



# STARTING THE CONVERSATION

## Talking to Your Children about Career Exploration





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# Welcome to an Exciting Career Journey!

Congratulations! By picking up this publication, you recognize the importance of planning for careers at an early age.

This magazine aims to help parents, guardians and mentors of young people understand the changing worlds of education and work. *Starting the Conversation* provides hints for helping your children make good decisions that will ease the transition from high school to college or a career. This publication will also highlight some tools and sources of information that the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) and other state and federal agencies we work with offer. While the world of work has become more complex, the tools to

help understand available opportunities in the labor market are also more sophisticated than in generations past.

TWC's Labor Market and Career Information Department (LMCI) offers many publications and online applications to help people better understand what is happening in the labor market and how they might make more informed choices about their future endeavors.

We hope this publication provides a helpful introduction to some of the resources available to assist you and your children with some of life's most important decisions. Welcome to the exciting world of career exploration!

## *Benefits of Early Career Exploration*

In today's labor market, great career planning leads to great careers. Here are some of the key benefits of not procrastinating and starting career preparation early:

**1. Career exploration provides a much-needed reality check.** It helps children understand what occupations are like, what skills and education they require and what lifestyles they can afford.

**2. Career exploration expands your children's horizons.** Many children can't name more than twenty occupations. Career exploration exposes them to occupations they may never have dreamed of before.

**3. Career exploration saves time and money.** Armed with self-awareness and accurate information, children can obtain the right training and education they need to achieve their goals and find careers they will enjoy for years to come while avoiding high student loan debt. By planning early, parents can also take advantage of savings and cost-reduction opportunities (including scholarships, dual credit, and grants) that can reduce debt and improve the likelihood of successful completion in higher education.

**4. Career exploration helps students take advantage of opportunities.** As students progress educationally, they



have lots of choices – what high school courses to apply for, what internships or apprenticeships to take, what kind of higher education institution to attend, or what major or certificate to

pursue at those institutions. Having a goal in mind will help students look for and benefit from quality career-building opportunities.

## *Key Steps in Career Exploration*

Career development is a life-long process that starts when your children learn to talk. Although certain activities need to happen at particular times, most of the activities and information-sharing can occur throughout childhood. Here are some key career exploration activities where parents can help:

- **Share information about the world of work.** Learn about labor market trends, a good work ethic, job hunting and more. Discuss this information with your children when they can understand it, probably sometime in high school. Talk about it regularly!
- **Help your children engage in self-assessment.** Later in this publication, we discuss some tools that help your children explore their interests. This self-assessment needs to happen routinely because your children grow and change all the time. Each discussion you have will make the next one easier.
- **Direct your children through career investigation.** Your children should begin exploring occupations and careers early, often, and in depth. As early as elementary school, students can start looking at coloring and activity books to get the process started. (These activity books are available now at [bit.ly/ImciPUBS](http://bit.ly/ImciPUBS).) Remember, in Texas your children need to choose in the eighth grade what career

endorsement they will pursue starting the following year in high school. So the sooner they have a sense of what careers would suit them well, the better.

- **Make sure your children understand the connection between work and education.** It's important that your children appreciate the value of education and the importance of choosing a field of study (major) that promotes specific career goals.
- **Help your children develop their own personal education/training plans that will help them meet career goals.**

At the end of this publication, we provide a suggested timetable that helps your children through this process in a more structured way.

Now let's discuss some strategies to keep the conversation going and highlight some tools to help your children through the process of exploring careers.

# Chapter One: Conversation Starters



The best way to begin career exploration may be by talking to your child about your own career. Just everyday conversation. Unless you have taken your children to work, they probably know little about your work history.

Talk about what you do at the job you have now, and how each job you've held prepared you for the next one. Discuss what you liked most and least about each job. Be sure to include the

education and training that you needed. Describe how your job has changed over the years. Be honest about mistakes you've made and your hope that your children will benefit from your own experience.

When talking to your children about your experience, they may ask tough questions or even openly disagree. That's not necessarily bad! It may mean they are thinking about what they want for their own futures. Encourage that.

## *Overcoming Obstacles*

Children often enjoy talking about possible jobs. The future seems wide open and full of adventure. But as they get older, they may become more excited about the present or immediate future (e.g. their classmate's party on

Friday night) than the long term. This is normal. Teenagers can enjoy living "in the now" while still chasing their dreams.

A good rule of thumb: Rather than starting a whole new conversation

out of nowhere about their long-term future, when your children are talking to you, listen closely for opportunities to steer the conversation in that direction. Help them connect the dots between the homework they may not feel like doing tonight and living the life they want for the future.

Remember, you're not saying "no" to your children's dreams. You're encouraging them to pursue not just one dream, but many.

It's up to you to point out the value in all work, to show the grit behind

the "glamour" of more "popular" occupations, to discuss the hard work and perseverance needed to be successful in seemingly "easy" occupations such as singing, dancing, athletics, medicine, architecture and so on.

It's challenging to deal with the teen culture but it is also necessary and fulfilling. You've got to be persistent and work in small doses at a time when helping your child explore education and career options. You also need to take time to teach your child how to make decisions thoughtfully.

## *How to Approach Career Exploration*

We recognize and respect diversity. Texans come in all shapes and sizes with different interests and goals in life. When it comes to career planning, one size does not fit all. But it is also true that the market has greater need for some occupations than others, meaning that jobs may be easier to find in some fields than others. Success in today's economy involves matching individual interests with a career choice that has high employer demand. Helping your children learn more about their own interests and the world of work can prepare them for their future choices.

Here are some opening suggestions to make the career exploration process fruitful for both you and your children:

- **See career exploration as a gift.** It's an opportunity to know your children better. Discussions of interests, dreams and goals are inherently intimate and may draw you closer.
- **Take advantage of "teachable moments."** You don't always have to set aside "career exploration time." Running errands, watching TV

and talking about the day can lead to informal lessons about the work world.

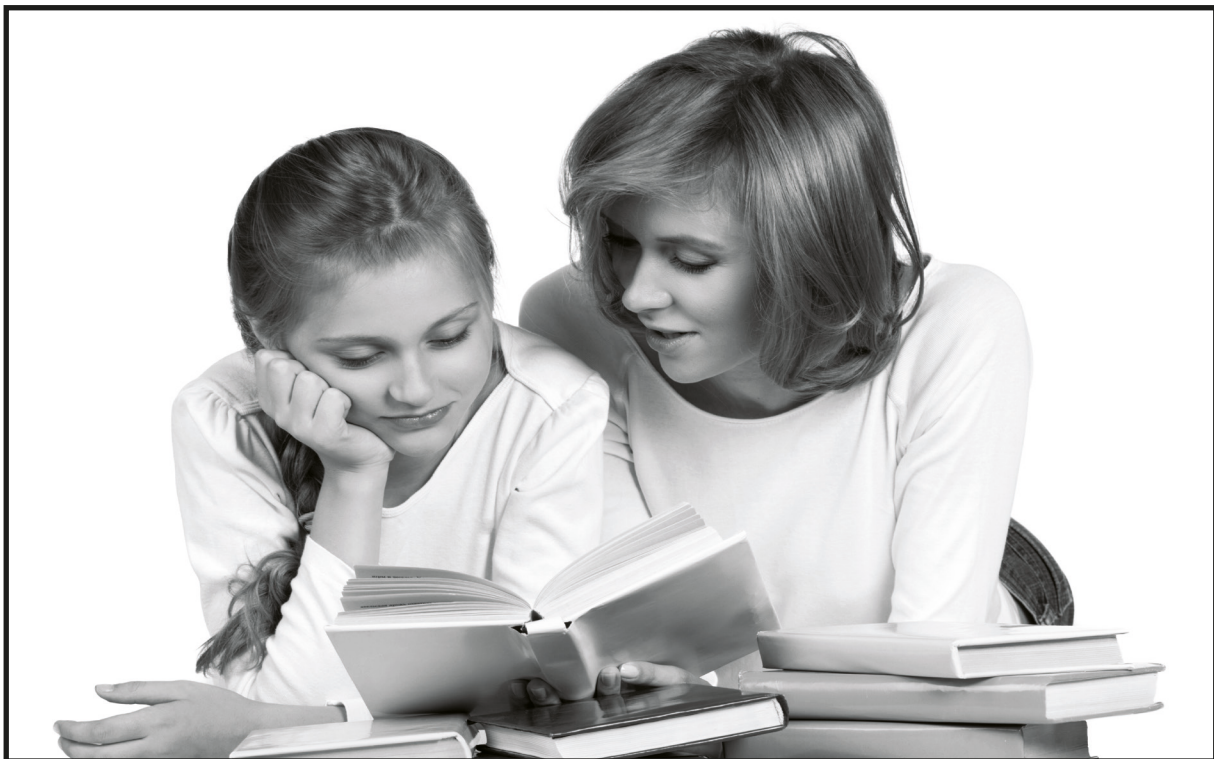
- **Select an approach that will work best for your children, not for you.** Don't worry if your children's methods seem scattershot to your logical brain. The goal is to help them find their own way—not your way!
- **Encourage your children's curiosity.** When your teenagers express interest in a profession you might find uninteresting or unsuitable, be careful about saying no. Shooting down ideas during the exploration process can limit your children's creativity and discourage them from honestly sharing with you. Encourage them to gather information and decide for themselves. The results may surprise you!
- **Prepare for resistance.** Just because you're fired up about career planning, doesn't mean your child is. Teenagers can be uncommunicative—especially when the stakes are as high as planning

for the rest of their life (or at least a good chunk of it). Resistance doesn't mean they aren't listening or don't care. Just respond with patient persistence.

