

Detroit's P-20 Partnership:

Implementing a Bold, Cradle-to-
Career Campus Vision

OCTOBER 1, 2022

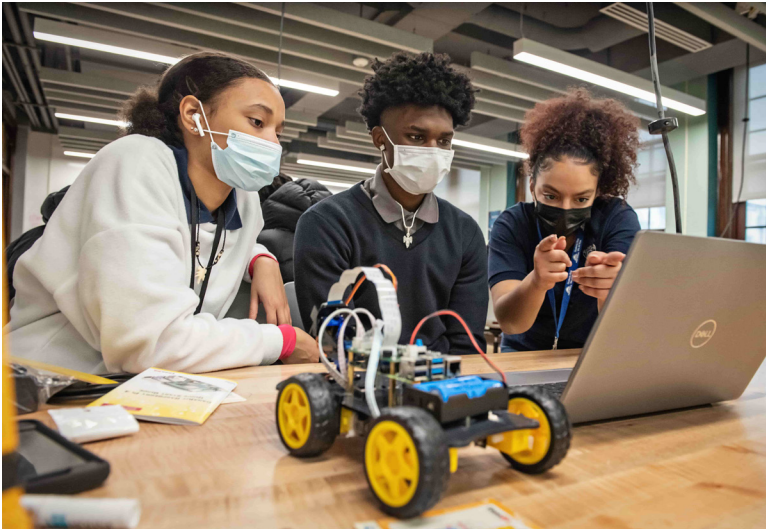


Case study prepared
by U3 Advisors in
partnership with the
Kresge Foundation.
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Marygrove P-20 Campus Partners



Credits, clockwise from top left: University of Michigan School of Education; Marygrove Conservancy; Darrell Ellis courtesy of The Kresge Foundation; Darrel Ellis courtesy of The Kresge Foundation

Credit: The Kresge Foundation



I. Introduction

The 53-acre Marygrove campus, with its stately trees, green lawns, and historic Gothic buildings, served as home to Marygrove College for over 90 years. Generations of Marygrove students learned and flourished in its halls, studying to become leaders and groundbreakers in their fields. Today, a very different set of learners fills the campus. Young learners ranging from infants and toddlers to high schoolers attend innovative new schools and explore how they can positively affect the world. A Teaching School exists within the K-12 school that includes on-site mentoring support and embedded professional development. Nonprofits and artists nurture their practices and grow their impact operating out of dynamic work spaces, while community members flock to the campus for events like movie nights and block parties.

Marygrove College closed in 2019, but careful foresight and bold investments beforehand ensured that the campus would continue to

Timeline

1927	Marygrove College establishes campus on McNichols Ave in Northwest Detroit
2000s	Marygrove experiences significant enrollment declines
2014	City of Detroit designates Livernois-McNichols among the first recipients of the Strategic Neighborhood Fund.
2016	Marygrove Pres. Beth Burns approaches Kresge Foundation for support.
2017	Kresge and Marygrove develop P-20 concept and conduct partner outreach.
2018	P-20 partner Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed.
May 2019	Marygrove College Board votes to permanently close.
Aug 2019	P-20 partners sign Joint Operating Agreement (JOA).
Aug 2019	The School at Marygrove opens high school with 9th grade.
Aug 2021	Marygrove Early Education Center opens with infant classrooms through preschool.
Aug 2022	The School at Marygrove opens elementary school with grades K-2.

uphold its legacy as a center for education, opportunity, and community. A groundbreaking, neighborhood-oriented educational initiative is now fully underway, reimagining the full spectrum of experiences from early childhood and K-12 to higher education and beyond – a comprehensive P-20, pre-natal to “20th grade”, vision. The Kresge Foundation has committed \$75 million to the development efforts in the Livernois-McNichols district and on the Marygrove campus: a historic, transformative commitment to this neighborhood.

Together with Kresge, the Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD), Starfish Family Services (Starfish), the University of Michigan School of Education (U-M), and today’s Marygrove Conservancy are closely partnered together to shape and deliver the vision.

The viable future of the Marygrove campus, however, was by no means guaranteed. It was made possible through the immense dedication of a wide range of stakeholders and partners and a vision inspired by the communities surrounding Marygrove. This case study charts the development of the campus re-envisioning partnerships and the many lessons learned along the way, beginning in 2017 when the initial pieces started to crystallize. In fall of 2019, the first new students of the program arrived as the inaugural 9th grade class of The School at Marygrove high school, opened by as a partnership between the Detroit Public Schools Community District and the University of Michigan School of Education (U-M SOE). The Michigan Education Teaching School also opened in 2019. In the fall of 2021 – in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic – the new Marygrove Early Education Center opened its doors, led by Starfish Family Services, with curriculum and professional development supported by U-M SOE. Recently, in the fall of 2022, the K-2 grade levels for The School at

Marygrove’s elementary school opened, beginning to link across the comprehensive P-20 vision. This case study documents:

- Factors and priorities that informed decision-making and partnership selection
- Structures for governance and project management across multiple program areas
- Program development for the P-20 academic program
- Project financing and planning for campus preservation
- Lessons learned for partnership cultivation and management

Key Lessons Learned for Building Long-Term Partnership and Investments

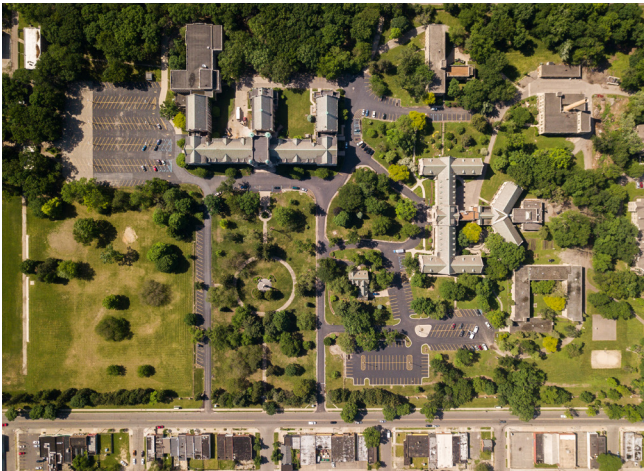
1. Identify partners through a set of guiding principles and ground the partnership by developing a strong shared vision.
2. Start with listening and community-building.
3. Develop structures for open and transparent communication, coordination, and collective accountability.
4. Build sustained trust and individual, people-focused relationships, and recognize relationship-building happens over time.
5. Center place-based educational initiatives around the neighborhoods where children and families live, and continue to study neighborhood trends over time.

II. Background

Marygrove College

Marygrove College holds an important legacy in Detroit and the region. The College played a major role in expanding access to higher education in Detroit, first as a women's college, and later recognition as a predominately minority-serving institution (MSI). Generations of Detroit leaders, and particularly educators and social workers, have graduated from Marygrove, grounded in its social justice- and service-oriented values.

