

## Michigan Future, Inc.

### An unexpected partner in Detroit education reform

Lou Glazer and his colleagues founded [Michigan Future, Inc.](#), a non-partisan, nonprofit think tank nearly 20 years ago to develop ideas to help transform the state from a factory-based to a knowledge-based economy. While a think tank is an unexpected partner in administering high school education reform in Detroit's urban ring, the evolution of Michigan Future's work and insights led the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and other local foundations to call upon the organization to lead the laudable endeavor.

"Early on, we had a pretty clear understanding that human capital is the asset that matters most in growing the economy, as well as the skill set people need to get into the knowledge-based economy," said Lou Glazer, Michigan Future's president and co-founder. "The foundations asked us to help tackle how you get central city kids – largely high school kids – connected to that economy. [Michigan Future Schools](#) grew from the work."

### Detroit High School Accelerator – Setting the Bar High

With funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation – together with the [Skillman Foundation](#), the [Kresge Foundation](#) and the [McGregor Fund](#) – Michigan Future is taking on the distinctive and ambitious goal of opening 35 new, small, open enrollment, high-performing high schools in Detroit and nearby suburbs by 2017. The new high schools will serve approximately 14,000 students when fully implemented by 2020, with the goals of 85 percent of students graduating high school, 85 percent attending college, and 85 percent earning either a two- or four-year college degree. The primary outcome is to increase the number of low-income and minority students graduating college-ready each year.

The lack of college-ready high school graduates is an alarming national problem, which holds true in Michigan as well. According to Gov. Rick Snyder's [Executive Memo on Education Reform](#) in April 2011, only 16 percent of all students statewide are college-ready, and 238 Michigan high schools have zero college-ready students in all subjects based on the spring 2010 ACT test.

"[High schools are the biggest problem in Detroit](#)," Glazer said. "Some urban K-8 schools are acceptable, but most open enrollment high schools in Detroit don't meet the standards."

According to Excellent Schools Detroit's [The 2011 School Report Card: The Best and Worst Results for Detroit's Students](#), only 10 high schools (four in the suburbs) have average ACT Composite scores of 16.5 or higher. The state average is 19.0. Particularly disturbing, nine Detroit high schools have ACT Composite scores under 14.5 and graduation rates under 65 percent. The scorecard provides school rankings for all Detroit Public Schools and public charter schools in the city, private schools that take the state tests, and suburban high schools where 30 percent of students are from Detroit.

"The typical kids are coming into high school with the equivalent of a fifth grade education," Glazer said. "The whole system needs to be transformed."

Michigan Future Schools is a high school accelerator designed to deliver systemic high school education reform at scale, versus the ad hoc approach of previous efforts. The accelerator, at its core, is designed to create, at scale, an alternative educational system based on quality, not governance.

The accelerator sets few requirements for their schools. The schools must be open enrollment, accepting all students who apply. The schools will open with a ninth grade, add one grade per year, and at full enrollment will serve no more than 500 students. Finally, the schools must meet Michigan Future School's student outcome standards.

Michigan Future Schools opened its first school – Detroit Edison Public School Academy – in the fall 2010 school year. Within three short years – by fall of 2012 – the high school accelerator will have eight high schools open, establishing incredible start-up momentum in achieving its overall goal of 35 new high schools by 2017.

### Opened fall 2010

- ▶ **Detroit Edison Public School Academy High School (DEPSA):** [DEPSA](#) expanded its class size for the fall 2011 school year to include a ninth and tenth grade. The high school offers innovative, rigorous and relevant college-prep high school learning experiences to prepare students for ongoing achievement, dynamic global leadership, and deep personal fulfillment.

### Opened fall 2011

- ▶ **Dr. Benjamin Carson High School of Science and Medicine:** [Carson High School](#) is one of three Michigan Future Schools opening for the fall 2011 school year. This school, part of the Detroit Public Schools (DPS) system, will prepare students for healthcare careers through a rigorous high school curriculum, supplemented by college courses and internships.
- ▶ **Detroit Collegiate Prep High Schools:** This DPS [school](#) will keep students on track for college through a rigorous curriculum, mentoring and family support by a team of nationally proven organizations: Talent Development, City Year and Communities In Schools.
- ▶ **Jalen Rose Leadership Academy:** This public charter [school](#) will use experience-based learning and a collaboration with the University of Detroit Mercy to prepare students for careers in leadership, sports management and entertainment; the school will also offer community resources such as a clinic and a credit union.

