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# An Examination Of Urban School Governance Reform In Detroit Public Schools, 1999-2014

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**AN EXAMINATION OF URBAN SCHOOL GOVERNANCE REFORM IN  
DETROIT PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 1999-2014**

by

**SHAUN M. BLACK**

**DISSERTATION**

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

2016

**MAJOR: EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP  
& POLICY STUDIES**

Approved By:

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Advisor

Date

## DEDICATION

I would first like to acknowledge and thank God for blessing me with the ability and good fortune to reach this point in my academic career, and I would like to dedicate this dissertation to all of the people in my life who have supported me in my pursuit of this doctoral degree.

First and foremost, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my loving wife, Kellie. I would like to thank Kellie for inspiring me to always put my best foot forward and for pushing me during the challenging times; thank you for being my best friend and for being such a great and supporting wife. I would also like to thank Kellie for being such a fantastic mother to our young son. And I would also like to dedicate this degree to my son: Shaun E. Black who has been a tremendous blessing to both of our families.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my phenomenal parents, Herbert and Connie Black, for supporting me throughout this long process, but also for raising me with the mindset that quitting is unacceptable. Mom and Dad, thanks for always wanting the best for all of your children and pushing us to be better.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my late grandparents: Herbert Black, Virginia Black, Jessie Mae Butler, and Pearl Butler. My grandparents were instrumental along with my parents in helping to shape and mold me into the man that I have become today. I thank all of you for your love and support throughout this long process.

Lastly, this dissertation is also dedicated to all of the hardworking educators (current and former) in the Detroit Public School system who gave their all to their students every single day in an effort to improve the life outcomes of the students attending Detroit Public Schools.

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At this time, I would like to acknowledge the two people who believed in me the most and motivated me in my early 20s to pursue a doctorate at a time when I was considering leaving the education profession all together: Coach James Reynolds, Jr. and the late Dr. Don G. Lessner.

Coach Reynolds inspired me to have a strong passion for educating urban youth, and he reminded me that the moral purpose of an educator is to become rich, not financially, but rich by investing into the futures of young people so that their futures can be positive. Coach Reynolds

also taught me that the name of the urban education game is to do right by kids; if it isn't right by kids then you should not do it, period! I would also like to thank Coach Reynolds for giving me the professional and moral purpose to become an urban educator who truly cares about doing what is in the best interests of kids.

Dr. Lessner inspired me over the Memorial Day holiday in 2007 to remain in the education profession and to strive to make a difference for kids who are being marginalized by the educational system in urban areas. Dr. Don also advised me that I should open a sports-themed boarding school for at-risk males living in poverty in metro Detroit. The purpose of this boarding school would be to provide the structure, discipline, and support needed for our males to be successful later in life. The end goal of the boarding school would be preventing these at-risk males from becoming negative educational statistics and the possible inclusion into the *school-to-prison pipeline*.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Our Nation is at risk! Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world. This report is concerned with only one of the many causes and dimensions of the problem, but it is the one that undergirds American prosperity, security, and civility... Our society and its *educational institutions* seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high expectations and disciplined effort needed to attain them (p. 1).

-National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983)

As late as the 1940s, urban public schools still set the standard for excellence for all of American education (Mirel, 1999). As white flight to new suburbs increased during the 1950s and 1960s, however, minorities (especially blacks) were left behind in urban public schools (Tyack, 1974; Mirel, 1999; Sugrue, 1996; Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). As the demographics of most urban cities changed from mostly affluent and mostly white to mostly poor people of color, so have the favorable perceptions of elected school boards and their role in education policy and school governance. Currently, most urban public schools no longer set the standard for excellence in education because today most urban public schools are characterized by the following: poor student achievement, fiscal irresponsibility, and a lack of accountability.

When President Lyndon B. Johnson sought to build The Great Society and declared the war on poverty in the 1960s, he asserted that the answer to all our national problems came down to a single word: education (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). In 1983, the education report *A Nation at Risk* was released, and it recommended sweeping changes in the requirements for American public education, especially graduation and curriculum requirements to prepare students to compete economically with Germany and Japan (Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Hunter, 1997). *A Nation at Risk* was a litany of dismal statistics, and the report shows a regression, not a progression in the quality of American education (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). This regression in

urban public schools was the trend in public education in urban areas during the 1970s and 1980s, which was dramatically portrayed in the 1989 movie *Lean on Me*. *A Nation at Risk* changed and validated the unfavorable perceptions that Americans had about the effectiveness of America's education system, especially urban public schools citing poor SAT scores, graduation rates, and dropout rates (*National Commissions on Excellence in Education*, 1983). *A Nation at Risk* also ushered in the standardized testing accountability era for the nation's schools (Ravitch, 2010a).

After the release of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) urban schools became the target of education reformers due to the schools' poor SAT scores and watered-down curricula (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). *A Nation at Risk* (1983) moved the nation towards the standardized testing era and improved accountability in public education (Ravitch, 2010a). Unfortunately, during this critical time, elected school boards in urban areas were characterized as ineffective and dysfunctional (Hess, 2010). Dysfunctional governance in urban public schools led to urban governance reform that resulted in state takeovers and mayoral control of schools. The reforming of school governance in urban areas was in response to the public's outcry over the perceived failure of urban public schools in their efforts to improve student achievement (Wong et al., 2007). The education policy reform movement was typical of liberal politics where government always attempted to solve domestic and economic problems, but Republicans led this legislative charge affecting mostly Democratic voting blocs in urban areas (Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Piliawsky 2003; Wong et al., 2007).

*A Nation at Risk* stated, "Our educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling" (p.1). During the 1980s, urban schools in particular were struggling to meet academic accountability standards ushered in by *A Nation at Risk*, but also fiscal



responsibilities due to shifting economic and racial demographics within urban cities comprised of high concentrations of poverty (Mirel, 1999; Sugrue, 1996). Today's urban educators and school districts are facing a crisis. Urban educators face a daunting task of trying to educate a population of mostly African American and Hispanic American students (i.e., achievement gap, standardized test scores, college readiness, graduation rates and dropout rates) who also are living in poverty which makes these groups of students difficult to educate (Wong et al., 2007).

Urban school systems face a myriad of problems including: older buildings, poor infrastructure, limited access to technology, students living in high rates of poverty, single-parent homes, insufficient and inequitable per-pupil funding, truancy, violence in schools, dysfunctional school leadership and bureaucracies, questions about teacher quality, lack of parent involvement and community support, and overcrowded classrooms and schools (Wong et al., 2007). These problems in urban public schools and the lack of accountability of the elected school board officials to address these problems resulted in scores of parents and the general public to support governance reform in urban public schools. The lack of confidence in elected school boards and their superintendents was common in urban public schools across the nation in 1990s and 2000s (e.g., Boston, Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, and Washington DC) (Rich, 2009).

This dissertation study seeks to provide new insight into what might be learned from one success story of the urban school reform era that followed closely after *A Nation at Risk: Boston Public Schools*, and what can be applied to Detroit Public Schools.

This first chapter is organized as follows: background of the problem, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, importance of the study, and a description of Chapters Two through Five.

### Background of the Problem

Urban school governance reform began at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in urban cities across America by Progressives. The Progressive Reform movement was led by influential business leaders and professional elites in urban cities (Tyack, 1974). Progressives worked for change at the local, state, and federal levels sharing their blueprint for change (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). One important goal of urban school governance reform was to separate and insulate schools from the political machines and the electoral nature of city politics (Portz & Schwartz, 2009). The goal of the Progressive Reform movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century was to reform urban school system power structures in the mold of the corporate business model of control (i.e., a corporation's board of directors) to meet the economic and social goals of these business leaders and professional elites (Tyack, 1974). This turn-of-the-century school reform placed power in the hands of the economic and socially elite school board members (Mirel, 1999). During that time period the buzz word *accountability* was created and used to describe urban schools (Tyack, 1974).

During that time period elected school boards began to centralize and consolidate their power in urban areas in cities like New York where the ward system of elected school board members was broken up in favor of a centralized at-large school board system (Tyack, 1974). The loss of *local control* (ward and subcommittee systems) *of schools* was viewed as un-Democratic, un-American, and an attack on the lower class, so when school boards finally became centralized (e.g., Chicago in 1917) they became political, which led to corruption, kickbacks, and favors for their supporters, loyalists, and constituents (Tyack, 1974; Payne, 2008). In the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century and in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century this pattern still holds true that schools boards were viewed and continue to be viewed as a starting point for an elected official's

political career. In school board elections it is rare for professional educators to hold board seats on elected boards of education (Tyack, 1974).

After *A Nation at Risk*, elected school boards in urban areas were under intense scrutiny for their lack of accountability, poor student achievement, and being fiscally irresponsible. In the 1990s, mayoral control became a viable alternative to elected school boards as mayoral control provided stability in urban school districts where elected school boards tended to mismanage the essential tasks of governance (Hess, 2008; Wong & Shen, 2003). Mayoral control is a school governance system where the mayor of the city has statutory control of the city's school district, not the elected school board (Wong & Shen, 2003). Mayoral control does not totally eliminate the dysfunction in urban school districts, but it does create conditions where *institutional progress* (i.e., improvements in: fiscal responsibility, accountability, community and business partnerships, and student achievement) can occur because the school governance structure establishes a foundation and culture where student success is possible, especially its ability to provide sustained leadership within the district (Portz, 1999; Portz & Schwartz, 2009).

Mayoral control does indeed have some drawbacks, but the turnaround experience in Boston illustrates what urban school governance reform can accomplish when it has strong executive leadership. Conversely, there is little evidence that mayoral control improves teaching, learning, or other educational outcomes (Hess, 2008). In addition, other large urban school districts under mayoral control have a mixed record when it comes to institutional progress (e.g., New York City, Philadelphia, and Washington DC). Nonetheless, something has to change because doing things the same way with the same structure (i.e., elected school board) will ultimately yield the same dysfunctional results, and the only losers in that scenario will be innocent schoolchildren in urban areas across the nation.

Over 100 years ago the urban school governance reform movement was done to consolidate power in urban areas forming at-large elected boards of education. Urban schools were the shining beacon of education, and the elected school board model was unquestioned until problems arose in urban areas during the late 1960s through the 1980s. During the 1980s, elected school boards in urban areas were ill-equipped to respond to the growing issues of educating populations of students in high poverty areas in addition to not being good financial stewards of education resources. Elected school boards in urban areas were also known for political infighting where the issues of children were secondary to local politics (Portz & Schwartz, 2009).

According to *A Nation at Risk* (1983), urban public schools suffered from: low standardized test scores, low graduation rates, and high dropout rates under the elected school board model. Therefore, another urban school governance reform movement began in the 1990s to address political infighting, a lack of accountability, poor student achievement and fiscal irresponsibility: mayoral control. In 1992, mayoral control was enacted in Boston with the expressed purpose to: increase accountability, improve student achievement, improve fiscal responsibility, and to eliminate political infighting. Mayoral control was a governance arrangement designed to streamline decision-making in urban school districts, and to address the most pressing issues facing urban school districts. Today, urban school governance is still an important issue in urban areas such as Detroit because of the struggles with its governance issues (elected school boards and state receivership) resulting in poor student achievement and fiscal irresponsibility under both models.

### Statement of the Problem

Most urban public school districts in America are facing a myriad of problems (Wong et al., 2007). The resulting effect of these problems in urban public school districts is systematic dysfunction and urban public school students are not being properly educated, which compounds social problems later in life for those students in those urban cities (Wong et al., 2007). In addition, this urban education dysfunction may exist with elected school boards (Payne, 2008; Hess, 2008). According to *A Nation at Risk* (1983), the chief problems facing most elected school boards in urban public school districts were improving student achievement (i.e., low standardized test scores, low graduation rates and high dropout rates), improving fiscal responsibility with district funds, and increasing accountability among district leadership (Wong et al., 2007). For example, A *Boston Globe* editorial described the Boston School Committee as a “disaster,” and that “the buck does not stop with anyone” (Portz, 1999; Hess, 2008). When other urban public school districts have been faced with similar dysfunctional issues, voters, parents, business leaders, and the media in several cities around the country have called for urban school governance reform moving from elected school boards to mayoral control (e.g., Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, New York City, Oakland, Philadelphia, and Washington DC).

Student achievement on standardized tests, poor graduation and dropout rates have been cited as reasons for having mayoral control in urban public schools (Wong et al., 2007; Portz, 1996). Recently, standardized testing has been highly scrutinized in urban cities such as Atlanta, New York City, Philadelphia, and Washington DC due to the indictments and subsequent prosecutions of cheating conspiracies, testing inflation allegations, and allegations of cheating conspiracies (Rich & Hurdle, 2014; Mathews, 2012; Severson, 2011). Therefore, this study looks beyond standardized testing data as the only measurement of the effectiveness of urban

school governance reform on institutional progress. Most of the literature on urban school governance reforms focuses on quantitative data (i.e., pre and post standardized testing data or financial data) to determine the effectiveness of urban school districts. This study will develop a theory about how governance, educational leadership, education reforms and policies can affect institutional progress from a qualitative perspective.

This study contributed to the literature in the following ways:

1. Developed an alternative framework for analyzing the organizational effectiveness in school districts (i.e., institutional progress) aside from quantitative standardized testing and financial reports;
2. Used qualitative methods to develop a theory about how educational leadership, district turnaround strategies, and school governance reform can possibly impact institutional progress in urban school districts;
3. Identified internal and external barriers to institutional progress in urban school districts; and
4. Suggested a new form of school governance for urban school districts which combines educational leadership, turnaround strategies, local control, and governance reform.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to understand how school governance reforms have impacted institutional progress in Detroit Public Schools (DPS) from 1999-2014. Additionally, the purpose of this study is to also understand how educational leadership and school governance reforms have impacted Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014. The goal of this dissertation research is to understand the impact of internal and external barriers to progress in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014. The DPS experience will: 1.) develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of educational leadership in urban public schools; 2.) develop a deeper understanding of how school governance reforms have impacted institutional progress in Detroit

Public Schools; and 3.) develop a deeper understanding of the possible effects the education reforms at the state and local level had on Detroit Public Schools.

This dissertation research will also tell the story of Boston Public Schools because of its successful turnaround story during the 1990s and 2000s as a suggestion for educators and policymakers about what it takes to improve a whole system of schools (Payzant & Horan, 2007). The end goal for this dissertation study is to identify possible reasons preventing DPS from being a successful turnaround district like Boston and offer possible recommendations to move the district forward.

This study will describe the following:

1. The impact of school governance reforms undertaken in Detroit Public Schools and the resulting institutional progress from 1999-2014;
2. The impact of educational leadership in Detroit Public Schools which possibly had an impact on the institutional progress in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014; and
3. The identification of internal and external barriers to institutional progress in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014.

### **Research Questions**

1. How was institutional progress impacted in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014?
2. How did school governance reforms impact institutional progress in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014?
3. What were the barriers to institutional progress in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014?

### **Methodology**

This qualitative historical case study described how the education policies in Detroit Public Schools were developed and then enacted since 1999 to address the Detroit community's concerns about the low graduation rates, high dropout rates, fiscal irresponsibility, and

educational leadership from the Detroit Board of Education and their superintendents. The goal of this study is to identify the barriers up to and including state policies which prevented DPS from making institutional progress. Contextual data was collected from past or current: Detroit Board of Education members, central office administrators, building administrators, teachers, and parents/community activists from 1999-2014. In addition, content analysis was conducted on other sources of information: school board documents, daily newspaper reports, and City of Detroit documents.

Contextual data was gathered from open-ended semi-structured and structured interviews. The open-ended interviews will develop an understanding of how governance and educational leadership can affect institutional progress in a school district. The data which was gathered in this study will potentially help stakeholders and policymakers identify the barriers to improvements on student achievement outside of standardized testing and other quantitative metrics.

The epistemology theory for this study of urban governance reform is constructivism, which means understanding is derived from our engagement with the realities in our world (Crotty, 2012). In other words, constructivism is making knowledge. The theoretical perspective for this study of urban governance reform is interpretivism, which means social reality is regarded as the process social actors use to negotiate meanings and contribute to the causal explanation of some phenomena (Crotty, 2012).

### **Importance of the Study**

In 1992, Boston Public Schools became the first urban school district to replace an elected school board with mayoral control due to *The Boston Globe's* editorials from 1989-1991 on the dysfunction of the elected Boston School Committee focusing on: fiscal irresponsibility,



political infighting, lack of accountability, poor student achievement, low graduation rates, and high dropout rates (Portz, 1996). Other large and troubled urban school districts (Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington DC) elected to follow Boston's lead in favor of mayoral control of schools. As mayoral control began to evolve as a viable alternative to the elected school board model of school governance, so did the positives and negatives of mayoral control. The positives are: fiscal responsibility, sustained leadership, improved accountability, and improved student achievement in the first two years (Wong et al., 2007). The negatives can simply be boiled down to one simple, yet, complex word: politics.

Boston Public Schools is significant to urban school governance reform because Boston has experienced success with increased student achievement (e.g., NAEP, increased graduation rates and decreased dropout rates) since 1992 (National Center for Educational Statistics; Boston Public Schools). Wong et al. (2007) conducted a major study on the effectiveness of mayoral control, which focused solely on the analysis of standardized testing scores with varying degrees of rigor among the 51 standardized tests analyzed in the study. Wong et al. (2007) admits that there is an overreliance on standardized test scores and suggested analyzing graduation and dropout rates as a different indicator for the effectiveness of mayoral control as a direction for future research on the effectiveness of mayoral control.

Currently in education policy, the problem with school accountability and school governance is the overreliance on standardized testing and other quantitative data points to determine if a school or school district is making *institutional progress* towards the overall end product, which is educating citizens/graduates. After *A Nation at Risk*, standardized testing became the primary means of demonstrating accountability to the public for the performance of local public schools in addition to being good stewards of the district's finances as well (Wong &

Shen, 2003). A primary reason for urban school governance reform has been a lack of accountability with elected school boards, poor fiscal management, and poor student achievement (Portz & Schwartz, 2009; Wong et al., 2007).

Expanding the focus to look qualitatively at the services and functioning provided by a school district will paint a clearer picture of the progress schools or school districts are making. Therefore, examining the leadership of Boston Public Schools under mayoral control will provide lessons for educational leadership which could possibly be applied to other urban school districts across the nation such as Detroit Public Schools. The focus of this study is to understand the relationship between school governance reform and successful school district turnarounds like Boston Public Schools; what did Boston do in addition to mayoral control which continues to elude urban school districts of: Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, and Philadelphia for example? What is the importance of state law and policy in district reforms?

This research on urban school governance and turnaround leadership is important, timely, and relevant because most urban school districts across the United States are dealing with poor student achievement, fiscal irresponsibility, and a lack of accountability with the elected school board governance model, or even the mayoral control model. Detroit Public Schools have experienced several different school governance models (i.e., elected school board, state takeover, and state receivership) and state education policy leaders must decide which school governance model is best suited to meet the needs and the challenges of Detroit Public Schools and its students, but it appears that despite the school governance reforms in Detroit Public Schools the district lacked a proven turnaround model (e.g., Boston Public Schools). This qualitative study will develop a holistic view and understanding of governance reform, provide possible ideas of what transformative leadership is needed in Detroit Public Schools, explain

how educational leadership might positively impact urban school districts, and explain how institutional progress can be achieved in urban school districts by attempting to answer the research questions stated above.

The rationales for selecting Detroit Public Schools as the site for this historical case study are the following:

1. From 1999-2014, the educational leadership in Detroit Public Schools has been a revolving door and has not been supported by city government (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012).
2. Detroit followed Boston's lead into mayoral control in 1999. The people of Detroit did not embrace the encroachment of state control on Detroit Public Schools and voted to return to an elected school board model in 2005 only to be placed under state control again in 2009 (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012; Rich, 2009).
3. The conditions under the Detroit Board of Education were typical of urban school district lacking institutional progress: fiscal irresponsibility, poor student achievement, no sustained leadership and a lack of accountability (Wong et al., 2007; Portz, 2000; Payne, 2008; Rich, 2009; Addonizio & Kearney, 2012).

### **Definition of Terms**

#### **Institutional Progress**

*Institutional Progress* is a term which will be used throughout this dissertation study to explain the improvements in the overall functioning of Detroit Public Schools, and how the variables below were impacted due to the three different school governance models (i.e., state takeover, elected school board, and state control under the emergency financial manager models) in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014. The variables of institutional progress are the following: personnel, finances, leadership, educational programs, community support, and political support.

Additionally, *institutional progress* is the improving of Detroit Public Schools from a qualitative perspective using a combination of quantitative metrics, not just standardized test scores. In short, can the people who come in contact with Detroit Public Schools on a daily basis see the quality and feel the quality of the district improving? Are there tangible indications that the school district is in fact making progress as an institution with the purpose of educating children?

### **Organization of this Dissertation**

The remainder of this dissertation will be broken down as follows. In Chapter 2, a review of literature analyzes resources containing information on the research questions and their relationship to institutional progress in Boston Public Schools and Detroit Public Schools. In Chapter 3, the qualitative research methods guiding the study are explained. In Chapter 4, the data analysis for this study was explained. In Chapter 5, a summary of the findings and recommendations based upon the findings were listed for Detroit Public Schools to achieve institutional progress.

### **Chapters and Sections Breakdowns**

**Chapter 1: Introduction:** introduction of the problem; background of the problem; statement of the problem; purpose of the study; research questions; importance of the study; definition of terms; organization of the dissertation; and conclusion.

**Chapter 2: Literature Review:** introduction; historical urban school governance reform; conceptual framework; elected school boards; mayoral control; urban school governance reform in Boston Public Schools, 1992-2013; institutional progress framework; institutional progress in Boston Public Schools, 1995-2013; institutional progress in Detroit Public Schools, 1970-1999; and conclusion.

**Chapter 3: Methods:** introduction; research design; participants; setting; data collection; data analysis; trustworthiness; and conclusion.

**Chapter 4: Data Findings:** introduction; findings; a lack of institutional progress Detroit Public Schools, 1999-2014; school governance did not have a positive impact; internal and external barriers prevented institutional progress; and conclusion.

**Chapter 5: Summary, Recommendations, and Conclusion:** summary; institutional progress recommendations; and conclusion.

### Conclusion

School governance creates a condition and atmosphere for students to either be successful or unsuccessful in school. In most large urban school districts elected school boards have allowed conditions in urban schools to deteriorate, which has led to increases in dropout rates, poor standardized test scores, decreases in graduation rates, a lack of accountability among school board leaders, and poor fiscal management. These unacceptable conditions and dysfunction in large urban school districts have led to urban school governance reform, in particular, mayoral control; however, in Detroit's case, multiple state takeovers. The Boston Public Schools experience is an example of cooperation, while Detroit Public Schools lacks that level of cooperation. Research and literature has revealed some clear advantages for mayoral control and state takeovers over the elected school board model of governance in addition to some drawbacks to mayoral control and state takeovers. Despite the drawbacks of mayoral control, mayoral control is a viable option for troubled urban school districts looking to improve the quality of education in their districts. Nevertheless, school governance reform and mayoral control in and by itself are not enough. Urban school governance reform must also be accompanied with educational leadership, a proven district turnaround strategy, and additional resources. Therefore, simply relying on quantitative metrics is not enough to determine whether or not a school district is producing educated citizens who are college and career ready.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

This literature review will examine urban school governance reform from a historical reform perspective with the Progressive Era and then from a modern reform perspective post-*A Nation at Risk*. Educational institutions were blamed for not providing a quality education to its students, especially in urban public schools pre-*A Nation at Risk*. Elected school boards since *A Nation at Risk* was released have been subject to criticism for not addressing the poor student achievement among other issues such as political infighting and fiscal irresponsibility (Portz, 2000). A review of literature explored elected school boards detailing positive and negative outcomes. With the negatives of elected school boards outweighing the positives of school boards, leaders in urban areas decided to reform urban school governance with state takeovers and mayoral control. Currently, more than two-thirds of states have legislation allowing for the takeover of struggling urban school districts (Wong & Shen, 2003). The path into state takeovers and mayoral control leads us to Boston and Detroit Public Schools.

Institutional progress will provide a framework to assess the overall improvement of a school district (i.e., school governance), not just finances or standardized test scores. Boston was chosen as the first case study for this dissertation research because the elected Boston School Committee was the embodiment of all of the typical problematic issues previously discussed about elected school boards in the 1980s in addition to poor student achievement described in the *A Nation at Risk* report, but the 1990s witnessed a dramatic turnaround. In 1992, Boston leaders decided to reform its school district in favor of mayoral control, and the decision to experiment with mayoral control can best be described as a decision to focus on children resulting in institutional progress; therefore, a goal of this dissertation research is to understand why Boston

Public Schools made institutional progress and why Detroit Public Schools was unable to make institutional progress during essentially the same time periods.

Most urban school governance reform literature focuses on quantitative analysis of data to determine the effectiveness of the governance model, while this research will take a qualitative approach to discover why Detroit has been unsuccessful (i.e., a lack of institutional progress) and what can be learned from the Boston case study where institutional progress was achieved. How did Boston Public Schools make their turnaround? What did the leaders in Boston figure out that seems to elude other school leaders in places like Detroit? What was the secret to Boston's success since 1995: was it a certain reform from the local or state level, was it something special about the educational leadership, was it mayoral control, or was it a combination of everything? What lessons from Boston can be applied to Detroit after this study?

### **Historical Urban School Governance Reform**

Urban school governance reform dates back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, but during the 1990s and early 2000s urban school governance reform has been at the forefront of urban education policy matters. Boston Public Schools was the first large urban school district to reform its governance structure from an elected school board in favor of mayoral control back in 1992. According to *The Boston Globe*, the elected school board in Boston (the Boston School Committee) lacked leadership and accountability resulting in a poor quality of education being provided to the children of Boston characterized with high dropout rates and low graduation rates (Portz & Schwartz, 2009; Portz, 1996; Wong et al., 2007). Elected school boards represent local democracy, but urban school districts and their elected school boards such as Detroit have shown they lack the ability to seriously impact student achievement in urban public schools or to be fiscally responsible (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012; Mertz, 1986; Rich, 1988; Wong et al., 2007;

Payne, 2008). As more urban school districts have decided to make the shift to mayoral control, there have been some noted positives and negatives.

Wong et al. (2007) conducted the most comprehensive study on the effectiveness of mayoral control by quantitatively measuring the effectiveness of mayoral control on student achievement via standardized testing results and fiscal responsibility of the district by analyzing pre and post testing and financial data. Wong et al. (2007) concluded that mayoral control does indeed have a positive effect on student achievement and fiscal responsibility in urban school districts. However, Wong et al. (2007) admitted their research had an overreliance on quantitative data and areas for future research included a more comprehensive or qualitative investigation of school districts under mayoral control and the effect mayoral control has on institutional progress, especially graduation and dropout rates. This study will take a holistic approach to understanding the urban governance reform in Detroit Public Schools and the impact that educational leaders have on improving institutional progress (e.g., standardized test results, graduation rates, and dropout rates) in the district.

School governance must provide accountability, oversight, and best practices for school districts in addition to how success will be measured (Hess, 2008). School governance is crucial to student success because it creates the foundation for students to be successful (Wong et al., 2007). School governance is about the structure of authority by which major decisions are made and resources allocated within a school system; governance is about control and who drives the educational bus (Portz & Schwartz, 2009). Frustration with urban schools has led to the demand for increased accountability and leadership, and the current education reform in urban education is changing school governance from elected school boards to mayoral control of schools in cities such as: Boston, Chicago, New York City, Philadelphia, and Washington DC (Viteritti, 2009;



Wong et al., 2007). Good school governance is characterized by a focus on outcomes and increasing community support (Hess, 2008).

School governance reform alone is not a strategy or silver bullet to directly improve quality schooling, but it can possibly create the conditions for effective leadership to flourish (Hess, 2008). According to Hening (2009), for struggling urban school districts what matters most are: vision, capacity, sustained political support, and governance structures because they either facilitate or undermine student achievement. Therefore, mayoral control can create the conditions necessary to increase student achievement and fiscal responsibility (Wong et al., 2007). Nonetheless, policymakers are not sold on mayoral control as the panacea or silver bullet for the ills of elected school board dysfunction in large urban school districts.

Boston Public Schools is an ideal case study because of the strong leadership while under mayoral control since 1992 from: the mayor, the superintendent, and the appointed Boston School Committee. Mayoral control leadership in Boston Public Schools changed the public discourse towards education in the city because the mayors of Boston embraced Boston Public Schools as a part of the equation to improve the quality of life in the city of Boston (Portz & Schwartz, 2009). With a national focus on school accountability and student achievement there has been a shift from conflict and sharp debate to a more civil discourse focused on improving educational outcomes in most urban cities in the United States (Portz & Schwartz, 2009). This study will not only examine the importance of education leadership in the context of urban governance reform, but it will examine the importance of reforms enacted at the local and state levels, in addition to understanding what educational leadership qualities are needed to reform urban school districts. What stars aligned in Boston which eluded urban school districts such as Detroit?

### **Elected School Boards**

In the United States nearly 15,000 elected school boards are responsible for the overall leadership direction of school districts, which includes creating policy and in how the district will address macro issues such as student achievement from a policymaking role (Hess, 2008). Local elected school boards members are residents in the community who are invested in their local public schools, but are also invested in seizing the opportunity to begin careers as elected officials (Payzant, 2011). School boards and school board elections typically represent local democracy in the United States (Merz, 1986). Elected schools boards are established to create educational goals, policies, and a district vision to support academic achievement (Portz & Schwartz, 2009).

The primary functions of school boards is to serve as both the policymaking and the administrative function for the school district, and school board members are held accountable by voters for those two primary functions (Rich, 1988). The most important task of a school board is to hire a good superintendent and then to evaluate their performance (Payzant, 2011). School Boards also make policy decisions, review and approve school budgets, vote on recommendations presented by the superintendent (e.g., district goals, strategic plan, curriculum programs, personnel appointments, and contract negotiations) (Payzant, 2011). School board decision-making is democratic with voting on major school issues with majority rules, devoid of autocratic decision-making. According to Ravitch (2010b), local elected school boards are the first line in the defense of public education due to differences in socioeconomics and demographics.

According to Hess (2010), strengths of elected school boards are the following:

1. Elected school boards are focused on student performance (e.g., graduation and dropout rates);
2. Elected school boards provide transparency;
3. Elected school boards give all members of the community an opportunity to voice their opinions; and
4. Elected school boards have positive working relationships with their superintendent.

### **Critiques of Elected School Boards**

According to Wong et al. (2007), elected school boards do not have the political incentives necessary for significant reform, especially because of low voter turnout which is between 18 and 20 percent. In addition, school board elections are subjected to significant influence by the teachers' union. Elected school boards are more responsive to the public than appointed school boards, but are susceptible to political infighting, dysfunction, and outside influences such as the local teachers union (Hess, 2008). According to Hess (2010), the elected school board governance model lacks the accountability and leadership needed to improve district outcomes.

In high achieving districts school boards are significantly different in their knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors than school boards in low achieving districts (Rice et al., 2000). Payne (2008) further asserted that elected school boards structures and operations subvert the organizational mission of school systems with their dysfunctional behaviors. For example, The Detroit Board of Education, elected or appointed, has a history of firing superintendents as its sole means of accountability to the public (Rich, 2009). Thus, superintendents and elected school boards are frequently engaged in power struggles and the unintended consequence of a superintendent's firing is wasted time and resources on the fired superintendent's agenda (Payne, 2008; Payzant, 2011).

According to Hess (2010) weaknesses of elected school boards are the following:

1. Elected school board members are not held accountable due to a lack of voter attention;
2. Elected school boards are susceptible to special constituencies due to voter apathy;
3. Elected school boards suffer from a lack of coherence, discipline, and continuity forcing superintendents to produce short-term results; and
4. Elected school boards are politically disconnected from the civic leadership of cities.

Eli Broad, sponsor of the *Broad Urban Education Prize*, openly questioned why school boards are still in existence because they are dysfunctional and antiquated due to their poor decision-making (Hess, 2008). For example, school politics in Boston Public Schools under an elected school board structure was noted for its divisiveness around school closings, relationships with the community, and fiscal responsibility (Portz & Schwartz, 2009). Boston Public Schools under the leadership of the elected Boston School Committee was known for its mismanagement of financial resources and corruption (Portz, 2000). A *Boston Globe* editorial described the elected Boston School Committee as a “disaster characterized by infighting, grandstanding, and aspirations for higher political office, and incompetence have become mainstays of the floundering system” (Portz, 2000; Hess, 2008).

For a majority of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and into the 2000s, school boards took a low-key, hands-off approach to student learning, reasoning that instructional decisions should be made by professional educators (Lashway, 2002). Furthermore, the lack of professional educators on elected school boards weakens its knowledge and expertise in prudent education policy and governance decision-making. The dysfunction caused by poor decision-making has slowly eroded the creditability of elected school boards in urban areas, as national and state politicians

have used urban schools as political footballs to advance their political careers/agendas as education has become a top campaign issue for politicians since *A Nation at Risk* (1983) was published (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

The number of school board members creates an excuse mechanism or blame-game situation among board members for unpopular decisions or lack of decision-making (Rich, 1988). Since the 1960s, urban school boards have been characterized as experiencing conflict, frustration and a high rate of turnover (Merz, 1986). The lack of voter turnout during May school board elections questions the mandate of voters and allows special interests candidates (i.e., local teacher union candidates) to be elected (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012; Rich, 2009; Hess, 2008; Payne, 2008). Large urban districts usually have at-large centralized schools boards where school board members are not voted in by their neighbors. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century school boards became centralized, and then school boards became political, which led to corruption, kickbacks, and favors for their supporters, loyalists, and constituents (Tyack, 1974).

Corruption and serving the interests of school board members has long plagued elected school boards such as the Detroit Board of Education (Tyack, 1974; Payne, 2008). The Boston School Committee during the 1970s and 1980s was under criticism for a host of reasons, including their frequent involvement in managerial aspects of school operations as well as their ineffectiveness in improving overall educational outcomes (Portz & Schwartz, 2009). In addition, the elected school board governance model is not effective if it is not accompanied with sustained leadership which will address the finances and school improvement (Hess, 2008). Elected school boards in cities (e.g., Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, New York City, and Washington DC) during the 1980s and 1990s have proven themselves to be dysfunctional and ineffective. Therefore, what's the next governance step for urban schools? Hess (2008) asserted

before changing school governance for mayoral control that an assessment of the conditions of the political landscape in the city and school district should determine if school governance reform and mayoral control can be successful. In Table 2.1 below, a chart outlines the positives and negatives of elected schools boards developed from the literature.

*Table 2.1: The Positives and Negatives of Elected School Boards*

<b>Positives of school boards</b>	<b>Negatives of school boards</b>
Represents local democracy	Political infighting/Financial mismanagement
Democratic decision-making	Outside influences/special interest candidates
Very responsive to the public	High rate of member turnover; members use this elected position to start political careers
	Lack of voter turnout in May elections
	Superintendents are politically shielded by the School Board
	Members are most likely not professional educators
	Cannot address poverty in the school district with limited resources

**Sources:** Wong et al. (2007); Hess (2008); Mertz (1986); Lashway (2002); Payne (2008); Rich (1988); Farkas, Foley, & Duffett (2001).

### **Mayoral Control**

The elected school board governance model during the 1980s and 1990s in selected large urban schools districts were struggling to provide a quality education for its students, in addition to mismanaging finances (Wong & Shen, 2003). In this era of high stakes testing, community leaders, state and local politicians, parents, voters, and the media in different parts of the United States were frustrated with the lack of accountability, financial mismanagement and poor student achievement in urban school districts and with elected school boards (Wong et al., 2007). The elected school board model lacks clear lines of accountability while the children in these large urban school districts are forced to endure this systematic dysfunction.

Therefore, what is the next step in governance for urban schools? These various groups within select urban cities have decided upon a bold initiative, bold to some and old to education historians: change the entire local school governance system. The emerging school governance reform in selected urban school districts across the nation is *mayoral control*. Mayoral control is a school governance system where the mayor of the city has statutory control of the school district, not the elected school board. Mayoral control is attempted in an effort to improve the city's public school system. Driven by mayors with goals of reinvigorating their cities in the face of major economic, social, and cultural shifts, mayoral control places urban schools at the center of efforts to improve the quality of life of city residents (Wong et al., 2007).

During the 1990s state and then mayoral takeovers were used as the education policy to address the lack of student achievement and fiscal irresponsibility in urban school districts (Wong & Shen, 2003). Clearly parents, policymakers, and researchers are all keenly interested in the relationship between mayoral leadership and urban school performance (i.e., productivity, management and governance, human capital, and building public confidence) (Wong et al., 2007). The importance of broad community support is well accepted and one strategy to build it is with a mayoral takeover of schools (Portz, 2000).

Hess (2008) argued the following position for the support of mayoral control in urban areas as an alternative to elected school boards:

For troubled urban districts, an examination of the evidence provides no persuasive research on the question of mayoral control but does provide good reason to think that replacing an elected board with one named by a strong, active, and accountable mayor is a promising way to jump-start coherent and sustained school improvement... Mayoral control can help foster these conditions but is not a substitute for or a shortcut around them; it is only promising as a means to provide them (Hess, 2008, p. 239).

Those advocating for mayoral control start with the position that the current system of elected school boards is flawed stemming from constant infighting among elected school board members, and the lack of accountability and oversight (McGlynn, 2010). According to Portz (2000), mayoral leadership is needed to bring the full engagement of the community to public education and to ensure accountability of the school system. This full engagement of the community is limited to the mayor's education policy and selection of a superintendent, but despite those shortcomings mayoral control is still a legitimate alternative to elected school boards in failing urban school districts. Under mayoral control, if the school system is not improving the mayor and their policies can be held accountable on Election Day (McGlynn, 2010). And lastly, a mayoral control has a broader mandate than elected school boards; mayors know how to build coalitions with business and civic leaders including non-profits and universities in addition to maximizing media opportunities (Wong & Shen, 2003).

The motivations behind mayoral control are uncertain: is it to provide genuine educational opportunity for inner-city students, or instead, a public relations strategy to advance the corporate community (Piliawsky, 2003)? Mayoral control followed the design of a growing number of state legislatures, mostly Republican-dominated, which took control of large, troubled urban school districts: Chicago (1995), Newark (1996), Washington, DC (1996), Baltimore (1997), Hartford (1997), Cleveland (1998), and Detroit (1999) (Piliawsky, 2003). As of 2009, almost two-thirds of state legislatures passed legislation for state takeovers of failing school districts (Wong, 2009).

Mayoral control in Boston is praised for its continuity in leadership, additional resources, and focus on teaching and learning (Portz & Schwartz, 2009). A basic rationale for mayoral control has been the assumed links among improved schools, city economic development, and



retention of middle-class families; an implicit policy assumption is that mayors are better equipped than elected school boards to highlight school problems and mobilize the necessary personnel and resources needed to solve them (Kirst, 2009). Mayoral control makes city hall a key factor in determining the allocation of resources in a school system (Portz & Schwartz, 2009).

The changes to Boston Public Schools under mayoral control laid out the foundation for mayoral control across the country (Portz, 1999). Mayoral control in Boston set the stage for other large urban school districts to go the route of mayoral control, because of the typical urban dysfunction in elected school board models (e.g., poor student achievement, poor fiscal responsibility, and a lack of accountability). The positive changes in Boston caused other education leaders to take notice. According to Kirst and Bulkley (2001), mayoral control from Boston to Washington has one similar characteristic: centralized executive decision-making. Mayoral control varies in terms of the mayor's actual role in the schools depending on the wording in the legislation, or the mayor's willingness to take political risk/responsibility with the city's public schools. Mayoral control has increased in favorability among stakeholders as fiscal responsibility, student achievement, and accountability are the metrics used to improve the perception of the district (Wong et al., 2007).

