

Introduction of the EdUp Campaign

It cannot be under stated that there is a proven link between a person's education level and their ability to earn a living. In Fall River, less than 20% of the residents hold a college degree, or higher. Meanwhile, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts maintains an average of 38%. Now compare average household incomes with household educational levels. Fall River households on average earn approximately \$36,000.00 per household as opposed to the Massachusetts average of \$68,000.00. Do you need to more evidence? Sherborn, MA has one of the highest household educational attainment levels in the state. Contrast Fall River's \$36,000.00 average household income with Sherborn, which is \$186,000.00. The disparity is sobering.

Earning a post-secondary degree is no longer just a pathway to opportunity for a privileged few. To the contrary, it has become a prerequisite for the retaining and growing of jobs in this region's transitioning economy. Improving educational attainment levels in Fall River is also critical to the attraction and retention of businesses. How can the Fall River successfully attract innovation technology and niche manufacturing firms into the new Life Sciences and Technology Park when many within the area workforce lack the credentials to work there? This has also been a chronic problem for the over sixty businesses in the Industrial and Commerce Parks. Clearly, a change in accepted local wisdom is required.

Shifting the mindset of an entire community is a major undertaking. It requires a collaboration of many organizations and resources including area schools, universities, colleges, financial institutions and businesses. Ultimately, it must leverage the use of all mediums of media including billboards, television, web, radio and traditional print publications. In many ways, the campaign to raise awareness and aspirations about educational attainment is already underway.

Phase one began with the reinstatement by Nick Christ, President and CEO of BayCoast Bank, of the Chamber's Education Committee. For the past two years the Education Committee has been advocating on core issues such as support for level funding of services at the Fall River, Somerset, Swansea and Westport public schools. There was also the introduction and funding of Teach for America teachers into the Fall River school system two years ago. Another initiative has been the sustained release and publication of monthly editorials that are routinely published in The Herald News, WSAR1480AM and the Chamber Voice monthly newspaper. Copies of the editorials are chronicled within the "Workforce" section on the Chamber's website. These early efforts shaped and set the foundation for Phase two.

Phase two has been the creation of a multi-year marketing campaign that is strategically aimed at raising awareness about the value of educational attainment. Utilizing feedback from research gathered by 3 separate marketing research survey projects, a marketing team comprised of UMass and BCC administrators, faculty and students has outlined and produced a brand for the region, entitled "EdUp."

The community partnership is now moving into the third phase, which marks the launch of the "EdUp" campaign. The official launch date is set for Wednesday, September 18, 2013. On that



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day, at 1:00 p.m., the campaign and its purpose will be unveiled during a special edition of the Chamber's Voice of Business radio program on WSAR1480AM.

In the months ahead, the "EdUp" brand will be expanded with a social media platform, operational by October. It is designed to be a resource for people seeking information about improving performance in school, how to acquire college scholarships and provide assistance in applying for college financial aid. The new website will also serve as a gateway for area families and individuals to connect with local experts. It is through the charitable work of the Fall River Area Chamber of Commerce Foundation that the EdUp website and marketing campaign are made possible.

Next steps include release of a local ad campaign and the launch of two television programs in partnership with Bristol Community College, FRCTV and the Chamber. One of the shows, the "Workforce Connection" features interviews and discussions about workforce related issues. It begins airing in September on local cable access stations across the region. The other program, which is in the development stage, will spotlight regional educational issues.

The EdUp campaign may prove to be one of the most important initiatives undertaken by the Chamber and its many partners. Please help us ensure that more people in the area aspire to higher educational levels. With so much at stake, the Chamber asks that we all do our part to collectively "EdUp" Fall River.

Respectfully,

Robert A. Mellion, Esq.
President and CEO
Fall River Area Chamber of Commerce and Industry