- **Stay positive.** The world of work today may seem more uncertain than in the past but there's no point in scaring your children more than they already are. Don't make the future sound horrible or the past sound perfect. Instead, focus on your children's opportunities and help them adopt a can-do attitude.

- **Pay attention.** Observe your children as a teacher or sociologist might. How do they play, work, interact with others? What do they enjoy or dislike? What you learn will aid your children's career search and help you start the conversation.

If you follow these suggestions, you'll be in the proper state of mind to help your children plan their future. This may seem like a challenge, but the rewards you reap will make it worth the effort.





## *Describing the Decision-Making Process*

You are preparing your children to make one of the biggest decisions of their lives—the choice of career, or at least a first career! It’s time to teach them how to make long-term decisions based on facts.

This page outlines one process for thoughtful decision-making. Sit down with your children and discuss the process. Regardless of their age, begin using this process (or one you devise) for all sorts of decisions—from what to eat and wear today to vacation planning.

If they practice this method for everyday life decisions, your children will become accustomed to it and apply it more readily to career and school decision-making. They will learn to apply logic, identify preferences, gather facts, focus on outcomes, evaluate factors and ultimately make important decisions.

Once you and your teens are ready, begin putting the process into action on career exploration.

### *Career Decision-Making Process*

Here’s an overview of the whole process. You can help your children complete each of the steps.

#### **Step 1 – Choose a Goal**

Identify three different broad career fields, such as Medicine, Teaching and Information Technology.

#### **Step 2 – Explore Options**

Take interest tests.

Explore a wide range of occupations in a variety of fields.

#### **Step 3 – Identify Alternatives**

Narrow your children’s focus to a reasonable number of occupations.

Research each of them in depth.

#### **Step 4 – Weigh Alternatives**

Analyze each option and compare the associated facts, including possible pros and cons and overall impact on life and lifestyle.

#### **Step 5 – Make a Choice**

Decide on one option that best fits goals and has the best impact on life.

#### **Step 6 – Create an Action Plan**

Outline the activities necessary to achieve employment in the career path chosen, including the training needed, connections to make with industry professionals, etc.

Develop a timetable to complete them.

#### **Step 7 – Execute the Plan**

Actively bring the plan into reality. Set a timeline and follow it.

Ask oneself every day, “What can I do today to get closer to my goal of landing the career I want?” Whatever the answer is to that question – do it.

#### **Step 8 – Review and Revise**

Evaluate the progress and outcomes of the decision and the Action Plan. “How close am I to my goal in comparison to where I wanted to be at this point?”

Revise steps or timeline as circumstances may change.



# Chapter Two: Self-Assessment

As you know—and your children will soon learn—you have to know yourself to know the right career for you. If you don't, you may be very dissatisfied with how you spend most of your waking

hours, which is at work.

You'll find the most job satisfaction if your work and job setting match your interests and goals.

## *Identifying Interests*

To find an occupation or field of study in which your children will be happy, productive and successful, you should together identify and discuss their interests in work, personal values and leisure activities. The methods change as your children mature.

### **1. Start Casually**

To begin helping your children identify their interests and preferences, discuss their:

- favorite and least favorite school subjects
- favorite activities and hobbies
- personal interests and goals
- favorite types of work (e.g., working outdoors, working with his/her hands or using a computer)

Share your favorites as well. That turns the self-assessment process into a conversation rather than a test or interrogation! It can make your children feel more comfortable opening up.

### **2. Move onto Informal Assessments**

As your children reach middle school, have them take some informal interest inventories, such as the

one below. A good resource for such informal inventories is the *Texas Job Hunter's Guide*, available through TWC. You might also try the Internet, including *Interest Profiler* tool at [TexasCareerCheck.com](http://TexasCareerCheck.com).

#### *Instant Interest Inventory*

Have your children answer the following questions to get a clearer sense of the **type** of work that interests them.

Do you like:

- building things?
- fixing things?
- helping people?
- being outdoors?
- selling things?
- solving problems?
- being creative?
- speaking in front of people?
- initiating projects yourself?
- working alone or with others?
- following the same daily routine?

The goal of these assessments is to tease out information that will help your children choose an educational and eventual career path. Make no judgments or criticisms.

### 3. Arrange for Formal Career Assessments

Encourage your children to take formal interest inventories and assessments. These career assessments often examine interest, personality, and work values.

It's not hard to find these tests for your children. Their guidance counselors have access to many different tools and know how to help your children go through this process and understand the results. Many community colleges also administer them for a small fee. If you type in "career assessment" into any Internet search engine you will see hundreds of options; many at no added cost. Since many of these assessments can only be administered in group settings, check with your counselor to see which tests the school administers and ask to receive an interpretation of the assessment results.

Career assessments have improved considerably in recent years. Still, always remember that they can point you in the right direction but they can't make decisions for you. When your children take career assessments, remind them that there are no wrong or right answers. The results serve only to help your children investigate occupational and training options, not to force them to "pick a career."

The information gathered in the inventories can help them start

comparing interests with actual careers to assess how well they match. They might start with a school subject that they enjoy and search for related careers. An interest in math, for example, would result in occupations ranging from cashier to engineer.

You can also explore careers using specific types of work activity and conditions that your children enjoy. If your children enjoy public speaking, what kinds of occupations allow or require that? Teachers, trainers, coaches and scientists leap to mind and there are many more. Again, tools such as *Texas Career Check* can help make the connection.

As your children learn more about different occupations, take different subjects in school, gain experience through job shadowing or mentorships or expand horizons through part-time jobs, they may find certain jobs or training options more appealing. Some of these experiences will coincide with assessment results and others may be different. That's normal!

Learning what they enjoy can help children appreciate that work isn't just "putting in time" to get money; it's about providing a service. Still, money—and the lifestyle it affords—is important and can help children focus on the types of careers they want. The Reality Check budget calculator is especially good for connecting educational and lifestyle desires ([TexasRealityCheck.com](http://TexasRealityCheck.com)).

## *Helping Your Children Identify Interests*

To help your children identify their interests, ask them to list the:

- least and most interesting school subjects
- favorite and most effective ways to study
- style of working/studying (individually or with others)
- best time of day to work/think

One way to help children recognize their skills and unique attributes is to create a list yourself. Sharing your observations with children may help them realize qualities in themselves they didn't see before.

Once you get the ball rolling, ask your children to write their own list, such as:

### *Personal Strengths*

- I do my chores without supervision.
- I am good at verbal communication.
- I am good at drawing.
- I like working on a team.

The online *Texas Career Check* ([TexasCareerCheck.com](http://TexasCareerCheck.com)) is particularly helpful here, as it contains an interest profiler.



## *Developing Career Navigation Skills*

Today's workers change jobs several times over their working lives. Developing good job-searching skills is a must – both for picking a career and for successfully navigating the job market. Some of these skills are taught in schools, and all of them should be encouraged and developed outside of school. Here are some critical skills your child should develop:

- **Self Assessment.** Every job hunt begins with a serious self-appraisal—something workers must continually do as they gain experience and maturity. Truly knowing your character, values, skills, knowledge, needs, personality type and interests will enable you to select a job and career that make a good fit. It's also the basis for initial career exploration.
- **Research.** Tracking down information about prospective jobs using all available means—the Internet, books, other people—is part of job hunting and career exploration.

- **Verbal Communication.** Interviewing for a job—by phone or in person—demands clear communication skills. So does career exploration, which requires children to articulate goals, ask for information, and even interview adults.

- **Writing.** Job hunting is all about writing—letters, emails, résumés, applications, thank you notes and more. So is career exploration. Children who write about their dreams and goals are more likely to find careers that will help achieve them.

- **Networking.** Connecting with others—forming friendships—is one of the most effective ways to job hunt. It's also helpful when exploring careers.

Encourage your child to read the *Texas Job Hunter's Guide*, published by TWC, for a complete description of how to find and obtain a job in today's competitive labor market. The *Texas Job Hunter's Guide Express* is available in Spanish.





## Texas Career Check

The information you and your children need to explore careers is a click away. The Texas Workforce Commission has prepared *Texas Career Check* ([TexasCareerCheck.com](http://TexasCareerCheck.com)), a website packed with information about career paths, educational opportunities, and today's Texas Labor Market.