There are two different forms of mayoral control. Wong et al. (2007) have identified the two forms of mayoral control for school governance:

1. *mayor-appointed school boards* (e.g., Boston, Chicago, and New York City);
2. *shared city-state governance* (e.g., Baltimore, Detroit, and Philadelphia);

Governance changes are not a silver bullet, but they do provide an important context for reform and setting for leadership (Portz & Schwartz, 2009).

### **Critiques of Mayoral Control**

Despite the various forms of mayoral control, one question remains: can governance changes in and of themselves directly improve classroom teaching and learning (Kirst, 2009)? According to Hill (2000), “Mayoral and state takeovers are desperate moves, and they do not automatically improve school quality; everything depends on what the people who take over do and how educators respond” (p. 1). Hess (2008) argued that mayoral control is not a shortcut to student improvement, and there is no general consensus about the overall effectiveness of mayoral control. By and large, mayoral control literature addresses the outcomes of mayoral control and school governance reform by primarily examining standardized testing or other quantitative data metrics (Wong et al., 2007).

Wong et al. (2007) supported mayoral control as a preferred option for troubled urban schools, but still has the following critiques of mayoral control:

1. Mayoral control is undemocratic;
2. Mayoral control is a power grab; and
3. Mayoral control is a form of a state takeover.

Policymakers have often relied on student test scores as the only policymaking mechanism because it’s an easy strategy for accountability (Darling-Hammond & Ascher, 1991; Wong & Shen, 2003). However, for a more accurate assessment of the effectiveness of mayoral control other factors should be considered to determine if the school system as whole has improved (i.e., institutional progress), especially dropout rates and graduation rates (Wong et al., 2007). Most policy analysts would doubt whether governance changes can directly improve classroom teaching and learning (Kirst, 2009). Finally, there is conflicting evidence on whether or not mayoral control actually improves student achievement or fiscal responsibility due to the

inability to directly measure the impact of governance reform quantitatively (Hess, 2008). Lastly, mayoral control is a governance and administrative arrangement, not an identifiable and consistent package of pedagogical and reform strategies (e.g., Detroit Public Schools, 1999-2005) (Henig, 2009).

Does the mayor actually have the *political juice* to get resources into the public schools to improve them or will the mayor use the schools as a *political football* to advance his or her future political ambitions (e.g., former Baltimore mayor Martin O'Malley) (Rich, 2009)? The insertion of politics into the school system is viewed as a major drawback of mayoral control, from education policy decisions made or not made by the mayor to possible civil rights violations on how mayoral control may have been implemented in urban cities (e.g., New York City in 2002). Ravitch (2010b) asserted that mayoral control is undemocratic making it a major drawback of mayoral control in public education, and likens mayoral control in New York City under Mayor Michael Bloomberg to a Soviet Union-era autocratic committee highlighted by the *Monday Massacre* controversy over the issue of social promotion. Mayoral control does indeed limit democracy, but the trade-off for limited democracy is a streamlined decision-making process. In Table 2.2 below, it lists the positives and negatives of the mayoral control school developed from mayoral control literature. The positives vary, but improved management is usually a benefit of mayoral control. The negatives also vary, but are all rooted in politics.

**Table 2.2:** *The Positives and Negatives of Mayoral Control*

<b>Positives of mayoral control</b>	<b>Negatives of mayoral control</b>
Fiscal responsibility	Leadership disagreements between mayors and superintendents
Improved system of accountability	Superintendent is politically shielded by supportive mayors
Sustained leadership	Decision-making is autocratic

Increased student achievement on state standardized tests	Multiple municipal issues make it difficult to vote a mayor out of office due to mayoral control of schools or education policy
Poverty and student achievement can be addressed simultaneously	Possible civil and voting rights violations of citizens
Access to additional federal and state funding resources	Politically ambitious mayors who take a hands-off approach to the schools
Collaborations develop between mayors and universities	
Ability to increase community and parental engagement, and mobilizing electoral support for school reform	

**Sources:** Wong et al. (2007); National Center for Educational Statistics; Hunter (1999); Hess (2008); Ravitch (2010a); Wong (2009).

### **Urban School Governance Reform in Boston Public Schools, 1992-2013**

*The Boston Globe* ran editorials from January 1989 to December 1991 on the problems in Boston Public Schools: low graduation rates, violence in schools, political infighting on the Boston School Committee, poor leadership from the superintendent(s), high dropout rates, school closures, and fiscal irresponsibility; and then *The Boston Globe* publicly called for the elected school board (the Boston School Committee) to be replaced with an appointed one led by the mayor (Portz, 2000). The Boston mayor at the time, Raymond Flynn, was initially hesitant, but eventually supported *The Boston Globe's* calls to take on the responsibilities of leading Boston Public Schools as it became evident that political leaders and business leaders in Boston supported the new form of governance (Portz & Schwartz, 2009; Portz, 2000; Wong et al., 2007).

In 1992, Boston Public Schools was the first school district to experiment with mayoral control (Wong & Shen, 2003). The leadership in Boston (Mayor Thomas Menino and Superintendent Dr. Thomas Payzant) had a significant impact on the institutional progress of

Boston Public Schools, especially addressing student achievement issues (i.e., low graduation rate and high dropout rate). In addition, the leadership of Boston Public Schools had the support from voters, parents, and the business community (Portz, 2000). Mayoral control in Boston did not just occur with a referendum vote in the early 1990s, but the debate over school governance in Boston dates back to the controversies surrounding desegregation and busing in the 1970s and the Boston School Committee's political stance on those issues (Portz & Schwartz, 2009). In Table 2.3 below, Boston Public Schools dropout rate data from 1985 to 1995 highlight the seriousness of the dropout problem in Boston Public Schools with a dropout rate near 40% prior to mayoral control being enacted in Boston Public Schools (National Center for Educational Statistics). In Table 2.4 below, Boston Public Schools graduation rate data from 1991-2011 highlight the seriousness of the low graduation rate problem in Boston Public Schools with a graduation rate barely above 50% in 1991 prior to mayoral control being enacted in Boston (National Center for Educational Statistics).

**Table 2.3:** *Boston Public Schools Dropout Rates, 1985-1995*

	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Mean
Dropout Rate	36%	38%	39%	37%	33%	32%	30%	28%	27%	26%	26%	32%

**Source:** National Center for Educational Statistics

**Table 2.4:** *Boston Public Schools Graduation Rates, 1991-2011*

	1991	1996	2001	2006	2011	Mean
Graduation Rate	51%	59%	60%	59%	64%	58.6%

**Source:** National Center for Educational Statistics

### **Institutional Progress**

Institutional progress is a term coined by former *Baltimore Sun* reporter, David Simon, who was also the creator of the critically acclaimed HBO series *The Wire* during an interview on the PBS series *Bill Moyers Journal* on April 17, 2009. Simon argued that stats can be manipulated (i.e., juking the stats) to tell any story a politician wants to tell in terms of progress being achieved. Simon used the example of the arrest stats in Baltimore during his time as a crime reporter for the *Baltimore Sun* where arrests were increasing, but the violent crime and the drug problem in the city remained unchanged. Simon asserted that the number of arrests did indeed increase, but the quality of the arrests did not have an impact on crime in Baltimore. Simon argued for institutional progress to occur there essentially has to be a qualitative approach to looking at progress in our institutions, not solely a quantitative approach.

In developing the theoretical framework for this study, Simon's concept of institutional progress will be applied more broadly to education grounded in the literature from Wong et al. (2007), which is a purely quantitative assessment of a school district based upon standardized test scores or the financial health of a school district. With the standardized test cheating scandals in Atlanta and Philadelphia, and the alleged cheating scandal in Washington DC, scholars or educators can broadly apply Simon's argument of *juking the stats* in education, not just crime statistics. To more accurately determine whether or not the institutional progress of an educational institution is being achieved several quantitative and qualitative measurables should be examined, not just standardized test scores which can be manipulated. Simon's argument was grounded in *Campbell's Law* (Campbell, 1976).

Simon (2009, April 17) asserted the following on institutional progress during his interview on the *Bill Moyers Journal* television show:

You show me anything that depicts *institutional progress* in America, school test scores, crime stats, arrest reports, arrest stats, anything that a politician can run on, anything that somebody can get a promotion on. And as soon as you invent that statistical category, 50 people in that institution will be at work trying to figure out a way to make it look as if progress is actually occurring when actually no progress is... and an assistant school superintendent can become a school superintendent, if they make it look like the kids are learning.

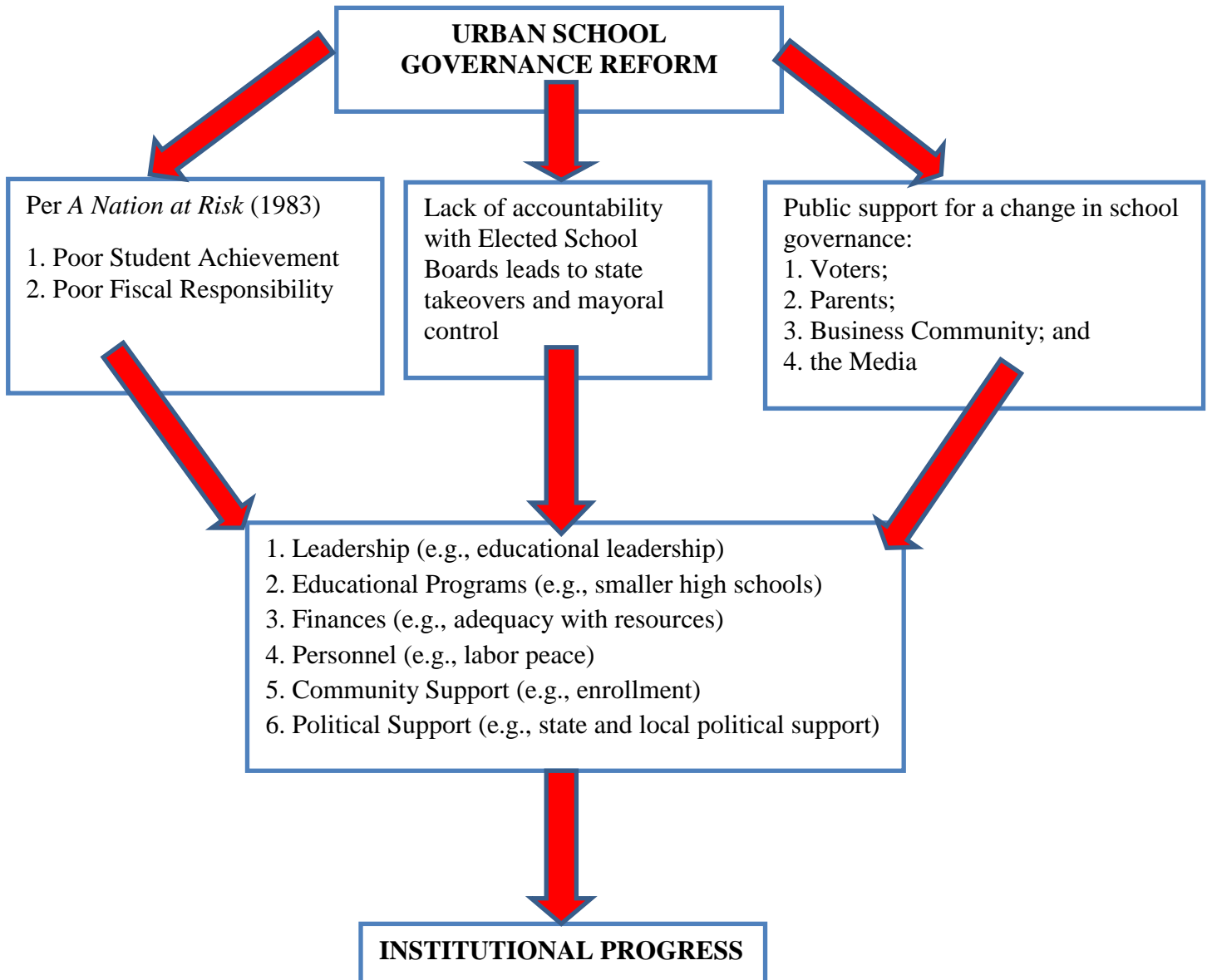
Like Simon, who argued that numbers can be manipulated, Wong et al. (2007) argued that a more comprehensive assessment of school districts is needed which also included graduation and dropout rates. A qualitative perspective must be included in the final analysis when determining the institutional progress of a school district. For a more grounded educational approach to institutional progress, the literature on the variables of institutional progress were studied in addition to how these variables emerged from the literature on Boston Public Schools' turnaround during the 1990s and 2000s.

1. Leadership
  - a. District leadership
  - b. Educational leadership
  - c. Central office effectiveness
  - d. Building principal effectiveness
2. Educational Programs
  - a. Development of significant education reforms
  - b. Curriculum initiatives and other reforms
3. Finances
  - a. Balanced budget
  - b. Adequacy with financial resources
  - c. Fund balance
4. Personnel
  - a. Teacher turnover and layoffs
  - b. Labor peace
  - c. District morale
5. Community Support
  - a. Public perception

- b. Newspaper coverage of Detroit Public Schools
  - c. Business support
  - d. School closures
  - e. Enrollment
  - f. Charter schools
6. Political Support
- a. City education agenda
  - b. State education agenda
  - c. Internal and external barriers



*Figure 2.1: Institutional Progress Concept Map*



### **Institutional Progress Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of institutional progress will be used as the guiding framework for this dissertation study. The institutional progress framework emerged from examining the literature on Boston Public Schools after their district turnaround during the 1990s and 2000s, which are the following themes: leadership, educational programs, finances, personnel, community support, and political support (Payzant, 2011; Portz, 2007; Wong et al., 2007; Portz & Schwartz, 2009; Payzant & Horan, 2007; Portz, 2000; Portz, 1996; Reville, 2007).

The *leadership* variable within institutional progress examines the characteristics of educational leadership in a school district from the governance structure, district leadership to the leadership of principals in schools. The *educational programs* variable of institutional progress examines the quality of educational programs implemented by district leaders to improve the quality of education in the school district. The *finances* variable of institutional progress examines how well district leaders are managing district financial resources and the adequacy of financial resources. The *personnel* variable of institutional progress examines the state of labor relations in a school district, but also how district leaders are addressing morale issues in the district. The *community support* variable of institutional progress examines how well district leaders are engaging with the community to support district turnaround efforts. The *political support* variable of institutional progress examines the legislative support for the school district from city and state political leaders in addition to external and internal barriers preventing the district from achieving progress.

These variables are important to improving the outcomes of a school district, which is to educate children and to prepare them for careers or postsecondary education opportunities. These variables are also interrelated. For example, leadership is needed to develop and then

implement educational programs in the district. Furthermore, districts need to be good financial stewards to convert resources into school personnel change to change the outcomes of students, which will change the narrative of the school district leading to more community and political support.

This conceptual framework will explain: the effects of educational leadership, the impact of school governance reform, and it will identify possible internal and external barriers to institutional progress in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014. The available literature on the urban school governance reform places an emphasis on only examining tangible statistics such as standardized test scores (Wong et al., 2007). This study will analyze the perceptions and perspectives of the educational leadership in Detroit Public Schools and the impact governance and its leadership had on institutional progress in the district. The enrollment of Detroit Public Schools in 1999 prior to the state takeover was 167,000 students and it has decreased to 47,000 students in 2014.

### **Institutional Progress Literature Review**

Institutional progress is a conceptual framework used to examine district-level performance by not strictly focusing on quantitative metrics such as standardized testing scores or fiscal responsibility. Wong et al. (2007) asserted the need to take a more comprehensive examination into school districts to evaluate their overall impact beyond fiscal responsibility and standardized testing results by examining graduation rates and dropout rates, too. However, simply examining more quantitative data will not answer the question about whether or not a school district is living up to its mission of *properly* educating children. Therefore, examining qualitative data alongside quantitative data will provide a clearer picture of a school district's performance (i.e., the quality of the education).

## Leadership

Educational leadership at the school building and district levels is an essential element of improving educational outcomes. Educational leadership is second only to classroom teaching as a major influence on improving student achievement (Leithwood, Harris & Harris, 2008; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004). Leaders should create an academic culture focused on instruction, not discipline, allowing leaders to observe class practices regularly, informally and formally (Spillane et al., 2004). When educational leadership is focused on improving teaching and learning it is done by positively influencing: staff motivations, their commitment to their students, and working conditions (Leithwood et al., 2008). Furthermore, when student engagement increases it is usually the effect of educational leadership and when principal turnover occurs it is one of the reasons why schools either lose progress or fail in spite of what teachers might do. (Leithwood et al., 2008). In short, educational leadership is effective when principals and superintendents build a vision, have high expectations for teachers in regards to improving the quality of instruction, and are focused on improving student achievement in their buildings and school districts (Leithwood et al., 2008; Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Hallinger, 2003; Walberg, 1984).

In struggling urban school districts a different type of educational leadership has emerged: turnaround district leadership. Turnaround district leadership has different a different meaning to different people. One example of turnaround district leadership is enlisting the nontraditional administrators without education backgrounds as superintendents in troubled and large urban school districts (e.g., Paul Vallas, David Adamany, etc.) to reform these urban districts (Eisinger & Hula, 2004). Nontraditional administrators or gunslinger administrators gained popularity during the 1990s and 2000s in an effort to bring order to urban school districts

in chaos (Eisinger & Hula, 2004). These gunslinger administrators have generally been successful in terms of reforming the operations and bureaucratic structures of urban school districts, but have fallen short on improving student outcomes (e.g., the emergency financial manager model in Detroit Public Schools) (Eisinger & Hula, 2004).

The other district turnaround strategy perspective is a quick and dramatic change by capable superintendents to support principals to maximize success (Kowal, Hassel & Hassel, 2009). In turnaround school districts the priority is hiring qualified turnaround principals, establishing structures within the central office to accommodate the turnaround, and a commitment to the turnaround as a relentless strategy to eliminate low-performing schools within the district.

According to Kowal et al. (2009), there are seven steps to turning around low performing schools and schools districts:

1. Commit to success requires district leaders to be prepared to stay the course for the turnaround;
2. Choose turnarounds for the right schools is a shift in thinking for the adults working in the schools, and the right types of principals need to be in-place to oversee these turnarounds;
3. Develop a pipeline of turnaround leaders is the result of 70% of successful turnarounds coming at the hands of new top leadership which can then develop principals;
4. Give turnaround principals a certain level of autonomy and support from district leaders on controversial decisions and actions;
5. Turnaround district leaders and principals are held to short timelines for results or the reforms will not take root;
6. Prioritize staffing at turnaround schools with recruitment of teachers, adjustments in the collective bargaining where the dismissal of teachers unable or unwilling to improve their instructional practice occurs; and

7. Proactively engage the community to gain their support for the turnaround with a vision for the future.

Even though turnaround leadership is in the vanguard there are other educational leadership methods that can use to improve outcomes for students. According to Eilens and Camacho (2007), educational leadership in the form of changing school culture is essential to school level success. Educational leadership for school turnarounds should include professional development for principals and teachers, structural changes to the schedule, aligning the curriculum to the assessment, focusing on the needs of students, using data strategically, team building, and observing high performing schools (Eilens & Camacho, 2007).

Effective educational leadership is also influenced by administrative policies, behavior and practices; and good inner-city schools are led by teams with both managerial and instructional leadership skills (Hallinger, 2003). More specifically, the quality of the people leading schools matter as the skillful leadership of school principals is a key contributing factor when it comes to explaining successful change, school improvement, or school effectiveness can occur (Hallinger, 2003). Lastly, Cuban (1998) asserted effective schools are the results of successful school reforms; and successful school reforms are the result of the popularity of the reform, how well the reform can be adapted to a school or school district, and the longevity of the reform (Cuban, 1998). Ineffective schools and the failure of school reforms are due to the inability (i.e., lack of skills or lack of knowledge about the reform) of school leaders to implement the reforms with fidelity (Cuban, 1998).

### **Educational Programs**

Since *A Nation at Risk* was released the educational system in the United States has been adjusting to changes in curriculum, but more specifically to the standards-based reforms. An element of institutional progress is the implementation of education programs specifically aimed

at improving student achievement such as standardized test scores or dropout rates. An improvement in student test scores is a great starting point for systematic improvement and an evaluation of educational programs in a school district (Payne, 2008). The struggle for educators since the standards-based reform movement began was for teachers to constantly link relationships, pedagogy, and curriculum into daily instruction to create critical reflective thinkers (Shindler, Jones, Taylor, & Cadenas, 2004). The classroom environment is central to the learning process and in urban schools especially the social and emotional needs must be addressed in order for students to achieve (Shindler et al., 2004). The successful schools had principals with higher expectations for students and teachers on the standards which influenced the quality of school outcomes (Hallinger, 2003). Successful schools align their curriculum to the standards and also to the state assessment while unsuccessful schools have a curriculum that is not aligned to the curriculum or state assessment (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986).

However, creating standards is not enough to improve education (Darling-Hammond, 2004). There must be an investment in education for educators to reach these increased standards (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Teacher quality matters and resource allocation is very important to the educational outcomes as there is a positive correlation between better trained and paid teachers and student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2004). For example, Connecticut policymakers increased education funding when they increased standards in their state curriculum, which was accompanied with improved teacher preparation, incentives, and relevant professional development on teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond, 2004). As a result, Connecticut improved to one of the top states in terms of student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2004). In addition to understanding how curriculum, instruction, and teacher quality factor into improving the quality of educational outcomes for students, it is very important to

understand how local education reforms such as how leaders decide to invest their resources into their school districts factor into the closing the achievement gap between urban school districts and affluent suburban school districts.

### **Finances**

There are two conflicting beliefs about the role financial resources factor into the educational outcomes of student achievement, but understanding how to be prudent with financial resources and being fiscally responsible is an element of institutional progress. An improvement in fiscal responsibility is a great starting point for systematic improvement (Payne, 2008). *The Coleman Report* (1966) found that school resources had a surprising small effect on measured student achievement as it was influential in the relationship between school resources and student learning (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012; Mirel, 1999; Coleman et al., 1966). Hanushek (1997) further asserted that there is not a strong relationship between school resources and student performance. However, some school districts find productive resources and use extra resources to boost the performance of their students (Hanushek, 1997). In terms of education funding policymaking, local school districts which do not use funds effectively complicate the funding policymaking process (Hanushek, 1997).

According to Darling-Hammond (2004), closing the achievement gap requires an investment in education and specifically in the following areas: smaller teacher-to-student ratios in early lower elementary grades, smaller high schools, and universal preschool education. More specifically, the movement to breakup large impersonal high schools is a step in the right direction to lower the achievement gap among black and white students as smaller high schools outperform large high schools on standardized tests and decreasing the dropout rate (Shakrani, 2008).



## Personnel

The success of any organization is due by and large to the people working within the organization, and having productive and satisfied school district employees is an element of institutional progress (i.e., good staff morale). According to Taylor (2004), the *Hawthorne Effect* states that productivity among workers increased after positive interactions (i.e., praise) with their managers. Therefore, urban schools and their bureaucratic structures must address the dissention, frustration, and demoralization they create among the teacher ranks lowering the professional culture within a particular school or within the system as a whole (Payne, 2008). In addition, trust among a staff has a significant influence upon the overall success of the school and the students (i.e., strong social capital) (Payne, 2008). Demoralization among teachers is a reason for a lack of student achievement in urban areas with high poverty as teacher attitudes and beliefs can affect school reforms (Payne, 2008).

Labor strife and contentious issues regarding labor contracts and teacher salaries can have a negative effect on the morale of a school district in addition to student achievement. According to Baker (2013), students who have been affected by a labor strike learn 3.8% less during the course of a school year than their counterparts who were unaffected. Additionally, school leadership including teacher unions can negatively affect school reform and district morale with confusion, corruption, incompetence, and internal power struggles (Payne, 2008). District morale is also negatively affected in urban school systems because they are overcentralized and not in-tune with the needs of local schools with too many programs, and too many changes in leadership (Payne, 2008). Furthermore, the instability of leadership, mismanagement of funds, corruption, and a loss of focus on educating children can lead to a

demoralized staff preventing a school district from achieving institutional progress (Payne, 2008).

Another aspect of personnel is the quality of the personnel working in the district because the most important predictor of academic success in schools is teacher quality (Goldhaber, Lavery & Theobald, 2015). Because there is a link between teachers and student outcomes teacher quality is an important factor in improving institutional progress (Lankford, Leob & Wyckoff, 2002; Goldhaber, Lavery & Theobald, 2015). A further analysis of teacher quality in schools finds that there is a difference in teacher quality across schools, especially in urban schools (Lankford, Leob & Wyckoff, 2002). More specifically, urban schools have lesser qualified teachers while nonwhite and poorer urban schools have the least qualified teachers (Lankford, Leob & Wyckoff, 2002). Teacher quality is generally impacted by salary variations, hiring practices, and working conditions (i.e., teacher-to-student ratios, access to resources, etc.) (Lankford, Leob & Wyckoff, 2002). Therefore, for institutional progress to occur personnel in urban school district must be respected but also supported by central administration in the form of hiring practices with a focus on recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers to improve student outcomes.

### **Community Support**

For struggling urban public schools to make institutional progress they cannot do it without the support of the communities they serve. Community support is an important element of institutional progress as voters must approve millages and bond proposals to help finance initiatives to improve different aspects of the district's operations (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). Parent participation is essential for schools to be effective in their mission to educate students (Comer & Haynes, 1991). The process for promoting student achievement is directly affected by

the home environment (Sanders, 1998). If the goal of schools is to develop children to their maximum potential then both the schools and families must work together for the mutual benefit of students (Comer & Haynes, 1991). As schools and families continue to work together they will eventually improve the academic self-worth and behavior of students resulting in increased student achievement (Sanders, 1998).

Community support at the district level is also very important as the structure of community support is an important piece in school reform efforts and will lead to improved institutional progress (Portz, 2000). The support of the community can look different in different cities, but for political and business leaders the control of financial and other resources is important to the long-term survival of reform efforts in urban school districts (Portz, 2000). Lastly, community support coupled with broad and sustained political support will lead to effective teaching and learning (Portz, 2000).

For institutional progress to occur in urban school districts community support must exist for the school district at city hall and with the local business community (Portz, Stein & Jones, 1999). Unless the business community is linked to public education by a set of common interests and concerns, the civic capacity of the community is unlikely to be activated in support of the schools (Portz et al., 1999). A superintendent, mayor, or other leader can provide the vision, focus, and energy that result in civic resources being applied to educational problems and those resources will possibly increase the institutional progress within the school district (Portz et al., 1999). Lastly and most importantly, building a system of excellence in public education is a task not only for educators but for the entire community (Portz et al., 1999).

### **Political Support**

Institutional progress in urban school districts also hinges on the nature of the political

support it receives from local and state level policymakers. For institutional progress to occur the nature of the political support must be supportive of a school district's reforms, not opposing a school district's reforms. Why are some education reforms supported by policymakers while others are not? School governance and finances are usually prioritized over other education reforms or problems because it is easier to address those issues than more complex issues in school districts (Portz, 1996).

Policymakers use a threshold to view education reform and how reforms are prioritized (Portz, 1996). *Problem visibility* is whether or not the problem is acknowledged by a large consensus of people in which the problem might be affecting; *political sponsorship* is whether or not the problem can get political support from local civic leaders or business leaders for change; and *viable solutions* are whether or not the problem has possible solutions that doable and the solution can be accepted by a large consensus of people (Portz, 1996). The role of the media cannot be overlooked in the education reform process, because the influential role of the media (newspapers and television) in establishing the tone, and for framing the question of the problem for policymakers to address with buzz words like: crisis, severe, chronic, and on-going (Portz, 1996). Lastly, the problems that rise to the top of the education policy agenda demand the attention of policymakers because those are the problems that are viewed as critical to their constituency, which can also be supported by civic leaders, various organizations, and other institutions. These supported reforms have the possibility of providing doable solutions (Portz, 1996).

Political support also comes in the form of local political support, which is essential for moving a school district towards institutional progress with the support of local actors inside and outside of city hall. A framework for understanding this type of civic cooperation is called

*urban regime theory* (Stone, 1989). After looking at the history of Atlanta (1946-1988) urban regime theory is used to explain how racial polarization did not dominate the city's civic life but rather a biracial coalition formed and became an essential part of the city's governing regime (Stone, 1989). An *urban regime* is not just any informal group that comes together to make a decision; it is an informal group that is relatively stable and has access to institutional resources that allow it to have a sustained role in making governing decisions (Stone, 1989). An *urban regime* perspective thus highlights why many social programs fail or never rise above the level of triage operations (Stone, 1989).

In the context of Detroit, urban regimes control wealth and investment decisions by non-governmental actors and achieve sustained influence in key policy areas (Orr & Stoker, 1994). For example, the regime was led by corporate actors who started initially with the support of a downtown revitalization of Detroit and it expanded to other areas of civic involvement; the Big Three automakers (i.e., Chrysler, Ford and General Motors) remained a substantial force in civic affairs of the urban regime (Orr & Stoker, 1994). The Detroit Compact is an example of the role the urban regime can play in politically supporting the school district as it was an agreement between Detroit Public Schools, the city's business community, the city of Detroit, and the state of Michigan that offers students guaranteed college tuition or employment for meeting stringent academic and attendance standards (Orr & Stoker, 1994). Another instance where the urban regime inserted itself into the affairs of Detroit Public School was in the 1988 school board election and the election of the HOPE Team members who were seeking to oust the at-large incumbent members of the school board to restore fiscal responsibility to the district after nearly a decade of operating with a budget deficit (Orr & Stoker, 1994; Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). In addition, the Detroit Chamber of Commerce was instrumental in persuading the school

superintendent at the time, Dr. Arthur Jefferson, to resign/retire and supported the appointment of Dr. John Porter as his replacement to oversee the restoration of fiscal responsibility to the district (Orr & Stoker, 1994). Given the changes in federal policies and administrations at the federal and state levels, the urban regime in Detroit was in a better position to have more leverage with Mayor Coleman A. Young, but the changes in and around Detroit politically caused a limited and weak urban regime in Detroit compared to Atlanta (Stone, 1989; Orr & Stoker, 1994).

Detroit Public Schools has its experiences with political support in the form of a public school cartel (Rich, 2009). The public school cartel worked as a veto player in the struggle for the school system and it was a coalition of professional school administrators, long-time board members, union leaders, and school activists organized for the protection of the organizational culture and policies of the system (Rich, 2009). The mobilization of the Detroit Public School cartel is usually triggered by threats of change, whether real or imagined (Rich, 2009). Mayor Young had the political clout in Lansing and support in the city to limit state's encroachment into the districts affairs leading to the state takeover in 1999 while his successor, Dennis Archer, never achieved sufficient political clout to offset the state takeover even though he objected to the idea in 1997 (Rich, 2009).

### **Institutional Progress in Boston Public Schools, 1995-2013**

The conceptual framework for institutional progress was grounded in the literature and research on Boston Public School's turnaround in the mid-1990s under the leadership of Dr. Thomas Payzant (Payzant, 2011; Payzant & Horan, 2007; Portz & Schwartz, 2009; Dukakis & Portz, 2010; Portz, 2007, Portz, 2000, Portz, 1996; Reville, 2007; Wong et al., 2007). There were several themes which emerged from the literature on Boston Public Schools' turnaround

that were used to develop the institutional progress conceptual framework for this dissertation study and those themes were the following: leadership, educational programs, financial, personnel, community support, and political support (Payzant, 2011; Payzant & Horan, 2007; Portz & Schwartz, 2009; Dukakis & Portz, 2010; Portz, 2007, Portz, 2000, Portz, 1996; Reville, 2007; Wong et al., 2007) (*See Appendix F-1*).

It is essential to tell Boston's story to increase the knowledge of parents, educators, students, and policymakers about what it takes to improve a whole system of schools, because this is not the same Boston Public Schools and Boston has benefited from proven turnaround strategies and educational leadership from the superintendent (Payzant & Horan, 2007). Governance and educational leadership are two important variables in determining whether or not an urban school district can be successful. Governance provides a structure for educational leadership to possibly flourish and make positive change in an urban school district. During Dr. Thomas Payzant's tenure as superintendent in Boston Public Schools his leadership forged a strong working relationships with the mayors of Boston, the teachers union, and with the appointed Boston School Committee which was rare for public education during that time period in urban public education (Hess, 2008; Portz & Schwartz, 2009; Portz, 2007).

According to Payzant (2011), there are several key elements for the design and implementation of systematic reform plans in urban schools which are the following:

1. *Vision*: describes the destination where the district or school wants to go;
2. *Mission*: states what has to be accomplished for the destination to be reached;
3. *Theory of Action*: sets forth the specific expectations about how to get to the destination by stating that if we use a particular strategy and implement it with fidelity, we can expect to achieve a defined result; and
4. *Goals*: provide specific targets and timelines for results.

## Leadership

Why is Boston Public Schools during that time period a system of interest and an example of institutional progress? When Dr. Payzant took over Boston Public Schools he was a highly respected, low-ego, and high-reform district school leader equipped with a research-based “theory of action” aimed at improving instruction in order to increase learning in the district (Reville, 2007). Dr. Payzant’s focus as the superintendent in Boston Public Schools was not about solely improving standardized test scores or balancing a budget, but to be the face of the district as an instructional leader (Payzant, 2011). Educational leadership is an important aspect of institutional progress as the previous superintendents in Boston displayed a lack of leadership which led to mayoral control in Boston Public Schools (Portz & Schwartz, 2009). Dr. Payzant believed the mission and goal of the district was do what was in the best interests of children (Payzant, 2011). Another part of leadership is having a clear vision and mission for the district, which was the *Focus on Children* reform plans for the district (Boston Public Schools; Portz & Schwartz, 2009). Dr. Payzant’s tenure witnessed a dramatic change in the district, not only in terms of quantitative educational metrics, but the overall quality of the district had improved significantly (i.e., institutional progress) as the focus was on the children in Boston.

**Boston’s Six Essentials of Whole-School Improvement.** Leadership requires a clearly articulated vision on how a school district will be reformed. Dr. Payzant believed in the first step for whole school improvement was the development of *Boston’s Six Essentials of Whole-School Improvement* built on the premise that every child should achieve high standards (Payzant & Horan, 2007).

According to Payzant and Horan (2007), *Boston’s Six Essentials of Whole-School Improvement* consisted of the following approach to whole school improvement:



1. Use effective instructional practices and create collaborative school climate to improve learning;
2. Examine student work and data to drive instruction and professional development;
3. Invest in professional development to improve instruction;
4. Share leadership to sustain instructional improvement;
5. Focus resources to support instructional improvement and improved learning; and
6. Partner with families and community to support student learning.

Another goal for Boston Public Schools was to improve the instructional leadership capacity of building principals by focusing on improving instruction with relevant professional development for them and for their teachers (Payzant, 2011). To achieve these goals, layers of the bureaucracy of Boston Public Schools were eliminated in the Boston Central Office, where principals reported directly to the superintendent and the deputy superintendent. Dr. Payzant posits that the challenge for any leader is to make sure that getting the right people in place is not stifled by the organizational structure (Payzant & Horan, 2007).

Leadership also consisted of changing adult culture in the district to one of being a learner yourself from the principal ranks down to the teachers (Payzant & Horan, 2007). Dr. Payzant instituted relevant district-wide professional development and smaller learning communities in larger schools to increase collaboration among teachers on the best instructional practices. Dr. Payzant also collaborated with principals on issues going on in their schools and developed a leadership group to seek their guidance on district policy and budgetary issues (Dukakis & Portz, 2010). Furthermore, principals reported directly to the superintendent to engage in meaningful conversations about what needed to occur at schools to improve instruction (Dukakis & Portz, 2010; Payzant, 2011). Dr. Payzant believed educational leadership from the superintendent and from principals was in the form of improving the quality of teaching

and learning in the district via high standards would improve student achievement (Dukakis & Portz, 2010; Payzant, 2011). Dr. Payzant visited every Boston Public School to understand what was happening inside of Boston's schools and to observe instruction first-hand (Payzant & Horan, 2007). The results of those visits confirmed that there was a lack of curriculum coherence in the district and no clear learning objectives for students (Payzant & Horan, 2007).

According to Payzant (2011), the quality of instruction in the classroom and the effectiveness of leadership in schools and school districts are the most important variables which can improve student achievement. Knowledge of teaching and learning is essential for the superintendent to help principals understand what good instruction is so they can then lead those conversations with teachers at their buildings, and principals should focus on inspiring and supporting teachers to improve their instruction in the classroom (Dukakis & Portz, 2010).

**District leadership.** In addition to stability in the superintendent's office, stable leadership was also provided by the appointed Boston School Committee (Dr. Elizabeth Reilinger) and the Boston Teachers Union (Edward Doherty) (Portz, 2007; Portz & Schwartz, 2009). In Table 2.5 below, it gives an example of what sustained leadership can look like in an urban school such as Boston Public Schools from 1992-2013 with superintendents having more than five years in their leadership position on average while under mayoral control.

*Table 2.5: Leadership in Boston Public Schools, 1992-2013*

<b>BPS Leader</b>	<b>Tenure</b>	<b>Reason for leaving the district</b>
<b>Dr. Lois Harrison-Jones</b>  *Hired by the elected Boston School Committee six months before mayoral control was enacted in January 1992.	1991-1995*	<b>Contract was not renewed.</b> Political differences developed as a result of Harrison-Jones lack of political understanding of Boston and her inability to fulfil the appointed board's reform mandates.
<b>Dr. Thomas W. Payzant</b>	1995-2006	<b>Retired.</b>
<b>Michael G. Contampasis</b>	2006-2007	<b>Retired.</b> Served in a long-term interim capacity

until a permanent superintendent could be hired.

<b>Dr. Carol R. Johnson</b>	2007-2013	<b>Retired.</b>
<b>Average Tenure</b>	<b>5.25 years</b>	

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**Sources:** Boston Public Schools; *The Boston Globe*.

During the 1980s and early 1990s, Boston Public Schools was similar to other major urban school districts characterized by poor student achievement and governed by an elected school board known for political infighting and fiscal irresponsibility. For example, in 1991, the year before mayoral control was enacted, the graduation rate was only 51% and the dropout rate was 30% in Boston Public Schools. However, when mayoral control was enacted in Boston the narrative about Boston Public Schools began to change from hopelessness to one of hope and ultimately institutional progress. In 2012, twenty years into mayoral control, the graduation rate increased to 65.9% and the dropout rate decreased to 15.9%. How did Boston Public Schools make this turnaround? What did the leaders in Boston figure out that seems to elude other school leaders in places like Detroit?

Dr. Payzant believed Boston Public Schools would improve in accordance with the improvement of building principals as instructional leaders, not just building managers (Payzant, 2011; Payzant & Horan, 2007). There was a focus on teaching and learning in the district which was not present before Payzant's arrival (Portz & Schwartz, 2009). Intense professional development on standards-based instruction was given to all Boston Public Schools principals and then Payzant and his deputy superintendent were the direct supervisors for principals (Payzant, 2011; Payzant & Horan, 2007). This instructional leadership approach led to increases in the major student achievement areas (i.e., standardized tests, NAEP, graduation rates, and dropout rates).

