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Opinion

Dallas County isn't graduating enough kids who can earn a living

Students aren't pursuing skills, education sufficient to support themselves.

By [Dallas Morning News Editorial](#)

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A school bus drives past the closed hospital building at 2949 S. Hampton Road, Wednesday, Nov. 9, 2022, in Dallas.(Rebecca Slezak / Staff Photographer)

All of us who care about the future economic health of this region better be paying attention to a sobering report recently issued by the nonprofit education advocacy group Commit. The report concludes that children born in Dallas County have a 2-in-3 chance of not earning enough to afford life's basic needs.

Think about that. Most of us already know that kids today often don't have the hope prior American generations did that their lifestyles will meet or exceed that of their parents. Costs have gotten too high and opportunities have become too few.

But the material Commit lays out gives us insight into why that's the case and what we can do about it.

First, the study reviewed information from the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Workforce Commission that shows Dallas County public school alumni ages 25 to 30 have an average annual salary of \$45,100. That isn't just a lower standard of living; it means there isn't enough money to pay all of the bills. Forget about getting ahead; life will be a struggle against falling behind.

The problem is the gap between education and earning. And we aren't just talking about four-year college degrees. This is about ensuring that young people in Dallas are getting some postsecondary training and education that is the difference between a living wage and a non-living wage.

Commit studied outcomes for Dallas County high school alumni from 2009 to 2015. Just 28.2% obtained some postsecondary education. "Their average income is \$45,100, which is around \$12,000 (20%) less than the county approximate \$58,000 living wage benchmark," the study notes.

Now compare that to a subgroup of the study from the charter school network Uplift Education. In that group, more than 55% of alumni have earned an associate's degree or higher, and their average salary is \$69,900.

Low-income, minority students face particularly high barriers to achieving some postsecondary education. But the Commit study identifies three ways to help overcome the challenges: tapping into additional state funds that reward schools for achieving college and career readiness; increasing resources for counselors who can help guide students into post-high school education; and expanding access to high-quality college-credit courses for high school students.

Dallas ISD has been hard at work in all three of these areas. Superintendent Stephanie Elizalde has smartly focused on getting more counselors into schools to help show students the way along future paths.

We need to keep the focus laser-sharp, because the problem is acute. Our schools are graduating too many students who have neither the education nor training to earn enough to support themselves, much less a family. There is hope and important work is underway.

Failure isn't an option here. Everyone will suffer if we do.

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