



# CHOICES in EDUCATION

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## PARTNERSHIP

# How parents and educators can work together

By Metro Editorial Services

Parents and educators alike aspire to help students perform their best in the classroom. An effective parent-teacher partnership can go a long way toward helping children reach their academic potential.

A collective effort on the part of parents and educators can increase the likelihood that each student fulfills their academic potential. Parents and educators can work together to keep lines of communication open and make the most of opportunities to speak directly with one another.

With that goal in mind,

parents and educators can employ the following strategies as they seek to develop a strong working relationship:

## Keep lines of communication open

Communication between families and educators is of paramount importance. The Early Learning Network, an organization devoted to improving the academic success of children that is funded by the Institute for Education Services, emphasizes the importance of routine communication between parents and educators throughout the school year. The ELN notes that open, clear, constructive and timely

communication can help parents know what's going on at school and ensures teachers know important things about their students.

## Make use of parent-teacher conference sessions

Both parents and teachers can utilize parent-teacher conferences to communicate directly with one another. Parents can prepare a list of questions regarding their child's academics, while teachers can provide a clear assessment of each student with feedback that celebrates the positive developments a student is making and offers constructive advice



FILE PHOTO

on areas where students can improve. Ample pre-conference preparation on the part of both parents and educators can help ensure sessions are productive and beneficial to students' development.

## Develop a plan together

Western Governors University recommends parents and educators develop a plan to collaborate together. Estab-

lish routine intervals to communicate to discuss a student's progress. Discuss what seems to be working and any areas where the approach by both parties may need to be tweaked. For example, parents should be open to suggestions regarding homework if the work students are submitting is not reflective of their abilities. Similarly, if students indicate to their parents that a certain in-class approach is not resonating, educators can remain open to suggestion or offer extra assistance if possible. Working on a plan together decreases the risk that any issues a student experiences will fall through the cracks.

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## CTE READINESS

# Demand is rising for career and technical education

By Metro Editorial Services

A four-year college degree is not necessarily the next step for students after they graduate from high school.

The rising cost of college tuition has revitalized interest in career and technical education (CTE).

According to data from the National Student Clearinghouse, enrollment at community colleges rose 2.6% in 2023 compared with a year earlier, enhanced by a 16% surge at schools with a focus on CTE. Similarly, a survey by Edge Research commissioned by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation found on-the-job training seems to be more valuable to both high school students and non-enrolled graduates than a four-year degree, with 83% of the former stating it is excellent or good in value, compared to 80% for college. Favor for CTE schools is up 63% from the previous year.

The New England Association of Schools and Colleges says CTE has evolved from a traditional vocational school model to one that offers academics and skills for higher education and careers in skilled trades, technology and applied sciences. Demand for this type of education continues to grow, with various state superintendents and directors of CTE programs indicating they can only accommodate a fraction of the applicants they get for CTE programs.

While a traditional four-year university might be the right path for some individuals, CTE has proven ideal for many others. Some education officials say it's a sentiment being shared across the nation, that there is another way and another track for students

## Did you know?

Interest in CTE programs continues to grow as students look for alternatives to the high tuition costs and rising student loan debt associated with four-year degree programs. Certain trades are among the highest-paid occupations.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, here is the average salary expected and growth rate of these five high-paying trade jobs expected from 2022 to 2032:

**1. Ultrasonographer:** \$131,161 per year; 10% job growth rate

**2. Respiratory therapist:** \$104,437 per year; 13% job growth rate

**3. Dental hygienist:** \$99,013 per year; 7% job growth rate

**4. Construction manager:** \$88,319 per year; 5% job growth rate

**5. Aircraft mechanic:** \$82,476 per year; 4% job growth rate TF247125



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

to be successful. CTE may help students get more excited about school and view themselves in careers they may not otherwise be exposed to.

The National Center for Education Statistics puts the average annual tuition for a four-year degree at a private institution in the United States at roughly \$35,000 (and public at approximately \$10,000.) Room and board costs also must be considered, and those can increase the overall cost by a significant amount. The average tuition for a trade school can be around \$17,600 a year, but rates vary based on the trade. Most of the CTE schools

do not require students to reside on campus, which helps to save money.

Exploring the Career and Technical Education route can be highly satisfying and financially rewarding. Careers are diverse, and students can find a track that enables them to start training and working by investing less than they would if they were to attend a traditional college.