The main Career Check website features "Explore Careers" and "Explore Education" drop-down menus. The site also includes information about high school endorsements and what careers connect to them. An interest profiler (career assessment) will help students identify what occupations align with their interests.

Here is just a sampling of information you can find on *Texas Career Check*:

- The number of job openings projected in each occupation

- How the average wage for occupations vary by region of the state
- A list of the fastest-growing occupations both statewide and by region
- Descriptions of military occupational specialties
- A comparison tool allowing students to look side-by-side at data for various occupations
- Cost and program of study information for schools and colleges
- A comparison tool allowing students to look side-by-side at education outcomes data

Want to learn how to start a great Texas career? You can find all the above and more at *Texas Career Check* ([TexasCareerCheck.com](http://TexasCareerCheck.com)).

The screenshot shows the Texas Career Check website. At the top left is the Texas state logo with the text "TEXAS Career Check". To the right is a search bar labeled "Search Texas Career". Below the header is a navigation menu with three items: "HOME", "EXPLORE CAREERS", and "EXPLORE EDUCATION". The main content area features a large image of a young boy sitting in a library. To the right of the image is a "What's New?" section listing "High School Graduation Plan" and "Pop a Job!". Below this is a logo for the Texas Workforce Commission and the LMCI (Labor Market and Career Information) logo.



# Chapter Three: Occupation Exploration



Career exploration begins with your children's awareness of different occupations and ends with selecting one or more occupations that your children will want to pursue after (and perhaps during) high school.

There are two ways to explore careers. One is to investigate and the other is to experience. Your children should do both.

If talking with your children about the future and dealing with all the previously discussed issues seems challenging, take it in small bits. You need not go through the whole career exploration process in one sit-down. You and your children may review and revise interests, work activities, career

and education alternatives again and again until all the pieces fit in a way that makes sense to both of you.

It is important, however, not to let your children have only general career goals, once this process is complete. When they say "I want to be a business person!," ask for clarification. Do they want to be an entrepreneur or work for a corporation? If so, in what capacity? What does "business" mean? Your children should understand the significant differences in educational requirements and earnings among occupations within a given field. The goal is to identify specific occupations that are a good fit for your children and merit further exploration.

## *Keep It Light*

Career development is a life-long process and few things are set in stone. As parents, we know that plans change—whether we want them to or not. Children don't always understand this.

Explain that your children's interests, likes and dislikes will expand and change as they read about occupations, take new classes in school and gain real-life experience through volunteer work, part-time jobs, extracurricular activities at school and so on.

Help your children incorporate those

experiences and perceptions of career exploration. Share your own experiences of work interests, work values and your career path—both tips to follow and mistakes to avoid!

If necessary, remind yourself that change happens. If your child explores an occupation that you dislike or expresses interest in vastly different areas, let it go for now. Your child may want to be a heart surgeon and a Broadway star. But eventually this "plan" will change. Trust your child. You may remember having a similar experience yourself!

## *Career Investigation*

Serious career investigation means learning as much as possible about a particular occupation—from duties and salary to working conditions and educational requirements.

You might start with a job that your children have talked about already. Ask questions such as:

- Do you know how much money people who work in this field make?
- Do you enjoy doing the specific tasks that occupation requires?

- Do you know the amount and type of training required for this job? Where would you get that training?

Your children's responses will tell you a lot. If they have no answers, don't worry. You're just starting at square one, and you can help your children find additional information over time.

Encourage your children to collect information, even if it is just browsing the Internet. The goal is to teach your children how to investigate careers and assess the results.

## *What to Learn about an Occupation*

Plenty of resources are available for people who want to learn about specific occupations. Some of the best are *Texas Career Check* ([TexasCareerCheck.com](http://TexasCareerCheck.com)), the Occupational Outlook Handbook (available at any library or online at [bls.gov/ooh](http://bls.gov/ooh)), the Kids Page at

the Bureau of Labor Statistics website ([bls.gov/k12](http://bls.gov/k12)) and real people in that profession. Also check LMCI's website at [TexasWorkforce.org/labormarket](http://TexasWorkforce.org/labormarket). Or call the LMCI Career Hotline at 1-800-822-PLAN to get information on three careers or schools of interest.



So what do you need to know? Here are the basics:

- duties (skills, knowledge and abilities required)
- salary (new, vs. experienced)
- working conditions (environment, hours)
- education, training and licensure required
- advancement opportunities
- projected openings (long-term)

You and/or your children can explore careers in various ways. Some examples include:

**Interview** someone who works in the field of interest. Ask about duties, pros and cons of the job, educational requirements, the “fun” parts, the tedious tasks and more. This is often referred to as “informational

interviewing.” The interview can offer great information and helps children develop a skill—interviewing—they may use often in the future.

**Job shadow** someone who works in a field of interest, which provides a taste of what a job actually entails. They spend several hours or a day following around someone in an occupation that interests them. If your child’s school has no job shadowing program, set up some shadowing yourself.

**Compare** two or more occupations in the same field to identify the differences in responsibilities, education and income. Examples include a nursing assistant, licensed vocational nurse and registered nurse; a drafter and engineer; or a physician’s assistant and a physician.

Attend the school’s **Career Day** or **Career Fair** and summarize the pros



and cons of three careers of interest.

Review the results with your children. Make sure they understand the difference between anecdotal

information and market data. One person's experience with a job may not reflect the typical experience for most people.

## *Work Experience*

One of the best ways to teach your children about the world of work and to help them explore careers is to put them to work. Your children will gain first-hand experience in the tasks and duties of an occupation. They will also appreciate the dignity in work.

Work experience can begin at an early age. And it doesn't have to be paid work. Here are some suggestions to get your children started:

**Assign age-appropriate chores.** Make sure that the tasks are done to the best of your children's ability.

**Encourage your children to volunteer** whenever possible.

**Encourage your children to play sports or participate in the arts,** such as dancing or music. They will learn discipline, the rewards of effort, teamwork and perseverance—qualities that will help in the workplace.

**Have your children take a part-time or summer job.** It's best if the work somehow relates to their field of interest. Any job, however, will help foster your children's work ethic. But remember, no job should take precedence over your children's academic performance.

**Make sure your children know that entry-level positions can provide the crucial first step in their professional lives.** If they can demonstrate trustworthiness on the job with fewer responsibilities, they are more likely to be given additional ones. Plus, taking an entry-level job helps students develop good work habits and contacts that can pay dividends throughout a career. This, plus continuing education and training beyond high school, are fundamental building blocks for future success.

Combined with occupational investigation, work experience can ensure that your children understand the world of work and form some clear ideas of the work that might suit their tastes.

Once your children narrow their choice of careers down to just a few, it's time to start investigating the education and training needed to make those careers into reality. That crucial work/education connection is the topic of the next chapter.

## Cultivate Soft Skills



There's a saying in the professional world: hard skills get you hired; soft skills get you fired. More precisely, **lack** of soft skills can get you fired. An auto mechanic must know how to fix cars to be qualified for that job, but to keep that job the mechanic must also: communicate and get along with co-workers, be reliable, take responsibility for fixing the car right, follow appropriate safety guidelines, and more. These other skills are often referred to as "soft skills," and they are just as important to employers—and to career advancement—as the technical expertise required to do the job.

The good news is these "soft skills" can be taught and practiced from an early age, at school or extra-curricular and civic activities as well as in a job setting. Here are some practices that children can learn at an early age that will serve them well later in life:

- **Pride in Work.** Do your best at whatever you do, whether it's cleaning the toilet or negotiating a deal. See your work as a reflection of yourself.
- **Good Attendance.** Show up to work. On time. If for some very good

reason you can't, make sure that your work is covered and your boss knows.

- **Personal Integrity.** Be honest. Don't lie, cheat, steal or cover up for those who do. Follow company policies and procedures to the letter.
- **Positive Attitude.** Be upbeat and open to change. Be pleasant and engaging with your coworkers. See work as an opportunity to give, not get. You may be surprised at what you do get in return.
- **Maximum Effort.** Work hard, with focus and intensity. Leave your personal life at home and avoid excessive breaks. Volunteer for more!

These qualities won't guarantee work success but they'll put you on the right track. Encourage your child to read *Succeed at Work*, published by LMCI, for a complete description of how to be an excellent employee, starting from the first day on the job to the last. There is also a Spanish translation available called *Succeed at Work Express*.



## *Every Job Matters*

Seth and Joel, two high school sophomores, had been friends since kindergarten but their personalities were like night and day.

The differences became clear when they took summer jobs at a local fast food chain. Seth did not take his work seriously. He was frequently late and even failed to call in once when he was going to be absent. When he did show up, his work was sloppy. He put in only the minimum effort. "It's just fast food," he'd say. "No one cares about it."

