



November

Career and Educational Options

Identify abilities and interests

Parents know their children better than anyone. They can, therefore, be an invaluable resource in helping their kids identify his/her interests, talents, strengths, and values. Also, trying to help students see how their personality traits, talents, and interests can be valuable assets in the right career.

Explore career options

Students can learn about various careers by 1) reading/researching, 2) talking to people, and 3) getting first-hand experience.

The following websites are helpful career exploration tools:

- <http://www.careercruising.com>
 - Username: zeelandeast or zeelandwest
 - Password: chix or dux
- <http://bigfuture.collegeboard.org>
- www.careeronestop.org
- <http://www.bls.gov/ooh>
- <http://online.onetcenter.org/>

Encourage your child to talk to people who work in various career fields they are considering and ask the following questions:

- What do you do on a typical day?
- How did you prepare for this career?
- How did you get your present job?
- What qualifications and personal characteristics does someone need in order to be successful in this career?
- What do you like most about your job/career?
- What do you like least about it?
- What courses should I take to prepare for this career?
- Is this a career field that is growing?
- Are there opportunities for advancement in this career?
- Are there any related fields I should consider?
- What is the average starting pay?
- Would you go into this career field again?
- Do you have any advice for someone who is considering a career in this field?
- How can I find out more about this career?

If possible, see if you can arrange for your child to job shadow someone for a day. It is a great way to get an idea of what it's like to work in a particular career field.

The best way to learn about a career is to get some firsthand experience by getting involved in a related activity, taking a course, or getting a job in a related field. Volunteering is also an excellent way to learn about a career field. Students considering a career in health care, for example, should consider volunteering at a hospital or clinic. Students interested in the building trades could volunteer for Habitat for Humanity. The Greater Ottawa

County United Way has an online volunteer database that students can register with and search for volunteer opportunities. The website is <http://www.ottawaunitedway.org>.

The Bridge Youth Ministry Center in Zeeland is also offering our students the opportunity to participate in a program they offer called *Skills for Life*. This is a monthly program that offers high school students a direct connection to local employers that will introduce them to a wide variety of skills, jobs, and career opportunities. Once a month, Bridge YMC will bring a group of interested students from Zeeland East and Zeeland West to local businesses that share a common theme. Students will receive a tour and be introduced to the types of immediate jobs, as well as careers available through our local businesses. There is no cost to participate. Students will need to cover the cost of their lunch at a fast food restaurant. Students who are interested can contact their counselor to learn more.

Evaluating Educational Options

Approximately 80% of all careers require education and/or training beyond a general high school education. Some careers require four years of college. Others require one year of education or training at a career school. In many cases, a student's career choice will determine which education option is most appropriate.

While there are many factors that determine the kinds of opportunities a student will have in life, the most significant determining factor is education. High school students should carefully consider and explore the following six educational options:

1. **High School Career Programs** – Most high schools offer career prep programs in a variety of fields (business, skilled trades, computer technology, etc). Students in these programs “learn by doing.” For instance, students studying early childhood careers work with children, and students studying auto body do repair work on cars. In Zeeland, juniors and seniors have the opportunity to apply to and attend one of more than 25 available programs at the Careerline Tech Center. More information about the Tech Center can be found at <http://www.oaisd.org/ctc>.
2. **Career and Trade Schools** – Career and trade schools offer short-term training programs in a wide variety of career fields (ex. cosmetology, welding). While some programs last only a few weeks, others take up to two years to complete. Career and trade schools can be expensive, and not all of them are reputable.

It is very important, therefore, for you to thoroughly investigate any school being considered. The following guidelines will help you evaluate a career or trade school.

- Licensing and accreditation – If a school is accredited, it means that it meets the minimum standards of the accrediting agency. Check to see if, and by whom, the school is accredited. Be wary of any school that is not.
- Facilities – Take a tour. Is the equipment up-to-date and adequate for the number of students enrolled? Do the students receive instruction on the same equipment they'll be using in the workplace? What are the buildings, classrooms, and other facilities like?
- Placement – Does the school help their students find jobs? What percentage of the school's graduates finds jobs in the fields in which they received training? Who hires the school's graduates? What are their starting salaries?
- Cost – What is the total cost of tuition, supplies, and fees? What is the refund policy? Is financial aid available?
- Quality of Instruction – What are the qualifications and credentials of the instructors? Are their courses and books up-to-date?
- Reputation and Stability – How long has the school been in operation? Of the students who enroll, how many complete the program? Ask to talk to some recent graduates and check out what area businesses think of the school.

Career and trade schools can be expensive. They are usually privately owned. While these schools can be expensive, costs vary depending on the type and length of program. In some cases, students may be eligible for financial aid.

Career and trade school credits usually do not transfer. Because they vary tremendously in their requirements and the programs they offer, their credits are usually not accepted by two and four-year colleges. Students should, therefore, not go to a career or trade school with the idea of transferring.

3. **Apprenticeships** – Students who prefer a hands-on approach to learning may want to consider applying for an apprenticeship program. Apprentices learn a skilled trade (ex. carpentry, plumbing, roofing, firefighting) through a combination of classroom instruction and on-the-job training. Apprenticeship programs are considered by many to be the best way to receive training in the skilled trades.