## Educational Programs

The primary goal of the educational programs and reforms implemented by Dr. Payzant was to transform *all* schools so that *every* child received a rigorous educational experience in *every* classroom (Payzant & Horan, 2007). Another goal of the educational programs and reforms implemented by Dr. Payzant were to recast the principal as the instructional leader to advance the academic agenda of the district (Payzant & Horan, 2007). Dr. Payzant's legacy will be a laser-like focus on improving instruction, but during Dr. Payzant's tenure it was marked with several educational programs to improve student achievement in the district including the following: preschool education, standards-based reform, and smaller high schools which addressed student achievement issues in the district (Payzant & Horan, 2007; Payzant, 2011; Portz & Schwartz, 2009). Also, a focus on literacy was implemented in Dr. Payzant's first year (Payzant, 2011). For the educational programs to be successful there was an investment in the people working in Boston Public Schools from professional development to Boston's Collaborative Coaching and Learning (CCL) where teachers learned together, shared best practices, reviewed student data, and reflected on their instruction (Payzant & Horan, 2007).

**Preschool education.** Another school reform was the advent of Pilot Schools very similar to charter schools in the district. In addition to Pilot Schools, another major school reform in Boston was the introduction of all-day kindergarten for all five-year-olds in the city; additionally, Boston Public Schools opened several early childhood education centers (Payzant, 2011; Portz, 2007; Payzant & Horan, 2007). These reforms expanded the number of seats in kindergarten from 700 in 1994 to 1,700 by 1999 (Payzant & Horan, 2007). Smaller high schools and a preschool education are two K-12 reforms which are proven to close the achievement gap.

**Standards-based reform.** The quality of instruction in every classroom and leadership in each school are the most critical levers for improving student performance, and standards-based reform provides the framework for teaching and learning and it sets a high bar for all students to meet high standards (Payzant, 2011).

According to Payzant (2011), the framework for standards-based reform has four components:

1. Standards in each subject for what students should know and be able to do;
2. Access for both teachers and learners to a rigorous curriculum aligned with the standards;
3. Support for teachers to engage in continuous improvement of their instruction; and
4. Data from both formative and summative assessments of student achievement with the understanding that some data would be used for accountability purposes and other data would be used by teachers to determine the necessary instructional steps to modify the curriculum during the school year to differentiate instruction.

**Smaller high schools.** As previously mentioned, a notable reform undertaken in Boston Public Schools during Dr. Payzant's tenure was the reorganization of large high schools into smaller high schools with learning communities. Dr. Payzant believed despite the lack of early evidence and results that smaller high schools with more personal settings were helping to improve the climate for learning and the quality instruction (Steinberg & Allen, 2007). Dr. Payzant created schools where adults and students want to teach and learn, and where instruction is rigorous in every classroom in every subject area. This approach to reducing students' sense of anonymity or alienation at the high school level was especially designed to curb the persistent dropout rate problem in Boston Public Schools (Payzant & Horan, 2007).

Visitors to Boston Public Schools see education complexes that represent conversions of large high schools into several small schools; high schools with a charter-like approach with autonomy of their budgets (Steinberg & Allen, 2007). Boston is not the first urban school district to implement this reform; however, Boston stands apart because of high-level and sustained commitment from Dr. Payzant making this a systematic reform (Steinberg & Allen, 2007). This high school reform was designed to make high school more engaging for students with a relevant curriculum (Steinberg & Allen, 2007). Also, teacher quality was expected to improve via the use of collaborative planning time with teachers teaching in the same content area or courses, which was a practice designed help teachers to become more reflective in their practice and to share best practices (Steinberg & Allen, 2007). As a result of these high school reforms in Boston Public Schools, the dropout rate decreased from 26% in 2001 before this high school reform was introduced to 20% in 2006 when Dr. Payzant retired (Boston Public Schools). According to a *U.S. News and World Report* in 2014, Boston Public Schools had nine high schools which were nationally recognized, with four high schools in the top 50 in the state of Massachusetts. The Boston Latin School was ranked 1<sup>st</sup> in the state of Massachusetts and 56<sup>th</sup> nationally respectively.

**Literacy.** Improving literacy was high on Dr. Payzant's list of priorities for the district's school children (Payzant, 2011). The first step was developing a literacy program based upon city-wide learning standards for literacy aligned to the state's curriculum framework with a determination of what type of reading and writing programs would be appropriate to reach those goals (Payzant, 2011). The rollout for this program was done in four stages over the course of four years and the schools with the lowest leadership capacity did not enroll in the program until the fourth year when it was mandatory (Payzant, 2011). The results were improved reading

scores on the NAEP. In Table 2.6 below, NAEP results for Boston Public Schools in 4<sup>th</sup> Grade math and reading from 2009-2013 are listed in math in addition to the percentage of students who are below basic levels of proficiency.

**Table 2.6:** Boston Public Schools 4<sup>th</sup> Grade NAEP Results: 2009, 2011 and 2013

NAEP	4 <sup>th</sup> Math	Below Basic	4 <sup>th</sup> Reading	Below Basic
2009 Boston Public Schools Results	236	19%	215	39%
2011 Boston Public Schools Results	237	19%	217	38%
2013 Boston Public Schools Results	237	20%	214	39%

**Source:** National Center for Educational Statistics

## Finances

District leadership decided to redirect resources in a different way to support reform in Boston Public Schools. Therefore, the reconsideration of finances must go hand-in-hand with educational strategy, and Boston Public Schools could use existing resources and strategic realigning of them away from traditional uses creating an atmosphere at the secondary level with more collegial support for teachers and improved classroom instruction (Miles, 1995).

**Financial reforms.** Other reforms in the district while under mayoral control included a cost-benefit analysis of educational programs in Boston Public Schools. According to Miles (1995), there were four educational programs that accounted for 40% of instructional resources: 1.) reduce use of pull out programs; 2.) redesign provision of teacher planning and development time; 3.) modify formula-driven student assignments to create more flexibility; and 4.) restructure daily schedule in secondary schools. Lastly, the district believed in increasing after-school activities for students and launched an initiative with local business partners to increase after-school activities for Boston students to increase academic and social outcomes (Boston

Public Schools). After mayoral control was enacted in Boston Public Schools, the district no longer experienced budget deficits (Portz & Schwartz, 2009).

### **Personnel**

Dr. Payzant believed that there is a leadership and managerial continuum, but wanted a focus on instructional leadership for principals to improve classroom instruction in the schools (Dukakis & Portz, 2010). Dr. Payzant believed in developing competent instructional school leaders and principals because Dr. Payzant was dismayed by the lack in quality leadership candidates coming from traditional sources such as higher education and other certification programs (Boston Public Schools, 1996; Mapp & Suesse, 2007). More specifically, Dr. Payzant believed the biggest assets in the district were the educators, and everyone must be a learner, especially principals and district level personnel (Payzant, 2011). Boston Public Schools even created a leadership development pipeline of its own to the principalship (Mapp & Suesse, 2007).

Furthermore, under Dr. Payzant's tenure, his philosophy on leadership development consisted of the following areas: 1.) begin with a focus on instruction; 2.) establish an organizational and reporting structure that supports leadership development at the level of the principalship; 3.) hire talented staff; 4.) engage external partners; 5.) offer district-coordinated programs and events for professional development; and 6.) create space for individual leadership development efforts (Mapp & Suesse, 2007). Dr. Payzant worked closely with the appointed Boston School Committee and the Boston Teachers Union, and this continuity in leadership among key education actors stands in sharp contrast to the typical turnover, and frequent turmoil, in urban school districts (Portz & Schwartz, 2009). From 1995-2006, Dr. Payzant was the superintendent of Boston Public Schools overseeing many systematic reforms, but most



importantly, acknowledging the hard work of the employees of Boston Public School raised morale in the school district in addition to changing the culture to one of learning for both students and teachers (Payzant & Horan, 2007).

Dr. Payzant stated, “All the planets have to be lined up” and this was true for the district’s relationship with the teachers’ union and its two presidents during that time period (Portz & Schwartz, 2009). Edward Doherty served as president of the Boston Teachers Union for 20 years and his replacement, Richard Stutman, was a longtime union member (Portz & Schwartz, 2009). Doherty and Stutman worked with district leadership during that time period to establish labor peace and to support the changing narrative of Boston Public Schools (Payzant & Horan, 2007). The cooperation of the teachers union was essential as it allowed district leadership to focus on its initiatives, which revolved around a focus on teaching and learning.

### **Community Support**

Developing a positive relationship with the media is essential in developing a positive relationship with the communities that you serve and are charged with educating their children (Dukakis & Portz, 2010; Portz, 1996). Developing a positive relationship with the media can change the narrative about Boston Public Schools within the community (Dukakis & Portz, 2010; Portz, 1996). Furthermore, the superintendent must be the advocate and face of reform in the district and not a polarizing figure (Dukakis & Portz, 2010; Portz, 1996). A positive relationship between the superintendent and the media can be the difference in how reporting is done on an urban school district. Superintendents must also building positive relationships with teachers and principals by simply being visible in the schools, and not confined to central office issuing edicts. Superintendents should visit schools on a regular basis to get a greater sense of what is going on in the schools and assessing the reforms currently in-place firsthand (Dukakis &

Portz, 2010; Payzant, 2011). The positive relationship that Boston Public Schools developed in the community after mayoral control was enacted was reaffirmed after the Boston voters decided against a return to the elected school board model in a sunset clause vote in 1996 (Wong et al., 2007). Community support can also be determined by how supportive local businesses are of the school district (Portz & Schwartz, 2009).

**Focus on Children (1996).** In 1996, four years into the new urban public school governance system of mayoral control in Boston Public Schools then Superintendent Thomas Payzant designed a comprehensive reform plan designed to bring all students in Boston Public Schools to an acceptable level of mastery. *Focus on Children* addressed the following areas for district-wide improvement: technology, safe schools, increased parental involvement, establishing high standards of curriculum and assessments, improved instructional strategies, and the implementation of a broad-based literacy effort (Boston Public Schools). This was a district-wide school improvement program to support teaching with professional development and benchmarks or the new Citywide Learning Standards, which was the central measure in driving this school reform towards the use of resources more efficiently (Boston Public Schools). The most important reform for closing the achievement gap was the introduction of preschool and full-day kindergarten classes in Boston Public Schools through federal grants (Payzant, 2011). Lastly, the process of change has occurred with optimism, sustained leadership, and a community focused on children and commitment to their success.

**Parental involvement and community engagement.** Decades of evidence suggests that high levels of family involvement increases children's educational achievement and social-emotional functioning (i.e., *The Coleman Report*) (Mirel, 1999; Weiss & Westmoreland, 2007). For healthy outcomes for children, program activity to increase engagement consists of the

following: parenting, home-school relationships, and responsibility of learning (Weiss & Westmoreland, 2007). Dr. Payzant began to consolidate the various parent groups into a singular parent group called the Parent Support Services, which promoted family and community engagement by improving the home-school relationship and giving parents a voice in school matters and policy; the group then evolved into the Boston Parent Organizing Network (Weiss & Westmoreland, 1999). The BPON developed a framework for Boston Public Schools by asking the following questions: 1.) What services should parents expect from Boston public schools; 2.) What is working well now in their school, in Boston Public Schools, and in the community to help their children to succeed in school; and 3.) What services should Boston Public Schools add, change, or eliminate to improve parental involvement and communication between home and school (Weiss & Westmoreland, 2007)? Family Resource Centers were developed to work with both schools and families to promote positive practices for family and community engagement. BPON maintained pressure on the district to involve families in its agenda, and as a result the Boston Public Schools laid the foundation for large urban school districts to support schools and their efforts to engage families in a voice at the district level (Weiss & Westmoreland, 1999).

### **Political Support**

There was an unprecedented political support for Boston Public Schools from Mayor Thomas Menino and city hall, especially from 1995-2001 (Portz & Schwartz, 2009). The political support for Boston Public Schools was evident in the increased funding of \$10 million in 2009 for the school district and the new superintendent (Portz & Schwartz, 2009). Furthermore, the mayor believed in supporting the school district to be successful and his vocal support for the school district was evident when the mayor's education agenda was on front stage

during his annual *State of the City Addresses* where the percentage of the speeches were mentioned (Portz & Schwartz, 2009). Mayor Thomas Menino was the biggest supporter and cheerleader for the success of Boston Public Schools including being present at the 2006 announcement of Boston Public Schools winning the Broad Prize for Urban Education (Payzant, 2011).

Public support for a change in school governance, lack of accountability for elected school boards, poor student achievement, and poor fiscal responsibility are additional reasons why Boston Public Schools was selected for this case study. Empirical evidence shows that the leadership of Boston Public Schools was focused on changing the narrative of Boston Public Schools with: sustained leadership, more accountability in the school district, a focus on improving student achievement, and improved fiscal responsibility. After mayoral control was enacted in Boston Public Schools improvements in graduation rates, dropout rates, and NAEP scores were observed.

**Education policy reforms in Massachusetts since 1992.** Massachusetts is often hailed as one of the best states in the nation in terms of providing a quality education (e.g., NAEP results) by establishing a clear curriculum and assessing whether students are learning the standards in that curriculum. In 2012, shortly before the Common Core curriculum was released, *Education Week* conducted a study of the quality of education provided in public schools across the nation, and Massachusetts was tied for second with New York, and behind Maryland (*Education Week*). Massachusetts was one of the first states to enact standards-based reforms with the passage of the *Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 (aka MERA)* to address both education reform and a state financial crisis in terms of per-pupil funding for school districts in property poor school districts (McDermott, 2001; McDermott, 2004; Dee & Levine,

2004). This historic legislation creates the framework for unprecedented improvements in students learning, teachers' professionalism, school management, and equity of funding (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education). This legislation took dramatic steps to launch a new era of standards-based accountability for public education in Massachusetts with new curriculum frameworks in all major subject areas (Payzant & Horan, 2007).

Over the past 20 years, the state of Massachusetts has tripled funding on education from \$4.2 billion to \$12.6 billion (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education). For example, funding in Boston Public Schools increased 95% from the fiscal year 1993 to the fiscal year 1997 from \$59.4 million to \$115.5 million (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education). The typical concerns with increased education funding are: will the increased funding reach the classroom and students, will the increased funding be wasted, and will the increased funding result in increased student achievement. In the case of MERA, resources were allocated towards activities directly related to student instruction, to support services and capital expenditures; particularly in curricular standards, time spent in school, and childhood education (Dee & Levine, 2004).

### **Summary**

When Dr. Payzant became the superintendent of Boston Public Schools his focus was on improving instruction, which would then improve student achievement in Boston Public Schools. As a result of many of the reforms enacted under mayoral control and during Payzant's tenure, student achievement in the areas of graduation rates, dropout rates, and NAEP standardized testing all improved. School reforms not only addressed high schools with their restructuring, but also addressed early childhood education by enrolling all five-year-olds in Boston into

kindergarten. Building instructional capacity within the employees of Boston Public Schools was a focus of district leadership to improve instructional leadership and instruction in the classroom. Professional development aimed at building instructional capacity within all employees was an important reform in the district. All of these reforms improved student achievement, but more importantly, the reforms in Boston Public Schools addressed the lack of engagement from families and the community. A major focus of these reforms was rebuilding confidence in the school system and valuing the role that parents play in educating Boston school children. Dr. Payzant did not want to lose the focus, which was Boston school children and working tirelessly to improve their educational opportunities and outcomes (*See Appendix F-1*).

**Graduation and dropout rates in Boston Public Schools, 1991-2011.** Boston Public Schools made some systematic changes under Dr. Payzant's leadership which directly affected the graduation and dropout rates in the district. The educational leadership in Boston cannot be overlooked as each superintendent focused on graduating college and career ready students from Boston Public Schools (Payzant, 2011). The focus on the institutional progress variables, especially leadership, educational programs, and personnel significantly contributed to the turnaround success of Boston Public Schools in the areas of NAEP testing and graduation rates given the testing requirement to graduate from the state of Massachusetts per the MERA legislation.

In Table 2.7 below, graduation rate and dropout rate data for Boston Public Schools is listed every five years for a 20-year span from 1991-2011. The overall trends in Boston Public Schools since mayoral control was enacted in 1992 are the following: an increase in graduation rates and a decrease in dropout rates.

**Table 2.7: Boston Public Schools Graduation Rates and Dropout Rates, 1991-2011**

	1991	1996	2001	2006	2011	Mean
<b>Graduation Rate</b>	51%	59%	60%	59%	64%	58.6%
<b>Dropout Rate</b>	30%	25%	24%	24%	21%	24.8%

**Source:** National Center for Educational Statistics

### **Institutional Progress in Detroit Public Schools, 1970-1999**

Addonizio & Kearney (2012) argued that Detroit Public Schools (aka DPS) should have returned to mayoral control after the term expired for the first emergency financial manager, Robert Bobb; however, the task for whoever is in control of Detroit Public Schools will remain a daunting one, as expressed by Addonizio & Kearney (2012):

The essential building blocks of real and lasting improvement for schools and students remain unchanged: socially and economically stable families, strong and consistent leadership for the schools and capacity and willingness of government, business and community leaders cooperatively shape and support the city's evolving educational system (p.230-231).

### **The Historical Context of Detroit, Michigan, 1945-2000**

Detroit, unlike any other major city in the United States, has come to symbolize both hope (i.e., The Arsenal of Democracy, The Motor City) and despair (i.e., The Murder City) depending on which half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century one is reflecting upon; Detroit is its own *Tale of Two Cities*. The long and complicated political and racial history of the city of Detroit makes it very difficult for any reform to be enacted whether it's civic reform or education reform, due to its significant demographic changes since 1950 and the pervasive culture of mistrust that Black Detroiters have of Whites and non-Detroiters (i.e., outsiders). The story of the Detroit Public Schools corresponds with Detroit's long and complicated political, economic, and racial history with its boom and bust periods because Detroit is one of the few places in the United States that

offers a better perspective on the interaction between industrial capitalism and the politics of class and race (Mirel, 1999).

Detroit Public Schools was a model urban school district prior to World War II. The history of Detroit Public Schools allows one to virtually witness every major educational reform and innovation of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, from the breaking up of the wards system to the at-large school board elections, standardized testing, vocational education, racial tensions and desegregation issues (Mirel, 1999). As the demographics and socio-economic conditions changed within the school system, in addition to the decline of the automobile industry in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, there was a point when Detroit Public Schools began to experience a decline very similar to other large urban school districts in industrialized areas across the United States like the case with Boston Public Schools.

In 1950, Detroit's population peaked at 1,849,568 people. From 1950-2010, Detroit had lost 62% of its population. The White population decreased from 68.9% down to 10.6%, while in stark contrast the Black population had increased from 16.2% up to 82.7%. By 1999, 44% of Detroit school children lived in poverty and 70% were receiving free or reduced priced school lunches (Piliawsky, 2003). Conversely, only 31% of Michigan students state-wide received free or reduced priced school lunches in 1998 (Michigan Department of Education).

Sugrue argued (1996) the following reasons for Detroit's population decline from 1950-2000:

1. *Job loss to the suburbs*: from 1947-1992, Detroit lost 276,000 manufacturing jobs while suburban Detroit areas gained 120,000 manufacturing jobs. The overall job decrease in Detroit from 1960 to 1990 was 350,000 jobs compared to an overall job increase in suburban Detroit 1,050,000 jobs;
2. *Freeway construction*: the mass construction of freeways and interstates during the Eisenhower administration made it easier to commute from suburbs to central cities;



3. *Cheaper housing in the suburbs*: federal policies made it less expensive to purchase new homes in the suburbs instead of paying more to rent a home in Detroit;
4. *Racism*: a growing number of Whites simply did not want to live with the increasing Black population in Detroit;
5. *The 1967 Riot*: after the property destruction to businesses (2,509 buildings) that occurred during this riot, many White Detroiters finally pulled up stakes and moved to the suburbs;
6. *Busing*: the plan to bus school children around Detroit to achieve integration caused many to pull up stakes, saying they wanted to send their children to school down the street, not across town, which resulted in the historic *Milliken vs. Bradley (1974)* Supreme Court decision in effect allowing de facto segregation to remain in effect in the northern United States.

### **Detroit Public Schools, 1970-1999**

#### **Leadership**

**District leadership.** After the retirement of long-time DPS superintendent Dr. Arthur Jefferson in 1989, Detroit Public Schools was led by four different people from 1989-1999 with an average tenure of only 2.5 years (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). Despite the short tenures of these superintendents they managed to enact meaningful reforms. Dr. Porter, the former president of Eastern Michigan University and the former state superintendent of Michigan, was an interim superintendent of DPS with the main goal of leading DPS out of its budget deficit and balancing the budget after an entire decade of operating with a budget deficit (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). The next superintendent, Dr. McGriff, did not have Detroit roots which was her undoing as she did not understand the *institutionalized culture* of DPS (i.e., education cartel and Detroit Federation of Teachers) as her empowerment schools initiative backfired and she was blamed for the 27-day teachers strike in 1992 (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). Dr. David Snead was a native Detroiter who rose through the ranks to become the superintendent of DPS (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). Dr. Snead was the 1995 Michigan Association of School

Administrators superintendent of the year for his leadership in passing a 1.5 billion bond measure to repair the district's aging schools and infrastructure. Dr. Eddie Green replaced Dr. Snead and was responsible for the reorganization of Detroit Public Schools and the elimination of the area office for a more centralized and consolidated central office structure in 1997 (Detroit Public Schools, November 11, 1997). Despite the significant accomplishments of DPS leaders from 1989-1999, none of them addressed the quality of education Detroit school children were receiving with any meaningful academic reforms to improve standardized test scores, or even the graduation or dropout rates in DPS. Despite the political differences between board members and the superintendents during that time period, not a single superintendent was terminated for the lack of student achievement in the district. In 2.8 below, a list of district leaders of Detroit Public Schools from 1989-1999 explains why each leader left DPS.

*Table 2.8: Leadership of Detroit Public Schools, 1989-1999*

<b>Leader</b>	<b>Tenure</b>	<b>Reason for leaving the district</b>
Dr. John W. Porter	1989-1991	<b>Retired</b> ; accepted the position on a two-year interim basis.
Dr. Deborah McGriff	1991-1993	<b>Forced to resign</b> ; Political differences with the new school board members elected in 1992 replacing three HOPE team members; rejected her empowered schools reform initiative; fallout from the 27-day teachers' strike in the fall of 1992.
Dr. David L. Snead	1993-1997	<b>Forced to resign</b> ; Political differences with school board members stemming from his recent marriage to a Detroit politician named Sharon McPhail; Dr. Snead was honored as the 1995 Michigan Superintendent of the Year.
Dr. Eddie Green	1997-1999	<b>Retired/resigned</b> ; The 1999 state takeover legislation was passed, which eliminated his position making his position an interim position until a CEO was hired to replace him.
<b>Average Tenure</b>	<b>2.5 years</b>	

**Sources:** Addonizio & Kearney (2012); *Detroit Free Press*; *Detroit News*; Detroit Public Schools; *Education Week*; Payne (2008); Piliawsky (2003); Viteritti, J. (2009).

## Educational Programs

The literature on Detroit Public Schools does not tell a story of educational reforms enacted on the scale of Boston Public Schools (1995-2013). The lack of educational programs in DPS possibly attributed to its poor graduation rate in the 1990s. In Table 2.9 below, the graduation rates for Detroit Public Schools are listed from 1990-2000.

**Table 2.9:** Detroit Public Schools Graduation Rates, 1990-2000

Year	1990	1995	2000
Graduation Rate	27%	32%	34%

**Source:** National Center for Educational Statistics

## Finances

The financial decline of Detroit Public Schools corresponded with the population decline of the city, which led to a loss of revenue and funding due to a loss of student enrollment. From 1970-2000, the enrollment in Detroit Public Schools had steadily decreased from 290,000 students down to 167,000 students (National Center for Educational Statistics; Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). Local property tax revenue is one of the primary sources of funding for public schools in Michigan, and as Detroit's population decreased it negatively affected the financial health of Detroit Public Schools because the tax base was leaving the city and property values were decreasing due to crime, blight, and abandonment (Sugrue, 1996; Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). Nevertheless, as funds left the Detroit Public Schools' budget for the suburbs and charter schools, there were still more financial demands being placed upon Detroit Public Schools for special programs to accommodate the needs of special education students, at-risk students, and students living in poverty (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). In Table 2.10 below, information is listed demonstrating the seriousness of the White Flight problem and the Black middle-class

Flight problem in Detroit since 1970 severely affecting the enrollment in Detroit Public Schools. The enrollment from 1970-2000 has steadily decreased in a 30-year span almost on pace with the city's population exodus.

**Table 2.10:** *Detroit Public Schools Enrollment, 1970-2000*

Year	1970	1980	1990	2000	Percentage change
Enrollment	290,000	225,000	175,000	167,000	-42%

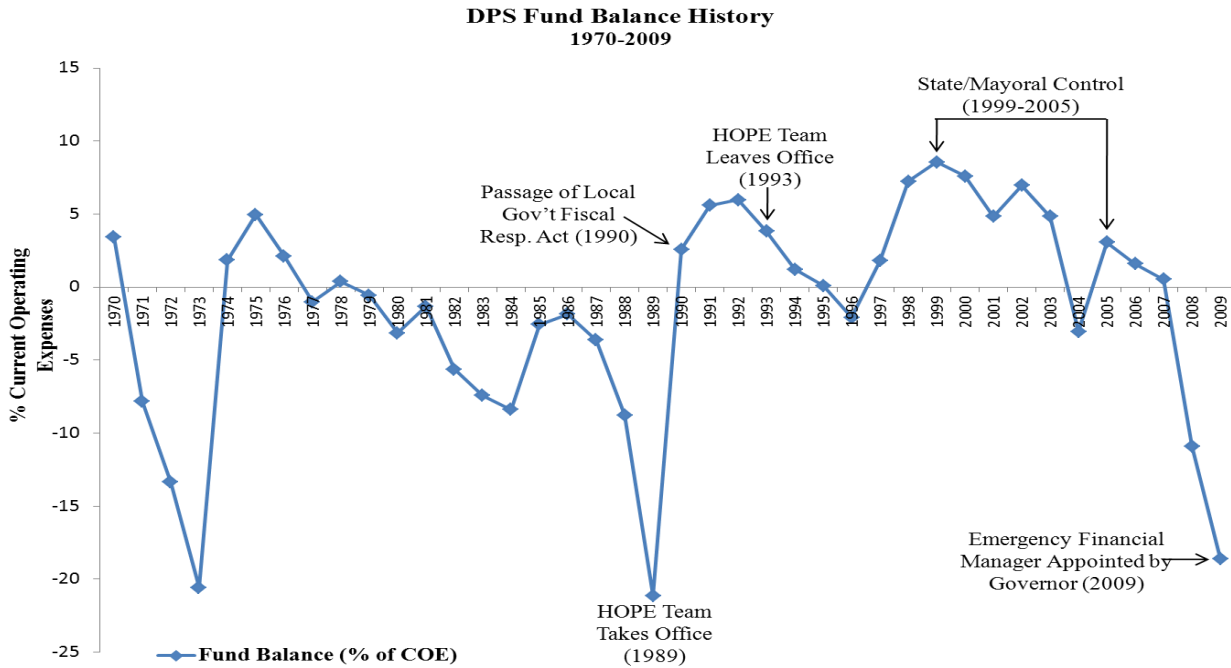
**Source:** National Center for Educational Statistics

**Balanced budget and fund balance.** From 1970-2000, Detroit Public Schools had budget deficits 13 times with most occurring between 1979-1989, which prompted the Michigan Legislature to pass the Local Government Fiscal Responsibility Act in 1990 (aka Public Act 72) allowing the governor to appoint an Emergency Financial Manager (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). Many observers believed the emergency financial manager legislation was the state's backdoor to take over Detroit Public Schools; however, with the election of the HOPE Team (Frank Hayden, David Olmstead, Larry Patrick and Joseph Blanding) to the Detroit Board of Education in 1988, Detroit Public Schools began the process of correcting its problem of financial mismanagement.

After the HOPE Team was elected in 1988, they stopped the bleeding in Detroit Public Schools and returned Detroit Public Schools to the black in 1989 (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). The HOPE Team kept Detroit Public Schools in the black for almost its entire tenure (1990-1993). After the election the Hope Team in 1988, Detroit Public Schools operated with a balanced budget and a surplus every year in the 1990s except for 1996. In fact, Detroit Public Schools had a \$93 million surplus after the state takeover in 1999 (Kang, 2015). The major accomplishment of the elected school board of Detroit Board of Education was the successful

bond campaign in 1994 passed by Detroit voters totaling \$1.4 billion for physical upgrades to Detroit Public School buildings (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012).

**Figure 2.2:** Detroit Public Schools Fund Balance History, 1970-2009



**Source:** Addonizio & Kearney, 2012

## Personnel

The Detroit Board of Education poorly negotiated labor contracts with the Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT) over teacher salaries and working conditions from 1979-1989 (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). The result of these poorly negotiated labor contracts with the DFT was a shortage of financial resources causing DPS to go into deficit from 1979-1989 (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). Teacher salaries were constantly increasing during that time period while DPS did not address the core issues around the loss of funding due to enrollment decreases (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). In 1968, Detroit Public Schools had the highest

starting teacher salaries in the United States at \$7,500 (\$46,472 adjusted for inflation in 2010), attracting top-tier teachers, both Black and White, from all over the nation. The only drawback is while the teachers constantly received pay raises, fewer resources were directed into the classroom, and the Board of Education established a poor practice of giving raises while the district was in deficit.

**Labor peace.** In September 1973, the DFT called a 43-day teachers strike to protest a Detroit residency requirement for Detroit teachers (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). It was a long and bitter strike, which ended only after then-Governor William Milliken intervened (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). In the fall of 1992, DFT president John Elliot led a 27-day teachers strike over the differences from the Board of Education's reform policy in regards to empowerment school reforms (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012).

### **Community Support**

After Proposal E in 2005 passed (65% to 35%) by Detroit voters, all of the political posturing from state officials and local officials ended with the sunset clause vote in which Detroit citizens decided to end mayoral control in Detroit and return to an elected school board and local control (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). According to Rich (2009), Proposal E was a referendum on Mayor Kilpatrick's leadership, a message to Lansing regarding home rule and local control, but few saw it a vote as the final solution of the Detroit Public School problem.

The passage of Proposal E in 2005 led to the reinstatement of an elected school board. The elected board had achieved electoral legitimacy but not necessarily command legitimacy, that is, the ability to make knowledgeable decisions based upon expertise that would be accepted by the public (Rich, 2009). In the board elections, candidates ran as concerned citizens, not education experts and none of the winners were experts in school governance or student

achievement (Rich, 2009). The takeover of Detroit Public Schools has to be considered unsuccessful because Detroit residents voted to return to an elected school board model in their first sunset clause vote in 2005 (Rich, 2009).

A similar mistake made was the how legislators did not seek the approval of what Rich (2009) describes as the public school cartel. The public school cartel is a term used to describe the coalition of professional school administrators, longtime board members, union leaders, and school activists for the protection of the organizational culture and policies of the system (Rich, 2009). Even though legislators have the statutory power to pass legislation granting the state takeover of Detroit Public Schools, the consent of the public school cartel and Detroit citizens was essential if the takeover was to be extended beyond the sunset clause vote in 2005.

Throughout the five years of mayoral takeover in Detroit, the mayor and his supporters were never able to convince Detroit residents that an appointed board, insulated from the electoral system, would yield better school governance and, more importantly, higher student achievement in the classrooms (Rich, 2009). The return to an elected board was a message to state government in regards to home rule and local control, while the public school cartel painted the sunset clause as a chance to make the argument that the vote was about the franchise rather than about school reform (Rich, 2009). Detroit illustrates the necessity of cooperation among all stakeholders. The mayoral takeover did not have any elements of collaboration and was interpreted as a heavy-handed attack on Detroit by the rest of the state. As the years passed by, the takeover became less and less about the students, and more and more about the political ramifications of the takeover.

## Political Support

Prior to the state takeover of Detroit Public Schools and dating back as far as the 1970s, Detroit Public Schools and the city of Detroit had a turbulent relationship with state politicians in Lansing and even with some Detroiters as well. The effects of local politics in Detroit created a backlash from White Detroiters who were rebelling against the *Milliken v. Bradley (1974)* United States Supreme Court decision and the growing Black Power movement by supporting conservative candidates for public office. There was also a backlash from national politics by White Detroiters directed primarily against the Democratic Party for their support of civil rights, public housing, and an undeserving poor (Sugrue, 1996). As the demographics of Detroit's population continued to change, so did the political culture among Black Detroiters and especially Black politicians. Black Detroiters began to develop a political culture of an “*Us vs. Them*” or “*City vs. Suburbs*” approach to politics in the region and the state of Michigan, which was further propagated by elected officials such as the first Black mayor of Detroit, Coleman A. Young (Sugrue, 1996). Moreover, as Detroit's population declined, the population decline caused a power shift in state politics as Detroit's suburbs gained more power in Lansing. This political shift created a situation where the takeover of Detroit Public Schools was possible in 1999.

In 1970, the Detroit Board of Education decided to take on the cause of desegregation with a busing plan throughout the Detroit metropolitan area, which culminated in the *Milliken v. Bradley (1974)* Supreme Court decision that in effect decreed that de facto segregation was constitutional. Desegregation was a failed policy because it was ultimately unsuccessful in the courts and it was one of the reasons why Whites who still lived in Detroit after 1970 cited for



finally deciding to leave Detroit and Detroit Public Schools behind which was over 90% Black by 1990 (Sugrue, 1996).

**State education agenda.** In 1999, the Michigan State Legislature was controlled by Republicans including then-governor John Engler. In 1999, the Michigan State Legislature led by Governor John Engler passed legislation, Michigan Public Law 10, which allowed for a state takeover of Detroit Public Schools similar to legislative action in Illinois with Chicago Public Schools in 1995 (Piliawsky, 2003). Governor Engler justified his stance on a takeover of Detroit Public Schools in February 1999 with the following statement, “The problem is not the kids. The problem is the system. It is broken. It is corrupt. It’s not a matter of resources. It’s a matter of management” (Piliawsky, 2003, p. 268). Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer said the following in *The New York Times* about his position on the state takeover of Detroit Public Schools, “The school board had ignored too many proposals over the years to improve its financial management practices and the overall administration of schools” (Bradsher, 1999a).

Governor Engler and Mayor Archer cited issues with the management of the schools, but Michigan legislators cited poor student achievement via Michigan’s standardized test (Piliawsky, 2003). Democratic lawmakers in Michigan decried the state takeover of Detroit Public Schools. Future U.S. Senator Gary Peters said, “I don’t believe that you can argue for local control in every city in the state of Michigan, yet carve out an exception for the city of Detroit” (Piliawsky, 2003, p. 269). State Representative Keith Stallworth said the following in *The New York Times* about the state takeover, “There has not been an issue that has been this controversial and this disruptive to the social fabric of Detroit since 1967” (Bradsher, 1999a).

Despite the political posturing, evidence from the Department of Education from 1998-1999 shows that Detroit Public Schools was not actually the worst school district in Michigan in

terms of student achievement, nor was Detroit Public Schools in a financial deficit in 1998-1999 school year (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012; Piliawsky, 2003). According to Piliawsky (2003), Detroit's fourth-grade students actually outscored the students in 240 of the 554 school districts in Michigan, placing it 17<sup>th</sup> among the 34 school districts in Wayne County despite the low socio-economic status of the students in Detroit. And according to the Michigan Department of Education, Detroit Public Schools was in the black all but one year in the 1990s (1996) prior to the takeover. However, the justification from Republican lawmakers for the takeover was poor academics despite the evidence from the Michigan Department of Education suggesting to the contrary.

Business leaders in metro Detroit also voiced their concern for the education children received in Detroit Public Schools. Detroit business leaders, such as Dave Bing of Bing Steel in Detroit complained of costs associated with training new employees (Piliawsky, 2003). In 1995 business leaders in Chicago called for a similar state takeover of Chicago Public Schools and mayoral control in Chicago. Nonetheless, the democratically-elected Detroit Board of Education was replaced by an appointed board in 1999. In Table 2.11 below, a comparison of MEAP testing results is displayed comparing Detroit Public Schools to overall statewide passing percentages in Michigan prior to the state takeover in 1999.

**Table 2.11:** Detroit Public School MEAP Reading Passing Percentage, 1998

	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	7 <sup>th</sup> Grade	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade
Michigan Statewide	58.6	48.8	58.9
Detroit Public Schools	52.6	32.2	31.8
Difference	-6.0	-16.6	-27.1

**Source:** Piliawsky, 2003; Michigan Department of Ed.

Maybe the reason for the takeover of DPS was something simple such as crude politics?

The nature of the takeover was *heavy-handed* and the rhetoric about it being an academic takeover does not hold water nor does the rhetoric for mismanagement. A possible explanation for the takeover of Detroit Public Schools could be the political ambitions of both Governor Engler and Mayor Archer. Detroit Public Schools had middle of the road test scores and any improvement in the district could be considered political victories for both men if they decided to run for a higher elected office in the future.

### **Summary**

Detroit is truly a *Tale of Two Cities* with its rise as the poster child of industrialization from 1900-1950, and its decline as the poster child for urban decay and dysfunction from 1950-2000. Detroit's decline was not limited in scope to one aspect of the city (e.g., economic), but seemingly unlimited in its scope, affecting every aspect of city life for Detroiters: social, economic, cultural, political, and educational. Socially, Detroit's image began to decline from an industrial power to the poorest city in the nation (Piliawsky, 2003). Culturally, Detroit has continued to decline as the poverty line has steadily increased from 10% in 1970 up to 34% in 2010. Politically, Detroit has declined as Detroit's residents moved to the suburbs, which began to erode the political power of Detroit in Lansing. In addition, Detroit suffered from its Black political culture of "*Us vs. Them*", which resulted in heavy-handed politics from Lansing directed specifically at Detroit (e.g., Local Government Fiscal Responsibility Act in 1990: Emergency Financial Manager Law and Michigan Public Law 10 of 1999: State Takeover of Detroit Public Schools Law). Educationally, Detroit Public Schools have declined due directly to massive student exodus from Detroit Public Schools. Detroit Public Schools' enrollment decreased from 290,000 in 1970 down to 167,000 in 2000, which is a -42% change and it has severely affected its funding and ability to provide a quality education for all of its students.

The Detroit Public Schools in comparison to Boston Public Schools is also a *Tale of Two Cities* as Detroit has struggled to maintain its enrollment against the increasing popularity of charter schools in Detroit despite numerous governance models (i.e., state takeover, local control, state receivership). Furthermore, the differences in Detroit and Boston can be viewed from the differences in leadership. Boston has experienced solid and sustained leadership since 1992 and the implementation of several reforms, which have made a significant impact on the institutional progress in Boston. Detroit's leadership can be described as unstable since 1999 without any meaningful local education reforms enacted. Lastly, the method of implementation of the first governance change in Boston and Detroit differs greatly with a referendum vote leading to state legislation in Boston compared to state legislation in Detroit.

The literature on Detroit Public Schools discusses political and social issues within the city, but the literature does not detail any significant reforms undertaken in Detroit Public School to reverse the significant trends of decreasing enrollment or poor student achievement, which is contrary to literature on Boston Public Schools. One could assert that the literature on Detroit Public Schools probably cannot get into any reforms attempted because of the constant political infighting among school board members, superintendents, and politicians, if there were any meaningful reforms undertaken. The literature on Detroit Public Schools details the problems with student achievement in the district, but none of the superintendents of Detroit Public Schools were fired for failing to raise or address student achievement issues in the district. Leaders of Detroit Public Schools often were victims of the local political structure in the city of Detroit.

