

Over the past two decades I have studied and worked in the legal community in DeKalb County. During that time I have had the privilege of assisting countless parents and kids who found themselves for one reason or another in our court system. This interaction has allowed me to gain some modest insight into the minds of our youth.

Many of these kids feel lost, lonely or abandoned. Most have both parents working to make ends meet. Many come from single-parent households. Some drift from foster home to foster home. All are stressed. A consistent theme that runs throughout their stories is a seeming alienation from our educational system. Once they have become disconnected from school, they have lost the structure so vital to a happy childhood. The street becomes their school; drug dealers and gangsters become their teachers. The court system becomes the eventual destination for many. Every case that gets filed involving a child represents societal failure on some level.

I share this insight with the public as my way of supporting the DeKalb School District construction referendum that includes the building of a new high school. Building a new school is an investment in our youth that would reap benefits far beyond the obvious physical expansion of a burgeoning educational system. It would send a message to teenagers that we are willing to commit scarce taxpayer funds in an effort to give them the best education it is in our power to provide.

Rejection of this referendum would have the opposite effect. It would leave the middle school and high school kids in DeKalb with the impression that their education is not a worthy investment. It would force them to continue to attempt to get a quality education in an overcrowded and inadequate facility. In the competitive world of education, they would know that other students have a step up on them.

Investing in our youth now might keep them out of trouble later. It just might provide that extra incentive some kids need to stay in school. Kids who stay in school stay out of trouble. Fewer troubled youths mean fewer resources devoted to our already overworked legal system. In the end, more classrooms surely make more sense than more jail cells.

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