### Opening fall 2012

- ▶ **Detroit Delta Preparatory Academy for Social Justice:** This [charter school](#), founded by the [Detroit Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.](#), has developed a rigorous college preparatory curriculum centered on the organization's mission. The curriculum has an emphasis on social justice for instruction and mentoring. The academy will provide a superior learning environment where the highest standards of teaching, learning and leading prepare students to fully participate as leaders in society.
- ▶ **Schools for the Future:** The [school](#) is a partnership between Boston-based [Schools for the Future](#) and Detroit's [Black Family Development](#). The public school's mission is to enable students who have been previously retained at least twice and who have severe academic skills gaps to successfully graduate from high school within three to five years, ready for college and further career training, without the need for remediation.
- ▶ **YMCA Detroit Leadership Academy:** This [public charter](#) school will be committed to creating a holistic school culture that will support students' high academic achievement while providing resources, mentors and experiences beyond the classroom through the YMCA's extensive community resources, wraparound services, and college-prep experiences. It will be the third component of a complete K-12 school operated by the Y.

### Open Date Pending

- ▶ **Cornerstone Health High School:** This public [charter school](#), in partnership with the Detroit Medical Center, will use small group instruction and high-tech teaching to guide students toward health industry careers. Cornerstone Health's open date is pending.

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation has invested \$7.5 million toward Michigan Future's initial \$14 million budget to help the accelerator implement its business plan to launch the new high schools.

"The Kellogg Foundation did something we didn't even ask for and is really unique," Glazer explained. "They have funded the administrative costs of the accelerator for five years. Without the Kellogg Foundation grant, this wouldn't have happened. It's the biggest grant, but most importantly, it funded the hardest piece to fund.

"It's allowed us to focus on opening schools. The fact that we got a school open as quickly as we did was pretty extraordinary. With eight new high schools opening in Detroit by 2012, we have already substantially increased the volume of capable school operators willing to lead high schools in Detroit. It's unlikely that there have ever been eight new high schools opened in the city in a three-year span before this effort.

### Innovative Solutions to Complex Challenges

Meeting Michigan Future Schools' aggressive achievement measures, especially to have 85 percent of students earn either a two- or four-year college degree, is no small feat. Education leaders across the country are struggling to develop systems and models to effectively meet the challenge.

"The biggest barrier – what keeps me up at night – is not really knowing how you get to the academic standards we've set," Glazer said. "We're working to build capacity to assist schools in meeting the goal of students entering college without remediation. Nationally this remains the biggest challenge. The better reform high schools here are getting high graduation and college attendance rates, but far too many of their graduates are not academically ready to do college-level work."

Education reform is not just a problem for school administrators and teachers. Parents and communities have a role to play as well.

"We have to attract students to the schools," Glazer said, "so parent outreach is important. Parents need to know what a quality school looks like and that they're here in the community for their kids."

"Community support is vital as well. In order for kids to succeed, we have to address the whole child – not just content education, but making sure they're healthy and secure, they're motivated and want to learn. The schools can do some of this, but the community sure can help it. Kids have to believe they can achieve success and want it. If they don't want to get there, the fact that we want them to get there is irrelevant."

### **Changing the Education Landscape**

Michigan Future Schools, along with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, is committed to ensuring all kids have access to a quality education.

"Education attainment is now the most reliable path to realizing the American dream," Glazer said. "So if we really believe in equal opportunity, at the core is quality education. It's the only way poor kids are going to be able to live a middle-class life. It's central to everything."

Glazer recognizes the significance of the work, not just for Michigan, but for urban high school education reform across the country.

"If we meet our goals, we will have substantially increased the number of poor kids who are going to be middle-class Americans," Glazer said. "We want all of our kids, regardless of race and poverty, to do just as well as middle-class kids attending suburban schools."

"The culture we're trying to create is a group of educators who genuinely believe their kids can meet the standards and understand that if the kids are off-track, then it's the educators who have to change, not the kids. If we succeed, the contribution will be enormous."