Founded in 1905 as St. Mary's College by the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (the IHM Sisters) to educate women, Marygrove College moved to Northwest Detroit and established the campus on McNichols Avenue in 1927. The College, along with University of Detroit Mercy just one mile away, were critical anchors for the surrounding neighborhoods, centered around the major corridors of Livernois Avenue and McNichols Avenue. The campus hosted community events, arts performances, and youth opportunities for decades, and residents were proud to have the beautiful, stately campus in their backyard.



Credit: The Kresge Foundation

By the late 1990s and early 2000s, however, Marygrove began confronting many of the same challenges facing small, independent liberal arts colleges across the national landscape. Namely, a declining college-aged demographic population and a decreased feeder pipeline – particularly exacerbated in the Northeast and Midwest regions – have led to under-enrollment at many of these colleges.

At Marygrove, enrollment experienced a significant decline in the late 2000's, and at the same time the College took on additional debt for programmatic and capital investments. Enrollment failed to recover, and the College now faced a significant debt burden. When Dr. Beth Burns became the College's President in 2016, she saw the College would not be able to survive under these financial conditions. She urgently needed to stabilize the College's operations and so began reaching out to local foundations for support, even as she restructured core operations. When she met with the Kresge Foundation, Kresge understood the stakes involved – how neighborhood stabilization efforts Kresge and other stakeholders had been investing in for years would be jeopardized if Marygrove's campus were to shut down.

Fitzgerald/Live6 neighborhood development

The Kresge Foundation had been partnering for several years on neighborhood investment initiatives in the Livernois-McNichols area, guided by the goal of demonstrating successful equitable revitalization in the context of Detroit's neighborhoods. Kresge had firsthand experience in the catalytic potential of anchor institutions, through their involvement in Midtown Detroit working with university and hospital systems to stimulate new development.

An anchor-driven approach then offered a natural strategy for the neighborhoods surrounding Marygrove College and University of Detroit Mercy. These included the neighborhoods along the intersection of Livernois and McNichols (Six Mile) Avenues: Fitzgerald, Bagley, Martin Park, and University District.

The City of Detroit and other partners, including Invest Detroit, designated the Livernois-McNichols neighborhoods among its first round of a newly-launched Strategic Neighborhood Fund in 2014. At the same time, the national initiative of Reimagining the Civic Commons selected the Fitzgerald neighborhood as a partner with the neighborhood organization Live6 Alliance, which provided additional momentum and resources behind public space and infrastructure. Together, Kresge, the City, and other city and neighborhood partners targeted investments ranging from housing stabilization, to commercial corridor development and small business support, to public space development. These efforts were driven by a vision for an equitable child- and

family-centered neighborhood, catalyzed by a beautiful new neighborhood park and greenway and a major pedestrian-friendly streetscaping project.

The campus nodes of Marygrove and the University of Detroit Mercy played a central role in designing the neighborhood's future development. Both institutions were involved in planning for these neighborhood investments and determining priorities. Marygrove's campus and campus life were thus integral to the long-term stability of the neighborhood.

Throughout the development process for the Marygrove campus, the project has continued to prioritize equitable development without displacement across the broader neighborhood, ensuring that while the campus can serve as a catalyst for economic development in its surrounding neighborhoods, the voices, priorities, and socioeconomic mobility for the existing residents in the community.



Ella Fitzgerald Park, a new neighborhood park opened in 2018. Credit: Greg Siemasz for Earthscape, 2018.

III. Setting the Vision

Dec 2016 – May 2017

Marygrove College & Kresge Foundation Partnership

While Kresge was aware of some early signs of Marygrove’s operational challenges, by 2016 when Dr. Burns approached Kresge president Rip Rapson, the concerns around enrollment and finances had dramatically escalated. Kresge and the MacGregor Fund agreed to a \$500,000 grant, intended to help the College stabilize current operations and launch a turnaround effort.

As the Kresge team, now led by Detroit Program Managing Director Wendy Jackson, worked more closely with the College and conducted more detailed financial due diligence, the team saw that the College “was very close to becoming insolvent,” as Jackson recounts. Similarly, Aaron Seybert, Managing Director of Kresge’s Social Investment Practice, reflected that collectively they realized the College would be unlikely to “grow their way out of the problem” through enrollment alone. Already, the College was facing a large operating deficit that triggered federal Department of Education warnings and a freeze on federal student aid disbursement. Together, Kresge and Marygrove College leadership began to strategize and project a range of scenarios, while reaching to potential partners in higher education and the public sector. However, no simple solutions emerged.

Dr. Burns’ leadership was pivotal during this period, recognizing the difficult decisions required of her, her team, and the Board that would impact Marygrove’s students, faculty, staff, alumni, and broader communities that cherished the institution. By June 2016, it was clear that the College’s closure was a real risk, and a major

transformation would be needed to sustain the campus for the community’s long-term future. Dr. Burns also recognized the importance of the campus and Marygrove’s history to the broader city and sought solutions that could maintain the campus as a civic resource.

Kresge’s Social Investments and Detroit teams began working hand-in-hand with the College’s leadership on a financial workout strategy, in the meantime issuing a Program-Related Investment (PRI) guarantee to backstop the College, allowing its students to access federal student aid funding. Along with providing other general operating grants, the Kresge Detroit Program team began to explore long-term campus alternatives. As Jackson said, “if it the College has to close, it has to close responsibly... Failure was not an option.”

Ultimately, the ongoing enrollment challenges and debt burden forced Marygrove’s trustees to make the difficult decision to close Marygrove’s undergraduate programs at the end of 2017. Marygrove worked with other higher education institutions in the region to guarantee “teach-out” opportunities for students to continue and complete their studies. Kresge supported the College as well as its students’ transitions during this time. Between 2017-2019, Kresge provided a combined \$16 million in grants to the College, as bridge funding and to support restructuring.

Marygrove then became a graduate programs-only institution starting in 2018. However, Marygrove and Kresge understood that for this new business model to be viable, it required relieving the College of the operating expenses and responsibilities of the campus. As the College and its Board discussed future campus scenarios with Kresge, three criteria emerged for future campus programming. The campus must: 1) remain an asset (not a liability)

to the neighborhood; 2) fulfill the IHM mission to be a transformational leader in education, and 3) partner with the traditional public education sector, in order to honor the legacy and commitment of the IHM Sisters to public education.