The literature on Detroit tells a story where cooperation did not exist in addition to sustained leadership from superintendents, which is the exact opposite of the blueprint used in

Boston. The literature on urban school districts that are unable to make systematic reforms are characterized by the following: over centralization, career interests superseding educational interests of students, and a profession without professional judgement (Payne, 2008). More specifically, Payne (2008) asserted that people who spend their careers in failing districts can have difficulty developing professional judgement, and over centralization means there is a lack of knowledge about what's happening in the school, and failing districts have been shaped to serve the career interests of those who staff it and not the educational interests of students.

### **Conclusion**

Urban school governance reform has been a constant conversation in struggling urban public schools throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century with increased attention after the *A Nation at Risk* report was released in 1983. For struggling urban public schools the elected school board model has struggled to meet the needs of students in some communities. Elected school boards represent democracy, but have struggled to address the chronic issues plaguing urban public schools. The negatives of elected school boards, especially political infighting and fiscal irresponsibility grab the attention of the media in addition to poor student achievement. However, the inability to really address these issues by elected school boards has become problematic in urban public schools. Therefore, in some struggling urban areas, civic leaders decided to experiment with mayoral control.

The literature on Boston Public Schools tells a story of a school district which achieved institutional progress from 1995-2013. The stability of leadership in Boston Public Schools in addition to educational leadership focused on improving teaching and learning led to institutional progress in the district. The educational leadership in Boston Public Schools was also responsible for the implementation of the systematic reforms (i.e., educational programs) that led

to significant improvements in student achievement. Institutional progress was achieved in Boston in the areas of financial reform, community support, and political support by changing the narrative of Boston Public Schools and focusing on what's in the best interests of children. On the contrary, the lack of stable leadership in Detroit Public Schools in addition to the lack of educational programs resulted in a lack of student achievement. The enrollment in Detroit Public Schools has decreased since 1970, and with the explosion of charter schools and the state takeover of DPS, community support for Detroit Public Schools decreased significantly leading to a lack of institutional progress in the district.

Mayoral control in Boston Public Schools created the environment for its leaders to focus on making institutional progress in the district in the areas of finances, student achievement and community engagement (Portz & Schwartz, 2009). The Boston experience is an example of the positives of mayoral control where the politics of education are minimized and the business of focusing on children is at the forefront of initiatives and other reforms. The elected school board model and mayoral control in Detroit Public Schools are both examples of the negatives of both types of governance models taking center stage and being ineffective in addressing student achievement issues, fiscal issues, and rapidly decreasing student enrollment (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012; Piliawsky, 2003). The political culture in the city of Detroit has it made very difficult to attempt meaningful educational reforms.

This qualitative historical case study will continue to examine how educational leadership and school governance factors into whether or not an urban school district such as Detroit Public Schools can achieve institutional progress and examine how the barriers decrease or impede institutional progress. Detroit Public School leaders and historical artifacts from Detroit Public Schools and about Detroit Public Schools will provide insight on what reforms were enacted and

the results of those reforms. The literature gap filled will examine the local and state reforms enacted from 1999-2014 to address the poor student achievement issues in Detroit Public Schools in comparison to reforms in Boston Public Schools from 1995-2006. This qualitative study will look beyond quantitative standardized testing data as the sole measurement for the effectiveness of urban school district. Lastly, this study suggests a new form of school governance in urban school districts such as Detroit Public Schools that have experimented with elected school boards and state receivership both with mixed results and the same fiscal and academic issues plaguing the school district.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODS

### Introduction

As stated in the previous chapter, urban educational governance reform research by and large has taken a quantitative approach by examining pre-and post-mayoral control numbers on standardized testing and financial data to determine the effectiveness of school district governance structures. In urban school districts, the call for urban school governance reform has been focused on a lack of: student achievement, fiscal responsibility, and accountability in the elected school board governance model. The Wong et al. (2007) study on mayoral control by and large did not take into account the human factor as to why mayoral control can succeed compared to an elected school board, and how mayoral control can positively affect student achievement and fiscal responsibility. Therefore, this proposed study will take a qualitative approach to explain particular factors that prevented institutional progress from occurring in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014. Furthermore, this qualitative study will describe how the leaders in Detroit Public Schools developed and then enacted education policies to address concerns about the low graduation rates, high dropout rates, and low standardized test scores.

Contextual data was gathered from open-ended interviews with the criterion participants (i.e., board members, central office administrators, building administrators, teachers, parents, and community activists) due to their knowledge of Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014. In addition to interviews, content analysis from documents pertaining to Detroit Public Schools were reviewed for themes about Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014 about education policies and the impact of the governance reforms in the district. The open-ended interviews developed a deep understanding of how governance and leadership can affect student achievement. The data gathered in this study will help stakeholders and education policymakers identify the



effectiveness of governance structures in Detroit Public Schools and their possible effects on leadership and student achievement outside of standardized testing.

In this chapter, the following elements relating to the methods for conducting the study will be described. First, I will describe the research design. The research design of this study was a qualitative historical case study to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014 using interviews and document analysis as methods to gather qualitative data on Detroit Public Schools. Second, I will describe the participants. The participants in this study had an intimate knowledge of the inner workings of DPS as former or current employees, parents, and community activists. The participants in the study have the following positions/relationships with DPS: former school board members, central office administrators, building administrators, teachers, and parents/community activists. Third, I will describe the setting. The setting for this study was the Detroit Public School system in Detroit, Michigan from 1999-2014 while under three different school governance models (i.e., state takeover/mayoral control, elected school board, and emergency financial manager). Fourth, I will describe the data collection. The data was collected from two different sources.

The interview data consisted of two rounds of interviews (structured and then semi-structured interviews). The document analysis was a collection of: newspaper articles from the *Detroit Free Press* and *Detroit News* on their coverage of Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014, Detroit Board of Education meeting minutes reports from 1998-2014, and transcripts of speeches given by Detroit mayors during their annual *State of the City Address* from 1999-2014. Fifth, I will describe the data analysis. The qualitative data in this study was analyzed through the open-coding process where codes emerged from the contextual data in the interviews, which were in-turn used to develop larger themes in relation to the research questions. This same open-

coding process was used to develop themes from the newspaper articles and *State of the City Addresses*. Lastly, I will describe the trustworthiness of this study which are essentially the methods used in the study itself that would allow another researcher to replicate this study using the same methods from this study.

### **Research Design**

The research design of this study was organized to understand the phenomenon of Detroit Public Schools to pursue new paths of responsiveness and discovery as they emerge (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). This study is a qualitative historical case study of Detroit Public Schools over the course of three different governance models: state takeover/mayoral control, elected school board, and state control (i.e., emergency financial manager). This historical case study was designed to develop an understanding from open-ended structured and semi-structured interviews of current and former Detroit Public School employees in addition to community activists and parents. In addition to the interviews, document analysis was conducted to triangulate the information from the interviews, but also to support or refute information from the interviews (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). The data collected on Detroit Public Schools explained why institutional progress has remained elusive in DPS despite the numerous governance reforms in DPS since 1999.

The literature on Detroit Public Schools does not provide a list of the educational reforms attempted. The empirical evidence on Detroit Public Schools informs us what was attempted, and if anything was unsuccessful. The trustworthiness of the study was established by the open-ended interviews and two rounds of interviews during the data collection process in addition to the document analysis of Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014.

## **Research Purpose**

Research Purpose (Exploratory): This qualitative methodology developed an understanding of how school governance reform impacted institutional progress, educational leadership, and the identification of potential barriers to institutional progress in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014.

## **Epistemology, Theoretical Perspective, and Methodology**

Epistemology is a way of understanding and explaining how we know and what we know (Crotty, 2012). For researchers understanding the lens in which they view the world is important because it allows researchers to construct their understanding of society. The epistemology for this study of urban governance reform is constructivism, which means understanding is derived from our engagement with the realities in our world (Crotty, 2012). In other words, constructivist theorists argue that meaning is constructed by human beings as they engage with the world that they are interpreting; moreover, we do not create meaning, we construct meaning (Crotty, 2012). Detroit Public Schools has constructed a social context and the interaction among humans created a reality for this study.

Therefore, this study is seeking to explain how institutional progress of the lack thereof in DPS occurred from 1999-2014. Also, this study is seeking to explain how the participants in this study attempted to construct their understanding of successes and failures of leadership in Detroit Public Schools under the various governance models from 1999-2014, especially while under state receivership. This study will explain and develop an understanding of the barriers in Detroit Public Schools, which prevented student achievement from occurring at scale in DPS.

The theoretical perspective for this study of urban school district reform is interpretivism, which means social reality is regarded as the process social actors use to negotiate meanings and

contribute to the causal explanation of some phenomena (Crotty, 2012). In other words, a theoretical perspective is a way of looking at the world and making sense of it (Crotty, 2012). Interpretivism is focused on understanding and causality (Crotty, 2012). Using this interpretivism lens will help explain some of the historical and culturally important phenomenon in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014. This theoretical perspective provides a context for the grounds of logic (Crotty, 2012).

The methodology of this study to better understand of urban school governance reform is phenomenology research, which is the understanding of a phenomena and the relationship between human beings and the world (Crotty, 2012). Phenomenology requires us to engage with phenomena in our world and make sense of them directly and immediately (Crotty, 2012). In addition, phenomenology has two clear characteristics: objectivity and critique (Crotty, 2012). The objectivity is in search of objects of experience rather than being content with a description of the experiencing subject, and an exercise of critique comes as it calls into question what we take for granted (Crotty, 2012). Phenomenology is an exploration of personal experiences and putting oneself in the place of others (Crotty, 2012). The method which will be used to collect data in this study of mayoral control will be open-ended phenomenology interviews where the interviewee was free to describe the impact their leadership had Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014.

### **Participants**

Describing the participants in this study bolstered the data collected in the study because the participants made significant contributions to the research effort itself by providing significant information on the subject which was studied (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). The participants in this study were either former or current school board members, central office

administrators, building administrators, teachers, or community activists/parents leaders in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014. These participants have been identified due to their intimate knowledge of the inner workings of Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014, which impacted institutional progress in the district during that time period. Participants were selected to participate through a snowball method and word of mouth from other participants.

This snowball method was used to eliminate any potential bias of the researcher and prevented the selection of like-minded people for the interviews. The snowball method was selected because it was hard to find willing participants outside of trusted social networks. The limitation to the snowball method was finding a large number of people to participate because there was no prior relationship between the researcher and the participants, which is why the interviews concluded after 27 interviews. Interviews were *not* conducted on any property belonging to Detroit Public Schools, nor were interviews conducted during business hours with any current DPS employees. A total of 27 people were interviewed for this study; 16 interviews were conducted over the phone and 11 interviews conducted in-person. Most interviews lasted for 28 minutes while the longest interview was two hours and 15 minutes.

### **Interview Process**

The interviews were divided into two phases. The first phase of interviews consisted of a structured interview process with: former school board members, central office administrators, building administrators, teachers, and parents/community activists to establish baseline information on Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014 with the same exact interview questions. Member checking was conducted to improve the accuracy and validity of the interview data collected. Member checking also allowed participants to affirm their intentions from the interviews, and correct any errors or misinterpretations, and then their interview was finalized for

the study and then analysis. Only one participant elected to edit her responses given. In Table 3.1 below, an interview participant breakdown is listed.

**Table 3.1:** *Structured Interview Participant Breakdown*

<b>Role in Detroit Public Schools</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Teachers	9
Building Administrators	7
Central Office Administrators	5
School Board Members	3
Community Activists/Parents	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>27 participants</b>

The second phase of the interviews was conducted in-person and over the phone for those participants who contacted the researcher via the snowball method to preserve the anonymity of those participants. The researcher used the semi-structured interview process to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of governance, educational leadership, and the barriers preventing DPS from making institutional progress from 1999-2014. The semi-structured interview process allowed for a deeper exploration of themes from the initial interviews as participants explained their understanding of the issues preventing DPS from making institutional progress from their experiences. There were 12 people who participated in the second phase of the interview process. The interviews usually lasted 10-30 minutes in length. These participants were selected for the second round as they provided significant context about Detroit Public Schools during the initial interview phase. Every participant group was represented in the second round of interviews, but this part of the data collection also served as the saturation point as no new

information arose from the second round of interviews. Probing questions were asked (e.g., how so, can you explain more about that particular point, etc.) during the semi-structured interview phase to reach this saturation point. Member checking again took place during this phase of the interview process. In Table 3.2 below, an interview participant breakdown is listed.

**Table 3.2: Semi-Structured Interview Participant Breakdown**

<b>Role in Detroit Public Schools</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Teachers	5
Building Administrators	4
Central Office Administrators	1
School Board Members	1
Community Activists/Parents	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>12 participants</b>

### **Setting**

The setting for this study was Detroit Public Schools located in Detroit, Michigan. In 2000, Detroit Public Schools had 167,000 students enrolled in the district a year into the state takeover of DPS. Enrollment has decreased 46% from 2000-2010. There were three school governance models in DPS since 1999: state takeover/mayoral control (1999-2005), elected school board (2006-2009), and state control again in the form of an emergency financial manager (2009-2014). The enrollment of Detroit Public Schools has decreased to 47,000 students in 2014 (Zaniewski, 2015b).

### **Data Collection**

The data collection methods are described below to eliminate any unintended or perceived bias on the part of the researcher which could potentially be a threat to the internal validity of the study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). The open-ended structured interviews asked interviewees for their insights on Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014. The open-ended structured interviews were conducted with people who had direct experience with Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014 ranging from board members and central office administrators to parents and community activists. The participants in this study were knowledgeable of the culture and inner workings of Detroit Public Schools during all three school governance models since 1999. After the initial interview data was collected there was a second round of interviews conducted with the interviewees who provided very detailed information about Detroit Public Schools during that time period in a semi-structured interview format to gain a deeper understanding of the initial themes which emerged from the data collection.

**The information collected.** There were 27 interviews of former and current Detroit Public School personnel and community activists/parents. There were two sets of interviews: structured interviews with all 27 participants in the study to establish a baseline of information in regards to the research questions and institutional progress in DPS, which was then followed by semi-structured interviews with 12 participants who provided significant details during the initial phase of interviews to reach a point of saturation and to possibly discover anything not uncovered in the initial phase of the interviews. The semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to explore for a deeper understanding of DPS during that time period in relation to institutional progress, school governance reform, and barriers preventing DPS children from receiving a quality 21<sup>st</sup> Century education. In addition to the interviews, there was document



analysis of Detroit Public School Board of Education meeting minutes reports, the daily newspaper coverage (*Detroit Free Press* and *Detroit News*) of Detroit Public Schools, and document analysis of official archives from Detroit Public Schools was the data collected for this study.

**The information collection process.** Interviews were recorded on a recording device which was then transcribed into text to create interview transcripts. The interviews were protected on a password required personal laptop and the researcher was the only person with knowledge of the password. There was no identifiable information kept on any interviewees, which adheres to Wayne State University IRB research protocols. Interviewees were only identified by their interview number, type of position they held in DPS, and their years of experience. The documents were collected from online resources, online databases, and through paid public information requests to the City of Detroit.

**The explanations for collecting the information.** A robust qualitative data collection was used to triangulate themes from multiple sources of information, and it also served to corroborate or vet information and historical events. There is also a confluence of evidence which ensures creditability in to the findings of the study (Bowen, 2009).

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is important as it enhances our understanding of the ways in which societal conditions and personal characteristics interact in producing valued qualities (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). So therefore, interview and data was collected to determine the perceived effects of the education policies developed and enacted from 1999-2014 to address the institutional progress in Detroit Public Schools from people with intimate knowledge of DPS during that time period. In addition, document data was also collected to determine the perceived effects of the

education policies developed and enacted from 1999-2014 to address the institutional progress in Detroit Public Schools from documents written during that time period reporting on various things happening within the district.

The coding process used to analyze the contextual data, and it was a multi-step process (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009; Lofland & Lofland, 1995). The steps to replicate this study are listed below:

1. Identify keywords or codes within the interview transcripts and the documents (e.g., schools were out of control, state takeover was unsuccessful, etc.).
2. Align the keywords or codes from the interviews and documents into larger the themes related to the research questions (i.e., institutional progress, impact of governance, barriers). In this study, the larger themes were the six institutional progress variables from the conceptual framework: leadership, educational programs, finances, personnel, community support, and political support.
3. All of the individual codes were placed on post-it notes and placed under each institutional progress variable as they related to each research question. This portion of the data analysis created a theory about institutional progress in Detroit Public Schools and determined whether or not Detroit Public Schools actually achieved institutional progress from 1999-2014.
4. This coding process also created the sub-finding for this study (e.g., *Peter Principle* administrators, instability in district leadership, etc.).
5. To ensure a reliable data analysis, this process was repeated two additional times with several minor changes to the original analysis, major findings, and sub-findings.
6. All of the interview and document data was coded, aligned, analyzed and then placed into the findings section of this study found in Chapter 4. However, the city of Detroit transcripts from the annual *State of the City Addresses* did not shed a great deal of information on the educational agenda for the city of Detroit as the mayors during that time period were focused on other civic issues they were responsible for by the way of statue, and rarely mentioned education in their speeches. Nonetheless, the *State of the City Address* information was collected and the speeches were analyzed providing readers with insights on the various mayoral agendas for Detroit mayors from 1999-2014. (See Appendices E-1 and E-2).

**Coding process clarification.** The interview and document information was placed into a *Grounded Theory* coded format where the researcher generated a theory grounded in the data from the participants' experiences and document analysis in relation to the research questions and the institutional progress framework (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Even though this is not a grounded theory study, the coding technique was used for the data analysis purposes to generate findings and sub-findings from the participants and document analysis (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). This grounded theory coded format process was used to shape an explanation of institutional progress in DPS, not the researcher.

**Document analysis.** Document analysis is a technique that enables the study of human behavior in an indirect way through an analysis of written communications with codes and themes using both manifest content and latent content to improve both the reliability and validity of the study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Specifically to this qualitative study, content analysis triangulated several themes in the data collection between the interviews and document analysis.

In Table 3.3 below, an explanation of the methodology (data sources, methods of data collection, and purpose) is provided for a clearer understanding of where this information came from, how the information was collected, and the reasons for collecting the information.

*Table 3.3: Explanation of Methodology*

<b>Data Sources</b>	<b>Methods of Data Collection</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Interviews of: school board members, central office administrators, building administrators, teachers, and community activists/parents from Detroit Public Schools, 1999-2014.	Interviews were recorded and then transcribed for data analysis using Apple voice to text software. An open-coding process was used to analyze the interview data.	To collect information on the impact of institutional progress, the impact of school governance reform, and the impact of barriers in DPS.
Daily newspaper coverage of Detroit Public Schools in the <i>Detroit Free Press</i> and <i>Detroit News</i> from 1999-2014.	Document analysis was conducted using the open-coding process.	To triangulate themes from the interviews. In addition, to gain an understanding of the impact of institutional progress, the impact of school governance reform, and

Detroit Board of Education meeting reports	Document analysis was conducted using the open-coding process.	the impact of barriers in DPS. To triangulate themes from the interviews. In addition, to gain an understanding of the impact of institutional progress, the impact of school governance reform, and the impact of barriers in DPS.
City of Detroit historical archives	Document analysis was conducted using the open-coding process.	To triangulate themes from the interviews. In addition, to gain an understanding of the impact of institutional progress, the impact of school governance reform, and the impact of barriers in DPS.

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**Source:** Fraenkel & Wallen (2009)

### Trustworthiness

It is essential for trustworthiness to be established by qualitative researchers in an effort to present a convincing case that their work is academically sound by grounding the research methods in the following areas: confirmability, dependability, transferability, and credibility. (Shenton, 2003). So therefore, trustworthiness in this study began with the snowball sampling of the participants for the interview portion of the data collection. More trustworthiness was established with the standardized open-ended interview instrumentation for the structured first round interviews with the preliminary themes serving as the baseline for interview questions for the semi-structured interviews during the second round. The words in the structured interview questions were worded exactly the same for each respondent, determined in advance, and the questions were worded in a completely open-ended format (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). The respondents answered the same questions and it increased the comparability of the responses. The contextual data was organized into codes and then into larger overarching themes, which facilitated the organization and analysis of the contextual data (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). The questions were focused on what the respondent did in the past to elicit descriptions of the

experience and phenomena of governance reform in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014 (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Recording the interviews further allowed for the trustworthiness of the data collection with a triangulation of the data to eliminate observations and biases, and it established validity in the data collection process.

As previously stated by Shenton (2003), to improve trustworthiness in qualitative research you must do the following: have credible methods, translate information that transfers dependability and conformability. Creditability will consist of well-established methods, familiarity with the organization, random sampling, triangulation, and interviewing people who genuinely want to participate (Shenton, 2003). Transferability will provide sufficient contextual information about Detroit Public Schools to enable readers to make the transfer (Shenton, 2003). Dependability consists of describing the research design and plan, being careful with data collection, and to remain reflecting in the process (Shenton, 2003). Conformability are the findings and the results of the participants, rather than characteristics and preferences of the researcher (Shenton, 2003). The trustworthiness of this qualitative study will be increased by not communicating with potential interviewees prior to their interview and it only generated a small pool of interviewees. Also, the researcher followed established methods for gathering the data and then transferring the data for the data analysis portion of this study. The same methods and procedures were replicated for every piece of data collected in this study.

### **Conclusion**

These qualitative methods allowed for a more holistic understanding of Detroit Public Schools during that time period when multiple governance reforms were enacted in DPS. The methods described allowed for the construction of the understanding that the impact of school governance reform in Detroit Public Schools, and it also constructed an understanding of the role

educational leadership plays in improving or preventing student achievement from occurring. This study and its methods also analyzed quantitative data such as NAEP results, graduation rates, and dropout rates to determine a baseline for institutional progress in Detroit Public Schools during that time period. In summary, these qualitative methods mentioned in this chapter develop a deeper understanding of how governance, educational leadership and barriers affected teacher practice and ultimately student achievement in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014.

In chapter 4, the anticipated data collection themes provided insight on the impact of school governance reform on institutional progress while under the three different school governance structures from 1999-2014.

In summary, this proposed qualitative study provided additional insight on:

1. How school governance structure created conditions for educational leaders to experience institutional progress in urban public schools;
2. How educational leadership in an urban school district is an important element for the institutional progress in urban school districts; and
3. How the internal and external barriers in Detroit Public Schools affected institutional progress in the district.

## CHAPTER 4: DATA FINDINGS

### Introduction

This chapter provides findings from an analysis of the data collected using the methods described in the previous chapter. Specifically, findings come from the data analysis of the interviews of Detroit Public School personnel, and content analysis of: Detroit Board of Education Minutes Reports, newspaper coverage of Detroit Public Schools in the *Detroit Free Press* and the *Detroit News*, and the annual *State of the City Address* given by Detroit mayors from 1999-2014.

The data sources were analyzed and the following overarching findings were identified:

1. There was a *lack* of institutional progress in Detroit Public Schools;
2. School governance reforms did *not* have a positive impact; and
3. Internal and external barriers *prevented* institutional progress.

The state takeover of Detroit Public Schools led to a dramatic decline in the institutional progress in DPS, which has manifested in the financial crisis that DPS has been mired in since 2008. There was a severe lack of educational leadership in DPS during that time period. More specifically, the lack of educational leadership was characterized by not implementing any comprehensive or systematic reforms to address student achievement issues plaguing the district, there were eight different district leaders since 1999, and there was a large percentage of *Peter Principle* administrators serving in central office and principal positions. According to Peter and Hull (1969), the *Peter Principle* is a theory in management that a person is promoted to their level of incompetence based upon their performance in a lower level position. In addition, internal and external barriers were identified in this study, which were primarily related to

environmental issues in the city of Detroit (e.g., poverty), but there was also a lack of funding, and low morale among DPS teachers.

The lack of educational leadership led primarily to the dramatic lack of institutional progress during that time period from the superintendent's office down through the principal ranks. Simply put, there was just too much instability from the superintendent's office to make meaningful and substantive change within the district. The average tenure of the district leaders in DPS from 1999-2014 was just two years. During this 16-year time period, DPS did not implement any meaningful systematic reforms to address issues plaguing DPS such as the historically poor graduation and dropout rates. In other words, the lack of educational leadership during that time period was evident by: the lack of an academic vision, a lack of accountability among its leaders, a lack of metrics for success, and a lack of focus on the systematic improvement of teaching and learning in DPS. The lack of educational leadership was also evident among a number of principals who were unable to maintain institutional control in their school buildings and lacked the instructional leadership skills to change teacher practice, which could have resulted in increased levels of student achievement in their schools.

The results of the analysis indicate that there was a negative impact on Detroit Public Schools when school governance was changed four times since 1999 which prevented DPS from achieving institutional progress from 1999-2014. As a result of the school governance instability in DPS from 1999-2014 the following occurred: student achievement remained elusive, enrollment decreased 71%, the issues of students appeared to be secondary, and district-level education policies were not implemented to address the systematic issues which plagued DPS. There were three different school governance models in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014; overall, there was a steady decline in institutional progress after the state takeover of 1999,



especially after Proposal E was passed in 2005. Furthermore, state control of DPS has created political turmoil in the city of Detroit as it is the only city in the state of Michigan that cannot elect its own school board members to represent the community's interests.

This study also identified barriers that existed in Detroit Public Schools which prevented DPS from making institutional progress from 1999-2014. The major barriers identified in this study were the following: The Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT), poverty, a lack of funding, and other environmental issues for children living in poverty in the city of Detroit. Educating children living poverty is a very challenging task as the lack of nutrition can affect the academic growth of students. The Detroit Federation of Teachers is considered an internal barrier because of the DFT's political stances and public disputes with district leaders. The political disputes probably caused more students to leave DPS which resulted in teacher layoffs and school closures in DPS. The current financial emergency in DPS is one of the causes of low morale in DPS in addition to the adversarial relationship between administrators and teachers in the district. The cause of a poor public perception stems from the overwhelmingly negative newspaper coverage of DPS in the *Detroit Free Press* and the *Detroit News*, which has partially contributed to the decline in student enrollment and the growth of charter schools in metro Detroit.

Chapter 4 is organized into five sections. The findings section provides an overall summary of the three overarching findings in this study. As previously stated, the three findings in this study are the three middle sections of this chapter: 1.) there was a lack of institutional progress in Detroit Public Schools; 2.) school governance reforms did not have a positive impact on Detroit Public Schools; and 3.) internal and external barriers prevented institutional progress. The final section of Chapter 4 is the conclusion which will describe how all of the findings are

interrelated and how the findings layout an explanation as to why Detroit Public Schools did not achieve institutional progress from 1999-2014 while under three different school governance models including state control for 13 of the 16 years studied during that time period.

### **Findings**

The findings from the data collection of this study have been synthesized into a narrative to explain why Detroit Public Schools did not achieve institutional progress from 1999-2014 despite the numerous governance reforms in DPS during that time period. The data was analyzed using the institutional progress conceptual framework described in Chapter 2: leadership, educational programs, financial, personnel, community support, and political support. In Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014: student achievement, enrollment and financial problems worsened, because there was a negative impact from the multiple school governance reforms, a lack of educational leadership, and unaddressed internal and external barriers to institutional progress in Detroit Public Schools.

The data collected for this study consists of interviews of current and former Detroit Public School personnel, document analysis of Detroit Board of Education meetings reports from 1997-2014, document analysis of daily newspaper coverage of Detroit Public Schools by the *Detroit Free Press* and the *Detroit News* from 1999-2014, and city of Detroit archives on the annual *State of the City Address* given by Detroit mayors from 1999-2014 (*See Appendices: A-3, B-1, B-2, B-3, B-4, C-5, C-6, D-1, D-2, E-1, E-2, and F-1*).

### **Significance of the Findings**

For urban school governance reform to be successful it must be accompanied with strong and consistent educational leadership, an academic mission and vision, a district turnaround strategy, and the additional financial resources to educate children growing up in poverty.

Second, multiple governance reforms can cause political divisiveness and instability within an urban school district and multiple governance reforms should be avoided. Third, internal and external barriers must be addressed by district leadership to lessen their effects on institutional progress and more importantly student outcomes.

### **A Lack of Institutional Progress in Detroit Public Schools, 1999-2014**

Using the institutional progress conceptual framework several key themes emerge from the contextual data. These themes illuminate a lack of institutional progress under both local and state control. First, the theme of leadership will be described below and how a crisis of leadership essentially developed in the district from 1999-2014 at both the district and local school levels.

#### **Leadership**

The data analysis revealed that there was a lack of institutional progress in Detroit Public Schools because of the lack of educational leadership from the district leaders, central office administrators, and building administrators. The instability of district leadership created a crisis of leadership throughout the district in addition to the omission of a clear district academic vision, mission, goals, or turnaround strategies. The instability of district leadership also resulted in a lack of meaningful reforms implemented to improve student achievement in DPS. In 2010, the Emergency Financial Manager at the time, Robert Bobb, attempted to implement an academic plan to set forth the tone for: financial, facilities, security, and safety plan for Detroit Public Schools (Higgins, 2010b). However, Bobb's legal disputes with the Board of Education for control of academics derailed his academic plan for DPS (Higgins, 2010b). In addition to the power struggle over academics, there were a large percentage of administrators in DPS who

could have been considered textbook definitions of the *Peter Principle* (Peter & Hull, 1969). The organizational structure of DPS also caused a lack of leadership as central office was too centralized and communication between schools and central office was ineffective in terms of meeting the needs of principals, teachers, students, and parents. And most importantly, there was a clear lack of educational leadership in DPS as there was not a clear focus on teaching and learning in DPS during that time period either.

**District leadership.** Leadership in any setting is the ability to set a vision for followers, but also to hold followers accountable with both team and individual goals. According to one teacher, “The buck did not stop with anyone in DPS.” In tough urban school districts like DPS, leadership and holding people accountable is one of the necessary approaches for a district turnaround to occur, but there cannot be a crisis of leadership at the top. There have been eight different district leaders or superintendents in Detroit Public Schools, not including interim appointments from 1999-2014 (Walsh-Sarnecki, 1999; MacDonald, 2005a; Walsh-Sarnecki, 2007; Mrozowski, 2007a; Pratt Dawsey, 2009a; Pratt Dawsey, 2009b; Pratt Dawsey, 2011a; Higgins, 2013). Therefore, the average tenure of a district leader in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014 was just 2.0 years. The frequent turnover of district leadership resulted in problems with implementing and sustaining meaningful educational programs in the district; in other words, there was a crisis of leadership.

Dr. Burnley had the longest tenure during that time period, which was five years (2000-2005); however, Dr. Burnley’s tenure in Detroit Public Schools ended when his contract was not renewed for no apparent reason though it seems to suggest (Rich, 2009; MacDonald, 2005a; Detroit Board of Education, 2005a, p.3 ). Dr. Burnley’s contract was not renewed because of issues regarding student achievement, but because of personal differences with several Reform

Board members (Rich, 2009). His tenure was long enough for him to implement his Open Court reading initiative, which yielded significant gains on the MEAP per the 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading test (Michigan Department of Education, 2014). Despite the daunting challenges of leading a district such as Detroit Public Schools, the Board of Education did not utilize an outside consulting firm which specialized in superintendent searches such as the Michigan Leadership Institute to conduct their superintendent search in 2007 (Mrozowski, 2007a). This flawed approach to selecting a district school leader was highlighted in 2007 during the superintendent search which only resulted in 25 candidates nationwide (Mrozowski, 2007a). The Board of Education eventually hired Dr. Connie Calloway and fired her 18 months later for personal differences (Mrozowski, 2007a; Pratt Dawsey, 2009c). District-level leadership and management were largely ineffective because of the frequent turnover of key leadership positions.

*The impact of district leadership at local schools.* The leadership from the district leaders differed greatly in their leadership styles and how they connected with students, teachers, principals, and parents. One central office administrator stated, “The CEO had the goal of trying to understand what was going on in the schools by doing school drop-ins and sitting in classrooms to observe the teachers because they were struggling.” It appears this central office administrator understood what was needed to happen to help schools and principals to be successful, which was being purposeful in their actions to understand the issues at the school level. However, this central administrator’s protocol of visiting schools was not something done on a consistent basis in Detroit Public Schools by other district leaders. Nonetheless, the process of engaging with teachers for understanding issues in DPS appeared to decrease after the state takeover in 1999. One teacher stated, “I worked in one of the most popular schools in the district and I routinely saw superintendents prior to the state takeover in our building over my 40 years

in DPS. After the state takeover, I never saw one of the CEOs in our building or even heard about a CEO being in our building. To change DPS you have to be on the frontlines with the teachers.” It appears that after the contentious state takeover of DPS and after Dr. Adamany’s tenure, there was not a concerted effort by district leaders to engage in dialogue with teachers in an effort to reform issues plaguing DPS at the school level; hence, the absence of district-level reforms to improve student achievement. As a result of district leaders in Detroit Public Schools not visiting the neighborhood schools, it led teachers and principals to believe input was not valued and created a dysfunctional relationship in the district. One building administrator stated, “They (the CEOs) did not seek the input of all the stakeholders, especially the principals or the teachers.” Another building administrator stated, “The CEOs did not include the principals in any of the conversations about the district. How can you be successful and not include the principals in your reforms?” There appeared to be a disconnect between district leaders the professionals who actually worked with students every day which prevented institutional progress from occurring in DPS.

The lack of institutional progress in Detroit Public Schools was identified due to the lack of instructional leadership from district leaders. One teacher stated, “The CEOs have had a negative impact... These people are business people and managers, not teachers. They did not have a deep understanding of teaching and learning.” Another teacher stated, “I did not feel that the CEO set the tone for the district. There were no specific reforms or anything being done in my opinion that directly affected student achievement that you could say it was an initiative implemented by the CEO to address these specific problems. Dr. Burnley did implement the Open Court reading, but that was elementary only, nothing for high schools.” The lack of educational leadership from district leaders was evident as teachers interviewed for this study

could not articulate any district level reforms or a common district vision for DPS. It is very hard to achieve institutional progress without strong leadership, a vision for success, and a proven turnaround strategy to measure the success.

According to the interviewees, there was a lack of educational leadership in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014 as district leaders did not seek teacher and principal input on major issues facing the district, nor did district leaders implement any meaningful reforms to increase student achievement on scale. During that time period the lack of leadership, vision, turnaround strategy, and focus on teaching and learning probably led to the decreases in student achievement in Detroit Public Schools. One teacher summarizes his sentiments about the district leader after the state takeover in 1999, “I don’t think there was a serious, serious thought to being more than average.” If the rank and file had the perception from district leaders that excellence wasn’t a realistic expectation then it probably prevented institutional progress from occurring. In Table 4.1 below, the leaders of Detroit Public Schools over the past 16 years from 1999-2014 are listed with explanations why each district leader left their district leadership position in DPS.

*Table 4.1: Leadership of Detroit Public Schools, 1999-2014*

DPS Leader	Tenure	Reason for leaving the district
Dr. Eddie Green	1997-1999	<b>Resigned/Retired;</b> when the 1999 state takeover legislation was passed.
Dr. David Adamany	1999-2000	<b>Interim appointment.</b>
Dr. Kenneth S. Burnley	2000-2005	<b>Contract was not renewed;</b> personal differences among school board members and Burnley.
William F. Coleman, III	2005-2007	<b>Fired;</b> raised questions about possible fraud of \$46 million within the district; later settled a whistleblower lawsuit.
Dr. Connie K. Calloway	2007-2009	<b>Fired;</b> political differences with the school board over the deficit reduction plan for the district’s budget.
Robert Bobb	2009-2011	<b>Did not seek re-appointment.</b>
Roy Roberts	2011-2013	<b>Did not seek re-appointment.</b>

Jack Martin	2013-2015	<b>Did not seek re-appointment.</b>
<b>Average Tenure</b>	<b>2.0 years</b>	

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**Sources:** Addonizio & Kearney (2012); *Detroit Free Press*; *Detroit News*; Detroit Public Schools.

**Educational leadership.** According the *Council of the Great City Schools Report* (2008), Detroit Public Schools dealt with for a prolonged period, a lack of educational leadership as there were no meaningful reforms enacted in DPS during that time period. There was a top-down approach during that time period without real input from principals or teachers to the direction of DPS. One teacher stated, “These leaders should have developed relationships with the community and with the students in the schools and then they would have made a more meaningful impact on the district. The top-down approach just doesn’t work in DPS. Sometimes you have to meet people halfway to get what you want done.” It’s very hard to reform an organization if you do not include all stakeholders, especially teachers in urban public schools. Teachers can make or break reforms if leaders do not receive buy-in from teachers and principals because their efforts are needed for the reforms to be effective and not just words on paper.

**Peter Principle.** The ineffectiveness of educational leadership in DPS was also a result of unqualified people who were promoted to the levels of principal and central office. One teacher stated, “We need the best and brightest people to run these schools to create action plans for school improvement, and not putting your cronies in places just to have jobs. This process was just screwing over kids and teachers. Administrators in DPS have hired mediocre people all around them to secure their jobs. DPS needs to do a nationwide search for new administrators and clean house in the district, that’s the only way systemic change will ever take place in DPS.”

The ineffective educational leadership in Detroit Public Schools was also a result of not having



an academic vision, turnaround strategy, and meaningful district-level reforms to address the issues which have plagued Detroit Public Schools for the better half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (e.g., high dropout rate and low graduation rate). The ineffectiveness of educational leadership in DPS started at the top and spread throughout central office and into the principal ranks as well. Despite the poor graduation and dropout rate in Detroit Public Schools, district leaders did not have an academic vision or any district-level reforms to address those two serious student achievement issues. In short, the lack of educational leadership in Detroit Public Schools during that time period was evident as there were not any goals for success, strategies for success, or any measures for success. The lack of educational leadership was due to the *Peter Principle* quality of some administrators in DPS.

During that time period, Detroit Public Schools rarely hired people outside of DPS to fill vacant assistant principal or principal positions. The common practice was for Detroit Public School principals and assistant principals to be promoted from within. This hiring practice constricted the leadership capacity and the leadership pool of quality candidates in the district, and the result was a decrease of institutional progress from 1999-2014. Payne (2008) describes this type of personnel practice in struggling urban schools districts as a system that has been shaped to serve the career interests of those who staff it, not anyone's educational interests. According to multiple building administrators interviewed for this study, building principals were selected through a district principal academy where aspiring administrators were selected by their own principal. So therefore, relationships were prioritized for upward movement within DPS, not knowledge, skills, or ability. However, this selection process opened itself up to cronyism and the possibility of too many people being placed in positions of authority who were either not qualified or lacked the skills to be an effective administrator in DPS. One teacher said

this about his experience with Detroit Public School principals, “The impact of principals I worked under was mixed, but you’d have to learn towards principals in the district not having an understanding of instruction and most were incapable of controlling their buildings.” This promotion process in DPS may have been part of the reason why some principals were unable to either control the students or teachers in their buildings, the reason why instruction was not prioritized, and the reason why student achievement decreased.

**Central office effectiveness.** A major issue in Detroit Public Schools was the size of the central office bureaucracy described as layer upon layer, and supervisor after supervisor, thus, making central office in DPS largely ineffective (Detroit Board of Education, 1997, p.13-17). The size of the central office in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014 made it difficult for district leaders and principals to communicate on issues needed to improve schools and student achievement in the school district at scale (Detroit Board of Education, 1997, p.13-17). As previously mentioned, in 1997 then-interim superintendent Dr. Eddie Green implemented his *site-based management* plan, which centralized all operations in DPS in the central office building (Detroit Board of Education, 1997, p.13-17). Prior to this reform, Detroit Public Schools had area districts (i.e., Area A, Area B, Area C, Area D, and Area E) and area superintendents (Detroit Board of Education, 1997, p.13-17).

