

Narrative Report

The High School Accelerator Project - Michigan Future Schools

Grant P3012387

Report Period: July 1, 2014 – December 31, 2015

Submitted by Michigan Future, Inc.

I. Project Summary

In 2009, Michigan Future, Inc. (MFI) established a high school accelerator with the financial support of four foundations. The goal of the initiative is to help launch new high schools at scale that substantially increase the proportion of Detroit students graduating from high school college ready and ultimately earn college degrees.

MFI expects that all students enrolled in the high schools it supports will succeed in college. It has committed to its funders that at least 85 percent of each school's students will graduate from high school, of those graduates at least 85 percent will enroll in college and of those who enroll at least 85 percent will earn a college degree.

This grant established five specific outcomes of the initiative. Each remain a priority for MFI. The five are:

- Develop the capacity to assist in the start up of quality high schools
- Launch 11 high schools in the five years of Phase I. (The initial goal included a Phase II that envisioned 35 schools in total. That was abandoned once state policy created the Education Achievement Authority and uncapped charter schools. At that point there were too many high schools in the city.)
- Ensure that opportunities were provided to Detroit's low-income and minority students
- MFS high schools meet the student achievement goals of at least 85 percent high school graduation and 85 percent college enrollment
- MFS high schools improve the success rate of the traditionally underserved and underprivileged Detroit students. Our measure being 85% of those who enter college earning a two of four year degree.

II. Lessons Learned

Given that this is the end of the Kellogg grant and of Phase I of the project lets begin with lessons learned. Most of these lessons learned are applicable not just to the high schools MFS has worked with. But more broadly to pre K-12 education certainly in Detroit but also to urban schools across the state and likely even more broadly to pre k-12 education of non affluent students statewide. Quite possibly to early childhood programming as well. There are six big takeaways from the work:

- An unregulated marketplace diminishes quality teaching and learning

The consequence of an unregulated education marketplace with little or no quality standards is too many schools chasing too few students. Which leaves all education operators unstable—both public school districts and charters. And that instability contributes to low quality teaching and learning.

MFS was designed and launched before the creation of the Education Achievement Authority and the removal of the cap on charter schools without meaningful quality standards. Those policy changes almost certainly trumped starting new high schools with much higher student achievement goals as a lever for improving at scale outcomes of Detroit high school students.

- College ready is far more than a test score

We began the initiative believing—as most still do—that the ACT (and now SAT) score was the key predictor of college ready. The MFS grants commit the schools we funded to reach an average ACT score of 21. Turns out that was wrong.

Based on (1) national research; (2) the experience of the national charter school networks which are getting the best student outcomes in determining which of their graduates do well in college and ultimately earn degrees; and (3) learning from our higher education partners, we learned that in addition to content specific cognitive skills there are non cognitive skills and non content specific cognitive skills that matter at least as much as the content specific academic skills that are tested on college entrance exams (and other standardized tests).

We developed the MFS matrix to delineate what matters most to college success: student ownership; engagement and effort as measured in GPA; academics as measured by the ACT and the SAT; college writing; college matching and alumni support.

Our policy committee concluded that the foundation skills for all Michigan students should be the 4 Cs of the Partnership for 21st Century Learning: critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity.

- Central offices—not school buildings—matter most to improved student outcomes

Contrary to conventional wisdom, the core characteristic of schools that are getting breakthrough gains in student achievement is the commitment and capability of the management of schools (the central office of both charter school networks and traditional public school districts), not building level leadership and/or the quality of the teachers. Both of course matter, but they, by and large, are a reflection of the quality of the central office both in hiring and developing building-level talent and in providing building-level professionals with a playbook for meeting high student outcome standards.

What surprised us the most during this initiative is how weak the school operators were that MFS funded and has worked with even though they were selected through what we thought was a very rigorous RFP process. This weakness was true of the two national operators we selected as well as the local operators. And true of charter school management as well as the central office of DPS.

As we detail below many struggled initially with running the enterprise tasks and student recruitment. The basics you need to be good at before you can tackle student outcomes. When it came to student outcomes the default approach is to focus on discipline and teaching the content on standardized tests. The latter at a not rigorous enough level.

