



## ***The 1999 Annual Meeting of the Citizens Research Council of Michigan***

October 1999

### **FUTURE OF DETROIT PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

*On September 22, 1999, the Citizens Research Council of Michigan sponsored, in connection with its 83<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting a panel discussion on the Future of the Detroit Public Schools. Participants on the panel were Dr. David Adamany, Interim CEO of the Detroit Public Schools; Freman Hendrix, Deputy Mayor of the City of Detroit and Chairman of the Reform Detroit School Board; and Mark Murray, Treasurer of the State of Michigan and representative on the Reform Board of the Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction. The moderator was Chuck Stokes, editorial director for WXYZ-TV/Channel 7.*

*This special publication is an edited transcript of that panel presentation.*

**CHUCK STOKES:** To say that this is a controversial issue is an understatement. It has practically consumed the Southeastern Michigan region over the last year or six months. Let me begin with a question to all three of you that I think people in this city, as well as people from around the country want to have answered. Five years from now, from each one of your own perspectives, what do you think the Detroit Public Schools will look like? Dr. Adamany, let's begin with you.

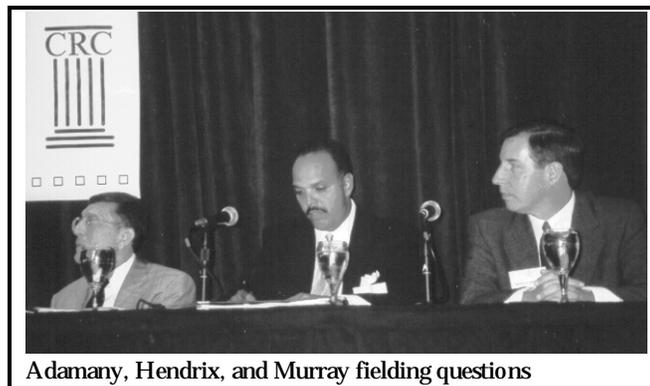
**DAVID ADAMANY:** I think the most important change that we would like to see is that student academic achievement is significantly improved as measured by standard school test scores and evaluation of student performance by teachers and graduation rates are significantly higher. A five-year time frame, I personally believe, is not sufficient to result in test scores that would be competitive with the state and nation. That is about an eight-year process. But we should be very far along the way on test scores and on graduation rates five years from now. A lot of things must be changed in terms of the efficiency and operation of the district but, if we don't achieve those two goals, we will not

have accomplished anything important.

**STOKES:** Freman Hendrix, the same question to you. All this hard work that you are putting in, all this volunteer time, what will be the fruits of your labor?

**FREMAN HENDRIX:** Hopefully, five years from now, when people look at the City of Detroit—whether it's from around the region, around the state, nationally, or internationally—they will see a dynamic city that has clearly been on the move for many, many years and that one important component—public education—will have, in large part, both perceptively and in a real manner, been changed. That perception being that the schools are on the right track, that school enrollment is up and that parents and other individuals who are thinking about

coming to live in the City of Detroit will find that schools no longer are the issue on why they choose not to be here. I think that's an important perception, of course, for all of those things to fall into place. As David Adamany indicated, there are some real substantive and meaningful changes that will have to take place: Graduation rates will have



Adamany, Hendrix, and Murray fielding questions

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to increase, test scores will have to increase, absenteeism will have to improve. Those things certainly will need to occur. The perception of the City of Detroit is one that has a public education system that is improving significantly.

STOKES: Mark Murray, the same question to you. You are on the board to a great extent, to make that Lansing connection. To make sure that our state legislature and the governor have some sort of say-so in what's going on in the largest school district in the state. What are the interests that you have from a state stand point and where do you think we are headed?

MARK MURRAY: I would affirm what I have just heard. I think that we do have a shared vision here of where we are trying to go. I would add a couple of things; one is that I would hope that the district is educating the same number of children



State Treasurer Mark Murray

or about the same number of children as it is now. We are in a competitive world with a lot more schools of choice. I'd like to see the district strong enough to compete in a competitive

world. I would add a real strengthening of the authority and role of the teachers and the principals. As we are sitting here, education is going on in classrooms with teachers and principals. They are the heart of the educational process and I would hope that they are strong and empowered. Finally, students who will be in the third or fourth grade five years from now haven't started school yet and there is no reason at all why we can't be competitive at those early grade levels. We can get about that business now. It may take longer for the system as a whole to catch-up, but a kinder-

gartner starting this year ought to have the same set of opportunities that a kindergartner anywhere else has.

