

IS College Right for My Child?

For some parents, sending a child to college may seem impossible or even ill-advised. College is expensive. The application process seems bewildering. Is it really worth it, especially if your child has no idea what career she wants?

Colleges Provide an Opportunity for Nearly Everyone:

All this doesn't mean college is right for your child. Ultimately, she will have to decide that for herself. But you can help her by understanding the choices.



A College Education Creates Earning Power

Research shows that people with college degrees have more job choices and earn more money.



-Look beyond the "sticker price" schools advertise and explore the aid options to determine what you will really pay.

"I didn't go to college, so I can't send my child."

College can give your child opportunities you may not have had, and you don't have to be an expert to help her get there. A counselor at your child's high school will help you and your child select and apply to the schools that are right for her. Ask the counselor about college fairs, where representatives introduce schools, and about writing to schools for information. You should also plan to visit a few schools.



•Some emphasize training in specific fields, such as computer technician; others offer a general academic program.

• There are thousands of schools and programs of study to choose from.

•Many colleges also have programs that can help your child develop successful study habits and improve skills.

College Teaches Essential Thinking Skills: Many jobs today depend on brain power, not muscle power.

In fact, the government predicts that 18.7 million of the 18.9 million new jobs expected in the next decade will be in service industries—including professionals of all kinds—not manufacturing.



College is a waste if my child doesn't have a career plan.

Many students have no idea what they want to study when they enroll in college. Most four-year schools require a broad course plan in English, humanities, science, and math that will help your child learn about and decide on areas of study. Again, a high school counselor can provide strategies to help your child focus on a field of interest.

Today, 9 out of 10 people change jobs at least twice in a career, often switching to fields that are brand new. Technology advances so rapidly that it is difficult to predict what kinds of new opportunities will be available to your child.

But a college education will provide the critical thinking and reasoning skills to succeed in an ever-changing world.



"My child did poorly in high school, so he won't get into college."

•Higher-education opportunities exist for just about everyone.

•Four-year colleges and universities offer Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) or Bachelor of Science (B.S.) degrees.

•Community, technical, and junior colleges offer programs that are two years or shorter, awarding an associate's degree.

•Some have open enrollment policies, meaning a high school diploma or equivalent is all that's required.

Misperceptions parents may have about college. College is too expensive.

While college costs are rising, one survey found people overestimated tuition at public colleges by two to three times.

Not only are colleges less expensive than most believe, there is more than \$168 billion in financial aid available.

-Almost two-thirds of full-time students received grant aid in 2007-08. Most financial aid is need-based, the more help you need, the more you're likely to get.



My child won't fit in at college.

With so many high school students continuing their educations, colleges are filled with people from many different backgrounds. Colleges often have support networks and associations, such as an African American club or Korean study group, which can help your child find people with similar needs and interests. Part of your child's education will be interacting with people of various cultures, making her better prepared for the world after college.

Later Is Okay, Too

Even with your encouragement, however, your child may not be ready to start college. The idea of time off between high school and college can be worrisome for parents. Experts say most teenagers who take time off do go on to college—and they're usually better, more motivated students than their peers.

If your child says she needs a break, consider together how she might spend the time, whether gaining job experience, volunteering, or traveling. Colleges will ask for an account of how this time was spent. A year full of rich, mind-expanding experiences will help a student's chances of admission, even if she has a poor high school record.

Another option is to go through the college selection process and then defer for a year once accepted, an arrangement most colleges allow.

The Bottom Line

A college education can mean more money, more job choices, and greater knowledge for your child. While you can't make the decision about college for her, you can help her understand the opportunities and discover the education plan that's right for her.

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