## Career paths in the field of CTE

CTE programs offer students access to a wide range of career paths. If high school students were once advised to focus primarily on traditional four-year universities as their

next step after graduation, more and more of today's students are considering CTE programs as they seek to find rewarding, lucrative career paths.

Students considering CTE may be intrigued to learn that employment prospects figure to be substantial in the years to come. In fact, the Association for Career & Technical Education projects a deficit of 6.5 million skilled workers by 2030, which suggests students who enroll in CTE programs should encounter a thriving job market upon graduation.

With that in mind, students wondering if a CTE program could be the next step in their academic

journeys can explore a number of different career tracks, including:

▪ **Agriculture:** Farming may come to mind when individuals think of the agricultural sector, but there are many additional pathways within the industry as well, and various CTE programs can prepare individuals for such careers. The career resources experts at Indeed note that CTE programs may focus on agribusiness systems, environmental service systems, food products and processing systems, and plant systems, among other paths. Aspiring farmers, agricultural inspectors, park rangers, wildlife administrators, and others can

look into CTE agricultural programs as they consider the next step in their academic careers.

▪ **Business:** Indeed notes that business courses are popular CTE courses because they teach students the ins and outs of business operations. That's vital knowledge for students who ultimately aspire to own their own business. In addition to the technical training students receive in CTE programs, the focus on business ensures students also are well-trained in the everyday tasks necessary to run a successful business, including general management, human resources and operations.

▪ **Construction and architecture:** According to Indeed, CTE programs focusing on construction and architecture teach students about the principles of designing and drafting structures. Construction technician, construction inspector and project estimator are some of the popular career paths among students who enroll in construction and architecture CTE programs.

▪ **Health science:** Careers in health science also may appeal to students who want to find rewarding careers in in-demand fields in the years ahead. Health science CTE programs are wide-ranging. A program that offers instruction on biotechnology can prepare students for a career as an emergency medical technician. Various other specialties can prove equally beneficial to students interested in working in a health care setting, and those jobs figure to be in demand in the decades to come as the aging population continues to grow.



## A CREATIVE FORCE

# Nurturing this trait could bolster kids' confidence

By Family Features

Creative expression not only helps children convey their thoughts and feelings, but it also helps build the self-esteem and resilience needed to navigate life's complexities.

Creativity can even serve as a powerful catalyst for educational, emotional and cognitive growth.

These findings are part of a Crayola-commissioned study conducted by YouGov of 702, 6- to 12-year-olds who explored the connection between creativity and the development of essential life skills. The study revealed that when faced with challenges, children most often rely on their own creative ideas rather than depending on others or giving up. This instinct to turn inward for solutions demonstrates a natural tendency toward creative problem-solving.

More specifically, the study found 92% of participants believe being creative boosts their confidence, and 6 in 10 said participating in a creative activity gives them a sense of pride.

What's more, 65% of children shared that engaging in a creative activity makes them feel happy and excited to participate.

"Creative activities help children recognize their unique talents and develop a deeper belief in their abilities — giving children an incredible sense of joy and accomplishment," said Cheri Sterman, Crayola's senior director of education. "By prioritizing creativity, we not only enhance children's immediate happiness and sense of

pride, but also equip them with the confidence and skills they need for future challenges."

The study supports the premise of Crayola's Campaign for Creativity, an advocacy initiative championing the importance of childhood creativity as a critical life skill that empowers kids to reach their full potential and encourages adults to nurture that creativity.

Parents and caregivers play a critical role in incorporating creative moments into their child's day, whether it's in a traditional form of artwork or reflected in a wide range of other activities, including storytelling, drama, dance, music and even sports.

Notably, more than half of survey participants (53%) shared they wished they could spend more time expressing themselves creatively with a parent or caretaker.

"Engaging in creative activities together is a powerful way for parents and children to strengthen their bond while helping children grow into confident, capable individuals," Sterman said.

As a parent, you can tap into programs such as Crayola Creativity Week to gather ideas and inspiration for nurturing creativity that promotes the development of essential life skills, including:

- **Self-Expression:** Engaging in creative activities allows children to express their thoughts, feelings and identities. This expression helps them better understand themselves and fosters a sense of ownership over their ideas and

creations.

- **Confidence:** Sparking creative moments with kids allows them to build their confidence through self-expression, idea exploration and problem-solving. This, in turn, empowers them to tackle challenges, think independently and develop resilience.

- **Problem-Solving:** In the study, children reported often turning to their own creative ideas to face challenges. Fostering creative problem-solving empowers children to navigate obstacles independently.

