps the most difficult question of all:

If you were a future leader of Detroit, how would you accomplish your vision of Detroit?

Each workgroup was asked to complete an action plan on each of their three consensus-based priorities including who would be responsible to make it happen, how would the priority be implemented. At the end of the day, all participants heard presentations by each of the student workgroup teams of their action plans.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following list of recommendations of the ESD Institute is derived from the foundational work of the students who attended the Youth Symposium.

Recommendation #1: Safety & Security

Perhaps the most common concern heard throughout the Symposium day was that the students put a high priority on safety and security at their schools and communities and importantly wanted to play a role in making their schools and neighborhood safe places now and in the future to live, learn, and work. The reality of crime galvanized the student into action steps ranging from mentorships, parent, community, corporate and governmental engagement, volunteerism, and proactive police enforcement to junior peer anti-crime training, and local student groups with high-tech equipment like alarms, jet packs, networking tools, and close-net informational sharing. Safety was identified by the students as a key component of what makes a city cool. We were not surprised that it surfaced again in the workgroup reports.

1 It is our recommendation that the DPS Office of Inspector General and the Detroit Police Department consider the establishment of a transparent Schoolplace Security Advisory Council (SSAC) that focuses on “schoolplace” abuse and crime directly reporting to the DPS Police. Similar to the Board of Police Commissioners at the Detroit Police Department, SSAC would consist of critical stakeholders that care about the reduction and elimination of school-based abuse and crime. Members would include representative school administrators, teachers, students, parents, law enforcement, and community and governmental leaders. This council could serve as a platform to build inclusive and proactive program recommendations to address school security issues on a real-time and sustainable basis, including how to get more youth directly involved in making their schools safer places to learn. To enhance cohesiveness and effectiveness, the SSAC would establish a School Subcommittee made up of those schools that elected to play an active advisory role to benefit the work of SSAC. Members of the Subcommittee would provide their specific needs, experiences, and solutions for SSAC’s consideration.



Recommendation #2: Interactive Learning

Few are unaware of the daunting challenges we face in attracting and retaining student interest in the field of Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM). A challenge in the promotion of interest and competency in engineering, for example, lies in its inherent difficulty to be measured especially in the early stages of its introduction to both the teachers and the students. While a student’s success in mastering the textbook can be a measurable outcome that can then be tested and reported as data for educational, performance, and financial considerations, this positive attribute may, however, be a negative one when applied to STEM. Specifically, Engineering is largely a creative, applied problem-solving discipline. New and creative outcomes or solutions to problems cannot be identified in advance as either right or wrong and therefore do not lend themselves to an easy measurable assessment.

Interactive teaching as identified by our students as an enabler to accomplish better educational outcomes can be a useful tool in advancing STEM and was identified by our students as a means to better their education and opportunities for advancement.

2 **It is our recommendation** that the DPS Division of Academic Affairs consider the establishment of a transparent, district-wide Learning Interactive Council (LIK) that would be led by a school administrator appointed by the DPS Division of Academic Affairs. The membership of the LIK would include a math/science instructional specialist to serve as lead coordinator and include representative teachers, students, parents, and other educational stakeholders. Importantly, however, members of LIK would include engineering and scientific professionals to serve as advisors, mentors, and other resources for both teachers and students. LIK would also include representatives from our state's universities and colleges that offer undergraduate degrees in STEM-related fields to serve as an academic resource for transition to higher education. Finally, representatives from the business and labor communities should be encouraged to participate as active members of LIK to provide the cutting-edge reality check on skill level and other requirements for students to compete as adults in today's global workplace. To enhance cohesiveness and effectiveness, LIK would establish a School Subcommittee made up of those schools that elected to play an active advisory role to benefit the work of LIK. Members of the Subcommittee would provide their specific needs, experiences, and solutions for LIK's consideration.



Recommendation #3: Talent & the Arts

Another compelling need generated by many voices in the Youth Symposium was the desire for an outlet to foster student expression in arts and entertainment. This area of focus had been previously identified in our The Lean Green School Initiative Symposium. The “A” in STEAM stood for “ART” and the concept was that in connection with a progressive STEM program, schools should add this component. Art can play a critical role in engaging a wide range of students and take STEM to the next degree in motivating students and broadening the benefits of their educational experience.

For purposes of this report, we observed that the students looked upon art and entertainment as not only a way to fulfill their interests at school but also a means to build a career path after graduation. Clearly, the students saw the art and entertainment industry as a springboard for future recognition and employment opportunities. The students had no difficulty in identifying potential solutions to the “How” part of the equation, as well. Those ideas are described at length in the workgroup reports. To highlight a few, the students wanted to create a forum for the “Stars of Tomorrow” with sponsorships from local celebrities in the Detroit area and to establish a school entitled “Detroit Dance Academy” to provide training in local cultural dance, ballet, and cheerleading with support from our local professional sport organizations, businesses, and community organizations.

3 **It is our recommendation** that the City of Detroit, in conjunction with the New Economy Initiative, Kresge Foundation, and other interested foundations, establish an “incubator” for Detroit middle and upper school student talent development and arts-related programs entitled the “Detroit Talent Incubator.” Homegrown celebrities and other entities in both the performance and visual arts should be solicited to act as potential sponsors and mentors who could then provide funding, forums or facilities for practices and performances by the students. To enhance cohesiveness and effectiveness, the Talent Incubator would establish a Student Subcommittee made up of students from those schools that elected to play an active advisory role to benefit the work of the Incubator.