To us the evidence is clear: if we do not improve the quality—as it relates to student outcomes—of the management of those who run schools in Detroit (and more broadly in schools serving predominantly non affluent students across the state) we will not get the breakthrough student achievement gains we all want.

- The student outcomes bar is too low

Michigan Future Schools was launched to improve the college—not high school—graduation rate of students growing up in the city of Detroit. We have not lowered that standard even as the schools struggled to meet it.

One of the barriers we ran into—somewhat unexpectedly—is that those the schools are accountable too have set much lower student achievement standards. This includes state policy makers; charter school authorizers; the Michigan Department of Education; the Education Achievement Authority; the Detroit Public Schools; and the charter school boards of the schools we have worked with.

The student outcomes bar the schools are help accountable for is their test scores and, too some degree with high schools, their high schools graduation rate. Which overemphasizes the test score at the expense of developing other essential skills not on the test. But, even worse, what matters with the test score is almost exclusively in Detroit whether a school is on the bottom five percent list or not. If you are you get in trouble (the individual school, not, by and large, the central office/management). If not, no matter how low student outcomes are, there is little external pressure or incentive to get better.

Add to that our experience has been that far too many of the professionals at the building level and at their central offices; the school boards; and those responsible at the local and state level for holding schools accountable have low expectations for Detroit students. That a college ready standard is too much to expect of most kids growing up in Detroit.

Low standards and low expectations are a recipe for low student achievement.

- High schools can make a difference in students' life outcomes

Before we began MFS we got a lot of push back here and nationally not to do high schools. The notion being they are too difficult and too expensive and also that high school is too late to change student outcomes. That, by and large, there is little improvement possible from the level students have achieved through the 8th grade.

At the end of Phase I of the accelerator we believe, at least as much as we did at our launch, that high schools in and of themselves can make a big difference in the life outcomes of its students.

The reality is there are non-test-in urban high schools around the country that are getting big gains in student outcomes without pre K-8 feeder schools. Including the Noble charter schools in Chicago and the New York public school district's small schools (as assessed by MDRC).

Also MFS had the good fortune of having on staff three professionals who had worked nationally in urban schools getting the kind of results that MFS was designed for. They describe the quality gap in teaching, coaching, counseling and management between the schools they taught in and the ones they have been assisting in Detroit and that closing that gap is possible and what kind of student achievement gains can be realized if that gap is closed.

- Online learning is not a substitute for quality in person teaching and learning

Conventional wisdom increasingly is that the way to improve student outcomes is to move teaching and learning online rather than delivered by a teacher in a classroom in a school building. The MFS experience is that that is unlikely to be true. (The public data from EAA and Cornerstone charters—both who made online learning a central feature of their design—also indicates that online learning is not a substitute for quality in person teaching and learning.)

The two schools we funded with blended learning models at their core did not work well. Schools for the Future never really had a chance to test its nationally developed model. The initial attempt was plagued by poor management and building level leadership. The second attempt by very low enrollment. WAY, on the other hand, with a well designed and innovative project based online teaching and learning system has been fully operational for nearly three years with very poor student outcomes. With high rates of students leaving school; for those who stay enrolled low rates of earning high school credits combined with low rates of academic achievement.

Our experience with both SFF and WAY was that if the online learning was as rigorous as it needs to be to graduate students college ready, unless educators can build student ownership in the value of education, students would not spend the time online to complete assignments, let alone entire courses. In addition, the non content specific skills that are at least as important

to college, career and life success cannot be learned online. They require a community of teachers and other students.

III. Progress Towards Goals

Detroit high school students have more higher quality school options because of the accelerator. Of the seven schools MFS is currently working with which have received extensive capacity building services based on the MFS matrix four are far enough along to have letter grades in the latest ESD scorecard. All four are rated C or better. Four of ten open enrollment high schools with a score of C or better that are located in the city of Detroit. (There are five more in the suburbs which have a grade of C or better.)

Of the 28 high schools with letter grades of D+ or worse none have worked with MFS since the creation of the MFS matrix. (Detroit Collegiate Prep now operates Northwestern High School. It opened as a stand alone new school with initial grant funding by MFS before its merger with Northwestern as a turnaround school.)