HENDRIX: I don't think that's too bold of a statement that Mark just made. And I know that Dr. Adamany quakes a little bit when we talk about the great improvements that we're going to see in our children and test scores and the learning within our school system. But, the collective bargaining agreement that was hammered out with the Detroit Federation of Teachers included one very important provision that spoke to class size. The Detroit Federation of Teachers said we need K-3 class sizes reduced to 20 kids. Of course, Dr. Adamany and Chuck Wells went one better and made that 17 in 44 schools at a minimum over the next three years. If you look at it from the perspective that smaller class sizes do, in fact, equate to more learning, five years is not an unreasonable period of time to see some improvement, particularly, at the lower grade levels.

STOKES: Not every member of the current reform board is a resident of the City of Detroit. Some people in our community will say the old elected board was kicked out and the new board was put into place and it remains an issue in the minds of many people. As you look over the next year or so, do you feel that everybody on that board should eventually be a resident of the City of Detroit or that it doesn't really make any difference for the reform process.

HENDRIX: That's a seven-member board, the mayor appoints six of those members. Of the six that are currently represented by the mayor's appointment, four are Detroit residents, so that issue wasn't lost on the mayor or myself when we made the selection and appointments originally. We thought residency is an important issue. We think it is important for an individual to live and if not live, work, in an area in order to have some empathy about important decisions that need to be made. I will say to you that residency is not an end all-be all, but I think that, at the end of the day, we've got a pool of very talented people in the

City of Detroit and we certainly should be able to find those individuals who live and or work in the city to serve on this board.

STOKES: Dr. Adamany, not terribly long ago, I had the pleasure of interviewing John Elliott, president of the DFT and I asked him about the reform process. I asked him about you, specifically, and he said, and I quote, "He's still learning on the job. I can't be impressed because he hasn't had an opportunity to do anything of substance. He made many mistakes and he has learned a lot, but he is not going to be around to bring about whatever reform he wants. Look at the record. The last 10 years, every new super wants to do things in a different fashion. Who's the future leader and what will that person want?" Do you agree with him that you really haven't done anything in terms of reform?

ADAMANY: Well, as is in so many cases, John is about half right. If you think about the effort that's been put forth in the school district by the board, corporate leaders in the community, the community organizations and the construction industry to do \$80 million of repair work in a deteriorated school system that has not had that much work done in 20 years, that must be counted as an accomplishment. Of course, John doesn't get into school buildings much, so it may be that he's overlooked the importance of that. Teachers and students in the buildings I'm now going into are amazed at the scope of the physical repairs. Secondly, 750 new certified teachers have been hired. We had 1,000 spots that didn't have certified teachers. We recruited and placed 750 certified teachers. That's the largest influx of new certified teaching personnel that we've had in decades in the Detroit Public Schools. Third, despite the failures of the past, textbooks and supplies were in the schools and waiting on the first day of school. There was no glitch; we didn't have any youngsters going into school and not finding textbooks to work with.

Beyond those matters, of course, we have taken some negative steps. We have put a hold on this

fouled up bond issue so that when we spend that money it will be spent effectively to revitalize the schools. We have negotiated the most comprehensive change in collective bargaining arrangements in the last quarter of century in this district with the DFT. Now that we have it with the DFT, it's going to roll out into the other seventeen contracts we are about to negotiate. So, I think John must have been tired the day he was talking to you.

STOKES: Let me follow that up. What type of person would you like to see become the permanent CEO because, if John Elliott is right about anything, it is the fact that over the last several years Detroit citizens have seen a lot of leadership. They've seen Dr. Porter, Dr. McGriff, Dr. Snead, Dr. Green and now Dr. Adamany. They are wondering whether real reform can take place until we get someone that is going to be there for a significant period of time. Dr. Adamany.