After only a month on the job, Seth was fired. "His coworkers were complaining and I even heard from a couple of customers," the manager explained. "Actually, I should have fired him a long time ago but he's a bright kid and I

thought I'd give him a chance. What a waste of time."

Joel, on the other hand, was always on time, hardworking and courteous. He volunteered for extra duties. He soon moved from cooking to behind the counter. "I moved him into a cashier position because he's the kind of employee that makes our place look good," the manager noted.

At summer's end the manager wrote a great recommendation letter for Joel and asked him to come back the following year. When asked why he was such a good worker, Joel replied simply, "My dad always taught me that you can tell a person's character by their work. And every job matters."



# Texas Reality Check

The screenshot shows the Texas Reality Check website. At the top left is the logo with a star and the text 'TEXAS Reality Check'. At the top right are links for 'FAQ' and 'Feedback'. The main heading is 'Will you be able to afford the lifestyle you want?' followed by a subtext: 'Texas Reality Check will show you how much your living expenses will cost, and the amount of money you will need to earn to pay for them.' To the right is an image of a hand putting a coin into a piggy bank. Below this is a dark banner with the text 'It's time for a Reality Check.' The main content area features a photo of a smiling couple on the left and the heading 'Lifestyle Calculator' on the right. Below the heading is a subtext: 'Walk through expenses you'll incur each month' with a checkmark icon.

Some children may not know what they want to do for a living but are very clear about what they want to do on their days off! What they may not realize is how much money that costs or what kinds of jobs pay the salaries that provide that lifestyle. Fortunately the Texas Workforce Commission has produced a website called Texas Reality Check that can help your children articulate the lifestyle they want and then provide a reality check about costs: [TexasRealityCheck.com](https://www.texasrealitycheck.com).

With Texas Reality Check, your children can understand the relationship between lifestyle, occupational choice and educational pursuits. Once your children's projected expenses—and the necessary income level—are clear, look at the wages for several occupations of interest and estimate the income your children would likely earn with each. Do their lifestyle ambitions and potential earnings match? Maybe, maybe not.

Then ask your children to investigate jobs that pay the kind of wages they want—and the education those jobs require. This may be where students begin to see the importance of a post-secondary education relative to earnings.

Don't be surprised if your children want to redo the cost of living exercise with a different standard of living. Or maybe look at other occupations with higher earnings. Either way, you might not need to say a word to your children about the value of education. Nothing speaks louder than the numbers!

Once your children have a sense of their interests and values, they can use that information to assess the different types of occupations that they explore.

# Chapter Four: Today's Labor Market



Just as it is important to help your children understand what they enjoy doing, it's equally important to help them understand today's labor market. Many jobs today didn't exist 20 years ago. Technology has changed everything – including how employers and job seekers behave. Your children must understand a few basics about today's job market in order to decipher the choices they need to make.

## **The Disconnect Between “Glamour” Jobs and In-Demand Jobs**

One critical fact is sometimes the jobs children hear about in their childhood, such as on primetime television, aren't the ones most in demand from employers. The chart on the following page illustrates the disconnect:

<b>Top 15 Occupations by Student Interest</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Top 15 Occupations by Labor Market Demand</b>
Registered Nurses	1	Registered Nurses
Multi-Media/Video Game Designers	2	General & Operations Managers
Sports Athletes	3	Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers
Forensic Science Techs	4	Elementary School Teachers
Architects	5	Accountants & Auditors
Chief Executive Officers / Entrepreneurs	6	Secondary School Teachers
Lawyers	7	Nursing Assistants
Teachers (High School)	8	Licensed Practical / Vocational Nurses
Veterinarians	9	Middle School Teachers
Physicians (Family, General Practitioner)	10	Medical Assistants
Physical Therapists	11	Substitute Teachers
Accountants, Auditors	12	Computer Systems Analysts
Dental Hygienists	13	Auto Service Mechanics / Technicians
Special Education Teachers	14	Software Developers
Web Developers	15	Lawyers
The top 15 occupations requested by students calling the LMCI Career Information Hotline (1-800-822-PLAN). Based on 10,316 student inquiries in 2016.		The top occupations expected to have the most annual average job openings (that require at least an Associate's degree or a post-secondary non-degree award). Source: TWC/LMCI projections 2014-24

### **The Labor Market Is Not the Same Now as in Generations Past.**

Some of today's hottest jobs didn't exist 20 years ago, and the economy has also changed since then. The number of job openings and the background and experience employers expect in a given field changes over time as well.

So it's important not to get preoccupied with other individuals' experiences in a given occupation. A friend's or loved one's salary or other experience in a particular occupation may not be representative of other people's, and the profession may be different for today's incoming workers.

Instead, try some of the tools we discuss in this publication that provide



sound labor market information based on today's economy and obtain current national and Texas wage averages and job forecasts. Remember the goal here is for your children to find the best career for them, which may or may not be the same as what worked for a neighbor or relative (even you!) or what seemed "prestigious" in the past.

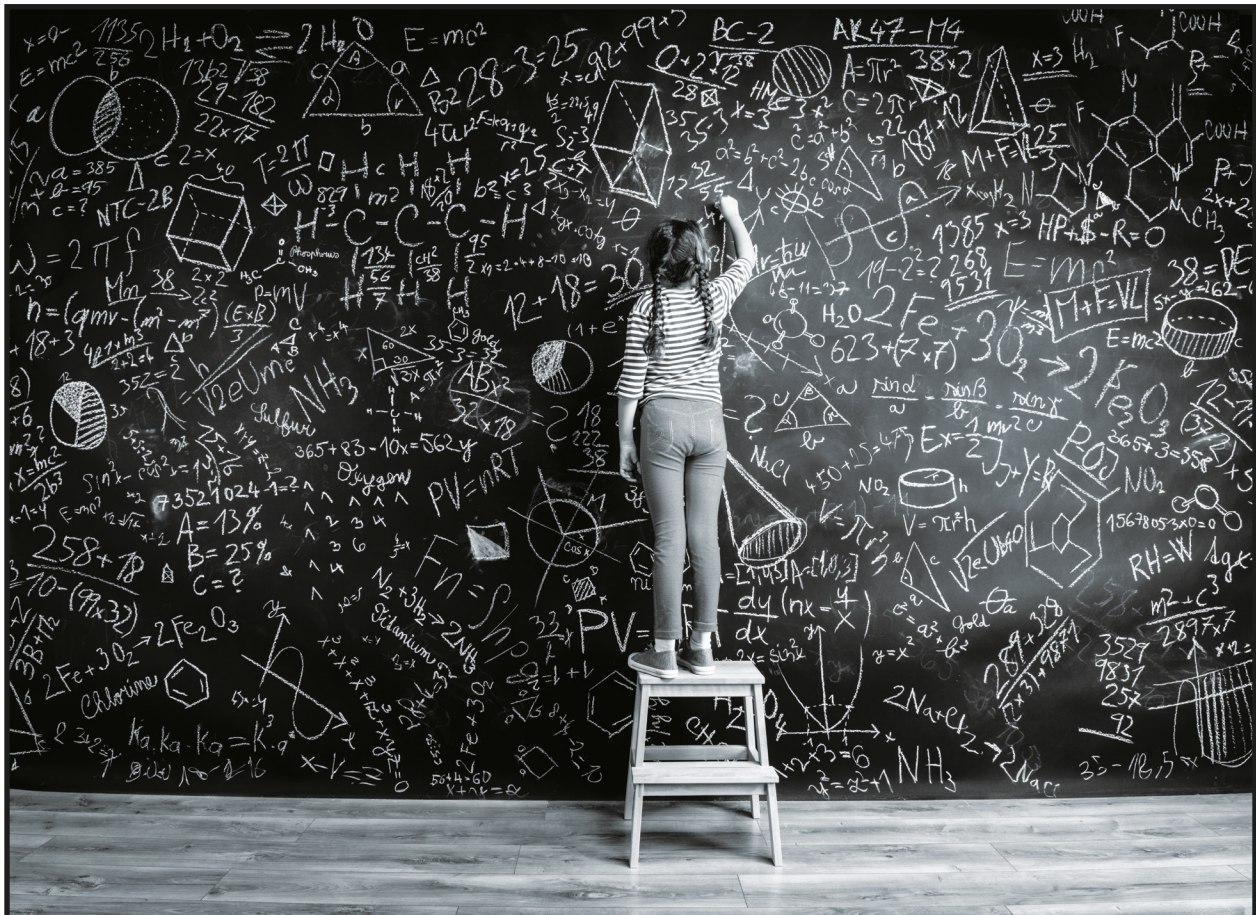
None of this is to say that people's experiences don't matter. They do. It is simply a good idea to include the big picture when your children are deciding what career paths to pursue. Labor market information provided by TWC and others provide that big picture.

## Math = Money

Many of the highest-paying jobs are in fields that involve mathematics. STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) careers are growing and generally pay well. The health sciences in particular are expanding rapidly. A strong mathematics background in school can pay serious dividends later in life.