- **Self-Esteem:** When children feel free to create without fear of judgment, they develop a sense of accomplishment and pride in their work, which can strengthen their self-esteem. Creative activities also help them recognize their unique talents and develop a deeper belief in their abilities.

- **Creative Capacity:** The act of creating something can empower children. When they conceptualize and execute their ideas, they realize they have the skills to turn their thoughts into reality.

- **Resilience:** The creative process involves experimentation and failure. Children learn that setbacks are part of learning, which enhances their resilience. This experience fosters a belief in their ability to bounce back and tackle future challenges independently.

*You can discover inspiration for nurturing your children's creativity, including free creativity resources at [crayola.com/creativemoments](http://crayola.com/creativemoments).*

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## LANGUAGE ARTS



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Long thought to adversely affect young students learning to read, bilingualism has since been shown to do just the opposite.

## Bilingualism has many benefits

*By Metro Editorial Services*

Bilingualism is more common than ever before.

According to Ecole Bilingue de Berkeley (EB), today more of the world's population is bilingual or multilingual than monolingual.

Anyone can benefit from speaking multiple languages, and people of all ages, and children in particular, may find that learning more than one language is a particularly useful skill.

### Effects on the brain

There are cognitive and neurological benefits to bilingualism, according to a 2012 study published in the journal *Cerebrum*. The brain of someone who is bilingual or multilingual more efficiently processes information and, as one ages, it may be possible to more effectively stave off cognitive decline. The same study indicates that bilingualism has been associated with better memory, visual-spatial skills and even creativity.

### Academic advantage

Studies have shown that children who are bilingual can outperform children who only speak one language in a number of subject areas, indicates Unuhi, a bilingual literacy platform. This can further a child's educational development, literacy and other skills that can have positive effects outside of the classroom.

### Economic advantages

As bilingual children grow and become young adults, speaking a second language can pay dividends in the workforce. Ours is a global society, and knowing a second or third language can make a person a more attractive hire over another who only knows one language. More companies, especially those with international offices, consider bilingualism a high priority.

### Higher adaptability

As their brains constantly switch from one language to the other, bilinguals learn to manage conflict more readily, thus making them more adaptable. This means that people who speak multiple languages may be less affected by environmental changes, and could be more open-minded to new experiences, says EB.

### Strong cultural ties

Children who are bilingual may have grown up in households where their first languages are those of their families' native countries and the second come from having to assimilate into society. Bilingual children often have strong ties with their families, cultures and communities. The National Academy of Sciences has reported that babies raised in bilingual households show better self-control and are able to use their second language to create strong relationships.



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## 10-YEAR TREND

# Most high school students don't get 8 hours of sleep on school nights

By Ian McMahan

*Special to The Washington Post*

In 2023, only 23% of high school students got at least eight hours of sleep on an average school night, according to a survey of adolescent health and well-being from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that charted a decline in students' health lifestyle behaviors between 2013 and 2023.

The report, which describes 10-year trends and more recent changes over a two-year period, delves into adolescents' diets, physical activity and sleep behaviors.

It is based on a national youth risk behavior survey of a representative sample of students in grades nine

to 12.

Across the survey period, there was a decrease in the percentage of high school students getting eight hours of sleep a night, from 32% in 2013 to 23% in 2023. In a glimmer of good news, the percentage held steady from 2021 to 2023.

As with other aspects of the report focused on nutrition and exercise, female students were less likely to exhibit healthy sleep behaviors.

In 2023, 22% of teen girls got at least eight hours of sleep vs. 25% of boys.

From 2013 to 2023, adolescents from all races and ethnicities slept less, according to the CDC data. Multiracial students' sleep declined the most, from 32%

sleeping eight hours a night in 2013 to 17% in 2023.

The percentages of Black students sleeping eight hours dropped from 30% to 19%; Hispanic students declined from 33% to 24%; and Asian students dropped from 28% to 19%.

Most teens need about eight to 10 hours of sleep each night, according to the CDC.

The report linked adequate sleep duration to better emotional regulation, physical and mental health, attention, learning and behavior.

On the other hand, too little sleep increases the risk of chronic diseases such as Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and stroke.



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## A STRESS RELIEVER

## More state colleges are admitting students — before they even apply

By Danielle Douglas-Gabriel

*The Washington Post*

More states are easing the stress of the college search by letting high school students know they are promised admission before they even apply. It is a paradigm shift in the often tedious admissions process that can require students to spend lots of time and money with no guarantee of success.