ADAMANY: Well, I won't comment on the recruitment of someone to come in to be the CEO of the district. All I can say is that I hope it will be sooner rather than later. I would like to comment

on the second point because that is a very important and telling point. We have had so much leadership turnover and, with each turnover of leadership, there have been new educational initiatives. We have not had the



Interim CEO David Adamany

good sense when making those educational changes to completely dismantle old programs that were now obsolete. At the classroom level, the teachers are swamped with educational reform and are very discouraged about the zigzags in the road. They are the ones who have to carry this out. So, I think it is

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very important to recognize that when we do recruit somebody, we have to recruit somebody who will stand with us for the four and a half years remaining in the life of this reform legislation and will have broad community support once the honeymoon is over so that they will be encouraged to stay. What we now need is sustained change in educational reform, not repeated change in educational leadership.

STOKES: When I asked Dr. Adamany about the new reform board, his comment was, "I didn't realize before I sat down at the negotiation table just how little power that new reform board really has." I think he was essentially saying that the new reform board is almost a non-entity. If there is one thing you *do* have power over, it is who will be the next permanent CEO. Freman Hendrix, what type of person would you like to see?

HENDRIX: If anybody ever questioned whether or not leadership matters, we certainly can see a change now. It's easy to talk about all the problems that public schools have and to suggest that, because



Deputy Mayor Freman Hendrix

of the unions, because of all the socio-economic problems that kids bring to schools, because of the bureaucracy, because of the lack of money, because of the politics in Lansing or locally, because of

an elected school board, it really doesn't matter who the CEO is. Well, David Adamany has blown all that to hell. We see now that it does matter who sits at the top of a very dynamic organization, as dysfunctional as it may be. So, you ask me the profile of the individual that should come in here to succeed David Adamany? I want David Adamany 20 years younger, of African-American descent.

That's who I want. I say that tongue in cheek. This individual has to be someone that has had experience, not necessarily working in an education system, but certainly some experience at turning around a large, somewhat dysfunctional organization. Having some experience and background in collective bargaining, and having some experience with working in an organization with a work force that is predominately women and people of color makes up a very special set of talents. Does that person have to come from an educational system? Not necessarily. There are education models to be looked at, there are large corporate models to be looked at, and frankly, there are military models to be looked at.

You ask the question, why does the person have to be someone of color? Detroit is a city that is 80 percent ethnic minority majority, and is 73-77 percent African-American. As we approach the new millenium, there are outstanding, talented, African-American men and women in this country that I believe would step up to the plate and want to do this job, particularly when they find out how much power they've got. We can find that person, whether a man or a woman. I think it's an important message that our youngsters need to see—people of color in important, significant positions.

STOKES: Mark Murray, what would you like to see. Should it be a person with more of a financial background? Should it be more of an educator? Should it be a retired military person? Should it be a CEO person on loan from a major corporation so that they still have all of their finances and all of their perks and they don't have to worry about someone trying to compromise them from a financial standpoint so that they can make tough decisions and not worry about whether they can still provide for their family?

MURRAY: It is going to have to be an individual who has a substantial background and has been through significant change in large organization management. I think they have to have a passion for education, and that can come from a variety of

places. Certainly, having been involved actively in leadership of a school system would be of benefit, but I don't think it's a requirement.

I think the Detroit system and hundreds of school systems around the state have been victims of the reform of the day, the reform of the month, the reform of the year and there has not been sustained direction. Many different models can work if there is a will and a sustaining of that direction for a period of time and an empowerment of the people who actually have to do the job.

The people who will educate the children of the Detroit school system are the teachers. They will do it in a building with a principal. We must keep the focus on the principal, the teachers, and the building. We're going to need very focused attention, we're going to need somebody who has strong will and real character, and who can rally people behind her or him, but I think this can come from any background. I, first and foremost, will be concerned about whether we're going to have a clear, simple direct focus that is sustained for a good period of time and is effectively communicated in real leadership.

STOKES: One last question to you Mark Murray. A bond issue of \$1.5 billion has been kind of sitting around this town. A good portion of that money is still unused. A lot of people are wondering what it is the state takes into account before approving the expenditure of that kind money.

