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FUTURE DETROIT: ENVISIONING TOMORROW TOGETHER

A Symposium Abstract¹

The City of Detroit has experienced more than four decades of economic, manufacturing, population, education and infrastructure decline. Once again, under a new city administration, the aspirations are high. Everyone is hopeful. At the same time, a few miles away from the city center, the 115-year-old local Engineering Society of Detroit (ESD), is keeping its promise and commitment to raising the future generation of engineers by being the regional sponsor to the Future City[®] competition. ESD is in its 16th year of sponsorship but 2010 marks the first time that ESD is launching a new and exciting competition called **Future Detroit**.

While city leaders continue to devise a plan to return Detroit to a globally competitive center for technical innovation, what has never been done in this process is listening to the plans emerging from the minds of those inhabitants with the richest imaginations: Detroit's children. Right after its launch, 26 Detroit public, private and parochial schools embarked on the challenge to dream up a future Detroit. The opportunity to match Detroit's need with the creative minds of Detroit's youth, is what has made launching the local component of this national competition an immediate success.

To envision, “think big” and formalize ideas by producing papers, three dimensional computer renderings and scaled tabletop models is an incredible challenge and learning opportunity for the 6th, 7th and 8th graders embarking on the Future City[®] competition challenge. According to the International Association for Educational Achievement, the United States is rapidly declining when compared to other countries' achievement of students in math and science. These skills are critical if our region is to maintain a prominent position in the development of new technology. The Future City[®] program is a STEAM based initiative, raising student interest in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics. Michigan's Future City[®] a powerful, enriching experience for the children and important to the region.

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Following the Future City competition, the Engineering Society of Detroit Institute (ESDI) will conduct the **Future Detroit: Envisioning Tomorrow Together Symposium**, where Future City® contestants express the ideas and opinions that were generated by their teams while developing their competition entries. Together, the former contestants will create a team that will collaborate in drafting a collective vision for a future Detroit. Following the process established by the National Academy of Science Foundation, symposium facilitators will begin to engage participants with an icebreaker question:

What are the things that make a city cool?

Our facilitators will then ask all the students to engage the following *Mega Question*:

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

After discussion on the *Mega Question*, participants are asked two *start from scratch* questions, which will be debated in self-selected workgroups. Both questions require the students to envision themselves as adults, living in the Future Detroit they created. One is a micro-level question and is about the individual living in the city and the lifestyle the city offers the individual, the second is a macro-level question that asks about larger issues affecting the city: infrastructure, policies, transportation, economies. The workgroup questions are as follows:

- 1. If you were 30 years old and living in Detroit, what would be your vision in order to live and work happily there?**
- 2. If you were a future leader of Detroit, how would you accomplish your vision of Detroit?**

The results of the symposium will then be collected, edited, and shared in the form of white papers with the community, local and state leadership. This symposium interaction is meant to be an enriching personal experience for those involved as well as for the community. Three student presenters from the best five teams, a total of 15 students, will be invited to share their vision of Detroit with a larger audience of students from the 21 remaining schools.

The process of the symposium is inclusive and outcome-neutral. The ESD Institute has a proven track record of bringing together leaders from business, labor, government, academic and the professions throughout Michigan to identify consensus-based initiatives to turn



Michigan's economy around. Attendees at past symposia have generated breakthrough ideas such as a new Michigan investment zone that will allow us to compete globally as an exporting state and the Blue Economy that will attract water-focused businesses ranging from the manufacturing of alternative energy products, to growing our food for a healthy tomorrow in an urban setting.

Future Detroit: Envisioning Tomorrow Together, will be ESDI's first youth-based symposium. We are eager and excited to work with the students of Detroit and the metropolitan area as they envision and draft their vision of a future Detroit. At the end of the one-day symposium, parents, mentors, community members and leaders will be invited to listen to a presentation of the outcome. Following the symposium, the facilitators are asked to write symposium reports and recommendations resulting from the workgroups. The resulting body of knowledge will be published in the ESD Institute series of publications and the results will be shared publicly.