Developing the P-20, Cradle-to-Career Campus Concept

Kresge also recognized the critical role of quality public education to help a neighborhood thrive - and the gap in early childhood and K-12 investments in the neighborhood at the time. Nonetheless, finding the right strategy for tackling education in the neighborhood was initially uncertain. In 2017, as preliminary discussions on campus transformation were underway, Kresge began engaging U3 Advisors, a consulting firm focused on place-based strategies with anchor institutions. U3 researched and advised on potential models for an education program that could connect families and children from early childhood to K-12 and into higher education - what became known as the “P-20” (pre-natal through 20th grade) or cradle-to-career concept.

The range of possibilities was broad, from early college high schools that focus on students’ transition between high school and college, to schools centered on real-world, project-based learning, and programs that integrate community services into the school structure and family experience. Schools that were directly designed with and supported by partner universities, and sometimes are closely tied to the university’s physical campus, offered additional clear precedents for the Marygrove campus. Kresge was particularly interested in partnership schools that had a neighborhood-serving focus, often through a neighborhood catchment area requirement or preference for enrollment.

Identifying P-20 Partners

By the beginning of 2017, several other citywide educational initiatives coincided. In the early childhood education sector, Kresge had already launched an initiative on investing in early childhood centers, convening a Center Advisory Partners (CAP) with IFF, a Midwest-based community development financial institution. DPSCD, the U-M School of Education, and Starfish Family Services were all participants in the CAP process, including the impact of building new, state-of-the-art early education centers in the city. This was based on a call to action for improving the quality of early childhood facilities across the city, as part of the Hope Starts Here framework, Detroit’s first early childhood strategic plan developed after a yearlong community engagement process. The Hope Starts Here framework continues to be the guiding vision and set of priorities for Detroit’s early childhood stakeholders to this day.

In 2016, Kresge and IFF issued an RFP to early childhood education providers, seeking proposals to open the first new center in Northwest Detroit. Starfish and its partner Development Centers (DCI) were selected, but immediate next steps were paused as Kresge’s work with Marygrove advanced through 2017, including consideration of an early childhood center as part of the P-20 vision. Meanwhile, Starfish continued their own strategic planning that charted a path towards growing an integrated service model in Detroit, becoming a direct service provider in the city and integrating various federal grant-funded programs.

On a parallel path, for the K-12 partnership, Marygrove’s leadership and Kresge determined they would commit to working with the Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD). The school district had recently returned to local

control and brought on Dr. Nikolai Vitti as its new superintendent. DPSCD's new leadership was highly motivated to tackle ambitious projects, including expanding the types of school offerings available to Detroit families. Already, they were developing programs like tuition-free Montessori and expanded gifted and talented and dual language programs. The concept of offering a new P-20 learning environment fit into the District's larger strategy of finding different ways to attract back families, including those who were leaving the city to send their children to school.

As Kresge, Marygrove, the IHM sisters, and DPSCD explored a potential partnership for operating a K-12 school, they also understood that working within the district public school system would allow for the school to establish neighborhood enrollment catchment areas. This was critical to the central goal of creating a neighborhood development-oriented educational anchor. Finally, Marygrove and the IHM sisters saw partnering with the public school district as the best approach to honoring the College's legacy of impact in public education and a commitment to social justice. At the May 2017 Marygrove College Board meeting, the Board officially agreed to partner with DPSCD to establish a public district K-12 school as part of the P-20 vision.

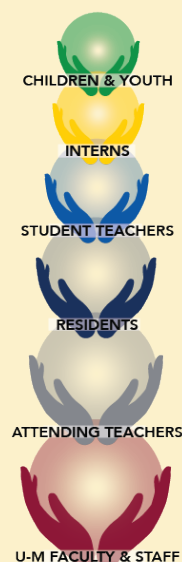
During this time, Dean Elizabeth Moje of the University of Michigan School of Education, as a member of the advisory board for the early childhood facilities committee, was aware of discussions about locating a new early childhood center on the Marygrove campus. She became interested in the possibilities for U-M SOE to serve as a partner on the Marygrove campus. Dean Moje had been developing a program concept for the School of Education to invest and return to U-M's "hometown" of Detroit in a significant way. The University of Michigan was first founded in Detroit in 1817, and partnerships across the city

today include research, engagement, and support for community organizations, local businesses, government officials, and nonprofits, across many U-M schools. The School of Education in particular has had long-standing partnerships with Detroit's public school system in teacher education and research.

For several years, Dean Moje had been developing the concept of a "Teaching School" based in Detroit, modeled after the teaching hospitals system for training resident doctors. Instead of sending teachers into their own classrooms after only a year-and-a-half to two years of clinical practice and educator preparation, under this new model, certified teachers would be placed in a school as first, second, and third-year residents. Experienced "attending" teachers and university teacher educators would continue to provide ongoing, scaffolded development and support in the teachers' initial years of teaching. This Teaching School model created a holistic professional environment where certified early-career teachers

U-M Teaching School Mission Today:

"The U-M Teaching School's mission is to elevate the profession of teaching by creating a collaborative, sustainable, and translatable model of teacher preparation that extends and deepens teachers' opportunities for professional learning. Teaching for social justice is at the center of this model, animating both its method and its substance. By embedding the Teaching School in a K-12 school context, and by focusing simultaneously on the learning and development of young people and of their teachers, we bridge research with practice, teacher with learner, teacher educator with practitioner."



are supported to become efficacious in the profession, while also building a much-needed pipeline of teachers in Detroit. While Moje had initially conceptualized locating the Teaching School at an existing DPSCD school, she quickly saw the immense opportunity for the Teaching School to be a core part of a new continuous P-20 education campus by bringing together teacher training, curriculum development, and a community-in-schools approach to teaching and learning.

As these potential partners emerged, Kresge was developing a framework for a strong, sustainable P-20 partnership model that would ensure a high-quality educational experience above all. Throughout the early months of 2017, Kresge had been in discussion with these institutions' leaderships at the highest levels to ensure their alignment of vision and firm commitment to this complex, long-term endeavor. By engaging with executive leadership, Kresge could begin to align specific goals and priorities and guide program development. In this sense, Kresge was uniquely suited, as a long-term funder in the neighborhood, to lead a collaborative visioning process and lay the foundation for the partners to build upon.

IV. Creating the Governance Structure

June 2017 - August 2019

With the key partners around the table, the next key phase centered around formalizing long-term partnership agreements that would lay out a common set of vision, principles, and roles and responsibilities. The partners first signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in September 2018, followed by a long-term, governance-oriented Joint Operating Agreement (JOA) in August 2019.

Alycia Meriweather, Deputy Superintendent at DPSCD, reflects, "The MOU was a very important document, because it forced each entity individually, and us collaboratively, to define what we're doing and how we're holding each other accountable... We needed the MOU that turned into the JOA. It's brought up at different points [to reference], and it provides a hedge of protection for the project in case of leadership changes."