MURRAY: There have been two issues in the use of those proceeds. I think the work done this summer was a good use of the funds. Part of that came out of the bonding money. There was a period of time where the most basic work of financial record keeping and being able to tally and enumerate what had actually happened to the funds was not in place. That is a fairly basic fiduciary level. We were not prepared to release more money until there was a core system in place that could at least enumerate where the funds had been

spent. We are now at that point. It is not perfect and there are still some improvements to come, but I think the work that was done this summer proved that there is now the ability to enumerate where the funds were and how they were spent. In something as complicated as this, there are always going to be mistakes. We are never averse to working through some issues there. That basic issue is largely behind us.

The next question relates to what will we look at in the use of funds. I would say what we will look at here is the same as what we look at in any district, which is whether these meet reasonable standards for cost per square foot depending on what kind of work is being done. Is it focused on education? Does it conform to plans that matched up with the education plan? It's a fairly high threshold to have us intervene actively and say that we really would rather see you do it this way or that way. We generally leave it to the districts to make the decisions. Speaking more as a board member than as the treasurer, I'm very pleased to see that the plan is being put on hold for a chance to recalibrate and take another look.

Rehabilitation is an enormously expensive activity. Many of you know that from experiences in your own organizations. It may very well make sense to build some new schools in Detroit. It may be just as cost effective and it may make sense to get around the city and see where the population centers are. We may be able to find the right model for the current elementary school in this setting and then we can put up a few of those schools with some real cost efficiency. I'm hopeful that we can have a fairly quick look. This is not the time to be sitting around studying for 12 months or 18 months, but it certainly warrants a few months and then we can come back and get about the business of improving the buildings here in the city. Most of it, I assume, will still end up being rehabilitation, but there may make some sense for some new schools as well.

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### Excerpts from Panel Responses to Questions from the Audience

*In response to a question regarding the graduation rate in the Detroit Public Schools*

ADAMANY: The present graduation rate, taking ninth graders who either graduate but excluding those who either go into military or into other school systems, in the most recent year was 53 percent from ninth to twelfth. Over the last decade, it has varied between 52 percent and about 61 percent. The statewide graduation rate has been about 76 or 77 percent. So, we are about one-third below the statewide average. That's a lot of ground to cover.

*In response to a statement regarding potential actions by the Michigan Legislature to make penalties on striking teachers automatic:*

ADAMANY: First of all, public employee strikes are illegal in Michigan. Secondly, I think striking against the public is an act that requires some remedy. However, the remedy that is provided by the present law is for, at least for the Detroit Public Schools, no remedy at all. We would have had to hold one hearing for each teacher in order to impose the fines. We would have faced more than 8,000 hearings. We could have kept all the trial lawyers in Detroit busy and the school district would have paid a lot of money hiring lawyers to process these cases.

Secondly, we would have had to develop the evidence for each case. Third, of course, the principal witnesses in these cases would have been the principals, assistant principals, and department heads in the schools, who know who was in attendance and who was not. They are all unionized and some were out on the picket line in support of the teachers. I'm not sure that we would have had willing witnesses. In addition, since the Michigan Employment Relations Commission has to decide every case within 60 days, so they don't want us to bring them more than a hundred cases at a time. We would have been two-thirds of the way through the contract, still hauling teachers in to fine them. Now, tell me what kind of collabora-

tion we could have had on educational reform if every month a new batch of several hundred teachers were being hauled in to be fined. The answer is we wouldn't have gotten any co-operation.

Finally, the law is flawed because in an earlier case some teachers in Brighton engaged in a sick-out. Charges were filed against them under this law. The contract was settled. The Brighton school district withdrew the charges and the Michigan Employment Relations Commission concurred. You can withdraw the petition up to the moment when someone is fined. So all we would have accomplished if we had attempted to fine the teachers was to have thrown onto the bargaining table a further issue to be negotiated. The union would have wanted to negotiate the withdrawal of the petition.

There may be other remedies. I did recommend to the legislature that they strengthen the injunctive provisions to get children and teachers back in school, so that we don't have the problems that we had. This law, as far as I can tell, is not workable in a big city school district like Detroit.

