

## on Michigan's Communities

March 01, 2010

The goal of this publication is to profile child advocacy efforts of one or more of Michigan's communities to encourage networking and sharing of advocacy strategies. This issue highlights the **Small School Redesign Projects of Cody and Osborn High Schools**. These redesigns are being conducted by the Detroit Federation of Teachers, and the Detroit Public Schools in partnership with the Institute for Student Achievement (ISA), the Skillman Foundation, the United Way of Southeast Michigan, and several other community partners.

Low graduation rates, low achievement and violence at large high schools indicate that the structures, daily routines, and impersonal relationships have resulted in significant numbers of students who are not engaged in the life of the school and feel alienated from adults and one another. Students who fear their personal safety, and don't feel cared about, are more likely to drop out of school. There has been a wealth of attention paid to the alarmingly high dropout rates in Detroit, and in poor achievement throughout the school district. In the fall of 2008, 8137 young Detroiters entered the Detroit Public Schools as 9<sup>th</sup> graders. Only 37 percent returned for their 10<sup>th</sup> grade year. Some dropped out, many moved out of the DPS schools they were attending. Of the students who graduated in 2008, only 11 percent passed the ACT with scores that indicated they were college ready in language arts. Only 2 percent of those students were college ready in math.

Educational success is built on both the successes and failures of multiple systems. It takes a coordinated system of professionals, parents, and students themselves working together to impact the educational success of youth. In Detroit, the Skillman Foundation and the United Way of Southeast Michigan have teamed up to turnaround or shutdown 30 failing schools across the city of Detroit that are struggling to serve students well. The goal is aggressive- to graduate 80 percent of Detroit students who enrolled as freshman in 2009 and ensure that at least 80 percent of those students enroll in some form of post secondary education program.

According to data maintained by the Detroit Public Schools and the Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), both Cody and Osborn high schools fell well below Michigan averages in regards to graduation rates and rates of student achievement in the 2007-2008 academic year.

	Dropout <sup>1</sup> Rate	Graduation Rate	Off track Continuing	Satisfactory Michigan Merit Exam Scores <sup>2</sup>	
				English Language Arts	Math
<b>Michigan</b>	14.19%	75.50%	10.31%	52%	46%
<b>Cody High School</b>	24.48%	61.07%	14.45%	17%	11%

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.michigan.gov/cepi/0,1607,7-113-21423\\_30451\\_51357---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/cepi/0,1607,7-113-21423_30451_51357---,00.html)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.detroit.k12.mi.us/docs/2009.07.10\\_Building\\_Centers\\_of\\_Excellence\\_In\\_Every\\_School\\_v6.pdf](http://www.detroit.k12.mi.us/docs/2009.07.10_Building_Centers_of_Excellence_In_Every_School_v6.pdf)

<b>Osborn High Schools</b>	22.63%	57.37%	20.00%	10%	3%
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To improve graduation rates and put more young people on a post-secondary path in the city, Skillman and the United Way have helped to create smaller learning environments for students. “Small schools allow us to take care of the emotional and social needs of our students and remove barriers to learning. For example, we now provide breakfast to students who are coming to school hungry.” - Dr. Gabriela Gui, Principal, Detroit Institute of Technology at Cody High School. These smaller learning communities being developed in Detroit are based on evidence gathered from model schools across the country. Small Schools<sup>3</sup> share a set of common characteristics:

- **They are small.** Few effective small schools serve more than 400 students, and many serve no more than 200 students.
- **They are autonomous.** The school community—whether it shares a building, administrator, or some co-curricular activities with other schools—retains primary authority to make decisions affecting the important aspects of the school. The principals of each of the small schools in the shared building meet weekly in governance meetings to discuss how to properly share and utilize space. Athletic teams are a shared service and youth from each school in the building may participate.
- **They are personal.** Every student is known by more than one adult, and every student has an advisor/advocate who works closely with her and her family to plan a personalized program. Student-family-advisor relationships are sustained over several years.
- **They are committed to equity** in educational achievement by eliminating achievement gaps between groups of students while increasing the achievement levels of virtually all students.
- **They use multiple forms of assessment** to report on student accomplishment and to guide their efforts to improve their own school. The small schools at Cody and Osborn are being evaluated based on three measures of success: test scores, student attendance, and student academic progress. In place of MEAP assessments, ISA has developed alternative assessments to gauge learning in math and writing with students participating in these assessments in the fall and spring semesters to measure growth. ISA has also developed perception surveys to measure interest in college going. These measures have been developed to measure thinking and learning rather than just testing students.
- **They view parents as critical allies**, and find significant ways to include them in the life of the school community.
- **They are schools of choice** for both students and teachers, except in some rural areas, and are open, without bias, to any students in a community.

