Creating Opportunities for Postsecondary Success in Detroit

DETROIT PROMISE ZONE AUTHORITY
5 YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

JANUARY 2025

Introduction

Letter from Detroit Promise Zone Authority Board Chair

As we celebrate over a decade of the Detroit Promise, I am filled with hope and excitement for the journey ahead. This initiative began with a powerful vision – a vision rooted in the belief that every Detroit high school graduate deserves access to a tuition-free education and a pathway to a fulfilling career and bright future. Together, we are making this vision a reality, one student at a time.

Our progress would not have been possible without the unwavering commitment and dedication of the Detroit Regional Chamber, Michigan Educational Excellence Foundation, our other dedicated partners, board members, elected officials, funders, and the 50 Detroit high schools and 32 Michigan colleges that stand alongside us. Thanks to their hard work, we have supported over 6,000 college students — and that number is set to grow substantially in the coming years.

Recognizing that tuition is just one barrier to success, we launched a coaching program in 2019 to provide tailored support for Promise students attending community colleges. This initiative has proven transformative – students who engage with coaches have significantly higher persistence and graduation rates.

As we look ahead, Michigan's higher education landscape is evolving, and the Detroit Promise is poised to embrace this new era. Established in 2013 with the support of the Michigan Educational Excellence Foundation and expertly administered by the Detroit Regional Chamber, we have witnessed a remarkable transformation. The creation of the Detroit Promise Zone Authority in 2016 has allowed us to harness Detroit's rising property tax revenues to enhance our scholarship offerings. With growing support for scholarship programs at the state level, and new state legislation allowing us to cover essential expenses beyond tuition, we have the opportunity to support our students in a more holistic way.

Our 5 year strategic plan seizes these opportunities and reaffirms our commitment to enable more Detroit students to achieve their goals. We will increase awareness of the Promise and demystify its offerings; strengthen our collaboration with postsecondary institutions, and expand our partnerships with support providers, ensuring that students receive the comprehensive support they need to thrive. We know that tuition is not the only barrier to a degree, and I am excited for us to embark on a path that includes a more robust coaching program and the ability to reduce barriers such as access to school supplies, stable housing, reliable transportation, nutritious food, childcare and other essentials.

As we step into this exciting chapter, we are guided by the voices and experiences of our students. By building on our successes, we will pave the way toward an even brighter future for our city and its young leaders.

With determination and gratitude,

Dr. Iris Taylor
Chair
Detroit Promise Zone Authority Board of Directors

Vision



Our vision is a Detroit where high school graduates have the opportunity to achieve postsecondary success, paving the way for generational wealth and a vibrant, equitable city.

Mission



Our mission is to provide every Detroit high school graduate with a clear pathway to a postsecondary degree or credential by removing the burden of tuition and addressing other barriers through comprehensive support. We help students accomplish their goals, unlocking a world of possibilities and a brighter future for Detroit.

Values



Rooted in Detroit

Our initiatives reflect the experiences and perspectives of Detroiters. We center the voices of students, families, and alumni in our decision-making processes and value their lived experiences.



Equitable Access

We strive to eliminate obstacles and ensure that every high school graduate, regardless of their background or circumstances, has the opportunity to achieve a postsecondary credential.



Continuous Learning

We are committed to a culture of continuous learning and adaptation where both qualitative and quantitative data serve as the cornerstone of our decision-making. This commitment allows us to make informed decisions that drive success.



Trusting Partnerships

We are dedicated to growing strong partnerships built on mutual trust and shared goals. We believe that successful collaborations are grounded in transparency, understanding and respect, and that our collective efforts are essential in achieving impactful and sustainable outcomes.



Good Stewardship

We uphold the highest standards of fiscal responsibility. We prioritize transparency, accountability, and ethical stewardship in all our financial practices, ensuring that resources are used effectively and efficiently to maximize our impact.

The Detroit Promise: The student journey to a tuition-free degree or certificate.

1 Introduction to the Promise

In 8th or 9th grade, students learn about the Detroit Promise—a scholarship that covers any remaining tuition after all other financial aid has been applied—ensuring a tuition-free path to a degree.

The Detroit Promise conducts outreach at all 50+ Detroit high schools, with 8th grade counselors and parents, and at 100+ community organizations.

ⓘ *Chronic absenteeism rates are particularly high in Detroit—over half of the students miss 18 or more days of school per year. This affects college readiness.*

2 Signing up for the Promise

All 9th - 12th grade students sign up for the Promise.