The other three schools MFS is working are not far enough along to have a letter grade. But all so far are progressing to where they are likely to have student achievement similar to the four that do have letter grades.

Students who attend the seven MFS schools we continue to work with are on track to get high high school graduation rates and college attendance rates

Its way too early to know how many of the graduates of MFS schools will earn college degrees. Our best guess at the moment would be in the 20-25 percent range. No where near our aspirational goal of 85 percent of those who enroll in college. And also trailing some of the best national charter school networks who have college completion rates in the 35-40 range. But 20-25 percent is substantially better than the around ten percent completion rate for students who attend non-test-in Detroit high schools.

What follows are the details of the accelerator first six years:

A. Establishing the Accelerator

Michigan Future, Inc. solicited input from an accelerator work group for nearly a year to establish a formal Business Plan which served as a proposal to seek funding for new, high-quality high schools. After consideration of the Business Plan, four Michigan foundations (Kellogg Foundation, Skillman Foundation, Kresge Foundation, and the McGregor Fund) committed to the initiative by funding it with an initial investment of \$13.05 million.

B. Creating the Governing Council

The Michigan Future, Inc. Board elected the following individuals to the Governing Council: (Four of the members have been with the initiative from its inception. Three of the funders have changed program officers but the funder has been represented from MFS's inception.)

1. Kristen McDonald, Skillman Foundation, Chair
2. Sharlonda Buckman, Detroit Parent Network
3. Kate Markel, McGregor Fund
1. Wendy Jackson, Kresge Foundation
2. Yazeed Moore, Kellogg Foundation
3. Mike Schmidt, Ford Motor Company Fund
4. Cindy Schumacher, Central Michigan University
5. Carmen N'Namdi, Nataki Talibah Schoolhouse Educational Service Provider

C. Developing the Accelerator

In order to help start schools as quickly as possible, rather than hiring staff first, MFS decided that the initial assistance it would provide to its grantees would be done by contractors.

The virtue of working with schools first, rather than staffing up was both schools opening sooner and learning from working with the schools what capacities MFS needed to best help its grantees meet its student achievement outcomes.

During the third grant year MFS moved to a structure organized around four support groups which assisted grantees to meet the initiative's standards. Through MFS staff or contractors it supported grantees in the following areas:

- Launch and operations
- Student recruitment
- Student achievement
- College success

Michigan Future Schools has constantly changed based on our reflections of what supports the schools needed to meet the high student achievement goals of the initiative—rather than lower the standards—and to incorporate lessons learned from the characteristics of urban schools across the country which are making substantial progress towards meeting those goals.

This resulted in the fifth grant year moving to a full time staff of five working exclusively with schools on improving student outcomes in the six areas we learned were essential to preparing students to graduate from high school ready for college success:

- Student ownership of their own education
- Engagement an effort (as measured by GPA)
- Academics (as measured by college entrance exam(s))

- College writing
- College matching
- Alumni support

D. Selecting the Accelerator High Schools

Criteria for Selection

MFI created a template outlining the criteria necessary for selected schools. The accelerator – Michigan Future Schools – is designed to work with traditional public school districts, charter schools and private schools. Its focus is on quality, rather than governance or location. It only works with new schools. And only with schools it believes have a high likelihood of meeting its student achievement expectations.

MFI does not believe that there is one right model of teaching and learning to achieve those goals. It is willing to work with schools with a variety of approaches to teaching and learning. But it believes there are some core characteristics of schools that are most likely to achieve college success. These include:

1. A school culture committed to all students enrolling and succeeding in college and being career ready
2. Smaller numbers of students
3. Project-based learning
4. Teaching and learning built on academic rigor, relevance and relationships
5. Responsive to the broad needs of each student: focused on the whole child, rather than exclusively on teaching content
6. Partnerships with higher education and/or employers ideally involving teaching and learning on college campuses and places of employment as well as in school
7. Working to engage families in their children's teaching and learning
8. Continuous improvement. Driven by a commitment to all students succeeding in college, constantly adjusting teaching and learning to improve student achievement.