Schools that have implemented the Small Schools model have found that student achievement increases, particularly for minority and low-income students. As student attendance improves, graduation rates rise, and college going rates increase. Students in Small Schools are more engaged in their studies and are more likely to participate in extracurricular activities. Compared with students in large urban schools, students who are enrolled in schools-within-schools attended up to five more days of school per semester, drop out at one third to one half the rate, have up to a .22 higher grade point average, and higher reading scores by the equivalent of almost half a year.<sup>4</sup> Disadvantaged students in Small Schools significantly out-perform those in larger ones on standardized basic skills tests. Small

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.smallschoolsproject.org/index.asp?siteLoc=whysmall&section=whatss>

<sup>4</sup> Wasley, P.A. & Lear, R.J. (2001). Small Schools Real Gains. *Educational Leadership*, 58 (6). 22-27.

Schools are also better able to close the achievement gap between less and more affluent students. Students who attend small schools report feeling safer, report fewer fights, and no incidents of serious violence; students also report that they are more connected with adults in small schools. Teachers report a greater sense of efficacy, job satisfaction, and connections with parents.

Beginning November 2008, a small team of redesign experts, the Institute for Student Achievement (ISA), met with teams of educators, parents, and other community partners from the Cody and Osborn communities including Detroit Parent Network, Detroit College Promise, Black Caucus, Leadership Next, Eastern Michigan University Gear Up Program, Detroit Economic Club, Michigan Department of Transportation and Civil Engineering, Michigan Technical University Enterprise, City Year, Black Family Development, Made Men, the Matrix Center, the Neighborhood Service Organization and St. John's Health Center to lay out the vision for the two learning communities and how to graduate more youth who reside in their neighborhoods. Leadership for each small school was selected by these community partners. Small Schools utilize a site-based management model. Once these principals were hired, they were tasked with the responsibility of selecting and training their team of staff, designing their instructional programs, and managing their own budgets.

The small school redesign efforts were made possible by grants received from the Greater Detroit Education Venture Fund. Each school has received 5 year, \$1.6 million grants. The Venture Fund is designed to target high schools with current graduation rates of 60 percent or less and empowers them to work with educational redesign experts, such as the ISA, to create smaller learning communities. Additional funding sources being used to support the implementation of the model include district funds and a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Small High School Grant from the Michigan Department of Education and seed grants from the Skillman Foundation. IBM also provided resources to Cody High School to fully equip the computer labs in the small schools.

Both schools launched their redesigned schools in the Fall of 2009 with three 9<sup>th</sup> grade academies at Osborn and four at Cody High School (each academy has a maximum enrollment of 100 students) and an upper academy that serves students in grades 10-12. These "academies" have been built within the original school buildings, separated by hallways and floor levels. Each has their own theme and culture, an assembled team of 7-9 core subject teachers, and a guidance counselor placed at each small school. In each subsequent year, a new 9<sup>th</sup> grade class enters and each previous class is maintained. In the Fall of 2010, the Cody small schools will enroll 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders. Students enrolled in Osborn will transition from the Osborn building to the Brenda Scott Middle School Building, but each of the small schools will be maintained. In the Fall of 2011, the small schools will serve 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> graders; and in the Spring of 2013, the small schools will graduate their first senior class. By the fourth year, the small schools will have a total population of no more than 450 students- the outside limit for a school to offer the advantages of a small school structure. The upper academies will be phased out over the next three years, with today's 10<sup>th</sup> graders being the last to graduate from these upper academies. Beginning in the fall of 2010, youth who are currently enrolled in the Osborn upper academy will be dispersed to other high schools in Detroit.

Prior to the implementation of the small school redesign, Cody and Osborn had enrollments of nearly 2000 students. When the small schools are fully implemented, each building will be servicing no more than 450 students in total.