States say they are hoping to keep talent close to home and develop an educated workforce. They are turning to a “direct admission” model that matches students with local colleges based on their grades and sending a powerful message that post-secondary education — whether vocational training or a bachelor’s degree — is within reach.

The number of state-run, direct admissions programs has jumped from one in 2015 to more than a dozen today, including: Idaho, Minnesota, South Dakota, Washington, Indiana, Hawaii, Connecticut, Wisconsin, Utah, Illinois, Texas, California, New York and Oregon. Five of those states adopted the policy in 2024. Several other states have introduced legislation this year, including Arkansas, or have pilot programs in the works.

While Michigan as a state does not do direct admissions, several Michigan universities are offering guaranteed admission with a GPA of 3.0 or higher as part of the Michigan Assured Admission Pact.

While individual colleges and online admissions platforms such as the Common Application have been experimenting with direct admissions for years, the increase in state-run programs could have a tremendous impact on the movement, said John Lane, vice president for academic affairs and equity initiatives at the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association.

“Having state higher education offices and systems on board brings scale, resources and perspective,” Lane said. “It also increases the long-term sustainability of direct admissions.”

Part of the appeal of direct admissions is that it is a race-neutral way to increase diversity.

The Biden administration had urged colleges to explore the policy after the Supreme Court in 2023 struck down the use of race-conscious affirmative action in admissions. And as the Trump administration pressures colleges and universities to abandon diversity, equity and inclusion practices, more states and individual institutions are likely to turn to direct admis-



SCOTT EISEN — GETTY IMAGES

A growing number of states are easing the stress of the college search process by letting high school students know they are promised admission before they even apply. Known as “direct admission,” it matches students with local colleges based on their grades.

sions, higher education experts say.

“By being universal, direct admissions is race-blind,” said Jennifer A. Delaney, associate professor of higher education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. “So in the aftermath of the Supreme Court ruling, it’s become attractive for states to move the needle a bit on equity measures without having a race-specific policy.”

Direct admissions programs build on guaranteed admissions policies popularized by Texas, in which high school students in the top percentage of their graduating class are automatically admitted to certain public colleges. The newer programs are more inclusive and proactive in informing students of their options and the requirements to enroll.

Still, the movement has challenges. An offer alone is not enough to get students to enroll when their ability to pay for college remains an open question. And enrollment is no guarantee of graduation.

### The mechanics

State direct admissions programs vary in scope and design.

Utah’s program features all 16 of its public colleges and universities, while California’s is focused on the 10 campuses of the California State University system. Minnesota, Idaho and Wisconsin use data-sharing agreements with high schools to pull students’ transcripts for information. Connecticut and Illinois, which use the online

platform Common Application for their programs, rely on self-reported student data that is later verified.

In most cases, colleges and universities are given a choice to participate and can set a GPA threshold that students need to meet to be automatically admitted. Students usually receive a letter early in their senior year with a list of schools where they are guaranteed admission and must then submit an application to the school of their choice.

### The benefits

One of the big selling points for direct admissions is the way it engages first-generation students, said Stephanie Ruckel, director of strategic enrollment at Augsburg. The policy, she said, eases the fear of rejection and encourages students to ask more probing questions about whether the school is a fit.

Wendy Robinson, assistant commissioner for programs, policy and grants at the Minnesota Office of Higher Education, said direct admissions also makes clear that most colleges are eager to accept students, a reality that is lost in all of the public attention on highly selective schools.

“Students hear a lot of narratives around how hard it is to get into college,” Robinson said. “The truth is that the majority of colleges accept the majority of their applicants the majority of the time.”

To change the narrative, Minnesota set out in 2022 to include public, private and tribal colleges in the lineup of schools in its direct admissions pipeline. All of the more than 50 schools participating in the Minnesota program waive their application fees and most don’t require an essay or standardized test scores. The same is largely true for the direct admissions programs in Wisconsin, South Dakota and Idaho.

Having pioneered the direct admissions model in 2015, Idaho has fine-tuned its program. Sara Scudder at Idaho’s Office of the State Board of Education said the state has changed the criteria five times — lowering the GPA threshold and eliminating SAT requirements — simplified its online application and increased awareness through videos and social media posts.

Those efforts have increased first-time undergraduate enrollment by an average of 50 to 100 students per participating campus in Idaho, with the strongest gains at community colleges, according to a 2022 study of the state program.