In addition to the above characteristics the accelerator-funded schools must comply with the following priorities:

1. Open to students from the City of Detroit.
2. To help students succeed in college, hiring both a college transition counselor to insure all graduates enroll in college and a college success counselor to work with graduates while they are in college.
3. If applicable, union agreements that allow for open hiring (no guaranteed spots for current union teachers), no bumping into the school, and work rule flexibility that allows for innovative approaches to teaching and learning.
4. To participate in a learning network of the MFS schools

5. To agree to the Accelerator's accountability standards.
6. To make available to the Accelerator all student data that can legally be made available.
7. To agree to possible branding as an Accelerator school.

E. MFS High Schools

The MFS Governing Council selected to provide funding to eleven schools, through a rigorous competitive process. To be selected, applicants went through a three step process:

1. Written proposals. The initial proposals serve as a pre application. It is designed to quickly determine whether schools have a vision aligned with the initiative, a high likelihood of achieving the desired student outcomes and a high likelihood of being ready to open after one planning year.
2. Finalists interviews with the MFS Governing Council. Based on its assessment of the written proposal, MFI invites a small number of potential school founders to participate in an interview to determine their interest, qualifications, commitment, and suitability to start and operate a quality high school.
3. Negotiation of grant amount and terms. After the interviews MFI identifies finalists to partner with to open new high schools. Making it to this stage does not guarantee that a school will be funded.

Michigan Future Schools staff and the founder and staff of the proposed school jointly develop a detailed implementation plan for the launch and successful operation of the school. If applicable, those selected would need to secure approvals from their governing boards.

Based on those negotiations a determination was made of whether there is a high likelihood that the proposed school can meet the initiatives requirements and student outcomes. If yes, a grant agreement was negotiated and recommended to the Governing Council for approval.

Of the eleven schools funded MFS continues to work with six:

- Detroit Edison Public School Academy Early College of Excellence
- Dr. Ben Carson School of Science and Medicine (a DPS school)
- Jalen Rose Leadership Academy
- Detroit Leadership Academy (founded by the Metro Detroit YMCA)
- University YES Academy
- Detroit Delta Preparatory Academy for Social Justice

We also are providing support to Voyager Collegiate Prep a school we did not provide a grant. They are managed by the same company as the Jalen Rose Leadership Academy.

MFS helped launch three schools that no longer are part of the MFS network and are not receiving ongoing support from MFS:

- Detroit Collegiate Prep (a DPS school, operated by Diplomas Now)
- Cornerstone Health Academy
- WAY Academy (West campus)

Two of the schools that received grant funding are closed or will close at the end of this school year.

- Experiencia Preparatory Academy
- Schools for the Future Detroit

F. School grants

Each selected school received financial support (averaging \$800,000) starting the year before operations begin and running through the third year of operations. Commencing in year four – when the school reaches full enrollment – it is expected that the school will be financially self sufficient. Grant payments are contingent on compliance with the grant agreements and adequate commitment to and progress on achieving the initiative’s student outcomes.

No Kellogg Foundation funding was used to fund school grants.

The status of grants by schools is:

- Detroit Edison Public School Academy Early College of Excellence: \$850,000 completed
- Dr. Ben Carson School of Science and Medicine: \$800,000; \$650,000 paid. The Governing Council cancelled the remaining funding due to lack of compliance by DPS to the grant agreement.
- Jalen Rose Leadership Academy: \$800,000 committed; \$725,000 paid. Payment of remainder of grant is contingent on the school working out long term affordable financing for its facility.
- Detroit Leadership Academy: \$800,000 completed.
- Experiencia Preparatory Academy: \$800,000 committed; \$677,000 paid. Remainder of grant was cancelled by the Governing Council when the school’s board decided to close the school at the end of the 2016 school year.
- University YES Academy: \$800,000 completed

