Opportunity
for Detroit
Children
Agenda
For the past 60 years, The Skillman Foundation has served as a steady drum beat for children.

Beginning with our founder Rose Skillman and continued across the decades, we have focused our energy and endowment on championing our community’s most cherished yet most vulnerable—our children.

Over the years, our grant- and changemaking shifted from responding to a variety of children’s issues to building strategies that prevent harm and improve outcomes for kids. This drew our focus to the developmental experiences of children and youth, as these have an outsized impact on lifelong wellness and success. We were then led to the K-12 system—where we believe the greatest impact can be made to ensure children develop healthfully and thrive as adults.

We acknowledge the K-12 system in its full scope—its reliance on the strength of other youth-serving entities, an informed and active community, and supportive state policy and funding. We are attentive to its interconnection to afterschool and summer programs, and college and career pathways.

We value high-quality systems, programs, practices, and policies. But most of all, we value people. The genius of our children. The heart of our parents. The energy of our educators. The dedication of our nonprofit workers. The tenacity of our community members who safeguard our children. The generosity of our business leaders.

We work in partnership with a broad swath of individuals and organizations—and we help bring these partners together to collaborate toward a shared vision for Detroit children, with shared data, resources, and goals for meaningful and long-term change.

We deploy our dollars, our voice, and our ability to convene diverse partnerships to this end. Rather than help children beat the odds, we seek to change the odds for children.

In the story “60 Years of Service to Children” on pages 6–25, you’ll see common areas of work carried throughout our history. K-12 education. Afterschool system building. Youth employment. College and career readiness and access. Juvenile justice. Community leadership. These threads have carried through the years to today, though with differing strategic approaches and levels of emphasis. When context and opportunities shift, we follow.

The Skillman Foundation will forever be a fierce champion of children, listening to their needs, amplifying their voices, and leaning in where we believe we can have the greatest impact.
Since 2017, The Skillman Foundation has advanced an Opportunity Agenda for Detroit Children. We want Detroit kids to have equitable opportunities to learn and to lead. To this end, we are focused on K–12 education, afterschool, and college and career pathways.

The Opportunity Agenda came at the heels of our Good Neighborhoods Initiative, a decade-long $120–million commitment to improving conditions for children in six Detroit neighborhoods. Our intention was to expand the neighborhood work to impact children citywide, and we have since worked to leverage the momentum, learnings, and relationships to do so.

Why we’re focused on systems change

Changing the odds for all Detroit children requires system–level changes. The Skillman Foundation works to identify and change the practices, policies, and prejudices that limit Detroit kids, replacing them with the supports and opportunities needed for young people to set and achieve their highest aspirations.

We want equitable systems for Detroit children. Our ultimate vision is not that Detroit kids will have the same offerings as their wealthier counterparts, but that our city will rethink and innovate its child–serving systems to leapfrog forward.

What about programs?

While we work to influence systems change, we also stand in the gap for children and support those who do the same. Investing in the programs and people who support children every day provides a critical counterbalance to long–term strategies. Additionally, high–quality programs, innovative practices, and strong partnerships between youth providers are proof points of what is possible for system–level changes.
K-12 EDUCATION

A quality education is the basis for being able to lead a life of independence and prosperity. It better enables you to write your own future. It helps you direct the futures of your community and country as an active citizen. A good education expands what is possible and makes positive outcomes much more probable. It is the key to a brighter future for individuals and the collective.

But too often, quality is an anomaly in schools whose communities have limited resources. Struggling to fill the gaps, schools stretch their dollars to meet the needs of children. As a result, they are largely unable to offer the same level of academic options and rigor as their counterparts in more well-to-do neighborhoods.

Detroit has over 200 K-12 schools, including the Detroit Public Schools Community District and an array of public charter and private schools. In service of all Detroit children, The Skillman Foundation has a long history of investing across Detroit’s system of schools, with K-12 systems change first identified as an area of focus in 1991.

