

JOE HOLT | LOCAL CONTRIBUTOR

Let's make our own opportunities

Opportunity Austin - the Chamber campaign to bring over 70,000 new jobs to the region - has been incredibly successful, and shows what this community is capable of when we work together to build a strong economic future. Much of the campaign was built on the premise that Central Texas can be successful because we are the Human Capital, founded on a well-educated talent base that businesses want. But the reality of the global market place has intensified the need for more well-educated workers. At the same time, we have more low income students and families, and unless we drastically change predicted trends, our college going rate will decrease, even as our companies require higher and higher levels of skills and more educated workers.

We often think of the personal benefits to those getting a college degree: higher earnings potential, better working conditions, increased life expectancy and better health. All of these are true. But noted economist Ray Perryman shows an even greater return in economic benefits to our region of increasing college going and college success rates. These include much higher regional earnings and tax base, greater productivity, increased consumption, and decreased cost of social services. In fact, Perryman's analysis shows that unless college-going rates are significantly increased, Central Texas stands to lose 85,000 jobs and \$67 Billion by 2030! That's why the Greater Austin Chamber is working on closing achievement gaps and getting 20,010 more students into college by 2010.

We must get more students into college, and the Chamber has launched efforts on multiple fronts to do that. But it starts well before college. Our best students need to be even better prepared to be globally competitive,

and our challenged students need to succeed at much higher rates. We must eliminate education achievement gaps while helping every student meet his or her highest potential. We must have every child entering Kindergarten ready to learn.

As the business community, we need to be part of the solution. We must invest in and support our schools, be involved in education programs, provide tutors and internships, and help students learn what it takes to be successful in business. We need to be better about letting students, teachers and counselors know where the jobs are and where they will be in the future, and what skills are required to be successful in those jobs. After all, the skills that we require of new employees are much different than when I started in business!

That's why we are part of The Blueprint for Educational Change™ in Central Texas (www.TheBlueprintforEducationalChange.org). This newly launched strategic plan is unprecedented for any region in the state, and provides the basis for all of us to work together to build a vital economic future based on a strong talent base. We can live up to the potential of the Human Capital.

The Blueprint is the Central Texas community's commitment to building the strongest educational pipeline in the country. It lays out four overarching goals, with action strategies and a structure to achieve those goals. The third goal is that "All students graduate college-and-career-ready and prepared for a lifetime of learning." As a Chamber, we know that this goal is critical to our economic future. And it is a goal that takes all of us.

Because Graduates Are Made. Not Born.