## The Number of Jobs a Worker Holds in His or Her Career is Increasing.

Today people regularly change jobs and employers. The federal Bureau of Labor





Statistics measures the length of time workers generally stay with the same job—their “job tenure.” In 2016 the median number of years that workers had been with their current employer was 4.2, according to research from the U.S. Department of Labor. If you work 40 years, you might switch jobs more than eight times.

Similarly, traditional pensions are becoming less common in the private sector (though many public sector jobs still offer them). Defined contribution plans such as 401(K) investment plans are more common, making individual workers responsible for saving for retirement and managing funds.

Bottom line: Your children will have to be responsible for their own career development and actively learn how to job hunt successfully.

## **Education Pays, but Some Degrees and Certificates Pay Better than Others.**

The cost of higher education is increasing dramatically. At the same time, the labor market data clearly shows people with college degrees and other postsecondary credentials, on average, make more money and are more likely to be employed. A college education is often a good investment

in today’s economy, provided it is the result of good career planning. And there are also a lot of good, well-paying jobs that require some technical training after high school.

Different degrees or certificates will inevitably result in differing employability and income levels for your children. What students major in and their career-related activities while in post-secondary education can make a big difference in their long-term professional success.

Let’s be clear: student interest matters, and students should find and major in a field that interests them. But they also need to know that the labor market values some courses of study more than others, so they can make an informed decision.

The good news is we are collecting more and more data on returns to education. Later in this publication, we’ll discuss where you can go to learn about labor market outcomes by degrees, major, and institution. Bottom line: a college education or other post-secondary credential matters in today’s economy more than it ever has, but it’s not sufficient. Having a career plan before entering higher education will help students make choices that lead to a career path better-suited to them.

The table below shows the average pay for occupations based on the education levels they typically require. Education beyond high school often pays dividends that last a lifetime.

<b>Typical Education Needed for Entry into Occupation</b>	<b>Employment Distribution 2014</b>	<b>Projected Employment Distribution 2024</b>	<b>*2015 Salary</b>
Doctoral or professional degree	2.1 %	2.1 %	\$123,601.34
Master's degree	1.4 %	1.5 %	\$71,844.58
Bachelor's degree	19.1 %	19.3 %	\$80,840.50
Associate's degree	2.4 %	2.4 %	\$54,872.04
Postsecondary non-degree award	6.0 %	6.1 %	\$38,849.06
Some college, no degree	2.3 %	2.2 %	\$36,364.84
High school diploma or equivalent	38.5 %	37.6 %	\$42,238.76
No formal educational credential	28.3 %	28.8 %	\$23,620.84

\* In the above chart, the 2015 Salary is weighted by how many people were employed in those occupations in 2014. Occupations that employed more people are weighted to count more than jobs which employed fewer people.

### **Gaining Experience and Contacts is Part of Career Development.**

Succeeding in school and developing skills employers want is important. So too is getting relevant work experience, meeting people in a profession, and understanding what career pathways exist in today's economy. As students identify careers that interest them, they should also consider how to gain experience and meet professionals in those fields. There are many ways to accomplish this, including internships, apprenticeships, part-time employment,

school activities (such as honor societies or clubs for persons with a certain major), job shadowing and informational interviewing. Much of this happens outside the classroom. How to get work experience and network is an important part of any career plan.

### **Personal Branding Matters.**

Students should understand that a key part of navigating the career market is developing a personal brand. A good question for any student: What does your brand involve? Hopefully, words like conscientious, diligent, punctual, and hard-working are part of that

brand (we call those “soft-skills”). But it would also include “hard-skills” like Masters’ Degree in Civil Engineering, ASE (Automotive Service Excellence) Certified auto-mechanic, 10 years of successful accounting experience, and much more. When employers hire someone, they’re purchasing a brand.

As a student, you can think of this process of branding as your very own “Me, Inc.” Think of your career path like a CEO running your own company. You are its CEO, accountant, public relations person and secretary. Your product is you: your skills, knowledge and ability. Your customers are your employers and coworkers and everyone else. Self-employed people are always trying to please customers more and expand their services. That’s how you have to think about your own career.

If you think of yourself as Me, Inc., you will have a positive attitude toward this ever-changing world of work. You will take charge of your own career and be ready for anything that may happen, whether you’re laid off, employed or changing fields. View each job as an opportunity to improve and expand your skills, advance your career and make new contacts who can help with your next job search—whether it happens in two years or ten.

Remember, everything you do at work affects your brand – from how you perform your duties to how you treat

your coworkers. And the impression you make impacts whether people want to buy that brand later on. This can be positive (being the critical link to meeting business goals, being diligent and dependable, being polite to coworkers) or can be negative (getting arrested, stealing, doing sloppy work, etc.). Conduct yourself at work in a way that reinforces your brand, and it can pay unexpected dividends down the road.

## **Social media is Part of Developing that Brand.**

Young people love technology. And for purposes of the labor market, that’s a good thing. More and more employers are using social media sites such as LinkedIn to post job vacancies and look for qualified candidates. Developing a social media presence can be important in some fields, especially technology. But students must remember: it’s a public forum that many employers check when vetting candidates. Never post content such as negative comments about an employer, as future employers might be reading.

Students prepared to enter the workforce know – in general – what field or job types they are interested in and have started to develop a personal brand. A key part of that personal brand involves the educational credentials your children earn.

# Chapter Five:

## Work/Education Connection

Knowing what you want to do for a living influences what education or training you get, just as knowing what type of education you want determines the occupations you can pursue.

The more you can help your children to see the connections, the more informed life choices they are likely to make as

a result. By the end of your children's senior year, they need to decide what to do after high school—one of life's biggest choices.

The skills and knowledge you acquire in school will help you in your working life, either directly or indirectly.

### *Education Level/Earnings*

Today, the more you learn, the more you earn. Although there are some exceptions to this rule (Bill Gates for example), it holds true for most people.

Jobs requiring a bachelor's degree or higher pay on average \$80,841 a year—considerably higher than those with just a high school diploma. People without that degree aren't eligible to move into these positions. There are also many good jobs that don't require a college degree, but even these often require

some sort of post-secondary credential (we detail some of these later in this publication).

Because of the powerful connection between earnings and education, it's important for students to take courses in high school that set them up for successful post-secondary education as well as expose them to subjects and career fields they might not have considered previously. High school is a great opportunity to experiment!

### *High School Graduation Plans*

As your school counselors have probably emphasized, high school course selection plays a major role—not only in whether one graduates from high school but also on post-secondary options after high school. So it's important for parents to help their child choose courses that both allow for a range of post-secondary options and provide more exposure to career plans of interest.

At the time of publication, graduation from high school in Texas requires all students to complete the foundation

program and encourages students to complete an endorsement on top of that.

In selecting an endorsement, students should think about how that endorsement would prepare them for life after high school. TWC has prepared some endorsement bulletins that describe some of the career opportunities that each of the endorsements prepare you for. You can find them in several places on our website, starting at the Your Bright Future portal:



[lmci.state.tx.us/explore/TSC/ybf.asp](http://lmci.state.tx.us/explore/TSC/ybf.asp). Information about endorsements is also available on Texas Career Check. Consult your child's high school counselors on what endorsements are available in your district.

Both vocational and many post-secondary institutions like to see three to four years of mathematics, including Algebra II. A lot of research shows successful completion of Algebra II is highly correlated with achieving a college degree or other post-secondary credential. It is also the gateway to higher math courses, which are often required for some of the best-paying future careers. Remember, a strong math and science background can pay dividends later in life.

Many high schools now offer some

outstanding Career and Technology Education (CTE) programs that can often lead to fulfilling careers. These programs can provide a low-risk way for students to learn more about—or even try out—career fields of interest. Some high schools even offer programs that lead to an industry-recognized credential or license, that can qualify the student into a career of choice.

Dual credit is also expanding rapidly, where high school students can take college courses and get credit both in high school and college. This can allow students to get used to college level work and save some money on higher education expenses. Check with your children's high school counselor for more detail on CTE and dual credit programs offered at their school.

## *Planning Education After High School*

Nowadays, people need to have more than a high school diploma to attain a middle-class standard of living or higher. At the same time, you don't have to get a Bachelor's Degree or beyond from a four-year university to do so, provided you gain skills and qualifications for which employers are willing to pay well. Before your child makes a decision, gather some information, pay attention to the trends, weigh the alternatives and make a selection that will best fit your children's career goals.

### **Educational Alternatives**

Many types of institutions offer post-secondary education, but which is the right fit for your children?

First, you and your children need to consider whether more formal education is the right course to take immediately after high school. Listed below are the

alternatives available to your child.