Dr. Green’s site-based management plan created a larger bureaucracy in DPS making it harder for the needs of principals, teachers, and students to be met by district officials in central office. One community activist stated the illogical nature of the over centralized school district, “District leaders needed to move decision-making to the individual schools. Who has the responsibility to educate students every day? Not people in the central office... Either you trust the people in the schools to improve student achievement or you don’t.” The site-based

management plan prevented resources not to reach the classroom, for example, teacher vacancies spanning several months were not usually filled in a timely fashion. This central office structure prevented institutional progress in DPS. One building administrator explained the issue with the size of central office and its effect on children in Detroit Public Schools, “Central office personnel became so centralized that they were detached from the children as they were making decisions. Decisions were no longer about children, decisions were about money.” Dr. Green’s centralized reform was never undone despite principals voicing their concerns over how the newly overly centralized school district was ineffective in terms of communicating the needs of schools (e.g., funds, resources, supplies, personnel, and guidance on new directives) in comparison to the previous area district model.

It seems as if the structure of Detroit Public Schools after 1998 was an impediment to the institutional progress in the district, but it also appears that some of the people working in central office led to the lack of education leadership in the district. One community activist simply stated, “Get people in there [central office] who know what they’re doing. I never understood how ineffective principals were promoted to become central administrators.” One teacher echoed the same sentiments about how ineffective principals became central administrators, “Administrators in DPS are evaluated by their friends and the cronyism perpetuates itself. DPS is dysfunctional and there is a refusal to hire talented people outside of DPS. All the unqualified people in DPS occupied all of the positions of authority in DPS and that pretty much explains it all.” The lack of educational leadership from central office is also evident with the lack of an academic vision for Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014, but the lack of an academic vision is also evident in the method used to promote administrators in the district based upon relationships, not meritocracy.

The central office structure of Detroit Public Schools was too centralized which made the district too difficult to manage (Detroit Board of Education, 1997, p.13-17). There were multiple layers of supervision between the superintendent and the building principals which made it difficult to meet the needs of students in the district (Detroit Board of Education, 1997, p.13-17). The intention of the reorganization of DPS's central office structure was to in fact make site-based decisions, but in an effort to reorganize the district it further consolidated central office operations which decreased central office's the impact on schools and students. One central office administrator stated:

The structure of central office in DPS was just too large and cumbersome to impact change at the school level. Everything in DPS was so centralized and gaining approvals was difficult because there were just too many layers in the central office structure which complicated the process... There were a lot of large centralized departments in DPS, but these various departments were NOT housed in the same offices or buildings, so the organizational structure was similar to silos. Communication among these various departments was not effective and the structure of DPS made things very difficult to get things done.

In addition to the issues caused by the size of and ineffective structure of central office, there were no meaningful reforms from central office leading to significant changes in teacher practice and thus student achievement in Detroit Public Schools. However, actions taken by central office administrators created a hostile working environment in Detroit Public Schools. One building administrator said, "Well, there are some things that were done by district administration that were counterproductive to any type of progress in a district such as DPS: two-hour meetings telling you how bad you are, constantly being observed, threats of losing your job every year, being transferred or having to reapply for your job every year, and pay cuts that were supposed to help the budget but the deficit that somehow increased." The fact that central office operations were too centralized and communication was ineffective resulted in building

principals struggling to meet the needs of their students and teachers, and it resulted in a lack of institutional progress.

The overall lack of vision and commitment to an academic plan caused the communication issues with central office to grow exponentially leading to confusion about one's status in DPS. One building administrator pretty much summarizes how central office in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014 affected building administrators, "Central office was a roadblock and impacted the district in a negative manner." Central office in Detroit Public Schools did not pick up the slack from the lack of educational leadership from district leaders. Central office in Detroit Public Schools during that time period was a road block to institutional progress in the district. It's just hard to make institutional progress when the leaders of the district are not on the same page with the building principals.

In summary, the reasons for the lack of educational leadership from central office in Detroit Public Schools can be explained by: the overly centralized central office structure in the district, the top-down approach with principals, little to no engagement with students, no academic vision for the district, unqualified administrators in central office, and the internal political atmosphere in central office which created a hostile working environment within the DPS. According the *Council of the Great City Schools Report* (2008), many outside observers looked at DPS and said that it had only itself to blame for its troubles; those inclined to point fingers found ample evidence in a school system that saw very low and often stagnant student achievement, dysfunctional and sometimes self-serving operations, political corruption, and chaotic leadership. The chaotic leadership was a direct byproduct of the *Peter Principle* administrators, the lack of vision from central office, and the chaotic central office structure in DPS.

**Building principal effectiveness.** Of course every principal in Detroit Public Schools during that time period was not ineffective, but according to the data there were a large percentage of principals in Detroit Public School who were ineffective school leaders (i.e., *Peter Principle*). Besides a lack of instructional knowledge by some principals, other principals did not even have institutional control within their own school buildings which led to more violence in the schools (Riley, 2010). According to Riley (2010):

There were issues of violence at Finney [high school] that were unbelievable. It mirrored what you would see in a movie. Many parents had no value for the school. Kids had no value for the school. And there were certain teachers who had no value for the school... the Finney principal had been struck in the mouth while breaking up a fight. He was out for weeks... [there was] a crowd that was literally kicking and stomping a young man into unconsciousness. Finally, me and another assistant principal were left with the victim, who later died.

The violence in DPS schools was a serious phenomenon and so was the inability of some principals to control the student body in their schools. One central office administrator shared her experience with an out of control school, “I worked with principals on every level. I visited a middle school on the eastside one time and the school was in total chaos. The principal asked me what I was going to do to help to get the kids under control. I just walked out and left [the building]. I was shocked at how out of control the school was.” Urban schools can be tough places to teach and learn, but if building administration cannot control or effectively discipline the student body it will be very hard to improve teacher quality as teachers will seek greener pastures elsewhere and then a teacher turnover problem will develop. Most teachers just want to be supported by their administrators and come to an orderly school where they can attempt to teach and reach kids. Schools in DPS which were out of control contributed to the decline of morale and institutional progress in the school district.

***Institutionalized culture in DPS.*** The effect of large numbers of ineffective principals leading the schools in Detroit Public Schools resulted in a decrease in student achievement at scale, which then resulted in thousands of Detroit parents opting to pull up stakes and enroll their children into unproven charter schools popping up all across metro Detroit (Pratt Dawsey, 2006a; Pratt Dawsey, 2008a, Pratt Dawsey, 2009b; Kang, 2015). The lack of educational leadership was apparent as interviewees in this study did not understand how some people were selected for advancement into administration positions in the district. One building administrator stated, “Nepotism and other people who were either inexperienced administrators were in these positions.” As previously stated, it appeared that relationships were valued more than skills, merit, qualifications, and an understanding of instructional leadership in DPS. It’s very hard to turn around a school district if the people leading the turnaround do not have the skills to it. Instructional leadership is a skill and it is an essential skill for turnaround principals to have if they are to positively affect student achievement.

As previously stated, educating children in Detroit Public Schools was already a daunting challenge, but it appears the task was made more daunting by the poor decisions to promote unqualified people into administrative positions. One teacher expressed this sentiment, “I guess what I am still bewildered by was the promotion of the most incompetent people to the highest positions of authority in the district. I still scratch my head about my two plus decades in DPS and how the most unqualified and least talented people became assistant principals, principals and in some cases superintendents. Then if you take a step back and look at the educational problems in Detroit (i.e., DPS, EAA, and charter schools), what do they have in common? Charter schools were supposed to bring innovation to education, but the only thing charter schools did in Detroit was become a landing place for some former DPS administrators who

were the definition of incompetence... most of them [DPS administrators] didn't have a clue.” The poor quality of some administrators seemed to be at the forefront of the minds of teachers working in the schools, and the quality of administrators can directly affect whether or not institutional progress can occur as instructional leadership and institutional control are essential to improve teacher practice and student achievement.

What are some other reasons why some principals were ineffective? One central office administrator believed principals were ineffective because of their union, “Most schools were bad because of the principals’ union.” In 1999, Interim CEO Dr. David Adamany got legislation passed in Lansing to eliminate the principals’ union in an effort to make Detroit Public School principals more accountable to the district, and not the principals’ union (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). The goal was to place more effective principals in leadership positions. However, this move by central administration was counterproductive as it pitted the principals against central office. For example, one building administrator explains this move and how it affected DPS principals, “One of the more significant changes in DPS was the dissolving of the principals’ union, which took the protection away from the principals. The data would indicate so goes the principal, so goes the school. When you take the person out of the union they cannot advocate for their school anymore without fear of retribution from central office.” And in some cases, the dissolution of the principals’ union negatively affected good principals as told by one teacher, “The best principal I ever had got let go. He supported teachers and disciplined students and he really supported teachers. He had a relationship with his staff and the staff respected him. He was fair. He got let go for political reasons.” One central office administrator also added, “There was a serious issue among the principal ranks and all principals were not the same, because some principals were about improving education for the kids while others were just



about keeping their jobs.” Dr. Adamany addressed what he perceived to be a barrier to reforming DPS, but he was met with push back and resistance, not praise and support. It is reasonable to want or expect to have some type of job security, but job security as a principal should not come at the expense of a child’s education, nor should job security be based upon personal vendettas or political differences. The lack of vision and academic goals in DPS created subjective variables to judge job performance of principals in DPS. The quote below from a 16-year DPS veteran possibly explains why institutional progress was elusive in regards to the educational leadership being provided by some principals in DPS during that time period:

There are a lot of bad teachers, but administrators in DPS did not do real teacher evaluations to get rid of unsatisfactory teachers. Administrators did evaluations of the teachers they wanted to get rid of because that person made too many waves and the administrators heard about it from parents or from central office. Administrators in DPS do not understand what the term due diligence means. Principals did not want people in their schools who would make waves despite what’s in the best interests of the kids or the schools...

The principals played politics with the people who got promotions in their schools. Loyalty was valued more than qualifications, merit, ability, skills, or intelligence for that matter. For example, the majority of promotions were African American females and only 4% of the administrators’ academies were white, despite the fact that 50% of the employees in DPS were white. The systemic issue with race cripples the district and the leadership is pulled from a small talent pool and the talented people are forced out of the district.

The former school board members interviewed had interesting positions on principals in their school district. One former school board member stated, “In some cases, principals were not successful because they were not the best people for those positions and the *“institutionalized culture”* got them into those positions.” Another former school board member interviewed echoed similar sentiments about their understanding of the quality of principals in DPS, “What I found was DPS was a district with a few good principals, some middle of the road principals, and some people that had no business being principals or leading schools for that

matter.” It was obvious to the former school board members the vision of the principals they wanted in Detroit Public Schools but they understood the reality of the situation they were in with so many ineffective principals in DPS. District leadership during that time period did not provide a clear strategy to address principal quality, and institutionalized culture in DPS made it difficult to replace these principals. There was just a lack of leadership from district leadership to overhaul the principal ranks. The following statement below captures the lack of educational leadership and the ineffectiveness from district leaders, some central office administrators, and some principals. The statement comes from one teacher with 26 years of experience in DPS. This statement can partially explain why Detroit Public Schools was unable to achieve institutional progress from 1999-2014 due to their apathy towards the schools and children they were charged to lead:

I remember a basketball game between two Eastside high schools being played at my far Westside high school. I asked why the game was being played all way on the other side of town and my athletic director told me the two principals knew their schools would end up fighting at the game, so they relocated the game to our school. I thought that was the stupidest thing I have ever heard in my entire life. So instead of addressing the problems and disciplining the students who are problems in the schools, the decision was to penalize good students and the parents of the basketball players and move the game across town?

And in typical DPS fashion both of those principals who could not even control their students received promotions to central office despite that fact that both of their schools were two of the worst schools academically in the entire state of Michigan. Then you have these two administrators training the next crop of principals. This cycle leads to what DPS had which was a large crop of do-nothing administrators. I have watched the quality of administrators decline sharply since I began working in DPS in the 1980s.

Ineffective principals are a problem in any urban school district because of the multitude of issues principals must deal with on a daily basis. However, principals are instructional leaders and they are charged with improving student achievement by changing teacher practice. During that time period, there were some good principals in Detroit Public Schools, but those principals

and their efforts were overshadowed by the actions of ineffective principals who most likely got their position due to their relationship with someone of influence in DPS. One teacher pretty much sums up the dilemma which is keeping Detroit Public Schools from making institutional progress at the school level, “You just had too many administrators that didn’t do anything and didn’t do anything for kids. That’s not leadership. There were a few good principals, but most of them put their interests above the interests of their students and their staffs.” It appears the culture in DPS protected poor principals as there appears to have been no accountability measures in place because of the ineffectiveness of central office and the lack of vision from the superintendents to improve student achievement in DPS.

### **Educational Programs**

The data analysis revealed that there were no significant education reforms in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014. According to one building administrator the lack of educational programs was due to the lack of educational leadership from central office, “Not that I can recall. The problem was central office was loaded with too many elementary level administrators who then oversaw the high schools, which was just a stupid and backwards idea. There were funds to help struggling students, but there was inequity in the funding by the school levels and not enough was devoted to the high school levels.” As other large urban school districts were copying reforms and education programs from each other DPS leadership did not follow this trend. One teacher stated the following about the lack of educational programs in DPS, “I cannot think of one impactful initiative the Detroit Public Schools instituted from 1999-2014 on a district level.” However, there was a short-lived reading initiative implemented during Dr. Burnley’s tenure called Open Court reading, but nothing on the scale of reforms or educational programs similar to Boston Public Schools during its turnaround in the 1990s and 2000s.

**Open Court reading.** The only memorable reform enacted in the district from 1999-2014 was the Open Court reading initiative which began a year into Dr. Burnley’s tenure as CEO of Detroit Public Schools (Detroit Board of Education, 2002, p.2-3). One teacher stated, “The success in DPS was the result of the Open Court reading program introduced by Dr. Burnley.” This initiative was for elementary school-aged students (Detroit Board of Education, 2002, p.2-3). MEAP data (*See Table 4.3*) supports the success of Dr. Burnley’s reading initiative. Open Court reading was discontinued shortly after Dr. Burnley’s contract was not renewed in January 2005 despite the evidence that Open Court was making gains (MacDonald, 2005a).

However, after the effects of the program dissipated student achievement worsened while DPS was under state control for a second time as DPS students scored historic lows on the NAEP, graduating from high school remained elusive, and MEAP scores decreased significantly. Most recently, the results of DPS students on the M-Step examination suggested that DPS is one of the lowest achieving school districts in the state of Michigan with only 11% of third graders proficient and 15% of seventh graders proficient (Tanner & Higgins, 2015). A teacher stated the following about Open Court reading and the general lack of educational program in DPS to improve student achievement, “I can only recall Dr. Burnley's Open Court reading initiative, but there was nothing geared towards student success at the secondary level where the low graduation rate and high dropout rate were an issue.” It is very hard to achieve institutional progress with proven best practices from other school districts in the form of educational programs to address specific student achievement issues in the school district.

**Development of significant education reforms.** The Board and the numerous district leaders in Detroit Public Schools during that time period did not seek to address systematic issues plaguing the district. One former board member stated this about his tenure on the Board

in regards to education reforms for DPS, “We didn’t deal with a lot of reform while I was on the Board. We were trying to rewrite the ship after the state takeover, and we didn’t look at the reforms that much on the Board. We should have looked at more reforms though.” Such reforms could have included the following areas plaguing the school district: unacceptable graduation and dropout rates, poor accounting practices, poor human resources practices, student accountability, parenting, equity in funding, poor accountability of district personnel, violence in schools, central office ineffectiveness, and poverty. One teacher stated the following about the district’s lack of focus on issues plaguing DPS:

There needs to be accountability for bad parents and bad students. Students who are constantly misbehaving should not be catered to because the administration is too afraid to deal with the kid’s parents or because holding on to those students is only done for financial purposes. There needs to be a policy to establish excellence in the district starting with holding students accountable for their education. Parenting is poor and the district does not work with parents to make students more accountable for their own education.

Parenting is an important variable in the improvement process of institutional progress, but so is developing education reforms to address issues which have been plaguing the district in an effort to reach a different outcome with the students in DPS. The lack of education reforms, especially a turnaround strategy is one of the causes for the lack of student achievement in DPS from 1999-2014.

The graduation rate in Detroit Public Schools has historically been low because of the availability of well-paying middle-class jobs in the auto industry (Sugrue, 1996). Back in the 1940s, 50s and 60s, a high school dropout in Detroit could easily find a job with one of the Big Three automakers and achieve a middle-class lifestyle (Sugrue, 1996). However, times have changed and completing high school is a necessity in order to compete in today’s 21<sup>st</sup> Century global economy. Neither the Board or district leaders developed systematic programs to address

the dropout problem in Detroit Public School from 1999-2014 such as: 9<sup>th</sup> grade academies, boarding schools, or tiered academic support and remediation programs for students below grade level (i.e., Response-to-Intervention) on a district level. Institutional progress can only be achieved when educational programs are developed and then implemented with fidelity to address issues plaguing the district. It's almost insanity to expect better results without doing anything differently on scale supported by research and best practices in education. This domain is where significant teacher professional development around best instructional practices for teachers and principals would provide the support needed to improve the quality of instruction throughout the district.

**Curriculum initiatives and other reforms.** There have not been any meaningful curriculum initiatives enacted in DPS to improve student achievement at scale or to address systematic issues plaguing the district (i.e., poor test scores, low graduation rate, and high dropout rate) aside from Dr. Burnley's short-lived Open Court reading initiative (Detroit Board of Education, 2002, p.2-3). There is a deep-seeded culture at DPS to maintain the way things were done, such as a lack of proper accounting, no way of tracking down millions of dollars in contracts given out without proper paperwork, and no ready desire to ensure an effective educational curriculum (Logan, 2008). The role of the emergency financial managers has not improved curriculum initiatives in DPS despite having control over the finances for the curriculum reforms.

It's just hard to improve academic performance in the district if there are not any clear expectations for students. However, according to one central administrator interviewed, "Dr. Adamany addressed the social promotion problem in the district with mandatory year-round schooling for students who were below grade level." Therefore, aside from Dr. Adamany's

focus on social promotion and Dr. Burnley's focus on reading improvement DPS was negatively impacted because there were no other meaningful or clearly communicated district level reforms aimed at addressing student achievement issues plaguing the district. One former school board member shed some light on local education policies in DPS, "There have been a variety of reforms enacted in the district, but they have all been short-lived and too much change is too unsettling to people in DPS. People in DPS don't have the patience for change. During my tenure there was a reading initiative and a curriculum initiative implemented, but when the leadership changed, the reforms were no longer continued. There was not a sustained focus on instructional improvements." As previously stated, it is a hard task to turnaround a struggling district with people in positions of authority who lack the skills or experience to turnaround the district, and too much change was met with resistance by some leaders in DPS. Then again it seems like change was something the institutionalized culture in DPS was going to fight against anyway.

### **Finances**

The data analysis revealed there was a lack of institutional progress in regards to financial standing in Detroit Public Schools because DPS is currently mired in a financial crisis dating back to 2008 (Pratt Dawsey, 2008a). Despite the inability to balance the budget, DPS has been plagued by perplexing financial decisions such as closing buildings with hundreds of millions of dollars in upgrades in them, the relocation of DPS's headquarters from a building DPS owned to renting space in the Fisher Building, poor accounting practices, embezzlement by employees, and questionable overages to bids on capital projects and contracts.

**Balanced budget.** For anyone who does not know the story of Detroit Public Schools prior to the state takeover, one would have to think the district was in utter chaos, especially in

terms of mismanaging its finances and resources for students. To the contrary, fiscal mismanagement was not the case with DPS prior to the state takeover in the 1990s (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). In 1999, Detroit Public Schools had a \$93 million surplus and by the end of 2004 Detroit Public Schools had a \$200 million deficit and projected a \$400 million shortfall in 2008 (Kang, 2015; Pratt Dawsey, 2008a). Detroit Public Schools operated with a fund balance three of the four years (1995, 1997 and 1998) prior to the state takeover in 1999 (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). Detroit Public Schools had a fund balance the following years since the 1999 state takeover: 1999-2003, 2005-2006, and a modest \$7 million fund balance in 2007 (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). According to one teacher, “DPS had a fund balance prior to the takeover, now DPS is swimming in the red. DPS was a not a perfect district prior to the takeover, but it was far better prior to the takeover. The takeover and other events just created an atmosphere that took the focus away from kids and took the drive out of teaching so I retired. The takeover had a negative impact on institutional progress in DPS and led to the popularity of charter schools. Detroit moved backwards and backwards under state control.” The state takeover of Detroit Public Schools did not have positive effect on district finances as the finances of the district worsened as more and more parents opted to take their children out of DPS and to place them into local charter schools.

**Adequacy with financial resources.** For institutional progress to occur financial resources have to reach the classroom to impact students. Sometimes precious financial resources in DPS were wasted and not used towards improving student outcomes. One teacher stated the following in regards to poor accounting practices in DPS:

The black aristocracy in DPS is feeding on the black peasantry in Detroit. The principals were stealing money from the district, but very few principals lost their jobs because of it. The principals used their schools similar lordships and fiefdoms... In light of the recent allegations, that the former Principal at Western



International High School, embezzled thousands of dollars with a co-conspirator, I feel the need to comment further. This incident serves to underscore everything that I have said about graft and corruption in Detroit Public Schools.

In 2015, the principal of Western International High School was suspended and then arraigned on charges that he allegedly embezzled over \$10,000 from the school's budget (Zaniewski, 2015a). For urban schools to make institutional progress stories like the one at Western International High must be a thing of the past but recent events in Detroit have proven the alleged criminal activity at Western could be part of a larger trend in DPS (Wisely & Zaniewski, 2015).

Poor accounting practices in DPS have hindered institutional progress in the district, especially the public's trust and confidence in the district not to waste tax dollars and to use tax dollars on students. According to the *Detroit Free Press*, poor accounting practices and controls allowed for the spending of \$1.6 million on travel, hotel rooms, and catered food from 2007-2008; the *Detroit Free Press* uncovered expenditures which district officials could not explain, such as, why meetings were held at the Doubletree Hotel Dearborn at a cost of about \$235,000 (Editorial, 2008). This *Detroit Free Press* investigation also uncovered detailed travel expenses to: the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel in Grand Rapids for \$75,300; to the Hilton St. Louis at the Ballpark for \$13,628; and to the Hilton New York in Midtown Manhattan for \$9,036 (Editorial, 2008). According to the *Detroit Free Press*, these expenses occurred a year in after the Board of Education called for reforms about travel expenses at the district expense because \$1.5 million was spent on travel during the 2006-2007 school year (Editorial, 2008). For a comparison, Cleveland Public Schools only spent \$117,974 on travel during a six-month stretch of the 2007-2008 school year (Editorial, 2008). It's just hard to achieve institutional progress when some people in the district believe it is okay to spend district funds on themselves and not the kids.

In 1999, Dr. Adamany launched a district-wide audit and several employees were fired and prosecuted for embezzling funds from the district including one high school principal, Dr. Elijah Porter, who embezzled over \$95,000 from the district (Walsh-Sarnecki, 2001). Criminal activity, theft and fraud continued to occur in the district by and large because of the poor accounting practices in the district (Walsh-Sarnecki, 2001; Riley, 2009). In 2007 the FBI began an investigation into suspicious wire transfers from Detroit Public Schools to contractors totaling \$46 million (Pratt, 2007). In 2010, a DPS official was indicted in federal court of throwing himself a \$40,000 going-away party in addition to looting the district of \$3 million dollars (Dixon & Pratt Dawsey, 2010). Robert Bobb was determined to root out corruption in the district and sent several cases to the Wayne County prosecutor's office (Riley, 2009; Higgins, 2010b). Criminal activity in the district was one of the major subjects covered by the daily newspapers during Bobb's tenure. According to Wisely and Zaniewski (2015), stealing money from Detroit Public Schools might have been a widespread practice in DPS, "Wilbourn (a former DPS principal) acknowledged that she would help vendors score school business by ghost writing their responses to bids. She would take a cut of vendor payments and allow vendors to overbill. In one case, she said she had a vendor hire her uncle to channel money to her cousin. She said, 'she was taught all of this during her DPS days by veteran principals'". When public officials such as school principals violate the public's trust, not only is it hard to make institutional progress with finances but also in terms of community support.

Wasteful spending has been an issue for the Board (appointed and elected) since 1999. Since 1999, there have been some questionable decisions regarding monies spent on capital projects and educational programs in Detroit Public Schools (Pratt Dawsey, 2013a; Pratt Dawsey, 2013b). For example, \$291,000 was awarded to Redford High School for educational

programs at the school in January 2007; Redford was closed by the district later that year in June; Redford High School also had a new athletic complex built in 2004 (Detroit Board of Education, 2007, p. 12). In 2008, a contract for the Stewart K-8 auditorium was increased from \$241,628 to \$578,028 with an 11-0 vote without any discussion on the reasons why the contractor increased the cost of the project \$336,400 (Detroit Board of Education, 2008, p. 29). The remarkable fact is that even as Detroit Public Schools were hemorrhaging students from 2000-2010, construction and renovations of schools moved full steam ahead (Pratt Dawsey, 2013a; Pratt Dawsey, 2013b). It's just difficult to have confidence in a district when tax dollars are not valued by school officials, and it slowly erodes the public's confidence in the school district.

Another example of wasteful spending by the Board is the construction of the new Cass Tech High School in 2006. The original bid to construct the new Cass Tech was \$100 million, but the final cost of the construction of the new Cass Tech was \$127 million making the new Cass Tech one of the most expensive high schools ever constructed in the United States (Pratt Dawsey, 2013a). In addition, the demolition of the old Cass Tech totaled another \$3 million (Pratt Dawsey, 2013a). Cass Tech has an enrollment of 2,500 students. To put this project into perspective, according to the *National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities Report* (2010), the average cost to construct a new high school with an enrollment of 1,600 students was \$54.9 million. For a further comparison, Macomb Dakota High School in the Chippewa Valley school district in central Macomb County has an enrollment of 2,600 students, and Macomb Dakota was constructed for a total of \$40 million in 1995; if you adjust for inflation to 2006 dollars when the new Cass Tech was completed, the cost for Macomb Dakota would have been \$52.4 million (Chippewa Valley Schools, 2015). And yet another example of wasteful spending was the

decision to relocate the headquarters of Detroit Public Schools in 2002 from the Schools Center Building on Woodward Avenue in Midtown, which was owned by the district to lease space in the Fisher Building to the tune of \$40 million annually (Oguntoyinbo, 2009). Repairs and upgrades for the Schools Center Building would have only been a one-time cost to the district of \$15 million (Oguntoyinbo, 2009). These questionable decisions made it very difficult for the public to trust the leadership of district officials.

According to the Board of Education meetings, overages of contracts were a typical practice and the overages were not actively discussed or debated by board members as to why these overages were occurring or why they were necessary (Detroit Board of Education, 2008, p.29). From 2006-2008, when most of the contracts were approved for overages beyond the original bid, board members usually voted 11-0 to approve the new contracts unless board members Marie Thornton or Tyrone Winfrey raised some questions about the overages (Detroit Board of Education, 2008, p.29). In 2013, the *Detroit Free Press* issued a report on the status of the bond monies invested into schools that are either now closed or have been demolished, and the report revealed that \$437.8 million dollars was invested into several dozens of schools for capital repairs or new construction that are no longer being used by Detroit Public Schools as of 2013 (Pratt Dawsey, 2013b). Furthermore, in 2003 when Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick replaced several Reform Board appointees with his own appointees their charge was to spend the remaining \$334 million from the 1994 bond on capital improvements in the district (Pratt, 2003). Time has revealed that the decision to aggressively spend the 1994 bond monies by the Reform Board was a mistake due to the shrinking enrollment in the district with great sums of money being invested into buildings that would eventually be closed. Now most of these buildings have

been vandalized and scrappers have stolen everything out of the schools that was not bolted down to the floor, especially the copper pipes in the buildings.

**Fund balance.** At the end of 2014, Detroit Public Schools had a budget deficit of \$169.5 million after the conclusion of the third emergency financial managers' term (Zaniewski, 2014b). The deficit in Detroit Public Schools hit its lowest point of \$305 million in 2010 (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). Since 1999, Detroit Public Schools operated with a budget deficit in 2004 and 2008-2014 (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012; Zaniewski, 2014b). The Reform Board was a good group of financial stewards with only one year (2004) operating with a budget deficit (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). However, the elected school board operated with a budget deficit two out the three years when it was in control of the district's finances (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). In 2008, the financial situation in the district was growing more and more serious as each day passed, but the Board and then-superintendent Dr. Connie Calloway were at odds about the particulars of the district's deficit elimination plan to be submitted and then approved by the state of Michigan (Mrozowski, 2007b).

In summary, since 1999 Detroit Public Schools has been operating with a budget deficit eight out of 16 years or 50% of the time (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012; ). Detroit Public Schools has operated with a budget deficit while under state control seven out of 13 years or 54% of the time. Detroit Public Schools has operated with a budget deficit under local control one out of three years (33%) albeit that the elected school board is partially responsible for the budget deficits from 2008-2014 (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012; Kang, 2015; Pratt Dawsey, 2008a; Pratt Dawsey, 2008b; Pratt Dawsey, 2009b). It is very difficult to achieve institutional progress when spending does not have any checks and balances to prevent theft, and poor financial decisions are routinely made without any accountability for these poor financial decisions.

## Personnel

Institutional progress has not been achieved in the area of personnel as teacher layoffs started in 2004 and continued through 2014 (Pratt, 2006a; Gehring, 2004; Zaniewski, 2014b). Two teacher strikes in 1999 and 2006 resulted in over 20,000 students leaving DPS (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012; Pratt, 2006b). The district's morale is low because of the financial crisis in DPS as all DPS employees were forced to take wage concessions and salary freezes in the amount of 10%, but DPS is still in deficit several years later (Pratt Dawsey, 2011b).

**Teacher turnover and layoffs.** Teacher turnover in Detroit Public Schools has been an issue plaguing the district since 2004 when the layoffs of teachers began in earnest (Gehring, 2004). Layoffs in Detroit Public Schools have continued in the district since 2004 in an effort to right-size the district due to the declining enrollment, but school communities and students have suffered due to the frequent turnover of instructional staff members (Gehring, 2004). Job instability regardless of the organization will cause employee turnover and low morale in an effort to find more stable employment and less stress about someone's job security.

**Labor peace.** The Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT) was one of the main internal barriers which prevented Detroit Public Schools from achieving institutional progress in DPS. One central office administrator stated, "The DFT's role was to make non-issues into issues giving DPS teachers black-eyes in the process." The purpose of a teachers' union is to protect employees from unfair labor practices by a school district. However, it seems in the case of the DFT that any issue with central office was an opportunity to bash the leadership of Detroit Public Schools and to make every issue a political one. One building administrator added, "The DFT didn't have a vision. And this lack of vision in the DFT led many to believe the DFT was wearing two left shoes." The only loser in the political back and forth between DPS and the

DFT is the district as good teachers, administrators, and students leave DPS. One teacher was not impressed with the leadership within the DFT:

The DFT stood up to administration when they had slam-dunk grievances, but the DFT did not systematically address the unethical tactics used by administration to force people out of their buildings or how evaluations were used as a means of intimidation. The DFT was almost complicit in the crap that was going on in DPS. I should get my union dues back because people got paid to represent their interests, not the interests of the teachers. Why do you think the morale of teachers was so low? It was because they didn't have anyone on their side.

The DFT represents teachers but union leadership during those uncertain times can represent the interests of their teachers with an eye towards the best interests of DPS and the kids attending DPS.

Labor peace was interrupted two times in Detroit Public Schools since 1999. There was a strike under the Reform Board's tenure in 1999 for nine days and then there was another strike in 2006 under the elected school board's tenure (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). The DFT represents teachers against unfair treatment from the district, but the DFT during that time period seemed to work against the best interests of its own membership when it called for strikes in 1999 and 2006 causing 14,000 students to leave the school district for charter schools and schools of choice resulting in: school closures, teacher layoffs, and a financial emergency where the salaries of DFT members were either frozen and salary raises were no longer being granted (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012; Pratt Dawsey, 2011b; Pratt Dawsey, 2009b). The two teacher strikes in Detroit Public Schools during that time period led many to believe that the DFT and radical elements within its membership was a barrier to institutional progress in the district.

One former school board member lays out a case about why the DFT is not only bad for helping kids in DPS, but also for its own membership working in DPS:

The DFT represents teachers, not kids. The primary disconnect were issues the DFT politicized that negatively affected the school district instead of working with district leaders to solve their perceived issues. The DFT called two strikes that did more harm than good to the district. DFT members were negatively affected and so were the kids. The DFT does not have a clear vision for helping members and for helping kids.

More specifically, the strike of 2006 needs to be closely examined because the DFT wanted pay raises despite the fact that the district was losing significant numbers of students to charter schools. Yes, DFT members received a small pay raise two years after the 2006 strike, but at the cost of 14,000 students leaving the district, which leads one to believe that the strike was more detrimental to the overall financial health of district without the pay increases being factored into the equation (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). Another former school board member added, “DFT leadership did things that drew attention to DPS for the wrong reasons and the strike in 2006 may have hit their membership just as hard as it hit the finances of the district. I would say not a very positive impact.” It is very difficult to achieve institutional progress when leadership and labor are not on the same page and their disagreements are playing out in the media all while students are leaving DPS for charter schools which do not have unions and this level of resentment from parents about union issues affecting their children’s education.

**District morale.** There was low morale in Detroit Public Schools during that time period for a number of reasons, but the main reason was a lack of job security due to the financial emergency in addition to wage concessions and pay freezes (Pratt Dawsey, 2011b). Teacher layoffs, pay freezes, and pay cuts have proven to be ineffective ways to balance the budget in DPS, which created a system with demoralized teachers who were not giving their best efforts in the classroom because they did not feel appreciated by district leadership. Teacher salaries were frozen, insurance has increased, and 10% of their pay was taken away by the emergency financial manager in the form of concessions (Pratt Dawsey, 2011b). One building administrator



stated, “Detroit Public Schools has its fourth EFM now, and we are still in a tremendous deficit and the result is low teacher morale in the district. The teachers have shouldered the brunt of this financial mess by taking pay cuts and frozen step increases. Did you know that new teachers in DPS only make \$37,000 per year including critical shortage area teachers? You cannot adequately recruit or retain *good* teachers with a lack of competitive salaries, and then you continue to make more demands from teachers of their time with no additional compensation. There is a feeling of doing more, for less. Now, the EFM is making people pay \$3,000 deductibles for health care insurance and the EFM continues to take 10% out of everyone’s paycheck, so now you can’t afford to get sick if you work in DPS.” It’s just difficult to make institutional progress when morale is low and personal finances supersede the needs of the students. In terms of improving morale, a district cannot balance the financial books of the district off the backs of the teachers and expect to have a happy work force. This approach in DPS has increased demoralization among its teachers.

District leadership did things which actually worsened morale such as not addressing overcrowded classrooms and not increasing teacher salaries (Pratt, 2006b). One building administrator also cited issues with how central office affected district morale, “The schools authority was taken away and as a result all decisions were made by central office. Schools couldn’t make decisions, which led to poor morale and unhappy staff.” One teacher asserted his belief as to why teacher morale in DPS was low, “Teacher morale was low in the district due to administration... There are a lot of bad teachers, but administrators in DPS did not do real teacher evaluations to get rid unsatisfactory teachers. Administrators did evaluations of the teachers they wanted to get rid of because that person made too many waves and the administrators heard about it from parents or from central office.” With the everyday challenges in urban education

district leaders must make a concerted effort to improve district morale by engaging with teachers on district reforms and finding ways to reward teachers when they go above and beyond for their schools and students.

Another explanation for the low morale in DPS is the lack of success stories. The successes in Detroit Public Schools can be best described on an individual basis, and not any major district-level success such the success Boston Public Schools experienced in the 1990s and 2000s. For example, one central office administrator states the lack of effort by administrators to celebrate the success of DPS students, “The Excellence Awards Dinner was one of these functions, which honored high school students who had maintained a 4.0-3.5 GPA throughout their high school career and we would have over 300 kids each year at Cobo Hall. There was no press coverage for this event. The event has been discontinued due to a lack of corporate funding. The Wade McCree scholarship was a success as students had to maintain a 3.0 GPA from middle school through high school to qualify for a scholarship to universities in Michigan. Some of these successful kids were not afforded these opportunities because some principals did not do the extra paperwork to honor these kids.” After the state takeover in 1999, the Board of Education stopped celebrating schools at the beginning of each board meeting, which was the customary opening of each board meeting opening prior to the state takeover. Positive affirmation is the easiest way to increase the positive energy and morale within an organization, and for DPS to make institutional progress the positives of the district must be celebrated and publicized (Taylor, 2004; Kowol et al., 2009)

### **Community Support**

Community support for DPS has decreased as the district experienced multiple school governance changes coupled with the overwhelmingly negative media coverage, especially

crime and school closures in DPS during that time period (Pratt, 2006a; Ware, 2005; Higgins, 2010a; Mrozowski, 2007b; Walsh-Sarnecki, 2001; Zaniewski, 2014b). Evidence of this lack of institutional progress in community support for DPS was the drastic decrease in enrollment in since 1999 to the tune of 71% through 2014.

**Public perception.** The successes of students and schools is what it is all about in urban education as educators are trying to positively influence as many students as possible, however, the successes in DPS were severely outweighed by the negatives (Pratt, 2006a; Ware, 2005; Higgins, 2010a; Mrozowski, 2007b; Walsh-Sarnecki, 2001; Zaniewski, 2014b). One central office administrator stated, “There were successes in the district, but they were hidden among the trees of dysfunction. There were great principals, great teachers, and great students, but they were overshadowed by the negatives in DPS such as the deficit and employees stealing from the district.” One teacher puts a different perspective on successes in DPS, “Successes?! Come on are you serious, successes?! There were no successes when these crooked adults got involved, especially when the state got involved. Successes, just look at the number of charter schools in Detroit, that’s how you measure success in DPS.” Public perception for Detroit Public Schools took a direct hit during Robert Bobb’s tenure as he was determined to root out corruption in the district, which became headline news; Bobb fired a truck driver for stealing \$70,000 worth of computers, he fired a secretary who embezzled \$44,771, and he fired a cafeteria worker for stealing over \$300 from the cash register on several different occasions (Higgins, 2010b). Positive public perception or a changed narrative about DPS is an essential variable to achieve institutional progress as parents, business leaders, and civic leaders can support the positive mission of the district. Therefore, headlines need to scream successes in DPS, not illegal behavior from employees or more of the same abysmal educational statistics from students.

Public perception and support for the Detroit Board of Education has steadily decreased from 1998-2014 when the Board of Education moved the public participation portion of the agenda to the very end of the board meetings. The comments in the public portion of the agenda by parents became very critical of the Board, especially during the Reform Board era and afterwards. As school board meetings grew longer in length of time going from just over two hours prior to the state takeover to over four hours in length, the perception the community had of the Board was one that the Board did not value the students as adult issues usually dominated the meetings (Oguntoyinbo, 2009). The Board of Education and its behavior towards parents and among each other was one of the reasons why public perception of DPS was unfavorable. There was a perception that the Board did not value the voices or concerns of parents in the district, which caused many parents to enroll their children in charter schools.

The rotation of the board meetings across the city further fueled the public perception that parental input was no longer valued by the Board. Public participation rules/policies were revised in accordance to the *Open Meetings Act* two times due to several incidents where the meetings became unruly and contentious, especially meetings about possible school closings (Ware, 2005; Detroit Board of Education, 2000, p. 2). The actions by the Board in regards to the public comments and Board meetings locations randomly placed around the city fueled a perception that parents were not valued in DPS. It is almost impossible to make institutional progress if parents feel alienated by district officials, especially the Board of Education.