ISA has intermediaries appointed in each of the small schools, and that consultant provides each of the schools with coaching and technical assistance with implementation of the ISA model. The ISA model

is framed around seven principles: a college preparatory instructional program, Distributed Counseling<sup>5</sup>, a dedicated team of teachers and counselors, continuous professional development, extended school day and year, parent involvement, accountability and continuous organizational improvement. ISA does not dictate to the schools who their community partners should be, but does emphasize the need for the inclusion of community in the classroom. Small School staff share common planning time on a weekly basis where they can reflect and improve practice in the classroom. Credit recovery programs will be offered during after school and weekend hours to provide students who are performing below expectations to catch up. Bridge Programs will be implemented in the Small Schools between summer and fall months to reach out to students ensure that students are able to build and maintain relationships with students and foster a sense of belonging. The Bridge Program will include field trips, college tours, and social activities.

The ISA model has been successfully implemented in over 80 public high schools over the last 9 years. Based on data collected from ISA's previous work in New York, the ISA model has significantly increased rates of attendance (at least 90 percent school-wide average daily attendance), produced an 80 percent passing rate in core subjects (math, science, English, & social studies), decreased annual dropout rates to an average of just 4 percent, and significantly increased teacher retention rates (by approximately 80 percent).

#### **What have been the challenges to school redesign implementation:**

- *Cultural expectations about high school are deeply embedded.* Schools and the communities they serve are often locked into the notion that a large selection of courses is the best way to meet students needs. Each school operates as a separate entity with different goals and approaches. Each principal has his or her own vision which is focused more narrowly and is not comprehensive in scope. The only common goal for each of the schools is college readiness.
- *Schools that attempt to go small do too little, too slowly.* Central office administrators may impede the process by requiring that Small Schools operate under the same constraints that larger schools do- even when those constraints are, in part, what the reform is trying to break.
- *Decision-makers focus only on short-term goals.* School boards and state legislators often insist that the reform efforts provide data about improvement quickly. The demand for instant evidence of success often leads to compromises that seem necessary for survival but decrease the possibility for long term success.
- *Student recruitment/overcoming the reputation of last year's school model.* It took great efforts by the Detroit College Promise, Skillman, and United Way to overcome the skepticism of parents, to regain the trust of families and convince them to re-enroll their children at Cody High School and give the new redesign model a chance.
- *In addition to academic need, students need a high amount of social services.* Each Small School is mandated to serve a certain percentage of special education students. Forty four percent of students enrolled at Cody high school are special needs. It is a challenge to get these students on par with their other peers.

#### **How do students feel about the school redesign initiatives?**

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.tc.edu/ncrest/onlinepub/ISA%20DC.SP.FINAL.pdf>

School redesign provides more opportunities for one-on-one student/teacher interaction and has allowed students to complete assignments working at their own pace.

“I get way more attention. We work at our own pace. If it wasn’t for this I would slack- you know, drop out.” - Freshman, Academy of Critical Thinkers, Cody High School

“I came to DIT skeptical. It’s not what people think. Project based learning is really hands on. I get to do what they are teaching. Getting attention and working at your own pace has helped me increase my grades. Relationships with teachers are like our parents. This helps out way more than at a bigger school.” - Freshman, Detroit Institute of Technology, Cody High School

“I have two teachers in all my classes and have access to after school programs. They [the teachers] don’t want to see me fail. Small schools give us a chance.” - Freshman, Osborn College Preparatory Academy

“ I came up on the streets, living house to house. Without the Cody Academy of Public Leadership, I’d be hussling- you know- selling weed. The school has changed my perspective and what I want to be in life. I can do things I didn’t think I could. I used to be very bad. It’s been good for me to be around people that care about you. They don’t want me to get in trouble.” - Freshman, Academy of Public Leadership, Cody High School

Small schools models, like ISA are showing great promise for increasing graduation rates among at risk urban city youth. Additional small school models being implemented in and around the city of Detroit include Henry Ford Academy, Melvindale High School and Pontiac High School and Van Dyke Lincoln High School.

For more information on these small school redesign schools, contact Thomas Parker, Principal, Osborn College Preparatory Academy, at 313 401 6792, or via email at [thomas.parker@detroitk12.org](mailto:thomas.parker@detroitk12.org); Dr. Gabriela Gui, Principal, Detroit Institute of Technology at Cody High School, at (313) 852-6606 or via email at [gabriela.gue@detroitk12.org](mailto:gabriela.gue@detroitk12.org); or ISA at 516-812-6700, or via email at [info@isa-ed.org](mailto:info@isa-ed.org).

*If you would like to find out how your community can be profiled for your innovative work in any arena of child and family services, contact Michele Corey at 1-800-330-8674 or 1-517-485-3500, or via email at [corey.michele@michiganschildren.org](mailto:corey.michele@michiganschildren.org).*