



The Building
Community Institute

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July 2008
E-Newsletter

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The K-12 Education Corridor: America's Greatest Investment Opportunity

To emphasize the importance of a specific economic sector to the well-being of a defined geographical area, we describe as a corridor, one that moves through the broader economy with the potential for enormous impact. As a corridor with promise, the value, the investment, and the return are highlighted. We are left with little doubt of its long-range impact and the role we as citizens must play to ensure its success.

Today, I want to talk with you about a different kind of corridor, one I feel to be of critical importance to the well-being of our nation. I want to talk about the value of, the investment in, and the return on the K-12 Education Corridor-from kindergarten to high school graduation. The K-12 Corridor is the starting gate for a race of immense importance. Ensuring its success must become a national priority. And, unlike an economic corridor, this corridor's success depends upon each of us. We all can participate in the valuing process.

We see the value of the K-12 Education Corridor all around us; from productive caring citizens, commanding officers, Supreme Court judges, educators, leaders of industry, employees in the marketplace, to moms and dads making this society work, and to icon of sports and entertainment. Sadly, we also see what happens with many of our youth who do not successfully navigate this corridor. Their failure is the nation's loss. Data shows that within every hour of the day, a number of students drop out off this corridor. Where do they land? We have this data, as well. For example, 75% of our state prison inmates are high school drop outs. This unfortunate reality must not be overlooked! The message of the importance of this corridor must be communicated early and consistently and across all social strata. This must become a national agenda item.

America's future depends upon the success of K-12 Education Corridor!

No matter our line of work, or interests, all are impacted by the success or failure of this foundational corridor running through our lives. Its success should be the concern of every American. We have defined many important corridors for the sustainable future of our country, from technology to Bio-Medical, but I dare say that none will be more important than this one. From this corridor comes the enlightened support citizenry that is absolutely essential for ensuring the bright future that Alexis de Tocqueville imagined for this country in the 1830's.

As a nation, we cannot afford to undervalue or underestimate the importance of the nearly 60 million children and youth who make up this corridor. Nor can we afford to undervalue the education process, the teachers, the principals and the staff who support this corridor. If our youth are not brought along within this K-12 Education Corridor, their gifting to America and the world, is severely curtailed. We all have to understand this. Parents and caretakers, first and foremost must have this sense of who their children are, who they can become and the significant contributions they can make to humankind. We must not take their natural dependence upon us as adults to define our worth and value, while overlooking theirs. The surrounding community of friends and relatives must also embrace the reality that the small kids they see skipping and running throughout our neighborhoods are the same kids that can grow up to navigate our interplanetary transportation systems and maybe discover the alternate fuel source we so desperately need. Our elected officials from the President of the United States to the lady on the city council must understand that their electorate will come from these youth. They must understand that they are tomorrow's taxpayers, and equally important, their potential employers. We must honor, support and challenge the educators charged with the awesome responsibility of harnessing and directing their growing intellect for the good of our society.

The well-being of this important infrastructure of our society should remain top-of-mind, not just an occasional acknowledgement at graduations or a major news item when something goes wrong. These should be the questions asked on a regular basis: from Corporate meetings to the dinner table, from Public offices to communities of faith. How are our K-12 schools performing? What can I do to ensure their success? How can I help in reducing the drop-out rates? How can I support the educators? How do we let the students know that they are the 'future' we've been anticipating. **An intentional focus on the K-12 Education Corridor is our nation's greatest investment opportunity. Protecting this treasure should remain the concern of every American.**

- Clifton L. Taulbert