

Survey: Would higher education opportunities make Massillon better?

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Posted Oct 3, 2017 at 7:48 PM

City residents are being asked to take a survey regarding higher education and the possibility of a college facility here.

MASSILLON Is a higher learning facility feasible here?

Do you want more opportunities to further your education without leaving the city?

If an education facility was in your backyard, would you take classes?

Massillon and Kent State University at Stark leaders want a chance to gauge your response to questions like that.

City officials have partnered with the university on a survey to get feedback about higher education opportunities in Massillon. Residents can take an **online survey**, answering 15 questions, which include a few queries about yourself.

“It’s about the overall health of the city,” Mayor Kathy Catazaro-Perry said. “We want it to be a better world for our residents.”

As the city looks to the future, leaders have identified education as a key component in making sure Massillon thrives, she said.

Catazaro-Perry wants to start the push for higher education with young kids and instill in them a love of learning and a healthy respect for its importance.

“We have places with good jobs and sometimes kids get lost along the way and take the wrong turn,” the mayor explained. “If we can get them on the right path and help them get to college, graduate and start a career, then they can take care of a their family.”

The mayor envisions fewer social issues and stronger families — a combination which helps build a stronger community, she said.

College in Massillon?

The survey is just the beginning of a push to improve life for folks in Massillon, the mayor said, noting that a satellite learning center similar to Stark State’s office in downtown Canton could be a reality here if people want it.

“As mayor, I think I know what is best but I want to have the right idea, not skewed,” she said. “I think the survey is the best way to attack it.”

Denise Seachrist, dean and chief administrative officer at Kent State Stark, is often approached about bringing an educational outlet to Massillon.

“It’s fascinating to me that some feel, even though we are six miles away from Massillon, we are too far,” Seachrist said. “It’s hard to get there (they say).”

Seachrist said Kent established the regional campuses found across the area — including the Stark campus in Jackson Township — to provide better access to students, and she wants to capitalize on any opportunity to extend higher learning to more people.

Officials understand there are many barriers — time, money, distance, transportation, confidence — keeping people from furthering their education.

Expanding education opportunities to Massillon could mean a more comfortable learning environment for some, Seachrist said.

The survey will allow leaders to see where the divide might be.

“Anytime you can make people feel at ease and have that relationship in the classroom or they are familiar with their surroundings, that’s when better learning can take place,” Seachrist said.

Survey says

Officials hope to garner from the survey how important attending college is, if transportation is an issue for people and if offering classes in downtown Massillon would make someone more likely to go to college.

The survey also seeks information about what areas of study interest people, how frequently people visit downtown, why they visit and what they like or don’t like about the city.

Catazaro-Perry said the questionnaire, which was done at no cost to the city, is the first step in the process. Once the data is collected and studied by a Kent Stark analyst, results will indicate the next step, which could be a full-blown educational facility, or perhaps a scaled back help center for potential students to learn about college, technical or trade school possibilities or get help with filling out applications and financial aid forms.

“Our kids are going to college for free when they are in high school but not nearly at the rate of other communities,” Catazaro-Perry said. “We can improve upon College Credit Plus. An education for a lot of kids is going to be key and we, as a city, have to support them.

“I think it is part of the city’s role, not just the school’s problem,” she said. “We have to help everyone achieve and be successful and (education) really impacts our community as a whole.”

According to the Stark County Significant Education Progress report released in December and compiled by the Stark Education Partnership, since the 2006-07 school year, there has been a substantial increase in the number of participants in the college credit program in the county. During 2006-07 school year 461 students earned 2,766 college credits. In the 2015-16 school year, 6,888 students in Stark County earned 20,358 credits.

The collaboration is a great opportunity for western Stark County, the mayor said.

“If you can reach out and make them (students) comfortable and make them see what is possible in their lives, that’s how we change lives every day,” Seachrist added.

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