U3 helped research several precedents of collaborative school planning and governance models, including reviewing governing documents and interviewing leadership on the partnership process, from:

- Penn Alexander School, Philadelphia, PA
- Teachers College Community School, NYC
- Henderson Hopkins School, Baltimore, MD
- Clark University, Worcester, MA

Drafting the MOU

Based on this research, Kresge, with support from U3, proposed to the partners that they first develop and sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which would establish

a formal partnership and chart the path for a long-term, governance-oriented Joint Operating Agreement (JOA). The initial MOU partners were the Detroit Public Schools Community District, University of Michigan School of Education, Kresge Foundation, and Marygrove College. Starfish Family Services and Marygrove Conservancy would later join as signatories of the JOA. An outline of main MOU terms, and key milestones set to finalize the MOU, helped organize the partners through a regular meeting cadence and project managers were identified to support executive leadership.

The drafting process ran from April to September 2018. Again, Kresge's leadership during this process was key, holding the project vision across the many partners while facilitating day-to-day management and documentation of complicated terms. Key terms of the MOU established:

- Major roles and responsibilities of each of the signatories.
- Stages and major components of the planning process, including future agreements to be negotiated, community engagement needs, and school opening and phasing targets.
- School buildings' location, design, financing and construction roles.
- K-12 school program focus on social justice and engineering, using a project- and place-based approach.
- Enrollment priority for students living in a to-be-determined neighborhood catchment area, and that the school would offer automatic enrollment for students coming from an on-campus early childhood center.
- Collaboration between U-M and DPSCD on curriculum decisions, professional development opportunities, and staffing processes.
- The U-M Teaching School's operations at the K-12 school.
- The executive leaders of the P-20 partners would conduct an annual review and approvals process for school programming.
- U-M SOE's responsibility for data collection, management, and analysis to ensure that the Detroit P-20 Partnership was meeting its goals.



Credit: Ryan Southern, courtesy of The Kresge Foundation

Long-term Governance Planning

Following signing of the MOU, the partners publicly announced the P-20 campus initiative and a September 2019 opening date for the The School at Marygrove (TSM), starting with a 9th grade class. This announcement launched an urgent timeline to finalize the long-term governance documents, renovate the physical school facilities, and ultimately deliver a successful, on-time opening of the school itself.

During this time, Starfish Family Services formally joined the partnership structure as well, having formally been selected in a competitive by Kresge to advance a new early childhood education center at the Marygrove campus. Starfish's leadership, under Ann Kalass, quickly understood the vision and potential impact of the comprehensive P-20 vision, particularly as it structured early childhood education as an equal partner.

The P-20 planning infrastructure expanded at this stage to advance multiple simultaneous workstreams. First, the partners formed a Steering Committee to guide decision-making, facilitated by Kresge and consisting of representatives from the core MOU signatories as well as other representatives from the City of Detroit and other education-oriented organizations. This Steering Committee was later restructured in early 2019, with a core Executive Committee composed of the partners' executives and an advisory Steering Committee. The Executive Committee continues to serve as the primary structure for reviewing and approving P-20 programmatic decisions.

Other subcommittees formed, and others were added over time, with dedicated representatives and expertise from across the partner and facilitation support by Kresge, U-M SOE, and U3, including:

- Community engagement and communications
- Curriculum development
- Child and family support services
- Age Birth-to-Eight transitions & alignment
- Staffing selection
- Early childhood education facility design
- K-12 facilities design

Through these subcommittees, project managers collaborated on and formed recommendations to shape the K-12 and early education center (EEC) school structures. Any key decisions needed were then presented to the Executive Committee. Long-term commitments were memorialized in the Joint Operating Agreement (JOA), drafted and signed in August 2019 before The School at Marygrove opened that September. Several sections of this 2019 JOA updated with further details in the final JOA, executed in August 2020, which allowed for more time to develop P-20 terms related to the EEC. This additional time also proved valuable to help continue relationship and trust-building.

Refining the Program & Key Principles

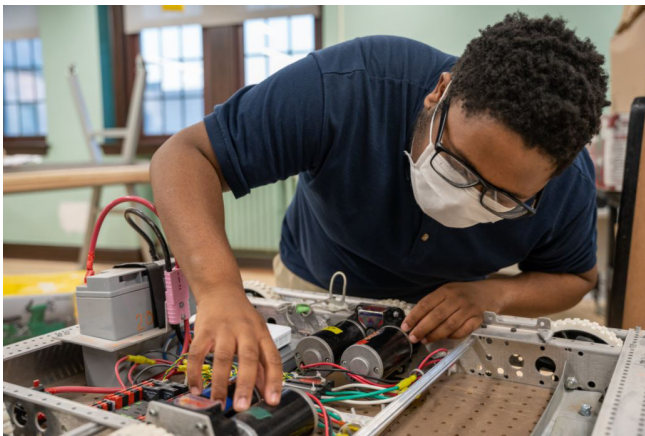
Over the course of a full year of planning, the P-20 partners developed the terms of the JOA and plan for The School at Marygrove's opening year. TSM's first principal was also on board for the full planning year, allowing them to become embedded in the partnership and vision.

Examples of key school planning, program, and partnership decisions included:

- **Setting the enrollment catchment area.** The Executive Committee was presented with a set of scenarios and data, based on enrollment at other DPSCD schools and demographic data about the number of children in the geographies surrounding the school. The data

attempted to estimate how many students the school would be able to enroll, while avoiding as much as possible any impact on adjacent DPSCD schools.

Having clear scenarios helped the committee discuss goals, values, and trade-offs, raising complicated questions around the best, most equitable approach to creating access to high-quality education, promoting diversity and integration, and also mitigating potential gentrification over time. Ultimately, the Executive Committee agreed to establish a tiered approach to enrollment priorities:



Credit: University of Michigan School of Education

first with the largest weight given to students living in a primary catchment area 1 mile from campus, followed by those in a secondary catchment area 2 miles from campus, followed lastly by students living elsewhere in the City of Detroit. The Marygrove Early Education Center also was able to integrate these priorities into their enrollment policies when it later opened in 2021. This has ensured that more than 50% of the first high school class at The School at Marygrove are residents of the 2-mile radius from the campus, honoring the partners' shared commitment to prioritize neighborhood residents and to support development and growth without displacing existing families.

- **Design thinking & social justice curriculum and school themes.** The partners initially recognized the value of creating an engineering focus at the K-12 school, both from DPSCD's districtwide priorities and the value of U-M's brand and strengths in engineering and in education for social justice. At the same time, the partners saw an opportunity to honor Marygrove's history and legacy of social justice. Through planning and developing the curriculum, U-M and DPSCD expanded the engineering focus beyond career and technical approaches, but also to a social justice and human-centered. U-M SOE and DPSCD envisioned a curriculum that could empower young people around issues of social justice and designing change, both in their own immediate communities and as global citizens, which has only become increasingly resonant in the years since the school opened.
- **Collaborative staffing and hiring decisions.** The JOA set forth that selection of the K-12 school principal and EEC leader (later also called a principal) would be led by DPSCD and Starfish respectively with support from U-M SOE and approved by the full Executive Committee. The principal selection process thus involved partners' input on interview questions and evaluation criteria, and all Executive Committee members were involved in interviews with finalist candidates. For the K-12 principal, staff and parent representatives have also been engaged in the selection process.

