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The purpose of a report card is to communicate the student's performance level. In most communities, a report card is issued by a school to the student, or the student's parents. Typical report cards use a grading scale to determine the quality of a student's school work. If a similar procedure were employed to grade a community, one significant factor in the report card would be the graduation rates of children attending area public high schools.

Why are graduation rates so important to the economic evaluation of communities? It is all about business attraction and retention. City and town officials across Massachusetts acknowledge that businesses often grade communities according to their reported graduation rates when looking to relocate, invest or expand.

The influx and retention of business becomes a big win for a city or town because not only does the business itself pay income taxes, real estate taxes, municipal fees and excise taxes that all generate revenue, but employees with higher salaries pay higher taxes as well. Furthermore, business expansion reduces local unemployment. Companies and their employees also become contributors to the local economy. The addition to the local tax base then has the added impact of enhancing the social and economic development mechanisms of the city and state on the whole, which can be measured through improved quality of life.

On the other hand, if the high school and college graduation rates are low in a community, business attractiveness suffers. The consequence is that the revenue potential of the city or town either stagnates or declines. A declining tax base has a direct impact on the ability to provide basic municipal services and thereby diminishes the areas quality of life.

In our increasingly competitive technology driven world, companies require degreed knowledge workers more than ever before. To gain an edge, businesses seek out individuals who can multitask, assimilate information and collaborate with other industry disciplines. In other words, in business, adaptability through versatility is rewarded financially. This is one of the reasons why people with high school and college degrees on average earn one million dollars more over the course of their lifetimes than non-degreed individuals. Even for those who do the same job, the one with the degree makes more.

While it may appear as commonsense to support educational attainment from a business and economic standpoint, in difficult economic times, it must be acknowledged that our elected officials are challenged with the balance of supporting each part of government. This is no easy task when faced with budgetary shortfalls and declining revenues. The importance of public safety, public works and other municipal services plays a key part in this equilibrium to insure the welfare of the community. That is why as a community we must support the education of our children each and every year on a consistent basis.

Equally imperative is the need to provide no less than a minimum of level services funding for our schools. We are talking about the education and viability of the next generation. These are the individuals who will one day enter the local economy and workforce. Anything less sends a resonating message to the businesses looking to invest in our community. It also rings loud and clear with those companies that are already here who are called upon repeatedly to contribute time, money and human resources toward a multitude of local causes.

There you have it. From a business person's perspective, a community's education attainment level really can impact a city or town's bottom line. The instruction and development of our youth is a battle that we must win, but it is a victory that will not happen without the necessary support from the community at large.