- **Four-Year Colleges and Universities.** Four-year colleges and universities offer broad based four-year degrees in a multitude of disciplines. Students gain exposure to many varied courses, develop research and gain knowledge in specific disciplines.
- **Two-Year Colleges.** Public community and technical colleges (CTC) offer two-year degrees and technical program certificates. They prepare your child to transfer to a four-year college or directly enter the job market. Many two-year colleges charge less than \$2,500 a year for a full-time program. Your child can obtain an Associate's degree or a special career certificate in an area such as graphics, health or electronic technology. Your child can obtain more information from

any of the sources cited above. A student who starts at a community college and later transfers to a four-year institution gets the same degree as someone who started at the four-year institution but often at a lower cost. Many new employers in an area work with the local community colleges to create training programs that prepare workers with the skills required for the jobs they offer.

- **Career Colleges.** Private career colleges offer specialized education that may lead directly to employment. It's important to find out as much as you can



about the institution and its track record on employment outcomes before enrolling. Programs vary from several months to two years or more. They range from the very inexpensive for short-term programs to very costly for multi-year residential schools. In Texas, TWC regulates Career Colleges and Schools. We've prepared an information page for career college students at [twc.state.tx.us/jobseekers/career-schools-colleges-students](http://twc.state.tx.us/jobseekers/career-schools-colleges-students). TWC requires Career Schools to report the completion and employment rates for their graduates, including salary, which should be consulted before enrolling and may be accessed from the webpage above.

- **The U.S. Armed Forces.**

Enlistment in the U.S. Armed Forces—Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines or Coast Guard—requires a multi-year service commitment. It pays a certain amount per month (depending on many factors) and includes career training and experience, paid room and board and an opportunity to travel. It also makes your child eligible for the G.I. Bill, which helps pay for further education. Be sure your child carefully considers the occupational specialty they choose.

Army - [goarmy.com](http://goarmy.com)

Air Force - [airforce.com](http://airforce.com)

Marines - [marines.com](http://marines.com)

Navy - [navy.com](http://navy.com)

Coast Guard - [gocoastguard.com](http://gocoastguard.com)

Air National Guard - [goang.com](http://goang.com)

Army National Guard - [nationalguard.com](http://nationalguard.com)

- **Apprenticeships.** Students can get hired as apprentices to learn a craft or trade from a craftsman or experienced supervisor. As apprentices, students receive real-world training and experience while accessing difficult-to-break-into trades, such as plumbing or electrical work. Earnings typically increase each year until the apprentice completes the program. There may be union dues to pay and equipment to buy. Apprenticeship programs are approved for over 700 occupations in Texas. See also TWC's book Licensed Occupations and Apprenticeship Program Contacts in Texas for additional detail. For more information on apprenticeship in Texas, visit TWC's apprenticeship website at [texasworkforce.org/svcs/apprentice.html](http://texasworkforce.org/svcs/apprentice.html) or email [apprenticeship@twc.state.tx.us](mailto:apprenticeship@twc.state.tx.us).

## Educational Trends

Just as you and your children need to understand trends in the labor market, so too should you review trends in education. Here are a few:

- **A Bachelor's degree helps but doesn't guarantee success.** Two-year Associate degrees from community and technical colleges may lead to greater employability upon graduation, depending on the field of study. What you choose to study is increasingly important.
- **Education is increasingly expensive.** The costs of higher

education include tuition, fees, room and board. All have gone up at a much higher rate than inflation. As a result, students and their parents usually go into debt to pay for the degree. That's why students should be smart about where they invest their time and money. Why spend \$30,000 to pay for a degree that will earn you only \$20,000 a year? The Texas Consumer Resource for Education and Workforce Statistics (Texas CREWS), a joint project of TWC and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), publishes data by institution and major on earnings outcomes in higher education.

- **The major field of study matters.** Quite simply, choosing a major that relates directly to specific "in demand" occupations can make it easier to find work. Research suggests that those who work in fields for which they trained earn more than those who work in unrelated fields. Occupations with easily identifiable links between college major and occupations, e.g., Physical Therapy, tend to pay well soon after graduation.

It may be helpful for students to make two lists: one of subject matters that interest them, and another listing the number of job openings that require skills learned in those areas of study. Which two or three of those subject matters has the highest number of related job openings? One of those just might be a good major.

## *Financing Your Education – Start Early*

The cost of higher education is rising. Yet labor market data clearly shows obtaining a degree can lead to higher-

paying jobs. Careful planning for higher education financing has always been a good idea, but it is now critical for Texas

families to avoid unnecessary debt. The sooner you start saving the better and the less debt your children will graduate with.

## Savings Plans

Fortunately, the State of Texas offers several tax-advantaged savings programs allowing parents to put money away for college and helping effectively manage higher education's rising costs. This is intended as a general list of resources, not financial or tax advice or an endorsement of any specific investment vehicle.

Most of the state's tax-advantaged college savings programs are offered by the Comptroller of Public Accounts: [comptroller.texas.gov/programs/education/](http://comptroller.texas.gov/programs/education/).

- **College investment plans.** The Comptroller offers the Texas College Savings Plan and the LoneStar 529 plan. These plans allow savers to put money away, without paying taxes on the growth, and withdraw it tax-free for qualified education expenses. Using tax-advantaged savings accounts makes your hard-earned money go further toward paying college expenses. Some other states also offer 529 plans that also accept contributions from out-of-state residents and have the same federal tax advantages. Consult a financial or tax adviser for more details.
- **Pre-Paid College Tuition plan (the Texas Tuition Promise Fund).** This tax-advantaged savings program allows Texans to pre-pay tuition at state universities. While the savings plan only covers tuition and fees, and not living expenses,

it has one key advantage: the tuition is pre-paid at today's prices, reducing the impact of future tuition increases.

Assets in your state college savings accounts are not considered in determining eligibility for Texas state-funded financial aid.

## Understanding Financial Aid

Don't assume you make too much money to qualify for financial aid. The increasing attention paid to student debt means even upper-middle-class families often qualify. Some financial aid is not need-based, but can be based on scholastic merit or other criteria.

So apply. You might be surprised what happens. A good place to start is the THECB website [collegeforalltexas.com](http://collegeforalltexas.com). The most important thing you can do is fill out the FAFSA—the Free Application for Federal Student Aid—during your child's senior year. It's the gateway to most financial aid programs. Go to [FAFSA.gov](http://FAFSA.gov). (Some universities also require the PROFILE financial aid form available from the College Board.)

Financial aid money comes from federal and state governments, banks, the schools themselves and private donors. Explore the many sources of funding to help you send your child to college. It's an investment in your child's future! Your child must apply for financial aid to obtain it; it's not part of the school admission process. The amount and kind of aid received can depend on a number of factors, including financial need, academic record, the college or university one attends, or student characteristics.



## Types of Financial Aid

Hundreds of billions of dollars of financial aid, which comes in several forms, are awarded every year in the United States. Most students who receive aid get a combination of them, put together in a “financial aid package” by the financial aid office at the school or college they have chosen.

- **Grant:** a sum of money that does not require repayment (e.g., Pell Grant).
- **Loan:** a relatively low interest loan that does not accrue interest or require payment until after the student leaves school (e.g., federal student loans).
- **Work study:** payment for working—usually on campus, sometimes in a position related to career goals or fields of study (e.g., working in a computer lab).
- **Scholarships:** money that does not need to be repaid given on certain conditions, such as maintaining a certain grade point average or participating in team sports or music.
- **Aid for military personnel:** Financial aid opportunities that come with joining the military (e.g., Veterans’ Educational Assistance Program).

## Financial Aid Tips and Resources

Researching and applying for financial aid can seem daunting but it’s definitely worth the effort. Here are some tips

to guide your progress. For more tips, visit the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators at [nasfaa.org/students\\_parents\\_counselors](http://nasfaa.org/students_parents_counselors).

- Pay attention to admission and financial aid deadlines at each school to which your child applies.
- Keep copies of all financial aid documents and tax records.
- Begin searching for private scholarships and grants approximately two years prior to your child’s intended start date to higher education programs.
- Be wary of scholarship scams or services that promise big money. Don’t pay anyone who claims to be holding a scholarship or grant for your child. Free money shouldn’t cost a thing. For more information on scholarship scams, visit the Federal Trade Commission website: [consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0082-scholarship-and-financial-aid-scams](http://consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0082-scholarship-and-financial-aid-scams).
- The College Board ([collegeboard.com](http://collegeboard.com)) offers tremendous financial aid advice, which can currently be accessed at the “Big Future” subpage [bigfuture.collegeboard.com](http://bigfuture.collegeboard.com).

## Texas CREWS

Most students go to college because they want to improve their career. But is the course of study they have chosen likely to result in a better salary and plentiful job opportunities?


In the past, students and parents had to make educated guesses to answer that question. But now, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) has teamed up with the Texas Workforce Commission to answer it with real numbers that reflect what actually happened after students graduated. We call that effort the Texas Consumer Resource for Education and Workforce Statistics or *Texas CREWS* ([TxCREWS.org](http://TxCREWS.org)).

