

**A proposed compromise regarding the southside debate:
“College or die” vs. “Not everyone needs to go to college”**

Much discussion has occurred during the meetings of the Southeast Education Task Force and the Southeast Working-Class Task Force (SEW-CTF) around the career needs of our southside students who are mainly from working-class families. The legacy that southside children will end up in common labor jobs as did their parents and extended family, is challenging to students and schools as each faces pressure from the current “...going to college culture” or the concern that a diploma alone no longer guarantees career success (Loschert, 2017).

Mainly, the opinion that manual labor was the destiny of Manual students and folks who lived on the “other side of the tracks” was reinforced by low graduation numbers and the consequent perpetual cycle of poverty. This provided proof to others that the stereotypes were true: the culture of low-income families was fundamentally flawed and made southsiders well-suited for the working-class lifestyle and conditions as they showed a capacity to accept their “station.”

This does not mean there are many outstanding individual Manual and Wood High graduates. Yet, these isolated cases sustain the stereotypes which suggest that only an exceptional few can find success in southside schools and that this success is partially defined by their ability to leave the southside community to live in a more “successful” one on the northside of “the tracks.” See how Indy’s railroad tracks actually divide the city by class (Baird & Lubin, 2013).

Southside public schools and concerned citizens must give young people a reason to invest in their learning. Students will commit to their education when its purpose is to help them do something to eliminate the characteristic of poverty and other social toxins (community health, crime, systemic oppression, unemployment, housing, etc.) they have to deal with and which act as barriers to their academic success.

Helping students to understand, question, and challenge the beliefs and practices associated with any oppressive condition they face will ensure this investment. Thus, schools must create a critical awareness in lower-class students so they not only see the connection between many of their individual/neighborhood problems/experiences and the systemic socio-economic conditions of that community, but act with their school to improve those conditions.

Investment will happen when low-income southside students are taught the skills needed to become more capable producers of counter-information which will discredit the stories by others who want to blame school failure on the character flaws of individual students and/or the cultural deficits ingrained in southside life. And, this awareness will connect students to the larger local social justice struggle fighting unjust conditions.

The compromise regarding the “College or die” vs. “Not everyone needs to go to college” debate is having our southside public schools foster a school/classroom climate that empowers all students regardless of what they plan to do after graduation. This climate normalizes selfrespect, self-realization, critical self-consciousness, and intellectual capacity centered in community change and enabling working-class students to become: 1) more critical consumers of all information they encounter daily; and 2) more critically conscious citizens due to an empowering education using a curriculum valuing the intellectual potential in all students.

<http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/A-proposed-compromise-regarding-the-southside-debate-College-or-die-vs.-Not-everyone-needs-to-go-to-college.pdf>

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SEW-CTF meets the 3rd Wed. of the month at 901 Shelby St.