



Capstone Executive Summary

Setting PK-12 Education Policy for Responsible Oversight in Community

An Idea Whose Time Has Come

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## List of Abbreviations

CEC	Community Education Commission
CFDS	Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren
DEC	Detroit Education Commission
DPS	Detroit Public School
DPSCD	Detroit Public School Community District
EAA	Education Achievement Authority
GLEP	Great Lakes Education Project
M-STEP	Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress
MDE	Michigan Department of Education
NACSA	National Association of Charter School Authorizers
NCC	Nashville Charter Collaborative
SGP	Student Growth Percentile
<i>TCIO</i>	<i>The Choice Is Ours</i>

Greater than the tread of mighty armies is an idea whose time has come.

— Victor Hugo

## Executive Summary

### Area of Inquiry

This project examines the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS) in partnership with the 482Forward grassroots organization failed attempt to pass state legislation in 2016 to create a new, nonpartisan entity called the *Detroit Education Commission*, to coordinate and streamline citywide education functions. The accompanying Detroit Education Commission (DEC) idea was a legislation proposal attached to a larger crisis or “focusing event.” The focusing event was the Detroit Public Schools’ (DPS) debt crisis and key legislation to prevent a looming bankruptcy and potential dissolution of the Detroit Public School District (DPSD). The prominent agenda item was the state’s assumption of the Detroit Public Schools’ debt and returning the governance of DPS to an elected school board. Other education reform proposals, inclusive of the DEC proposal, accompanied the DPS’s legislation proposal. These other proposed Detroit education reform policies were attached to the DPS’s legislation as solutions to increase the quality of Detroit schools as DPS emerged from bankruptcy. Specifically, the Detroit Education Commission legislation proposal and other accompanying proposals were designed to increase the communication and coordination between the authorizers, Detroit city planners and city officials, and the traditional district and charter schools in service of quality PreK–12 education in Detroit, Michigan.

I worked with 482Forward in an effort to understand why this specific DEC policy initiative failed to make it from the decision agenda into final legislative action and to use the findings to inform future directions and priorities for 482Forward, the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren, and the broader education policy community.

## **Project Context**

Of the 114,000 K–12 school-aged children living in the city of Detroit, approximately 50,000 attend the Detroit Public School Community District (DPSCD); 36,000 attend public charter schools, and approximately 28,000 attend school in the surrounding suburbs. There are ninety-three DPSCD schools and eighty-four public charter schools in Detroit serving 86,000 students. More than 60% of K–8 students attending Detroit schools are performing below the state average in academic growth with less than 12% proficient in reading and less than 16% proficient in math (MSD, n.d.). Less than 10% of Detroit high school students are meeting the College Readiness SAT Benchmarks.

In 2017, Dr. Nikolai Vitti was hired as the superintendent of the Detroit Public School Community District to lead the turnaround efforts to increase student achievement across the traditional district schools and is now into his fourth year of a turnaround. The DPSCD elected school board serves as a single point of accountability and coordination for Dr. Vitti. Additionally, Dr. Vitti actively lobbies for his district to help raise funding and provide resources for Detroit children to help them achieve higher academic performance. According to the 2018–2019 Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress (or M-STEP) state data, the most recent valid assessment due to COVID-19, there are indicators of academic gains within the DPSCD.

Conversely, the Detroit charter school districts, serving approximately 32% of Detroit children, have ten different charter authorizers with each authorizer using different requirements and standards for the schools they open, monitor, and reauthorize. A recent news article in *The Detroit News* captured the issue this way:

“Michigan was one of the first states to allow charter schools,” Citizens Research Council President Eric Luper said. “The focus then and for many years to follow was

to enable the charter school movement to take roots and become part of the education landscape. Oversight was a neglected aspect of those efforts.” (Chambers 2020)

Each of the charter authorizers is located outside of Detroit, with the exception of DPSCD which authorizes six of the ninety-one charter schools (CEPI 2019) and has limited ability to lobby or fundraise for the individual charter schools or charter districts they authorize within Detroit. Many of the charter schools have changed management companies’ multiple times and have shut down and closed their doors leaving students displaced; of the ninety-one charter schools remaining from the original (approximate) 200, less than 20% are delivering quality results as measured by the M-STEP student growth and proficiency data (MSD, n.d.). Many management companies formed due to the lenient chartering rules and Governor Snyder’s public education agenda calling for an “expansion of charter schools...and removing the cap of the number of charter schools” (Mason and Arsen 2014, 19).

Charter schools, which at one time were viewed as a silver bullet to solve Detroit’s schooling problems, have added layers of complexity and dysfunction to an already complicated set of circumstances. Although some charters have demonstrated consistent improvement in student-learning metrics, the large majority have performed no better or worse than neighborhood schools and have faced no consequences (Chambers 2020).

In 2014, 482Forward, a network organization comprised of many community-led advocacy groups inclusive of Detroit’s education, civic, and philanthropic leaders who have historically fought for quality education, launched a campaign to create greater accountability for Detroit charter schools and community control over traditional public schools. At the time, the Detroit Public School Community District was under state-mandated emergency management and the Detroit community wanted control back. In the midst of launching the campaign, 482Forward learned they were not the only activist group advocating for changes to charter school arrangements in



Detroit.

In response to these political winds, 482Forward, in partnership with approximately 100 community, civic, business, philanthropic, and political leaders, came together as the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS). The CFDS advocacy group worked together to create legislative recommendations outlining how Detroit should improve its system of schooling. In March of 2015, the Coalition released their recommendations which included, but was not limited to, the creation of the Detroit Education Commission (DEC) to help coordinate education functions in the city of Detroit. Senate Bill 710, which included the DEC legislation proposal, died. In 2016 the State of Michigan House of Representatives proposed and passed a modified package of the Coalition's recommendations in House Bills 5383 and 5384. The changes made to the bill cut the DEC provision that 482Forward and CFDS had advocated for, and this essentially killed the chances of legislation on charter school coordination.

## **Conceptual Framework**

I drew on John W. Kingdon's Multiple Streams Model as a conceptual tool to direct and organize this investigation. Kingdon's framework offers a framing for why some ideas survive a policy-making process and why other ideas do not. Kingdon (2011) asserts that policy changes occur with the coupling of streams at a time a "policy window" may open or close. The streams include: the problem stream, the policy stream, and the political stream.

- The problem stream is defined as the problem recognition of issues in society that captures the attention of people in and around the government.
- The policy stream pertains to what Kingdon calls the "policy primeval soup" inclusive of a policy community that concentrates on generating policies and proposals.
- The political stream refers to various political events, political forces, and other related

governmental phenomena that have powerful effects on agendas (Kingdon 2011).

Kingdon suggests that these three separate streams can come together at critical times and solutions from the policy stream to “become joined to problems, and both of them are joined to favorable political forces...this coupling is most likely when a policy window...is open” (Kingdon 2011, 194). Kingdon explains that “policy windows” are important political openings for a policy idea to become law. He also states, “Once a window opens, it does not stay open for long. An idea’s time comes, but it also passes” (169).

### **Research Question(s)**

Aligning the context, literature review, and Kingdon’s agenda-setting framework, I established a central research question: Why was the recommended legislation to “create a new nonpartisan entity, the Detroit Education Commission, to coordinate and rationalize citywide education functions” put forward, in March 2015, by the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS), killed in Senate Bill 710, and removed from the rebranded House Bills 5383 and 5384?

- a. Problem Stream. In what ways was the definition of the problem recognized/not recognized as a pressing problem to gain a prominent place on the policy agenda?
- b. Policy stream. In what ways did the Coalition’s policy proposal meet or fail to meet the necessary criteria to survive in the policy primeval soup (a strong policy community and presence of policy entrepreneurs to advocate for the legislation, value acceptability, and alternatives) to successfully pass through the selection process onto the decision agenda?
- c. Political Stream. What political events, political forces, or other governmental phenomena affected the CFDS’s policy agenda in 2016?

### **Data, Analysis, and Methodology**

To investigate this question, I followed Kingdon’s approach to policy analysis, drawing on a

range of available data sources and generating new data by way of semi-structured interviews. I first reviewed existing data collected by 482Forward and CFDS, which included news articles about the CFDS's policy recommendations, participatory research on charter authorizers, traditional district schools and community organizations, community-based research led by community members that were impacted, and legislative documents. These documents allowed me to examine my research question(s) using Kingdon's conceptual framework. Second, I turned to interview stakeholders, which included members and allies of 482Forward and the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren. My findings show how within each stream, the Detroit Education Commission had mixed results meeting the criteria for survival, but ultimately failed under the weight of political forces and concurrent political events. Finally, I offer recommendations that are a possible path for sustainable education reform in the city of Detroit and potentially for the state of Michigan.

## **Findings**

***Problem Stream Finding.** The problem was that “the schoolchildren of Detroit are suffering—still...and academic achievement remains tragically low.” This was recognized as a Detroit problem and met the necessary criteria to gain a prominent spot on the decision agenda. However, because the narrative and framing were focused primarily on Detroit, the problem was not perceived as pressing enough to move the idea from the decision agenda into final legislative action.*

The state of Detroit's schooling has long been recognized as underperforming, relative to the schooling being offered in the rest of the state of Michigan. So “creating quality education for Detroit children” rang true for many as it recognized a problem of a lack of quality education for students living in Detroit. As it was defined by the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren, “the schoolchildren of Detroit are suffering—still,” this problem met the necessary criteria to initially gain a prominent spot on the decision agenda. The authors of the bill comprehensively framed the multifaceted,

highly complex, Detroit education problem(s) and supported these claims with significant amounts of data from reputable sources. However, Detroit-specific data was presented to a majority white middle-class audience of legislators, who could not see themselves, their children, or their communities in the narrative. The definition of the problem—“Detroit schoolchildren are suffering—still and academic gains are tragically low”—therefore did not register beyond the threshold that legislators deemed worthy of fighting for. The Detroit Public Schools’ debt elimination legislation had the potential to financially impact the entire state of Michigan, which captured the attention of legislators representing every part of the state. The remainder of the accompanying legislative proposals, inclusive of the Detroit Education Commission, was perceived as Detroit-specific. Therefore, although the data was powerful, it was not perceived as pervasive and not perceived as necessary enough to the legislators who had the power to approve it.

***Policy Stream Finding.** Although the 482Forward and Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren’s policy community had a diverse, broad coalition of specialists operating inside and outside of government advocating for the Detroit Education Commission (DEC) legislation, the specialists within the Coalition’s policy community were fragmented internally, which created varying levels of support for the DEC legislation. Despite the internal fragmentation, the DEC legislation made it into the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren’s final recommendations and onto the decision agenda which also included the prominent agenda item the Detroit Public Schools’ Debt. Ultimately, the DEC legislation recommendation was sacrificed to accomplish the “main thing,” which was the looming crisis of the Detroit Public Schools’ Debt.*

The strength of the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren’s (CFDS) policy community in many aspects came from its internal diversity and broad net of groups with a range of policy experience. There was strong advocacy for quality schools within the CFDS, but there was not

strong advocacy for the Detroit Education Commission's legislation as a solution because of the varying ideologies and value systems within this diverse coalition. The stark political ideologies of the Coalition's advocacy community led to internal fragmentation. In addition to the fragmentation, although the policy entrepreneurs supporting the Coalition were committed and skilled at their job of softening up the key individual(s) in Lansing, the DEC legislation was one of many recommended legislative proposals in a larger package of proposed legislative agenda items. The debt crisis was "the main thing," according to a key political entrepreneur, in the legislative package which trumped all other alternatives; therefore, the DEC legislation was cut from the bill and sacrificed.

***Political Stream Findings.** There was a preponderance of pressure from pro-charter school lobbyists, in the form of campaign financing and election repercussions, placed on key legislators to remove the Detroit Education Commission's (DEC) legislation from Senate Bill 710. In addition to this extreme pressure, the perception of Detroit's mayoral control of the DEC, the bubbling up of American Federation for Teachers' union strikes within Detroit Public Schools (DPS), and signs of corruption in the current DPS administration threatened to change the mood in Lansing against any DPS legislation. The combination of these political forces and political events led to the failed Senate Bill 710, which included the proposed DEC legislation.*

A majority of the respondents named pressure groups' campaign finance contributions and the threats of negative election repercussions as a key reason the Detroit Education Commission (DEC) legislation was stripped from the bill. In addition to pressure group influence, respondents stated there were political forces like perceived mayoral control of the DEC that hindered the passage of legislation and other political events which included the American Federation for Teachers' union strikes and allegations of corruption at Detroit Public Schools (DPS). The DEC legislation was sacrificed to "do the thing that mattered the most" within the small policy window, which was resolving the DPS' debt and

returning the school to local control. As certain political alliances converged and advocates for the DEC were either sidelined or forced to choose between competing priorities, a movement spelled the end of 482Forward's and the CFDS's hope for the Detroit Education Commission legislation.

## **Recommendations**

***Recommendation 1. Support a Detroit Charter Collaboration: Support the creation of a local charter-led collaborative to lead in the coordination of Detroit charter schools as the next iteration of charter coordination in Detroit.***

This recommendation addresses several of the reasons the Detroit Education Commission (DEC) model was rejected by internal stakeholders—lack of autonomy, lack of local control, and the need for self-determination—and was ultimately removed from the CFDS's legislative package. The recommendation to support the creation of a local charter-led collaborative to lead in the coordination of Detroit charter schools is grounded in the challenges that the previous DEC policy faced in the stages of problem articulation, policy negotiation, and political buy-in, which was reviewed above.

***Recommendation 2. Support an Unlikely but Forward Thinking, Innovative Partnership: Support the creation of a strategic alliance with the pro-charter lobby Great Lake Education Project (GLEP), Detroit charter leaders, Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren, and 482Forward to fund the acceleration of coordination between charter school districts in Detroit.***

This recommendation is based primarily on finding number three, which concluded there was a preponderance of pressure from the pro-charter interest group, Great Lakes Education Project (GLEP), placed on key legislators to remove the Detroit Education Commission (DEC) legislative recommendation from the bill. Given the significant influence and affluence of GLEP, I believe

482Forward, Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren, and the Detroit charter leaders should explore an alliance. The GLEP, which is pro-charter, could bring direct funding to the proposed alliance which could accelerate coordination of charters in service of Detroit families and children, which is one of the goals put forward in the DEC legislation.

***Recommendation 3. Broaden the Narrative, Broaden the Coalition: Craft a statewide narrative with a broad statewide coalition with supporting data and indicators that clearly define the quality education issue as a statewide problem.***

Data revealed “the schoolchildren of Detroit are suffering—still...and academic achievement remains tragically low” as a Detroit problem and met the necessary criteria to gain a prominent spot on the decision agenda. However, because the narrative and framing were focused primarily on Detroit, the problem was not perceived as pressing enough to move the idea from the decision agenda into final legislative action. If 482Forward and the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS) makes a second attempt at legislative action, the advocates must reframe the problem as a broader statewide quality education narrative in partnership with a broader coalition of policy communities throughout the state and a broader base of policy entrepreneurs in Lansing. The chaotic and uncoordinated education landscape between charter schools and traditional district schools is not isolated to Detroit only, as explained in the CFDS’s literature. There are 365 charters across the state of Michigan in rural communities and other urban areas struggling with the same quality school problem.

## Introduction

482Forward is a citywide education-organizing network in Detroit comprised of neighborhood organizations, parents, and youth committed to ensuring that all Detroit children have access to an excellent education, regardless of their race or socioeconomic status. 482Forward believes families have the right to help define solutions to problems in their schools and in their communities, and student success is the collective responsibility of the entire community. Their vision is to “create a Detroit where every student graduated is ready to become a fully-engaged participant in the world, equipped with the character and the capacity to negotiate their environment and change it for the better.”

In 2014, 482Forward launched a campaign to create greater accountability for Detroit charter schools and community control over the traditional public schools—the Detroit Public Schools (DPS). At that time, DPS was under state-mandated emergency management and the community wanted control back. In the midst of launching the campaign, 482Forward learned they were not the only ones in front of these education issues. 482Forward knew and worked with some of the community, civic, and philanthropic leaders who have historically fought for quality education, however, the conversations around the inequities in education were once again rising to a heightened level and were on the radar of several other community-based organizations. In addition to a heightened level of discussion, the “governor’s office was expected to announce proposed legislation for the Detroit schools” (Lenhoff et al. 2019, 6). Community leaders wanted to get out in front of the legislation.