Almost every Texas employer has to report wages to TWC for unemployment tax purposes, and THECB has data on graduates of Texas public colleges and universities and what they studied. We've combined the two datasets to

provide better information to education consumers so they can make informed decisions. And remember—*Texas CREWS* isn't limited to bachelor's degrees from four-year universities. We have data on graduate programs, two-year colleges, and vocational certificate programs.


In *Texas CREWS*, you can search by class year, institution, or major. For example, someone could find out what the average wage for psychology majors who got their degrees in 2008 and compare that with what civil engineering majors made. You could also compare institutions and majors within institutions. You could find the average wage for the Class of 2011 for each major at a given institution, to give another example.

*Texas CREWS* can help you get the most career bang for your higher education dollar.



Texas Consumer Resource  
for Education and  
Workforce Statistics

The Texas Consumer Resource for Education and Workforce Statistics (Texas CREWS) is an interactive dashboard tool providing comparative information about Texas public 2-year and 4-year postsecondary institutions. By evaluating programs and institutions on the basis of resultant wages and student loan levels, Texas CREWS will allow parents and students to make informed decisions about college and get the best return on their educational investment.





## *TexasOnCourse.org*

Texas OnCourse is an online resource designed to empower pre-K through grade 12 students, parents, teachers, and counselors to make education decisions.

In today's world, professional success almost always means earning some kind of credential beyond a high school diploma, such as a certificate, an associate's degree, bachelor's degree, maybe even a master's or a doctorate.

Depending on your child's career of choice, you may need several years of education or training after high school. Training may be on the job, in the classroom or some combination.

Costs can vary widely, as can your pay options, so it is important to make informed decisions.

What's right for your child? Texas OnCourse is here to help you figure it out at no cost to you, offering educational tools, games and activities to plan for life in and after high school. These resources enable students to explore endorsements, careers, and the knowledge, skills and abilities they need to succeed.

Go to [texasoncourse.org](http://texasoncourse.org) today and click on "Students & Families" to start exploring the future with your kids today!

## A Final Note

We hope this book has helped guide you and your children through the exciting and necessary career exploration process in a positive, creative way. We hope it has helped you and your children understand yourselves, each other and the worlds of work and education a little better. Finally, we hope it's helped your children make decisions that will lead them toward careers that will enable them to be self-sufficient, to continue to learn and grow and to take charge of their futures.





# Appendix A: Timetables

If you're unsure when to start talking about career exploration with your children, follow the suggested timetables below. Key events or

milestones are bolded—they require your special attention. Also, "post-secondary" refers to anything after high school.

## *Elementary School (Grades K-5)*

### **The Goal is to Increase Self-Confidence and Career Awareness.**

- Discuss the many different occupations that exist. Use concrete examples and explain what tasks each job entails.
- Reinforce your children's positive attributes.
- Do not limit possibilities in occupations.
- Show respect for everyone, regardless of occupation, so that your children understand that all occupations and people have dignity

and value.

- Talk about the work people do when out and about in the community. Discuss the differences between job tasks.
- Play career games. Watch career videos. Read books and stories about people at work.
- Let your children know that things they enjoy doing can be translated into occupations with the same type of tasks.
- Assign chores to teach your children responsibility.
- Give an allowance to teach your child about money management.



- Check out the Kids' page on the Bureau of Labor Statistics website at [bls.gov/k12/index.htm](http://bls.gov/k12/index.htm) or other sources of online career information.
- Use the Careers Are Everywhere Activity Workbook from TWC to spark interest in career exploration

and increase exposure to different types of jobs.

- Consult a financial planner to discuss saving for your child's postsecondary education. Ask about tax-advantaged savings accounts and pre-paid tuition programs.

## *Middle School (Grades 6-8)*

### **The Goal is to Investigate Careers and their Connection to Education, and Plan High School Course Selections Accordingly.**

- Continue to do everything you did in elementary school but use the LMCI publication *Career Investigation* to guide exploration.
- Help your child develop the basic skills for academic and workplace success, including good attendance, attentiveness and pride in work.
- Discuss the duties and tasks, required skills and educational requirements of different occupations.
- Encourage your child to take interest assessments and review the

results together.

- Remain aware of how your child is doing in school and scores on basic skills tests. What subjects are going well? Where are academic problems, if any? With the school counselor, establish instructional strategies to remedy areas of weakness.
- Formulate a high school graduation plan (by eighth grade) that will challenge your child and keep open future career possibilities. That means lots of math and science! Select an endorsement. Consult LMCI's Foundation High School Program Endorsement Bulletins for more details on the connection between high school graduation and careers.



## *Freshman Year*

### **The Goal is to Begin the Self-Assessment Process.**

- Have your children review post-secondary educational opportunities such as four-year institutions, apprenticeships, two-year colleges, technical and vocational schools and the military.
- Encourage your children to stick with a rigorous high school curriculum to prepare for a broad range of occupational careers.
- Arrange for your children to take career interest inventories to evaluate occupational and personal interests.
- Encourage your children to obtain current information about different occupations, including salary ranges, duties, tasks and related jobs.
- Make sure your children's high school program meets admission requirements of their top three post-secondary choices. If it does not, work with the counselor and principal to resolve the discrepancies.
- Discuss the impact of grades in obtaining different sources of financial aid for post-secondary studies.
- Help your children maintain a collection or "portfolio" of growing personal data, including grades, work experiences and work history, and other results from occupational and educational investigation. List extracurricular activities, volunteer activities, awards and honors. Start a résumé!
- Continue to monitor financial plans to facilitate your children's postsecondary education.





## Sophomore Year

### **The Goal is to Seriously Investigate Post-Secondary Options.**

- Review career exploration tips in LMCI's *Career Success* publication.
- Arrange for your children to take the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT), an exam that prepares students for the SAT, which—along with the ACT—many colleges require as part of the entrance qualifications. Review results with the school counselor and establish instructional strategies for areas of academic weakness.
- Review and revise the four-year graduation plan with your children as needed.
- Ask the school counselor to establish job shadowing opportunities.
- Attend “Career Days” at school with your children.
- Attend career fairs held in the community to speak to recruiters about different jobs to learn more about occupations of interest.
- Arrange for your children to interview people who work in fields of interest.
- Encourage your children to volunteer or work part-time in fields of interest.
- Retake career interest inventories to determine if interests have deepened in a particular field or if they have expanded to include other occupations.
- Obtain labor market information—such as national and state annual earnings averages, growth of the occupational field and best locations—for at least three occupations of interest.
- Encourage your children to identify the lifestyle they want. Compare that information to the occupations of interest. Do they correlate? Help your children understand and balance the difference between wants and needs. (See Chapter 4 and the Reality Check budget calculator online software at [TexasRealityCheck.com](http://TexasRealityCheck.com).)
- Investigate summer school possibilities to improve areas of academic weakness or as enrichment programs.
- Meet with the school counselor to discuss enrollment and access to postsecondary courses. These opportunities could include dual-credit, regular classes taken during the summer between the junior and senior years, distance learning, technical colleges and community colleges.
- Investigate ROTC (Reserve Officers’ Training Corps) enrollment and scholarship opportunities. Junior ROTC is also available at many high schools. For more information, visit the website at: [todaysmilitary.com/training/rotc](http://todaysmilitary.com/training/rotc).
- Continue to monitor financial plans to facilitate your children’s postsecondary education.



## Junior Year

### **The Goal is to Prepare for Post-Secondary Education.**

- See that your children register, prepare for and take the SAT and/or ACT. Check with your counselor for details and exam dates or visit [collegeboard.org](http://collegeboard.org) or [ACT.org](http://ACT.org).
- Discuss what your children like and dislike about past work experiences (if any). What kind of employment do they want to find or avoid?
- Discuss money, personal and social management skills and how they can help in future occupational pursuits.
- Examine admissions applications from post-secondary institutions. Many are available online. In Texas, you can apply to all state-funded schools and some private institutions using the application found at [applytexas.org](http://applytexas.org).
- Have your children obtain more detailed information about occupations of interest from the Internet, professional organizations, school counselors and government agencies. A good place to start is the toll-free Career Information Hotline at 1-800-822-PLAN.
- Have your children take on a summer job. In the spring, ask the school counselor to help arrange summer internships in occupations of interest. If that doesn't work, any job will do. The goal is to familiarize your children with the types of

expectations employers have of employees.

- Ask the school counselor about study abroad programs, work-study programs and/or youth exchange programs—all of which can broaden your children's horizons and clarify their interests.
- Investigate the financial requirements of post-secondary training selections. Begin searching for financial aid grants, scholarships and work-study options.
- Encourage your children to gather as much information as possible about their preferred post-secondary institutions. Visit campuses and websites. Talk to former students. And rely on tools such as [TexasCareerCheck.com](http://TexasCareerCheck.com), [collegeforalltexans.com](http://collegeforalltexans.com) and [TxCREWS.org](http://TxCREWS.org) to get more information on costs and outcomes.
- Maintain contact with the school counselor's office for application deadline notices, scholarship information and campus recruiter visits.
- Advise your children's guidance counselor about their interests. The counselor may know of schools that have the best post-secondary program for your children to enroll in and keep a "head's up" for related financial aid.