Taylor Odle, assistant professor of educational policy studies at the University

of Wisconsin at Madison and co-author of the study, said the results show that states shouldn’t solely focus on high-achieving students when designing direct admissions programs.

“This behavioral nudge is going to be most effective for the people who didn’t know that college was an option for them, and those are most often students who fall further down the academic gradient,” Odle said.

### The challenges

Yolanda Watson Spiva, who runs the nonprofit Complete College America, said colleges must provide academic and social support to directly admitted students to ensure they graduate. A proponent of the admissions strategy, she said it could yield the best results as part of a continuum in college completion, not a stand-alone initiative.

“Access alone won’t address the challenges that historically disadvantaged and underrepresented students are likely to face once they arrive on campus,” she said. “This has to be holistic.”

Getting students with few financial resources to enroll remains a significant challenge for the direct admissions movement. Odle and Delaney’s study of Idaho found that its direct admissions policy had little to no effect on the enrollment of students whose household earnings were low enough to qualify for the federal Pell Grant.

A separate 2023 study conducted by the pair, using Common App data across four states, also found minimal impact on enrollment, even though the admissions policy resulted in more applications from minority, first-generation and low-income students.

State leaders say the next evolution of direct admissions is to pair admission offers with financial aid awards. That may mean using the same data that determines whether a student is qualified for admission to determine their qualification for institutional or state-based scholarships.

Texas Commissioner of Higher Education Wynn Rosser said the state is exploring possibilities as it builds out its new direct admissions initiative, which was launched in 2024 with 31 universities.

“The most significant barrier students and families tell us about is being concerned about cost, being concerned about debt,” Rosser said. “If we can send the message that there is a place for you and you can afford it, then we want to send that message early and consistently.”





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## QUICK STUDY

# Universities try 3-year degrees to save students time, money

By Elaine S. Povich  
Stateline

With college costs rising and some students and families questioning the return on investment of a four-year degree, a few pioneering state universities are exploring programs that would grant certain bachelor's degrees in three years.

The programs, which also are being tried at some private schools, would require 90 credits instead of the traditional 120 for a bachelor's degree, and wouldn't require summer classes or studying over breaks. In some cases, the degrees would be designed to fit industry needs.

Indiana has enacted legislation calling for all state universities there to offer at least one bachelor's degree program that could be completed in three years and to look into whether more could be implemented. The Utah System of Higher Education has tasked state universities with developing three-year programs under a new bachelor of applied studies degree, which would still need approval by accreditation boards.

More than a dozen public and private universities are participating in a pilot collaboration called the College-in-3 Exchange, to begin considering how they could offer three-year programs. The public universities include the College of New Jersey, Portland State University, Southern Utah University, the Universities of Minnesota at Rochester and at Morris, the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh and Utah Tech University.

Proponents of the three-year degree programs say they save students money and set them on a faster track to their working lives. But detractors, including some faculty, say they short-change students, particularly if



DREAMSTIME — TNS

A few pioneering state universities are exploring programs that would grant certain bachelor's degrees in three years.

they later change their minds on what career path they want to follow.

Last year, the Utah Board of Higher Education approved the new three-year degree category. Various areas of study would be tied to specific industry needs, with fewer electives required. These degrees are broader than two-year associate degrees, but narrower than a full four-year bachelor's.

"We told the institutions to start working on them now and

developing the curriculum," Geoff Landward, commissioner of the Utah System of Higher Education, said in an interview. "Also, we want them to find industry partners that would be willing to hire people with bachelor's degrees of this type."

He added: "We created a sandbox for our institutions to play in."

Once created, individual programs would need both national accreditation and state Board of Higher Education approval.

Landward said he has taken

note of criticism that the three-year programs might "cheapen" the bachelor's degree by short-changing students who wouldn't receive a broad college education. But he said students could save on tuition, get a head start in the workforce and meet the needs of industries that are looking for certain skilled workers to address shortages in the state.

That includes nursing, he said, where requiring a four-year degree means taking lots of electives that have nothing to do with the

career.

Utah State University's current four-year nursing program, for example, suggests several electives along with the required anatomy, math and biology courses as prerequisites during freshman and sophomore years.

"We think if we are partnering with industry and they help us develop it, I don't think it cheapens the degree," Landward said. "I think it creates a very specific degree."