As a response, 482Forward, in partnership with other community-based organizations such as the American Federation of Teachers, the NAACP Detroit Chapter, MOSES, Black Family Development Inc., the Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation, the Skillman Foundation, plus approximately 100 community, civic, business, philanthropic, and political leaders, created the



Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS). The CFDS advocacy group worked together to create legislative recommendations for how Detroit should improve its chaotic and inequitable school ecosystem. In March of 2015, the Coalition released their recommendations which included, but was not limited to, the creation of the Detroit Education Commission to help coordinate education functions in the city of Detroit. In June 2016, the State of Michigan House of Representatives passed the modified package of CFDS's recommendations that did not include the creation of a Detroit Education Commission. This policy recommendation was removed from the bill.

Despite the failed policy attempt, 482Forward and the broader Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren have continued their advocacy on behalf of children but have not revisited the legislative push.

In what follows is a study I have coined *Setting Responsible PreK–12 Education Policy In Community: An Idea Whose Time Has Come*. I will investigate the policy process undertaken by 482Forward as a member of the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren. I will explore at which point(s) in the policy process the progression was either interrupted or incomplete. The purpose of this project is to look back in order to look ahead and make a recommendation to 482Forward where I have identified what can be done differently in their next legislative attempt to increase their odds of success as they have pledged to continue the fight.

## **Organizational Context**

### **Partner Organization 482Forward**

482Forward is a citywide education-organizing network in Detroit comprised of community-led advocacy groups, neighborhood organizations, parents, and youth committed to ensuring that all Detroit children have access to an excellent education, regardless of their race or socioeconomic status.

482Forward also includes Detroit-based education, civic, and philanthropic leaders who have historically fought for quality education. 482Forward believes families have the right to help define solutions to

problems in their schools and in their communities, and student success is the collective responsibility of the entire community. Their vision is to “create a Detroit where every student graduated is ready to become a fully-engaged participant in the world, equipped with the character and the capacity to negotiate their environment and change it for the better.”

The non-profit consists of two categories of memberships: organizational members and individual members. The organizational members are faith-based, school, or any other organizations that demonstrate a significant commitment to the mission; there are currently ten organizational members which include ACCESS, Brilliant Detroit, Brightmoor Alliance, Congress of Communities, the Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation, Developing K.I.D.S, Hope Village Initiative at Focus Hope, Total Life Christian Ministries, MI Student Dreams, and Urban Neighborhood Initiatives. The individual members are parents, youth, or community members that demonstrate a significant commitment to the mission.

482Forward started in 2014 with nine neighborhood-based organizations that recognized the loudest voices in education were not parents, were not students, nor were they educators—despite being the most impacted groups in education. These nine organizations started 482Forward to change that.

All 482Forward members are also members of the neighborhood-based action teams, issue-focused network committees, or the organizing collaborative of students called the Youth Collective. Action teams are committees of parents, students, and/or community members that receive training in community-organizing tactics and local school issue identification; they run campaigns for policy changes in their neighborhood schools. 482Forward has action teams in Hope Village, Southwest Detroit, Northeast Detroit, and Brightmoor. Network committees offer members more narrow and in-depth training on specific areas that helps the organization develop a greater capacity to support our campaigns. Currently, 482Forward’s organization has network committees for policy, membership, communications, research, and training. All of their youth-serving member organizations participate in the Youth

Collective, sending student representatives to be trained in organizing, developing, and running shared campaigns.

## **482Forward Impact**

482Forward, in partnership with their partner organizations, has made significant improvements in the lives of Detroit students, families, and educators, including advocating for \$667 million to stabilize Detroit Public Schools and prevent the district from filing bankruptcy. They have supported the termination of emergency management of Detroit Public Schools and a return to an elected, empowered school board for Detroit Public Schools. 482Forward's organization played a key role in the dissolution of the failed Education Achievement Authority, an oversight body established in 2011 that failed to deliver on its mission to turn around failing schools. 482Forward has also helped stop twenty-five school closures in highest-need neighborhoods and their grassroots community efforts include educating over 2,000 Detroit voters about school board elections in 2016 and an intensive voter education program for 400 Detroit voters in 2018 state elections.

## **Theory of Action of 482Forward**

The 482Forward organization works in partnership with the community to build power to make systemic change and win educational justice for communities through education organizing. Education organizing refers to the action of parents and other residents in marginalized communities to transform low-performing schools toward higher performance through the intentional building of power. Education organizing focuses on system change and school accountability. 482Forward's theory of action includes improving educational outcomes as a part of a broader agenda of creating justice for low- and moderate-income communities.

## **482Forward and the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren**

482Forward is a member of the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS). Angela Reyes, Executive Director of the Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation, serves as both a founding member of 482Forward and a founding member and co-chair of the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren. “The Coalition was formed with an understanding that a coordinated effort of community partners was needed to leverage local and state resources to improve all schooling options for Detroit children” (as cited in Lenhoff et al. 2019). The CFDS was led by six co-chairs: Tonya Allen, Skillman Foundation President and CEO; Rev. Wendell Anthony, Fellowship Chapel and President of the Detroit branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); David Hecker, President of the American Federation of Teachers Michigan/AFL-CIO; John Rakolta, Jr., CEO of Walbridge; Mark Reuss, Executive Vice President of Global Product Development, Purchasing, and Supply Chain of General Motors; and Angela Reyes, Executive Director of the Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation. The Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren steering committees and leadership teams were made up of over 100 community members. Members of 482Forward served as CFDS’s co-chairs and sat on the steering committees and leadership teams. The CFDS authored *The Choice Is Ours: Road to Excellence for Troubled Michigan Schools Begins in Detroit* which advocated for several pieces of key legislation including the creation of the Detroit Education Commission.

## **Context of the Problem and Policy**

Detroit schoolchildren are performing significantly below their peers in Michigan and across the nation. Many advocates for quality schools feel that the contributors to the low academic performance are a poorly regulated, uncoordinated, chaotic Detroit education ecosystem.

There are approximately 114,000 K–12 school-aged children living in the city of Detroit. Approximately 50,000 of those children attend the Detroit Public School Community District (DPSCD), 36,000 attend public charter schools, and approximately 28,000 attend school in the surrounding suburbs.

There are ninety-three DPSCD schools and eighty-four public charter schools in Detroit. More than 60% of the K–8 students attending schools in Detroit are performing below the state average in academic growth in English language arts and math; less than 12% are proficient in reading and less than 16% are proficient in math, as measured by the Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress (M-STEP) (MSD, n.d.). The M-STEP is administered annually to assess student growth and student proficiency in math, English language arts, and, most recently, science. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which is the national assessment of student learning that provides a comparison among states, Detroit is the lowest among other major cities with similar demographics (NRC, n.d.). They have also found that less than 10% of Detroit high schools meet the College Readiness SAT Benchmarks.

### **Context: DPSCD and Charter Schools**

In 2017, Dr. Nikolai Vitti was hired as the superintendent of the Detroit Public School Community District (DPSCD) to lead the turnaround efforts to increase student achievement across the traditional district schools. Dr. Vitti is now into his fourth year of an aggressive turnaround and has seen indicators of modest success, according to the 2018–2019 M-STEP data. Dr. Vitti feels that with continued investment, discipline, and oversight, over the next few years the DPSCD schools could be positioned to make even more progress in academic achievement. This is Vitti’s vision for the 50,000 students who attend DPSCD.

Approximately 36,000 students attend a public charter school in Detroit. The charter schools in Detroit have ten different charter authorizers with each authorizer using different requirements and standards for the schools they open, monitor, and reauthorize. Such variation might be acceptable if charter schools leveraged flexibility to deliver better outcomes relative to a neighborhood school. This, however, is not the case as demonstrated by the three-year Student Growth Percentile and the inequitable and socially unjust treatment of students and families.

*Student Growth.* The state of Michigan utilizes a statistical methodology called Student Growth Percentiles (SGP) to measure year-over-year academic growth. According to the 2018–2019 Center for Educational Performance and Information data, on average, Detroit K–8 students attending public charter schools are performing lower than their academic peers with an average SGP Composite Score of 48 and growing less than one year. Only two out of ten charter authorizers’ portfolio of schools met the state average for growth year-over-year. One of the aforementioned authorizers, Northern Michigan University, has only one school in its portfolio; this data is significant because Detroit students are moving from grade to grade already behind academically and in order to catch kids up and get them prepared for college and life, they need more than the one-year worth of academic growth year-over-year.

*Proficiency.* Michigan State University Education Policy Innovation Collaborative in July 2019, studied the projected impact of the Read By Grade Three legislation and estimated 19.7% of third graders in partnership schools (partnership schools are the lowest-performing schools) were projected to be retained in third grade as compared to 3.7% of their peers in suburban districts (EPIC 2019). This means 20% of Detroit kids are performing so low in reading that with the new legislation they are projected to fail third grade.

## **Social Injustice and Inequitable Treatment**

Many education advocates feel the lack of proper vetting, monitoring, and accountability by the authorizers are the primary reasons school closure disruption continues to happen to our students and families across Detroit. In addition, the lack of proximity to Detroit also perpetuates issues of equity.

In September 2018, three and a half weeks after the school started, Delta Preparatory Academy for Social Justice, managed by EQUITY Education and authorized by Ferris State University, announced it would be shutting its school doors at the end of the week, displacing 344 students and leaving families to find a new school for their children in the middle of the school year (Einhorn and Levin 2018).

Just as recently as May 2019, another charter school management company, Education Alliance Solutions, responsible for Southwest Community School District and authorized by Grand Valley State University, announced it was closing its school doors due to an eviction notice from the property owners, displacing over 347 students.

Both management companies were unable to fulfill their financial obligations, in part, due to incomplete or inaccurate charter applications without sound business models, poorly designed start-up plans, lack of capital needed in the long run, and, in many cases, executive teams with limited organizational leadership and education experience—all of which are criteria authorizers are responsible for vetting. The lack of proper vetting, monitoring, and accountability by the authorizers is a primary reason school closure disruption continues to happen to our students and families across Detroit.

In addition, the charter authorizers are all located outside the city of Detroit (with the exception of Detroit Public School Community District, which authorizes six of the ninety-one charter schools) and are unaware and too far removed by the real impact the lack of diligent oversight has on students, families, and communities. Many have changed management companies multiple times or have shut down and closed their doors leaving students displaced; of the ninety-one charter schools remaining from the original 200, less than 20% are delivering quality results as measured by the M-STEP student growth and proficiency data. Many management companies formed due to the lenient chartering rules.

Charter authorizers are the entities that decide who can start a new charter school, set academic and operational expectations, and oversee school performance. They also decide whether a charter should remain open or close at the end of its contract (NACSA 2016). Charter authorizers decide who gets schools.

## **Area of Inquiry**

In 2014, 482Forward launched a campaign with the intention to create greater accountability, equity, and smarter planning for Detroit charter schools. While launching the campaign, 482Forward

learned they were not the only ones noticing the issues. In partnership with other community-based organizations such as the American Federation of Teachers, the NAACP Detroit Chapter, the Detroit Hispanic Community District, MOSES, Excellent Schools Detroit, and the Skillman Foundation, plus approximately 100 community leaders, they created the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS). This coalition worked together to create legislative recommendations for how Detroit should improve its chaotic and inequitable school structure.

In March of 2015, the Coalition released their recommendations which included, but was not limited to, the creation of the Detroit Education Commission (DEC) to help coordinate education functions in the city of Detroit. Senate Bill 710, which included the DEC legislation proposal, died. In June 2016, the State of Michigan House of Representatives passed the modified package of CFDS's recommendations in the form of House Bills 5383 and 5384 that did not include the creation of the Detroit Education Commission. The DEC policy recommendation was completely removed from the bill and was rejected from the policy agenda.

With the new opportunity introduced this year to partner on this capstone project, 482Forward views this as an opening to potentially make a second legislative push. To move ahead with the second effort, the organization needs a clear understanding of why the advocacy as a part of the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren in 2016 did not lead to the approval of the recommended policy legislation. Specifically, the goals of this policy analysis are to help 482Forward and the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren:

1. Determine why the Detroit Education Commission policy recommendation advocated by the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren was not passed by the House of Representatives in 2016, and



2. Offer recommendations that can inform future policy legislation to continue the quality education efforts of 482Forward and the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren.

## **Literature Review**

The state of Minnesota passed the first charter school law in 1991 with the confidence that charter schools would be the much-needed transformative agent in a public education system brimming with parents wanting alternatives for their children. The high expectation for charters led to an exponential proliferation of charter schools across the nation. Manno and Finn (2015, ¶ 1) write, “Since [1991], forty-three states and the District of Columbia have allowed for the existence and operation of these independent public schools. Today, some 6,700 of them serve nearly three million students, almost 6% of U.S. public-schools.” At their inception, charter schools were embraced as a disruptive innovation, giving access to higher quality education and helping close the achievement gap. However, in many cities and communities, charter schools have created “separate and unequal education systems, disproportionately located in, and harm, students and communities of color by depriving both of the high-quality public education system that should be their right” (NEA 2017, ¶ 2).

The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) is a national independent entity advocating quality education for all children by strengthening and promoting charter schools authorizing best practices and policies. NACSA examines the ongoing health of charter schools through the lens of authorizing and education policy. In the NACSA State Policy Analysis (2016, 8), NACSA found “Michigan’s charter school law, authorizing practices, and charter school quality varies tremendously, and local stakeholders vigorously debate how to improve them.” Michigan received a low score of sixteen out of thirty-three based on NACSA’s performance framework. And although the National Association of Charter School Authorizers is a well-respected advocacy group and charter authorizer accreditation body, their analysis, scoring, and perspective only serve as recommendations. The power to

hold charter schools accountable rests within individual states. Michigan charter schools are subjected to oversight from their authorizers, as well as limited oversight from the state government (CRCM 2020, 7). In Michigan, “authorizing body” is defined as any State Public University, Community College, K–12 Local Education Agency (Traditional School District), or Intermediate School District according to RSC §380.501(1) (MDE 2017, 2). The state superintendent and Michigan Department of Education (MDE) also have a documented, but insufficient, role in the accountability of charter schools. “All power given to the MDE and state superintendent is without explicit standards or consequences and that limits its effectiveness. MDE, like many state departments, approaches oversight as an exercise in ‘checkbox’ accountability” (CRCM 2020, 7). And despite the various entities with the responsibility of oversight to ensure children are well served, 482Forward and the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren were still unable to pass legislation to make local charter oversight an “issue.”

Kingdon (2011) explores the phenomenon of how “issues” become issues and the theory of policy making. The study of the policy-making process has historically focused on how policy issues are decided. Kingdon (2011, 196) instead describes the policy-making process as “why some subjects rise on governmental agendas while others are neglected, and why people in and around government pay serious attention to some alternatives at the expense of others.” His focus is not on the final decision but rather “why participants deal with certain issues and neglect others” (196).

Kingdon (2011) also states the convergence of three streams—problem, policy, and political—that must come together at a moment in time that presents the best opportunity for a launch: the policy window. “These policy windows, the opportunity for action on given initiatives, present themselves and stay open for only short periods” (166). And the outcome, in large part, depends on how these three streams are coupled. Kingdon distinguished between governmental agendas, which include subjects to which people in and around government are paying attention to a decision agenda which Kingdon (2011,

142) describes as “subjects that are moving into position for some sort of authoritative decision such as a legislative enactment.”

In addition to the convergence of the three streams and the infrequent but salient policy window opening, it is also important to tease out of the Kingdon model the influence of the political actors—the who. Whose interests are aligned with or aligned against the proposed policy actions? Bell (2005) puts forth a theory called “Interest Convergence” which argues that the collective interest of the minority is only realized when that interest converges with that of the majority. Using *Brown v Board of Education* as an example, Bell states that arguing for a policy on the merit of harm alone is not enough. Bell asserts that effective policy-changing strategies must align with and utilize interest-convergence factors.

