

Detroit Achievement Academy

Kyle Smitley, Founder

DETROIT, MICHIGAN



Creating What Was Missing

Kyle Smitley had not originally planned to start a school. She had moved to Detroit with the intention to volunteer at one, yet her search soon made clear what the city was missing. “I couldn’t find a school that I thought was really delivering for kids in Detroit. So, I opened Detroit Achievement Academy in 2013 with a group of kindergarteners and first graders in the tiny wing of a church.”

“When we first opened, we said “what area of Detroit needs an amazing school?”” Detroit Achievement Academy (DAA) opened on the northwest side of Detroit, a low-income area whose existing schools were known for low student proficiency rates. “I wanted to put an end to the narrative that still persisted in Detroit that kids who live in poverty are too poor or unsupported to reach their full potential.”

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An Expansion Made Possible

In 2015, DAA moved from an old church into a school building, and in 2020, the time came to expand. “We needed to figure out a financing plan to do that expansion. Because of the misalignment between Michigan’s school funding and current construction costs, we knew we needed a nontraditional funder and for us, that was the New Market Tax Credit route.” DAA was introduced to Civic Builders through Chase Community Development Banking - New Markets Tax Credit Group and received \$12.5 million in New Market Tax Credits. “Finding financing is hard... and Civic was great in helping us move past [challenges] in a way that made sense. We very certainly would not have been able to finance the project without having an allocation in a NMTC structure.”

The expansion of DAA meant 22 additional classrooms. “Because we had been so constrained, we were leaving hundreds of students on our wait list every year, which now that we’ll have the expansion, we’ll be able to serve rather than leave stranded.” The expansion will also include facilities accessible to the community, including a gym. “We’re creating a building that will impact our kids and families generationally but will also impact our neighborhood generationally as well.”

Model for Success

Since its founding, DAA has witnessed its students achieve monumental academic success. “We saw our founding first graders all get accepted into their top choice high schools.” One reason for the success of DAA’s students is that despite its recent expansion, DAA continues to emphasize slow, intentional growth. “We believe it’s our job to be fully obsessed with the wellbeing of every child, to truly know them and what they need. Most families would simply say, “they really care about my child” and the reality is that we do.”