

January 14, 2021

Dear MACUL Innovative District Award Selection Committee:

I'm writing this letter on behalf of the City of Detroit in support of the Detroit Public School Community District's (DPSCD) application for the MACUL Innovative District Award. DPSCD has served as a model community leader throughout the pandemic in ensuring that students and families remain safely connected to schools.

Early in the pandemic, DPSCD and the City of Detroit realized the urgent need to connect students who were learning at home with their schools, and we understood the scope of the challenge. As many as 40% of Detroit residents don't have access to broadband internet, and this digital divide had clear implications for student access to education.

Under DPSCD's leadership, community partners quickly mobilized to distribute 50,000 devices, one for each student, through Connected Futures. Along with the device, each family received free internet for one year and customer service supports through a manual and access to a customer care line. The District also started intensive professional development to help teachers transition to online teaching, and they provided technology classes and online resources for families to learn to navigate the new learning environment. The District didn't stop at device deployment, though. As they realized that families needed ongoing technology support and troubleshooting, in December DPSCD organized Technology and Family Resource Hubs. These hub sites provide families with a place to go for technology support and a way to access other family supports like grab-and-go meals or health information.

These pandemic response efforts are laudable. However, as the City of Detroit's Director of Digital Inclusion, I am most excited by the ways in which Connected Futures builds a sustainable avenue of digital inclusion for our city at large:

- **Devices:** Rather than simply loaning devices to students, the Connected Futures program makes the device the property of the family, and families are encouraged to use the device to access services like telemedicine, utility assistance, and job searching. The District has also committed to putting its retired in-school devices into a pipeline of low or no cost devices available to their families for use at home.
- **Connectivity:** Beyond the year of subsidized LTE internet connections, families have access to Connected Futures internet navigation services that help them sign up for affordable broadband services, making their connections faster and more reliable.
- **Skilling:** The District and its partners are focused on helping families build their skills to use and care for the provided technology, including Parent Academy sessions targeted toward households new to owning an internet connected device.

These efforts will enhance and accelerate our citywide campaign to become one of the most connected cities in America through Connect 313. Everyone knows that this year has been unprecedented and challenging, and I believe that this year DPSCD has exemplified what it means to be an innovative district. I wholeheartedly support their application for this award.

Sincerely,



Joshua Edmonds (Jan 16, 2021 03:19 EST)

Joshua Edmonds
Director of Digital Inclusion
City of Detroit