



To the parents of the 2017 graduating class: Congratulations, you've reached an educational and parental milestone. Most likely this is only the beginning of many more as your high school seniors start their college and career paths. If you're reading this then there's better than an 80 percent chance you have an undergraduate degree, or higher, and most likely the young person in your house will too, even though he or she may be testing your nerves right now with a serious case of senioritis.

Not so for the majority of the Dallas County senior class, this year, next year or for the foreseeable future. Consider that 86 percent of Dallas County high school graduates come from low-income homes, and less than 5 percent of them are college-ready. Through well-meaning "access" programs about 5,000 will enroll in college this fall, but underfunded and unprepared, and 9 out of 10 will drop out.

Call this the Big Set Up. We do it every year to these great kids who kept their side of the bargain, persevered to stay in school and earned their diplomas. Then we send them to colleges where, by no fault of their own, they are set up to fail and drop out. Most will have debt they cannot pay and owe balances to their departing schools that will prevent them from enrolling elsewhere. It's costing us, and more important, these great kids, an enduring and avoidable fortune.

For Texas taxpayers, according to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, we flush more than \$80 million each year in grants that fail to produce degrees. Each class of dropouts rings up a lifetime cost of \$1 billion to \$2 billion in social services for Dallas County, according to Commit2Dallas calculations. With each class of college dropouts, Dallas County forgoes \$135 million in annual gross domestic product, or more than \$5 billion per class lifetime loss. Setting up our low-income students like this negates most of the \$160,000 we invested in them while we had them in kindergarten through 12th grade. Most important, Dallas County desperately needs to double its degreed population by 2030 to remain competitive and attract the jobs that stoke our middle class and sustain our growth.

The cost to these great kids is more direct and tragic. Firstly, we cause them to lose or suspend their grants for college. Most will have debt, often more than \$25,000, which will permanently damper their ability to rent, own or save. We lock them into a sub-middle-class earning stream at \$30,000 or more per year less than what they could earn with just a vocational degree. Each forgoes more than \$1 million in lifetime earnings. High school graduates are 12 times more likely to be incarcerated than their peers with post-secondary degrees.

Following that last point, a 2010 study by Commit2Dallas surveyed the 10 high schools and surrounding ZIP codes representing western and southern Dallas. In one year, combined, the 10 high schools produced 27 college-ready graduates (based on standardized testing scores) while their surrounding ZIP

codes produced 3,102 inmates. Let that sink in a minute. Not that all those inmates were college candidates, but 3 of every 4 are between the ages of 18 and 24. We can spend \$44,000 per year to incarcerate a person, or, \$3,000 to help that person earn at least a career-ready vocational degree.

Our universities are not equipped to handle this, but there are some simple things you can do that can make a big difference. If you've earned a degree, or helped a child do so, then you're qualified to help mentor one of these great kids navigate and earn a life-changing degree. Most likely there are plenty of candidates you can advocate for in your ZIP code or the next one over. Ask your local high school or check in at the Commit2Dallas.org website and find a college advisement organization to partner with.

Neither we, nor our high school graduates, can afford the current state. Jump in and help change lives and Dallas County, with college degrees.

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