Teacher selection at the K-12 school primarily was the responsibility of the principal but required significant involvement with U-M, particularly due to the role of the U-M Teaching School. Each year, U-M helped review staffing structures and job descriptions and participated in interviews for key staffing

roles across the school.

- **Robust, continuous child and family support services.** The vision for transformative education centered around the whole child and family required deliberate strategies for holistic support services that span early childhood through high school. These supports include physical and mental health and well-being, social-emotional learning, extended learning time, and other family supports with basic needs, as well as a comprehensive, integrated data and evaluation system. Several national examples of Community Schools initiatives and federal Promise Neighborhoods offered valuable



Credit: Montez Miller, courtesy of The Kresge Foundation



Credit: Darrell Ellis, courtesy of the Kresge Foundation

examples and lessons learned.

The JOA set forth principles that the EEC and K-12 elementary school would collaborate on ensuring continuity and alignment of services. U-M funded a Child and Support Services Coordinator role, as an employee of U-M, to lead these efforts, identify potential service providers and partners, and work directly with the K-12 school and EEC center's leadership. U-M SOE is also leading efforts to develop an on-campus health clinic that would serve the physical and behavioral health needs of students, families and neighbors of the campus.

- **Research-based school times.** Based on review of academic research on teenagers' developmental needs and school operating times, the U-M team recommended that the high school classes start and end on a later schedule than the District's standard. This has proved popular and effective among students, and provided an early example of collaborative decision-making between U-M researchers and DPSCD administration.

Starfish undertook a similar planning process to open the EEC in September 2021. Key collaborative decisions included:

- **Blended funding model.** Starfish Family Services – as well as most providers in Detroit – had primarily operated in silos of the early childhood funding system: Head Start and the state-funded preschool program. For the Marygrove EEC, Kresge, IFF, and Starfish worked together to design a blended model including tuition that would enroll families eligible for public funding programs as well as families paying private tuition. This was an entirely new set of operations for Starfish and a bold change for Detroit. A blended model

allows the EEC to enroll more diverse families with different needs than a typical center and in more socioeconomically integrated classrooms, while also providing Starfish more diversified, stable sources of revenue and funding.

- **Enrollment priorities aligned with P-20.**

Starfish navigated complex state and federal program enrollment requirements to develop an enrollment system that gave priority to children in the same catchment areas as The School at Marygrove, as well as siblings of families enrolled at The School at Marygrove. Starfish also helped design and facilitate the kindergarten class enrollment policy and process. TSM kindergarten enrollment is guaranteed for students living in Detroit who are matriculating from Starfish's PreK classrooms. In Fall 2022, the partners also agreed to keep Starfish PreK students in their same classroom cohorts as they matriculate to kindergarten, so that students can continue to build on their relationships with each other and teachers can more easily collaborate across the PreK to kindergarten transition.

- **New curriculum development with U-M.**

U-M SOE researchers, partnered with other researchers across the country, are leading development of a new, research-backed curriculum designed to continuously serve children from birth through age eight – which does not currently exist in the early childhood education landscape. Researchers are developing the curriculum in partnership with Starfish by working with teachers to implement and observe curriculum components in action. As Starfish introduces this curriculum at the EEC, their team will continue to work with The School at Marygrove to align curriculum and teaching practices. Ultimately, this early childhood-to-elementary-aligned curriculum approach presents an immense opportunity to prevent typical “fade-out” of Pre-K gains in language, literacy, and math skills by the time students reach third grade.

- **Articulating family-oriented supports**

and organizational culture. A significant component of aligning experiences across early childhood and K-12 was understanding



Credit: Timothy Hursley

the culture and particular language cultivated at each. In early childhood, especially at Starfish, student development and supports are inherently tied to understanding family supports. Starfish had also recently updated an organization-wide strategic framework that reiterated the family at the core its service model. Thus understanding and articulating Starfish's services and staffing model at the Marygrove Early Education Center formed a



Credit: Timothy Hursley



Credit: Darrel Ellis, courtesy of The Kresge Foundation

basis for mapping out strategies to continue a family-oriented model at The School at Marygrove Elementary.

- **New facility planning, design, and development.** The Kresge Foundation and the Marygrove Conservancy partnered with several community development entities and the Northern Trust bank to finance the construction of a \$22 million, state of the art early education center as a model for other early childhood centers in Detroit. This investment was tied to the citywide Hope Starts Here initiative to further best practices in design, operations, and financing for early childhood facilities.

Opening in September 2021, the Marygrove Early Education Center was the first new construction for the Marygrove Conservancy on the campus, which owns the building and leases to Starfish for a nominal rent and common area (CAM) maintenance charges. It was developed by the national nonprofit IFF and designed by Marlon Blackwell Architects with an emphasis on natural lighting, child development-appropriate interiors, and plentiful access to vibrant outdoor spaces through interior courtyards and backyard play spaces that also support family engagement and employee wellness.

- **Creating aligned transitions and culture with elementary.** With The School at Marygrove grades K-2 opening one year after the EEC, the EEC's leadership has played a critical role in informing the structures, design, and programming decisions that help families moving from the EEC to K-2 feel continuously supported. The EEC and TSM Elementary School will collaborate on enrollment and classroom formations, pre-

kindergarten and kindergarten transition collaboration across teachers, shared professional development, curriculum alignment, child and family support services, etc. In addition to better serving the students and families, this approach helps model valuing early childhood educators as equal peers to their elementary school counterparts.

Relationship-Building

With such a complex collection of moving parts, partners, and other stakeholders involved, building strong, trusted relationships was a critical foundation for long-term success of the P-20 effort. For example, prior to this partnership, DPSCD's leadership had not worked directly with an early childhood education provider at this in-depth level. Learning what Starfish does, the services it provides, and its focus on serving families holistically was an important process for DPSCD and the other partners to understand the early childhood landscape.

For Starfish, building trust was also an early priority, as they entered direct P-20 partner discussions after the MOU phase. Thus they did not initially have the same relationships as other representatives at the Executive Committee and other subcommittees, or experience with partnerships at this scale. Starfish also faced broader, systemic challenges, in that early childhood educators are often not seen as peers of their K-12 counterparts. Ann Kalass recalls, "I had to encourage my team to step into that leadership role to be credible and position ourselves as the expert."

