

Investing in education reaps benefits

ESCANABA — My job is economic development, but at heart I'm a teacher. My parents are both retired schoolteachers, so the smell of chalk dust, the jarring ring of school bells, and tall stacks of papers to grade were part of my life from infancy.

Before I transitioned into the business world I was an English teacher for four years. Trust me, even Donald Trump in the boardroom is easier to satisfy than a classroom of 40 squirming middle school kids right before holiday break.

When my husband and I moved to Escanaba from Minneapolis in 2003, I spent a year and a half substitute teaching in five Delta County school districts — Escanaba, Gladstone, Bark River-Harris, Rapid River, and Mid Peninsula. I also taught classes at NahTah Wahsh, Holy Name, and the Delta-Schoolcraft ISD. Without exception, I found Delta County schools to be excellent.

Having a foot in both the educational and business communities puts me in a unique position to see the

MINDING
OUR OWN
BUSINESS



Christina Quick
Henderson

connections between the two. And so I'd like to point out five ways in which our local K-12 schools impact economic development:

Preparing our workforce

Business owners know that a quality K-12 education improves the productivity of the workers they employ. As the Economic Oppor-

tunity Study for the Upper Peninsula published this September aptly states, "The key to a prosperous future is an educated citizenry and educated and skilled workforce. The K-12 school system is certainly the anchor upon which that goal rests."

Quality of life

Families are concerned about the quality of schools their children attend because a good K-12 education is essential to the future success of their child in higher education and the job market. Schools also significantly impact the day-to-day lives of our kids, providing educational activities, sports, fine arts, service clubs, mentoring, etc. These experiences make life fun, build friendships, and

facilitate personal growth. Young people who enjoy life in Delta County and feel supported by their community want to stay here, work here, and give back.

Attracting talent

Whether we're trying to attract the best doctors for our hospital, educators for our college, or specialized professionals for local businesses, newcomers want excellent schools for their children.

Property values

Homeowners, even those who do not have school-age children, pay attention to the quality of local schools because they recognize the direct positive effect it has on the resale value of their property.

Attracting new business

According to the Michigan Economic Developers' Association, the educational system "is one of the biggest components to quality of life decision making and, therefore, one of most important aspects to the community's benchmarking system." People who want to relocate or expand a business study key indicators to assess the educational quality of the community.

They look at awards and recognition, changes in student population, expenditures per pupil, graduation rates,

etc. and compare those statistics with surrounding school districts, and state and national averages. It is important that our Delta County schools continue to rank well for our community to be economically competitive.

Research shows, and my own experience confirms, the links between K-12 education and economic development are significant. If our Delta County communities hope to retain and grow existing businesses and attract new business development, we must pay close attention to the continued quality of our local schools.

On Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2010, every registered voter who lives in the Escanaba Area Public School District has the opportunity to vote on a bond proposal to fund construction and renovations. The Delta County Economic Development Alliance strongly encourages citizens to educate themselves on the bond proposal and vote on Feb. 23.

— — —
Christina Quick Henderson is director of the Delta County Economic Development Alliance, a public/private partnership dedicated to business retention, expansion, and attraction in Delta County.