

College Isn't the Only Option

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Increasingly, a college education is viewed as an expensive but necessary choice - but it isn't the only choice. In Rhode Island, specifically, there are a large number of young adults who have accumulated an amount of debt that will take decades to pay off. Yet after years of college, there's still no job to pay off that debt. A four-year college education is seen as something that has to be done in order to begin a career. However, there is another option that lots of young adults aren't educated about, but it will benefit plenty of them, and that option is going to a trade school. So many kids go to college with no idea of what they want to do, they just think that's what they're supposed to do, but if a kid knows that they want to be an electrician, a plumber, or a variety of other well-paying trades, then going to a trade school will benefit them immensely.

In Rhode Island, there has been the issue of how much college debt people have. Rhode Island has the tenth highest average student loan debt in the United States, at \$31,217. Also, over the past ten years, the total student loan debt has increased to \$4.5 billion, which is double what it was in 2008. As of 2017, the average income of a four-person household is about \$64,000, so most families will have to finance money in order to pay for college because there's just not enough money to pay for college, along with all other expenses that have to be paid for. In addition, 70% of students who go to the University of Rhode Island have debt, as well as 67% of the students who go to Rhode Island College have debt. Over the past several years, the amount of college debt throughout the country has increased by an extreme amount. On a nationwide scale, people at the age of 30-39 years old have had an increase of college debt of 30% in the past five years, which is an extreme issue for lots of people. It's absolutely horrible how much college costs currently and how much it's going to increase in the future. However, something

that high school kids don't know is that the cost of going to trade schools is much lower than the cost of a regular four-year college. The average cost of a trade school degree is around \$33,000, which is miniscule compared to the cost of a four-year degree at \$127,000. So, if trade schools are promoted and made more known, then a large chunk of kids who want to become a part of a trade will have much less debt than they would have otherwise.

In order to promote trade schools, there are some things that will have to happen. More kids will have to be educated about the benefits of all trade schools, and one way to inform them about that is having actual people who have gone to a trade school, come into high schools and talk about their experiences. Tamala Dirlam, 47 of Westerly, Rhode Island, went to New England Tech to become a plumber, and she graduated in 2008. She had around \$20,000 of debt, which is now all payed off, and this is because shortly after graduation she got hired by a local plumbing company, and now makes around \$70,000 per year. Having people like her come into high schools and sharing their stories shows kids that going to a four-year college isn't mandatory. Kids who want to become a part of a trade will be able to learn more about it. Plenty of kids might not have known about trade schools before, but after seeing a presentation, they'll be able to have much of the knowledge they need when it comes to choosing what path is right for them. So, having people who have actually had the experience of going to a trade school informing kids about all the positive aspects of them will promote trade schools and show people that there is another option other than a four-year college.

There is another way to educate people about the pros of going to a trade school. That way is giving kids the option to go on field trips. In Rhode Island there are plenty of different trade schools where kids can visit, such as Lincoln Tech, IYRS School of Tech and Trades, etc. This way high school students can see what trade schools look like, they can see what the

environment is like, and they can get the feel for everything. During the field trip, if students were allowed to look in on classes and see how everything was run, then that would give them a better idea as to how it would if the student decided to go to that college. Also, most trade schools have much fewer kids per classroom, which might attract some kids who prefer that classroom setting. So, giving kids the option to visit a trade school would promote them exceptionally because students can see what it would be like to attend a trade school.

In conclusion, promoting trade schools will help a tremendous amount with the issue of college expenses. This will give many kids the chance to go to college for something they really want to do, and in the end, it will make it easier to acquire a job. Kids won't have to worry about not being able to pay back their college debt because they'll have a steady job that will quickly pay that debt off. Seniors who are interested in any type of trade should be educated about the fact that there is another option besides going to a four-year college, which will be much better for some people. Yes, this option is only available for certain people, but it does give a large amount of kids the chance to follow their dreams and not have to pay an extreme amount of money. So, even though college debt for many occupations is unavoidable, there is a large chunk of people that can avoid that by going to trade schools.

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