In a modified version of Kingdon’s policy window, Ashford (2006) asserts agenda setting—Kingdon’s problem stream and coalition building—and Kingdon’s policy streams are helpful in conceptualizing the making process. Ashford deviates in his model and incorporates “policy learning” as a crucial element. Ashford’s policy learning component highlights the need to use data and information as key influencers in the process. “Those committed to issues have to work hard to bring evidence and concerns to the attention of the policymakers” (Ashford 2006). He explains how scientific evidence and research results were instrumental in creating health plans that were ultimately approved by the Kenyan Ministry of Health. Ashford finally concludes the availability of scientific research by policymakers can help trigger policy action. Ion and Iucu (2015) also argue that policymakers need more research in their decision-making process, specifically in the area of education policy. Kingdon (2011) articulates similar points in the problem stream and coins research and data as “indicators.” Kingdon (2011, 91) states “decision-makers and those close to them use the indicators in two major ways: to assess the magnitude of a problem and to become aware of changes in the problem” (91). He explains that defining the problem with indicators that are quantitative measures the level of attention and “the countable problem sometimes acquires a power of its own that is unmatched by problems that are less countable” (93).

Brown (2007, 20) also supports inserting clearly articulated research into the policy-making process by saying “researchers must ensure that they present their work in such a way that stakeholders across the streams and political parties can access their work used.” He goes on to leverage Kingdon’s multiple streams approach to explain how education policymakers and stakeholders in Wisconsin justified the need to construct and implement the state’s *No Social Promotion* statutes. Brown examines the role of key actors using Kingdon’s policy entrepreneur frame from the policy stream:

In applying this theory of the policymaking process to my investigation into stakeholders’ understanding of the need for Wisconsin’s *No Social Promotion* statutes, one finds that the *No Social Promotion* statutes spilled onto the policy agenda through the acts of former Governor Tommy Thompson (Republican), a visible participant who takes on an entrepreneurial role within this policy process. (4)

Brown also uses Kingdon’s available alternative framings and states: “At the same time, they [the policy advocates] must continue to put policy alternatives into the policy” (Brown 2007, 20). Kingdon (2011) warns availability of alternatives is not sufficient in isolation but the absence of alternatives significantly decreases the probability the issue will make it onto the decision agenda. Kingdon argued “the subject with an available alternative is one that rises on the agenda, crowding out equally worthy subjects that do not have a viable, work-out proposal attached” (as cited in Light 1982, 147–149).

Howlett (1998) explores policy window and policy theory and leveraging the applicability of Kingdon's theory of agenda-setting to Canadian political life. Howlett focuses more on the role of the government. He puts forth that governmental actors at all levels must also be able to recognize which issues are more likely to move from a social to political agenda if there is any hope of driving large-scale change.

Based upon the literature review, I will use Kingdon’s Multiple Streams Model (2011) as the primary framework to analyze the policy-making process for the 2016 House Bill 5834. The multiple streams

framework will be instrumental in identifying wherein the process there is an opportunity to make different choices on the next attempt to pass legislation.

## **Conceptual Framework**

I drew on John W. Kingdon's Multiple Streams Model for this study. Kingdon's framework offers a framing for why some issues make it on the policy agenda and why other issues are not considered. Kingdon (2011) asserts policy changes occur with the confluence of three distinct streams at a time of a "policy window." The threefold set of streams include: (1) the problem stream is defined as the problem recognition of issues in society that captures the attention of people in and around government; (2) the policy stream pertains to the policy community which concentrates on generating policies and proposals; and (3) the political stream refers to various political events, political forces, and other governmental phenomena that have powerful effects on agendas (Kingdon 2011). The policy windows, in which the three streams converge are brief, yet important, political openings. "These policy windows, the opportunity for action on given initiatives, present themselves and stay open for only short periods" (Kingdon 2011, 166). The outcome, in large part, depends on how the three streams—problem, policy, and political—are coupled.

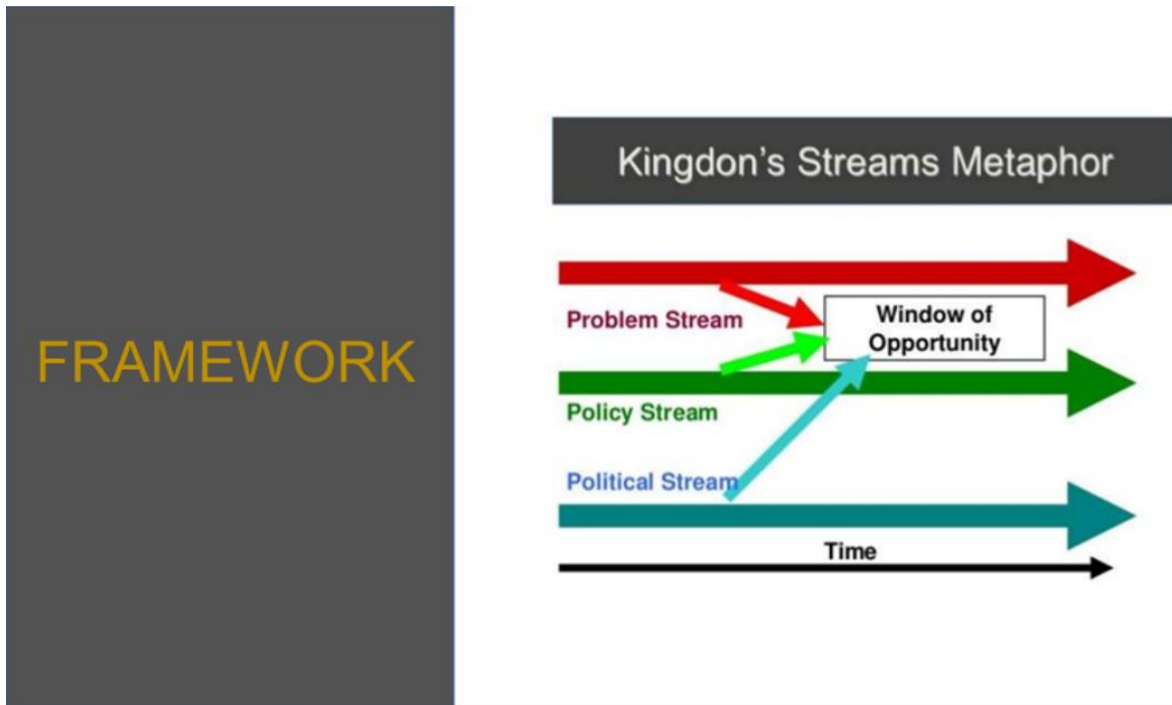


Figure 1. Kingdon's Multiple Streams Model. Ayushi Chaturvedi, 2017

## Questions

Despite the failed policy attempt, 482Forward and the broader Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren have continued their advocacy on behalf of children but have not revisited the legislative push. The proposed study is to investigate the policy process undertaken by 482Forward and the broader Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren, focusing on 482Forward as the partner organization. The findings from this study will help 482Forward in their next attempt to pass legislation, as they have pledged to continue the fight. The study will explore at which point(s) in the policy process was the progression interrupted or incomplete. Based on the findings from that study, what I am coining is the *Idea Whose Time Has Come Project*, which will make a recommendation to 482Forward and identify what can be done differently in their next legislative attempt to increase their odds of success.

This capstone project, Setting Responsible Pre-K-12 Education Policy in Community the *Idea Whose Time Has Come Project*, will examine the following research questions to guide the work of

482Forward: Why did the recommended legislation to “create a new nonpartisan entity, the Detroit Education Commission, to coordinate and rationalize citywide education functions” put forward, in March 2015, by the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren, get removed from the legislative package?

1. Problem Stream. In what ways was the definition of the problem recognized/not recognized as a pressing problem to gain a prominent place on the policy agenda?
2. Policy Stream. In what ways did the Coalition’s policy proposal meet or fail to meet the necessary criteria to survive in the policy primeval soup (a strong policy community, and a presence of policy entrepreneurs to advocate for the legislation, value acceptability, and alternatives) to successfully pass through the selection process onto the decision agenda?
3. Political Stream. What political events, political forces, or other governmental phenomena affected the Coalition’s policy agenda in 2016?

## **Project Design**

### **Sources of Data and Analysis**

The present research project utilized a mixed-method approach for policy analysis to investigate the aforementioned research questions. The research draws on a range of data which include (1) documentation from 482Forward and the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS); (2) semi-structured interview with key stakeholders (Brenner 2006); and (3) related press releases, news articles, and archived videos from the CFDS’s website.

### **Data Collection**

**Internal documents.** The first set of data I collected comes from existing documents provided by 482Forward. The documents include, but are not limited to, news articles about the work, participatory research on authorizers, and community-based research led by community members that were impacted

by charter school policy. Some of the documents include: *The Choice Is Ours Policy Recommendations & Roadmap* authored by the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren, 482Forward’s “Strategic One Pager,” and a one-page fact sheet called “Let’s Get the Facts Straight” by the Detroit Education Commission (*see* Appendix 3).

**External documents.** The second set of data came from the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren’s (CFDS) website. I reviewed reports and publicly-written communication about the Movement and other historical education reform efforts impacting the Detroit education landscape. I also searched media articles about the Movement. I collected communications to identify key choices in language that revealed how the issue was defined, how it was framed, and how it was interpreted and perceived by my various stakeholder groups. These included seventeen CFDS press releases; seven press releases were dated for “immediate release,” which left me uncertain if they were ever actually released. The CFDS’s website also linked to news media which included:

- Steering Committee Reflections on March 16, 2015
- CFDS’s Press Conference on March 2015
- Michigan Legislature Sessions on March 2016
- Freedom Institute Townhall Luncheon on May 2016
- CFDS’s Press Conference on May 2016
- Parents Speak Out YouTube Video on May 2016
- Our Schools Our Moment on December 2017

Other news media sources that I searched for references included the *Detroit News*, Michigan Radio, and a national education newsletter called *Chalkbeat Detroit*.

**Interviews.** The third set of data came from semi-structured interviews with key members of 482Forward and the CFDS. I used a snowball methodology for sample selection, beginning with the



482Forward CEO and following leads as key stakeholders were identifiable. My intention was to ensure I chose key members of the Coalition and had representation of the various stakeholder groups. I sought to maximize variation to gain perspective from philanthropy, education, business, parent, charter management, community leaders, political leaders, and legislators. In total, I interviewed seventeen members of the CFDS, which was inclusive of 482Forward members.

I focused my interviews primarily on co-chairs and subcommittee members of the CFDS because they were the leading voice behind the Movement. The CFDS was comprised of local politicians, elected officials, community leaders, and business leaders outside of the 482Forward organization. The Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren was established in 2014 and focused on key priorities to improve Detroit's system of schools—both traditional public and charter.

In addition to the CFDS, I interviewed staff of 482Forward, which included the advisory committees, community organizers, and a parent with children in the Detroit K–12 school system—all of whom were directly involved in the 2016 policy campaign.

I created an Interview Protocol document (*see* Appendix 2) to set some parameters and create a loose structure for the interviews (Brenner 2006). I designed the protocol as an outline of the three streams and the key elements applicable to each stream. The three-streams design of the protocol allowed me the freedom to explore, probe, and ask questions that elucidated and illuminated key themes from the various streams (Brenner 2006). I shared the protocol template with each respondent at the beginning of each interview. The respondents found it useful in helping to frame the conversation and some respondents commented that the prompts helped their memory recall as the timeframe being discussed was greater than four years in the past (2015–2016).

All the interviews added depth to my findings, although not all participants were supportive of my investigation. One respondent, in particular, refused to answer the questions as presented and warned me about asking these types of questions. I did not ask the respondents to identify a political affiliation,

however, their ideologies, their stances, and their language did reveal their potential political affiliation. Many of the respondents were left leaning and a couple of the more conservative respondents did self-identify as Republican. More than half of the respondents were from the city of Detroit, a few were from Metropolitan Detroit (surrounding suburbs), and a few did not live or regularly work in close proximity of Detroit.

All interviews occurred remotely via a Zoom video conferencing call that lasted approximately 30–60 minutes each; due to COVID-19, it was not possible nor practical to meet face-to-face. On rare occasions when a respondent had to take the interview en route to another meeting (one respondent) or when video conferencing technology failed during the interviews, the interviews were conducted by phone on an unrecorded line. However, to control accuracy in the case of unrecorded phone interviews, the interview responses were repeated back to the respondent verbatim to ensure accurate transcription. I used the auto-transcripts created in Zoom and took detailed notes of the two conversations that were not conducted in Zoom.

## **Data Analysis**

I used a deductive approach to coding, leveraging Kingdon's Policy and Agenda Setting Framework (Merriam 2019). The initial deductive coding framework consisted of Kingdon's Three Streams model including (1) problem stream, (2) policy stream, and (3) political stream. The thematic coding categories aligned with my research questions and allowed me to capture common themes across interviews and document reviews (Merriam 2019). For example, reviewing a Coalition's press conference I listened to each CFDS's co-chair person's framing of the issue, which aligned with the problem stream—how the issue was defined and recognized as a problem. I listened for and documented specific language, adjectives, and terminology used in presenting. The language suggested how the problem was initially defined by particular stakeholders and how it was being presented to various stakeholder groups including the news media.

I applied a three-step method to analyze all data for this study. First, I read the transcripts of the interviews and reconciled the transcripts against the video recordings of each interview. The reconciliation allowed me to ensure I accurately transcribed the participants' statements and allowed the first pass at identifying consistent themes in the interview data. Second, I collected and analyzed the publicly available 482Forward's website, documents, and reports, as well as the CFDS's website documents and reports. In addition, I viewed the videos, press conferences, and archived news footage from the Coalition of the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren's website always with an eye toward the three deductive codes of problem stream, policy stream, and political stream. I took detailed notes on the stakeholders present in the media and notes on what was being said via these different modalities and according to these three broad codes. At the time of the data collection between August 2020 and January 2021, some of the content on the CFDS's website had been deactivated or pulled down.

Third, I coded the documents, notes, and interviews using Kingdon's framework and assigned the three deductive codes of problem stream, policy stream, and political stream across all transcribed interviews. As I proceeded, I added additional subcodes where relevant to identify relevant themes within the deductive themes the Kingdon frame offered. For example, within text coded as *problem stream*, I identified areas where particular "indicators" were cited that had been used to define the problem in particular ways. When I encountered instances where text was not relevant to a particular code, I returned to the definitions of each code and either double-coded or added the code of "other" and returned to it in a later pass of the data (Merriam 2019).

The majority of the respondents (fifteen out of seventeen) provided content that was relevant and context that allowed me to see the broader, more complex nuances impacting the final policy outcome. Most of the content from the interviews was easily categorized within a specific stream. In some cases, the content qualified for placement in more than one stream. In these occurrences, I made a judgment call based on how I understood the content in the broader context.

In the analysis, I paid particular attention to how the problem was framed across all the mediums, who from the policy community was framing the narrative, and if there were individuals or groups that were vocal in speaking out against the proposed policy recommendation. I used the codes to clarify what category or stream the activity aligned most closely. I used the codes to capture the degree to which the elements in each stream were present indicating if enough of the necessary criteria were present to draw a conclusive finding. I discuss the findings in reference to the three-part research question to distill which element had an impact on the removal of policy recommendations out of the legislative package.

## Findings

In applying Kingdon's Three Stream Model, my study analyzed how an idea "to create a new non-partisan entity, the Detroit Education Commission, to coordinate and rationalize citywide education functions" met enough survival across the three streams—problem, policy, and political—to move onto the decision agenda. But it did not meet the necessary criteria to move from the decision agenda into legislative action.

**Problem Stream.** The state of Detroit's schooling has long been recognized as underperforming, relative to the schooling offered in the rest of the state of Michigan. So "creating quality education for Detroit children" rang true for many as it recognized a problem of a lack of quality education for students living in Detroit. As it was defined, "the schoolchildren of Detroit are suffering—still...and academic achievement remains tragically low." This problem met the necessary criteria to gain a prominent spot on the decision agenda. However, because the narrative and framing were focused primarily on Detroit children, too many, including key legislators, did not perceive the problem as pressing enough to move the idea from the decision agenda into final legislative action.

**Policy Stream.** Although the policy community had a diverse, broad coalition of specialists, operating inside and outside of the government, advocating for the Detroit Education Commission (DEC) legislation, the specialists within the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren's (CFDS) policy

community was fragmented internally, which weakened its ultimate position and contributed to the failed DEC legislation. The strength of the CFDS's policy community in many aspects came from its internal diversity and broad net of inclusion. There was strong advocacy for quality schools, but there was not strong advocacy for the DEC as a solution because of the varying ideologies and value systems within this diverse coalition. The stark political ideologies of the CFDS's advocacy community led to internal fragmentation. In addition to the fragmentation, although the policy entrepreneurs supporting the Coalition were committed and skilled at their job of softening up the key individual(s) in Lansing, the DEC legislation was an alternative the legislators chose not to pursue. The debt crisis was "the main thing" that trumped all other alternatives and ideas.