DPSCD and U-M had a longer partnership history, and Alycia Meriweather and Dean Elizabeth Moje had previously worked together on various advisory boards and projects, such as curriculum development and teacher preparation. However,

the nature of this P-20 partnership would be different and more complex than any other existing partnership. For example, the U-M Teaching School would require DPSCD to give U-M much deeper access to the school and commit long-term to hiring and hosting resident teachers.

In October 2017, Kresge and U3 facilitated a two-day trip for the partners to visit schools in Newark, NJ and Philadelphia, PA, including the Bard High School Early College Newark and the Penn Alexander School. While the trip was originally designed to learn from the schools' successes and challenges, the participants reflected that the extended amount of time spent together as colleagues was the most impactful aspect of the trip and a turning point in the partnership process. Ann Kalass called the trip necessary "breathing space." As the campus continues to expand and add staff on-site, maintaining this space for community-building and collegiality will be critical to sustaining the campus-wide culture.



Credit: Darrel Ellis, courtesy of The Kresge Foundation

V. Marygrove Campus Transitions

May 2019 - today

Marygrove College Closure

From the start of this P-20 planning process, Marygrove College had helped shape the vision, particularly through President Burns and the Board. As the P-20 planning effort took shape, faculty in the education department also joined various planning committees, particularly to advise on early childhood to elementary alignment and wraparound supports.

Throughout this time, the College, IHM Sisters, and Kresge were continuing to address Marygrove's financial challenges, with a focus on relieving the College of campus operations and debt. They established a new nonprofit entity, Marygrove Conservancy, in the fall of 2017, designed to steward the campus and its assets long-term. The Conservancy's board included representatives from Marygrove College, Kresge, University of Detroit Mercy, and the IHM Sisters.

By February of 2018, the College successfully transferred the campus and buildings to the Conservancy, along with the IHM and Kresge debt. Kresge provided initial general operating support to fund the Conservancy and core operations so that the Conservancy could lease the campus back to the College, now operating as a graduate student-only institution, and hire a property management firm.

However, Marygrove College's enrollment and fiscal challenges continued, even after shifting to a graduate student-only program and launching a re-branding and marketing campaign. In May 2019, Marygrove's Board voted to permanently close Marygrove College at the end of 2019 – the same year that the new School at Marygrove would open with the inaugural 9th grade class. Students, alumni, faculty, and community members mourned the closure but celebrated the rebirth of the campus that would continue to honor Marygrove College's history.

Reflecting on Kresge's years-long partnership with Marygrove College, Aaron Seybert observed that if their goal was solely



Credit: Timothy Hursley

to preserve the physical campus, Kresge could have pursued much less costly and more straightforward alternatives. Instead Kresge dedicated immense financial resources, as well as staff and leadership focus, to sustaining the College for as long as possible, and then preserving the legacy of the College in the new programs. When the College did ultimately have to close, Kresge helped ensure their students would have the transitional support to complete their studies. Seybert says, without the full breadth of their investments and commitment, “I don’t



Credit: Montez Miller, courtesy of The Kresge Foundation



Immaculata Building, renovated to house The School at Marygrove grades K-5.
Credit: The Kresge Foundation

know that we would have been able to overcome the Detroit scarcity mindset - this way of thinking that big ambitious things are not for Detroit’s communities and neighborhoods. We could build the finest buildings at the highest standards, but if Detroiters do not feel this is something for them, we have completely failed.”

Alycia Meriweather reflected, “I’m a lifelong Detroiters... the Marygrove campus was always so beautiful and amazing, and struck me as one of the most beautiful things in the city. I know what the campus means to the city and the neighborhood. I also know that when a campus of that size goes dark, it can cause devastation and a ripple effect in the neighborhood. When you talk to the people in the city who’ve lived here, Marygrove holds a special place. When you understand that, you want to be a part of preserving it.”

Financing P-20 Campus Development

As the campus evolved, major renovation and development projects were required for the P-20 school programs, all managed under a tight schedule to open the schools in time.

Kresge was instrumental in securing project financing. For the early education center, Kresge announced its commitment to a new building on campus that would showcase a state-of-the-art, purpose-built early childhood facility. Project financing was managed by IFF, a mission-driven lender and Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI), and included a combination of New Markets Tax Credits and private financing



Credit: The Kresge Foundation

guaranteed by Kresge. For the K-12 school located in a portion of the campus’s main Liberal Arts Building (eventual grades 6-12) and the stand-alone Immaculata Building (grades K-5), New Markets Tax Credits as well as Historic Tax Credits were also instrumental to financing. Across these three buildings, the Conservancy serves as the landlord and leases to the Detroit Public Schools Community District or Starfish Family Services.

Kresge is providing guarantees and tax credit backstops for these core P-20 projects. Guarantees allow philanthropy and other social impact investors to further leverage capital, by offering project lenders a guarantee of repayment through a pledge on the guarantor’s balance sheet if a project does not meet expected returns. In addition, these finance tools also strengthened governance and ongoing alignment between the parties, through a shared understanding of contracts, loan and operating agreements. Additional financing support was provided by PNC Bank and several community development entities (CDEs) that provided support for the New Markets Tax Credits and Historic Tax Credits transactions. With Barton Malow, a local construction firm, serving as its construction

management and implementation partner, the P-20 partners were able to address challenges both in the financing and construction of the project, ensuring that the renovations were delivered on time, and to exemplary quality. Describing Kresge’s experience with providing guarantees, Seybert says, “We were doing guarantees before, but not to this level and exposure at Marygrove. An 8-digit [financial value] guarantee was rare.” Because Kresge was deeply committed to the success of the project, guarantees emerged as “a very efficient way for us to generate significant leverage,” thereby bringing more stakeholders to the table, while preserving cash resources. Seybert acknowledges that this resulted in a complicated financing structure, between lines of credit with banks, individual project finances, and a new non-profit to manage these long-term. However, the complicated structure was feasible with Kresge’s close involvement and deep understanding of the projects, and its ability to coalesce many stakeholders around a long-term vision, a feature Seybert points out is unique to the role of philanthropy.

VI. Reflections and Looking Ahead

With a successful high school opening in September 2019, growth at the Marygrove Conservancy, and construction in progress on the state-of-the-art EEC, the P-20 partners tracked exciting milestones in 2019 and into 2020. The Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 threw the partners into uncharted territory, as the schools raced to support students and families, shifted into online remote learning, and then managed the gradual, start-and-stop shifts to in-person learning over the subsequent years.