We support a high-quality system of schools that help children meet educational milestones and move through life as capable and confident thinkers. We work to provide the best for Detroit students: high expectations, equitable treatment and resources, and best-in-class curriculum. We back educators, their development, and the availability of actionable data to help them lead effective classrooms and schools. We support partnerships

How will we know if learning and development opportunities improve for Detroit children?

The key indicators we are tracking are:

- Third-grade reading proficiency
- Meaningful high school graduation
- Funding in the afterschool system
- Perceptions of youth hope and opportunity

Data on key indicators will be available on skillman.org by the end of 2020.
Third-grade literacy is known to be a strong indicator of life outcomes because it is an academic milestone at which point children should advance from learning to read, to reading to learn. However, in 2019, fewer than half of Michigan third graders scored as reading proficiently, and in Detroit, fewer than 16% achieved the level of proficiency. Years of low marks has made literacy a priority for our city and state, further catalyzed by a 2016 Read by Grade Three Law that provides additional help for struggling students and schools—along with a provision that students may be retained if they are one or more grade levels behind in reading by third grade.

**Examples of our efforts in K–12 EDUCATION during 2018–19 include:**

**Instilling a love of reading, all summer long**

With third-grade literacy as a local and statewide priority for kids, we banded together with others to help young children learn to read. With a heavy focus on summer, a time when children tend to lose ground made during the school year, The Skillman Foundation invested in partnerships between literacy program providers, schools, and Detroit Parks and Recreation Centers to implement summer literacy programs. During the summer of 2018, the literacy programs we supported served over 400 first through fourth graders at 10 sites, with 80% staving off any loss of reading proficiency. In 2019, the summer literacy programs expanded in reach and purpose, aiming not only to retain but to improve child reading proficiency. Nearly 1,000 children were served across 22 sites, with 83% retaining and 29% growing reading proficiency. We also support summer learning and year-round literacy efforts through our involvement with 313 Reads!, Detroit’s Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, a community collective that serves as a hub of information, coordination, and operational assistance for organizations that support child literacy in Detroit.
Supporting best-in-class curriculum for Detroit students

A high-quality curriculum is proven to support student success. When the Detroit Public Schools Community District adopted a top English Languages Arts curriculum, The Skillman Foundation funded StandardsWork and EL Education to collaborate with DPSCD on the creation of training materials, helping teachers implement the new curriculum with greater confidence, fidelity, and ease. The modEL Detroit materials are now available free of charge to schools across the nation.

Recruiting, retaining, and elevating Detroit teachers

In partnership with the Detroit Children’s Fund, The Skillman Foundation launched Teach 313 in 2018. In its first year, the initiative resulted in 40 teacher placements, half of which were attracted from out of state. A Teach 313 Ambassador Fellowship engaged (and compensated) cohorts of 10 teachers per year to receive training to become a leading voice for educator advocacy amongst their peers and through public media. The campaign also secured discounts and incentives for Detroit educators from nearly 200 local and national businesses. Learn more at Teach313.org.

A list of all 2018 and 2019 K-12 EDUCATION system investments follow on pages 60 and 67.
When you think back to the childhood experiences that shaped who you became, there is little doubt that an afterschool program—be it sports, the arts, robotics, etc.—comes to mind.

Afterschool programs are outlets of exploration where young people discover and develop their talents and build skills and relationships that are central to their lives. They are a critical component to an effective education system.

The research makes it plain. Kids that participate in high-quality afterschool programming do better overall. Afterschool programs yield improved school attendance and performance, stronger social engagement and connections, and better mental and physical health. They also prepare young people to succeed economically, yielding higher employability and wages.

The Skillman Foundation has been a steadfast supporter of afterschool programs throughout our history and began working to develop a high-quality afterschool system—with an emphasis on reaching youth living in areas with limited services—in 1992. Alongside community partners, we are building a robust system of out-of-school learning and development opportunities that allow kids to explore and expand their sense of self and the world under the guidance of caring adults.

