

Education/Economic Development by Robert Karam

There is a direct correlation between a community's unemployment rate, economic circumstances and the educational attainment level of that community. In the case of Fall River, the low percentage of college graduates is the combination of the number of our students who fail to go on to higher education, and the number who do get some form of post secondary education, but move away because of lack of employment opportunity.

Many of us have been fighting the battle of Fall River's hopeless circumstances on three fronts. Get the kids to graduate from high school and continue their education. Find the training funds to retrain and re-educate middle agers so that they have marketable skills. Look for companies who, like Meditech, will invest in our community now, because their circle of prospective employees can encompass an area from as north as Taunton, as west as Providence and as east as the Bourne Bridge. Unfortunately, for our community, an appreciation from many of our residents of the importance of higher education, for not only the well being of their children, but, how in the end, it raises the economic circumstances of all of us, is lacking.

I have spent a good part of my life connected to education; 16 years as a student, two years as a teacher and over 20 years as a university trustee. I have learned one thing: for almost all of us, if we want family prosperity we need far more education than a high school diploma. That is why when I hear many of our elected officials, say, if they have to choose whether they should spend more on education in comparison to police, fire, roads, etc., I am appalled on how many will say you can't buy good education by throwing money at it. Yes, you can.

That additional money can do the following:

Pay teachers good salaries, but then insist they are to be held accountable.

Improve school facilities so the learning environment is conducive to a serious attention to educating one's self.

Invest in the best technology so that our kids are able to compete globally.

Lower class size or hire qualified counselors and education coaches who work on student shortcomings.

Years ago, Fall River competed against the American South, then Japan. After Japan, we had to compete with Korea and now South America and Africa. We compete against third-world countries until they mature, and then we compete against other third world countries. That leads to a Third World economy in our City.

Many of today's parents have walked away from their responsibility to make sure their children are serious about their education. These parents need to make sure their kids know what is expected from them regarding their work ethic in school. These parents must know their children's teachers and principals, so that the educators know the parents are with them in this struggle to educate their children.

It is not the teachers, alone, that are responsible for the educational achievement of your child. It is a 50/50 proposition. You get them to school ready to learn. You make sure they know that bad behavior in school results in discipline at home. You make sure they do their homework. In return, the teachers will successfully educate your kids.

In the end, higher education attainment level equals a job, with living wages and a better life for your children and grandchildren. In the end, higher education attainment levels mean more money in our community to do more for everybody. In other words, a more affluent society, economic development, more jobs, more opportunity, more police, more fireman, a safer community.

It begins and ends with education. We all must do our part.