**Political Stream.** There was a preponderance of pressure from pro-charter school lobbyists in the form of campaign financing and election repercussions, placed on key legislators to remove the Detroit Education Commission (DEC) legislation from Senate Bill 710. In addition, the perception of Detroit's mayoral control of the DEC, the bubbling up of American Federation of Teachers' union strikes within Detroit Public Schools, and other political events and distractions happening in Detroit threatened to change the mood in Lansing against any Detroit Public Schools legislation. The perceived anti-Detroit mood swing prompted legislators to move forward quickly with a less controversial bill that did not include DEC legislation.

### **Finding 1: Problem Stream**

The state of Detroit's schooling has long been recognized as underperforming, relative to the schooling offered in the rest of the state of Michigan. So "creating quality education for Detroit children" rang true for many as it recognized a problem of a lack of quality education for students living in Detroit. As it was defined, "the schoolchildren of Detroit are suffering—still...and academic achievement remains tragically low." This problem met the necessary criteria to gain a prominent spot on the decision agenda. However, because the narrative and framing were focused primarily on Detroit children, too many,

including key legislators, did not perceive the problem as pressing enough to move the idea from the decision agenda into final legislative action.

### ***Problem Stream Context***

Kingdon (2011) asserts policy changes occur with the confluence or coupling of streams at the same time of an open “policy window”; each stream has a set of survival criteria. The problem stream is the first of the threefold set of streams. Kingdon defines the problem stream as the problem recognition of issues in society that captures the attention of people in and around the government. Before a policy is enacted, government officials focus their attention on problems that meet certain criteria. Specifically, part (a) of the research question directly references the problem stream and asks the question: *In what ways was the definition of the problem recognized/not recognized as a pressing problem to gain a prominent place on the policy agenda?*

To answer this research question, I outlined how problems capture the attention of key people. The overarching categories include the use of systemic indicators, focusing events that seize attention, and the interpretation of the issue as an actual problem.

### ***What Indicators did the CFDS point to define the problem?***

All respondents agreed to the problem statement put forth in *The Choice Is Ours* document that stated, “schoolchildren in Detroit are suffering...and academic achievement remains tragically low.” The problem was defined as “the lack of quality education.” The problem statement did generally refer to the lack of quality education as “shared across the state,” but more specifically the indicators and data used framed the problem as a Detroit problem “and it was perceived as a Detroit issue” according to several of the respondents; all respondents shared the view that Detroit children were at the center of the conversations and at the center of the policy recommendation.

According to Kingdon (2011, 90), there are many ways for issues to capture the attention of prominent government officials: “fairly often, problems come to the attention of government decision-makers...because some more or less systemic indicator simply shows that there is a problem out there.” Education policy problems come to the attention of members in and around the government in many forms such as political pressures and political maneuvering. In some cases, these indicators are routinely monitored by governmental officials and in cases of outliers or anomalies, these indicators trigger action.

**Pervasive, Necessary & Powerful Indicators.**

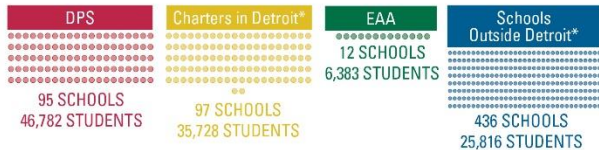
Based on the document reviews, interviews, and media coverage, there was evidence that the persons advocating for the policy marshaled a range of Detroit-specific indicators supporting the problem definition that “schoolchildren of Detroit are suffering—still...academic achievement remains tragically low.” The Detroit data was powerful but not perceived as pervasive and not perceived as necessary.

According to all members of the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS), the March 2015 *The Choice is Ours (TCIO)*, a roadmap and policy recommendation document, authored by the CFDS, was the foundational policy recommendation document delivered to the Governor of Michigan, Rick Snyder. In the opening pages of *TCIO*, the authors explicitly state “the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren has laid out a comprehensive plan to make quality schools a new norm for Detroit families.” All respondents in the interview agreed that the comprehensive plan and recommendations were aimed at trying to solve the lack of quality schools that had long plagued Detroit.

Many respondents stated in *The Choice Is Ours (TCIO)*, that the Coalition used quantitative academic data to define its argument of low-academic achievement and lack of quality schools. For example, in Chapter 2 of *TCIO* entitled, “Choosing Academic Excellence,” the authors used data that quantified Detroit as thirty-fifth in the nation in reading proficiency with African American students scoring “dead last” (CFDS 2015, 6). The Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren used this data to show 41% of high school students are not proficient in reading, emphasizing only 29% of African Americans are proficient in reading. *The Choice is Ours* used this data to support defining the issue of low-academic outcomes for Detroit children.

Chapter 3 of the same report entitled, “Choosing A Citywide System That Works for All Students and Families in Every Neighborhood,” defined the problem as a coordination issue: “No other city in the country has a system of schools quite like that of Detroit. It is hardly a system but instead an uncoordinated hodgepodge of schools that are not educating Detroit’s schoolchildren well” (CFDS 2015, 10). The indicators used in this problem definition include data such as “Detroit has fourteen different districts and authorizers” and “underneath those fourteen are more than fifty individual charter operators.” Additional countable data included “119,658 students attend hundreds of different schools” and “since 2000, more than 230 Detroit schools have been closed or reconfigured, impacting 75,000 students and their families.” The language consistent in this chapter further defines the problem with “there is no accountability,” “there is no stability,” “there is no efficiency,” and there is “no local responsibility or accountability.”

**Detroit’s 119,658 students attend hundreds of different schools, which are run by 14 different entities (authorizers and districts). These numbers don’t even take into account the many suburban schools that enroll mostly Detroit students.**



\*Charters in Detroit include those authorized by DPS and EAA. Schools outside Detroit include any school that enrolls at least one Detroit student. In 25 of these schools (traditional and charter), Detroit students account for more than 75 percent of enrollment. Source: 2013–14 Nonresident Enrollment file from the Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI)

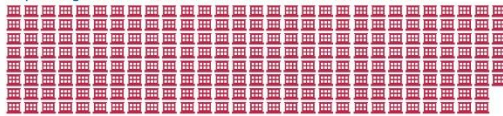
**None of these authorizers is locally controlled.**

Mileage from Detroit of the entities overseeing Detroit schools



**All of these authorizers and districts have the power to open and close schools on their own, without any coordination.**

Since 2000, more than **230** Detroit schools have been closed or reconfigured, impacting about **75,000** students and their families.

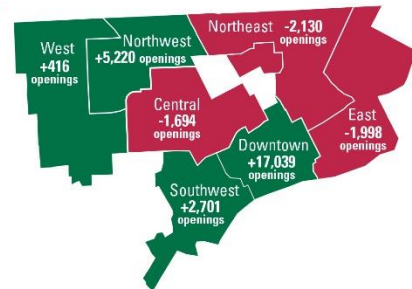


During the same time period, Detroit has had more than **100** schools either start new or convert from DPS-managed schools to public charters:



Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI)

**Some neighborhoods have too many schools, others have too few.**



Source: Data Driven Detroit calculation of seat over- or under-supply based on Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) 2015 population projections and Excellent Schools Detroit-provided estimates for school size: 800 students per high school and 85 students per K-8 grade, for all general education public schools located in Detroit (from Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI))

Figure 2. Taken from The Choice is Ours by the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren, March 2015, page 11.

In Chapter 4, “Choosing Equitable Supports for All Students and Families in Every



Neighborhood,” the problem was defined as the Detroit families’ inability to “take advantage of their options,” disparate enrollment procedure across schools, “no shared data systems,” “transportation as a barrier” to high-quality options, and lack of “equitable access to high-quality special education.” In Chapter 5, the advocates talked about the Detroit Public Schools’ (DPS) debt challenges and “fair and sustainable funding for all students and families in every neighborhood.” One of the key headers in this chapter was “the financial playing field is not level” with countable indicators that included DPS operating at a “deficit for twelve of the past fourteen years.” Additional indicators included the “\$53 million a year in debt service” DPS pays, which translates into “\$1,120” less per student for instruction.

Each chapter in this report included its own set of challenges and recommendations for solving the challenges. One of the recommendations was the Detroit Education Commission (DEC) legislation.

The Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS) added an additional one-pager to their collateral materials. The “Let’s Get the Facts Straight” one-pager outlined and countered what the CFDS felt were misconceptions about the DEC provision. The authors of the one-pager included qualitative data, in the form of true and false statements, specifying what the DEC would have the authority to do and what the DEC would not have the authority to do. Specifically, the document addresses four specific claims the advocates identified as “false” and included the “true” language to counter the false claims. For example, within the “Let’s Get the Facts Straight” (*see* Appendix 3) one-pager, the first false statements highlighted in red with the word “FALSE” in all caps stated: “The DEC would have the authority to close schools.” To counter what the advocate articulated to be a false narrative, highlighted in yellow was the word “TRUE” with what authors articulated was the true narrative: “The authority to close schools would remain under the State Reform Office. The DEC can NOT close schools...”

*To what extent was this defined problem (above) recognized by policymakers as an actual problem that required a policy response?*

Kingdon states that while pervasive, necessary, and powerful indicators are key elements to successfully defining a problem, indicators in and of themselves are not enough; and because some indicators are so formidable, interpretation of the indicators plays a significant role. “Indicators are not simply a straightforward recognition of the facts. Precisely because indicators have such powerful implications...the interpretations that are placed on these facts become prominent items for heated debate” (Kingdon 2011). The interpretations at play here were: the complexity of the K–12 education policy, perceived relevance of education implication outside of Detroit, racism, politics, and profit.

Many of the policy makers and legislators were far removed from Detroit and a majority of them were not education policy experts. The lack of understanding and lack of proximity impacted the perceived relevance of the issue outside of Detroit. And because Detroit is a majority-Black city, race may have played a role in the policy response or lack thereof.

**Complexity of K-12 Education Policy.**

A second challenge in conveying the problem to legislators was the policymakers' ability to grasp the complexity of K–12 education policy. Of the seventeen respondents interviewed, eight identified the lack of education policy knowledge in understanding the implications of equitable education policy or absence thereof. “Most of the legislators are educated, but never studied education policy,” explained one respondent. In another instance, a respondent stated, “Legislators just don’t get it, they have a specific lane, they are great in their lane, but the Detroit education system...Detroit community is not a lived experience for them.” This particular respondent goes on to state that the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS) made an argument that was so complicated and complex for them. Another participating respondent stated:

“One of the really difficult things as you know...grading schools is hard. Coming up with the right criteria, weighting them appropriately, all of that is really hard...so I think from a policy perspective I think most legislators don't really care about it because they're just not that well educated on the subject if I'm being frank... we had a couple of legislators like Senator Goeff Hansen who had done a ton of work, trying to understand the issue and lobbying for the issue on behalf of the CFSD...but he was one of the few.”

### **Perceived Relevance Outside Detroit.**

Legislators are removed from Detroit and they themselves and many of their constituents don't live in cities like Detroit. Policies affecting Detroit don't have the level of relevance that registers and the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS) weren't able to create a compelling narrative of why this issue mattered outside of Detroit.

I reviewed the narrative presented within *The Choice is Ours (TCIO)* document. The document opened with “Detroit, in many ways, is the canary in the coalmine. We believe that much of what is contained in this report is applicable to other failing school districts in Michigan...” (CFDS 2015, 2). One of *TCIO* headlines stated “A Struggling City in a Struggling State: The educational crisis extends well beyond the city of Detroit. Educational outcomes in Michigan have been steadily declining for years” (CFDS 2015, 6). Several respondents explained how the Coalition intentionally tried to frame the issue as not just a Detroit issue, but a “Michigan” issue. For example, a few respondents pointed to specific messaging in the figure as well as how the data figures did frame the issue beyond Detroit “like the figure on page 6.” Specifically, a few respondents gave additional examples explaining how the language articulated “low-academic outcomes are not isolated to Detroit.”

In a deeper examination of *TCIO* document, I noted eight specific references to quality education beyond Detroit. The prevailing positioning throughout the remainder of the twenty-eight page document, leaned more toward Detroit students, families, and communities; the recommendations were also more

Detroit-specific. The cover of *The Choice is Ours* was the Detroit skyline. Of the forty-four images of school-aged children, thirty-nine of the images were Black or Brown children.

While high-level messaging may have spoken to a statewide issue, a majority of the qualitative and quantitative indicators, supporting the problem articulated by the CFDS were clearly situated in a Detroit context. In addition, the recommended solution to the problem was the creation of an entity, the Detroit Education Commission, focused, specifically, on Detroit. As evidence of this finding, one respondent said, “We made an attempt to frame the problem as a broader education policy issue to help legislators understand this problem impacts all students across Michigan, but yeah, the data that was available at the time predominately focused on Detroit.” Similarly, one respondent stated, “One big lesson learned...build more robust coalitions, not just urban but also with rural communities.” Of the seventeen respondents interviewed, nine explicitly indicated the lack of proximity to Detroit as a barrier for legislators feeling compelled to act.

Conversely, one respondent explained that there was a fear from other cities similar to Detroit across Michigan in that “the perceived mayoral control in Detroit could set precedent to what happens in other cities like Benton Harbor.” This respondent also stated, “I think there was a lot of opposition to the Detroit Education Commission provision behind the scenes and throughout the education ecosystem—opposition we did not see or consider.”

### **Racism.**

Based on the comments and reflections from eleven of the seventeen respondents interviewed, race played a role in removing the Detroit Education Commission (DEC) legislation from the decision agenda. Given that the large majority of Michigan’s population outside of Detroit is white and that the children of Detroit schools are majority of color, interviewees suggested that legislators often saw Detroit problems as Black problems.

Kingdon (2011, 94) states that data alone isn’t sufficient, “Thus the data do not speak for themselves. Interpretations of the data transform them from statements of conditions to statements of policy problems.” When asked about the data and narrative presented, several of the respondents stated

the interpretation and translation of the data was quite clear but what existed in the legislature was a “lack of urgency and that lack of urgency was driven by race,” according to one respondent. The same respondent added, “You can’t talk about anything coming out of Detroit without having a race conversation.” Another respondent explained: “Racism came into play; many legislators did not care about the needs of Black and Brown and poor people in the city.” Similarly, another respondent shared:

“If you look at the indicators you see our Black children are doing worse in the state...the fact that we cannot have a policy that specifies race or gender in the state is a big problem...it’s stubborn and it’s a deep gap because as a state we cannot set policy that serve the people with the greatest need...we set policy that is race-blind.”

Eleven of the respondents pointed directly to racism, the history of marginalizing Detroit, and by having legislation and policy set by men who are overwhelmingly majority-white. For example, one respondent stated: “We put middle-class, middle-aged white men at the center of our policy discussion...this is the persona sets policy.” According to this respondent, a key reason white men don’t feel compelled to advocate for Black students or others is because white men believe they have worked hard and feel they are not getting from the government what they think they should have, so why advocate on behalf of Black people or Black children? One respondent observed “as a whole, the language coming out of Lansing was very racist” and this respondent heard language like “these Black people don’t know how to manage their own money...” This particular respondent went on to say “legislators isolated it as a Black issue that resulted in long-term improvements—it was a lot of ugly language being used and directed toward Detroit.”

This sentiment goes to an argument made by Bell (2005) who puts forth a theory called “Interest Convergence.” Interest convergence argues that the collective interest of the minority is only realized when that interest converges with that of the majority. Using *Brown v Board of Education* as an example, Bell states that arguing for a policy on the merit of harm alone is not enough. Bell asserts effective

policy-changing strategies must align with and utilize interest convergence factors.

David Hecker, at a Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren press conference in March 2015 stated: “The fact is that all urban districts are performing much better than Detroit. All we're asking for is a level playing field, one shared standard so that all kids can attend a quality school...our schools need to be empowered.” One respondent, referring to that press conference, questioned, “do people really care if our children are empowered?”

Analyzing the documents and the media clips, members of the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS), tried several variations of framing specifically for the legislator audience in order to appeal to their values. One CFDS steering committee member, Dan Varner, CEO of Excellent Schools Detroit, framed his conversation in the following context during the Michigan Legislature Session in March 2016:

“I'll start today by going back to our founding fathers. Of course they didn't get everything right, but one of the things that they got right was public education. Much has changed since 1780, but I would argue that the importance of public education has not, and I do believe that it is one of our greatest responsibilities collectively and one of your greatest responsibilities as elected representatives of the public and as members of this government. Public education is an incredibly important quality and an incredibly important thing for us to deliver to every child.”

