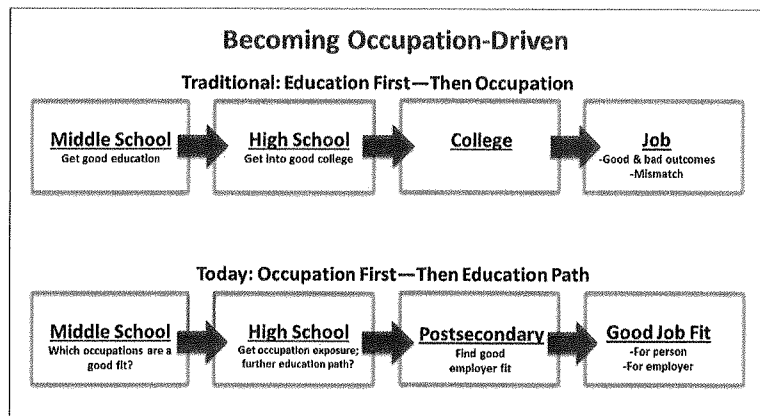


5 CONCLUSION: PARENTS NEED AN OCCUPATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THEIR STUDENTS

Parents and students are facing a new reality, impacted by changes in the labor market and the evolution of automation. There are not enough good jobs being created for the people who seek them. That means that having desirable job skills is critical and understanding the probability of graduation and occupational outcomes for a particular student is equally important. In the past, students could focus on getting a good education and worry about the occupation opportunities closer to graduation (see diagram). That is no longer true. Today, parents need to begin an occupation exploration for their students as early as middle school. An effective parental strategy would likely include:

Creating career-ready students: A new success model.



1. **Get a head start.** It will take time for a parent to determine which occupations might be a good fit for a student, based on talents, interests and passions. It will take more time to research the job skills, work experience, soft skills and education requirements for those occupations. And still more time for the student to get the appropriate work experience and skills. Starting as early as middle school could be advantageous. At the very least, parents and students can begin explorations and conversations, rather than simply focusing only on which college a student may eventually attend.
2. **Obtain good information and advice.** This is the most difficult step. Many government policies and institutions are still geared to serve the “college for all” assumption—without focusing on earnings and employment outcomes. High school counselors are often understaffed and many are focused on college counseling rather than career counseling. With information provided by colleges and academic research, a parent can discover graduation rates and occasionally earnings of graduates—but rarely can one find information on the earnings of dropouts. The College Scorecard earnings data is blended across graduates and dropouts and across all majors—not enough specific detail to be really helpful in choosing a specific career path. Wealthy parents can hire career counselors and they often have access to a network of friends and acquaintances that can provide contacts and advice. However, the average parent will have to rely on internet research and their own judgment until institutions provide information more relevant to new labor market realities. Additional information about implementation is available in Appendix F.
3. **Think creatively including “both-and”.** Parents and students have much more flexibility today and will have even more in the future. The choice is no longer only between stopping at high school or paying for a college education that, for some, is only a credential but not a path to a better career. While a liberal arts degree may not provide job skills, a student can get a subsequent career degree (e.g. an M.B.A.) or develop job skills and employer relationships during summers, working part-time or even during a bridge year between high school and college. A technical degree doesn’t have to be an end point. A “hands-on” vocational degree could be later supplemented with an online business degree to facilitate a career path into management positions. College students with no job skills can also go to a short, intensive boot camp to learn practical skills. Employers are starting to value credentials and experience, not just degrees, giving students even more flexibility.

Parents and students are already aware of the cost of college and of the difficulties faced by many college students and graduates. This research can help explain why some problems are occurring and what can be done to give students a path to a good career. Ideally, the strategies recommended here will also minimize the mismatch that can occur between education and employment, which has caused an excess of students in some fields while good jobs go begging in other fields. Reducing that mismatch will require people to understand how certain vocations have been upskilled and can provide a route to the middle-class. Finally, the real benefit of these strategies could be a better alignment of educational debt with earnings outcomes, or—said differently—a stronger ROI for educational investments.