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Austin American-Statesman

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Dropping out really is a drag

By [The Editorial Board](#) | Saturday, May 31, 2008, 05:23 PM

Among the changes the modern economy demands is a rewrite of the old expression "ignorance is bliss." Given the rapidly evolving work place, ignorance is too expensive to be blissful.

It's a point we've made often, but it bears repeating, and a broad coalition of business people, educators and elected officials are spreading that word in vivid detail.

Witness the commencement ceremony held last week at the Erwin Center at which 7,000 empty seats were taped off to symbolize the number of Central Texans who won't be getting a high school diploma this year. An incomplete high school education is a ticket to prison or public assistance rolls, at worst, or a series of low-paying jobs, at best.

The price tag for subsidizing that ignorance is an estimated \$425 million a year in Central Texas, and that's just for those 7,000 who didn't finish. It's going to be another \$425 million for the next batch of dropouts.

The E3 (Education Equals Economics) Alliance views the dropouts as a potentially dangerous drag on the local economy and brings together an array of people from around the region to attack it. Susan Dawson, executive director of the alliance, outlined a blueprint for action last week that involves everyone from parents to teachers to administrators to employers and the students themselves to step up and do something about it.

The alliance identified strategies for ensuring that children enter kindergarten ready to learn; that achievement gaps be eliminated through a series of academic reforms; that technical training options be expanded; and that business and community interests be included in developing academic strategy.

All of those are common sense, really, even if that wisdom is obscured here and there by its academic wrappings.

The underlying message is this: We all have a stake in seeing to it that Central Texas students are offered the opportunity to graduate from high school and continue their educations, whether in a traditional college setting or in a technical field. Parents and students have the responsibility to take advantage of that opportunity.

The price of failure is high, so it is heartening to see this array of private- and public-sector leaders coming together to advance this cause.

We haven't succeeded yet, but at least we're moving in that direction.

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