This reframing narrative also came with countable data to help the legislators understand this is a Michigan problem, not just a Detroit problem. For example, in the same speech at the legislative session, Dan Varner used a visual to support his argument: “Just because we see data from different sources...periodically celebrate the performance of charter schools—to be clear with you that better performance still leaves all these kids in red on the right not proficient. It's atrocious across the board...”

The authors defined the Detroit quality education problem(s) using significant amounts of

countable Detroit-specific data from reputable sources, however, the Detroit data was presented to a majority white middle-class audience of legislators. These legislators could not see themselves or their children in the narrative; the definition of the problem did not register beyond the threshold that legislators deemed worthy of fighting for and therefore the data was perceived as necessary, although it was powerful.

## **Finding 2: Policy Stream**

Although the policy community had a diverse, broad coalition of specialists operating inside and outside of the government advocating for the Detroit Education Commission (DEC) legislation, the specialists within the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren's (CFDS) policy community was fragmented internally, which created a varying level of support for the DEC legislation. The DEC legislation did make it into the CFDS's final recommendations to the governor, however, it was presented with several other pieces of legislation. The DEC legislation was viewed as an alternative piece of legislation accompanying the prominent agenda item, the Detroit Public Schools (DPS) Debt. The DEC recommendation was sacrificed to accomplish the "main thing," which was the elimination of the DPS Debt.

### ***Policy Stream Overview***

The policy stream is the second of the threefold set of streams. The policy stream is defined as the policy community, spearheaded by a specialist who has ideas and concentrates on generating policies and proposals from those ideas. This stream captures how those proposals are "debated, redrafted, and accepted for serious consideration" (Kingdon 2011, 143). Kingdon refers to the generating of these ideas in this community as the "policy primeval soup." Specifically, part (b) of the research question directly references the policy stream and the "policy primeval soup" by asking the question: In what ways did the Coalition's policy proposal meet or not meet the necessary criteria to survive in the policy primeval soup and successfully pass through the selection process onto the decision agenda?

To answer this question, I outlined the various components of the primeval soup and selection process. The overarching categories included policy communities, policy entrepreneurs, value acceptability, and alternative ideas.

***To what extent was there a strong policy community that was advocating for the Detroit Education Commission provision to meet the identified problem?***

**Diversity and Shared Purpose.**

A majority of the respondents identified diversity and alignment around a shared purpose as the key strengths of the Coalition.

The Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS) consisted of leaders from education, community, business, and philanthropic sectors from across the city of Detroit. Based on interviews and external document reviews, the goal at the formation of the CFDS was to have a broad, diverse coalition. The co-chair explicitly focused on creating an inclusive, wide-ranging coalition based on lessons learned from previous movements. “How we went about the Coalition is directly related to failures. We did the Excellent Schools Detroit thing a few years ago...we did this thing where it very much looked like an elite group of people behind doors...” (as cited in Lenhoff et al. 2019, 12) “Part of the Coalition in my mind was...having an eye towards inclusion that we have not traditionally had, so having it in terms of political views, gender, race, and life circumstances, socioeconomic status.” Nearly all responding CFDS members (sixteen out of seventeen), agreed the diversity goal was achieved and the diversity of the policy community contributed to the strength of the movement.

***By Whom was the Problem Defined?***



The problem was defined by a diverse set of stakeholders during the formation of the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS). The CFDS quickly assembled themselves around the common purpose to create legislation that would help solve the quality school problem.

Table 1 below shows the number of CFDS co-chairs and their representation in the education ecosystem. Nearly all the respondents interviewed spoke about the diversity of the group. For example, one respondent said, “Every stakeholder group was represented: parent groups, youth groups, faith-based groups, labor...we were very intentional about who we asked and to ensure representation from both sides of the aisle...we knew we could not get proper representation without bipartisan representatives.” Similarly, other respondents named specific members of the Coalition that represented the bipartisan nature of the Coalition: “John Rakolta, Jr. was a co-chair who was a Republican liaison...and David Hecker, the President of the American Federation of Teachers Michigan was another co-chair.”

TABLE 1  
*Characteristics of CFDS Co-Chairs*

	<b>Tonya Allen</b>	<b>Wendell Anthony</b>	<b>David Hecker</b>	<b>John Rakolta, Jr.</b>	<b>Angela Reyes</b>
<b>Profession</b>	President and CEO, Skillman Foundation	President, Detroit Branch NAACP	President, AFT Michigan/AFL-CIO	CEO, Walbridge	Executive Director, Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation
<b>Constituency Represented</b>	Philanthropy	Community	Educators	Business	Community
<b>Race</b>	Black	Black	White	White	Latina
<b>Political Party</b>	Independent	Democrat	Democrat	Republican	Democrat

Table 1. Sourced from ‘Triage, Transition, and Transformation’: Advocacy Discourse in Urban School Reform by Sarah Lenhoff et al., April 1, 2019.

A few respondents provided more details on the bipartisan nature of stakeholder groups that worked as a part of the Coalition. For example, one respondent said, “the governor had a liaison as part of the Coalition...the mayor had a liaison...” Other participants similarly emphasized the bipartisan representation of the Coalition: “We had Goeff Hansen who, at the time, was a Republican Senator...who was the main person carrying the legislation. We also had Republican John Walsh from the Governor’s Office.”

In a press conference in March 2015 officially launching *The Choice is Ours* document, a Coalition for the Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS) co-chair, Reverend Wendell Anthony, President Detroit Branch NAACP, also acknowledged the diverse coalition that worked on the legislation:

“Let me also say this coalition was composed of a very diverse group of people—Republicans and Democrats and all kind of Crats that you might think of—some who agreed, some who did not agree, and some have never worked together before and some who have...but [the Coalition] was for and is for the children. That's what we tried to keep at the forefront of our thinking...”

The sentiment around the intentionality of diversity was true for fifteen of the seventeen respondents who specifically addressed the diverse coalition. Another participant stated, “I do believe there was every attempt to have a diverse set of stakeholders to come together for the kids and [the co-chairs] did well there.” As evident in these examples, a majority of the respondents articulated the diversity of the coalition as helpful to the policy formation. For example, when asked about diversity, one respondent said, “The diversity was incredibly beneficial, it allowed us to get some things through the legislation that were really important.”

A few respondents shared a contrasting view of the Coalition’s diversity. These participants commented on the diversity from an ideological viewpoint: “You have to remember the NAACP [whose Detroit Chapter president was leading the Coalition as a co-chair] nationally has come out publicly as

anti-charter...and here in Detroit...the NAACP, the teacher's union...historically they've slanted toward Detroit Public School Community District and there are still remains in this sentiment...although not as much now." This respondent referred to two of the five CFDS co-chairs who are perceived to align more with the ideologies that support traditional districts. Similarly, another respondent said, "It's always difficult to have different ideologies to agree on next steps." This participant further stated because of the different ideology they "think we could have built the Coalition even deeper in Lansing...legislative districts...so people could have understood the problem better...because ultimately we didn't build enough power in Lansing." Regarding building the Coalition even deeper, one respondent said, "We did not do a good job getting support to other districts outside of Detroit and other districts...a big lesson learned...we need to look at building a more robust coalition not just urban but also with rural."

Despite the majority of the Coalition being Democrats, the common perception was the Coalition had diverse representation. For example, one respondent said, "The Coalition itself was probably 90% Democrats, but we made sure we had folks from both sides of the aisle on the Coalition."

Similarly, another respondent said, "There were a lot of people on the Coalition—the structure was good because it brought many stakeholder groups to the table..." This respondent also added a contrasting viewpoint by saying "...and it also caused problems as well due to the diversity of perspectives." The respondent went on to say that despite the conflict that arose from the various perspectives, there was an overwhelming consensus within this policy community around the underlying guiding principle of the Detroit children deserving better. There were examples of the consensus and alignment language in the media. For example, in the March 2015 press conference, one CFDS co-chair remarked, "We all brought perhaps different frames of mind to the table, but everyone knew that everyone involved in this process had one bottom line—and that is what's best for the children of the city of Detroit." And another respondent representing the sitting governor, Governor Rick Snyder, shared the governor's sentiment that "we need to collectively do better by the kids we serve."

The shared sense of purpose was evident throughout the interviews. A majority of the

respondents saw diversity and shared purpose as the anchor for the group.

As discussed in the literature reviews, policy communities are oftentimes diverse. "Policy communities are composed of a specialist in a given policy area—health, housing, environments protection [...] still others are academics, consultants, or analyst for interest groups [...] but they all have one thing in common, their concern with one area of policy problems" (Kingdon 2011, 117).

*To what extent was the specific legislation aligned or misaligned with certain values of the legislators considering the policy (and/or their constituents)?*

### **Fragmentation.**

Stakeholders' reasons for participating in the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS) were multifaceted but were all related to making sure Detroit children received a quality education. However, the specific Detroit Education Commission (DEC) legislation, as a solution to the quality education problem, did not align with the ideology, values, and belief systems of some members of the Coalition, which created fragmentation within the Coalition.

Kingdon (2011, 118) explained this phenomenon by stating "...communities of specialists vary tremendously in the degree of fragmentation...some are extremely closed and tightly knit. Others are more diverse and fragmented." He goes on to say "proposals that survive in the policy community are compatible with the values of the specialists. Obviously, all specialists do not have the same values, and in instances of disagreement...conflicts spill over into the political area" (133).

The shared sense of purpose was evident throughout the interviews but also as evident were the conflicting views of the varying perspectives. The translation of "do better" or "what's best" for children differed depending on your political stance. Based on the comments of several respondents, due to these varying perspectives, some members of the Coalition questioned if they truly ever agreed on what was best for Detroit children. For example, one respondent said, "Among some stakeholders, the problem was

clear but for others, not at all...it was hard and time-consuming getting stakeholders to agree that universally there was a problem...I don't believe some ever got there." Another respondent echoed the feeling, "It really felt like that [bringing in far-right and far-left] was reaching too far; there were going to be some people who were never going to be supportive. Some people on the far-left and far-right were just not going to get it." Some participants pointed out "while diversity was a good idea," the stark political diversity is what caused disagreement at the outset as they sought to define the problem and articulate appropriate solutions.

Offering another perspective, several respondents spoke to the false perception of homogeneity among charter schools and charter leaders. For example, one respondent, speaking directly to the fragmentation within the Coalition, said, "People think that all charter leaders share the same perspectives...and they group charters all in one category...even within charters there are divergent beliefs and approaches to educating children in Detroit."

Several respondents also pointed to competition as a reason for fragmentation. Based on the interviews, nearly all respondents believed the members of the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS) had a shared vision to provide quality schools for Detroit children, but for many the issue was that trust and competition got in the way of agreeing on the right solution or strategy to fix the problem.

Similarly, another respondent stated: "I think we all deeply, deeply, deeply want to see the children in this city succeed" and the issue wasn't the shared vision "but the broken part was the tactics... see we're still competitors, we're still competitive, right? And so everyone's existence is based upon our market share and on our performance." One respondent spoke about the new arrival of the Detroit Public School Community District superintendent: "When the superintendent arrived, it was very clear he was 100% against charter schools and came in saying that on day one."

Another respondent echoed the competition sentiment stating: "We've created a competition where we can't collaborate."

Based on one respondent's reflections, the stakeholders could be grouped into two categories: "There were far-right charter people, might be kind of the free-market charter...let me describe it this way...it was like the free-market charter school lobby group and there was the quality-first charter school lobby group." Similarly, another respondent stated, "You had on one side a Tonya Allen or Lou Glazer, who is very much in the regulatory, accountability camp and then you had like Clark [Durant] who never believed in standards and an accountability commission." One respondent in speaking of the ideological diversity stated, "I got that we need to have people on the far-right, and I thought John Rakolta would make sense, but I wasn't sure that Clark made sense." This respondent used John Rakolta as a Republican example in the Coalition.

Several other respondents questioned if one could have a unanimously agreed upon solution with such varying ideologies. One respondent described it in this way: "There were Coalition members who were really true believers who believe that an unfettered unregulated market will always produce the best outcomes [...] and then there were folks all the way to the left..." For an example of what some respondents view as "way left" anti-charter sentiment, one respondent stated: "What we really needed to do is totally change charter schools in the city, but if we couldn't do that, we needed the next best thing." In contrast, one respondent's observation of the far-right stance: "From the charters perspective, you are either for us or against us."

Several respondents spoke to the pro-charter movement, some of which are Republican-leaning, anti-regulation, and views any oversight as limiting their power and ability to expand the movement. One respondent did want to call out "all pro-charter leaders are not Republican and though there are very divergent views in the charter community...there is not just one charter community." Many respondents felt some of the languages used to frame the conversation was contrary to the pro-charter supporters, no matter if you were a Democrat pro-charter leader or a Republican pro-charter leader. For example, in the initial press conference in March 2015, Tonya Allen described the Detroit Education Commission in this way:

“The Detroit Education Commission is going to be responsible for essentially the planning and developmental function for schools; looking at what schools we need in the city, where do we need them, and listening to the community by working with seven regional districts who will work within a City Council district with residents and parents and teachers and principals who will have a say about what schools should open.”

The framing used in this opening remark at the launch of the publicity campaign for the legislation spoke explicitly to regulation when, as one respondent explained, “charters were founded on autonomy.” Prior to Tonya Allen speaking, Reverend Wendell Anthony, President Detroit Branch NAACP, was the first speaker at the press conference. Reverend Anthony framed the conversation stating the Coalition looked at all schools in Detroit, not just Detroit Public Schools but charter schools, the Education Achievement Authority everybody that has a school in Detroit; “We looked at [them all] because all of them need to come under the microscopic view...”

One respondent explained that in the education reform debate, there is the “regulatory, accountability camp” where some argue charter schools should be regulated and academic performance should be assessed, evaluated, and graded; and there is a “free-market camp” that believes vouchers, choice, and charters are the solution to America’s education system and an unfettered free market can and should drive the education transformation. This respondent stated: “I think the cynics...you know many of us who are a little more cynical on the quality side believe that the free-market side was driven more by profit motive than by a real interest in quality.”

Based on the perspective of several other respondents, Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS) members “were coming to the table and already had hard lines in the sand that they were unwilling to cross.” And as evident from the responses, a pro-accountability Detroit Education Commission (DEC) was a hard line for some of the Coalition members.

In addition to ideology, the topic of equity, as a specific belief system, did come up in several of the interviews as well. For example, this respondent specifically cited the reason for the DEC legislation being removed from the bill “would control the charter school movement, it would stop Detroit becoming an open field. [Charters] did not want the mayor to have the power. What they didn’t want was a commission with equity voices representing the community.”

One respondent explained, referring to the proposed DEC legislation, what they heard another member of the CFDS express publicly, “You know in the suburbs the mayors don’t have control over the district, so why should we have anything different than white people?” This respondent was referring to the perspective of a Coalition member’s concern about equity. This respondent went on to share “there were other Democrats that echoed this similar sentiment and felt nobody should have that kind of control over the district, [the control] that was recommended in the provision for the DEC was because white communities within the state had nothing similar.” In addition, this respondent added, “I had a contrasting view of equity...I looked at it as equity for Detroit...because [the Detroit Education Committee] was going to be controlled by Black folk in Detroit...some people feel the civil rights agenda means having exactly the same thing as white folk as opposed to having the freedom to invent our own thing [...] which is what it kind of means for me.”

At a critical moment in the process, during the legislative vote for Senate Bill 710, the stark differences in ideologies and values became apparent. According to one respondent, “The Coalition started to fall apart...so at the end of the day Sherry Gay-Dagnogo stood up in the House and was opposed to that provision...I think at the same time another former State Rep, who was part of the Coalition, Lamar Lemmon’s had access to the floor of the House and [he] was down on the floor lobbying individual legislators to vote against this thing...”

The majority of respondents stated that there was nearly universal agreement on all the policy recommendations “with a lot of give and take along the journey” but the Detroit Education Commission



legislation was the “trickiest” because you had “value systems” that were quite different. In Kingdon’s study, he noted that some of his participants’ values were composed of their ideologies as it relates to the proper size and extent of powers of the federal government. He goes on to say “[participants’] views on these issues directly affect the alternatives they propose and oppose” (Kingdon 2011, 133).