## Senior Year

### **The Goal is to Complete a Challenging Academic Course Schedule and Gain Admission to the Post-Secondary Institution of Choice.**

- See that your children refine their investigations of occupations, programs of study (college majors) and educational institutions. It is now time to make some decisions about their future pursuits. Make sure labor market information is accurate and up to date.
- Apply for financial aid in the fall of your children's senior year. Complete the Free Application for

Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) at [FAFSA.gov](https://fafsa.gov). This application is the first step to getting Pell Grants, student loans, college work-study and even financial support from the state or individual colleges.

- Apply for all scholarships possible.
- Have your children identify (and ask) teachers, employers and others who might write positive letters of recommendation for college admissions.
- See that your child submits applications to post-secondary institutions before the deadlines, which are non-negotiable.
- If necessary, have your children



retake the ACT and SAT to try to raise the scores.

- Submit college admissions test scores, high school transcripts and letters of recommendation to post-secondary institutions. Follow all deadline dates indicated on admissions materials.
- Have your children compile a portfolio if they haven't already. Include employment history, school transcripts, letters of recommendations from employers and teachers, work samples and so on. Have an updated résumé.
- Make sure your children attend career fairs held at school and in the community to apply for summer jobs or to seek internships in the occupation of interest.
- Make sure your children don't fall victim to the "Senior Slump." Many students, especially those who have

gained early admission to colleges, take few courses their senior year and may be tempted to skip classes. They are wasting a marvelous opportunity to learn—free of tuition. Cruising and skipping may endanger their college acceptance and/or scholarship opportunities.

- If your children decide to attend a college or university, visit the college career center and learn about the services it offers. Check out internship opportunities and school activities that relate to professions of interest.

This list of activities by grade isn't exhaustive. You can surely add items. But it does cover the main tasks and points you in the right direction. Plus, there are many other resources upon which you can rely.



# Appendix B: Additional Resources

You and your children are not alone in the career exploration process. Many resources can broaden the amount and level of information your children use to make informed career decisions. Here are some:

**School guidance counselors** can provide career resources and financial aid information, as well as help your children interpret assessment results, develop in-depth education and career plans and select appropriate post-secondary institutions to attend.

**Local Workforce Solutions offices** located throughout Texas provide convenience, a customer-friendly atmosphere, state-of-the-art equipment and a professional, knowledgeable staff who can assist you with all your employment needs. Visit [TexasWorkforce.org](http://TexasWorkforce.org) for details and locations. Staff conducts classes on how to write résumés and do job interviews, how to use the state’s job matching website [WorkInTexas.com](http://WorkInTexas.com), and can assist in finding age-appropriate part-time employment for high school students.

**Libraries**—public or school—have books describing occupations and fields and offering career information. A Career resource center or library may be available at your child’s school. Such

centers usually include career books, CD-ROMs, videos, brochures and other reference materials.

**The Internet** is another great resource for career exploration. We’ve created a handy list of career-related websites on the following page (some of which are mentioned elsewhere in this publication) that are packed with valuable information about the world of work.

**Career Information Hotline** (1-800-822-PLAN). TWC operates the Career Information Hotline to provide students, teachers, counselors and the general public with information about any specific career or post-secondary school. Callers can receive up to three (3) occupational and/or college information packets at a time. The Hotline is available free of charge.

**Professional associations and organizations** have both local and national offices that can provide detailed information about their professions, usually free of charge. Encourage your children to write or call the associations of the occupations of their choice. These associations and organizations may provide your child with the names of several of its local members who may come to the school and talk about the occupation.



# Quick Reference: Web Links

## *Texas Workforce Solutions Websites*

Texas Workforce Commission	<a href="http://TexasWorkforce.org">TexasWorkforce.org</a>
WorkInTexas (TWC's job-matching website)	<a href="http://WorkInTexas.com">WorkInTexas.com</a>
Labor Market and Career Information	<a href="http://TexasWorkforce.org/labormarket">TexasWorkforce.org/labormarket</a>
Texas Reality Check	<a href="http://TexasRealityCheck.com">TexasRealityCheck.com</a>
Texas Career Check	<a href="http://TexasCareerCheck.com">TexasCareerCheck.com</a>
Texas Wages	<a href="http://TexasWages.com">TexasWages.com</a>
Texas CREWS	<a href="http://TxCREWS.org">TxCREWS.org</a>
TWC Your Bright Future webpage	<a href="http://lmci.state.tx.us/explore/TSC/ybf.asp">lmci.state.tx.us/explore/TSC/ybf.asp</a>

## *Other State Agency Websites*

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board	<a href="http://collegeforalltexas.com">collegeforalltexas.com</a>
Apply Texas	<a href="http://applytexas.com">applytexas.com</a>
Comptroller's Education Savings page	<a href="http://comptroller.texas.gov">comptroller.texas.gov</a>
Own Your Own Future (Texas Education Agency)	<a href="http://ownyourownfuture.com">ownyourownfuture.com</a>
Texas GEAR UP	<a href="http://texasgearup.com">texasgearup.com</a>

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Texas Workforce Commission. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for 'About Us', 'Contact Us', 'Find Locations', 'FAQ', 'En Español', and 'Tiếng Việt', along with a search bar labeled 'Search TWC'. Below the navigation bar is a large banner featuring the TWC logo on the left and the text 'Welcome, we're here to help. Resources, tips and tools to build a stronger Texas workforce.' on the right. To the right of the banner is a 'Quick Links' section with a list of services: 'WorkInTexas.com', 'Unemployment Benefits Services', 'Unemployment Tax Services', 'Employer Unemployment Benefits Services', and 'Labor Market & Career Information'. Below the banner are five main content areas, each with a representative image and a caption: 'JOB SEEKERS & EMPLOYEES' (a group of diverse people), 'BUSINESSES & EMPLOYERS' (a group of people in a meeting), 'COMMUNITY & WORKFORCE PARTNERS' (two hands shaking), 'STUDENTS, PARENTS & EDUCATORS' (a group of people in a classroom setting), and 'TWC AGENCY INFORMATION' (the TWC logo).

## Key Federal Agency Websites


- U.S. Department of Labor  
Career One-Stop [careeronestop.org](http://careeronestop.org)
- O\*Net (U.S. Department of Labor) [onetonline.org](http://onetonline.org)
- Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas,  
Economic Education [www.dallasfed.org/educate.cfm](http://www.dallasfed.org/educate.cfm)
- U.S. Department of Education (student  
loans and more) [ed.gov](http://ed.gov)
- The FAFSA (financial aid application) [fafsa.gov](http://fafsa.gov)
- Job Corps  
(U.S. Department of Labor) [jobcorps.gov](http://jobcorps.gov)
- Bureau of Labor Statistics  
Student Page [bls.gov/k12](http://bls.gov/k12)
- Occupational Outlook Handbook [bls.gov/ooh](http://bls.gov/ooh)

## Other Helpful Sites

- Texas Jobs by Direct Employers [texas.jobs](http://texas.jobs)
- College Board [collegeboard.org](http://collegeboard.org)
- ACT [act.org](http://act.org)

Registered job seekers, employers, and workforce staff

User ID  Password



Find A Job. Find An Employee.  
Find Another Reason To Love Texas.

Join the Largest Free Job Matching Network in Texas	4,370 Jobs Posted Today	246,467 Total Job Openings	409,016 Active Resumés	2,290,952 Total Jobs Filled
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### Employer Registration

WorkInTexas.com is your Human Resource partner offering no cost services including job posting and advanced job matching to help you quickly find the best candidate.

- Search All Resumés
- Check Labor Availability
- Access Recruitment Tools
- Contact Us

Register Now to Post Jobs for Free!

### Job Seeker Registration

In addition to personalized job matching, WorkInTexas.com helps you build a resumé, provides access to career tools, and works as your job search agent.

- Search All Jobs
- Find State Jobs
- Hot Careers
- Contact Us
- Find Jobs for Veterans
- Access Career Tools
- Tell Us You're Hired





**Texas Workforce Commission**  
**Labor Market and Career Information**

101 East 15th Street, Room 354

Austin, TX 78778-0001

Phone: 512-936-3200

FAX: 512-936-3204

[texasworkforce.org/labormarket](http://texasworkforce.org/labormarket)

Career Information Hotline: 800-822-7526

Equal Opportunity Employer/Program. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.

Relay Texas: 800-735-2989 (TTY) and 711 (Voice).

February 2018



Scan here to  
discover more quality  
products from the  
Texas Workforce  
Commission.

A proud partner of the **americanjobcenter** network