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As state ponders how to fix DPS, Ivery surpasses 20-year mark at WCCCD

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May 24, 2016 | [By Ken Coleman](#)

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When Dr. Curtis L. Ivery, chancellor of Wayne County Community College District, first set foot in Detroit in 1995, Dennis W. Archer had just completed his first year as mayor, John Engler was Michigan governor and Bill Clinton was a first-term U.S president whose hair had only a few strands of gray.

It was 1995 and it stands to reason that most observers of the institution that celebrates 50 years of service stated bluntly: Okay, let's see how long this guy is gonna last.

That's because the community college has had a revolving door of presidents—few of them had tenures longer than four years.

Let's see: Reginald Wilson, George Bell, and Rafael Cortada just to name a few.

Ivery hails from Dallas, Texas, where he led the Mountain View College of the Dallas County Community College District for five years. He recalls enduring long stretches of the evening after a long day at the office trying to find his way home along Detroit's labyrinth of streets and freeways that shoot out of downtown like spokes on a bicycle wheel. Indeed, it took a minute to learn the town.

But 20 years later: WCCCD has successfully expanded its footprint out-county and built state-of-the-art facilities there and increased student enrollment (while K-12 institutions raid each other's turf to expand revenue and other resources) He's enjoyed years without having to increase tuition while area college and universities agonize over decisions to have their students pay more per tuition credit. He's led the effort to build strong career training programs like its nursing curriculum.

Surprising Ivery gets more love among colleagues across the country than he gets at home.

When asked during an interview last week, "Have you been consulted by Lansing government officials or Wayne County area education executives, or local political leaders on ideas to fix Detroit Public Schools?"

Ivery answered “no.” Yes, over the years he has bumped into general superintendents, emergency managers and lawmakers at dedication programs, church services, NAACP dinners, etc. but never formally asked to offer his professional expertise or advice.

Really?

That’s odd considering WCCCD’s student body has a high percentage of men and women are Detroit Public Schools graduates and the two institutions have partnered over the years to offer dual enrollment programs for youth who aim to get a leg up on the post-secondary education. Not to mention that WCCCD has a clean bill of fiscal health what would render others green with envy.

And, equally important, student enrollment has soared at WCCCD, from 12,000 in 1995 to 70,000 in 2015.

Ivery leans forward and responds with passion when asked: “What needs to be done to improve Detroit Public Schools?”

“It’s not that complicated,” he suggests.

He believes that all children can learn but it is about expectations and providing the necessary funding to invest in young people “on the front end” as opposed to increasing state budgets for corrections programs, etc.

You see, for folk like Ivery who grew up during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and ’60s, preach the gospel of providing resources and offering opportunities. He believes that if we can get children through the schoolhouse door we can offer them a future whether it is in construction trades, allied health such as nursing, or a emergency technician.

Ivery, happy where he sits, has even authored two books (*Black Fatherhood: Reclaiming Integration and the Language of Race in the ‘Post-Racial’ Era*). It sounds and feels as stirring as a Sunday morning sermon delivered by a down-t Detroit Public Schools to anyone who will listen: Hire an experience educator, and “provide the resources necessary.”

After a wide-ranging interview, I left reminding myself that Detroit Public Sch superintendents, CEOs, and emergency managers since 1995, from David Snea

Maybe the cure to what ails Detroit Public Schools, I thought to myself, is mor institution that’s anchored a short four-mile drive down the Lodge Freeway.

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