

Article Series  
November 2012

Melissa Pacheco

*Senior Program Specialist, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth*

What does an advocate do? An advocate supports or champions an individual or group of individuals. An advocate addresses concerns, answers questions, seeks information and resources and works on behalf of others.

Today we are in need of advocating for education, not only for our children, but for our community at large. We need to advocate on behalf of education in partnership with schools, businesses, local and state government and with the community that surrounds them.

Today, more than ever, it is not just a parent's job to advocate for our children's education, but everyone in the community's. If our children today do not consider education a priority, what will our region look like a few decades from now? Who will be there to care for us when we are sick? Who will be our teachers, our plumbers? Who will be there to defend our rights, counsel our loved ones, create future technology, manager businesses, and run and fix our utilities? Education is not an "in the box" issue, but needs to be a constant "top of mind" issue. Our children today must be aware that education is not only a priority, but a necessity. It is not just about finding a self-sustaining job for our future adults, but ensuring our region, as a whole, will be self-sustaining. Today our region suffers from high unemployment rates, as well as low percentages of higher education. According to a March 2012 Lumina Foundation report, Bristol County has the second to the lowest percentage of Massachusetts adults who have attained at least an associate degree. Our region today is being impacted by high unemployment rates, high levels of poverty, and low levels of post-secondary education attainment. It is our responsibility as a whole community to do something about it. Together we can make a difference today.

If you are a parent, you can encourage your child to read, go to the library, make flashcards, and attend free programs provided by your community or school. Ask your child everyday what they learned in school, and listen. Encourage your children and their peers by attending programs at school, praising them, and ask them what they want to be when they grow up and where they want to go to college or which technical school do they want to attend. Play games like scrabble or yahtzee, make a puzzle together. Be involved. It is never too early or too late.

If you are a citizen or community member with no children or with children who are already adults, you have a responsibility too. You can help through rewarding education in your business, by promotion or allowing flex time for your employee to attain a degree or attend their child's school event. You can sponsor school programs by providing monetary donations, product donations or even simply having a contest where children can highlight their artwork or school work on your business walls. Neighbors can be of encouragement to other families, by asking simple questions about school and by praising accomplishments. Encouragement can go a long way. You can also take the time to vote for education at the polls. Be an active member of society by taking the time to support school initiatives. Everyone can be a promoter of education through whatever means they have. I urge you to take the time to invest your means in supporting and advocating education wherever you are. You can make a difference, not only in our children's lives, but with our community as a whole.