***To what extent were there particular policy entrepreneurs who were positioned to advocate for the specific legislation?***

A key element of the “policy primeval soup” (Kingdon 2011) are advocates who push policy ideas to prominence. In some cases, these persons are authentic in efforts to design a policy to address specific problems while others consistently offer pet policies in search of a problem. Indeed, the case at hand included policy entrepreneurs within the Coalition and external to the Coalition, positioned in and around the government working on their behalf of the shared mission that helped shepherd the Detroit Education Commission legislation to the decision agenda.

According to several respondents, many of which were policy entrepreneurs themselves, the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren’s (CFDS) policy community was comprised of “heavyweights in the policy community.” Of the five CFDS co-chairs, all five were known for their policy advocacy locally, statewide, and, in some cases, nationally. Table 1 provides more information about each of the co-chairs. Several respondents also noted that on the CFDS steering committee of thirty-one members, there were state senators, state representatives, and chamber leaders “all of which were making calls and lobbying on our behalf.” One respondent noted “and the people on the steering committee had other people working for us.”

Several respondents referred specifically to the policy entrepreneurs both locally at the mayor’s office and in Lansing at the state capitol who worked as a part of the Coalition. For example, one respondent

said “the governor had a liaison as part of the Coalition...the mayor had a liaison...” Another respondent similarly emphasized the support the Coalition received from a senator. “We had Goeff Hansen who at the time was a Republican Senator who was the main person carrying the legislation.” Similarly, one respondent said, “Senator Hansen was the brave lone senator on the education committee who tried to position the bill nicely and it got shot down.” One participant stated, “We had the support of Senate Goeff Hansen who had done a ton of work.” Another respondent stated, “Hansen shepherded the legislation through the Senate for us.” And yet another respondent commented specifically on Hansen’s commitment and personal interest to the comprehensive legislative package saying “it’s like he had a passion for this... he volunteered to take it on.”

As evident in these examples, many respondents articulated that the CFDS’s advocates felt they had policy entrepreneurs positioned in key places to help lobby for quality education and their specific set of recommendations. For example, when asked about the strength of the policy community, one participating respondent said, “It was a broad coalition who went with us to lobby for legislation...we had Goeff Hansen, Scott Romney, John Rakolta, and Bill Milligan...” Another respondent said, “We had Republican John Walsh from the Governor’s Office,” who was also named as a policy entrepreneur who worked closely with the Coalition.

One respondent shared that a few of their policy entrepreneurs, who were key influencers in government, invested a lot of their time, energy, and called in favors. For example, one respondent said, “John Rakolta used a lot of his political capital fighting for this issue.” Another respondent said, “I have such great respect for John Rakolta, I mean he's a Republican but he is so into these issues.”

One policy entrepreneur advocating for the Coalition stated: “I was a Republican senator going into a Democratic area...it took a while to build trust—but my job was to make sure the state got out of Detroit schools.” He went on to say he spent a lot of time educating people around Lansing. He explained “I know how I had to sell it; I worked in the senate long enough and knew the pressure points...I knew I had

the votes I needed.” Kingdon refers to this process of “softening up” as a critical skill of policy entrepreneurs:

“These entrepreneurs attempt to soften up both policy communities, which tend to be inertia-bound and resistant to major changes, and larger publics, getting them used to new ideas and building acceptance for their proposals. When a short-run opportunity to push their proposals comes, the way has been paved, and the important people are softened up.” (Kingdon 2011, 128)

The Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren’s policy entrepreneurs spent a great amount of time softening up the legislators in Lansing. The Detroit Education Commission (DEC) legislation put forth in Senate Bill 710 initially received the necessary votes on the Senate floor to move to the House for approval. But ultimately, the policy entrepreneurs were not successful with passing the original legislative package and the package that did pass, House Bills 5383 and 5384, did not contain the DEC legislation.

***Were there alternative and/or competing pieces of legislation that purported to solve the problem?***

Kingdon (2011) states, “Sometimes crises come along that simply bowl over everything standing in the way of prominence on the agenda...potential agenda items sometimes languish in the background...” The state assumption of the Detroit Public Schools’ (DPS) debt crisis was the focusing event that reignited the Detroit quality school conversation and once again called attention to Detroit’s education problems. The Detroit Education Commission (DEC) legislation (and other policy recommendations) put forth by the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS) were accompaniment policies with the DPS’ debt elimination legislation, all of which made it to the decision

agenda. However, the political nature of the DEC legislation jeopardized solving the central DPS' debt crisis. The Senate Bill 710, which included the DEC legislation, died and was repackaged by the House of Representatives as House Bill 5383 and House Bill 5384; neither house bills contained the DEC legislation recommendations. The DEC legislation was an alternative the legislators chose not to pursue.

### **Detroit Public Schools' Debt and Brink of Bankruptcy**

Of the three (of five) co-chairs interviewed, all three shared the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS) was a hurry-up offense to finally get legislation to address the Detroit quality school issue, in response to the governor stating he was moving ahead with the Detroit Public Schools' (DPS) Debt Elimination issue. One respondent reflected, "In 2014, in a small meeting with Governor Snyder, he said he would put out a plan for DPS in Detroit and he said to us, we need to collectively do better by the kids we serve...we have not figured out how to provide them the best education they deserve." This respondent went on to say, "Governor Snyder would not tell us what to do with education...so we created a plan."

The following respondent shared their perspective upon hearing the governor's comments: "The governor was about to move to close the district; the leaders, of what would become the Coalition, asked him to hold off on making any decisions. We didn't want nothing about us without us." This respondent went on to explain that this was a critical moment and a "sense of urgency, which is why we put a time limit on ourselves which was ninety days. We met for hundreds of hours on nights, weekends, and holidays to assemble a set of recommendations before [the governor] could make a decision...we had to get our recommendations for Detroit children on his desk."

Several respondents provided more details about their push to get additional policy recommendations to "bring some coherence and structure to public education" and between January 2015 and March 2015, the CFDS worked together to draft their policy recommendations to not only address the DPS debt and the return of the school district to local control, but to also "to make education a priority again." Table 2 shows a complete list of the CFDS Recommendations compared to which

recommendations made it to final legislative actions.

TABLE 2

***CFDS Recommendations Compared to Final Legislation***

<b>Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren Recommendation</b>	<b>Recommendation Included in Final Legislation?</b>	<b>Final Legislative Action</b>
1. Return governance of Detroit Public Schools (DPS) to an elected school board.	Included	HB 5384: Allowed for the new district's elected school board (elected in November 2016) to take office in January 2017 and assume management of the new district at that time.
2. Expand transparency for charter authorizers and charter school boards with a greater focus on quality and coordination.	Partially included	HB 5384: In order to issue a charter for a new charter school, the authorizer must be accredited by a nationally recognized authorizing body.
3. State assumption of DPS debt	Included	HB 5384: Created a new Detroit Public Schools Community District and earmarked \$617 million from tobacco settlement revenue for the district, with a guarantee to fund any additional costs of the legislative package through the General Fund. The 18 mills levied by the old DPS will be diverted to pay off the debt.
4. Create a new nonpartisan entity, the Detroit Education Commission, to coordinate and rationalize citywide education functions.	Not included	
5. Establish advisory School Leadership Teams to include parents, staff, and students.	Not included	
6. Close the state-run school district, the Education Achievement Authority.	Included	HB 5384: Dissolved the Education Achievement Authority and moved accountability functions to the State School Reform Office.
7. Create shared systems of data across all schools.	Not included	

Table 2. Sourced from 'Triage, Transition, and Transformation': Advocacy Discourse in Urban School Reform by Sarah Lenhoff et al., April 1, 2019, page 20.

As evident in the aforementioned, some members of the Coalition felt this was a quality school issue in which the DPS' debt elimination was part of, but in and of itself, insufficient. For others in and around the CFDS's community, the DPS' debt crisis was the issue; from their perspective, it was a financial problem above all else. In reference to the DPS' crisis, one respondent explained, "Detroit Public Schools (DPS) had massive problems, a lot of debt, and the state took it over—emergency management didn't help it...it hurt it...DPS was in no better financial position nor academic standing." Another respondent stated, "The goal was to keep DPS out of bankruptcy, to restore an elected board and provide with the financial stability to move forward...this was one of the biggest issues for the governor's office."

One respondent reflected on the loss of the Detroit Education Commission legislation saying "Not everything we wanted made it...and some things we didn't want made it...but this legislation really saved DPS." Similarly, another respondent remarked, "There were many great things in the legislative packet...elimination of the debt...an elected school board...the most important things made it."

Four of the seven recommendations were included in the final legislation and moved into final legislative action; three of the seven were not included in the final legislation. As evident from Table 2, the creation of the Detroit Education Commission was not included in the final legislation.

According to Kingdon (2011, 104):

"Failure to solve or even address a problem, as well as success, may result in its demise as a prominent agenda item. It takes time, effort, mobilization of many actors, and the expenditure of political resources to keep an item prominent on the agenda. If it appears, even after a short time, that the subject will not result in legislation or another form of authoritarian decision, participants will quickly cease to invest."

The strength of the CFDS's policy community in many aspects came from its internal diversity and broad net of inclusion. There was strong advocacy for quality schools, but there was not strong

advocacy for the DEC as a solution because of the varying ideologies and value systems within this diverse coalition. The stark political ideologies of the CFDS's advocacy community led to internal fragmentation. In addition to the fragmentation, although the policy entrepreneurs supporting the Coalition were committed and skilled at their job of softening up the key individual(s) in Lansing, the DEC legislation was an alternative the legislators chose not to pursue. The debt crisis was "the main thing" that trumped all other alternatives and ideas.

### **Finding 3: Political Stream**

There was a preponderance of pressure from pro-charter school lobbyists in the form of campaign financing and election repercussions placed on key legislators to remove the Detroit Education Commission (DEC) legislation from Senate Bill 710. In addition to the pressure, the perception of Detroit's mayoral control of the DEC, the bubbling up of the American Federation of Teachers' union strikes within Detroit Public Schools (DPS), and signs of corruption in the current DPS' administration threatened to change the mood in Lansing against any DPS legislation. The combination of these political forces and political events led to the failed Senate Bill 710, which included the proposed DEC legislation.

#### ***Political Stream Overview***

The political stream is the third of the threefold set of streams. The political stream refers to various political events, political forces, and other related governmental phenomena that have powerful effects on agendas. "Flowing along independently of the problems and policy streams, the political stream composed of such things as public mood, pressure group campaigns, election results, [and] partisan or ideological distributions in Congress and changes of administration" (Kingdon 2011, 145). Specifically, part (c) of the research question directly references the policy stream by asking the question: *What political events, political forces, or other governmental phenomena affected the passage of the Detroit Education Commission legislative agenda in 2016?* To answer this question, I outlined the various components of the political stream. The overarching categories included changes in political alignments



and concurrent political events.

*Were there changes in political alignments that happened at/around the time that impacted the failure/passage of the policy?*

Kingdon (2011, 150) explains:

“But if there is some conflict among organized forces, then political leaders implicitly arrive at an image of their government that strikes some balance between those for and those against... Their perception that the balance of support is tilting against a proposal may not necessarily prevent the item from being seriously considered, but it does indicate the price that will be paid for pushing the item forward.”

A majority of the respondents interviewed (fifteen out of seventeen) named pressure groups as a key reason the Detroit Education Commission (DEC) legislation was stripped from the bill. One respondent said, “When [the DEC legislation] passed the Senate, it got everybody’s attention”; this respondent was referring to the notion that some people “didn’t think it would make it past the Senate.”

Another respondent stated that after the bill passed the Senate “Betsy DeVos woke up when [the bill] went to the House...the House changed the language including taking out the DEC...the House version goes back to the Senate...in which they either agree or have a conference committee which included people from the House and from the Senate trying to work out the differences... but they didn’t do that ...they didn’t call a conference committee—[the Senate] just voted on the bill and concurred with the House.”

Similarly describing the activities that took place the day of the vote, another respondent stated “Betsy DeVos’ people, the Great Lakes Education Project (GLEP), took the whole Republican caucus into a sequester and went into another room that morning; they would not let the House bring it to the

floor to vote on it...they did not vote on it that day...they had to go back a renegotiate; someone cried on the floor of the Senate...but the House passed it...later we found out that Betsy DeVos had contributed large amounts of money to these specific legislators.” Another respondent, referring to one of the leaders of the GLEP, said, “The legislative advocacy of the GLEP...they wanted to remove any oversight of the legislation in the state—Gary Naeyaert was against the DEC legislation.”

As evident in these examples, many respondents articulated the pressure group’s role in stripping away the DEC legislation; in some cases, respondents described the specifics of the backroom conversations. For example, when asked to describe why the DEC legislation was removed, one respondent said, “We had the votes, but the leader [Arlan Meekhof] told the legislators ‘if you don’t align with our parties position on this, you will be stripped of your assignments, etc....and you have an election coming up and there will be ramifications...some of those ramifications would be money put behind opposing candidates’...[there were] threats of impact as a current politician...[what] the threat of the future [would] look like for them... there were some who had integrity around this...but some...”

Regarding these interest groups as political forces behind the blockage of Senate Bill 710 and behind what respondents saw as a “strong charter lobby,” six out of seventeen said the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS) miscalculated the power of the charter sector in Michigan. For example, one respondent said, “We underestimated the ability of the charter sector in Michigan...the charter lobby is far more robust.” This respondent went on to describe the strategy behind the pro-charter movement speaking directly to DeVos as the leader in the movement. “We underestimated DeVos’ funding...she has been cultivating and curating relationships...she doesn’t just want Republicans...she has mastered how to put money on who will follow their prescribed agenda ...DeVos ‘seeded’ or ‘seated’ the Republican group...”

One of the respondents offered this narrative:

“[The Great Lakes Education Project’s] whole push was for privatizing education and schools and they saw [the Detroit Education Commission] legislation as a challenge to

their power to do that; they may have been hoping Detroit Public Schools would close so they could charter the city.”

Similarly, another respondent said:

“If [DeVos] had her way, every school with be a parochial school, a Christian school, and those schools are fine but it’s not public education—she wants the elimination of traditional public schools and schools to run free and have no controls on them whatsoever. She is probably the first Secretary of Education to be against traditional public schools. During the legislative fight, the hashtag for her Great Lakes Education Project’s think tank was #EndDPS.”

As evident in these examples, the majority of the respondents felt “key legislators were persuaded through campaign finance.” When I asked about evidence to support this claim, one respondent explained they gathered data from the Michigan Campaign Finance Network, which is an organization that tracks transparency around campaign finance “and there were large sums of money distributed during the same time the legislation was being voted on.” Specifically, the respondent stated, “the Michigan Campaign Finance Network reported there was money spent that week from the Great Lakes Education Project towards legislators... they spent approximately \$1.7 million in the legislature that week... the movement of money in a significant political week matters when it comes to voting.”

Another respondent reflected on the significant amount of money and power the pro-charter lobby group used to stop the Detroit Education Commission (DEC) legislation. This respondent said, “Private charter schools have a different ability to do advocacy in a way that traditional public systems cannot do...they have the money...they have the influence.”

“It’s about money,” one respondent stated at the opening of the interview. This respondent went on to say that the DEC legislation wasn’t “we didn’t want charters...it was about coming together to make the system better... but [charter proponents] saw it as a way for the mayor to put in a limit on

bringing in new charter schools.”

This same respondent went on to say that the money and pressure, if repositioned, could be a benefit. “The question for the charter advocates such as the Great Lakes Education Project isn’t *How do we have a charter system?* ... when the question should be *How do we have a charter system that is effective?*”

***Were there political events that happened at/around the time that impacted the failure of the Detroit Education Commission?***

**Detroit Public Schools’ Debt Package and Return to Local Control.**

One respondent stated, “The Detroit Education Commission (DEC) wasn’t the whole goal, it was a small piece.” The respondent shared with a follow-up remark to “help put the issue in perspective.” “The focus was the Detroit Public Schools’ (DPS) debt and getting the state out of Detroit. It was a huge endeavor for the state with the bankruptcy hanging over their head within two weeks...it would cost all other schools across the state up to \$3000 per student.” This respondent was referring to the money from the statewide per-pupil funding pool.