Robert Zemsky, a University of Pennsylvania professor and founding director of the university's Institute for Research on Higher Education, began proselytizing for the three-year college movement about a dozen years ago.

He said the idea has gotten traction recently because "we are wading in the deep waters of righteous anger" at colleges and universities because of the perception that four-year degrees are not worth their high costs.

A Pew Research Center survey found only 1 in 4 American adults said it is extremely or very important to have a four-year college degree as a means to getting a good-paying job. Only 22% of the respondents said the cost is worth getting a four-year degree even if the student or their family has to take out loans.

Zemsky suggested that a shorter time span also would lead to higher college completion rates. More than a third of students who began seeking a bachelor's degree in fall 2014 at a four-year school failed to complete their education at the same institution in six years, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

Zemsky said 27 colleges and



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By Family Features

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Learn how to protect your children and family in this digital age with these tips:

## Elementary-Age Children

- Encourage open communication. Have conversations about what your kids see and do online and talk with them about potential dangers. Avoid lecturing in favor of an open exchange of information.

- Make their inherent interest in privacy work in your favor. Kids in this age group, particularly toward the middle school years, understand the concept of privacy and value it immensely. Use that context to help them understand what goes online is there to stay. Talk about what kinds of information should always be kept private, including identifying details like addresses and social security numbers.

- Stay on alert. Not all apps are completely safe (even the ones you can access from trusted stores) and not all filters are foolproof. Keep close tabs on what your kids are downloading by reading comments and reviews, and regularly monitoring what kind of content they see.

## Middle School and High School Kids

- Continue talking about privacy. You can



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never have too many conversations about privacy. What seems like harmless sharing on social media can be quite revealing. For example, frequent posts about visits to a favorite store or restaurant can allow a predator to begin tracking behavior patterns that make your child a target. It's also important for kids to understand how their privacy settings work. For example, settings that allow exposure to friends of friends make their visibility to strangers much broader than they may realize.

- Help manage their online reputation. Behaviors that once resulted in a day or two of hallway chatter can now live forever. Documenting mischief online is only fun until it spills over into real life and everyone sees those mistakes in full color, including prospective future employers.

- Be clear about your position on bullying. From the safe distance of a screen, it's easier for kids (and adults) to say things they'd never say in

person. Teach your kids to handle problems constructively offline and avoid engaging in attacks on others through social media, email and other platforms.

## College Students

- Reinforce the risks. Once they're on their own, kids may feel more liberated to make their own choices online. However, college students are easy prey for identity theft and worse. Remind them what's at stake if they fail to protect their identity and private information, like where they live and what they do on a regular basis.

- Teach smart practices. With all the independence that comes with college life, this is an ideal time for your student to take personal responsibility for his or her online security, including learning about virus protection, updating software, avoiding scams and backing up data.

*If you're looking for more practical advice for everyday family matters, visit eLivingtoday.com.*

## Degrees

FROM PAGE 12

universities have embarked on creating three-year pilot programs and predicted 100 would be doing so in another year.

Over the past 10 years, Zemsky said, schools have been ignoring the desires of students and instead creating their curricula around the preferences of faculty, which is where most of the opposition is coming from.

At a 2023 conference of the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties, a bargaining unit for professors, President Kenneth Mash said the overwhelming number of college faculty nationwide "have a visceral disdain for the idea."

In an interview with Stateline, he said three-year programs would hurt students, creating a "two-tiered" system under which wealthy students would get a full four-year education and lower-income students a cheapened three-year degree.

"If it's not going to be a four-year degree, they should name it something that indicates it's not a B.A.," said Mash, who also is a political science professor at East Stroudsburg University. "We don't know that employers will treat them the same."

"I'm on board, as most faculty are, with the notion that people want to increase their job opportunities. But that's not all there is to a college degree," he said. "Degrees prepare you to be a better citizen, a better parent, and on and on."

And he said a broad education is what makes it possible for students to change jobs and careers many times during their working lives. "It's really that baking in liberal arts ... that makes it possible for people to do different things in their lifetimes."



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

## Credentialing requirements

At both public and private universities, the new three-year degree programs that require fewer credits would need national accreditation.

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, a regional credentialing agency, accredited several three-year bachelor's degrees at two private schools, Brigham Young University-Idaho and Ensign College, in 2023. The degrees are in applied business management, family and human services, software development, applied health and professional studies.

Sonny Ramaswamy, the commission's president, said in an interview that the three-year programs underwent two years of evaluation before being awarded accreditation.

