

THE DAILY CITIZEN

Serving Northwest Georgia since 1847

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Unsigned editorials represent the view of The Daily Citizen. Members of the newspaper's editorial board are William Bronson, Victor Miller, Jamie Jones, Wes Chance and Charles Oliver. Columns and letters to the editor are the opinions of the authors.

ANOTHER VIEW

Reducing jail sentences makes sense

Jails and prisons are there for a reason: to keep the public safe, to deter crime, bring a sense of justice and responsibility, and, hopefully, reform offenders.

A new report suggests that cash-strapped states could save millions of dollars by reducing sentences for nonviolent crimes without risking an increase in crime.

The numbers of inmates and costs to hold them are significant — one in 100 adults are federal-state-local inmates.

The inmate population has been rising — even as serious crime has been falling — as state Legislatures and Congress take politically popular anti-crime stances and pass tougher sentencing requirements for a range of crimes.

The Pew Center on the States found that state prisoners released in 2009 served an average of nine additional months in custody — 36 percent longer — than offenders released in 1990. That's an extra cost of \$23,300 per offender.

Pew research in several states showed that nonviolent offenders held for shorter times did not cause an increase in crime.

That conclusion is similar to many studies that show longer sentences don't do much as far as reducing recidivism rates.

A more sensible and cost-effective approach for many nonviolent and drug crimes is shorter prison sentences with more required treatment.

In the end, the fuel behind a majority of crimes is substance abuse. Focusing resources on breaking those addictions not only saves money but improves the lives of those affected, their families and communities.

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Today's Forum



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Editor's note: Please keep your comments brief. If you include a name, please spell it.

"Attention, residents of Westbrook Road and subdivision: Please read the sign on the right side of Westbrook Road just after you turn off Cleveland Highway which says 'Leash law strictly enforced. All animals must be on restraint.' I may be forced to call Animal Control if you

Ready to learn?

Last Thursday's Literacy Celebration at the Mack Gaston Community Center is a testimony to the generous people we have in our community.

Nearly 100 community members visited the United Way Volunteer Center website, volunteerNWGA.org, and connected with the opportunity to volunteer at the literacy event. Because of these volunteers, more than 600 children participated in reading circles, made their own book mark, received free books and even visited the mobile library.

More than 15 community organizations, governments, schools and non-profits joined together to kick off the Readers to Leaders initiative. As part of this initiative, United Way is recruiting 100 new readers, tutors and mentors to impact local education. You can volunteer by calling (706) CAN-HELP or by visiting www.ourunitedway.org/100-readers-tutors-mentors.

As summer comes to an end, we are reminded how much preparation is necessary to get kids ready for a new school year. Backpacks, shoes and pencils are all tangible items that prepare a child to learn and to achieve greatness through education. We must also remember the importance of preparing our children cognitively, socially and emotionally in order for them to succeed in school. United Way contributions provide summer enrichment programs through Boys and Girls Clubs, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, the Family Support Council, Friendship House, Whitfield County-Dalton Day Care Center and 4-H Murray.

Unfortunately, some children are already at a disadvantage before they even enter the classroom. A 2009 study on the Disparities in Early Learning and Development show that by age 5, children of middle-class parents on average recognize 22 letters of the

alphabet, whereas low-income children can only identify nine. At United Way, we recognize the importance of providing quality educational programs to



Amanda Burt

children of all backgrounds. United Way focuses on creating brighter futures even before children set foot in school. Arianna, a second-grader at a local elementary school, is a shining star in the classroom thanks to help from the Family Support Council, a United Way partner agency. From the time Arianna was two years old, Ms. Carol from Family Support Council started visiting Arianna and her grandmother, Barbara, Arianna's primary caregiver. Ms. Carol helped Arianna through her formative years. When Arianna had difficulties learning her colors, Ms. Carol suggested that Barbara start pointing out the colors of food that Arianna liked best. Using ice cream as a teaching tool, Arianna learned to associate "pink" with strawberry and "brown" with chocolate. When Arianna began kindergarten, her teacher was impressed by Arianna's school readiness skills.

Youth are better prepared to be the leaders of tomorrow when our community offers additional educational opportunities for children, support for parents and services for families in need. United Way supports educational programs that prepare children for school readiness. Your United Way investment of \$1,000 provides two children with kindergarten readiness through a high quality preschool.

School readiness also means providing children with the proper tools for

success. At the beginning of each school year, students are given a long list of supplies necessary to start learning in the classroom. Many families cannot afford the additional costs in August, but these children cannot be left behind.

For this reason, United Way is partnering with Market Street Shops and Northwest Georgia Radio Group for the Stuff the Bus School Supply Drive. If you would like to support children in your community for the upcoming school year, please join us by dropping off school supplies Aug. 6-10 at the Market Street Shops office, 1001 Market St. in Dalton. The Stuff the Bus School Supply Drive will culminate with a block party at Market Street Shops on Aug. 12 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. If you would like to invest in United Way's work in education, please visit ourunitedway.org/education.