Despite these monumental challenges, the P-20 vision continued to move forward. The Marygrove Early Education Center opened in September 2021, featuring bright classrooms and abundant, natural play areas. The School at Marygrove Elementary opened in September 2022 with grades K-2, in the beautifully transformed Immaculata Building. At the start of the 2022-2023 school year, the Marygrove campus saw its youngest children



Credit: Darrel Ellis, courtesy of The Kresge Foundation

experiencing their first major transition in the P-20 program as they entered kindergarten, while in June its oldest children will graduate from high school as TSM's first graduating class. In the coming years, as a new grade is added each year, the campus and buildings will continue to transform. At full capacity, the P-20 schools will serve over 1,100 students each year.

Meanwhile, the Marygrove Conservancy has launched an array of other complementary partnerships and programs, with over 40 arts, culture, and community-serving organizations leasing space and growing together on campus. Together with the P-20 schools, they contribute to a unique, dynamic creative ecosystem.

Initial Reflections

Each of the partners have also begun to see impacts of the partnership on their own respective institutions. At DPSCD, for example, The School at Marygrove offers opportunities for innovations that DPSCD can consider modeling in other schools, such as analyzing neighborhood catchment areas, adapting school start times, and deepening its role with early childhood education. On catchment areas, for example, DPSCD has not yet implemented a policy of giving additional weight to neighborhood residents, but is incorporating analysis of where students from a neighborhood geography are going to school. DPSCD is also promoting the concept of neighborhood schools as anchors in other neighborhoods, to build relationships with the City of Detroit and other partners.

Dean Moje recognizes gaining different perspectives from having U-M work so closely with the District. She observes the differences between a large system like DPSCD, with a stringent accountability system and decision-making approvals, and the relative flexibility

that the School of Education has within the U-M institution. “It’s good for us to be reminded of that, as researchers of education. It’s good for university-based education researchers to be confronted with reality,” she says, to better ground their research.

For Starfish, the Marygrove EEC has been a motivating rallying point across the organization, especially during the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. Opening the EEC has also prompted the organization to continue to learn and adapt to new approaches, from blended models with tuition to offering extended day and full-year care. Providing an example, Ann Kalass explained, “It’s not just families at Marygrove that need an extended day, so now how can we expand it at more of our centers?”

Finally, at the Kresge Foundation, Wendy Jackson reflected on the P-20 project’s impact: “This project has captured the minds and hopes of the entire Foundation... This is the first big project in which we looked at the city exclusively through the eyes of a child. We’re responsible for getting them the highest quality educational experience.” Similarly, Aaron Seybert says, “I struggle to think of a comparative project in Detroit that has [the same] transformative impact.” He recognizes the high “opportunity cost” of Kresge’s investment into the project, but the risks of failure – if the campus shut down and deteriorated – would have been enormous. The Foundation continues to see Marygrove as a flagship investment key to neighborhood-based development in Detroit.

Navigating Challenges

Four years after signing of the initial partnership MOU, these immense accomplishments are breaking new ground, not to mention impacting the day-to-day lives

of the hundreds of children and families served across the campus. Inevitably, however, the partnership has also had to navigate challenges in collaborating and ensuring the programs meet mission, vision, and values of excellence and equity long-term.

- **Individual school versus system-wide portfolio:** DPSCD, Starfish, and U-M have had to explain, and in some cases justify, the significant investments into the Marygrove schools in the context of their overall portfolios. For DPSCD, for example, The School at Marygrove requires a somewhat higher staffing ratio, especially as the school is far from reaching full build-out at all grade levels. Starfish leadership similarly navigates occasional questions about allocating resources across all of the centers it operates, given challenges with other existing facilities or hiring and teacher shortages. At U-M, leaders have navigated questions around other institutional interests, projects, and priorities, as well as concerns about reputational risk when tying an institution so closely to a single school.

To address these concerns, leaders have conveyed the impact of the P-20 project on broader, system-wide practices and strategies. As Alycia Meriweather explains, “We understand that we’re investing in Marygrove at a higher level, but it’s for the larger good.” By investing District resources in TSM, for example, the District dives deeper potential innovations in its own districtwide practices across school planning, design, and partnerships.

- **Coordination structure & capacity:** All partners also had to establish the capacity, personnel, and infrastructure needed to manage the many simultaneous workstreams.

Each organization managed complex coordination across the partners – who each had very different ways of implementing their work – as well as within different internal departments. This resulted in a high volume of meetings and communications designed to keep the many stakeholders aligned. Partners often had to re-evaluate appropriate roles and representatives for different discussions or the level of approvals needed for certain decisions.

To manage coordination, DPSCD established a cross-functional team spanning facilities, curriculum, human resources, etc., that met regularly, in addition to designating project managers to participate in P-20 committee meetings. Especially in the early planning and implementation years, DPSCD maintained a dedicated project manager to track all these workstreams and teams. This dedicated role, however, required additional funding.

At U-M SOE, Moje brought on dedicated staff to each manage four workstreams: the Teaching School and teacher hiring, curriculum development, data sharing and analysis, and student and family support services. These positions have been supported through U-M fundraising specifically for their P-20 role.

At Starfish, Celina Byrd was hired as a project director, and went on to become the Center Principal when it opened in 2021. Kalass reflects, “We were lucky, having her as part of the partnership from the very beginning, and her ownership in the building, the vision, and the relationship-building.”

- **Leadership recruitment, retention, & stability:** These partnership systems must persist through the natural turnover of leadership and staff over long-term programs.

Notably, The School at Marygrove experienced several principal transitions in its first three years, creating enormous disruptions and making relationship-building much more challenging. The first principal had been selected a year prior to the school opening, allowing for valuable school planning time, relationship-building, and ownership of the school vision by the principal. Due to unforeseen circumstances, the P-20 partners had to replace this initial principal early in the school’s first year, and finding stable leadership proved to be among the largest challenges of the first few years of the school. Foundational, trusting relationships between the principal and all the partners – including the liaisons, project managers, and leadership – underlies success at TSM and the Marygrove EEC, and these relationships require time and consistency to build and strengthen.

Both the TSM and EEC principals juggle enormous demands unique to their roles. They must balance not only their organizational responsibilities with DPSCD and Starfish respectively, but also responsibilities and communications with the other P-20 partners – on top of leading start-up schools in their founding years. Principals must weigh how to prioritize their time and availability between students and families, teachers, DPSCD/Starfish meetings, and P-20 meetings. The principals must therefore be deeply grounded and committed to the P-20 vision, to be able to channel all these demands into impact for students and families.

- **Core project management.** Partners recognize the central role that Kresge has provided, with project management led by Wendy Jackson and Jonathan Hui, that organized and continues to facilitate the Executive Committee. Remarkably several

partners: “It’d be easy to miss because it’s part of how we do business. But if that were removed, it’d be the same thing as removing the JOA and would create a lot of problems.” Kresge, according to the partners, was an ideal partner because of their approach to the work: laying the groundwork for the project with passion, respect, intentionality, and high standards. Kalass adds that the role of Kresge’s team was central to helping build trust in the partnership and feel trusted and valued as an equal partner.

