

A VIBRANT HISTORY

July 17, 2021

Washtenaw Promise was founded in 2018 with a mission to support the educational needs of very young children in communities of Ypsilanti, Michigan. Here, and in many similar areas throughout our country, far too many young children lack connections to educational and other opportunities imperative for their future. We know with certainty that the first years of life for these, and all children, are critical. This is where we are now making a difference.

At Washtenaw Promise, we sell no products and spend nothing in self-promotion. Instead, our energies focus on the initiation of new programs which will accelerate change, and networking, as we identify and support others who are improving the trajectories of children's lives. We are honored to join those in our community who are committed to the well-being of young children in need, and excited to lead as well as follow.

Below is a summary of what Washtenaw Promise has achieved by building relationships and partnerships, identifying needs, enlisting volunteers, sub-contracting experts, and creating program(s) for change. Our work since January 2018 has provided:

- Our ***"Big Friends" preschool mentoring program*** which has now placed over 100 trained mentors one-on-one with preschool aged children in Ypsilanti, in person pre-covid, and online from 2020 to present. Our strong and ever-growing *network of volunteers* come through partnerships with the University of Michigan, Concordia University, Eastern Michigan University and local communities.
- Production of over ***100 book-readings and other educational videos***, recorded by college and high school volunteers, now available on our website.
- Our ***"Act Me a Story" program***, producing videos of book readings by professional actors of color from around the country, through our partnership with "PlayZoomers" in Boston, Mass.
- Our support of the learning-through-movement ***"Bob-a-loo" program***, which includes assisting with a \$35K grant from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund, and bringing the program to Beatty Early Learning Center, Ford Early Learning Center, and BottlesNBackpacks Child Development Center.
- Our unique ***Teacher Wellness Program***, addressing the stresses of preschool educators. A first cohort of teachers from Beatty Early Learning Center recently completed the course.
- Support for the ***expansion of STEM education*** in Ypsilanti Schools, through *funding of new competitive Robotics teams*, volunteers and coaching.

- Sponsorship of the “Imagination Library” which enables us to provide, in partnership with the Dolly Parton Foundation, *one book every month for over 800 children* in the Ypsilanti community under the age of five.
- Our *partnership with BottleNBackpacks*, Ypsilanti’s largest African American child development center, supporting new STEM resources for preschoolers.
- Our *partnership with Willow Run Acres* as project manager of the Watch Me Grow Garden at Estabrook Elementary School and contributor to the development of the Watch Me Grow Community Gardens at Apple Ridge Park.
- A first-of-its kind “Block Party” for young kids and families on August 20th! Washtenaw Promise is proud to sponsor a celebration of children and their families as a great event in their lives approaches – the start of long awaited, in-person, full day school in September. We will have food, games, rocket launches, demonstrations and activities, and will encourage excitement for the school year about to start.
- Fiduciary on a \$10K grant from the American Academy of Pediatrics to support the development of an Anti-racism toolkit for preschools.
- Honor of an invitation from Washtenaw Intermediate School District (“WISD”) to serve on the select committee to update the Community Needs Assessment for 2021.
- Honor of an Invitation from WISD to serve as the Community representative on the self-assessment team to evaluate Early Head Start programs in Washtenaw County.
- Honor of Humanitarian Award from Brown Chapel of Ypsilanti
- Honor of a Special Tribute from the State of Michigan for our faith in, and support of Ypsilanti Public Schools, and our work in the community.

In 2021, all of the initiatives and partnerships listed above are continuing. Through our strong relationships with Ypsilanti Community Schools, the Washtenaw Intermediate School District, our many partners, and other community non-profits dedicated to young children, we are growing our capacity(ies) to help change lives. We anticipate our “Big Friends” preschool mentoring program will be in person beginning this coming fall. If instances occur where we cannot be in the classrooms, we have already discussed personal meetings during recess outside the classrooms.

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Fully understanding our primary focus at Washtenaw Promise is and will continue to be preschool, Washtenaw Promise’s community involvement has also led to leadership roles in two transformative programs that are now in the planning stages:

1. Local Community Center: An important initiative for 2021 and beyond, includes our planning and design for a cradle-to-career STEAM education, family empowerment and career opportunity facility for Ypsilanti communities with low access to resources. This facility is

planned to include: unique opportunities for public school students to gain education in the technical fields which lead directly to quality jobs of today, as well as a family empowerment center which focuses and coordinates community resources, career technical education and entrepreneurial opportunity(ies).

An ever-growing group of potential partners are now joining this effort, including Washtenaw Community College, American Center for Mobility, Ypsilanti Township, Ann Arbor Maker Works, Michigan Aerospace and MiSTEM. For two years, Washtenaw Promise has played a key role in the development of this idea, and we have great expectations for its' future.

2. School Beyond Walls™: For decades, there has been general agreement across American society between schools, teachers, parents and usually students as well, that imparting *content knowledge* is the first and most important purpose of education. A second assumption is that this content knowledge we are teaching is and will be relevant to the students' lives in the future. However, the knowledge base of our world continues to double at exponentially increasing rates. In 1982 it was doubling every 12 months. IBM now estimates that in 2021, human knowledge is doubling *every 12 hours*. As the amount of human knowledge continues to grow at an inconceivable rate, the content knowledge required to be successful in the jobs of the future has fundamentally changed. Content knowledge is no longer the first and most important purpose of education.

School Beyond Walls™ involves the development and implementation of an *alternative model of education*, where students learn through a combination of educational strategies involving place-based, project-based, real-world problem solving, with connections to mentors, resources and community experts, in real time and through online platforms.