**Newspaper coverage of Detroit Public Schools.** The top 10 issues covered by the daily newspapers on Detroit Public Schools were negative in nature to the tune of 60%. The negative coverage of DPS increased in volume after the Reform Board was voted out when Detroiters supported Proposal E in 2005. The negative and intense coverage of Detroit Public Schools from

2007-2010 could be a contributing factor explaining why more and more Detroit parents decided to take their kids out of Detroit Public Schools in favor of charter schools and schools of choice programs (Higgins, 2010a; Mrozowski, 2007b; Pratt, 2007; Pratt Dawsey, 2008a; Pratt Dawsey, 2009b; Pratt Dawsey, 2010; Riley, 2009). Newspaper coverage and reporting on a whole was responsible when covering significant issues to the survival of Detroit Public Schools and even focusing the Board's attention on the seriousness of the financial emergency brewing in the district in 2007 and 2008 (Pratt, 2007; Pratt Dawsey, 2008a; Pratt Dawsey, 2008b; Pratt Dawsey, 2009b; Mrozowski, 2007b). Newspaper coverage of Detroit Public Schools even raised issues which needed to be addressed by the Board such as charter schools, violence in the schools, and criminal activity by employees (Editorial, 2005b; Oguntoyinbo, 2009; Riley, 2009).

Other responsible reporting exposed wasteful spending and irresponsible decision-making in regards to the bond monies in 1994 and 2009 in which monies were invested into schools which are now sitting empty or have been demolished (Pratt Dawsey, 2013a; Pratt Dawsey, 2013b). In Table 4.2 below, daily newspaper coverage of issues in Detroit Public Schools are ranked by frequency.

**Table 4.2:** Daily Newspaper Most Frequently Covered Topics in Detroit Public Schools, 1999-2014

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**Daily newspaper most frequently covered topics in Detroit Public Schools**

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1. Financial (14%)
2. Criminal activity (12%)
3. Leadership (8%)
4. Enrollment issues (6%)
5. School closures (5%)
6. Student achievement issues (3%)
6. Lawsuits (3%)

- 6. Crime in schools/School issues (3%)
- 6. Teacher issues (3%)
- 6. Charter schools (3%)

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**Sources:** *Detroit Free Press; Detroit News*

The daily newspapers' coverage of Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014 varied on its frequency due to the issues being covered. For example, coverage on Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2006 averaged 12 articles per year. In 2007, the elected school board and the superintendent at the time, Dr. Connie Calloway, were under intense media scrutiny for issues related to the increasing budget deficit and how the elected school board and the superintendent were going to address the budget deficit in Detroit Public Schools (Pratt Dawsey, 2008a; Pratt Dawsey, 2008b; Mrozowski, 2007b). In 2009, the budget deficit increased to \$219 million and then-governor Jennifer Granholm declared a financial emergency and the appointment of Robert Bobb as the emergency financial manager in Detroit Public Schools (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012; Pratt Dawsey, 2009b). Robert Bobb's tenure drew intense media attention because Detroit Public School constituents wanted to know his plans to address the budget deficit, and his plans to root out corruption in the school district by prosecuting employees for fraud and theft (Pratt Dawsey, 2009b; Riley, 2009; Higgins, 2010b). After Bobb's tenure, media attention subsided as it was apparent solving the budget deficit in Detroit Public Schools was not an easy task with the continued negative enrollment trend and charter schools became a preferred choice of Detroit parents with the means to remove their students from Detroit Public Schools. In Table 4.3 below, lists information about the most reported topic in Detroit Public Schools in four year increments.

**Table 4.3:** Daily Newspaper Coverage of Detroit Public Schools, 1999-2014

1999-2002	2003-2006	2007-2010	2011-2014
1. 1999 State Takeover	1. Proposal E of 2005	1. Budget issues	1. Budget issues
2. Reform Board's CEO search	2. Crime in schools	2. Mayoral oversight	2. Criminal activity by employees
3. Facilities Improvements/ 1994 Bond	3. Charter schools	3. Enrollment issues	3. Emergency Financial Manager
4. MEAP scores	4. Enrollment issues	4. Charter schools	4. Enrollment issue
		5. School closures	5. Charter schools

**Sources:** *Detroit Free Press; Detroit News.*

**School closures.** Given the negative enrollment trends in Detroit Public Schools from 2000-2014, the Board did not address issues related to enrollment such as school closures and charter schools until it was absolutely necessary (Higgins, 2010a; Ware, 2005; Pratt, 2006a; Zaniewski, 2014b). Robert Bobb was the first Detroit Public School leader to begin an all-out marketing and public relations campaign entitled, "I'm in DPS" to address the enrollment decline in Detroit Public Schools after his arrival in 2009 heading into the 2009-2010 school year. Mr. Bobb even recruited world-famous entertainer and social critic, Dr. Bill Cosby, to come to Detroit to help with the recruitment of Detroit students back into Detroit Public Schools.

School closures in Detroit Public Schools began in 2004 and have continued through 2014 (Higgins, 2010a; Ware, 2005; Pratt, 2006a; Zaniewski, 2014b). In 1999, there were 261 schools in the Detroit Public School system and by 2014 that number decreased to 97 schools. Therefore, 163 schools (-62%) were closed during that sixteen-year span. The decision to close schools in any district can be a very contentious issue for any school board or school community on the closure list. The Board made some questionable decisions to close schools, and when the

Board bowed to public pressure to keep schools open, the Board usually closed the school the following year (e.g., Chadsey High School) (Bobb, 2009).

From 2004-2008, the Board made some questionable decisions and considerations regarding school closings. In 2004, Dr. Burnley promised the Communication & Media Arts High School community (CMA) that the school would not be closed, but a year later, CMA was placed on the possible school closure list (Ware, 2005). A survey of the CMA community revealed that if the school was closed 75% of the underclassmen students in the 2005 graduating class would not return to Detroit Public Schools. In addition, the 150 incoming freshmen to CMA would not attend any other Detroit Public School (Ware, 2005). CMA was not closed, but the possibility of closing a school with high test scores never entered into the conversation for the Board, which took a purely quantitative approach to school closings (i.e., facility operations and student enrollment). Southwestern High School was closed in 2012 despite good test scores and major capital improvements which were recently completed at the school to the tune of \$6.5 million (Pratt Dawsey, 2013b).

In 2013, Detroit residents paid more than \$437.8 million for renovations made to 110 schools that are now unused, trashed or demolished (Pratt Dawsey, 2013a). Detroit Public Schools have closed about two-thirds of its schools over the past decade from 261 to 97 (Pratt Dawsey, 2013a). During Robert Bobb's tenure (2009-2011) as emergency financial manager he closed a total of 60 schools (Pratt Dawsey, 2013a). Public participation at board meetings when school closings were being discussed or decided can be best described as very contentious. The board meetings minutes seemed to portray decisions that were already made and the public vote was merely a formality. There were not any meaningful discussions about how to avoid the closures of schools with small student populations which took precedence over the academic



performance of the schools on standardized tests. School closures are difficult, but without public participation the process then becomes contentious as the lack of transparency and an objective process causes parents to feel powerless. Community support can only lead to institutional progress if the voice of the community is heard in all major school decisions.

**Enrollment.** The enrollment of Detroit Public Schools has constantly declined from 1970-2014 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014). The enrollment in Detroit Public Schools decreased from 290,000 students in 1970 to its current number of students of 47,000 students in 2014, which is a loss of nearly -241,000 students (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014). The enrollment decline was a financial loss of billions of dollars in state per pupil funding when students left DPS for area charter schools and suburban school districts with schools of choice programs. Despite the overwhelming evidence that Detroit students were leaving the district in favor of charter schools, the Board never seriously discussed a marketing campaign to address the charter school dilemma more than 4% of the time even though the loss of students was causing teacher layoffs, school closures, and budget issues (Pratt, 2006a; Gehring, 2004; Pratt Dawsey, 2008a).

If one compares the decline in the student enrollment of Detroit Public Schools simultaneously against the decline in the population of the city of Detroit, the decade that symbolizes Detroit's bust from 2000-2010 (Michigan Department of Education, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau). As community support for Detroit Public Schools decreased after the state takeover, so did the confidence parents had in Detroit Public Schools via the increasing popularity of charter schools in metro Detroit. In Table 4.4 below, the enrollment numbers in Detroit Public Schools are listed from 2000-2014. Detroit Public Schools lost -46% of its enrollment from 2000-2010, which is 4% less than the total enrollment loss from the three

previous decades combined. Furthermore, the enrollment in Detroit Public Schools has drastically decreased since the state takeover of DPS in 1999.

**Table 4.4:** *Detroit Public Schools Enrollment, 2000-2014*

Year	2000	2010	2013	2014	Percentage change
Enrollment	167,000	89,000	49,000	47,000	-71%

**Sources:** National Center for Educational Statistics; Addonizio & Kearney, 2012; Detroit Public Schools; Michigan Department of Education

In Table 4.5 below, a comparison of the enrollment changes from Detroit Public Schools and population changes in the city of Detroit is listed from 1970-2010. The data clearly indicates an issue simultaneously affecting both Detroit Public Schools and the city of Detroit causing the exodus from 2000-2010 because the enrollment and population declines were substantially less during the 1990-2000 decade.

**Table 4.5:** *Detroit Public Schools and City of Detroit Comparisons, 1970-2010*

Decade	Detroit Public Schools Enrollment Change	City of Detroit Population Change
1970-1980	-22%	-20%
1980-1990	-22%	-14%
1990-2000	-4%	-7%
2000-2010	-46%	-24%

**Sources:** Michigan Department of Education and U.S. Census Bureau

**Charter Schools.** Charter school legislation in Michigan was enacted in 1994, but charter schools in Detroit did not make serious inroads in the Detroit educational marketplace until 2005 (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). After 2005, there was a serious and continued decline in student enrollment in Detroit Public Schools and despite this negative trend the Board did not proactively address the competition from charter schools and the development of a marketing

and public relations campaigns against charter schools. Around 2005, several Detroit area Catholic schools began to close (e.g., St. Martin DePorres, Benedictine, East Catholic, St. Florian, Notre Dame, Bishop Gallagher, Bishop Borgess, and Holy Redeemer). The closings of Detroit Public Schools and Detroit area Catholic schools allowed charter school operators to buy or lease these school buildings, which were perfectly suited for their needs and reducing their startup costs significantly. Even though charter school enrollments increased during the 2000s, it cannot fully explain the massive exodus from Detroit Public Schools. In Table 4.6 below, the enrollment trends in Detroit Public Schools and area charter schools is listed and it clearly indicates how Detroit Public Schools has constantly lost students to charter schools throughout the 2000s.

**Table 4.6:** *Detroit Public Schools vs. Detroit Area Charter Schools, 2000-2013*

District	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	Percentage change
<b>Detroit Public Schools</b>	167,000	153,000	89,000	77,000	50,000	49,000	-70%
<b>Detroit Area Charter Schools</b>	17,000	38,000	50,000	45,000	47,000	51,000	+200%

**Source:** Michigan Department of Education

### **Political Support**

Political support for DPS has been almost non-existent as the takeover legislation was passed in 1999 and continued to 2005 when Detroit voters decided to end state control of DPS. Therefore, DPS experienced local control briefly from 2006-2009, but in 2009 Michigan Public Act 72 (i.e., Emergency Financial Manager law) was enacted and DPS was again under state control and has remained under state control from 2009-2014. In terms of local political support,

Detroit mayors have not prioritized education as a part of their agenda to improve the quality of life in the city of Detroit.

**Detroit mayoral education agenda.** Political support for Detroit Public Schools was a low priority for Detroit mayors from 1999-2014; therefore, Detroit Public Schools has not been fully factored into the equation for improving the quality of life in the city of Detroit (City of Detroit, 1999-2014). But the reality is, educational reform was not an agenda priority for the five mayors of Detroit from 1999-2014. Despite the relatively low support from the mayor's office, one central office administrator believed a positive relationship between Detroit Public Schools and the city of Detroit is essential for the success of DPS, "There must be a good relationship with the mayor's office and CEOs office." Education reform consisted of only 4% of the cumulative agenda priorities in the annual *State of the City Addresses* given in the beginning of each new calendar year by Detroit mayors from 1999-2014 (City of Detroit, 1999-2014). A cooperative relationship between the superintendent and mayor are essential if the district is going to achieve institutional progress as civic resources are needed to improve student outcomes.

The most of the significant conversation by any Detroit mayor about education in Detroit came in 1999 right before the state takeover legislation was passed by the Michigan Legislature when then-Mayor Dennis Archer supported the takeover legislation despite the public opinion of Detroiters against the takeover (Bell, 1999; Harmon, 1999a; Harmon, 1999b; Harmon, 1999c; McWhirter, 1999). Below is an excerpt from Mayor Dennis Archer's 1999 *State of the City Address* entitled "*The Road to Excellence*" where he laid out his educational agenda and vision for the Detroit Public Schools where he was focused on reforming the Detroit Board of Education:

Detroit's destiny is not only to provide excellent public services, but also to benefit from an excellent public school system. So our journey has brought us to a critical period of decision regarding Detroit Public Schools. I have never coveted authority over the school system. My position has simply been, *'let's do the right thing for our children'*. The educational needs of Detroit's children should be our number one priority.

The top agenda priorities of Detroit mayors from 1999-2014 were: improving public safety/reducing crime (14%), city budget issues (10%), and the fight against blight (8%) in the city of Detroit (City of Detroit, 1999-2014). The only significant mention of education reform by any Detroit mayors were made by Mayors Archer and Kilpatrick who both had statutory control over Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2005. Mayors Archer and Kilpatrick were concerned with reforming the Detroit Board of Education, but did not add anything substantial to the dialogue such as detailed educational reform plans, increased spending, or measureable education goals (i.e., graduation rates, dropout rates, college readiness, or standardized tests scores, etc.) for Detroit schoolchildren (City of Detroit, 1999-2014). The data analysis reveals that education was a high priority in Detroit in 1999 when Mayor Archer was advocating for the power from Lansing to reform the Detroit Board of Education, but soon after education was not the high priority that it was in 1999 (City of Detroit, 1999-2014).

**State of Michigan Education Agenda.** From 1999-2014, there is no indication that the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) provided additional support to Detroit Public Schools other than the same reforms enacted statewide such as changes in the graduation requirements or standardized testing. There is also no indication that the MDE provided any additional resources, personnel, or school improvement consultants to help district leaders in Detroit Public Schools to make institutional progress from 1999-2014 despite multiple state interventions in the district during that time frame (Bradsher, 1999b; Keith, 2004; Pratt Dawsey, 2009b). Furthermore, the State Board of Education has not been an active participant in the on-going

conversations about the future of governance in Detroit Public Schools. The lack of action by the MDE can lead one to believe that educating Detroit children was not a priority of the state as the resources and intellectual capacity of the state's education department was not utilized to assist the state's largest school district to progress institutionally. One teacher added the following about the MDE's role in DPS, "Nothing that I can recall. The MDE may have been hamstrung a bit due to the EMF appointments. The only thing MDE did was political posturing. I never met a MDE representative during my tenure in DPS, which spanned 16 years. We never had a staff meeting presenting reforms from the MDE." Institutional progress cannot happen without the support and resources from the state's education department.

The MDE did not have a positive impact on the success of Detroit Public Schools. The MDE gave the same amount of oversight to DPS as it would have with any other school district in Michigan. The MDE did not create a special detail of employees to work with DPS officials to increase student achievement in Detroit Public Schools. One central office administrator believes the MDE worked against the interests of Detroit Public Schools, "No direction or guidance from the MDE, none. The MDE has or wants nothing to do with DPS." Another central office administrator stated the following about the MDE's role with Detroit Public Schools:

The MDE gave some oversight to DPS. MDE was helping DPS to deal with the deficit. MDE also helped DPS obtain much needed Title I funds for school improvement despite the spending restrictions placed on the district. You might have read DPS sending \$40 million back to the government, but in fact the MDE was working with the district to capture those funds because of the spending restrictions. The Title I funds provided school improvement funds for interventions and other additional much needed services to the district. I do not recall MDE creating any interventions to improve student achievement aside from school improvement grants and monitors of schools on the priority list.

Institutional progress is only a reasonable outcome when struggling urban school districts can receive additional support and resources from the state department of education, especially in the areas of how to best utilize resources to improve student outcomes. The MDE may have given added oversight to priority schools in DPS, but nothing additional to get out of the hole financially or in terms student achievement. One teacher described his take on the MDE's role with Detroit Public Schools:

The MDE is out of touch with what happens in urban schools in Michigan, especially Detroit. The MDE is just about setting standards. The hearts of the people in Lansing (MDE) are in the right places, but I cannot point to anything they've done to specifically address increasing student achievement in DPS. If so, it was never communicated to the teachers by district and building administrators. Overall, state intervention in DPS has been just too much and way over the top. The EFM model is a failure and the standardized tests are just for political tools, and they do not have that much educational value to the teachers after the results come in.

Institutional progress is possible when local school districts can collaborate with education professionals at the state level for improved guidance and support which is needed to meet the accountability standards of the state education department.

### **Summary**

The data analysis paints a picture of a district without any well-intentioned people working in it, but that was not the case. The Detroit Public Schools had thousands of well-intentioned people working with the children of Detroit Public Schools, but there was also a strong element of *Peter Principle* within the district as some principals and central office administrators were seriously ineffective in their positions. This phenomenon of promoting people to positions of authority in DPS without the proper credentials or the skills to be successful in these positions, which was a possible contributing cause for why DPS did not achieve institutional progress in the areas of student achievement and finances from 1999-2014.

As a clarifying statement, this study is not making the claim that every single principal or central office administrator in Detroit Public Schools during that time period was ineffective. This study is, however, making the claim that there were a large number of principals and central office administrators who were unqualified or unprepared for their positions, and ineffective in their roles. The district leadership of Detroit Public Schools during that time period, with the exception of Dr. David Adamany, did not bring the same level of educational leadership and laser-like focus on district-level reforms and instruction with them to the district leadership, which is in stark contrast to Dr. Thomas Payzant's 11-year superintendency in Boston Public Schools. Detroit Public Schools did not have a clear academic vision, nor were there any memorable systematic reforms leading to any district-level student success, so turning around DPS was unlikely.

The frequent turnover in district leadership is a possible contributing cause explaining why DPS did not make any institutional progress in the areas of student achievement. The lack of educational leadership in Detroit Public Schools during that time period was on total display when only three interviewees articulated a district reform (i.e., the Open Court reading initiative) implemented by Dr. Burnley back in 2002, which was over 13 years ago and it was discontinued in 2006 by the superintendent who succeeded him. The lack of educational leadership in DPS is a primary reason why DPS did not make institutional progress from 1999-2014.

**Student achievement.** From 1999-2014, there were no specifics about the educational programs implemented in the district with the exception of Dr. Burnley's Open Court reading initiative in 2002 (Detroit Board of Education, 2002, p.2-3). One central office administrator stated the following about comprehensive educational programs in Detroit Public Schools, "Not



much. Other issues such as the teachers' strike prevented the planning of a comprehensive educational program, so the district relied on the state curriculum to guide the district." The lack of educational programs in DPS led directly to lack of student achievement in DPS.

In 2008, the *Council of Great City Schools* issued a scathing 228-page report on Detroit Public Schools at the behest of then-superintendent Dr. Connie Calloway (Pratt Dawsey, 2008b). The report had the following findings: 1.) Since 2002, there has been no improvement in student achievement; and 2.) Earlier reforms have been dismantled or poorly implemented where there is no connection between the money being spent and what takes place in the classroom (Pratt Dawsey, 2008b). Simply put, Detroit Public Schools lacked a long-term strategy for improving student achievement whether it was standardized test scores, graduation or dropout rates (Pratt Dawsey, 2008b). One central office administrator stated the following about educational programs in Detroit Public Schools, "The reforms that were implemented were not prescriptive to the issues in the schools. Basically money was being spent on school improvement products that did not impact student achievement." The statement from the central office administrator illuminates the lack of educational leadership in DPS as resources were not being directed into the classroom to improve student achievement in DPS. In Table 4.7 below, graduation rates in Detroit Public Schools remained low despite the school governance changes from 2000-2010.

**Table 4.7:** *Detroit Public Schools Graduation Rates, 2000-2010*

Year	2000	2005	2010
Graduation Rate	34%	38%	40%

**Source:** National Center for Educational Statistics

To put the reading scores in DPS into perspective, in 2009 the 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading

proficiency of DPS students on the MEAP was 64.3%, but the reading proficiency of Detroit Public School students on the NAEP was 22% (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015; Michigan Department of Education, 2015). Nonetheless, the reading scores in Detroit Public Schools were at their highest after students were exposed to the Open Court reading initiative from 2002-2005 (Michigan Department of Education, 2015). Therefore, this cohort of 4<sup>th</sup> grade students (class of 2015) were the benefactors of Open Court reading from early elementary grades giving them the fundamentals to be successful and strong readers in later grades after the Open Court initiative was discontinued. Furthermore, as high school students, this cohort scored 16.4 on the ACT, which is the second highest in a five-year trend (16.4, 16.6, 15.5, 15.0, and 15.5) for Detroit Public School students (Michigan Department of Education, 2015). After the Open Court Reading initiative there were no other notable or clearly defined education reforms enacted in Detroit Public Schools to improve student achievement at scale.

As previously mentioned, Detroit Public School students scored poorly on the NAEP test in 2009, 2011 and 2013. In 2009, DPS students had the lowest scores in the history of the NAEP (National Center for Educational Statistics). In 2013, MEAP scores reveal that Detroit's children in state-managed DPS and EAA schools have fallen even further behind their state peers; cumulatively, since the 2009 state takeover, the proficiency gap has widened dramatically in every tested grade in reading; in math, Detroit students plummeted relative to their state peers in grades 3, 4, and 5 (Pedroni, 2014). In Table 4.8 below, the struggles of Detroit Public Schools are detailed through its struggles on standardized testing via the NAEP test in 2009, 2011 and 2013. Detroit Public School students were far below the national average in all three years.

**Table 4.8: Detroit Public Schools 4<sup>th</sup> Grade NAEP Results: 2009, 2011 and 2013**

NAEP	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade Math	Below Basic	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade Reading	Below Basic
2009 Detroit Public Schools Results	200	69%	187	73%
2011 Detroit Public Schools Results	203	66%	191	69%
2013 Detroit Public Schools Results	204	69%	190	70%

**Source:** National Center for Educational Statistics

### School Governance Reforms Did Not Have a Positive Impact

#### Governance

As stated in Chapter 2, Detroit has a long and complicated political and racial history. The state takeover could have possibly been successful if different methods would have been taken in 1999, but the methods and heavy-handed politics undertaken in 1999 made the takeover a political issue, and not an educational issue (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012; Rich, 2009; Kang, 2015; Harmon, 1999a; Harmon, 1999b). Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer supported the takeover of Detroit Public Schools, but Detroit residents did not support Lansing's encroachment on the principle of local control of schools (McWhirter, 1999). Therefore, Proposal E in 2005 was less about the performance of the schools under the Reform Board, but more about the right to vote and undoing Lansing's infringement on the voting rights of citizens in the city of Detroit (Rich, 2009; Addonizio & Kearney, 2012; Kang, 2015; Harmon, 1999a; Harmon, 1999b). Since 1999, Detroit Public Schools has experienced local control for three years (2006-2009) and state control for 13 years (1999-2005 and 2009-2014). During these shifts in school governance models the Detroit Board of Education's focus has also shifted. Some of the shifts were due to the structure of the meetings and the board's agenda (*See Appendices: C-1, C-2, C-3 and C-4*). In short, the changes in school governance did not have a positive impact in the past 16 years,

nor did the school governance changes lead directly to improved institutional progress in the areas of: leadership, educational programs, finances, personnel, community support and political support. Most notably, the leadership, finances and community support severely decreased during that time period.

**Multiple school governance reforms.** The multiple school governance reforms in Detroit have been a contentious political issue in the city since the 1999 state takeover (Zaniewski, 2015b). In fact, the governance issue in Detroit has still not been resolved as of yet (Zaniewski, 2014a). One community activist weighs in on the effect of the state takeover in 1999, “The removal of the elected Board of Education in 1999 and changes to the Board’s electoral structure had a negative impact on institutional progress.” One former school board member explains the effect that the multiple governance changes in Detroit are having on students and black residents in Detroit, “Detroit is a ‘*Braveheart*’ situation and the students are getting ripped apart. Governance does matter, and so do the democratic rights of citizens in a majority black city with a black school district. The historical fights over voting rights in the black community cannot be ignored, so the takeover rubbed Detroiters the wrong way.” As of February 2016, the fourth state-appointed emergency financial manager has not solved the budget crisis in Detroit Public Schools more than six years after a financial emergency was declared in the district in 2009 (Zaniewski, 2015b). Institutional progress cannot be achieved if governance frequently changes as the foundations for leadership are being built upon quicksand.

Regardless of the governance model in Detroit Public Schools since 1999, it has been hard for any model to achieve institutional progress because of the constant changes in governance models, and the constant change of governance models have not been healthy for the school district (Zaniewski, 2015b). One community activist openly questions the state of

Michigan's ability to run a school district given their track record of late, "The structure of school governance in DPS has been a run of the mill political agenda, at best. The state of Michigan's input, especially in regards to the appointment of emergency managers, is rather confusing. How can a state that is *NOT* in the top tier of well-run states, honestly control another entity successfully?" The multiple governance changes in Detroit Public Schools have not had a significant impact on the district in terms of improving student achievement or solving the financial crisis in DPS because it appears the debates over governance have overshadowed the real work of educating children in Detroit.

**The EAA.** There was another governance reform in Detroit Public Schools when the emergency financial manager at the time, Roy Roberts, signed an agreement allowing the state of Michigan to form a recovery district with 15 of the lowest performing Detroit Public Schools called the Education Achievement Authority of Michigan or commonly called the EAA. Several interviewees cited the EAA as unsuccessful and a distraction to reforming the financial problems of DPS or as one building administrator said, "The EAA is an abysmal failure." The EAA on smaller scale mirrored the issues preventing DPS from making institutional progress mainly a lack of educational leadership, a lack of educational programs (no curriculum for the first three years), *Peter Principle* administrative personnel, and a lack of community support. The EAA did have the political support from the governor (Rick Snyder) as the EAA was his reform idea.

**Instability of school governance in Detroit Public Schools.** School governance matters as it establishes how the district will not only be governed, but how the district will operate and function seamlessly. Detroit Public Schools has experienced three different forms of schools governance beginning with the state takeover in 1999. In 2003, the *Detroit Free Press* conducted a survey which highlighted the point that governance does matter, especially to

Detroit parents (Pratt, 2003). One teacher sums up whether or not institutional progress has been achieved in Detroit Public Schools with the various school governance models, “Regardless of the governance in DPS none of them have made an impact.” Throughout the 2000s, the changing governance structures created instability in Detroit Public Schools which resulted in significant declines in the areas of: student enrollment, fiscal stability, and student achievement (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). Simply put, institutional progress in Detroit Public Schools declined as a result of the instability of school governance.

It can be argued with various data points (i.e., enrollment decline, poor student achievement, school closures, and the growth of charter schools) from 1999-2005 that the state takeover of Detroit Public Schools is partially responsible for the district’s dramatic decline throughout the latter 2000s and it created many of the problems currently plaguing DPS today, especially the financial emergency. One teacher weighs in on how the constant changes in school governance have affected DPS, “The constant changing of governance and leadership created an unstable school district and that is why parents left DPS. DPS was like Michigan’s weather, if you wait a minute it will change on you. Too much change is not a good thing.” The constant changes created too much uncertainty for parents and it caused many of them to leave DPS for charter schools. In Table 4.9 below, a timeline of school governance is listed from 1999-2014.

**Table 4.9:** *Detroit Public Schools Governance Timeline, 1999-Present*

<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Governance Model</b>
1999-2005	Michigan Public Act 10; State Takeover/Mayoral Control (state and city shared governance).
2006-2009	Detroit Board of Education (elected)
2009-Present:	Michigan Public Act 436; Emergency Manager is appointed by

the governor.

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**Sources:** Addonizio & Kearney (2012); Piliawsky (2003); *Detroit Free Press*; Rich (2009); Detroit Public Schools.

**State intervention in Detroit Public Schools was unsuccessful.** State intervention in Detroit Public Schools did not improve the stated outcomes for the necessity cited for state intervention (i.e., financial health and student achievement) for DPS (Zaniewski, 2015b). State intervention on a whole has been unsuccessful and contributed directly to several of the problems DPS is currently facing, especially the financial crisis (Zaniewski, 2015b). One central office administrator also believed the takeover of DPS has been unsuccessful, “DPS has progressively gotten worse with state involvement. If you ride around any neighborhood in Detroit you will likely see the state’s thumbprint on DPS.” In 1999 and according to then-mayor Dennis Archer, the state takeover was necessary because of the corruption on the Board of Education and to safeguard the \$1.4 billion bond monies passed by Detroit voters in 1994 (Piliawsky, 2003; Bradsher, 1999a). State control of Detroit Public Schools has been unsuccessful and the district has worsened while under state control. One former school board member stated the following about the dismal results of state control in Detroit Public Schools:

According to the data, the state intervention has not been successful. The enrollment has declined and schools have closed. The budget has spiraled out of control. The state needs to accept the fact that the state of Michigan broke *Humpty Dumpty*. The state needs to figure out a new form of school governance with minimal involvement.

The elected school board from 2006-2008 is not immune from culpability because systematic issues worsened during their tenure leading to state intervention in the district for a second time (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012; Pratt Dawsey, 2009b; Kang, 2015). According to the board reports, the elected board from 2006-2008 was primarily concerned with approving

contracts, and not improving student achievement or being good financial stewards (*See Appendix C-6*).

School governance establishes conditions for students to be successful and since 1999 state control in its two attempts has not created the conditions for students to be successful leading to a decrease in institutional progress in DPS. In Table 4.10 below, the effect of multiple governance reforms is listed as the number of schools in Detroit Public Schools decreased 62% and the enrollment decreased by 71%.

**Table 4.10:** *State Intervention in Detroit Public Schools, 1999-2014*

	<b>1999</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>Percentage change</b>
<b>Number of schools</b>	261	97	-62%
<b>Enrollment</b>	167,000	47,000	-71%
<b>Finances</b>	\$93 million surplus	\$232 million deficit	-349%

**Sources:** Detroit Board of Education; Michigan Department of Education; *Detroit Free Press*.

According to Zaniewski (2015b), Detroit Public Schools has a projected \$232.8 million budget deficit as of June 30, 2015. Detroit Public Schools has been under state control since 2009 in the form of an emergency financial manager. One teacher believes state intervention was necessary, but a bit of an overreach, “The state has dismantled the district and it’s a Catch-22; state involvement is necessary, but the role of the state is not appropriate because things have gotten worse.” However, the purpose of state control for a second time in less than five years in DPS was to correct the district’s financial problems and to improve the quality of educational services in Detroit Public Schools but state intervention did not improve those targets areas in DPS (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012; Kang, 2015; Zaniewski, 2015b; Bobb, 2009; Pratt Dawsey, 2009b).



Since state intervention in DPS began for a second time enrollment numbers have plummeted and the financial crisis in DPS has worsened (Zaniewski, 2015b). One building administrator explains the impact of state intervention in DPS, “State intervention impacted the Detroit Public Schools with the closures of over 150 schools which has decreased the school system's overall population. With the state's takeover, over 50,000 students have left the district as a result of school closures. State education polices focused primarily on the elimination of the debt; however, the debt has increased significantly under the emergency financial managers.” There is an agreement from DPS employees that the takeover did not improve things, but made things worse in DPS and lawmakers did not thoroughly contemplate the unintended consequences of the takeover or the long-terms effects of the takeover.

#### **The Detroit Board of Education, 1999-2014**

**State takeover (aka Reform Board), 1999-2005.** In 1999, the state takeover legislation of DPS was signed into law by then-governor John Engler (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012; Bradsher, 1999b). From 1999-2005, six of the seven members of the Detroit Board of Education were appointed by Detroit’s mayors (Dennis Archer and then Kwame Kilpatrick) and one appointment was made by the governor (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012; Kang, 2015). The appointed mayoral/state Detroit Board of Education was known as the *Reform Board* because this board was replacing the elected Board of Education. During the Reform Board’s tenure, the major topics discussed were: educational programs (35%), leadership (20%), financial (12%), and personnel (9%) (*See Appendix C-6*). Educational programs were a priority with the Reform Board, but nothing substantial was implemented; MEAP results were frequently discussed in addition to CEO Dr. Kenneth Burnley’s Open Court reading initiative as part of the district’s academic improvement plan. However, no specifics were mentioned in the district’s academic

improvement plan other than Open Court, especially how Open Court was going to be evaluated for institutional progress. The Reform Board's leadership discussions were focused on the selection of three CEOs (Dr. Adamany, Dr. Burnley, and William Coleman III), the decision not to renew Dr. Burnley's contract without any rationale for the decision was evident as were multiple discussions about the CEO's evaluation without specifics about what was contained in the CEO's evaluation (Detroit Board of Education, 2005a, p.3).

The financial health of the school district was often discussed by the Reform Board, which led the district to layoff teachers in an effort to right-size the district in 2004 after holding several large teacher job fairs in 2001 to recruit and hire most of the teachers that were eventually laid off in the following years. The personnel decisions discussed by the Reform Board were the appointments of multiple central office administrators, the reassignment of principals, and the alignment of teacher service with district enrollment projections. During the Reform Board's tenure, there was an additional bureaucratic layer of central administration created in Detroit Public Schools called executive directors.

**Elected School Board, 2006-2008.** After Detroit residents passed Proposal E in 2005, control of Detroit Public Schools returned to an elected school board. From 2006-2008, the major issues discussed by the Board were: personnel (26%), financial (25%), leadership (12%), and the 1994 bond for capital improvements (11%) (*See Appendix C-6*). The major personnel issues discussed during that time period were teacher layoffs and contract negotiations with the Detroit Federation of Teachers, which resulted in a teacher's strike in 2006. Other financial discussions were focused on the district's procedures to eliminate fraud after issues arose from a FBI investigation into illegal wire transfers from the Office of Risk management (Pratt, 2007).

On June 17, 2010, former school board president Otis Mathis III was accused of fondling himself in the presence of the superintendent, which resulted in a lawsuit and \$650,000 settlement (Pratt Dawsey, 2011c; Pratt Dawsey 2010). The newly elected school board members were more concerned with keeping their power than solving problems in the district, chiefly financial issues relating to the decrease in student enrollment, and the newly elected Board of Education felt mandated to become embroiled in a power struggle with Lansing after the takeover (Payne, 2008). One central office administrator added this about her experience working with the elected school board, “A joke. I worked with board members directly and as result I got a picture that it was every man for his or herself. They were not a group that worked collectively for the improvement of the children, unlike the Reform Board. It [the Board of Education position] was a political stepping stone for the most of them. It wasn’t about serving the kids; it was about what was next for them politically.” For institutional progress to occur elected officials and district administrators have to be on the same page, and the elected officials should be in their roles for the betterment of kids and no other reasons as they represent the community’s interests as a means for positive change.

The other major financial discussions by the Board were focused on the district’s budget deficit. The budget deficit did not reach a heightened status until State Superintendent Michael Flanagan presented to the Board in September and November of 2008 about the seriousness of working with Dr. Connie Calloway on a budget deficit reduction plan, which had to be approved by Flanagan or the possibility of state control in the form of an emergency financial manager was in the future for Detroit Public Schools (Pratt Dawsey, 2008a; Mrozowski, 2007b).

The elected school board had a rough tenure and was eventually ousted from power by the emergency financial manager legislation in 2009 by then-governor Jennifer Granholm (D).

According to one central office administrator:

There was no continuity and no progress made in the district during my tenure in DPS. The elected board was incapable of making objective decisions for the school district... The integrity of governance was compromised during the elected board's tenure as members would leak information to the public for a contentious public comment portion of board meetings that lasted forever. The elected board just could not make the tough choices for the district and the deficit increased as a result.

School boards represent the people (i.e., voters) in the community but sometimes school board members find it hard to make decisions on politically charged issues as a vote the wrong way on an issue could result in their defeat in their bid for reelection. The elected board ushered a return of local level politics into the school system and issues of students seemed secondary.

**Emergency Financial Manager (aka Powerless Board), 2009-2014.** After Governor Jennifer Granholm declared the financial emergency in DPS the Board's focus shifted due to its weakened political position. The Board was forced to coexist with the emergency financial manager, Robert Bobb. (Pratt Dawsey, 2009b). From 2009-2014, the major issues discussed by the Board were: personnel (19%), educational programs (17%), financial (12%), and political support (10%) (*See Appendix C-6*). Personnel discussions by this Board were focused on the necessity of teacher layoffs in an effort to right-size the district due to the declining enrollment. There were educational discussions about the poor results on the NAEP and MEAP standardized tests, but there were no specific plans, reforms, or interventions implemented to improve the performance of Detroit students on these standardized tests.

The majority of the discussions by this Board regarding educational programs centered on who had control over academics in Detroit Public Schools: the Board, or the emergency

financial manager (Pratt Dawsey, 2009d). This political dispute resulted in a lawsuit being filed by the Board against the emergency financial manager for academic control of Detroit Public Schools (Pratt Dawsey, 2009d). The result of the lawsuit was the emergency financial manager controlled district finances. Thus, the emergency financial manager had control over academics in the district and then appointed former Cleveland superintendent Barbara Byrd-Bennett to oversee academics in the district. Byrd-Bennett is currently under investigation by the FBI about a \$40 million contract with Houghton Mifflin Harcourt during her tenure in DPS to determine whether or not she steered the contract fraudulently where she possibly received a bribe or kickback (Zaniewski, 2015c). Even though the Board no longer had control over the budget due to the emergency financial manager legislation and the court ruling, they routinely questioned the actions taken by Robert Bobb in regards to the direction of the deficit elimination plan (Higgins, 2010b). The Board during that time period used its position to garner support from the community to have state control and the emergency financial manager legislation essentially put on trial in the court of public opinion, especially after Robert Bobb was unable to solve the district's budget deficit by the end of his tenure.

### **Summary**

In summary, state intervention in Detroit Public Schools had an adverse effect on institutional progress in the school district and compounded issues which may have already existed in DPS. Nonetheless, listed below is a quote from a teacher interviewed with a total of 30 plus years of experience in Detroit Public Schools which may explain the issues preventing Detroit Public Schools from progressing institutionally during that time period due to state intervention:

I loved my 30-plus years in Detroit Public Schools. I can't really comment on some of things happening in DPS right now because I have been retired for over

ten years. The recent headlines in the *Detroit News* and the *Detroit Free Press* on Detroit Public Schools are absolutely heart breaking. The state needs to accept the blame for its failed interventions in DPS and should make things right in Detroit.

State intervention in Detroit Public Schools was unsuccessful, and all of the metrics point to the abysmal failure of state intervention in DPS. However, one teacher shared what he believes the state needs to make things right in Detroit Public Schools and his take on why the state has been involved in the district's affairs, "The state needs to provide the district with the means (i.e., funding) to make meaningful change, but the state is trying to get blood out of the turnip in DPS. The state is doing all it can to dismantle the district." If state intervention is to result in institutional progress the financial resources and direct oversight of the district will need to be adjusted as state intervention has not been successful in DPS to date as the outcomes of the district while under state control have continued to regress since 1999 and even more so since 2009.