- WAY Academy: \$800,000 committed; \$700,000 paid. The Governing Council cancelled the remaining funding due to lack of compliance to the grant agreement.
- Detroit Delta Preparatory Academy for Social Justice: \$800,000 completed.
- Schools for the Future Detroit: \$901,643 completed. (The larger amount was due to the school opening, then closing for performance reasons and then reopening under different management. The additional \$101,643 was awarded by the Governing Council for the planning year to get the school restarted.) Despite the grants, the school is now permanently closed.
- Detroit Collegiate Prep: \$338,357 completed. (DPS and Diplomas Now decided to merge the new DCP with Northwestern High School for the 2013-14 school year. In essence turning the school into a turnaround, which MFS does not work with. At that time all the parties to the grant agreed to terminate the grant and relationship.)
- Cornerstone Health Academy: \$360,000 for the planning year only, completed. (Because of substantial difficulties in getting the school off the ground – not opening in 2011, repeated changes to the school’s leadership, facilities acquisition problems and uncertainty in the online curriculum provider – the Governing Council revoked the remainder of the grant, but gave Cornerstone an opportunity to rebid for a 2013 school launch. Cornerstone decided to open the high school in 2012 without further assistance from MFS.)

G. Capacity building supports

In addition to the grants, MFS schools receive capacity building supports. Since the inception of the initiative those supports have been expanded greatly as we learned that the schools needed assistance in many areas.

MFS’ work with the schools was initially focused on insuring the schools have the capability to effectively operate and have plans for delivering effective teaching and learning to achieve our student achievement goals. Once the grant is made, the school’s management team meets quarterly with the MFI staff to review the school’s performance.

Over the long term the goal is to build an infrastructure – beyond launch assistance – that comprehensively supports MFS schools and its students. In building school supports the accelerator developed an operating philosophy of “come struggle with us”.

None of those involved with supporting the MFS schools have operated schools that have met our ambitious goals. Those goals almost certainly have not been met at scale in any urban community in America. So the MFS capacity building staff – a talented group of experienced and insightful educators – work collaboratively with MFS schools to put in place practices designed to better position the schools to reach our goals and to continuously improve.

The supports we initially put in place included:

- School launch and operations

Assistance to launch successfully; achieve financial and operating efficiency; where necessary, get charters; and secure facilities, including financing for charter schools.

- Student recruitment

Opening new schools has been, for more than a decade, the primary strategy of school reformers in Detroit. The operating assumption has been “If you build it, they will come.” That there is pent up demand in Detroit for more higher quality schools, and that they would automatically attract students and parents.

Clearly that is no longer the case. In a marketplace characterized by a growing supply of schools open to Detroit students and a substantially declining number of school age Detroiters, all schools – no matter their quality – need to work at recruiting and retaining students. Simply having a good school is not enough to guarantee full enrollment.

Opening new college preparatory high schools at scale is only part of the formula for ensuring that Detroit high school students receive a quality education. Today, the demand side matters as much as the supply side.

When it came to designing student recruitment assistance, we found that no one had done the basic research on how Detroit parents chose the schools they enrolled their children in. When we looked nationally for that kind of research, we couldn’t find it either.

So we began our work to build a student recruitment support by learning as much as we could on how Detroit parents choose the schools they enroll their children in. Given the absence of this basic research, we decided to focus on all students, not just high school students, and to share our research findings with everyone involved in school reform in Detroit, not just the MFS-supported schools.

To do the research we assembled a team of national and state leaders in researching urban parents as school shoppers and conducting household surveys. The research was conducted in the spring/summer of 2011. The researchers conducted doorstep interviews of 1,073 Detroit households with 1,699 school-age children and held a series of focus group discussions with Detroit parents and high school students. The report and executive summary can be found at:

<http://michiganfuture.org/schools/2012/04/summary-of-research-findings-detroit-parents-as-shoppers/>

During this reporting period we worked with three contractors to explore how MFS schools can better recruit in a crowded marketplace, how to segment—today and tomorrow— Detroit households with school age children and to identify vendors who can reliably identify households with middle schoolers.

- Student achievement

This is the most important support MFS is building. It will probably matter more to the schools achieving the student achievement goals than the grants. And, not surprisingly, the area where the schools need the most help. The support is designed to improve student achievement through a peer learning network and one-on-one supports so that students graduate from MFS funded high schools ready for college without the need for remediation.