He said the evaluation showed that competency in many professions could be attained in three years instead of four, and that graduate schools were willing to accept three-year bachelor's as a credential for the pursuit of higher degrees. He noted that European college degrees often are completed in three years.

"We said, 'We will approve you, but this is a pilot,'" Ramaswamy said. The schools will provide data to show their students have earned a good education,

he added.

"My intuition is that it will head in the right direction," he said. "The public is calling for innovation."

Michael Poliakoff, president of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, a nonprofit organization that says its mission is promoting academic freedom, excellence and accountability at colleges and universities, said "fluff" courses strengthen the case against a 120-credit hour bachelor's degree.

"Let people get a good foundation with a strong general education core, strong skills and some electives," Poliakoff said in an interview. "That's what a responsible university should be doing."

The council does an annual survey of higher education institutions and grades them A through F on what the group calls "core curricula" — the proportion of courses dedicated to mathematics, literature, composition, economics, laboratory science, American history and government, and foreign languages.

Poliakoff said the amount of debt students are accumulating over four years is "sinful" and unnecessary. Colleges and universities must meet the concerns of students and their families, he said.

"A 90-credit baccalaureate degree is a pretty good way to tighten up the bolts," he said.





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## WORK OUTDOORS

# Career opportunities in the agricultural sector

*By Metro Editorial Services*

Individuals approach their careers in various ways. Some may aspire to climb the corporate ladder, while others may pursue a career that affords them ample personal time to spend how they see fit.

Many individuals look for careers that afford them ample opportunities to work in the great outdoors, which could make the agricultural sector an appealing industry.

Talented individuals with an array of diverse skills dot the agricultural sector landscape, and the following are just a few of the many careers to consider within this vital industry:

- **Equipment technician:** Data from the career experts at Indeed indicates agricultural equipment technicians earn an average salary around \$65,000 per year. Agricultural equipment technicians maintain and repair existing machines and install new ones, among their many responsibilities.

- **Purchasing agent:** An agricultural purchasing

agent buys products and raw materials at wholesale. Indeed notes that purchasing agents often must meet specific purchasing quotas for processors and work with various clients who supply an array of agricultural products. The national average salary for agricultural purchasing agents is around \$51,000 annually.

- **Warehouse manager:** The receiving, shipping and storage of agricultural materials is overseen by a warehouse manager. Indeed notes that these professionals now routinely utilize artificial intelligence products to manage inventory. Warehouse managers must know and adhere to safety procedures and guidelines that dictate how materials and products are stored. The average salary of a warehouse manager is around \$52,000 per year.

- **Sales:** Like every industry, the agricultural sector requires talented sales personnel. Agricultural sales reps sell materials and products and identify the needs of potential customers. Agricultural sales reps may

spend ample time on the road at trade shows. Doing so allows them to identify customers as well as their needs and wants, and promote their own products and services. An ability to foster strong and trusting interpersonal relationships is invaluable for agricultural sales reps, who Indeed reports earn an average of about \$60,000 per year.

- **Environmental engineer:** Environmental engineers play pivotal roles within the industry, and could become even more vital in the decades ahead as the effects of climate change become more apparent. Environmental engineers design and implement solutions that occur on agricultural sites, helping to address issues such as unhealthy soil, insufficient drainage and inefficiencies, among other concerns. A career as an environmental engineer within the agricultural industry can be rewarding and lucrative, with Indeed noting that the average annual salary for this position is a little more than \$77,000.



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## PREPARATION 101

# How to help students master college entrance exams

By Metro Editorial Services

The college admissions process is multifaceted and stretches out over a year or more. High school students who plan to continue their education at four-year schools typically go through the admissions process at various schools before deciding where the next step on their academic journeys will take them.

Testing is part of the college admissions process. Parents and guardians who want to give young people the best chance of being admitted to their preferred school can help students prepare accordingly.

In the United States, performance on the SAT and/or the ACT has traditionally been a key consideration

for college admissions departments. The SAT consists of math and evidence-based reading and writing. Each section is scored on a 200-to-800-point scale (a score of 1600 indicates mastery of the exam). The ACT is a similar test that also helps measure college readiness. The ACT consists of four sections: English, reading, math and science. There's also an optional 40-minute writing test that some colleges may require. The maximum composite score for the ACT is 36.

Most schools do not favor one test over the other, so it's possible students will take just one exam. However, college-bound students are increasingly taking both the SAT and ACT and only submitting the

higher score to schools. This is important for families and students to recognize.