Another respondent described comments from the House Majority Leader Arlan Meekhof, “the Majority Leader told a group of us what they were going to do...they would not give it to the committee.” This respondent shared the hard decisions that had to be made to “do the thing that mattered most.”

Similarly, another respondent described what was at stake: “The bill was stalled in the House...we had to make a decision, we were a week away from filing bankruptcy...there was a package on the table that would take care of the debt.” This respondent went on to explain how the package had other things included like “academic programs, etc...” and also explained “we could not get the 110 votes in the House with the package as it was.” The same respondent shared, “We moved the package forward,

made the investment to eliminate the debt and left a placeholder with a voluntary DEC...it was one of those things we left to cook for a while and we could revisit the subject matter later.”

### **The Mayor’s Influence**

“The mayor was insistent to have a representative on the commission, that didn’t go over well for anyone—charter or traditional—the charter particularly...and time was ticking.” This respondent described the perspective and positioning of the mayor related to the structure of the Detroit Education Commission (DEC). For example, the respondent stated the nature of the relationship with pro-charter advocates and the mayor’s office as “historically having a roller coaster of support.” “The mayor tried to cut a couple of deals and at some point, there was a break between the mayor and large charter operators.”

Similarly, another respondent stated, “More than half of the Detroit delegation wanted mayoral control and more than a quarter did not...it came down to who was in control and whether [one was the more] appropriate way to go.”

Another respondent reflected on the conversation related to the structure of the DEC “during the first round of negotiations there were three recommendations (1) A citywide election for members to sit on the DEC, (2) some elected and some appointed members, and (3) all would be appointed by the mayor.” The respondent further stated, “We were moving toward the second option until the mayor came to the meeting and said if he was to run this, he would have to appoint them... we chose the option of the mayor because [we] needed the mayor’s support to move past the committee.”

Several respondents shared the mistrust the charters had in the DEC and perceived mayoral control. For example, one respondent stated, “It was a fine line to make sure it was not anti-charter...charter schools were afraid of what was going to happen if they were to put together the DEC.”

As evident in these examples, many people in government, around government, in community, and around the community were wary of mayoral control. One respondent described it this way:

“Mayoral control is perceived by the community as the mayor is in charge of education in our city, the mayor making critical decisions about education at the city level, not the school board, not the superintendents...but at the hands of the mayor's office—in terms of control. Now as you know there are places that have this kind of control right?...New York for example... There was a distrust of the unfamiliar, there was distrust of the unknown, and there was distrust of putting that kind of power within the governmental sector in our city.”

Similarly, another respondent shared “because of the mayor having control of the DEC, it created political conversation and fractures in the city over elected versus appointed—the conversation of the mayor appointing folks got involved because they wanted to have community control and since mayor control in other cities have not always involved community...”

A majority of the respondents stated the Detroit Education Commission (DEC) legislation and perceived mayoral control created controversy. One respondent commented that the “Let’s Get the Facts Straight” one-pager (*see* Appendix 3) was created to calm the “storm” around the DEC legislation “[The DEC] was such controversy...so you have the Helen Moore’s of the world who organized these groups” [Helen Moore being a longtime Detroit community activist and vocal proponent of equitable education] “[she and her people] have been organized for years around education ...they were just livid about the notion of mayoral control... now that was not the intent [of the legislation] so there was a need for us to put [“Let’s Get the Fact’s Straight” one-pager] out because not only did we have unrest among ourselves, we had caused unrest in the community.”

Another participating respondent stated, “It was totally clear it was about mistrust. It had to do with the charter folks [who] didn’t trust [that] the traditional folks wouldn’t try to harm them or put roadblocks in their way, they were scared there would be people on [the DEC] that are anti-charter.” This respondent referred to the proposed DEC legislation, which would have several mayoral appointees on

the commission. According to one respondent, it was the “perceived mayoral control that worried people, especially the Detroit charter sector” This respondent said:

“Together we were pushing for greater coordination, we were pushing for greater cooperation among the ecosystem and education...but depending upon where in the ecosystem you would land... whether it was the Detroit Public School Community District traditional public or if it was charter schools or whether it was the authorizers or whether it was the Michigan Department of Education, you had a different perspective about accountability or cooperation or collaboration and you had a different perspective on what perceived mayor control would mean to you.”

This same respondent went on to explain this historical context of the mayor’s office, “The mayor’s office has come out heavily in support of the traditional district... why would charters have a reason to trust an entity perceived to be under mayoral control to support their interests?” This respondent uses the example of enrollment:

“When it comes to trying to coordinate enrollment...we're competitors, you know, so how do we come together as an ecosystem and establish an enrollment process for the whole city? How do you do that right? So I guess what they were trying to do is say that there were some schools in some neighborhoods, there were some neighborhoods with school deserts, right?, and then you had overgrowth or oversupply of schools in some areas—and the mayor’s office had criticized the authorizers for not looking at that kind of issue, why would one area having an abundance of schools and the other areas have no school? That's because they weren't looking at the footprint...”

This respondent explained that due to the history of the mayor’s office of being critical of charters, charters and charter authorizers had a difficult time trusting the office with the amount of

authority the DEC legislation called for. For example, one respondent stated, “The charters and authorizers felt the mayor would lean more favorably towards the traditional district.”

### **Distraction in Detroit School District.**

“Once we got the package out of the Senate, we had this investment ready to go...the authority charged twelve to thirteen administrators for stealing from the school district... and American Federation of Teachers went on strike.” This respondent explains simultaneous political events happening while trying to get the legislation passed. For example, this respondent said, “There was chaos at the management and the union level...the acrimony...the bill had passed the Senate and bill was on its way to the House... we had to push through the bill quickly—but had a little tiny window before the charters really ramped up. But we had to stop and pivot and turn our attention to the strike and investigation...it took three weeks to get back to the vote.”

Another respondent stated, “Something was happening with the American Federation of Teachers... they were assigned some type of manager from the national or federal level to oversee the Detroit chapter temporarily ...their internal divisions were so heavy they couldn't operate ...there were two factions emerging internally...and one of those factions were going to be very loud...they would show up in Lansing with various unrelated demands.”

Similarly, this respondent confirmed, “there were work slowdowns in Detroit Public Schools...and shortly after the American Federation of Teachers did go on strike for two full days...if it had lasted any longer, the legislation for Detroit Public Schools’ debt would have been dead...” This respondent explained the impact union strikes have on the Democrats supporting the bill: “When a union goes on strike...it puts Democrats in the position... they feel like there's no way that I can get out in front of the union...if I vote on this bill I may be seen as opposing the bargaining [for] unionization... in general a cooperative Democratic member of the legislature is not so sure...”



The respondent also explained how the distractions impacted the Republican support: “The Republicans were trying to make a cost-benefit analysis if the district should go under and what does that mean in terms of lives—the students and families—what does it mean economically and what are the alternatives? ...So we're getting them closer and closer to realizing that an investment that avoids bankruptcy keeps 50,000 kids in school [and] strengthens or at least gives a better balance sheet to the school district ...then they look out the window and teachers are on strikes ...there are allegations of illegally wrongdoings...”

The political events, inclusive of the American Federation of Teachers’ union strikes, bubbling up of internal American Federation of Teachers’ factions and the controversial climate surrounding the Detroit mayoral control of the proposed Detroit Education Commission (DEC), may have forced the hands of many legislators to move quickly to at least solve for the “main thing,” the Detroit Public Schools’ debt; sacrificing any other legislation in the package that they perceived may have prevented the successful passage of the Detroit Public Schools legislation. However, the more unambiguous justification for the failed Senate Bill 710, which included the DEC legislation, was the targeted pressure from pro–charter school lobbyists blocking the legislation and influencing key legislators to remove the DEC legislation. Many respondents viewed the DEC legislation as a misalignment driven by profit and political ideologies.

## Recommendations

*Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness.*  
— Martin Luther King Jr

The recommendations that follow are intended to support 482Forward and the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS) in their continued effort to bring oversight and coordination to the Detroit education ecosystem. While not exhaustive, these recommendations offer insights and future considerations for 482Forward and the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren that build upon the work these organizations have done in the past and are continuing to do. The recommendations I offer are a possible path for sustainable education reform in the city of Detroit and potentially for the state of Michigan.

***Recommendation 1. Support a Detroit Charter Collaboration: 482Forward and the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren support the creation of a local charter-led collaborative to lead in the coordination of Detroit charter schools as the next iteration of charter coordination in Detroit.***

This recommendation addresses several of the reasons the Detroit Education Commission (DEC) model was rejected by internal stakeholders—lack of autonomy, lack of local control, and the need for self-determination—and was ultimately removed from the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren’s (CFDS) legislative package. The recommendation to support the creation of a local charter-led collaborative to lead in the coordination of Detroit charter schools is grounded in the challenges that the previous DEC policy faced in the stages of problem articulation, policy negotiation, and political buy-in reviewed above as well as the challenge of allowing charters to maintain a level of

control and autonomy.

One of the challenges that became evident through the interviews was the perception of the historical, traditional school district–leaning mayor’s office “having oversight and being the gatekeeper” (CFDS 2015, 3) to charter schools. In addition to the perceived mayoral control, the lack of clarity on how the mayor's office would coordinate “sixty different charter networks,” which consist of approximately ninety charter schools with varying systems, structures, and approaches to education. As one respondent shared during their interview, “People think that all charter leaders share the same perspectives...and they group charters all in one category...[but] even within charters there are divergent beliefs and approaches to educating children in Detroit.” From the charter leader perspective, the thought of oversight and coordinating body overseeing the Detroit Public School Community District (DPSCD), which in and of itself is comprised of 100 schools and 50,000 students with its own systems, structures, and approaches, in combination with the ninety different charter schools, who have not historically worked together, was hard to fathom.

Throughout the interviews it was also evident, no matter governance structure, all members of the policy community, charter leaders included, had a shared vision of Detroit children receiving quality education but the obvious fragmentation began when the proposed solution was framed in a way that limited autonomy of the charter schools. As outlined throughout this research, charter leaders want autonomy, they want independence, and they want a certain level of control...all of the principles on which the charter movement was founded—and the same themes rang true through the interviews.

School districts across the nation are finding ways to collaborate, self-govern, and hold a high bar of academic performance for themselves. School districts are finding ways to create and support a common vision in the service of children. “Emerging research has begun to articulate a framework for successful collective impact efforts that include: a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support (Hanleybrown et al. 2012 cited in Lenhoff et al. 2019). Leading charter schools in Nashville, Tennessee are an example of charter

schools that have come together in service of their children. "Nashville is a thriving city. Our students—every single one of them—should be provided the opportunity and education to be a part of our city’s success. No one person or organization has all the answers to get us there. But together, we absolutely can” (Dowell, Newman, and Dickson 2018). The Steering Committee was referencing the Nashville Charter Collaborative. It's important to note, the Nashville Charter Collaborative (NCC) does sit under the Metro Nashville Public Schools board of education; that governance model does hold the NCC to a different level of accountability than what is present in Detroit.

I am proposing a charter-led collaboration, spearheaded by Detroit Charter School Leaders in partnership with a community leadership team. The proposed community leadership team was originally branded “School Leadership Teams” in *The Choice Is Ours (TCIO)* document.

I want to acknowledge that some of the work laid out within *The Choice is Ours* are policy ideas that are still being pushed forward and implemented in Detroit despite the failed legislation. I propose we still move forward with the coordination of our schooling systems despite the failed legislation. The Detroit Charter Collaborative would be a more feasible, self-governing next iteration or 3.0 version of the Detroit Education Commission. The second iteration or 2.0 version of the DEC was created in 2018. According to Lenhoff et al. (2019, 22), although not in its proposed original form or with its proposed mandate from Lansing, two years later there was the establishment of a commission “in 2018, Mayor Duggan established the Community Education Commission to take on many of the responsibilities the Coalition proposed for the DEC.” On the Community Education Commission (CEC) website (CEC, n.d.), the CEC describes itself:

The Community Education Commission is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization formed in May 2018 by Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan. In response to the more than 30,000 students that leave Detroit every day to attend school outside of the city, Mayor Duggan sought to work with education leaders, families, and educators to develop new resources that help to retain students in the city.

Some progress has been made, but not the level of progress envisioned in the original legislation. The recommended charter-led collaboration could be the next iteration, or version 3.0.

Detroit charter leaders would not need a legislative mandate or need to start from scratch but rather leverage, in part, the framework of the Nashville Charter Collaborative. According to the Nashville Charter Collaborative's website, this charter-led body is comprised of twelve charter organizations in which there are thirty-two member schools serving more than 12,800 students across the city of Nashville. The Collaborative is serving students with similar demographics as Detroit and is demonstrating "high achievement and growth." The charter leaders in this collaborative "work together on areas of shared need, such as professional development and recruitment of high-quality teachers" (NCC, n.d.).

I recommend taking a look at this approach as a possible next step. The collaboration model takes into consideration several of the themes from the interviews: (1) It allows charters to maintain a level of autonomy; (2) it allows charters to have control over how they coordinate and how to best coordinate; (3) it allows time for diverse membership within the charter sector to build trust; and (4) it allows for the community's voice to be present and engaged through the community leadership teams.

***Recommendation 2. Support an Unlikely but Forward Thinking, Innovative Partnership: Support the creation of a strategic alliance with the pro-charter lobby Great Lakes Education Project (GLEP), Detroit Charter Leaders, the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren, and 482Forward to fund the acceleration of coordination between charter school districts in Detroit.***

This recommendation is based primarily on finding number three, which concluded there was a preponderance of pressure from the pro-charter interest group, placed on key legislators to remove the Detroit Education Commission (DEC) legislative recommendation from the bill.

Pro-charter advocates like the Great Lakes Education Project (GLEP) have been vocal about supporting quality choice options for students. According to the mission and priorities on the GLEP's website, "quality" is a key priority. The website states "Parents deserve meaningful school quality measures that empower them to make the best decisions for their children...quality, accountability, and transparency measures should be applied uniformly." The website goes on to support school choice and how important it is for parents to be "empowered."

The stated mission and priorities of the GLEP—quality, accountability, and transparency—closely align with the vision and many of the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren's (CFDS) priorities which clearly articulate school choice, transparency, and accountability as central to their mission. I want to note here that I also know that the GLEP and other pro-charter lobby organizations also support the expansion of the charter footprint, which is not a priority of the CFDS and has other views not aligned with 482Forward or the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren. However, ensuring the charters that do exist are quality and the children are achieving academically are metrics for both the Great Lakes Education Project and the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren.

Based on that common agenda, why not form a strategic alliance with the pro-charter lobby Great Lake Education Project (GLEP), Detroit Charter Leaders, the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS), and 482Forward to fund the acceleration of coordination between charter school districts in Detroit?

Recall from the literature review, I cited Derrick Bell. Bell (2005) put forth a theory called "Interest Convergence." Interest convergence argues the collective interest of the minority is only realized when that interest converges with that of the majority. Using *Brown v Board of Education* as an example, Bell states that arguing for a policy on the merit of harm alone is not enough. Bell asserts effective policy-changing strategies must align with and utilize interest convergence factors. I wonder what would be possible if Detroit community leaders and Detroit charter leaders' quality charter schools'

interests converged with those of the GLEP? Progress does not make much room for purists.

***Recommendation 3. Broaden the Narrative, Broaden the Coalition: Craft a statewide narrative with a broad statewide coalition with supporting data and indicators that clearly define the quality education issue as a statewide problem.***

This recommendation is based primarily on finding number one, which concluded that while the problem of the “schoolchildren are suffering—still...and academic gain are tragically low” was recognized as a Detroit problem, the narrow framing focused primarily on Detroit and prevented legislators from understanding the pervasiveness or the relevance.

**Broaden the Narrative Now in Preparation for the Next Unpredictable Policy Windows**

Part A of this recommendation is to reframe the narrative to include more statewide education quality issues now, in anticipation of another focusing event and or policy window opening in the unforeseen distant or near future. I recommend spending time in the present reframing a broader statewide quality education narrative in partnership with a broader coalition of policy communities throughout the state and a broader base of policy entrepreneurs in Lansing. According to the school count data from 2019–20 (the most recent data on record) across the state, there are 57 rural charters, 137 suburban or town charters, and 171 urban charters: 171 (inclusive of Detroit’s charters), a total of approximately 365 charters. Many of them have a similar education landscape comprised of a mix of traditional district and charter schools, which comes with the comparable challenges Detroit communities are facing. There should be a smaller subset of the Coalition, a think tank, behind the scenes crafting the broader narrative and aligning the broader coalition in anticipation of that broader policy window.

