

Article Series
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Marta Montleon

Education Committee Member

Superintendent, Diman Regional Technical Vocational High School

It's June! For high school seniors it's time for graduation, for celebration, and for moving on to the next phase of their lives. Every year at this time I ask graduating seniors to think about all the people who have contributed to their success and thank them. I encourage them to go one step further and pay the debt forward.

As these young people begin their adult lives, I ask them to make a commitment to making a positive difference in our world and in the lives of the people around them. And then I ask them to continue their education as lifelong learners whether or not they go on to formal education. That's a lot to ask of an eighteen-year-old, but I believe the vast majority of the students who graduate from our area schools are up to this challenge.

Our area high schools prepare our young people for bright futures and where there are gaps, the teachers and administrators are working to fill them. Graduation rates are rising, drop-out rates are falling, and students are being prepared for college and careers. But that's not all. Our schools are preparing our young people to be the citizens and community leaders we will depend on in the future.

Fifty-one Diman students who competed at SkillsUSA State Skills and Leadership event earned medals. Thirty-six were the best in the state and will be representing Massachusetts at the national competition and one of last year's graduates was invited to the SkillsInternational Competition. Over 350 students at Durfee are enrolled in college level Advanced Placement courses earning credit at some of the best colleges in our country. Recently, eight Somerset-Berkley Regional High School students either placed or received Honorable Mention at the Massachusetts State Science and Engineering Fair held at MIT.

One SBRHS junior earned the right to represent Massachusetts at the International Fair. Swansea's Joseph Case High School Marching Band came in first place in the New England and National Championship and the Drama Club was selected to represent New England at the Drama Festival. Westport High School doubled the number of Advanced Placement courses, increased the number of graduates meeting the MASS Core graduation benchmark, and instituted SAT preparation courses.

Our area teachers, staff, and administrators are committed to preparing our young people to be successful adults, but we cannot do it alone. We need the continued support of parents who care and know their children better than anyone else. We need the continued support of businesses that provide work experience to our students while reminding them that their most important job is graduating from high school.

We need the continued support of our communities who recognize that their future is indelibly linked to the success of their schools and students. We need the continued advocacy of elected and government officials for the economic development of our area and the addition of programs and courses in our schools that will prepare our students for the global economy.

This month over 1,200 seniors will graduate from four area high schools. Whether these graduates choose to enter the work force and begin their adult careers or extend their education through college or other post-secondary experiences, these young people are our future. The SouthCoast needs to give them the tools and resources for success, a reason to stay and for those who travel elsewhere, a reason to come back.