

## Students who need the most help will be hardest hit by cuts in funding

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There exists in the collective American consciousness the idea that all that we who work in education do is stand in front of classrooms and teach.

That's certainly a large part of the job, especially for us teachers. But it misses the bigger picture: Good educators -- including teachers, administrators, tutors, secretaries and other employees -- spend a great deal of time building relationships with students. And those relationships, just as much as classroom instruction, are essential for student success.

In Austin and across the nation, lawmakers are debating massive cuts to education. Such cuts would affect employee-student ratios, changing the classroom environment and preventing educators from forming positive relationships with their students and thereby decreasing student success. It's logical: Overworked educators have less time to invest in individual students.

In my four years in various positions at Fort Worth's Trimble Tech High School, I've seen the importance of positive educator-student relationships. I've assisted several students who have great potential but were having trouble achieving their goals. One of these students was Juan Gloria, a recent Tech graduate.

Gloria is in college. This is important to mention because it wasn't feasible for him in May 2010, a month from graduation. At that time, attendance and academic problems were threatening to keep him from receiving his diploma, much less beginning a college career.

Gloria quickly realized that he needed to straighten things out. One day he asked me to help him graduate. Over the next few weeks, he worked to clear up absences and incomplete grades. His record at graduation, though not indicative of his true abilities, was good enough to satisfy the state's requirements.

When Gloria received his diploma, he became the second-most-educated person in his family. That's impressive, but his graduation had local and national implications, as well.

Gloria is just one of the nearly 45,000 Hispanic students who make up the Fort Worth school district's largest subpopulation. And although Gloria's ethnic group is Tarrant County's second largest and is the one of the largest in the nation, it is traditionally underrepresented in secondary and higher education.

Roughly 86 percent of adult U.S. residents have at least a secondary education, according to 2009 data from the Department of Education. Among Hispanics, it's closer to 63 percent.

About 55 percent of U.S. residents have some post-secondary experience, with 27 percent holding at least a bachelor's degree. The numbers for Hispanics are much lower. About a third of U.S. Hispanics have any college experience, and only about 12 percent have at least a bachelor's degree.

This educational gap is cyclical, according to the Education Department. Low-education groups -- that is, Hispanics, blacks and other minorities, traditionally -- tend to stay low-education.

But Gloria and those like him are proof that educator involvement can help break the cycle. Gloria earned his diploma through his own hard work and dedication, but he freely admits that he needed the push he received from members of the faculty and staff at Tech.

The lawmakers who want to slash school funding need to realize what they're saying. Yes, many educators could handle additional sections and students, but that perceived increase in efficiency would be detrimental to the student experience. Educator-student relationships would suffer, and students such as Gloria would slip through the cracks.

If we want to operate public education like a cattle drive, then by all means, let's slash funding. But if we truly want to help our students succeed, especially the at-risk ones, we need to supply enough money to allow educators to do their jobs.

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