Data on the quality of afterschool programming shows Detroit’s offerings exceed the national average. This is not incidental. The Skillman Foundation and its grant partners have worked to strengthen program quality and impact. These efforts have been aided by the Youth Development Resource Center, established by The Skillman Foundation in 2013, to maximize program impact and advocate for accessible high-quality afterschool opportunities.

While quality is a high point in Detroit’s afterschool offerings, access remains problematic. Nationwide, an increasingly hefty price tag accompanies being on a sports team, exploring the arts, receiving tutoring help, and the like. Parents and caregivers make significant sacrifices to ensure their children can participate in afterschool activities, but not all have this ability. For every Michigan child participating in an afterschool program, three more would join if given the opportunity. By sixth grade, children of middle-class families will have spent over 4,000 more hours engaged in afterschool and summer programs than their lower income peers.

The benefits of afterschool programs are significant—and needed most in communities that have the fewest resources. We are committed to increasing public and private funding for Detroit’s afterschool system so that every young person who wants to participate can.

In addition to advocating for increased funding, our recent investments in Detroit’s afterschool system have included support for: building and strengthening
partnerships between youth-serving organizations; expanding high-impact programs to serve more children; piloting a transportation loop to connect families to multiple school and afterschool options; and public awareness of the benefits of afterschool programs.

**Examples of our 2018–19 AFTERSCHOOL efforts include:**

**Call for Collaboration**

In effort to bring organizations together to better serve children, The Skillman Foundation initiated a Call for Collaborations in 2018 and 2019, a grant opportunity that required organizations applying for funding to do so in partnership with at least one other entity. Partnerships could be between nonprofits, schools, government agencies, or for-profit organizations. A total of 18 grants were made for a total distribution of $4.9 million across the two years. The intent of fostering collaborations between organizations was to increase access to and quality of out-of-school programming, expand data collection and sharing, and further the case for public investment. Call for Collaboration grant partners expressed that they were better able to distribute workloads, problem solve, and innovate. Additionally, partners shared that these assets became especially valuable to weathering the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

**Increasing coordination across Detroit’s school districts**

Inspired by the Coalition for Detroit Schoolchildren’s call for a citywide coordinating body to help parents navigate and be better served by Detroit’s system of schools—which consists of nearly 200 schools, just over half of which are operated by the Detroit Public Schools Community District and the other half primarily by charter operators—Mayor Mike Duggan established the Community Education Commission in 2018, with funding support from The Skillman Foundation and Detroit Children’s Fund.

The CEC’s first signature project was the launch of the GOAL (Get On And Learn) Line, a bus loop that provides families with transportation to more than a dozen schools—charter and DPSCD—as well as to afterschool programs at the Northwest Activity Center. The Foundation’s funding of the CEC was focused on the GOAL Line as an effort to expand Detroit kids’ access to high-quality afterschool activities and strengthen connections between program providers and schools. A Michigan State University analysis of GOAL Line usage found that 77% of all rides took place in the afternoon, with 84% of these students connecting to afterschool programs. Students expressed high satisfaction with the GOAL Line and afterschool experiences. The CEC also created a Detroit Schools Guide to provide parents with information about every K-12 school in the city.

A list of all 2018 and 2019 AFTERSCHOOL system investments follow on pages 62 and 70.
We want Detroit youth to be the authors of their future. In order to do that, they must have pathways to choose from and the agency, readiness, and connections needed to succeed along the way. Schools don’t operate in silos. They are part of a communitywide fabric that must be knit closely together to adequately support and prepare youth for life beyond high school. Nevertheless, the connections between K-12 institutions, higher ed, and the economy are often thin. Too many young people exit high school unsure of their options or how to pursue them. Our College & Career Pathways work forges partnerships between K-12 schools, youth-program providers, postsecondary institutions, and employers to ensure youth are prepared for and connected to options after high school.