At the same time, the partners recognize that facilitation of the P-20 partnership will need to evolve long-term and will not continue to remain with Kresge. The partners are continuing to plan for long-term leadership sustainability and identifying the near-term steps towards building the capacity and establishing the governance and accountability framework to do so.

- **Long-term vision & strategy:** The long-term nature of the project vision is exciting and truly precedent-setting, but also among the biggest challenges. Meriweather observed, “It’ll be literally 13 years before we see the first little person from the EEC through the 12th grade.” Inevitably, executive leadership will change, and different priorities will emerge at each of the organizations. Thus core documents and systems like the JOA and Executive Committee hold the partners institutionally accountable to the vision long-term and with fidelity. Partners must guard against the risk that they lose focus, that Marygrove “becomes just another school.”

Similarly, with so many near-term milestones and priorities to resolve as the schools open and grow, there can be limited capacity to

address other long-term strategic questions at this stage. For example, the partners acknowledge a need to better define strategies and resources related to each organization’s fundraising needs, in the context of sustaining their roles and meetings their responsibilities.

Lessons Learned

Across the P-20 partnership, partners reflected on several key lessons that helped shape the efforts on the Marygrove campus and could inform similar place-based education efforts around the country:

1. Identify partners through a set of guiding principles and ground the partnership by developing a strong shared vision.

Kresge and Marygrove College spent several months carefully identifying priorities and selecting P-20 partners, gauging their institutional priorities, capacity, and leadership commitment. As a result, the P-20 partners all shared a similar vision and did not need to be convinced of its value. Instead, “the dialogue was more about the how and what does it look like.” Only with this strong shared understanding can such a complex partnerships succeed.

Maintaining the vision over time also involves recognizing when to balance day-to-day project management details with time for focus and reflection. For example, over the course of preparing to open the schools, leadership and project managers faced urgent pressures and timelines. However, it was critically important to also make time and space for longer, more reflective, vision-oriented discussions, from which identifying priorities and delegating decisions and tasks could follow.

2. Start with listening and community-building.

Investing in place-based education involves first understanding the place itself and involving its people. In the crucial initial stages of program visioning, the partners must collaborate on meaningful community engagement and listen to feedback, before planning programs and developing facilities that would impact the future of their neighborhoods. As a secondary benefit, the process of presenting to and listening during community dialogues also helps partners better articulate a shared project vision together.



Credit: Ryan Southen, courtesy The Kresge Foundation

Start with a community-engaged design process that elevates the priorities of the community, and then develop programming based on what you've heard. And along the way, consistently share updates, continue to listen, and



Credit: Darrel Ellis, courtesy of The Kresge Foundation

connect what you've heard with how your work is reflecting those priorities. The P-20 partners engaged the Detroit Collaborative Design Center (DCDC) to support its community engagement process, which first involved trust-building with community to address their own relationship with the campus over the years. Only then were the partners able to engage community members on their vision for facilities and programming on the campus. These findings informed the design process, and DCDC used ongoing documentation of “what we heard” and “how we responded” to create a feedback loop with community through focus groups, larger-scale community meetings, campus activations, and newsletter updates. Moreover, prospective and current students also helped design future spaces in their school buildings through youth-focused design engagements and charettes.



Credit: Marygrove Conservancy

In the educational program itself, community-building also involves incorporating student and family voice in upholding the vision. Leadership should empower students and families to hold the school vision as well and shape how the program can better meet this vision. At The School at Marygrove, the role of students and families in maintaining the school vision and culture has been critical.

3. Develop structures for open and transparent communication, coordination, and collective accountability.

Setting up clear project management structures soon after the partners were identified was critical to developing proactive, open communication and identifying problems as early as possible. Working committees formed by the identified project leads became the first venue for mapping out strategy and problem-solving, while the Executive Committee convened regularly for major decision-making and reviewing priorities. These are further strengthened by shared governance agreements such as a ten-year Joint Operating Agreement, or financing agreements such as loans and leases that reinforce the structures for coordination and communication.

Furthermore, establishing a core, stable governance group like the Executive Committee serves to ground the formal legal partnership agreement. The stability and consistency of the Executive Committee reinforces the durability of the partnership overall. As Wendy Jackson reflects, the current members of the Executive Committee will need to be mindful and intentional about preparing the next set of leaders to carry on these structures.

4. Build sustained trust and individual, people-focused relationships, and recognize relationship-building happens over time.

Each of the project leaders emphasized that creating time and space for relationship-building is absolutely necessary. As Alycia Meriweather states, “Get to know your partners as people.” The multi-day team trip that the Executive Committee and main project leaders took to visit schools in Philadelphia and Newark became a major milestone for strengthening the partnership, simply for providing time for the project team to spend and socialize together.

Relationship-building allows for trust and commitment between and across executive leadership and day-to-day project managers and on-the-ground leaders. This is especially needed on complex initiatives that lean on the expertise, capacities, and knowledge that different partners and team members bring, such as the operations of running a school, research informing curriculum, or data evaluation and student progress over time.

5. Center place-based educational initiatives around the neighborhoods where children and families live, and continue to study neighborhood trends over time.

Research has proven that children and families, especially in cities like Detroit, experience opportunities within the context of their neighborhoods. Child-centered investments must therefore be rooted in a neighborhood-based foundation. Partners agree that one of the most important aspects of the Marygrove partnership is its neighborhood priority – which has meant over half of its students are from the immediate neighborhood – as well as the campus’s community programming, that ensures all neighbors have access to resources on the campus.

To create a truly child- and family-centered neighborhood, educational investments should be supported with other comprehensive

infrastructure investments, such as streetscapes, public spaces, health, housing, and other supports that support the whole child and whole family. In particular, neighborhood housing dynamics require careful attention and focus. Demand for high-performing, neighborhood-based schools can exacerbate housing pressures, as other community development-oriented school partnerships have experienced when middle- and upper-income families seek to move within a defined catchment area and risk displacing lower-income people of color. Thus, evaluating neighborhood-wide dynamics over time is critical, such as demographics by race, ethnicity, and income, along with housing values and home rental versus ownership trends. Neighborhood voice and ongoing on-the-ground dialogue

with residents can also identify risks before quantitative data becomes available. Place-based education investments should incorporate neighborhood equity into guiding principles early on, so that policies and programs can evolve as the surrounding neighborhoods evolve over time.

Certainly, the Marygrove campus has proven more than capable of adapting over its almost-100-year history. Three years after the College's closure, new generations of students and families are shaping the evolution of Marygrove's legacy, and the campus, in turn is charting a new path for investing in Detroit's neighborhoods.



Credit: The Kresge Foundation



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