

The PBS video about Detroit Public Schools was very illuminating. I have lived in Metro Detroit my entire life, coming from the small city of Southgate a dozen or so miles below the city limits. I currently teach in Troy just beyond the city's northern edge. Every morning and afternoon I make my commute directly through the heart of the city passing the Ambassador Bridge, Mexican Town, Ford Field, Comerica Park, and the many casinos which call the city their home. As I traverse through the cityscape I love looking up at the lights and tall towering buildings. However, I never have spent a lot of time thinking about the Detroit Public Schools, oddly enough seeing as they are on the news quite frequently. The school system in Detroit struggles and amongst the many things that work against the district (funding issues/bankruptcy, a mass exodus of students, etc.) one of the biggest issues is the district's mediocre graduation rate. The question then becomes what are Detroit Public School (DPS) workers doing to help push the graduation rate up, and what could be added or done better to make even more improvements?

The video does a great job at highlighting some of the programs the city has put into place. One example is breaking up schools into smaller sub-schools (subunits?) in which students get more focused attention from teaching staff. It is crucial for students, especially those who may drop out, to have good interactions with their teachers and school workers. In the article "Dropout Prevention" there is moderate evidence to suggest that providing advocates to students and adding academic support is a great way to help students be successful. The reading continues by diving into these in more depth. The reading states, "Research suggests that students who have ongoing relationships with adults feel a greater sense of school membership, attachment, and involvement. Additional benefits of adult-student relationships include reduced risky behaviors, reduced absentee rates, improved grades, and improved communication and social

skills.” These positive influences that adults have with students can in the long run help them make it to graduation. Academic support and guidance is also crucial. In the video a student from Romeo schools is shown, and was considered to be at risk for dropping out. It was because her teachers were willing to provide support and get her involved with school programs that she was able to stay in class and be successful. It is vastly important that schools remove the “giving up” mentality from students’ minds. When teachers identify struggling students and forge solid relationships and bonds with them big things will happen, DPS is taking the first steps into making this happen. I would also hope that within the Detroit public high schools that there is a push for getting students involved. The benefits of students participating in school activities can be seen across a variety of school problems.

Balfanz et al does a great job at pointing out five major keys to students being successful. “In our previous work, we have found five major concepts predictive of student effort or academic achievement in the middle grades (e.g., Balfanz & Byrnes, 2006; Mac Iver et al., 2004): teacher support (how well students felt supported and encouraged to succeed as well as the extent to which they believed their teachers cared about them), academic press (the extent to which students felt both teachers and peers expected them to work hard and do their best), parental involvement (how often parents helped with homework and the degree to which they felt welcome in the school), utility (the extent to which students believed that the mathematics they were studying would be useful in life), and intrinsic interest (the extent to which students found mathematics classes interesting and exciting).” To be able to thoroughly go through all of these important facets could be the basis of a twenty pages paper, but in particular, DPS is doing a good job at reaching out to parents, one of the five concepts listed above (and one that I would argue is the most important). No matter how strong of an impact we as teachers and

administrators make, our students spend a majority of their time at home. One way that teachers have been able to reach out to parents is individually through phone calls and emails. With positive phone calls a teacher can easily motivate students to be successful in school. I love sending out happy emails because I get great feedback from parents, and my students always come in the next day buzzing about how great it felt when they got praise at home. I will never forget when I emailed the parents of one of my special needs students to say that she got a perfect score on a big test. The student came in the next morning and was beaming because she got to go out to her favorite restaurant for dinner and get dessert for her hard work; it's the little ways that I can change the world. This is not the only way though that Detroit schools are reaching out. DPS has what is called the "Detroit Parent Network", a program that helps reach out to parents and students who are in need of assistance. This support is available to those who attend DPS schools, and can be a major impact on the graduation rate. By targeting students' home lives and providing assistance to families, the district allows for students to continue focusing on school and success, which is difficult to do when families are going through tough times.

DPS has enormous issues facing it on the whole, and most of them are out of the district's control. A teacher in the video laments that a student's mom stabbed him and he was forced to spend a night in an abandoned house before arriving at school the next morning; this is clearly not an issue that would be seen in places like West Bloomfield or Allen Park. For many students education is not a focus, rather getting food on the table or staying dry at night is. In order for DPS to boost graduation rates they must keep utilizing the programs they have in place. By providing good role models and family support, the problems will hopefully begin to lessen. If I were an administrator for the district would also begin to focus in on elementary schools and

keeping students engaged and involved throughout their education. If students see the benefits of an education from a young age, and parent involvement is encouraged starting when parents still play a large role in their children's lives, I think we could see an increase in the graduation rate. Granted, extra targeting of high school students would still be needed, but you cannot start at this level, it is too late at this point. All of these efforts as implemented by DPS, and the efforts that I recommended, will continue to be an uphill battle until there is total collaboration between the school district, parents, and the surrounding community. There must also be a shift to promote education across these groups, especially for male students who make up a larger portion of the dropouts. Until then, we can only hope to see slow improvements and progress as hardworking teachers and administrators give it their all to keep kids in their seats.