- College Success

Unique to MFS is a commitment each of the schools we invest in make to staying with their graduates for at least the first two years of college. Each commits to hiring both a full time counsellor to help students enroll in college and another to help students succeed in college after enrollment. Our ultimate goal is college graduation (two or four year degree), rather than either high school graduation or college enrollment.

At the beginning of the 2014-15 school year MFS launched Accelerator 3.0. We had learned during accelerator 1.0 and 2.0 much more about what college ready means and how students are most likely to earn a college degree. That led us to the more targeted goal of students graduating from network high schools qualified for admission to selected admission colleges such as Alma College and the University of Michigan Dearborn (our current higher education partners).

The reason for the selective admission college goal is two fold:

- College graduation rates are much higher for selective admission universities. So if the goal is a college degree the odds of achieving that goes way up the more selective the college you attend.
- We came to believe that a high bar is key to all student achieving more whether they meet the standard or not. So students that enroll in a community college or non selective admission university or more likely to be ready for college because of the rigor of the high school they attended.

Accelerator 3.0 involved MFS focusing its capacity building work exclusively on student achievement. Working in six areas:

- School design and execution to build student ownership. Students wanting to succeed in college as much as the educators want them to.

- School design and execution to build engagement and effort as measured by GPA. (More predictive of college success than the ACT/SAT test score.)
- School design and execution to build college ready academics as measure by the ACT/SAT.
- School design and execution to develop students ability to do college writing. Which colleges have identified as a critical skill to college graduation.
- School design and execution to help students enroll in a college they are matched for and can afford.
- School design and execution of services to support their graduates for at least the first two years of college.

We learned that these six areas are what high schools need to be good at to prepare their students for college graduation. And that the ability of schools to deliver this range of services involved both school design and execution. That if our schools executed well their initial designs most of their students would not graduate college ready because the design of the schools was too narrow. Focused almost exclusively around creating an orderly environment for teaching and learning and then teaching the content contained in the standardized tests that both they and their students are judged on.

In addition to learning that quality teaching and learning involved far more than the content specific cognitive skills that standardized tests are designed to measure, we also learned that the key to successful schools—particularly at scale— is not at the building level but rather at the management level.

So another critical difference in Accelerator 3.0 from earlier versions was a shift in who we were providing capacity building services to: from building leadership to central office leadership—the superintendent and her student outcomes leadership team.

We also learned we were more successful when we initially provided schools with services rather than advice. Too often the advice was acknowledged, not owned. So it wasn't acted on, didn't drive needed change. Management and building level leadership are too swamped with day-to-day execution to do the hard work that is required to design and implement the kind of systemic change the MFS schools need to provide high quality student services in each of the six areas.

So Accelerator 3.0 involved MFS designing and implementing an interim assessment system across the network to drive improvement in student academics; designing (with Alma College) a writing curriculum for schools to implement; designing a set of tools to help counsellors, parents and students identify which colleges they should apply to and then guide their decision of which college to attend; develop an inventory of which quality after school and summer experiences that were best to build student ownership; design a college success course for schools; and much more.

Best practices guides

We have published best practices guides that are available to our schools in the areas we have provided capacity building services in. The concept is to provide an online resource of the schools to access our capacity building advice. The ebooks cover:

- Operations and finance
- Student recruitment
- Turing student's "light bulb" on
- Academic success
- College writing
- College selection and alumni support

H. Other supports for MFS schools

- New Teacher Prep Program

Although not an ongoing school support, MFS made a \$100,000 grant to the UM Flint School of Education and Human Services to develop a new pipeline of teachers prepared to teach in small urban high schools in Detroit. Both existing schools and those being opened with help from MFS.

The UM Flint School of Education and Human Services was chosen through a competitive process conducted by MFS and a network of existing small urban high schools serving Detroit students (pre MFS) who were dissatisfied with the quality of graduates from existing education schools.

Jointly the high schools developed an innovative new masters degree in secondary education program that will prepare teachers to teach in small urban high schools. The program is a complete redesign of how teachers are prepared. With the key feature of the new program being that it was co-designed, is co-operated and located in Detroit area high schools.