### **Internal and External Barriers Prevented Institutional Progress**

There were several internal and external barriers preventing DPS from achieving institutional progress from 1999-2014. The Detroit Federation of Teachers was a major internal barrier while environmental factors in Detroit neighborhoods and homes affected the quality of education DPS students were receiving from 1999-2014.

#### **Detroit Federation of Teachers**

How can a teachers' union be an internal barrier? According to one teacher, "The DFT did a good job of making teachers look bad and making teachers look greedy. The DFT was working against us if you ask me." The overall impact of the DFT on Detroit Public Schools should be interpreted as an internal barrier to institutional progress in the district with the

negative impact on student enrollment following the 1999 and 2006 teacher strikes (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). However, the insights about the DFT according a former school board member interviewed were very interesting, “The teachers union was very ineffective throughout this period. Their resistance to change and their propensity to protect poor teachers made them almost irrelevant with respect to student academic performance.” It is very difficult to achieve institutional progress if the teachers’ union is not supportive of what is in the best interests of children and places adult issues over student issues.

### **Poverty and Environmental Factors**

It cannot be overstated how difficult it is to educate a child when they are constantly hungry or when they have real-world issues awaiting them after school dismisses. It is difficult to educate students in poverty and there is a constant struggle to get 100% of their undivided attention due to issues in their home life. One former school board member added, “A lack of resources in DPS is another barrier for the district. There is a lack of money in the district to get the job done to educate kids properly and money has been lacking in DPS since the 1990s. The lack of resources plays into the communities of people living in poverty and require services beyond the classroom to educate children.” It is a challenging task to educate students in urban areas due to a lack of resources, which are needed to finance the interventions needed to improve student achievement. Students living in poverty require additional resources to be educated and it appears DPS did not seek out these additional resources and the result was poverty being a barrier to institutional progress.

One teacher also believes the problem of educating students in poverty lies with the adults in the schools and the adults in the community:

The community does not want to hold kids and parents accountable for the issues in DPS... There needs to be accountability for bad parents and bad students.

Students who are constantly misbehaving should not be catered to because the administration is too afraid to deal with the kid's parents or because holding on to those students is only done for financial purposes. There needs to be a policy to establish excellence in the district starting with holding students accountable for their education. Parenting is poor and the district does not work with parents to make students more accountable for their own education.

Poverty cannot be the excuse for not holding parents and student accountable for their education. However, if institutional progress is going to be achieved both parents and students must be active participants in their education.

The neighborhood or home life of a child can either positively influence or negatively influence a child's educational attainment. One central office administrator also believes environmental factors to be the reasons for causing the difficulties in educating children living in poverty, "A child's education was often neglected in the home and children were not provided with quiet places to study, but homes were usually chaotic. Also, children in poverty had lower vocabularies due to watching too much television. The nurturing of children was not being done very well... The safety in the neighborhoods was a barrier." The issue of poverty is obvious as it can be a psychological and emotional barrier in urban public schools. Increased resources funneled into the classroom can offset the effects of poverty and environmental factors students in urban areas face every day, but then for institutional progress to occur transformative leadership is required to change the mindset of the students to break the cycle of poverty.

### **Summary**

Educating Detroit school children is a daunting task because of the lack of funds and poverty in the city of Detroit. Therefore, the district was or is desperate need of partnerships to help educate DPS students. The DFT should have been an ideal partnership with DPS, but the DFT worked against the interests of its membership by being too political and squabbling with



district leadership publicly during the most inopportune times, which caused students to leave the school district in droves for charter schools leading to teacher layoffs and school closures. The MDE should have devoted more of its resources, personnel, and educational expertise to Detroit Public Schools in an effort to improve the school district and to improve the quality of education for Detroit students.

### **Limitations**

One limitation in the findings was the possibility of inconsistencies within the data which did not follow the institutional progress framework. Even though this inconsistency was rare, it did occur, thus, the need to mention it here. Another limitation in the findings was the possible information not revealed during the multiple interviews of the participants or documents analyzed which could have shed more insights on institutional progress in DPS. The final limitation was using the institutional progress framework to code the *State of the City Addresses* as those speeches did not align to the framework and were more suited to a political science analysis, not an educational analysis.

### **Conclusion**

The qualitative data in this study indicated that there was a lack of institutional progress, school governance reforms in Detroit Public Schools did not have a positive impact, there was a lack of educational leadership from the superintendents on down through the principal ranks, and there were some internal and external barriers preventing DPS from making institutional progress from 1999-2014.

There was a lack of institutional progress in DPS primarily due to a lack of educational leadership in Detroit Public Schools, and district leadership in DPS was not stable during that time period as there were eight different district leaders in DPS, not including the interim

appointments. The instability of district leadership made it difficult to enact any meaningful district reforms in DPS, which was the opposite approach taken in Boston Public Schools during the 1990s and 2000s with several successful district level reforms and sustained leadership from Boston's superintendents. The lack of educational leadership in DPS was also evident as there was not a clear focus on teaching and learning throughout DPS, nor was there a turnaround strategy for district success. One former school board member stated, "There was an absence of coordinated strategy to address all of the components of teaching and learning process." And the lack of educational leadership from central office manifested in DPS when principals were unable to get the resources and personnel necessary to run their buildings effectively to serve DPS students. The lack of educational leadership in DPS was also a result of too many ineffective principals and central office administrators who were not focused on changing the *institutionalized culture* of DPS as described by a former school board member. One teacher asserted his opinion on why the lack of educational leadership existed in DPS during this time frame, "You know what you get when you put clowns in-charge...You get a circus. You get a circus. And the people in-charge of DPS made it a three-ring circus!"

The lack of educational leadership at the principal ranks in some cases resulted in the inability to effectively change teacher practice in schools and the inability to maintain control of the student body in some cases. The lack of educational leadership in DPS is also attributed to the principals and central administrators who were promoted without the qualifications or job performance to merit such promotions. *Peter Principle* heavily influenced the lack of educational leadership in DPS during that time period. In short, the lack of educational leadership in DPS can be summarized with the lack of goals, a lack of educational strategies, a lack of support, and *Peter Principle* heavily occupying DPS administration positions. The lack

of educational leadership is also due to the lack of district reforms to address the student achievement issues which was attributed to the constant changes in district leadership. In addition, there was not a focus on teaching and learning in DPS during that time period.

Community support for the Detroit Public Schools decreased during that time period because Detroit residents did not support the state takeover and grew frustrated with the lack of progress with the elected school board and emergency financial managers in addition to the negative headlines about Detroit Public Schools from 2007-2011. Evidence of the lack of public support for DPS can be found in the significant enrollment decline in Detroit Public Schools as parents started to voice their displeasure with their feet by seeking other educational opportunities for their students, most notably charter schools. There was also a lack of political support for Detroit Public Schools as the takeover was passed in 1999 and then a second state takeover in 2009 with the emergency financial manager by a Democratic governor. There was not a strong partnership between the city of Detroit and Detroit Public Schools during that time period as Detroit mayors rarely mentioned the role of education as part of the process for improving the quality of life in the city of Detroit in the annual *State of the City Address*, which was the opposite approach taken during Boston's turnaround as the mayor publicly supported the turnaround in Boston Public Schools.

Governance in Detroit Public Schools, especially after the Reform Board's tenure did not provide the management and policy direction needed to make institutional progress in the district as local politics and relationships heavily influenced decisions made by the Board and central office from 2006-2014. Also, the instability of governance in DPS prevented the district from making institutional progress during that time period as the instability caused many parents to take their kids out of DPS for educational opportunities in charter schools and schools of choice

programs. The instability of governance in DPS caused many to question the dedication of governance officials to the people they were hired to serve. One teacher stated, “Multiple governance models would be the reason for the lack of impact. No EM was really dedicated/committed to the system, students, parents and teachers.” Despite the numerous changes to governance there were no changes in culture in DPS, which prevented the district from making institutional progress. One former school board member stated the following about DPS culture in regards to the many governance changes in DPS since 1999, “There were too many changes too fast. We can change governance on paper and you need to have a change of culture on the ground.”

There were some major barriers identified in Detroit Public Schools which prevented DPS from making institutional progress from 1999-2014. One heavily cited barrier was the challenges in educating students who were living in poverty because of the environmental factors which made education secondary to students who were dealing with real-life issues. The lack of funding in DPS compared to an affluent school district like Bloomfield Hills prevents necessary resources from reaching some of the neediest children in the state of Michigan. One former school board member stated her belief about how poverty is a barrier in DPS:

Children living in poverty require more and different services than those from middle and upper class backgrounds. However, schools and districts do not receive differential funding to be able to offer the different services that are essential to students’ achievement. This is one place where money really does matter. Social workers, health care, access to school supplies, etc. are all important in high poverty schools; however the people and the physical resources are not there.

If poverty is not addressed institutional progress will remain elusive as the effects of poverty can prevent students from learning. The effects of poverty can create a social-emotional barrier for kids at school in addition to physical and mental barriers. The issue of poverty was

also obvious to former school board members as a barrier to institutional progress in Detroit Public Schools. One former school board member added, “A lack of resources in DPS is another barrier for the district. There is a lack of money in the district to get the job done to educate kids properly and money has been lacking in DPS since the 1990s. The lack of resources plays into the communities of people living in poverty and require services beyond the classroom to educate children.” Another former school board member added a different perspective about poverty in DPS schools, “Poverty, a lack of hope and vision are the barriers to institutional progress in Detroit. Kids need to have hope and vision. I remember one kid saying that he didn’t see a future for himself because he didn’t know anyone who looked like him [black male] that wasn’t dead or in prison by the age of 25.” Former U.S. President Lyndon Johnson understood the effects of poverty on education because he was a teacher in rural Texas before he entered politics. Therefore, he wanted to fight the war against poverty with his Great Society initiatives as poverty was a barrier to education and the opportunities an education can afford someone.

In closing, Detroit Public Schools did not achieve institutional progress from 1999-2014. The lack of leadership from district leaders during that time period was one of the primary reasons for the lack of institutional progress in DPS as educational leadership is needed to lead the turnaround process in urban school districts. In addition, the lack of educational programs to directly address student achievement issues goes to the heart of the *Peter Principle* element in the administrator ranks in DPS during that time period. There were no noteworthy systematic reforms implemented to improve the educational outcomes of students attending Detroit Public Schools. The lack of leadership in DPS from district leaders, some central office administrators, and building administrators is a primary cause for the lack of institutional progress in DPS. The

lack of leadership affected all of the other variables of institutional progress, which decreased as there was not a vision or turnaround strategy for success for DPS from 1999-2014.

The lack of institutional progress coupled with state intervention being unsuccessful caused the barriers preventing DPS students from receiving a quality 21<sup>st</sup> education to increase exponentially. Nevertheless, there is hope for Detroit Public Schools because Boston Public Schools was reformed 20 years ago. Boston's story tells us that it is possible for DPS to make institutional progress; however, institutional progress in DPS will require policymakers at the state and local levels to make difficult decisions. In Chapter 5, Institutional Progress Recommendations are made for Detroit Public Schools based upon the data analysis presented here in Chapter 4.

## CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

### Summary

The contextual data was analyzed and themes emerged from the data about Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014: 1.) There was a lack of institutional progress; 2.) School governance reforms did not have a positive impact in Detroit Public Schools; and 3.) There were some internal and external barriers preventing DPS from moving toward institutional progress.

This qualitative study utilized four data sources: semi-structured and structured interviews with people with vast personal experiences within Detroit Public Schools (e.g., school board members, central administrators, building administrators, teachers, and parents/community activists) from 1999-2014, daily newspaper coverage in Detroit (i.e., the *Detroit Free Press* and *the Detroit News*) from 1999-2014, Detroit Board of Education meeting minutes from 1998-2014, and city of Detroit archives on the annual *State of the City Address* given by Detroit mayors from 1999-2014.

The contextual data collected on Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014 further informs us that there was a gradual decline in institutional progress during this 16-year period, and there was a negative impact on Detroit Public Schools due to the multiple governance reforms, and some barriers existed that were not addressed by district or city leaders. Every time the school governance model changed in Detroit Public Schools, institutional progress decreased, especially in the areas of finances, student achievement, and public support. The frequent school governance changes created instability in the district, not only financially, but in terms of educational leadership at all levels of administration. For example, there were eight district leaders during that time period resulting in an incoherent and fragmented academic vision for the district. Effective leadership was elusive in Detroit Public Schools because of the politics within

the district among employees, especially at the central office and building principal levels. Furthermore, the sheer size of the central office bureaucracy and the ineffective organizational structure of central office in Detroit Public Schools are partly responsible for the ineffectiveness of the school district and its educational leadership.

During that time period, public support for the district declined in the form of: negative opinion polls, an increased number of unsatisfied parents with unfavorable comments to the Board at board meetings, negative press coverage of the district, and the startling loss of 118,000 (167,000-49,000) students from 2000-2013 or -70% of the student enrollment leaving the district to attend metro Detroit charter schools or other school districts that offer schools of choice programs.

The impact of the multiple school governance changes over the 16-year period (1999-2014) placed politics and adult issues ahead of issues relating to the challenges of educating Detroit students. State control of Detroit Public Schools can best be described as politicians in Lansing having the courage to do what they believed was the right thing to do to improve the district, but not having that same courage to admit that their actions were not fully thought out when it became apparent that state intervention was not successful according to the data. As previously mentioned by an interviewee, state intervention in Detroit Public Schools is similar to the children's story of Humpty Dumpty. In essence, the state of Michigan has pulled Humpty Dumpty (i.e., Detroit Public Schools) apart, and did not have plan to put him back together.

### **Institutional Progress Recommendations**

#### **Recommendation #1: Leadership**

**District leadership.** Political leaders in Michigan should examine the data and give serious consideration to public input and have the courage to come to the conclusion that the



current school governance model in Detroit Public Schools has not been successful. State intervention in Detroit Public Schools overall has not been successful and has not made a positive impact on the district as student enrollment has declined drastically since 1999 and standardized test scores have not improved significantly from pre-state takeover levels in 1998. Stability in the form of district leadership is needed for institutional change to occur in DPS. In addition, further intervention from Lansing tramples over the democratic rights of Detroiters, and state intervention in DPS has proven to be a very divisive issue in the city of Detroit; nonetheless, a return to an elected school board is a possible step back towards state intervention for a third time in several years. Detroit's complicated racial history and political history calls for a unique form of school governance where the local vote, not state legislative or executive action decides the next form of governance in Detroit Public Schools. The greatest support for DPS comes from community activist such as the *Coalition for Detroit Schoolchildren* while the opponents of DPS are the charter school lobbyists and for-profit charter school management companies who are profiting from the enrollment decline and the governance instability in DPS.

The school governance and educational leadership recommendation is for Detroiters to be able to elect their superintendent as you would elect a county sheriff (Black, 2015). A school board would also be elected to serve only in an advisory capacity, and to represent geographic areas and neighborhoods within DPS. The superintendent candidates who would campaign for this position would be vetted by an outside group specializing in superintendent searches (e.g., The Michigan Leadership Institute) prior to being officially announced as a candidate. The *Michigan Leadership Institute* would be tasked with developing a qualified candidate pool to avoid issues mentioned in this study with too many people in Detroit Public Schools in positions of authority who are unqualified for their positions. All candidates would have to be certified

school administrators by the Michigan Department of Education, too. The goal of electing a superintendent would be democratically identifying a professional educator with successful educational leadership experience, but more importantly, an academic vision and turnaround strategy for success in the district. Listed below are the positives of electing a superintendent for DPS:

1. An elected superintendent would be politically accountable to voters and not politically shielded by a mayor or school board;
2. Electing a superintendent would provide sustained leadership (four-year terms);
3. Electing a superintendent during presidential elections would increase voter turnout;
4. The superintendent would have carte blanche over the district budget and educational programs;
5. Expedited decision-making;
6. Electing a superintendent would preserve the principles of local democracy and local control of schools;
7. Electing a superintendent would provide the district with a checks and balances system where parents would have a larger voice in school policy decisions, because the re-election of the superintendent every four years would serve as referendum vote on their leadership and policy decisions;

A potential drawback of this form of school governance is the obvious poor selection of a superintendent by the Detroit electorate. However, with the vetting process being conducted by an outside group specializing in superintendent searches the hope is to avoid bad candidates and candidates running on name recognition who are obviously unqualified to run a large urban school district. Detroit Public Schools needs a school governance model which will allow the superintendent to: *really* take charge of the district, be a true transformational leader, and be the face of institutional progress in Detroit Public Schools. No one will argue the extraordinary challenges facing Detroit Public Schools; however, returning Detroit Public Schools to the same

exact failed school governance models would be nonsensical. This decision in Detroit could possibly have repercussions for the next 20 years, just as the state takeover did the district. This school governance decision could be an exemplary lesson for urban school governance reform in the United States, just as Boston was over 20 years ago.

The data indicates that politics in Detroit Public Schools has been an on-going problem despite the governance model. This recommendation would severely limit politics in the district as the superintendent would be risking his or her political capital on important educational decisions which is something elected school board members or state appointed leaders have not had to consider when making district-level decisions. Lastly, this governance model is more attuned to the needs of parents in the district which makes it a more viable option than mayoral control because other civic issues prevent voters from singling out a mayor's education policy as the reason whether or not he or she should continue to be the mayor.

Most importantly, whoever the leader of Detroit Public Schools is under this model it is imperative for this person to be visible in the schools and in the community. Interviewees indicated that district leaders in Detroit Public Schools rarely visited schools and became detached from the purpose of educating children. A student enrolled in DPS has to represent more to the district leader than their per pupil allowance from the state, but truly care about the quality of the education each child in DPS receives. The superintendent of Detroit Public Schools should be a frequent visitor to schools in the district, and not just present for ribbon cutting ceremonies. The superintendent should meet with and seek the input of: principals, teachers, students, and parents to find out for himself or herself what is going on in the schools from people on the frontlines. In addition, unannounced visits to schools should be made by this vetted superintendent to keep principals on their toes and to work harder to maintain order in

their schools, but also to work more closely with district teachers to improve the quality of instruction and student achievement.

**Central office leadership.** The data in this study indicated that the Detroit Public School system was too centralized making it ineffective. The size of DPS and the size of central office made it difficult to make meaningful change within the Detroit Public Schools. Principals found it difficult to communicate with central office about the individual needs of their schools and received little or no guidance from central office to improve student achievement at scale. Therefore, Detroit Public Schools should decentralize the school district. Furthermore, the more decision-making responsibilities should be given to the local principals to meet the needs of their students according to the district's mission and vision for academic goals for the district.

Additionally, all district-level administrators should be held accountable for the academic performance of their assigned schools and should have the skill set to work with principals to analyze real-time data to develop action plans to improve student achievement at each of their individual schools. Furthermore, district-level administrators should be assigned to the schools in their area of expertise. The data indicates that district-level administrators were assigned to schools in which they were not experts. For example, district-level administrators who have elementary backgrounds should only supervise elementary schools and district-level administrators who have secondary backgrounds should only supervise middle and high schools.

**Building principal leadership.** Effective and highly effective people enhance the performance of any organization, so Detroit Public Schools should conduct extensive and objective reviews of principals, assistant principals, and teachers to identify effective and highly effective people working in the district. The best and the brightest people should be in Detroit Public Schools, not necessarily the most experienced. There has to be a dichotomy between

years of experience and the quality of the experiences individuals had in the district, so therefore, DPS should conduct a national search for proven turnaround principals. You cannot expect change or different results when you have the same people, in the same positions, or ineffective principals promoted to central office positions. You also cannot expect change when principals lack the instructional leadership or creativity to turnaround failing schools. Principals must also have institutional control within their buildings as school culture really makes a difference in whether or not a school will be academically successful. Principals who cannot maintain reasonable control of their students should be dismissed immediately because if principals cannot control the students in their own schools, how can those same principals simultaneously address improving instruction and improving student achievement? Lastly, according to the data in this study, the process for the administrator's academy should be changed where it promotes an objective system of meritocracy to be enrolled in the administrator's academy, not a subjective system of relationships and cronyism where appointments to the academy are based upon relationships and the recommendations of some ineffective principals.

### **Recommendation #2: Educational Programs**

The data in this study indicates that Detroit Public Schools did not have any clearly communicated district level and systematic reforms or an academic vision aimed at improving student achievement at scale in the district. Various proposals were discussed from 1999-2014, but nothing substantial was implemented. Despite the poor student achievement data (i.e., standardized test scores, graduation rates, and dropout rates) in Detroit Public Schools, there were no reforms enacted in DPS aimed at addressing the lack of student achievement in these areas. It is important to mention the only significant reform during that time period was Dr. Burnley's Open Court reading initiative, which was implemented in 2002. The results of this

initiative were substantial increases in 4<sup>th</sup> grade MEAP reading results, but this reform did not continue beyond 2005, which was the year Dr. Burnley's contract was not renewed.

Detroit Public Schools should hire Dr. Thomas Payzant the former superintendent from Boston Public Schools as a consultant to help DPS district leaders to duplicate and then implement the reforms from Boston Public Schools during Dr. Payzant's tenure which significantly increased student achievement in a district that was once dysfunctional as Detroit Public Schools is today. During Dr. Payzant's tenure, Boston implemented the following reforms at the district level which improved student achievement at scale throughout the entire district, especially in standardized testing scores, graduation rates, and dropout rates:

1. Implement after-school activities;
2. Actively engage the Detroit community and parents in the education of DPS children;
3. Implement the six essentials of whole-school improvement;
4. Implement early childhood education;
5. Implement standards-based instruction;
6. Implement cost-effectiveness measures to analyze the benefits of educational programs in the district so more resources can impact students in the classroom;
7. Implement professional development on improving instructional techniques; and
8. Implement smaller high schools and learning communities.

Despite the fact that Detroit Public Schools has been fiscally irresponsible with its resources to educate its students, the state of Michigan should seriously consider redoing the funding formula for school districts in the state. For example, more affluent school districts such as Bloomfield Hills Public Schools are allocated \$11,000 per pupil while Detroit Public Schools are allocated \$7,600 per pupil. There are other factors in the differences in per pupil allowances

such as hold harmless status, but the level of poverty in Detroit Public Schools or any school district for that matter should be factored into the per pupil allowance for school districts in Michigan. This poverty-based funding formula would somewhat level the playing field as additional resources (e.g., social workers, truancy officers, etc.) could be leveraged to help educate students living in poverty because it is more costly to educate students living in poverty than students living in middle-class and affluent school districts. In districts such as Detroit Public Schools, asking educators to do more with less is a recipe for dysfunction. The additional revenue would come from a revised school funding formula where the poverty level is factored into the per-pupil allocation. School districts with higher levels of poverty would receive additional per-pupil funds from the state.

For a point of comparison, over the past 20 years, the state of Massachusetts has tripled its funding on education from \$4.2 billion to \$12.6 billion. The result of increased funding in Massachusetts was an increase in state-wide standardized testing results in the state. Now, Massachusetts is regarded as one of the top states in terms of providing a quality education to its students. Despite the findings of the *Coleman Report (1966)*, there is new evidence that investing in education can improve outcomes for schools: preschool education, smaller student-to-teacher ratios, and smaller high schools.

**James Reynolds, Jr. Boarding School.** In 2008, Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick stated in his annual *State of the City Address* that a partnership with Detroit Public Schools existed to create a boarding school for at-risk males on Belle Isle. This partnership for the creation of a boarding school never materialized; nonetheless, this idea should to come to fruition. The data in this study indicates that a barrier to institutional progress in Detroit Public Schools is poverty and other environmental factors within the neighborhoods in the city of

Detroit. Environmental factors have an effect on school culture as violence from the neighborhoods is often brought into the local neighborhood schools and Detroit Public Schools are not immune that urban phenomenon. Therefore, the city of Detroit, Detroit Public Schools, and other philanthropic organizations should create a boarding school for at-risk males in the city of Detroit.

This boarding school would eliminate or at least minimize the environmental factors of urban neighborhoods that negatively influence teens, which cause some teens to: use and sell drugs, engage in underage and unprotected sex, and commit juvenile crimes. The boarding school would provide the 24/7 nurturing and mentoring that is often missing from homes of students attending Detroit Public Schools. The 24/7 boarding school would provide the nourishment and healthy diets students need to succeed in school as well. Also, the boarding school would provide the needed discipline and structure often missing from the homes of students attending Detroit Public Schools for students to be successful academically in high school. This boarding school should be a sports-themed boarding school, which is why it should be named after the winningest football coach in the history of Detroit Public Schools: James Reynolds Jr. A sports-themed boarding school would possibly attract more students to the school and it would possibly attract students back to the district from charter schools and schools of choice as those parents are most likely looking for partners in the development and maturation of their children before the streets claim them.

**Dual enrollment.** Detroit Public Schools should partner with Wayne County Community College District, Wayne State University, and the University of Michigan-Dearborn to develop a robust dual enrollment program where entrance into any high school in Detroit Public Schools means that DPS students are automatically eligible to earn an associate's degree



or they can earn two years of college credits. This robust dual enrollment program would have a couple of benefits for the Detroit Public Schools. First, it would serve as a program to be used to recruit students back to the district from Detroit area charter schools resulting in more per pupil funds infused back into the district's budget. Second, it would be part of the changing narrative of the district as students would not only be graduating from high school, but from community college as well. And third, this program would appeal to parents and students alike as a program to decrease the skyrocketing costs of a college education for their child. I am aware of a dual enrollment program at one Detroit Public high school, but it is not clear if this program is district-wide or not. Regardless, this program should be publicized if it is already in existence in the district. Students participating in this program will reap all of the positive benefits of the program, and the district will see increases in the traditional institutional progress areas of student achievement due to the increased rigor of the college classes while still in high school.

### **Recommendation #3: Finances**

**Financial Review Board.** After eight years of being in a deficit, and with a budget deficit over \$200 million, district leaders should implement more stringent and transparent financial controls to prevent this financial emergency from occurring again. Also, a financial review board similar to the one implemented during the city of Detroit's bankruptcy proceedings should be implemented to oversee the fiscal operations of the district. The financial review board would serve two purposes besides the obvious prevention of theft and wasteful spending: 1.) finding ways to place more financial resources directly into the classrooms; and 2.) changing the narrative of DPS to one of being fiscally responsible with taxpayer resources. In addition, the financial review board would also prevent abuses within the bidding process where vendors and contractors submit bids and then increase their costs after the bid has already been approved

for a lower price. The other piece to the financial equation is raising revenue which can happen if other areas on institutional progress are addressed, but most importantly, changing the narrative by publicizing success stories of DPS and DPS students.

**DPS's debt problem.** What about DPS's debt? There were news stories in late 2015 about allowing DPS to go into bankruptcy very similar to the city of Detroit. However, bankruptcy cannot be the solution if the goal is to change the narrative of DPS. Furthermore, if DPS goes into bankruptcy after being under state control for over six years, what does that move say about the emergency financial manager law and politicians in Michigan? The emergency financial manager law (Michigan Public Act 4) was voted down by Michigan voters in a state referendum in 2012; however, Republicans in a lame duck session of the Michigan Legislature added a newer version emergency financial manager law (Michigan Public Act 436). The recommendation to make DPS whole financially is for the state of Michigan to assume DPS's debt. This is the same recommendation made by the *Coalition for Detroit schoolchildren*. Most of DPS's debt has been accumulated during state control, so the state should rectify the situation and not allow the situation to implode or even allow the district to enter into bankruptcy. Regardless of the possible funding fixes or a new funding formula, as long as the enrollment in Detroit Public Schools is decreasing there will continue to be a financial problem in the district. Therefore, a Detroit Education Commission is needed to regulate the enrollment process in Detroit between DPS and Detroit area charter schools.

#### **Recommendation #4: Personnel**

**Improving staff morale.** Any effective organization is due by and large to the quality of leadership and the quality of the people within the organization. Successful and effective organizations have transformative leaders at their helms that support and motivate their members

to achieve team and personal goals. The *Hawthorne Effect* is a study that states productivity among workers increases with positive interactions among workers and supervisors; therefore, district and school leaders must make a conscientious effort to do things to support teachers and to improve staff morale in their buildings (e.g., teachers of the month, staff outings, and constant positive praise, etc.). The district's role in improving staff morale according to the data is addressing overcrowded classrooms and increasing teacher salaries as teacher salaries have been frozen, insurance has increased, and 10% of their pay was taken away by the emergency financial manager in the form of concessions. These financial measures had an adverse effect on staff morale, and if 10% concessions for six years cannot solve the financial problem in Detroit Public School, then it's time to do something less draconian to the teachers.

**Competitive salaries.** In 1968, Detroit Public Schools had the highest teacher salaries in the nation with \$7,500 and that competitive teacher salary back then attracted teachers from all over the nation to work in DPS. Times have changed, but to decrease teacher turnover and to increase staff morale competitive salaries should be seriously considered, despite the financial emergency in DPS. Competitive salaries will attract top-tier teaching quality and turnaround administrators to DPS. Thinking practically, people in general are less inclined to do additional work when they are not appreciated by their supervisors and not compensated for going the extra mile. There also needs to be an emphasis to hire qualified black males to work in the elementary and middle schools to serve as role models for young black males before they reach the sixth grade when the loss of academic motivation usually occurs causing students to drop out of school in and around the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. There should also be an emphasis to recruit high achieving DPS graduates to become teachers in DPS upon graduation from college.

### **Recommendation #5: Community Support (i.e., change the narrative of DPS)**

One of the most significant reforms in Boston Public Schools during its turnaround in the mid-1990s was changing the narrative about Boston Public Schools from one of dysfunction to one that focused on the best interests of students. Twenty years ago, Boston Public Schools were just like Detroit Public Schools that both districts were on the negative end of a lot well-deserved negative press from the local media because of fiscal irresponsibility and poor student achievement in the district. However, Detroit Public Schools should follow Boston's example and change the narrative of the school district by creating systematic reforms to address student achievement issues (i.e., poor test scores, poor graduation rates, and poor dropout rates) and fiscal irresponsibility. Then district leaders should develop a mission and vision for the school district that the community can support (e.g., *Focus on Children* in Boston Public Schools).

The new vision for DPS should be one that inspires students and parents alike towards excellence, and *all* district personnel should also believe that *all* children in Detroit Public Schools can learn. Part of this new vision for DPS should include providing clean and safe schools for its students. Changing the narrative and creating the new vision should also include all stakeholders, which will then become a community effort to change the narrative of DPS. This new vision should be nothing short of focusing on "TLC... Teaching, Learning and Children" (Watkins, 2016a). Lastly, to change the narrative positive statistics and improvements in areas of: standardized testing, fiscal responsibility, graduation rates, and dropout rates will go a long way to changing the narrative. In addition, DPS leaders should work with the local news media to publicize positive events in Detroit Public Schools such as the Excellence Awards Dinner which used to be held at Cobo Hall until 2012. Detroit Public Schools must establish solid academic and behavior expectations. Violence in schools is unacceptable and discipline

issues should be handled aggressively by local and district level administrators including expulsions for persistent disobedience and gross misconduct violations of the *Michigan Revised School Code of 1976*. In addition, Detroit Public Schools should hold their parents and students accountable for basic things such as attending school. Most importantly, the district needs to project an image to the community and to the business community that the old image of Detroit Public Schools no longer exists.

Lastly, the new Detroit Public Schools should be a school district that holds all of its employees accountable for providing a quality education to the students in the district because everyone in the new Detroit Public Schools should be dedicated to improving the lives of children living in Detroit, and uplifting children from poverty through a quality education. If Detroit Public School leaders make a concerted effort to change the narrative about the district there is a possibility that parents will return their students to DPS from charter schools and schools of choice. It all boils down to perception and the perception and narrative of DPS must be changed, but a changed narrative will only be accompanied with proven turnaround district-level and school-level reforms.

**Mentoring.** There is a serious need to mentor students in Detroit Public Schools. Students need positive role models to work with them to help them become better students academically and socially, such as the City-Year program by AmeriCorps. There is a need to mentor students and show them the right way of doing things in school and to motivate students to go to college and then to end the *school-to-prison pipeline* in urban areas. Former State Superintendent Tom Watkins stated in a recent article, “A mind is a terrible thing waste” from the old United Negro College Fund slogan (Watkins, 2016a). Mr. Watkins is correct and to not waste the minds of African American males in Detroit, a system-wide mentoring program and

partnership should be developed with Detroit Public Schools to seriously improve the quality of life in the city of Detroit, and to create new opportunities for Detroit students that otherwise would not have been a possibility without the mentoring.

### **Recommendation #6: Political Support**

**City of Detroit.** The city of Detroit and Detroit Public Schools should enter into a strategic partnership for the educational, economic, and social renaissance of this once great city. Educationally, the city of Detroit and Detroit Public Schools should collaborate on different ideas to re-engage and educate thousands of Detroit children on the benefits of graduating from high school and receiving a postsecondary education. Per the data in this study, mayors in the city of Detroit from 1999-2014 were primarily concerned with reducing crime and improving the quality of life in the city of Detroit. If the city partnered with the school district to find funds for the creation of programs to prevent students from dropping out of school and created after-school programs, those two examples would go a long way to reducing crime and improving the quality of life in the city of Detroit because Detroit children would have more productive opportunities outside of crime and the illegal drug trade in the city. More importantly, the city and the school district should collaborate on programs to reduce poverty in the city and to reduce the adult illiteracy rate in the city of Detroit. As more parents get the help they need, parents will in turn be better prepared to help their children with school assignments. Lastly, as the city of Detroit makes its comeback from bankruptcy perhaps to attract more middle-class families to the city there must be a solid public school system to accompany Detroit's renaissance. This requires a partnership between city leaders and school leaders to accomplish this economic, social, and educational change in the city of Detroit and improved partnership with the city of Detroit will make this possible. The partnership would consist of city leaders helping school leaders to

develop partnerships with business leaders to help bring additional financial resources into the school district.

**Detroit Federation of Teachers.** The Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT) district leaders are on the same team, so DFT leaders and district leaders need to present a unified front that both groups are collaborating with each other for what is in the best interests of the children of Detroit Public Schools, not what is in the best interests of its members only. Teachers unions are perceived by some parents and by a particular political party as a barrier to the educational process, thus, charter schools in urban areas are promoted as more effective than urban school districts because charter schools usually do not have unions in their schools. Therefore, labor peace must be maintained to avoid the potential loss of thousands of parents who will grow tired of the union's tactics and pull their children out Detroit Public Schools. Furthermore, the recent sickouts causing several DPS schools to close is not the solution to this political quagmire the State of Michigan has DPS mired in either (Higgins, 2016). In the spirit of collaboration, district leaders cannot balance the district's deficit on the backs of teachers either. Teacher layoffs, pay freezes, and pay cuts have proven to be ineffective ways to balance the budget but it created a system with a demoralized teaching force because they do not feel appreciated by district leadership appointed by the governor.

**Michigan Department of Education.** The Michigan Department of Education should develop a process to reform the three different educational entities in the city: Detroit Public Schools, the Education Achievement Authority, and charter schools. These three different entities are responsible for educating Detroit school children, but a productive partnership has not developed between the traditional public schools and charter schools. Enrollment standards should be established among the three entities to bring about consistency among the transient

nature of urban students and parents due to poverty. As former State Superintendent Tom Watkins stated, “There should be a partnership to develop *quality schools* in the city regardless if they are charter or traditional public schools.” (Watkins, 2016b).

Lastly, legislation in Michigan should address how new charter schools are opened. As one former school board member stated, “There is an ‘*excess capacity*’ problem in Detroit where charter schools are opening up and there are more seats available than there are Detroit school children to occupy them.” Another piece of legislation is the elimination of for-profit management companies. Education is not a for-profit venture because the bottom-line for the charter management company can possibly obstruct some charter school leaders from doing what is in the best interests of students. Additionally, the MDE should create special consultant positions to bring positive educational leadership experiences from all over the state and nation to advise district leaders in Detroit Public Schools in the areas of: school finance, instructional leadership, educational leadership, and program development. The MDE should make educating students in Detroit Public Schools a priority with personnel detailed to working with district leaders in DPS on a weekly basis.

### **Areas of Future Research**

Participants in this study at every level stated that the state takeover of Detroit Public Schools in 1999 caused the demise of Detroit Public Schools to its current state of declining enrollment and a budget deficit in the area of \$232 million. An area for future research is a quantitative survey study of former Detroit residents and former Detroit Public School parents who either moved out of the city or removed their children from Detroit Public Schools between 2000-2010 to ascertain whether or not the state takeover was the reason why they moved out of the city or removed their children from Detroit Public Schools. This research will partially



explain why 47% of the enrollment of Detroit Public Schools decreased during that time period in comparison to only a 5% decrease in enrollment the previous decade.

Another area for future research on Detroit Public Schools is a study on the effects of school closings on district enrollment. Ware (2005) stated that if Communication & Media Arts High School was closed in 2005 that 75% of the students would have left Detroit Public Schools all together. A quantitative study of the effects of school closings would ascertain if parents do indeed leave school districts all together if their local public school is slated for closing. This research will provide district leaders in Detroit and elsewhere with information on the possible financial ramifications of school closings beyond the initial savings from closing school buildings for a more accurate cost-benefit analysis to consider before making a decision to close a school.

The enrollment in Detroit Public Schools decreased from 167,000 students in 2000 to 47,000 students in 2014. The data points to students leaving Detroit Public Schools for charter schools and schools of choice. A third area of research on Detroit Public Schools is a possible qualitative study to understand why their children parents left Detroit Public Schools. Why would their children leave Detroit Public Schools for the uncertainty of charter schools? Did they leave for academic reasons, discipline issues, violence in the schools or for some other reasons currently unknown to us?

### **Conclusion**

As previously stated by Addonizio and Kearney (2012), one of the essential building blocks of real and lasting improvement for schools is strong and consistent leadership; in addition, government leaders, business leaders, and community leaders must cooperatively shape and support the city's evolving educational system. In other words, the institutional progress

variables of leadership, community support and political support are vital to the future success of Detroit Public Schools. This study found that the lack of strong and consistent leadership in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014 greatly hindered the district's ability to make institutional progress. According to both Wong et al., (2007) and Portz and Schwartz (2009), school governance establishes the foundation for leadership to be effective and for students to be successful; however, the multiple governance reforms in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014 hindered the district's ability to provide that foundation to build lasting educational reform in Detroit Public Schools. With leadership and governance being paramount in addition to the Detroit's complicated racial and political history a return to locally controlled schools would restore community support and political support to DPS. An elected superintendent would restore local control and it would address concerns from state lawmakers who believe returning to an elected school board in Detroit will be a repeat of history leading to the emergency financial manager again. The elected superintendent could also provide the strong and consistent leadership needed to reform Detroit Public Schools. If any lesson can be pulled from the institutional progress turnaround story of Boston Public Schools it should be that governance created the conditions for educational leadership to be effective, but the effectiveness of the educational leadership is based upon proven turnaround leadership experiences. Furthermore, in Boston there was not a back and forth with school governance reform which provided the foundation for educational leadership to flourish.

The impact of the school governance changes in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014 had an adverse effect on Detroit Public Schools in terms of achieving institutional progress. According to Zaniewski (2015b), prior to the 1999 state takeover of Detroit Public Schools, the district was financially solvent with a surplus and now Detroit Public Schools has a budget

deficit of over \$232 million as of July 2015 with the potential of the deficit ballooning to \$335 million by the end of the 2015-2016 school year (Zaniewski, 2015b). The data in this study indicates that institutional progress slowly decreased from 1999-2014 and state control of Detroit Public Schools was ultimately unsuccessful.

