



## Gown's for all of town

Op-ed by Mark Culliton and James E. Rooney  
Saturday, July 17, 2010

---

We always hope that college students from other areas stay here and contribute to our success. Why shouldn't we have that same expectation of kids from Dorchester, Roxbury and Mattapan?

Every summer as school lets out, Boston braces itself for a season of violence.

This year the season came early. The murders of two 14-year-old boys have caused us to ask how one child could murder another child in cold blood.

The answer is that young people who commit these crimes have no sense of purpose for themselves and none of the self-esteem, drive and determination that come from working toward a goal in life. As long as at-risk kids like these can't see a clear path to a future, they are forced to do little more than look over their shoulder in the hope that they don't become another target.

With these tragic killings comes the inevitable search for answers. Fortunately Boston has the powerful combination of some of the best nonprofit organizations in the country creating opportunities for young people and Mayor Tom Menino, a steadfast champion and supporter of programs and summer jobs for the city's youth.

In addition to the ongoing work to improve the daily lives of the city's youths and teens, we must create a profound shift in their perspective by challenging them to expect more for their future and to create a life plan.

Making graduating college, and all of the opportunities it presents, the focus of that life plan is key to putting even the most troubled youth on track to a better life.

Just as it is an expectation in suburban communities, college must be seen by urban youths as an expectation, not the exception. Boston is one of the most famous college towns in the world. But for the young men who allegedly committed these murders, college and the opportunity it provides were not in their minds.

We know from our early success that it is possible to take even the most at-risk youth and place them on the path to college. It takes a cradle-to-college approach that requires a consistent line of educational supports for kids, starting from early education and continuing through quality out-of-school-time programming with a focus on graduating from college.

Making college a common goal among young people in the city's urban neighborhoods will also improve the quality of life for the entire community. College graduates earn 74 percent more than high school graduates; they are half as likely to be unemployed; 18 times less likely to be incarcerated; and are more likely to vote, volunteer, exercise and prepare their own children to succeed in school.

However, nearly four out of 10 students in Boston Public Schools will not graduate from high school and only two of the 10 will graduate from college. These numbers simply must change if we want to change lives and communities.

As a city, we always hope that college students from other areas stay here and contribute to our success. Why shouldn't we have that same expectation of the kids from Dorchester, Roxbury and Mattapan?

*Mark Culliton is CEO of College Bound Dorchester. James E. Rooney is a member of the group's board and executive director of the Massachusetts Convention Center Authority. Both are Dorchester residents.*