The program began operations in January 2012. It is a two-year Masters Degree with secondary teacher certification program. Detailed information is available at:

http://www.umflint.edu/graduateprograms/edu_mac.htm

- Dual Enrollment at the University of Michigan, Dearborn

MFS has arranged with UM Dearborn for students in our schools to enroll in college courses at UMD as early as the 11th grade if the college deems them college ready. The standard is a cumulative GPA of 3.5 and above for 11th graders and 3.0 and above for 12th graders.

The program was piloted with the first DEPSA 11th grade class and exceeded everyone's expectations. About one third of the DEPSA 11th graders qualified to take college courses and have performed well in those classes. The success of the DEPSA students led to the offer from UM/Dearborn to open up the program to all MFS high schools.

- David Campbell Scholars at Alma College

Across the country the urban high school networks that are having success with their graduates earning four year degrees are finding that many of their graduates do best at small liberal arts colleges.

To provide those same opportunities, initially for the first graduating class at DEPSA, but ultimately all graduates of MFS schools we approached Alma College about a possible partnership. The end result is the establishment of the David Campbell Scholars scholarships which will provide annually a near full ride to fifteen graduates of MFS schools that meet admission standards set by Alma.

- Berman Scholars

Thanks to a one time grant from the Berman Foundation, MFS was provided 25 rising 10th graders with a 2016 free on campus summer experience at one of four Michigan colleges designed to build student ownership. This is another common component of what the best national urban charter networks are able to provide their students.

For the 2016-17 school year the Berman Foundation has provided MFS with another one time grant. This time to model another service regularly provided by the leading edge urban national charter networks: a small scholarship to help with the costs of buying books in exchanged for students providing their high schools with their semester transcripts. Helping the students financially but also helping the schools learn how well their students are doing in college. This detailed data is not available through the national clearinghouse.

I. Assessment of schools quality

We underestimated greatly when we started the initiative how far the schools would have to travel to be quality schools. Starting with basic school operations and student recruitment. Almost as preconditions to getting to work on our ambitious student achievement goals.

Much of our work the first three years was around basic operations, finance and facilities issues as well as student recruitment. Items related to running the enterprise. In addition to capacity building, MFS also got involved in working with schools and their authorizers in a number of cases to bring in new management and leadership.

As the 2013-14 school year came to a close, with one exception, we were comfortable with the leadership teams. The exception being Experiencia where there was substantial questions about board, management company and building leadership commitment and capability to meet the student achievement goals of the initiative.

We ended up working with Experiencia during the 2014-15 school year with still disappointing results. We then suspended our work with them, their school board voted to close the school after the 2015-16 school year at which time we ended the grant.

We also suspended our work with WAY for the 2015-16 school year and ultimately ended that grant as well. Both for poor student outcomes and an unwillingness at the management level to do a redesign that was necessary to improve those outcomes.

With the other seven schools, although there are still “running the enterprise” challenges in many of them and a lot are still have difficulty with stable building level leadership and teachers, except for DPS the management and central office commitment and capability is now strong enough so that the schools can begin to focus on delivering effective college prep teaching and learning.

This is what we always knew would be a challenge for the schools. As it is around the country. We have set very high student achievement standards—which we will not reduce—and to get there is going to take a lot of hard and creative work on the part of the schools and the MFS capacity building team. It is unlikely that any of our schools will graduate anywhere near are 85 percent standard of their student who meet our definition of college ready or who ultimately earn college degrees in the short term. But we remain convinced that most Detroit kids can succeed in college and that the schools working with us can over time prepare their graduates for college success.

We have in place now a system of receiving data from the schools that is aligned with our understanding of college ready. Which includes metrics starting in the 9th grade around student ownership of their education; GPA; and ACT aligned scores. The schools report data to us regularly and that data is shared with MFS staff, the Governing Council and with all the schools in the network.

DEPSA had their first graduating class in 2014. JRLA and Carson in 2015. DLA and UYA will in 2017. The Deltas Leadership school, although only opened two years, will have a graduating class in 2016 of students who transferred from the now closed Plymouth Ed high school. (Voyager had graduating classes before joining the MFS portfolio.)

The first DEPSA graduating class was terrific. Virtually all graduated and enrolled in college. Most in four year universities, many at selective admission universities. The class average GPA was above 3.0 and the average ACT was nearly 19.