The state of Michigan partially caused Detroit Public Schools not to achieve institutional progress for political reasons, not educational reasons. The state takeover of Detroit Public Schools was not in the best interests of the children in Detroit and it did not respect democratic voting rights for Detroit residents. State control of Detroit Public Schools has left DPS with a lack of resources in a city characterized with high poverty. The downfall of DPS created an open market in the Detroit educational marketplace which led to an increase of for-profit charter schools in and around the city of Detroit. For the most part, these for-profit charter schools have not lived up to the promise of providing a more superior education than DPS. According to Lewis (2015), only one in ten Detroit schools (i.e., Detroit Public Schools, Educational Achievement Authority, and charter schools) provides an adequate education to the students they are educating (Lewis, 2015). In summary, the major unintended consequence of the state takeover of Detroit Public Schools led to the current educational quagmire in the city of Detroit and a lack of resources because the resources have been divided up among 40 plus different educational entities (e.g., Detroit Public Schools, Educational Achievement Authority, and charter schools) in the city of Detroit all trying to educate students living in poverty regardless of the setting.

During state control, the Reform Board was steady in its management of the district, especially the financial management of the district, but there was a decrease in public participation during their tenure. However, the enrollment decline in the district began under the

Reform Board's tenure in addition to teacher layoffs and school closings due to the political posturing from local and state politicians in regards to Detroit Public Schools and the state takeover in 1999. After Proposal E in 2005, an elected board was reinstalled. The elected school board did not have the political savvy to effectively lead the district, nor the ability to make the tough financial decisions. This inability to make the tough political decisions by the elected board led to a fiscal emergency in DPS and led to state intervention and state control for a second time in less than four years.

The impact of the emergency financial manager model has been poor as the biggest decline in institutional progress and morale for that matter has occurred since 2009. The overall impact of the emergency financial manager model as a school governance model has been ineffective as the deficit has not been resolved, student achievement remained elusive, and enrollment has continued to decline. However, on the other hand the emergency financial manager model is a somewhat successful business model. For example, Kevyn Orr's tenure as an emergency financial manager successfully led the city of Detroit through its bankruptcy process. However, the emergency financial manager model has proven itself ineffective and not suited for the intricacies of K-12 education, thus, highlighting structural financial issues within the formula used to finance K-12 public education in the state of Michigan. In short, you cannot cut yourself out of a budget deficit and still be expected to provide quality educational services to the children in the district. Furthermore, you cannot right-size a school district with the *Wild West* charter school laws in Michigan. The financial emergency in Detroit Public Schools is now spreading as other local school districts in Michigan are currently experiencing financial shortfalls (e.g., Farmington Public Schools and Southfield Public Schools) making this issue of

adequate resources in the Michigan K-12 educational system a Michigan problem, not just a Detroit or urban school district problem (Zaniewski, 2015).

### **The Road to Damascus**

Despite the not-so positive data in this study, it is very possible for Detroit Public Schools to be reformed and begin to move towards some form of institutional progress because it has been done before in Boston Public Schools. However, several things need to transpire in order for Detroit Public Schools to be reformed:

1. A major marketing campaign to change the narrative and image of DPS;
2. Detroit Public Schools must implement an academic vision for the district based upon the best practices research of turnaround schools and school districts (e.g., Boston Public Schools);
3. Educational reforms must be designed to specifically address systematic issues plaguing the school district (e.g., poor attendance, dropouts, poor standardized test scores, etc.);
4. The structure of central office must be reformed to meet the needs of the schools and students and returned to a de-centralized structure prior to Dr. Eddie Green's *site-based management* reorganization in 1998;
5. Educational leadership in the district-level and school-level must have a laser-like focus on data-driven instruction to change teacher practice and to improve student achievement; and
6. The people leading these turnaround reforms must also be qualified to lead them. It does not make any sense to expect a district turnaround with people who have never turned around a school district, or to employ the same people who led the lack of institutional progress in the first place. In short, there can be no more *Peter Principle* appointments to administrative positions in DPS.

*If* improving the quality of instruction in the classroom is *not* the priority, this conversation will be revisited several years later accompanied with or without the financial issue in Detroit Public Schools depending on debt relief legislation from the state of Michigan. A new system of governance must be developed to eliminate corruption in the district, but more

importantly, to transform the district out of the shadows of the old negative public perception of Detroit Public Schools. The design of the new system of governance should be cognizant of the resentment Detroiters had with state control of Detroit Public Schools, but it should not repeat another unsuccessful return to an elected school board model. Regardless of the school governance implemented in Detroit Public Schools, transformational and sustained educational leadership is necessary to change the narrative and to improve student achievement at scale in Detroit Public Schools. Achieving institutional progress will improve systematic functions within Detroit Public Schools, and it will provide the children who are attending Detroit Public Schools in the district with a quality 21<sup>st</sup> century education.

The goal of urban school governance reform is to improve the quality of education in urban school districts and to improve institutional progress in urban school districts. Nevertheless, this was not the case in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014 and urban school governance reform did not lead to institutional progress. The identification of how central office was ineffectively organized and how unqualified people occupied positions of authority will hopefully eliminate the man-made barriers to student success in Detroit Public Schools. As previously stated, changing the narrative of Detroit Public Schools is imperative as it will possibly reverse the negative trend of student achievement and enrollment in the district, which in turn, equates to the following possibilities: providing students more opportunities later in life, uplifting people from generational poverty, and improving the quality of life for everyone living in the city of Detroit. Addressing these negative trends is paramount as schools must reverse the *school-to-prison pipeline* trend in the United States where most of the 2.3 million Americans currently incarcerated have less than a high school education.

The lesson from Boston Public Schools during the 1990s and 2000s is a positive example of how urban school governance reform done correctly can have a positive impact on institutional progress in a school district; however, urban school governance reform must be a community effort. Also, for urban school governance reform to have a positive impact the community must support the governance reform. For example, the people in Boston supported the governance reform of Boston Public Schools while the people in Detroit have fought against the governance reforms in Detroit Public Schools. Furthermore, the success in Boston Public Schools was a team effort (bottom-up reform) with the city of Boston, community leaders, and the business community supporting Boston Public Schools. Detroit Public Schools cannot continue doing it alone as added resources from the city of Detroit, community leaders, and business leaders to be successful. The top-down reform approach in DPS was unsuccessful. The lessons from Boston Public Schools also taught us that it is possible to educate a large mostly minority school district with the majority of students living in poverty. Lastly, besides being squarely focused on clearly articulated district-level reforms in Boston Public Schools, district leaders in Boston sought to change the narrative of the school district by addressing the issues plaguing the district prior to the governance reform (e.g., unacceptable graduation and dropout rates, poor student achievement on standardized tests, and fiscal irresponsibility).

In summary, the lack of an academic vision or educational reforms, an overly centralized central office structure, a lack of resources, and *Peter Principle* people in positions of authority prevented Detroit Public Schools from achieving institutional progress from 1999-2014. The impact of the multiple urban school governance reforms in Detroit Public Schools did not have a positive effect on the school district, and students continued to leave the district causing a financial emergency in the district in 2008 through to the present. State intervention did not help

Detroit Public Schools achieve institutional progress during the two different times the state has controlled Detroit Public Schools since 1999. The unintended consequences of school governance reform in Detroit Public Schools led to divisiveness, low staff morale, a loss of talent, instability in the top executive position, the needs of students were secondary to adults, and student enrollment significantly declined (e.g., 2000s) at a rate equal to the three previous decades (e.g., 1970s, 1980s and 1990s) combined.

### **Closing**

This study may paint a picture that *all* the of the teachers, principals, central office administrators, board members, and parents in Detroit Public Schools did not care for the children in Detroit Public Schools, but that is not true. As former State Superintendent Tom Watkins stated, “There were pockets of excellence in Detroit Public Schools, but those pockets of excellence were often surrounded by a sea of despair.” (Watkins, 2016b). There were thousands of well-intentioned educators working at all levels in Detroit Public Schools, and these educators were all dedicated to the children they served every day. These educators in DPS worked to reach students and to change the trajectories of their students’ lives. The efforts of these dedicated award-winning educators should by no means be marginalized or diminished by the findings in this study. Thousands of well-intentioned Detroit Public School educators fought the good fight every day and did all they could to help their students to succeed later in life, but there were several man-made, internal, and external barriers preventing Detroit Public Schools from achieving institutional progress. These barriers to institutional progress in Detroit Public Schools equated the efforts of these well-intentioned educators to raking leaves on a windy day.

Detroit Public Schools can have a *Road of Damascus* conversion but it will take several non-negotiables, especially sustained educational leadership from a charismatic and



knowledgeable turnaround leader to change the narrative and institutionalized culture of Detroit Public Schools. In addition to proven educational reforms, an academic vision and turnaround strategy aimed at improving various aspects of student achievement is desperately needed. The new academic vision and turnaround strategy should also be accompanied with a democratic form of school governance allowing parents are greater voice in the direction of DPS. A serious policy conversation about funding needs to be held in Lansing as it takes additional funding and resources to combat the effects of poverty in urban school districts such as DPS. Detroit Public Schools should develop a stronger partnership with the city of Detroit and improve its working relationships with the Detroit Federation of Teachers in addition to seeking additional expertise from the Michigan Department of Education to assist DPS with educating the whole child. There should also be a systematic movement to increase parental involvement.

These reforms could possibly reverse the tide of student enrollment and restore this district to its model status from the 1940s and 1950s. This policy conversation about Detroit Public Schools needs to happen as it can possibly improve the quality of life in the city of Detroit, but more importantly, to open the doors of opportunity to thousands of children attending Detroit Public Schools. The children attending Detroit Public Schools to no fault of their own are caught between the Michigan K-12 education policy margins. Nevertheless, a child's zip code in the year 2016 in the state of Michigan should not define the quality of the public education or postsecondary opportunities he or she will receive. And finally the strongest recommendation for DPS's future is to put the best interests of Detroit school children first! No more adult games and self-serving interests. *If the institutionalized culture of DPS changed where the most talented people were placed in positions of authority the district turnaround work*

would be possibility with strong focus on developing an academic culture in the district to meet the educational needs of children attending the Detroit Public School system.

**APPENDIX A-1****Structured Interview Questions**

1. How did educational leadership from the CEO, superintendent, or Emergency Financial Manager impact Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014?
2. How did educational leadership from central office impact Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014?
3. How did educational leadership from the building level impact Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014?
4. How did the Detroit Federation of Teachers impact Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014?
5. How did the structure of school governance impact institutional progress in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014?
6. How did state intervention impact institutional progress in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014?
7. What barriers affected institutional progress in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014?
8. What were the successes in Detroit Public Schools that affected institutional progress from 1999-2014?
9. What local educational policies or reforms impacted student achievement in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014?
10. What state educational policies or reforms impacted student achievement in Detroit Public Schools from 1999-2014?

**APPENDIX A-2****Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

1. From 1999-2014, Detroit Public Schools had three different school governance models. In your opinion, why didn't any of the multiple governance changes in DPS have a positive impact on the institutional progress of DPS?
2. Student achievement data on DPS suggests there was a lack of educational leadership in some key positions from 1999-2014. In your opinion, why was there a lack of educational leadership in DPS from 1999-2014?
3. Without a doubt, there are challenges to educating children attending DPS because most students are living in poverty. In your opinion, why do barriers exist for a quality education in DPS from 1999-2014? What can be done to minimize or eliminate these barriers to institutional progress?

### APPENDIX A-3

#### Summary of Interview Responses

1. The state takeover has caused DPS's demise and the current problems in DPS; State control of DPS has not been successful (45)
2. No meaningful or clearly communicated district-level reforms or academic vision aimed at addressing student achievement issues plaguing the district (40)
3. Too much politics in DPS; The elected board interfered with the daily administration and operation of DPS (38)
4. DPS was too centralized making it difficult to manage (31)
5. The State Board of Education and the MDE did not provide any special guidance for DPS to improve; Educating Detroit students has not a state priority (31)
6. Teacher layoffs and job insecurity throughout DPS has created low morale in the district, high teacher turnover, and a toxic environment to work in (31)
7. Governance during that time period did not have a positive impact on DPS (29)
8. Too many unqualified people in positions of authority/cronyism (24)
9. The education of DPS students was not a priority and were secondary to adult issues (21)
10. Poor instructional leadership capacity among district-level administrators (19)
11. Lack of resources/funding (18)
12. Fiscal instability/Poor accounting practices/Poor spending decisions (16)
13. Lack of family support/poor parenting/the need for increased parental involvement (15)
14. Principals should be held academically accountable, poor instructional leadership from principals, principals ignored central office directives, poor quality of principals (14)
15. High turnover and unsustainable district leadership since 1999 (13)
16. Lack of hope, low academic motivation, and a lack of accountability among students (12)
17. Competition from charter schools caused a dramatic decrease in services and revenue shortfalls (12)
18. The Emergency Financial Manager model is a failure (10)
19. Poverty (9)
20. Corruption under the elected school board led to state intervention (8)
21. Violence in the schools and neighborhoods (8)
22. Lack of academic progress/poor test scores (8)
23. The Elected Board could not make difficult decisions/was ineffective (7)
24. No Child Left Behind and too much testing (7)
25. Lack of teacher or principal input in district matters (7)
26. No progress was made in DPS (6)
27. The EAA is an abysmal failure (6)
28. The DFT was an impediment to progress in the district (6)
29. Theft and fraud by DPS employees especially principals was a problem (5)
30. Poor attendance by students (5)
31. School closures/enrollment decline (5)
32. Too many unqualified people teaching in the classrooms; too many long-term subs (5)
33. Classroom sizes are too large (4)
34. A new system of governance needs to be developed; state control isn't working (4)

35. The teacher evaluation process in DPS needs to be improved and systematic across the district (4)
36. Educating DPS students was not a priority if the students were not enrolled in talented and gift programs or schools (3)
37. Micromanagement from administration (3)
38. DPS leaders need to study successful urban school districts (3)
39. Political distrust between Detroit and Lansing; voting rights were infringed upon (2)
40. Detroit mayors and DPS superintendents need to work more collaboratively on education matters (2)
41. Competitive salaries are needed (2)
42. MDE implemented the Common Core curriculum
43. Lack of positive black male role models (2)
44. Open Court reading initiative was successful (2)
45. The Reform Board created the deficit (2)
46. The Emergency Financial Manager model is a successful (2)
47. Attempted self-governed schools (2)
48. Teachers need to believe that their students can learn (1)
49. Attempted early childhood education (1)
50. Laws addressing the dropout age (1)
51. DPS leaders need to be more visible in the local schools and the community (1)
52. Repair buildings in disarray (1)
53. Reverse racism (1)
54. District-wide professional development on quality instruction (1)
55. MDE accountability varies across the state (1)
56. Create more academic and athletic after-school activities for DPS students (1)
57. District leaders need to come from the teaching ranks, not other professions (1)
58. MDE provided minor oversight for DPS (1)
59. Increase adult education (1)
60. Smaller learning communities was attempted (1)
61. CEO Dr. Burnley was successful (1)
62. STEM programs were developed in DPS (1)
63. Lack of business partnerships with DPS (1)
64. Principals were allowed to select their own staff (1)
65. The Board should have had higher expectations for students in the district (1)
66. The Board should have developed better relations with the community (1)

**APPENDIX B-1****Detroit Board of Education Major Discussion Items, 1998**

1. Site-based management initiative (10)
2. 1994 Bond (Capital improvements) (6)
3. Possible state takeover (4)
4. Control of the 1994 Bond (4)
5. Superintendent's contract (3)
6. Violence in schools (2)
7. School finances (2)
8. Technology improvements (1)
9. Superintendent's vision (1)
10. Student scholarships (1)
11. Roofing proposals (1)
12. Marketing against charter schools (1)
13. Weapons sweeps (1)
14. Middle school vision statement (1)
15. DPS charter schools (1)
16. Opposition to school choice (1)
17. Transportation needs (1)

**APPENDIX B-2****Detroit Board of Education Major Discussion Items, 1999-2005**

1. CEO performance evaluation (26)
2. Audit/Budget/School finances (23)
3. Capital Improvements (16)
4. MEAP Testing (16)
5. Textbooks (15)
6. Central office appointments (13)
7. Human Resources issues (12)
8. No Child Left Behind (12)
9. Student enrollment trends (11)
10. CEO search (10)
11. District school improvement plan (10)
12. School and student safety (10)
13. CEO' s quarterly report (administration reforms, student achievement, capital improvements, and facts and figures) (9)
14. Athletics (7)
15. Marketing against charter schools (6)
16. School closures (6)
17. 1994 Bond (Capital improvements) (5)
18. Labor Negotiations/Collective bargaining (5)
19. Changes to public comments procedures (4)
20. Early childhood education (4)
21. Hiring of outside educational consultants (4)
22. Layoffs (4)
23. Open Court Reading Initiative (4)
24. Professional development (4)
25. Summer Learning Academy (Summer School) (4)
26. Transportation (4)
27. Back to school rally at Cobo Arena (3)
28. Business partnerships (3)
29. Deficit elimination plan (3)
30. Parent involvement (3)
31. School calendars (3)
32. Student promotion standards (3)
33. Support of the Wayne County millage (3)
34. ACT Testing (1)
35. Opposition to vouchers (1)
36. Principal salaries and working days (1)
37. Project S.E.E.D. (1)
38. Reimbursement of expenses for school board members (1)
39. Smaller learning communities (1)
40. Special Education services (1)



**APPENDIX B-3****Detroit Board of Education Major Discussion Items, 2006-2008**

1. Contracts (46)
2. Audit/Budget/Funding (22)
3. Deficit elimination plan (13)
4. Layoffs (13)
5. Hiring outside consultants (12)
6. Facilities upgrades/Capital improvements (11)
7. Human resources issues (10)
8. Superintendent evaluation (9)
9. Superintendent search (9)
10. Leasing/selling vacant properties (8)
11. School closures (8)
12. Enrollment (7)
13. Lack of community support (7)
14. NAEP (6)
15. Charter schools (5)
16. Athletic facilities upgrades (4)
17. Board of Education reimbursement policy (4)
18. Parental involvement (4)
19. Central office appointments (3)
20. School safety (3)
21. Dropout rates (2)
22. Labor Negotiations (2)
23. Student code of conduct (2)
24. Student safety (2)
25. District improvement plan (1)
26. Early childhood education (1)
27. High school graduation requirements (1)
28. Professional development (1)
29. Summer school (1)
30. Student dress code (1)
31. Superintendent reimbursement expenses (1)
32. Superintendent reprimanded by the Board of Education (1)
33. Textbooks (1)
34. Transportation (1)
35. Turnaround school proposal (1)
36. Vending machines (1)

**APPENDIX B-4****Detroit Board of Education Major Discussion Items, 2009-2014**

1. Board's relationship with the Emergency Financial Manager (40)
2. Parent/Teacher complaints (37)
3. Deficit elimination plan (27)
4. Library Commission (26)
5. Power struggle with Lansing (24)
6. School closings (18)
7. School safety (18)
8. Layoffs (17)
9. Settling lawsuits against the district (14)
10. Staffing concerns (14)
11. Athletics (13)
12. District Academic Plan (13)
13. Human resources issues (13)
14. Media bias against Detroit Public Schools (13)
15. Charter schools (10)
16. Curriculum (8)
17. Academic programs (7)
18. College-going culture (7)
19. Enrollment (7)
20. Contracts (6)
21. Lack of community support (6)
22. Low staff morale/district dysfunction (6)
23. MEAP (6)
24. 1994 Bond (Capital improvements) (5)
25. Real estate deals (5)
26. Superintendent evaluation (5)
27. ACT/MME (4)
28. Contract negotiations (4)
29. Hiring outside consultants (4)
30. NAEP (4)
31. Summer school (4)
32. Superintendent search (4)
33. Textbooks (4)
34. Central office appointments (3)
35. Federal Stimulus of 2009 (3)
36. Overcrowded classrooms (3)
37. Parental involvement (3)
38. Professional development (3)
39. Adult education (2)
40. Attendance issues (2)
41. Positive media coverage of Detroit Public Schools (2)
42. Public conduct at meetings (2)

43. Academic fraud allegations (1)
44. Advanced placement courses (1)
45. Gender academies (1)
46. Graduation rate (1)
47. Principal terminations, resignations and retirements (1)
48. School calendar (1)
49. Student code of conduct (1)
50. Teacher evaluation system (1)
51. Transportation (1)

**APPENDIX C-1**

**Detroit Board of Education sample agenda, 1998**

1. Comments by the Board President followed by the General Superintendent
2. Area presentations
3. Public participation
4. Approval of minutes
5. Report from the President
6. Schedule of future Board meetings
7. Committee reports
8. Superintendent's report
9. Gifts
10. Theft/Fire Damage
11. Unfinished business
12. New business
13. Communications/Petitions/Hearings
14. Open forum

**APPENDIX C-2**

**Detroit Board of Education sample agenda, 1999-2005**

1. Roll call
2. Approval of agenda
3. Approval minutes
4. Student, staff, parent and community partnership recognition
5. Public comment
6. Action items
7. Information items
8. Public comment
9. Next board meeting

**APPENDIX C-3**

**Detroit Board of Education sample agenda 2006-2008**

1. Roll call
2. Approval of agenda
3. Approval of minutes
4. Board President's report
5. Committee of the whole
6. Superintendent's report
7. Committee on academic achievement
8. Committee on finance and budget
9. Committee on facilities
10. Committee on safety, student code of conduct and expulsion
11. Committee on human resources, policy, legislative affairs
12. Committee on parent and community involvement
13. Committee on audit
14. Public Comments

**APPENDIX C-4**

**Detroit Board of Education sample agenda, 2009-2014**

1. Roll call
2. Approval of agenda
3. Approval of minutes
4. Board President's report
5. Committee of the whole
6. Superintendent's report
7. Committee on academic achievement
8. Committee on finance and budget
9. Committee on facilities
10. Committee on safety, student code of conduct and expulsion
11. Committee on human resources, policy, legislative affairs
12. Committee on parent and community involvement
13. Committee on audit
14. Public Comments

## APPENDIX C-5

## Detroit Board of Education Meeting Details, 1998-2014

	Elected School Board, 1998	State Takeover, 1999-2005	Elected School Board, 2006-2008	Emergency Financial Manager, 2009-2014
<b>Scheduled Start Time</b>	6:00 pm	5:00 pm	6:00 pm	6:00 pm
<b>Average Start Time</b>	6:08 pm	5:29 pm	6:05 pm	6:12 pm
<b>Average Meeting Length</b>	1:48	2:20	4:37	4:07
<b>Percentage of Meetings Starting Late</b>	100%	96%	25%	90%
<b>Meeting Frequency</b>	Bi-Monthly	Monthly	Monthly	Monthly
<b>Number of Members</b>	11	7	11	11
<b>Number of Committees</b>	15	5	7	7
<b>Public Participation</b>	Third agenda item out of 14 items	Eighth agenda item out of nine items	Fourteenth agenda item out of 14 items	Fourteenth agenda item out of 14 items
<b>Location of the Meetings</b>	Schools Center Building (69%) Elementary Schools (18%) Other (12%)	High Schools (72%) Middle Schools (26%) Schools Center Building (1%)	High Schools (84%) Middle Schools (16%)	High Schools (48%) New Center One (29%) Middle Schools (17%) Elementary Schools (6%)

Source: Detroit Public Schools



## APPENDIX C-6

## Major discussion items for the Board of Education, 1998-2014

	<b>Elected School Board, 1998 (only)</b>	<b>State Takeover, 1999-2005</b>	<b>Elected School Board, 2006-2008</b>	<b>Emergency Financial Manager, 2009-2014</b>
<b>Major Items Discussed</b>	Leadership (24%)	Leadership (20%)	Leadership (12%)	Leadership (3%)
	Educational Programs (6%)	<b>Educational Programs (35%)</b>	Educational Programs (10%)	Educational Programs (17%)
	<b>Financial (26%)</b>	Financial (18%)	<b>Financial (36%)</b>	Financial (15%)
	Personnel (6%)	Personnel (9%)	Personnel (26%)	<b>Personnel (19%)</b>
	Community Support (13%)	Community Support (6%)	Community Support (-1%)	Community Support (-17%)
	Political Support (13%)	Political Support (1%)	Political Support (0%)	Political Support (10%)
	School Closures (0%)	School Closures (2%)	School Closures (5%)	School Closures (5%)
	Enrollment (0%)	Enrollment (4%)	Enrollment (5%)	Enrollment (4%)
	Charter Schools (8%)	Charter Schools (2%)	Charter Schools (3%)	Charter Schools (4%)
	Other (4%)	Other (3%)	Other (4%)	Other (4%)

**Source:** Detroit Public Schools

### APPENDIX D-1

#### Detroit Public School daily newspaper coverage by subject, 1999-2014

1. Audit/Budget/School finances (116)
2. Criminal activity by employees/Corruption/Fraud (101)
3. Board of Education (68)
4. Enrollment/Student issues (51)
5. School closures (43)
6. School issues/Student achievement issues/NAEP/MEAP (32)
7. Lawsuits (26)
8. Student safety/Student crimes in schools (26)
9. Teacher issues (26)
10. Charter schools (25)
11. Contracts with vendors (24)
12. Superintendent issues (24)
13. Lack of community support (23)
14. Layoffs (22)
15. Mayoral control/Oversight (22)
16. College matriculation (20)
17. Labor contracts/Negotiations (19)
18. State intervention in Detroit Public Schools (19)
19. Teaching and Learning issues (17)
20. Teacher shortages/Overcrowded classrooms (15)
21. Central office appointments (14)
22. Facility improvements/Facility upgrades/1994 Capital Improvement Bond (13)
23. School administrators (11)
24. School buildings (9)
25. Transportation issues (8)
26. Education reforms (6)
27. Athletics (5)
28. Curriculum (4)
29. District academic plan (3)
30. Special Education issues (3)
31. Dropouts (2)
32. No Child Left Behind Act (2)
33. Parental involvement (2)
34. Preschool education (2)

**Total** = 803 newspaper articles.

**APPENDIX D-2****Detroit Public School daily newspaper coverage by year, 1999-2014**

1. 1999 = 12 articles
2. 2000 = 14 articles
3. 2001 = 12 articles
4. 2002 = 10 articles
5. 2003 = 11 articles
6. 2004 = 10 articles
7. 2005 = 16 articles
8. 2006 = 17 articles
9. 2007 = 91 articles
10. 2008 = 38 articles
11. 2009 = 182 articles
12. 2010 = 178 articles
13. 2011 = 155 articles
14. 2012 = 24 articles
15. 2013 = 18 articles
16. 2014 = 15 articles

**Total** = 803 articles

**Mean** = 53 articles per year

**APPENDIX E-1****Detroit State of the City Address Summaries, 1999-2014**

1. Improving public safety/reducing crime (14%)
2. Budget issues/city finances (10%)
3. Blight (8%)
4. Improving the quality of life (7%)
5. Improving city services (5%)
6. Job creation (5%)
- 7. School board governance reform (4%)**
8. Political debate with Lansing (4%)
9. Job training (4%)
10. New construction projects (2%)
11. Redeveloping vacant land (2%)
12. Ending corruption (2%)
13. Recreation centers/parks (2%)
14. Improving public lighting (2%)
15. Improving public transportation (2%)
16. 2000 Census (1%)
17. New investment in the city (1%)
18. After-school programs (1%)
19. Purchasing vacant buildings (1%)
20. Accomplishments of city workers (1%)
21. Improving the relationship with the suburbs (1%)
22. Media fairness (1%)
23. Redevelopment of downtown buildings (1%)
24. Neighborhood redevelopment (1%)
25. Creating neighborhood departments (1%)
26. Improving the city's information system (1%)

## APPENDIX E-2

**Detroit State of the City Addresses Highlights, 1999-2014**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Mayor</b>	<b>Major Talking Points</b>	<b>Education Priority</b>
02/15/1999	Dennis Archer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Governance Reform for Detroit Public Schools;</li> <li>2. Improving public safety;</li> <li>3. 2000 Census; and</li> <li>4. Improving the quality of life in Detroit.</li> </ol>	<p><b>High:</b> advocated for reforms in Detroit Public Schools and supported a state takeover of Detroit Public Schools;</p> <p>Archer did not cite specific reforms in Detroit Public Schools other than 1,200 certified teachers were needed in the district;</p> <p>Cited Chicago Public Schools as an example of urban school governance reform.</p>
02/01/2000	Dennis Archer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improving city services;</li> <li>2. New investments in the city; and</li> <li>3. An issue with the language in the state takeover legislation.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Low:</b> Archer took exception to the governor's appointee having total veto power over his appointees for the selection of the new CEO in Detroit Public Schools;</p> <p>This state power in the takeover language was highlighted when the governors' appointee vetoed the selection of John Thompson as CEO.</p>
01/08/2001	Dennis Archer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improving city services; and</li> <li>2. Improving the quality of life in Detroit neighborhoods.</li> </ol>	<p><b>None:</b> Archer decided not to run for a third term.</p>
03/13/2002	Kwame Kilpatrick	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improving the Detroit Police Department;</li> <li>2. Projected budget shortfalls in Detroit;</li> <li>3. Eliminating blight in the neighborhoods; and</li> <li>4. Plans to start an after-school program called Mayor's Time</li> </ol>	<p><b>Low:</b> Discussions with the school district leaders about a new city-wide school program to keep kids off the streets.</p>

02/12/2003	Kwame Kilpatrick	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Balancing the budget;</li> <li>2. Improving city services;</li> <li>3. Improving the city's information system;</li> <li>4. New construction in Detroit; and</li> <li>5. New Reform Board appointees.</li> </ol>	<p><b>High:</b> Kilpatrick replaced all of Archer's appointees to the Reform Board citing the need for Detroit residents to be on the Board.</p> <p>Reminded parents that they are responsible for their child's education and Detroit is now providing parents with educational choices (i.e., charter schools).</p>
02/24/2004	Kwame Kilpatrick	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Redeveloping vacant land in the city;</li> <li>2. Purchasing the Central Train Depot;</li> <li>3. Accomplishments of city workers and improved city services;</li> <li>4. Reducing violence in Detroit; and</li> <li>5. Proposal E.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Low:</b> State legislation was approved for a referendum vote for Detroit citizens on the future of school governance in Detroit Public Schools (Proposal E);</p> <p>Detroiters would decide if Detroit Public Schools would remain under mayoral/control or return to an elected school board.</p>
03/22/2005	Kwame Kilpatrick	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Projected \$200 million budget deficit;</li> <li>2. The redevelopment of vacant land in the city;</li> <li>3. Improving the quality of life in Detroit neighborhoods; and</li> <li>4. Reducing crime in the city.</li> </ol>	<b>None:</b>
03/14/2006	Kwame Kilpatrick	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improving the quality of city services;</li> <li>2. Improving the city's relationship with the suburbs;</li> <li>3. Balancing the city budget; and</li> <li>4. Eliminating blight in neighborhoods</li> </ol>	<b>None:</b>
03/13/2007	Kwame Kilpatrick	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reducing crime;</li> <li>2. Estimated \$96 million budget deficit;</li> </ol>	<b>Low:</b> made critical comments of the Detroit Board of Education and how it was not providing a quality education to

			students in the city of Detroit.
		3. Job Training and job creation.	
03/10/2008	Kwame Kilpatrick	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Took exception to media scrutiny on the mayor and his family following the Text Message Scandal;</li> <li>2. Redeveloped buildings in downtown Detroit;</li> <li>3. Job training and job creation in Detroit;</li> <li>4. Improving the Detroit Police Department; and</li> <li>5. Neighborhood redevelopment</li> </ol>	<p><b>Low:</b> Mentioned a partnership with Detroit Public Schools and superintendent Dr. Connie Calloway about the creation of a naval themed boarding school on Belle Isle;</p> <p>The school would be named after Admiral J. Paul Reason;</p> <p>The idea of the school was developed from the research of Michigan State University sociologist Dr. Carl Taylor.</p>
02/10/2009	Ken Cockrel, Jr.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Systematic reform to end corruption on city contracts; and</li> <li>2. Improving police response time to emergencies</li> </ol>	<b>None:</b>
03/23/2010	Dave Bing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The elimination of blight (3,000) buildings;</li> <li>2. Job growth with Windsor along the international boarder;</li> <li>3. Building a new police headquarters; and</li> <li>4. The creation of two academies to train people in public healthcare and public safety careers.</li> </ol>	<b>Low:</b> mentioned schools 11 times in the speech, but did not offer any specific plans or reforms other than schools should do a better job of preparing students for the workforce and careers.
02/22/2011	Dave Bing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Loss of state revenue sharing;</li> <li>2. To eliminate corruption;</li> <li>3. Reducing crime with 75 more officers patrolling the streets; and</li> <li>4. Construction of the M-1 Light Rail Line.</li> </ol>	<b>None:</b>
03/08/2012	Dave Bing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Financial support from the state of Michigan to avoid an emergency financial manager;</li> </ol>	<b>None:</b>

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. \$150 million to fix street lights in Detroit;</li> <li>3. Demolition of 6,000 properties;</li> <li>4. Blight; residents are encouraged to buy vacant land for \$200;</li> <li>5. Recreation centers will remain open despite media reports; and</li> <li>6. Employment rolls were cut by 3,000 jobs.</li> </ol>	
02/14/2013	Dave Bing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Crime reduction with 80% of Detroit police officers patrolling the neighborhoods; and</li> <li>2. Demolition of 10,000 vacant properties.</li> </ol>	<b>None:</b>
02/26/2014	Mike Duggan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Street light upgrades with 500 new LED lights;</li> <li>2. Improving transportation in the city with new buses and mechanics to fix the buses;</li> <li>3. Keeping 150 parks clean with regular lawn mowing schedules;</li> <li>4. Creation of a neighborhood department for improved services and code enforcement; and</li> <li>5. Improving EMS response time with 15 new ambulances and the hiring of 70 new EMTs.</li> </ol>	<b>None:</b> Stated throughout the year that he was elected to fix the city of Detroit, not run Detroit Public Schools.

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**Sources:** *Detroit Free Press; Detroit News; City of Detroit*



**APPENDIX F-1**

<b>Institutional Progress Variables</b>	<b>Boston</b>	<b>Detroit</b>
<b>LEADERSHIP</b>		
<i>District leaders</i>	4 (1992-2013)	8 (1999-2014)
<i>Average tenure of district leaders</i>	5.25 years (1992-2013)	2.0 years (1999-2014)
<i>Turnaround strategy</i>	Six Essentials of Whole-School Improvement	N/A
<i>Central office structure</i>	Principals reported directly to the superintendent	Principals did not report directly to the superintendent
<i>Vision (since 1999)</i>	Focus on Children	N/A
<i>Mission (since 1999)</i>	Improve teaching and learning for all children	N/A
<b>EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS</b>		
<i>District-level reforms</i>	1. Preschool education 2. Standards-based reform 3. Smaller high schools 4. Literacy	1. Open Court Reading
<i>2010 graduation rate</i>	63%	40%
<i>NAEP 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading (2013)</i>	214 (39% below basic)	190 (70% below basic)
<i>NAEP 4<sup>th</sup> grade math (2013)</i>	237 (20% below basic)	204 (65% below basic)
<b>FINANCES</b>		
<i>Budget information (2014)</i>	\$15.4 million fund balance	\$232 million deficit
<i>State per-pupil funding</i>	\$14,518 per student	\$7,069 per student
<b>PERSONNEL</b>		
<i>Number of massive layoffs</i>	0	11 (2004-2014)
<i>Number of teacher strikes</i>	0	2 (1999 & 2006)
<b>COMMUNITY SUPPORT</b>		
<i>Community programs</i>	1. Boston Parent Org. Network 2. Family Resource Centers	N/A
<i>Sunset clause</i>	Voters did not support the referendum to end mayoral control	Voters supported the referendum to end mayoral control
<b>POLITICAL SUPPORT</b>		
<i>Role in the local political agenda</i>	26% (1992-2008)	4% (1999-2014)
<i>State Department of Education</i>	Supported standards-based reform	N/A

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**ABSTRACT****AN EXAMINATION OF URBAN SCHOOL GOVERNANCE REFORM IN  
DETROIT PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 1999-2014**

by

**SHAUN M. BLACK****May 2016****Advisor:** Dr. Michael A. Owens**Major:** Educational Leadership & Policy Studies**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

In 1983, the *A Nation at Risk* report stated that our educational institutions in the United States and especially in urban areas were not meeting the educational needs of our students. Since *A Nation at Risk*, elected school boards in urban areas were under fire from the media, parents, other civic and community leaders, and voters due to fiscal irresponsibility and poor student achievement. In selected urban cities across the nation, elected school boards were replaced in favor of mayoral control (e.g., Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, New York City, Philadelphia, and Washington DC) and appointed school boards (Wong et al., 2007). In 1999, the Detroit Public Schools (DPS) was taken over by the state of Michigan in an effort to reform the district. In 1998 prior to the state takeover, DPS had 261 schools, 167,000 students enrolled in the district, and a \$93 million budget surplus. In 2014 after several years of state control, DPS had 97 schools (-62%), 47,000 students enrolled (-71%) in the district, and a \$232 million budget deficit (-349%). During this same time period, DPS had eight different district leaders under three different school governance models. This qualitative historical case study developed an understanding of the overall impact of school governance reform on the institutional progress in

DPS from 1999-2014. *Institutional Progress* examines the overall functioning of a school district in the areas of: leadership, educational programs, finances, personnel, community support and political support. This study also described the external and internal barriers preventing DPS from making institutional progress. This qualitative study utilized four data sources: interviews of current and former Detroit Public School personnel (i.e., school board members, central and building administrators, teachers, parents and community activists), Detroit Board of Education meeting minutes reports, daily newspaper coverage of DPS from the *Detroit Free Press* and the *Detroit News*, and city of Detroit archives on the annual *State of the City Address* given by Detroit mayors to determine whether or not institutional progress was achieved in DPS from 1999-2014. The findings of this study were the following: 1.) there was a lack of institutional progress in Detroit Public Schools; 2.) school governance reforms in DPS did not have a positive impact; and 3.) internal and external barriers prevented DPS from making institutional progress.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

### Education

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2016: **Wayne State University** (Doctor of Philosophy); *Educational Leadership and Policy Studies*  
 2009: **Wayne State University** (Education Specialist); *General Administration and Supervision*  
 2003: **Wayne State University** (Master of Education); *Educational Leadership*  
 2001: **Wayne State University** (Bachelor of Science); *Social Studies Education and History*  
 1996: **Detroit Public Schools** (High School Diploma); *College Prep*

### Professional Experience

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2015-Present: **The Achievement Network (ANet)**; *Director of School Support*  
 2014-2015: **Chandler Park Academy High School**; *Turnaround Principal*  
 2012-2014: **Battle Creek Public Schools**; *Assistant Principal*  
 2004-2012: **Southfield Public Schools**; *Social Studies Teacher*  
 2001-2004: **Detroit Public Schools**; *Social Studies Teacher*

### Coaching Experience

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2008-2009: **Farmington Hills Harrison High School**; *Varsity Assistant Basketball Coach*  
 2005-2008: **Pontiac Central High School**; *Varsity Assistant Football Coach/Defensive Coordinator*  
 2004: **Southfield High School**; *Varsity Assistant Football Coach/Special Teams Coordinator*  
 2002: **Martin Luther King, Jr. Senior High School**; *Junior Varsity Head Football Coach*  
 2001: **Southfield High School**; *Freshman Head Football Coach*  
 2001: **21st Annual MHSFCA East-West All-Star football game**; *East Assistant Coach/Defensive backs*

### Presentations

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2013: **University Council for Educational Administration National Convention**: *“An examination of the effects of urban school governance reform and their indicators of institutional progress”*

### NCAA Intercollegiate Athletics

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1998-2000: **Wayne State University**; *Three-time varsity letterman in football*  
 1996-1998: **The University of Akron**; *One-time varsity letterman in football*