

Listening to Communities of Color:

Findings from the Statewide Listening Project, Spring 2016

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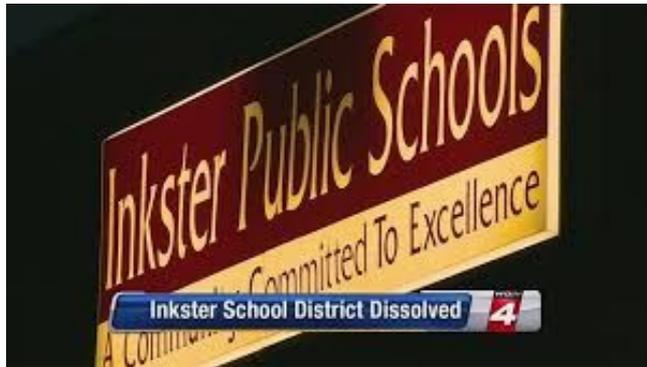
Statewide Listening Project

On May 21, 2016, the Michigan Network for Equity in Education and The Detroit LIFE Coalition hosted an intimate Listening Project for stakeholders in Michigan districts that primarily serve students of color.



Listening Projects

- Collection of experiences from people, organizations, or professional groups most impacted by an issue
- Example: [“Death by a Thousand Cuts: Racism, School Closures, and Public School Sabotage”](#)
- In our case, we collected the experiences of stakeholders in Michigan districts that primarily serve students of color



Goals

- Share stories and be heard
- Develop strategies for education advocacy
- Envision a better educational future for children and communities



Districts Represented

Albion	Grand Rapids
Bridgeport	Holland
Detroit	Inkster
Ferndale	Pontiac
Flint	Saginaw
Godwin Heights	Van Dyke

Five Priorities Identified through the Listening Project

- 1) Uphold Human Rights
- 2) Promote Educator Agency & Humanizing Working Conditions
- 3) Recognition of Community
- 4) Voice and Voting Rights for All
- 5) Call for Restoration

1) Uphold Human Rights

- Education is a human right
- Human rights are violated when public education is reduced, replaced, disappeared, or compromised
- Public education must be Available, Accessible, Adaptable, and Acceptable

“The school district that I grew up in [Buena Vista] was dissolved, so all of the “4 A’s” [Availability, Accessibility, Adaptability and Acceptability] have been denied those students.” – *Saginaw educator and parent*



2) Promote Educator Agency & Humanizing Working Conditions

- Educators and students experience dehumanizing conditions due to
 - State-imposed mandates
 - Loss of resources
 - Charter schools with little accountability



“Sometimes our pages fall out when we pick up our books” – *student from Saginaw*

3) Recognition of Community

- Policies that close schools and dissolve districts break-up communities
- Students are sent to districts and schools far from home
- This puts unnecessary stress and trauma on parents, caretakers, and students

“Closures have violated the human rights of my students and parents. They don’t have the choice with schools being closed in their communities...You disrupt an entire community because you have an abandoned school” – *former Detroit Public Schools administrator*

4) Voice and Voting Rights for All

- Communities with an imposed Emergency Manager lose their access to the democratic process
- Citizens are silenced as they become part of different communities that do not represent their concerns
- Citizens in districts overwhelmed by privately-managed charters have little recourse

“Inkster is being harmed because we have no schools. Our children are being bussed to various communities where they are not wanted. My granddaughter has to catch a 6AM bus.” - *grandmother from Inkster*



5) The Call for Restoration

- Participants called for restoration of their schools and communities
- Policies have caused harm, and damage needs to be repaired



“I want restoration. I want the school district restored. I want them to declare that it’s not only the water, that they’re killing our people with the education.” – *grandmother from Inkster*

Summary

In the final analysis, the Michigan Network for Equity in Education and The Detroit LIFE Coalition's goal is to build a statewide network of Public Education organizers and all of the structures needed to build, maintain, and support quality community-governed and neighborhood-based public education systems in every Michigan district.

Questions

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Appendix

Critical Elements of Sustainable Community Schools:

- **Curriculum** that is engaging, culturally relevant and challenging.
- **High quality teaching**, not high stakes testing, is emphasized.
- **Wrap-around supports** such as health care, eye care and social and emotional services are offered to assist learning.
- **Positive discipline practices** such as restorative justice and social and emotional learning supports are stressed so students grow and contribute to the school community and beyond.
- **Transformational parent and community engagement** is promoted so the full community actively participates in planning and decision-making.

Report: “Death by a Thousand Cuts”