Their accomplishments and the supports MFS provides to the schools it is working with are the major reason why Alma and UM/Dearborn entered into partnerships with Michigan Future Schools.

A fair assessment of the MFS schools is they have a ways to go to graduate most students college ready. All indications are that the schools will graduate a substantial proportion of their students and will help nearly all of them enroll in college. These are real accomplishments and should not be discounted.

But the primary goal of the initiative to have students enter college able, as we now have set the goal, to be admitted to selected admission colleges (using Alma as the standard) and ultimately earn a college degree. The schools need substantial improvement in student achievement to reach that goal.

DEPSA is in the 35-40 range of students enrolling in selective admission universities. The other three schools with graduating classes around 25 percent. And the three schools without graduating classes likely to end up in that range as well.

J. Work on state education policy

Policy development was included in the initial MFS business plan. But we deferred to ESD which was created just after MFS was launched. This past year we got back into considering a policy agenda. Out of a dissatisfaction on the part of staff and some funders at the consequences of state policy on the ability to deliver quality teaching and learning to non affluent students in Detroit and across the state.

That work led us to the Partnership for 21st Century Learning and their 4Cs as the foundation skills that all students need for successful careers in constantly changing economy. The 4Cs are broad, rigorous non content specific cognitive skills: critical thinking; creativity; collaboration and communication. We have begun work for a statewide, employer led campaign to make the 4Cs the foundation of a quality pre K=12 education for all Michigan students.

K. Fundraising

Michigan Future, Inc. raised \$16.7-million for Phase I from the following foundations:

Kellogg Foundation	\$7.5 million
Skillman Foundation	\$4.7 million
Kresge Foundation	\$1.5 million
McGregor Fund	\$1.4 million
MEEF	\$1.6 million

III. Future Plans

Two options in large part dependent on available funding. One is to continue the work of the accelerator in providing capacity building services to current portfolio schools with the possibility of expanding to more Detroit high schools. The MFS staff has designed a set of ongoing services that are even more focused on aiding central offices build enduring practices that will lead to better student success in each of the six “boxes” of the MFS matrix.

West Ed who evaluated MFS make the case well that capacity building work is both important and takes a long time when they wrote in our evaluation:

“Affecting change at schools is a slow process that occurs over multiple years. Implementation science (Blase, Fixen, Sims, and Ward, (2014), for instance, posits that implementation occurs in multiple stages: exploration; program installation; implementation, and full implementation. Blase et al. (2014) observe, “Creating change in classrooms, schools, districts, and states is a non linear, multilevel, multiyear, iterative process.”

The second, also dependent on available funding, is to get much more deeply involved in policy. Michigan Future has a major policy agenda development project underway that includes education. We will integrate the 4Cs work into the agenda. The education agenda will also draw heavily on the MFS lessons learned. That agenda will be statewide.

We also would like to do recommendations specifically for education in Detroit. Possibly 9-16. That would recommend how you could redesign schooling in Detroit to better prepare high schools students for college completion. The whole system and what all the players are responsible needs to be redesigned if we are to get the kind of breakthrough gains in student achievement we all say we want. No one is doing that kind of redesign. Michigan Future is well positioned to lead that kind of effort.

We of course with adequate funding could do both capacity building and policy. Both are clearly needed.

The policy work is designed to improve student outcomes of all Michigan kids. The capacity building work—most particularly the components of the MFS matrix—are important to all high schools in the city and across the state.

There already is interest in using the MFS system of interims to drive growth in academic achievement in schools beyond those in the MFS portfolio. And there is interest state wide in the MFS system of counseling 12th graders to identify and choose colleges that they best match with.

IV. Dissemination

Before this past year we did not do much dissemination of our work or lessons learned. The one exception was the research on parents as shoppers. Its results were disseminated widely.

Over the past year we began to present on our approach to college matching and lessons learned featuring the MFS matrix. And just recently started talking with folks around the state about the 4Cs as the foundation of a quality pre K-12 education for all Michigan students.

If we pursue a major communications campaign as part of our policy work dissemination of lessons learned from the MFS work will become quite extensive.

We also will make the ebooks public.