Supplies needed include:

- Backpacks
- No. 2 pencils
- Black or blue ink pens
- Colored pencils
- Notebook paper
- Spiral bound subject books
- Glue sticks
- Kleenex
- Pencil holders
- Crayons
- Expo dry erase markers
- Scissors
- Rulers
- Copy paper (white and color)
- Paper towels
- Pencil sharpeners
- Erasers
- Pocket folders
- Zip Lock bags (gallon size)
- Clorox table wipes
- USB drive

Amanda Burt is the president of the United Way of Northwest Georgia.

Community unity around education

I am proud to live in a community that embraces education the way Dalton and Whitfield County are doing so now.

It was an extraordinary moment last month when our mayor and county commission chair stood alongside the chairmen of the Dalton and Whitfield Boards of Education and other business and civic leaders to pledge their commitment to an education initiative that will have far-reaching benefits not only for our children and schools, but for the entire community.

The specific goal of the initiative is to support, encourage and nurture early literacy in all area children who attend our public schools. We want to create a culture that values literacy and that expects every child to be a proficient reader at an early age. We do not want any child to slip between the cracks and end up excluded from the vast and varied opportunities that are available to those who can read well and write proficiently.

Research tells us that up to third grade, students are learning to read. From fourth grade on, they are reading to learn — using the reading skills they've acquired to

understand the content-rich subjects of science, math and social studies while also developing problem-solving, critical thinking and analytical skills as well. The child who has not mastered reading is at a distinct disadvantage when approaching content-rich higher-level classes and it's a problem that only gets worse with time.

We know that children who are not proficient readers by the end of third grade are already on track to drop out from high school, and we know too that a high school dropout earns, over a lifetime, an average of \$260,000 less than a high school graduate. The personal impact of lost earnings is significant but is multiplied when considering the loss of taxes paid and other dollars that are not pumped into the economy by the lower wage-earner.

Estimates are that by 2020

some 60 percent of jobs will require education and training past high school, whether in the form of a technical certificate, an associate degree or a bachelor's degree. In Georgia, about 42 percent of young adults today are college-educated (far fewer in our Northwest Georgia region), so a huge gap exists between the future demand and the current supply. We need to create a pipeline of educated, trained, skilled young men and women to take the jobs of the future and those opportunities will simply not be available to those who cannot read and write.

At Dalton State, we know we are expected to turn out many, many more college graduates in the next few years to meet our local workforce needs. But to have college graduates we first need to have college students, and to have college students, we need to have high school graduates. And we will not have high school graduates if students cannot read and write.

More college-educated graduates working in higher-paying jobs will translate into a more robust local economy as dollars are earned and spent in the community. Furthermore, crime rates are

lower in communities with higher educational attainment.

A more educated community is also more attractive to young professionals and companies looking for a place to locate. Smart people are drawn to places where smart people live. The emphasis on early literacy in our schools also communicates effectively that we are a community that values education.

Implementing the literacy curriculum our local school systems have chosen is a pricey proposition, but addressing the matter on the front end — when children are young — is far less costly to the community than tackling it on the back end in the form of remediation, increased crime and lower-paying jobs.

We've all heard it said that knowledge is power; I believe literacy is the key to accessing information and knowledge. I am proud to support the Readers to Leaders literacy initiative. It's good for the children of Dalton and Whitfield County; it's good for Dalton State College; it's good for our entire community.

John O. Schwenn is the president of Dalton State College.

WORDS OF WISDOM

Bible verse: "I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I have set my heart on your laws." Psalm 119:30

Thought for Today: "Falling in love consists merely in uncorking the imagination and bottling the common sense." Helen Rowland American writer and humorist (1875-1950)

don't keep your large dogs under restraint. I must protect my children and my own small dog which is never out of the house without a leash."

"I work with a man from Michigan and he says people stop for funerals up there and it is the very least a person can do to show respect for the deceased and their grieving family. Even if I'm running late I take the time."

"Is 'shared responsibility' a shortened version of 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their need?' Instead of being a protection from tyranny, has our Constitution become only an obstacle that those who do not value individual freedom simply can — and do — easily find a way around?"

"The cost of health care and the inability to get private health care insurance will bring an end to the American Dream."

"In order to make a right turn on red, you must first come to a complete stop. Law enforcement, this means you, too!"

"Concerning the comment in the Forum on July 18 about long lines at the DMV: If all states did this we might get a fair presidential vote. How hard is this? I can come up with 12 (forms of ID) without trying. There has always been a waiting line. As those who are not qualified quit trying, lines will get shorter. Some will complain no matter what it is."

"Interesting fact recently in 'Today in History': In 1932, President Hoover announced he was cutting his salary and those of cabinet members. Wouldn't that make sense today since salaries are being cut or eliminated for many of America's workers?"

"In reference to John Stossel's piece about the education 'blob,' he has no idea what he's talking about. If our public schools are so horrible, why have so many of us who attended them succeeded in life? Are there problems with the system? Sure, but he makes it sound like our children are rotting in pits of iniquity. He did get one thing right: Parents who value education will make sure their kids get a good one. No amount of 'competition' can replace good parenting. I think the lazy parents blob is what we need to target."