

THE SUN CHRONICLE

SUNDAY, JULY 1, 2012

As summer vacation begins, the families of Attleboro's students can look back with satisfaction on a year of extraordinary student achievement. They can also look forward with anticipation toward a September marked by the implementation of full-day kindergarten, the arrival of dynamic new leaders in several schools, and a new scheduling system that allows AHS to continue its steady progress toward becoming the most prominent comprehensive high school in the state. Summer's onset also concludes a season of festivities commemorating milestones at the elementary, middle, and high school level. A perk of serving on the Attleboro School Committee is having the opportunity to witness the jubilation on the faces of students and parents at these culminating events. While all of these celebrations rightfully instill a sense of pride in our community, one event stands out for what it says about the core values that make Attleboro a special place to live.

The graduation ceremony of the Attleboro Evening Diploma Program (AEDP), a program teacher Donna-Marie Cameron and retiring Principal Jeffrey Newman have shepherded since its inception, signified 39 graduates' academic conquests and symbolized a collective triumph over adversity. Due in part to Ms. Cameron and Mr. Newman's unyielding dedication to Attleboro's students, these individuals became graduates of Attleboro High School through the AEDP on May 18th. This group set an inspiring example for all of us to follow by demonstrating that, regardless of what obstacles we may confront, prioritizing education will lead to a better life. The paths that led these students to their diplomas were at times treacherous, and for most there were chances to bypass the opportunity to finish high school. But despite the challenges they faced, each graduate was able to prove to a skeptical world the true meaning of perseverance.

As the AEDP commencement speaker, Bristol County Savings Bank president Patrick Murray regaled the program's third graduating class with stories of how prioritizing education put him on a path toward success. That choice – the choice to value education and recognize the difference it can make – was at the heart of the decision by our Superintendent Dr. Pia Durkin, Mr. Murray, and his predecessor Mr. Dennis Kelly, to develop a public/private partnership that would make AEDP a reality. Without the bank's support, this testament to our community's values would not exist.

The practical implications of developing productive relationships between private enterprise and public schools are compelling. They infuse much-needed financial support from entities that are naturally and necessarily inclined to demand positive results, instilling accountability in order to ensure the continued growth of the relationships. Although these practical considerations are important, there is a loftier reason to develop more of these partnerships, and it is precisely why the AEDP graduates should be our role models.

The men and women who graduated from the AEDP made a choice to value school in their lives, despite whatever sacrifices that would entail. By doing so, they have conferred the advantages of a more educated society upon their families, coworkers, and fellow citizens, making all of us the beneficiaries. Partnerships of this nature make a statement about who we are as a community. They say that we are a city that cultivates productive, fulfilling, and happy



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lives for our children, and that we are a people who recognize that a quality education is the exclusive way to make that happen.

In order to articulate these values, the time has come to initiate a new foundation whose sole focus will be on developing partnerships with businesses and individuals that will benefit the Attleboro public schools. An Attleboro Education Foundation would be dedicated to the development of an endowment that would serve specific and narrowly defined purposes, all aimed at improving and promoting the Attleboro school system. It would take years for this private foundation to yield tangible results, but its impact on our identity as a city would be immediate. The creation of this endowment would help ensure that at the center of this next chapter in our city's history are the Attleboro school system and its students. The graduates of the AEDP program made a choice to prioritize education in their lives. It is time for us as a community to do the same.