

Quality Public Education Benefits All

At the Tulsa Regional Chamber's annual meeting, Chamber leadership shared their priorities including workforce development efforts to meet the demands Tulsa faces. It was meaningful to hear the importance of quality education for a workforce ready to take on the jobs of tomorrow, and it was exciting to see the response of the business community.

School districts across the nation work to provide infrastructure needed for quality teaching and learning with the resources available to them. Recent events in school boards throughout our country remind us that community members, including business leaders, must be actively engaged to ensure our children are put first, to advance the common goal of sustaining a strong public education system, and to demand that elected officials not pander to polarizing culture wars or political theatrics.

One of the most meaningful programs the Foundation for Tulsa Schools oversees, Partners in Education, brings together businesses and organizations for the common goal of enhancing the educational experience of students in Tulsa Public Schools and creates a workforce pipeline for Tulsa.

Our Partners in Education understand that the return on investment is our graduates working for them, representing the vibrant communities of our city. These partners lend their time, talent, and treasure to help our schools prosper, and our students succeed.

To have strong public education systems, there are three things we must understand:

First, quality public education benefits everyone.

Our city is stronger when our students graduate ready to lead a successful life. Our students need to be active in maintaining democracy, justice, and civility. Public education provides the foundation for producing the leaders our community needs with skills in civil and civic participation to solve the challenges facing our city and state.

Partnerships enhance these skills. For example, the City of Tulsa organizes the Youth Advisory Council, bringing together high school students to work alongside city staff and elected representatives to listen, research, and act! During this program, our youth learn the role of local government and the importance of being civically engaged.

Second, schools require a partnership with the community, including the business sector, to succeed.

Educators have the singular focus to educate our students and help them develop critical skills to enter the workforce. Partnerships provide practical experience for our students.

This year, Choose Aerospace, Inc. with support from key stakeholders, partnered with East Central providing curriculum, materials, volunteers, tours, and funding. Upon graduation, the student participants will be ready to take certifications needed to make a career in aerospace through one of the several employers in the region.

Similarly, the Home Builders Association of Greater Tulsa alongside Hardesty Family Foundation partnered with Nathan Hale to provide funding for a construction program designed to be a pathway into high-wage job opportunities. Students can earn up to ten industry certifications while developing problem-solving and critical thinking skills.

Third, we must invest in the whole child to nurture the adult that will be a contributor to society – this requires commitment and advocacy from all of us.

Investing in our youth produces the greatest opportunity to positively impact our future. We need adults to advocate for adequate resources for public education.

Through the support of the community, the Foundation for Tulsa Schools is proud to provide several programs for educators and strategic initiatives ranging from teacher and transportation grants to enhance learning to mental health supports for students and educators and enrollment strategies to help families realize that Tulsa Public Schools is a district of choice.

Even with all this support, our educators must still use their own money to buy supplies for their students and administrators find themselves without enough resources.

What we need is a sustainable solution and a deeper level of support for our educators throughout the state. We expect so much from our school system and yet we invest so little. We cannot expect a five-star meal from a fast-food restaurant.

Our state thrives when we work together and properly invest in ourselves. The greatest investment we can make is in our students and educators in public schools. When the community bands together to provide the resources needed, our educators will be able to help our students develop the knowledge and skills necessary to excel, leading to positive outcomes for everyone.