ⓘ *Significant resources have been dedicated to registering Detroit students for the Promise scholarship, with 3,646 students registered in 2023.*

3 Applying to a Postsecondary Institution

Senior high school students complete applications to postsecondary institutions.

Students complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and other financial aid forms.

Students receive acceptance notifications from the institution(s).

Students decide where to enroll.

ⓘ *The Detroit Promise has MOUs in place with 32 partner colleges in Michigan in order to provide students with choices.*

4 Obtaining the Promise Scholarship

Students sign the Scholarship Acceptance Letter.

Students upload a transcript and/or admission letter.

The Detroit Promise Team does an initial verification determining eligibility.

Students who have been determined eligible by the Promise staff are then sent to the Postsecondary Institution for final review.

ⓘ *In 2023, 929 high school graduates signed the Detroit Promise scholarship letter and were accepted to a college.*

5 Enrollment

Students enroll in and attend a postsecondary institution.

ⓘ *232 students (25%) of the 929 students did not enroll in college within 12 months of high school graduation, despite having a tuition-free pathway.*

6 Persistence

Students progress each year, working towards program completion.

ⓘ *A survey of Promise students revealed the key reasons students stop out: feelings of disconnection from the college community, unreliable transportation, financial emergencies, mental health challenges, and difficulties balancing work, life, and school responsibilities.*

The Detroit Promise employs an intrusive coaching model addressing academic and personal challenges by proactively engaging with students, and helping them navigate barriers like housing instability and food insecurity. This model resulted in a 36% increase in persistence rates. After three years, the graduation rate was 10.7%, with an additional 36% still enrolled.

7 Completion

Students complete their postsecondary education, acquiring a degree or certificate.

ⓘ *The Detroit Promise measures the completion of a certificate or diploma by those who have completed within 6 years.*

4-year institution: 65% of Promise students from the Classes of 2016 and 2017 who initially enrolled completed, compared to the national average of 68%.

2-year institution: 19% of Promise students from the Classes of 2016 and 2017 completed their degree, compared to the national average of 42%.

* OPPORTUNITY //

Through research and additional programmatic support, we can close the gap in enrollment and ensure more Detroit high school students complete their postsecondary education.

Enhancing the Detroit Promise: Strategic Priorities for Student Success

	Strategic Priority #1		Strategic Priority #2	Strategic Priority #3
	Improve awareness and understanding of the Detroit Promise.		Improve the postsecondary enrollment rate for Detroit Promise eligible students.	Improve postsecondary completion rate for Detroit Promise students.
GOALS	Grow awareness of the Promise as an opportunity for all Detroit young people through integrated marketing and communications efforts.	Expand direct outreach to ensure 100% of 8th grade students are aware of the Promise before they begin high school.	Increase the proportion of students who are verified and enroll in a postsecondary institution by 5% annually. OPPORTUNITY // We can build on successful interventions that support students beyond tuition and successfully lower barriers to completion.	Increase the 6-year completion rate incrementally, achieving: • 75% completion rate for 4 year degrees (for students who initially enroll at 4-year institutions) • 45% completion rate for 2 year degrees (for students who initially enroll at 2-year institutions) In addition, every partner institution should reach the national average completion rate at minimum.
KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Reach of marketing campaign materials Impressions of campaign materials Engagement with campaign materials Conversion rate: i.e. direct engagement with Promise website or services	# of middle schools visits by outreach team # and % of students verified	# and % of Detroit students signed up for the Promise # and % of Promise students verified Comparison of the % of Detroit students enrolled with Promise, % of Detroit students enrolled without Promise, and % of Detroit students not enrolled at all Enrollment # and % by institution Enrollment # and % by high school	# and % of Promise students who graduate within 6 years: • # and % who complete 2 year degree • # and % who complete 4 year degree • # and % who complete certificates % of Promise students who complete vs. % of Detroit students without Promise who complete % of Promise students who are on track to graduate at end of each year by institution % of Promise students on academic probation by institution Transfer rates from 2-year to 4-year institutions by institution Total amount of debt incurred per student at completion

Strategic Focus Areas

Our strategic focus areas seek to enhance student experiences, strengthen partnerships, optimize communication, and ensure effective governance for student success and equitable access to postsecondary education over the next three years.

1

Student Engagement

Detroit Promise will deepen student engagement by conducting research to better understand barriers to enrollment and completion, establishing a student advisory group to develop targeted strategies, and evaluating equity in enrollment and completion. By embedding student voices in our approach, we aim to address holistic barriers to enrollment and completion and improve overall student success.