And it’s not only the first year of college or an entry-level job that we want to ensure young Detroiter’s are prepared for. We want them to be able to confidently choose from and succeed in a broad range of paths to meaningful, living wage work and remain resilient lifelong learners who can navigate job changes. We want them to have a foundation of knowledge they can build from as well as the adaptive skills required to do so, allowing them to subsist in—and lead—an ever-changing economy.

Our work in youth leadership supports this vision and more. By supporting experiences that help young people develop their leadership skills, we aim to cultivate confident, innovative thinkers who steer their future and the future. We are dedicated to helping Detroit youth become the change agents their city, state, and country needs.

We know that it is not just what young people are exposed to, but what they are not exposed to that shapes their future. Inequitable disciplinary actions, interaction with the criminal justice system, and exposure to violence place a heavy toll in the lives of many Detroit youth. These are barriers to opportunity that must be eliminated. Embedded in our College & Career Pathways work are strategies to advance juvenile justice—a core practice of The Skillman Foundation since our founding in 1960.
Examples of our 2018–19 efforts to strengthen COLLEGE & CAREER PATHWAYS efforts include:

**Expanding Youth Employment in Detroit**

Alongside Quicken Loans Community Fund and Bank of America, we funded Urban Alliance to bring its flagship High School Internship Program to Detroit. The program offers students a year-long, paid internship that includes mentorship, case management, professional skills training, and connection to nationwide alumni networks. The program targets students with low GPAs and no plans beyond high school graduation.

Since its launch in 2018, Urban Alliance has increased its number of intern placements by 33%. Of those who have completed the program, 89% grew soft skills linked to academic success, employability, and wages.
Engaging Youth in Civic Decision Making

We supported CitizenDetroit to educate and engage young Detroiters in the democratic process. Voter rallies and mock elections simulated by the Department of Elections, complete with trained poll workers, were held at high schools. Prior to “election day,” students received guidance on the election process, voter registration cards, and campaign literature for candidates and mileages presented on the mock ballot. Of students who participated, 96% said they were more likely to vote in the next election that they are eligible to vote in.

The Foundation also supported CitizenDetroit to create an informative “Detroit Citizens’ Manual,” targeted toward young adults, and to work in tandem with the Detroit Public Schools Community District to develop civic engagement curriculum for all grade levels. The intention of these activities is to foster youth engagement in the political process and to ensure that Detroit’s proud legacy of civic action continues.

Helping Youth Address Violence in Their Community

In 2018, the Foundation seeded a youth CompStat table to reduce crimes by and against youth and connect victims and perpetrators with helpful services. It is led by Detroit youth, facilitated by Wayne State University’s Center for Urban Studies AmeriCorps Urban Safety program, and attended by the Detroit Police Department, school police, and juvenile justice organizations. CompStat tables review crime data; participants bring deep contextual understanding of what’s behind the numbers, identify areas of focus, deploy solutions to diminish crime, and provide resources to victims and perpetrators. The Foundation has funded CompStat tables since 2013. This investment marks the creation of the first youth CompStat table in the nation.
What does life after high school look like? It’s an impossible question to answer without knowing what one’s future could look like. The Skillman Foundation supports Detroit College Access Network’s efforts to ensure middle and high school students are encouraged to consider a college degree and have the information and support they need to plan and prepare to do so. DCAN is a network of organizations—bigger than any one program or initiative—that connects schools, businesses, college-prep programs, and community resources to increase college enrollment and graduation rates for Detroit students.

Our 2018–19 funding supported DCAN to provide training for all Detroit Public Schools Community District high school guidance counselors and college transition advisers, offer targeted activities for middle school students preparing to transition to high school, and arrange SAT preparation for high school juniors who were near the threshold to receiving the four-year Detroit Promise scholarship. We also supported the College Bound Detroit Grants program, helping schools embody a college-going culture and assist all students in developing their college and career plans.

A list of all 2018 and 2019 COLLEGE & CAREER PATHWAYS investments follow on pages 63 and 71.

On the following pages, you will find our 2018 and 2019 grantmaking details. For further information about our grant and changemaking, visit skillman.org.