

The Embellishment of College Education

As college has become increasingly expected as the next step after high school for young adults, we have witnessed the decline of blue-collar education. Blue-collar careers have been framed as less appealing, less financially wise, and less important; however, many of these careers are extremely interesting, profitable, and crucial to the functioning of our society. The Nixa School District receives high praise for its ability to prepare students for college, but, in truth, the school district is pushing many towards college who would be better suited to pursue another path.

Millions of students graduate each year planning to attend college, yet many of them are blind to alternate career paths. Across the nation, 30 percent of college freshmen drop out during their first year (College Atlas, 2014). Students who drop out pay thousands of dollars in tuition before they realize that, based on their skill set, college is not the path they should be pursuing. A major reason for this occurrence is high school districts like Nixa imprinting onto its students that college is a requirement for a successful life. However, for many students this is far from true.

Trade schools have unique advantages as an alternative to college education. Trade schools are inexpensive in comparison with university tuition and fees. The average trade school degree costs \$33,300, whereas the average bachelor's degree costs \$127,000 (Hamm, 2019).

Additionally, trade schools take less time, have significantly lower dropout rates, provide increased job security, and offer a guided transition from education to employers who are hiring for these skills.

The idea has been implanted in students that blue-collar careers offer substantially lower earnings in the long run, but this fact is exaggerated. By the end of their careers, individuals who achieved their bachelor's degree earned an average of only \$16,900 more per year than those who did not earn a bachelor's degree (My College Guide, Unknown). When one factors in the extra years that an individual attending a trade school would work, as well as the fact that those attending college are also required to pay back hundreds of thousands of dollars in student loans, the pay gap between the two different forms of education almost balances out. It is also important to remember that this statistic even includes those who did not pursue any post-secondary education whatsoever. In the end, the tradeoff in individual earnings that result from attending university rather than trade school is not as monumental as it first looks.

Currently, the Nixa School District offers limited opportunities to prepare for and pursue a trade school education. The primary classes offered that provide education toward these careers are Welding and Woodworking, both of which only give a basic foundation for those who may pursue these careers. International and Advanced Foods, the culinary classes offered at the high school, give a very basic education on the basics of cooking a variety of foods; however, this education should be expanded. The high school could offer classes that are related to auto maintenance, HVAC, electrical work, plumbing, and many other similar careers. These opportunities would provide Nixa students with an expanded basic education related to these practical skill sets that will be useful throughout the rest of their lives. Additionally, people who are pursuing trade careers would have the ability to jumpstart their careers. If I had the power to change a major aspect of our school district, it would be to expand the number and impact of practical classes offered, as well as make it clear that students do not need to attend college to

lead a successful life. I would expand the Career Opportunities Center at the high school, as well as add several classes to the high school curriculum that are oriented more towards practical careers. This shift would better prepare Nixa's graduating students for life after high school.