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A little less than 1 in 5.3 (19%) students nationally don't graduate high school, per the U.S. Department of Education's most recent data (2012 - http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/tables/AFGR0812.asp). This number represents approximately 1 in 6.7 (15%) Whites; 1 in 4.2 (24%) Hispanics; 1 in 3.1 (32%) Blacks; 1 in 14.3 (7%) Asian/Pacific Islanders; 1 in 3.1 (32%) American Indian/Alaska Natives.

Furthermore, there are numerous individuals who want to receive additional education but cannot or don't achieve their dream(s) due to life challenges or circumstances --- whether socio-economic, financial, transportation, scheduling, learning environment, or other challenges. Collectively, these groups represent a significant number of individuals who will statistically have reduced future employment and advancement options.

An individual's past challenges should never be used as an excuse or a barrier to prevent or inhibit anyone from positive changes or opportunities. Anyone who has a dream, desire, or determination to achieve their goals should have many different opportunities outside of the traditional educational system to compete for gainful employment --- as everyone will not excel in a classroom environment.

The reason that access to quality educational options is significant to me is that I was a former at-risk student who struggled through the traditional educational process and environment. It took many years – along with lots of perseverance – for me to understand my learning style to make the customary learning process significant for me. My unlikely journey from almost failing high school to becoming a college professor has driven me to give-back to help others to receive low-cost, quality educational options --- even if their pursuits don't lead to a college degree.

At times, it can be difficult to overcome doubts, fears, and worries to obtain a quality educational experience. Understanding these challenges, I created an educational non-profit "Saving Our Communities at Risk Through Educational Services (SOCARTES – www.socartes.org)". SOCARTES teaches at-risk individuals about business, life, and soft skills. My organization provides me with opportunities to share my experiential knowledge used to overcome my educational challenges --- along with my extensive professional experience, while also leveraging my experiences as a college professor.

SOCARTES' services are available to anyone who wants to expand their knowledge or develop new skills. Unfortunately, community organizational gatekeepers haven't allowed SOCARTES access to provide services to those who these organizations serve, which is extremely disheartening. Moreover, many of these organizations don't want to enter into partnerships, create administrative roadblocks, or even worse don't return phone calls or emails --- even though these services are provide pro bono to these organizations.

These experiences result in frustration as there is so much community need, along with numerous approaches that can be leveraged to meet our nation's growing educational and socio-economic challenges. This is a powerful reason that I haven't given-up after being told "no" so many times by organizations that don't consider ways to make SOCARTES' services available to those who are in need of a quality, low-cost education. Nevertheless, these temporary setbacks haven't altered my dream and desire to help individuals who for whatever reason have faced educational challenges similar to mine.

It's most interesting that the only organization that welcomed SOCARTES' services is the Arlington County Detention Center (ACDF) in Arlington, VA (thanks to the efforts of Kristen Cane, ACDF Program

Manager). Some might think that more organizations might be willing to allow SOCARTES an opportunity to offer its beneficial services before an individual is incarcerated.

It's important to remember that access to business, life, and soft skills training shouldn't be limited to those who can afford it; quality options should be available to anyone who wants it. Therefore, additional low-cost educational options must be made available to ensure that more individuals have access to quality developmental training opportunities. These alternative teaching strategies can emulate lessons taught in college classrooms without unnecessary stress.

Moreover, models such as SOCARTES can be leveraged to partner with companies to create a pipeline of resources who will receive training to move past hourly jobs to salaried positions, which can also help to address the gaps between qualified resources and the growing number of unfilled jobs --- as well as the addition of valuable economic dollars to the communities served.

It cannot be understated that unresolved socio-economic challenges are human and civil rights issues.

The ability to overcome current socio-economic challenges is directly related to societies' and companies' desires to invest in non-traditional options to provide meaningful opportunities for individuals to receive a hand-up versus a hand-out. This type of economic development is essential, as there are numerous individuals who would eagerly participate and benefit from developmental business training. Furthermore, this training would prepare these same individuals for greater employment and/or business opportunities --- along with increased personal and societal economic value.

Those who offer philosophical arguments about the reasons that individuals are economically left behind without providing actionable recommendations or solutions do nothing more than to lengthen the cycle of socio-economic oppression and economic decline. It's beyond time to introduce and put into action innovative programs that demonstrate that there are many different solutions that can be implemented similar to the services offered by SOCARTES, which can lead to improvements that help, develop, and uplift those in need.

Let's begin the work now to create economic benefits, develop individuals, and build a stronger nation.

Sincerely,

S. L. Young
Founder and President