HENDRIX: The trigger, of course, in the 1994 law requires that the CEO or general superintendent petition MERC in order for a strike to be officially recognized and then sanctions imposed. Dr. Adamany never pulled that trigger and what the legislature is now deliberating is modifying the law so that the trigger is automatic. I think that would be a mistake for the reasons that David just indicated. Who knows better than the CEO at a collective bargaining table how the negotiations are going? In the instance of these negotiations, these were not hostile, confrontational, blame-placing, finger-pointing negotiations.

The nine-day strike, quite frankly, was a mistake. It caught everybody off balance. If ever there was a testament to that fact, teachers who were on their way to the vote the day after Labor Day

heard that there would be a 10-day extension and were so eager and prepared to go back to school, 70 percent of them went to their classrooms. Fewer than 25 percent showed up at the meeting, took it over from the leadership, and called for a vote. That's how we had a strike. David, for good reasons, did not pull the trigger on applying to MERC to impose penalties. Again, I think that it would be a mistake if the legislature took that out of his hands. There should be a local mechanism for making that determination.

*In response to a statement that the Reform Board has no legitimate power and that the CEO is not accountable:*

HENDRIX: First of all, this board has the authority, as it did, to appoint Dr. Adamany. We have a responsibility to monitor his activities as he carries out the school improvement plan, which this board has responsibility for reviewing, editing, and approving. I think that's an important responsibility because, at the end of the day, it is the decision of the board to decide who will lead the district. Now, this is not a governance system that I personally would want to live under for any long period of time. As David said when he came, this is somewhat of a receivership. We are living in extraordinary times with a failed system, or certainly a system that has failed too many of Detroit's children for too many years.

I would simply say that when school opened up ten days ago, I think there were 180,000 kids who ran back into school, who were very pleased at what they saw. Many of them, for the first time in their young school careers, saw that these schools had been painted up, fixed up, cleaned up, that the rooms were bright, the lawns well manicured. There was a new attitude, both with teachers and administrators. It's time to teach, their parents seemed to be excited, I've never seen so much attention and excitement and celebration demonstrated toward a school opening that we saw in the

City of Detroit on that day. Can we all take issue with how the legislation played out and the way the bill was signed into law? Sure we can, and I think, in hindsight, if any of us locally could have had a greater hand in that, we might have done things differently. But we are where we are today. We are six months into a five-year plan. One thing is absolutely important. The system in the past didn't work and we've been given a chance to serve 180,000 kids and we are going to try our level best to make that happen.

*Final Question:*

STOKES: A ten-second answer from each one of you as a final answer. If you could make one change in the governance of the Detroit Public Schools, what would it be?

MURRAY: Give principals as much effective authority as possible.

ADAMANY: Mark Murray is correct. The success or failure of education in the City of Detroit is going to occur at the school building level. At the present time, the principals, assistant principals, and department heads that must lead that change are not accountable to anyone. They are unionized. They can not be removed by me or by anyone else. If we are going to have educational success, we must have accountability by the administrators responsible. The chairman said they can fire me anytime. That's absolutely right, but I don't teach a single child. Unless the principals can be held accountable for the teaching of the children in their school buildings, we're not going to have progress here. I think the principals, assistant principals and department heads have to become accountable either through collective bargaining or by legislation. That will make all the difference.

STOKES: Interim CEO Dr. David Adamany, Deputy Mayor Freman Hendrix, and State Treasurer Mark Murray, thank you.

## 1999 Annual Meeting

### CRC Elects Directors and Trustees for 1999-2000

At its 83<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting on September 22, 1999, CRC elected officers, directors, and trustees for 1999-2000.

#### Officers Officers include:

Chairman – **Amanda Van Dusen**,  
Miller, Canfield, Paddock & Stone;

Vice Chairman – **W. Frank Fountain**,  
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Citizens Research Council of Michigan;

Assistant Secretary - **Paul R. Good**,  
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Board of Directors New members of the Board of Directors include **Vernice Davis Anthony**, St. John Health System and **Paul Clark**, National City Bank of Michigan/ Illinois.

Board of Trustees **Daniel Kelly** and **Robert Surdam** were re-elected as chair and vice chair respectively. Other members of the Board of Trustees elected include (new members in italics):

**Terence E. Adderley**, Kelly Services Incorporated

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