1A. Conduct research: Hire a consultant to analyze current survey findings and other relevant documents and conduct additional research with Promise students (prospective, current, alumni, and stop-out) parents/caregivers, and other community stakeholders to deepen understanding of students' experiences, priorities, and holistic barriers.

1B. Establish a student advisory group to develop and prioritize strategies to improve students' experiences and address barriers.

1C. Engage the student advisory group as postsecondary and operational partners implement strategies to increase enrollment and completion rates.

1D. Evaluate for equitable and representative Promise participation and outcomes.

2

Communications and Marketing

Detroit Promise will increase awareness and engagement across diverse audiences community-wide by working with a consultant to review current strategies, develop an integrated approach, implement targeted messaging across channels, and evaluate marketing efforts to identify gaps and optimize outreach. This strategy aims to clarify the Promise's offerings, demystify financial aid, and foster connections with students and alumni. We will seek to begin outreach at earlier grade levels and simplify the language used to explain how the Promise works for students.

2A. Hire a consultant to review Detroit Promise marketing including current strategies, messaging, and channels.

2B. Work with consultant to develop integrated communications and marketing strategy to increase awareness, trust, and belonging.

2C. Consultant implements integrated communications and marketing across audiences and channels.

2D. Evaluate communications and marketing to build on what's working and address any gaps.

3

Postsecondary Partnerships

Detroit Promise will strengthen student support by identifying best practices to enhance our coaching model, improving accountability with partner institutions, improving data-sharing systems, and working collaboratively to implement strategies that facilitate greater enrollment and completion. By working closely with partner institutions, we can better understand student needs and challenges, and ensure they receive the necessary resources and guidance to succeed.

3A. Analyze current data and collect additional relevant information to conduct a review of postsecondary partnerships to identify best practices and areas for improvement.

3B. Establish direct relationships with postsecondary partners, including setting regular meetings with school presidents, to engage in intentional collaboration.

3C. Support partner institutions in implementing strategies that ease enrollment and completion processes, provide wraparound supports and foster the Detroit Promise community.

4

Operational Partnerships

Detroit Promise will increase and expand partnerships with organizations that are well suited to serving students at each point in their Detroit Promise journey and beyond. By identifying key partners across Detroit's educational attainment and workforce development ecosystem, we can leverage existing efforts, strengthen collaboration across the community, and optimize resource allocation to provide students with holistic supports and connections to fulfilling employment opportunities.

4A. Review operational partnerships including implementation, communication and data-sharing practices.

4B. Model potential programmatic improvements based on impact on enrollment and completion.

4C. Implement programmatic changes based on research and planning outcomes.

5

Governance

Detroit Promise will enhance resource management and partnership outcomes by refining board operations, investing in board development, empowering staff and consultants for program implementation, and aligning the annual budget with programmatic needs. This strategic approach strengthens organizational performance and accountability.

5A. Adapt DPZA board operations and invest in board development to ensure adequate and efficient management of resources and partnerships.

5B. Align annual budget with programmatic needs.

5C. Put in place and empower staff and consultants to implement programming.

Ways to Engage with DPZA

Email info@detroitpromise.com

Call (313) 596-0373

Visit detroitpromise.com

Learn more about the DPZA Board: detroitmi.gov/government/boards/detroit-promise-zone-authority

Acknowledgements

BOARD MEMBERS

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Preston Welborne, The Grand Change Makers Organization

OPERATIONAL PARTNERS

Detroit Regional Chamber

Michigan Education Excellence Foundation

The Allen Law Group PC

POSTSECONDARY PARTNERS

Two-year Colleges

Henry Ford College

Jackson College

Macomb Community College

Oakland Community College

Schoolcraft College

St. Clair Community College

Wayne County Community College

Four-year Colleges

Albion College

Alma College

Central Michigan University

Cleary University

College for Creative Studies

Eastern Michigan University

Ferris State University

Grand Valley State University

Lawrence Technological University

Madonna University

Michigan State University

Michigan Technological University

Northern Michigan University

Oakland University

Rochester University

Saginaw Valley State University

Siena Heights University

The University of Olivet

University of Detroit- Mercy

University of Michigan- Ann Arbor

University of Michigan- Dearborn

University of Michigan- Flint

Walsh College

Wayne State University

Western Michigan University

Strategic Planning

INTERVIEWEES

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FACILITATION

The Work Department