Generally, students can study concurrently for both tests, and the following are some additional strategies to prepare for college admissions testing.

- Enroll in a test prep course. Students may benefit from taking test prep courses either in their sophomore year of high school or early in their junior year. These courses familiarize students with the testing format and enable them to take practice exams. They also offer tips for getting through the test within the allotted time. Knowing "how" to take the test is often just as important as knowing the material

on the test.

- Focus on vocabulary. Families can work together to expand students' vocabularies. Everyone can learn new words and use them on a daily basis.

- Prioritize rest and a healthy lifestyle. This can be a stressful time in students' lives. Parents and other caregivers can recognize this and reinforce healthy living habits that will help teens get the rest they need to stay both physically and mentally well. Try not to put extra pressure on students during this critical time. Avoid emphasizing a need to get the best test scores possible, which can lead to additional stress, burnout and resentment.

- Realize many schools



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

are test-optional. Students who simply are not excellent test-takers may take comfort in knowing that a growing number of schools have become test-optional.

Families can determine if students want to be "one-and-done" on standardized testing or take the test a few times to improve their scores.

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## CHOICES ABOUND

# 3 strategies to prepare teens for life after school

By Family Features

For some time, heading to college or joining the workforce has been the standard choice for teens upon high school graduation. Today, in part due to technology and social media, students have access to myriad career paths that are all but traditional.

With an increasingly dynamic career landscape creating an awareness of jobs that didn't exist even 10 years ago and a shortage in the workforce, there's a willingness for both potential employees and employers to look at careers and young talent from a whole new perspective.

"There isn't a 'typical' career anymore," said Lorna Bryant, Gen Z career expert and head of career education for Pearson Virtual Schools. "With the perfect storm in the workforce of boomers retiring, many people still not returning to work in the wake of the pandemic and a population that has declined for the last 50 years, this generation (ages 11-26) is positioned extremely well. Employers want and need them. In short, the scales have flipped to the supply side and demand is causing many employers to remove barriers to work entry. Whether high school grads go to college or work, developing in-demand skills early will help them secure and succeed in the jobs of the future."

Consider these tips from Bryant to help students explore the many options in front of them and prepare for the possibilities that await after high school.

## Help kids cultivate durable skills

While technology has transformed the world of work, an increasing number of careers prioritize durable skills over technical or hard skills. Durable skills (also known as "soft" or "human" skills) include collaboration, leadership, communication and attention to detail, along with traits like empathy, grit and resilience. According to Pearson's Power Skills report, these are some of the most in-demand skills for employers. In addition, research from America Succeeds found employers seek durable skills 3.8 times more frequently than the top five technical or hard skills in every location, industry sector and educational attainment level. Possessing these skills is not only attractive to employers but colleges and universities, too. One of the best ways to prepare for the jobs of tomorrow, which don't exist today, is to focus on timeless durable skills.

Many students already possess or are



PHOTO COURTESY OF GETTY IMAGES

actively developing these skills in high school. The key is to raise awareness of their importance, seek ways to boost them and showcase them on college and job applications or resumes. For example, teens can display their leadership skills by captaining sports teams or starting a club at school. They can showcase collaboration and communication abilities by holding and thriving in student government positions, volunteering or working part-time jobs.

## Bridge passions and hobbies to careers

Beginning conversations with children as early as middle school that expose students to job roles, responsibilities and salaries connected to areas of interest is im-

portant for setting them up for long-term success. Nurturing interests — rather than dismissing them as flights of fancy — and finding paths to explore that align with those hobbies or interests in real-world applications can open doors to potential careers that may not have previously been considered.

To help students align their values and interests with potential careers, ask questions such as:

- What is it, specifically, you enjoy about your interests? What jobs rely on related skills (working with your hands, serving others, being creative, etc.)?
- Do you have the skills to do those jobs? If not, what research and training do you need to acquire the necessary skillset?
- Are there related jobs available in the geographic location you want to live?

▪ Can you make enough money to live the lifestyle you want doing this job?

▪ Can you envision enjoying this type of work for 8 (or more) hours per day?

## Get a head start on credentials or college credit

As earning college credits, career-ready credentials and specialized training for future careers is becoming more accessible for high school and middle school students, it's important to research available options.

From online resources, workshops, career counselors and accelerated career readiness programs that allow students to enter college or the workforce "job-ready," there are more options available now than ever before.





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