

OTHER VOICES: To leave no child behind, teach adults



Diane Renaud

Michigan's recent receipt of a waiver from the well-intended but flawed, federally mandated No Child Left Behind program is good and bad news for the state and Detroit.

Does it help the state to get a waiver from the unrealistic goals? Yes. However, a reprieve from national standards does not mean that competent resolutions will be enacted. Not until there is a true understanding of one of the dynamics that impacts the generational resistance to education of Detroiters.

Most of the community applauds our recent effort to improve our schools and the widespread surge of involvement. But when it is reported that the Detroit area has the highest rate of functional illiteracy in the state, those measured are the adults, not the kids.

This is often not understood. Being a town founded on factories, Detroit has residents who still believe that if their uncle can get them a job on the line, they are going to be all set. Their family has never needed a diploma or GED, much less a college education. For generations. And seeking an education or doing well in school is a waste of time because you can make money in the trades.

Couple this with a dynamic we have learned from our students -- that one of the barriers to education is lack of support from friends and family. Then add into the mix a public education system that has been struggling to provide adequate instruction to its students for decades.

The result is that an education overhaul is not going to be truly successful until there is an "education" of the adults/parents of the city.

In other words, we need to learn from the generations that already have been failed by the system but who are taking matters into their own hands and obtaining their education.

This means a clear understanding by adults that a diploma or GED is now required in industries that did not mandate it previously.

For example, *Crain's* reported recently about the need for truck drivers in Detroit. You now need at least a GED to drive a truck. So the more than 200,000 adults in Detroit who do not have a diploma or GED are ineligible to get jobs in an industry that is desperate to hire.

How we can expect our children to embrace school and understand that their prospects are more limited than ever without a diploma if the adults don't realize it as well? We have to make sure that no child is really left behind by reclaiming the lost generations.

Diane Renaud is executive director and CEO of Detroit's St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center and its educational program, The Education Experience.