Recall, the focusing event for the Detroit Education Commission (DEC) legislation proposal was the Detroit Public Schools’ (DPS) Debt Crisis. All the respondents reference the short, ninety-day time period in which the advocacy group had to create the aforementioned set of policy recommendations to

address the DPS' debt and the more systemic education quality issues. The Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS) quickly responded to what Kingdon (2011, 189) refers to as policy streams joining during “unpredictable windows. [...] Sometimes their joining is partly accidental. The separate development of the streams has proceeded to the point where they are each ready for coupling at the same time.” Although these long-time activists and highly-engaged community leaders had been working on the quality education issue for years prior to the 2015 policy window, they still found themselves in a hurry-up offense to create a comprehensive set of legislation in a short three-month period. Time should be spent now preparing for the next policy window.

### **And Use Broadened Narrative and Coalition to Take Advantage of Predictable Windows**

Conversations regarding education policy are happening all the time in and around the government. Part B of this recommendation is to properly equip the broadened coalition with the broadened narrative to take advantage of predictable policy windows.

Kingdon (2011, 186) explains the predictability of windows:

“Windows sometimes open with great predictability. Regular cycles of various kinds open and close windows on schedule. That schedule varies in its precision, hence its predictability, but the cyclical nature of many windows is nonetheless evident.”

A budget cycle creates open windows on a schedule. The most predictable policy window in Lansing is the budget development process that runs from May through December each year. Budget drives policy and policy drives budget. This annual predictable policy window in Lansing creates an opportunity for 482Forward and the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren to advance the quality school conversations and bring light to the problem—only this time the statewide problem, and then push theirs just in time for proposals.

In addition to the budget cycle, there are other predictable window openings like swings in national moods. Kingdon (2011, 189) states, “Scholars and practitioners alike often speak of swinging pendulums. One of them is the swing between periods of reform and quiescence.” I believe now more



than ever is a time for education reform. The issues of race have shifted the pendulum. Today, as I write the conclusion to this paper, the verdict to hold former Minneapolis Police Officer Derrek Chauvin accountable for the murder of George Floyd has just been delivered...today the opportunity to bring equity into an education system that has been racist has just been delivered...today the policy window is open. The nation may be ready for it and the national mood might be asking for it.

## Conclusion

Education in Detroit, Michigan was and is still considered the Wild West. Currently, in 2021, we have ten charter school authorizers (down from fourteen in 2014), 100+ traditional district schoolhouses, and 80+ charter schoolhouses. Our PreK–12 Black and Brown babies are scattered in disparate school institutions throughout the city with our parents and families boldly and bravely trying their best to navigate this chaotic and insufficient landscape of schools.

In 2014, the Detroit Public Schools' (DPS) looming bankruptcy issue added to the Detroit schooling chaos and, at the same time, created a focusing event. The DPS' debt crisis captured the attention of the Michigan governor who needed to solve this problem. 482Forward and the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS) helped attach the DPS' debt problem to a policy solution, which made its way into the policy stream. The coupling of that policy stream to external political forces and events in the political stream created a policy window. This policy window created an opportunity for the CFDS's advocates to put forward a broader set of accompanying quality education legislation which included the creation of a Detroit Education Commission. The CFDS's advocates knew this policy window would not stay open long and they felt it would not present itself again in the near future; they sensed it was their opportunity to mobilize, advocate, and bring transformative change for Detroit families and children.

The CFDS, in partnership with their policy entrepreneurs in Lansing, Michigan, the state capital, added additional pieces of accompanying legislation to the DPS' debt elimination legislative proposal. The Coalition felt this comprehensive package of legislation could dramatically improve the school system in Detroit. They also understood that their proposed legislation would not make it to the decision agenda on its own and the looming DPS' bankruptcy served as the focusing political event that significantly increased their chances of getting their ideas firmly on the decision agenda. The Coalition was successful in getting their ideas to Lansing in the form of policy recommendations. The package of

proposed legislation made it all the way to the decision agenda and was initially approved by the Michigan Senate in Senate Bill 710.

However, the Detroit Education Commission (DEC) proposed legislation caught the attention of the prominent pro-charter interest group, the Great Lakes Education Project (GLEP). The organized interest group pressure from the GLEP had a negative impact on the CFDS's decision agenda and was attributed to being the main barrier to successfully passing the legislation that called for the creation of the DEC. In addition to the external pressure groups' overwhelming influence, the lack of buy-in from the internally fragmented CFDS itself also impacted the ultimate fate of the DEC legislation.

The CFDS's policy community was very diverse and broad in that it had a plethora of key stakeholders from the Detroit education ecosystem. This diversity added to the strength of the Coalition and at the same time added to the fragmentation that existed inside the Coalition, particularly along the lines of political ideology: free-market versus regulation and accountability. That fragmentation eventually spilled over into the public arena and demonstrated to the legislators that even within Detroit there were leaders who disagreed with the proposed solution. Many of the legislators already felt they didn't have much stake in the game as the majority were not from Detroit and not from communities like Detroit—communities that suffered from historical systemic racism and unsuccessfully implemented emergency management with severe underfunding for an already poor community. The lack of relevance, the lack of understanding of the education ecosystem complexity, the presence of racism from a group of far-removed lawmakers, and the extreme pressure from the pro-charter lobbies was more than enough to tilt the hands of the legislators toward the less controversial legislation reforms in the policy package. At the final hour, after being sequestered, pressured, incentivized, and coerced by the GLEP and allies, legislators backed off their support to create the Detroit Education Commission (DEC). The DEC legislation was killed in Senate Bill 710. The Detroit Public Schools' (DPS) debt elimination and other

accompanying legislation was repackaged in House Bills 5383 and 5384, and it was moved into legislative action and into a policy.

In applying Kingdon's Three Stream Model, my study analyzed how the idea "to create a new non-partisan entity, the Detroit Education Commission, to coordinate and rationalize citywide education functions" for Detroit children and families, met enough survival across the three streams—problem, policy, and political—to move onto the decision agenda. But it did not meet the necessary criteria to move from the decision agenda into legislative action. While the Detroit Education Commission's (DEC) policy legislation ultimately failed on the legislative floor...it made it to the legislative floor. This suggests that 482Forward and the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren (CFDS) have enough power, partnerships, and policy- and agenda-setting prowess to move a problem into an idea, into a policy, and into a position to land it on the decision agenda. Of the seven legislative proposals put forth by the CFDS, four made it into final legislation and ultimately made it into policy.

This is positive momentum. 482Forward cannot stop. The Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren cannot stop. We, as Detroit education leaders and activists cannot stop until all of our Detroit children have access to quality education. And no one will do it for us but us. And nothing should be done for us without us. And we should realize we cannot do it alone. It will take collaboration. It will take broadening the narrative and broadening the coalition. It will take unlikely allies. Bell (2005) puts forth a theory called "Interest Convergence" which argues the collective interest of the minority is only realized when that interest converges with that of the majority. Using *Brown v Board of Education* as an example, Bell states that arguing for a policy on the merit of harm alone is not enough. Bell asserts effective policy-changing strategies must align with and utilize interest convergence factors.

I contend that at this particular moment in history, the majority will be more receptive to bold action than any other moment in our foreseeable futures. This transformational moment in history presents a window in time we may not get again for a long time to come. Kingdon (2011) states the convergence of

three streams—problem, policy, and political—must come together at a moment in time that presents the best opportunity for a launch: the policy window. “These policy windows, the opportunity for action on given initiatives, present themselves and stay open for only short periods” (166).

Right now, in the recent wake of George Floyd and the countless other tragedies of systemic racism the world has shown us this year and right now as millions of unemployed Americans have the time to watch systemic racism play out on television and social media, we have an opportunity. Right now, this moment of heightened engagement represents a window, it represents a convergence of interests of all colors, genders, and ideologies to come together and agree on the systemic racism as we know must be disrupted. Systemic racism does not just live in the criminal justice system, systemic racism lives in all institutions founded on the backs of Black and Brown people in this country and in societies that have perpetuated white supremacist culture. Systemic racism lives and breathes in our Detroit K–12 educational systems.

Setting responsible K–12 education policy in the community...is an idea whose time has come.

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# Appendix 1

## Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren, March 2015

### *COALITION MEMBERS*

#### **Co-Chairs**

- Tonya Allen, President & CEO, Skillman Foundation
- Rev. Wendell Anthony, President, Detroit Branch NAACP
- David Hecker, President, AFT Michigan/AFL-CIO
- John Rakolta, Jr., CEO, Walbridge
- Angela Reyes, Executive Director, Detroit Development Corporation

#### **Steering Committee Members**

- Sandy Baruah, President & CEO, Detroit Regional Chamber
- Charlie Breckham, Group Executive for Neighborhoods, City of Detroit
- Ralph Bland, CEO, New Paradigm for Education
- Mike Brennan, President & CEO, United Way for Southeastern Michigan
- Sharlonda Buckman, CEO, Detroit Parent Network
- Dr. Stephanie Burrage, Chief Reform Officer, School Achievement Services, Wayne RESA
- David Carroll, Vice President, Quicken Loans
- Richard DeVore, Regional President, Detroit & Southeast Michigan, PNC Financial Services Group
- Clark Durant, Co-Founder and Former CEO, Cornerstone Schools
- Sherry Gay-Dagnogo, State Representative, District 8
- Stephanie Griffin, English Teacher, Brenda Scott Academy
- Steve Hamp, Chair, Michigan Education Excellence Foundation
- Ponsella Hardaway, Executive Director, MOSES
- Tashaune Harden, Science Teacher, Cesar Chavez Academy Middle School
- Arlyssa Heard, Education Activist and Parent
- Ines de Jesus, Community Schools Coordinator, Southwest Counseling Solutions
- Bert Johnson, State Senator, District 2
- Lamar Lemmons, At-Large member, Detroit Board of Education
- Faye Nelson, President, DTE Energy Foundation, and Vice President of Public Affairs, DTE
- Rev. James Perkins, Greater Christ Baptist Church
- Lisa Phillips, Principal, Detroit Cass Technical High School
- Julia Putnam, Co-Founder and Principal, James & Grace Lee Boggs School
- Edna Reaves, Teacher, Detroit Public Schools
- Mark Reuss, Executive Vice President of Global Product Development, Purchasing, and Supply Chain, General Motors
- Mayowa Reynolds, Dean of Arts, Accountability and Recruitment, Detroit School of Arts
- Roy Roberts, former Detroit Public Schools Emergency Manager
- Jimmy Settles, Vice President, UAW

- Larry Simmons, Executive Director, Brightmoor Alliance
- Shirley Stancato, President & CEO, New Detroit
- Alice Thompson, CEO, Black Family Development
- Dan Varner, CEO, Excellent Schools Detroit

## Appendix 2

### Interview Protocol: An Idea Whose Time Has Come

#### *Framing the Interview Questions using John Kingdon's Agenda Setting & Policy Formation*

##### *Framework*

#### 1. Introduction

- a. Hello! My name is Erica Robertson, I'm a doctoral student from the Vanderbilt Peabody College of Education. I'm here to learn about the 2016 legislative push for charter oversight and the types of activities and partnerships your coalition undertook. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today.
- b. The purpose of this interview is to learn about the 2016 legislative push and your perspective. There are no right or wrong answers, or desirable or undesirable answers. I would like you to feel comfortable saying what you really think and how you really feel.
- c. If it's okay with you, I will be tape-recording our conversation since it is hard for me to write down everything while simultaneously carrying an attentive conversation with you.
- d. Everything you say will be anonymous meaning that only myself will be aware of your specific answers—the purpose of that is only so we know whom to contact should we have further follow-up questions after this interview.

#### 2. Interviewee Background information

- a. How long have you been a part of the organization?
- b. What is your role (in the Coalition)?
- c. How did you get involved with this type of work?

## **Section I:**

**Problem Stream.** Was the definition of the problem recognized as a pressing problem to gain a prominent place on the policy agenda? (pg. 90)

3. Indicators & Data (pgs. 90-94)
  - a. What type of data was used to highlight the problem?
  - b. Was the problem countable?
4. Focusing Events (pgs. 94–100)
  - a. What was the education landscape like at the time?
  - b. What was the impetus behind starting the Coalition?
  - c. What was the time period the legislation was in Lansing?
  - d. Was there any crisis, disaster, etc. in education during that particular time period?
5. Feedback (pgs. 100–102)
  - a. Who were your key contacts in the legislature?
  - b. What were their backgrounds? Education?
  - c. Had they heard about this issue prior to legislation?
  - d. What type of information were they provided leading up to the legislation?
6. Problem Definition (pgs. 109–115)
  - a. How was the problem framed?
  - b. Did you use comparisons when framing the problem?
  - c. How was the problem categorized? i.e. Education? Civil rights? Equity?

## **Section II:**

**Policy stream.** Did the Coalition’s proposal meet the necessary criteria to enhance its chance of survival? (pg. 117)

7. Policy Communities (pgs. 117–121)
  - a. Fragmentation
    - i. What are the different departments in Lansing that deal with education?
    - ii. How well do they work together and collaborate with each other?
    - iii. Is their transparency between the departments?
  - b. Policy Entrepreneurs (FLUSH OUT)
8. Short List of Ideas (pgs. 139–143)
  - a. Alternatives
    - i. Was there just one policy proposal were there a few alternatives?
9. Criteria for Survival (FLUSH OUT)
  - a. Technical Feasibility
  - b. Value Acceptability
  - c. Anticipation of Future Constraints

### **Section III:**

**Political Stream.** What political events, political forces, or other governmental phenomena affected the CFDS policy agenda in 2016? (pg. 145)

10. National/Public Mood (thinking along same lines/attitudes toward government)
  - a. Climate of the country
  - b. Changes in public opinion
  - c. Broad social movements
11. Organized Political Forces/Interest Group Pressure Campaigns/Organized Interests
12. Changes in Ideology or Partisan Distributions

13. Election Results/Election Repercussions

14. Changes in Administration

## Appendix 3



**The Michigan State Senate advanced a bipartisan package** that, while not perfect, is a great step forward in ensuring that *all* Detroit students in *every* neighborhood have *quality* school choices.

Unfortunately, special interest groups — motivated by profit — are going all out to gut the actual reforms in the package. In the process, they are making charges that just aren't true.

<p><b>FALSE</b> The DEC would have the authority to close schools.</p>	<p><b>TRUE</b></p>	<p>The authority to close schools would remain under the State School Reform Office (SSRO). The <b>DEC can NOT close schools</b>. What opponents are really worried about is having an independent, nonpartisan watchdog shine the spotlight on schools that have failed to serve Detroit's kids, year after year, with no consequences or accountability. That needs to end.</p>
<p><b>FALSE</b> The DEC could ban new charter operators from opening schools, thus limiting choice.</p>	<p><b>TRUE</b></p>	<p><b>Detroiters have plenty of school choice</b> – more than 50 different school operators to choose from, governed by 14 different authorizers. These special interests are complaining because under the DEC, bad operators would no longer be able to open new schools – thankfully! High-quality schools would continue to replicate and expand with a DEC. Ensuring that only high-performing schools replicate is clearly the kind of choice families want. And it is clearly what's best for kids.</p>
<p><b>FALSE</b> The DEC would be biased against charter schools.</p>	<p><b>TRUE</b></p>	<p>The <b>Senate bills require that the DEC have an equal number of representatives from charter schools and traditional schools</b> (3 each), plus a final member with expertise in accountability and school improvement. Mayor Duggan, who would appoint those representatives, has repeatedly publicly supported school choice and indicated that he wants good schools of all governance types. Moreover, Mayor Duggan would be held accountable by Detroiters, who, according to surveys, would likely vote him out of office if his actions threatened school choice.</p>
<p><b>FALSE</b> Charter schools oppose the DEC.</p>	<p><b>TRUE</b></p>	<p>Most <b>Detroit-based charter school leaders support the DEC</b>. They know it gives them the best chance of providing a great education for their students. They also know that under a DEC, expansion will be based on merit – not political influence, real estate expertise, or false, predatory marketing to families. The special interests want to keep the system the way it is, so they can manipulate it. If we want a real choice system, we need to create a stable marketplace to attract only the best.</p>

**The Detroit Education Commission will help give Detroit families and students what they really deserve — more *quality* choices.**

April 2016