



Doc H's Blog

Kentucky Education Commissioner
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September 6, 2013

Educational choices and where they may lead

This week, I reviewed a report issued by the American Institute for Research titled "[Higher Education Pays; But a Lot More for Some Graduates Than for Others.](#)" The report underscored the point that the success we have with our focus on college- and career-readiness will have a big impact on the long range economy of Kentucky and the future of our high school graduates.

Students who do not graduate with the skills needed to be successful in college and careers, often have to take remedial courses for which they do not receive college credit. Furthermore, many of these students borrow money to take these courses. Currently, the student loan debt is over \$1 trillion and increasing every year. This debt burden will have a negative impact on our national and state economy and on the future of these high school graduates.

The core problem is that many students and parents do not know what it takes to be college- and career-ready. In addition, many students do not know the potential earnings for careers before they enroll in a postsecondary program and before they take on loans to pay for it. The report offered four important lessons that parents and students should know.

1. Some short-term, higher education credentials are worth as much as long-term ones. In Texas, some technical associate degrees pay \$11,000 more than a bachelor's degree. Also, credential programs that take 1-2 years to complete pay more in the long term than those that can be completed in less than 1 year.
 2. Where you study affects earnings but less than some may think. The more exclusive higher education programs that are more costly may not provide as much of an earnings advantage as parents may think.
 3. What you study matters more than where you study. Parents and students should look at this report to see which areas pay more in the short and long term. Graduates with engineering and health degrees earn more than graduates in music, liberal arts, and philosophy.
 4. The S in STEM is often oversold. Biology and chemistry degrees are not paying as much as engineering, computer and information science and mathematics.
- There will be exceptions to the lessons learned in this report. It is crucial that parents and students do their homework prior to applying to a postsecondary program.

Also, it is critical that parents and students begin very early in the school career to ensure the students are on track for college- and career-readiness. In Kentucky, we begin providing this information as early as 3rd grade.

In the next few weeks, parents will receive student test scores which show college- and career-readiness. No matter what level the child is in school, this is an excellent time to have a conversation with your student about college- and career-readiness expectations and to lay the groundwork for postsecondary education options.

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