

Trade Schools Vs. Traditional College: What You Should Know

We all know that a college education is *usually* worth the financial cost, but what about attending trade school instead? Unfortunately, many adults with influence over high schoolers never take the time to ask this important question.

I'm not only talking about school guidance counselors and other educators, but I'm also talking about parents themselves. For far too many parents with kids in their junior or senior years of school, the stigma surrounding having a child skip four-year college would just be too much to bear.

But, it's time to change the narrative, and for more reasons than one. Not only does trade school help students land a job faster, it also costs significantly less than traditional college. Plus, jobs in the trades are booming in general, whereas many other industries are oversaturated with new graduates looking for work.

Have *you* tried to hire a contractor lately? How about an electrician? If you have, you probably already know these jobs are in high demand.

These are just some of the reasons to consider trade school, but there are others. And if you have your child's best interest in mind, you will at least hear me out.



young apprentice in vocational training working on a turning machine in the industry

How Much Does Trade School Cost?

The initial cost of attending trade school is one of the biggest benefits this type of education has to offer. Where the average cost of attending a public, four year school worked out to \$10,740 for in-state students during the 2021-22 school year per [CollegeBoard figures](#), you can attend trade school for as little as \$5,000 per year. Not only that, but you can often learn a trade and enter a related profession in 18 months to 24 months vs. the four years or longer it takes to earn a bachelor's degree.

As an example, you could attend a public two-year in-district community college for an average of \$3,800 per year, finish a vocational degree within two years, then go on to work as a dental hygienist or even a registered nurse in states that only require an associate degree. Conversely, you could attend trade school to learn a skill like carpentry, or to become an electrician, a welder or a boilermaker.

With many trades, you can also take part in a paid apprenticeship that lets you earn money while you learn on the job. According to [statistics from the U.S. government](#), 92% of apprentices who complete their program retain employment and go on to earn an average annual salary of \$72,000.

Trade School Education Pays Off (Literally)

While trade school costs less in general, and while trades typically require less than four years of higher education, jobs in various trades also pay more, too. Yes, you read that right. Sending your kid to trade school can result in benefits like lower student debt or [no student debt](#) plus higher earnings later on.

A quick look at [May 2020 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates](#) from BLS.gov makes this readily apparent. While there are many different trades and educational paths to consider, here are some of the highest paying trades students could enter plus how many years of higher education they require.

Career	Education Required	Annual Mean Wage, May 2020
Avionics Technician	Two-year degree	\$69,180
Boilermakers	Apprenticeship	\$67,430
Cardiovascular technologists and technicians	Certificate or two-year degree	\$60,940
Carpenters	Apprenticeship	\$54,200
Dental Hygienists	Two-year degree	\$78,050
Diagnostic Medical Sonographers	Two-year degree	\$77,790
Electrical Power-Line Installers and Repairers	Apprenticeship	\$74,410
Elevator and Escalator Installers and Repairers	Apprenticeship	\$86,200
Occupational Therapy Assistants	Two-year degree	\$63,420
Pile Driver Operator	Apprenticeship	\$71,880
Plumbers	Apprenticeship	\$61,100
Radiation Therapists	Two-year degree	\$94,300
Respiratory Therapists	Two-year degree	\$65,640

Chart of the top paying jobs from the May 2020 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates (CREDIT: ROBERT FARRINGTON)

While these trade school and community college jobs definitely pay well, also keep in mind that these salaries apply to employees. If a student is especially business-minded, all kinds of trades work well for all kinds of small business ideas.

For example, someone who learns the art of plumbing can easily go on to open their own plumbing business, and the same is true for carpenters, electricians, and other skilled tradespeople who are good with their hands. I also know that, all over the country right now, we're facing a dramatic shortage of skilled workers who can remodel kitchens or bathrooms, install flooring, or take on any number of small remodeling jobs.

The bottom line: The work is there for students who pursue the trades, and the jobs pay handsomely for the most part. If your trade school student is prepared to break out on their own and start their own company, that's even better.

Should You Talk To Your Child About Trade School?

If you have a child who is unsure about college but might be a good fit for a technical career or a trade, you owe it to them to expand their horizons. They may think that four-year college is the way to go just because they don't know any better, and they may not hear any different from their school guidance counselor, either. By showing them other options, including trade schools, you can prove to them there's a different way to enter a promising field. Heck, you could even save them a ton of time, money and heartache along the way.

How do you tell your kid about trade school? Bring them a stack of brochures, send them links to school websites and, most importantly, show them figures and statistics. Too many young people believe that skilled trades pay less than jobs that require four-year degrees, so showing them the numbers can help.

Also make sure your child has the tools and information to determine the expected return-on-investment for various four-year degrees. For the most part, that really just involves looking up tuition and fee information for various schools and programs then comparing it to the average annual wages for related careers. In some cases, select four-year degrees [aren't even worth the cost of tuition](#), but you won't know unless you check.

Source: [Robert Farrington](#), Senior Contributor, [Personal Finance](#)