Apprenticeships are agreements in which employers pay individuals while they learn their trade or profession. Apprenticeship programs demand hard work and dedication, but individuals who participate have greater job security, earning power, and advancement opportunities.

Working under the supervision of journey workers, apprentices receive 2000+ hours of on-the-job training. They tend to last 2-6 years, with most programs requiring 4 years on the job. Apprentices receive almost 150 hours of related instruction each year on safety measures, theories, and techniques. Instruction programs vary greatly in how they are structured. After completing the program, an apprentice becomes a journey worker.

Apprenticeship programs are administered by employers, labor management organizations, and employer associations. Although apprenticeship programs are available in about 850 different occupations, over half of the apprentices work in the construction trades. The following are some of the most popular apprenticeship occupations: bricklayer, carpenter, cook, electrician, firefighter, machinist, painter, plumber, roofer, sheet metal worker, and tool and die maker.

4. **The Military** – The military trains young men and women so that they can protect the interests of our country. The military offers qualified high school graduates a good salary and free job training. The military also provides discipline and structure, as well as opportunities for career advancement and travel. The four major branches of the military are the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines. There are also military opportunities in the Coast Guard, National Guard, and the Reserves. ROTC programs are available for those students who want to attend college before entering the military, and the military academies provide educational opportunities for students who qualify.

To enlist in any branch of the military, young men and women must earn a minimum score on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB). They must also pass a physical exam, and as a rule, be a high school graduate.

For those considering the military, there is a wealth of information online at <http://todaysmilitary.com>. Students can also learn about a specific branch of the military by visiting the following websites:

Army	www.goarmy.com
Navy	www.navy.com
Air Force	www.airforce.com
Marines	www.marines.com

The best way to learn about the military is to talk to a local recruiter. Because the career, training, and educational opportunities are different for each branch of the military, students should talk to recruiters representing different military branches. Recruiters can be located through the above listed websites.

Obligations and Benefits

When young people enlist, they obligate themselves for 2-6 years of active duty. Enlisting in the military is a serious, long-term commitment. Students need to understand that it's very difficult to leave the military before an enlistment period is over. Pay in the military is determined by rank and number of years served. In addition to basic pay and free training, enlistees receive free housing and free medical and dental care. The Montgomery GI Bill also provides enlistees with an opportunity to earn money for college.

Basic Training

Basic training is 6-11 weeks of intense physical and mental preparation involving classroom instruction, field training, and exercise. After basic training, enlistees receive 2-24 months of advanced training, usually in a specialty of their choice.

The Reserves and the National Guard

Some individuals choose to be a member of the Reserves or National Guard. As part-time members of the military, Reservists and National Guardsmen go through basic training and job training. They then train for two days once a month and for two weeks once a year. The Reserves and National Guard can be called to active duty when there's a national emergency or in the event of a conflict. The Army National Guard and Air National Guard also help state governments with natural disasters (ex. fires, floods, etc.) and with conflicts such as strikes and riots.

The Academies

The Army, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard have their own academies (West Point, the Naval Academy, the Air Force Academy, and the Coast Guard Academy). After receiving a free four-year college education, academy graduates enter the military as officers. Because the application process for all the military academies is somewhat involved, interested students should start the application process in the spring of the junior year. Students apply through their Congressman (materials are generally available in the counseling office). Applicants should have high ACT/SAT scores and a high GPA in a strong college prep program. Applicants also need to be in good physical condition.

5. **Community Colleges** – Community colleges provide affordable, career-oriented programs that enable students to begin their careers after two years of college or less. Students enrolled in certificate and associate degree programs take the courses they need to prepare them for a specific career field. Accounting/office management, public safety, and dental hygiene are just a few of the careers that students can prepare for by going to a community college.

Community colleges do not require students to take a college entrance exam (ACT) or earn a particular score on the ACT; however, to ensure that all students enroll in courses that are appropriate for their ability levels, many community colleges require that all incoming students take placement tests.

While students need only a general high school education to enroll in most programs, some programs have additional academic requirements. For example, a nursing program may require that students have a year of biology, chemistry, and algebra before they apply. Students who haven't yet taken these courses in high school could take them at the community college and then apply for the program.

Most community colleges don't have dorms; however, many do provide athletic programs, clubs, and social activities, as well as a variety of support services such as counseling, career placement, and tutoring.

Students can also go to a community college for a year or two, and then transfer to a four-year college to earn their bachelor's degree. As long as students choose their courses carefully, the credits they earn at a community college can transfer to a four-year college. It is, however, up to the four-year college to say which credits they will accept. While credits in traditional academic courses like English, science, and math generally transfer, four-year colleges seldom accept credits in career-oriented courses. Community colleges have counselors and advisors who can help students choose courses that will transfer. Students should, of course, contact the four-year college they plan to attend if they have questions about a course or program.

Another good resource is the Michigan Transfer Network. This is a website that allows students, advisers, and the general public to view transfer course equivalencies between many Michigan colleges and universities. It can be found at <http://www.michigantransfernetnetwork.org>.

- 6. Four-Year Colleges** – A four-year college education earns a student a bachelor's degree. Four-year colleges vary greatly in their size, costs, admission policies, and in the majors they offer. In order to be ready for college-level work, students need to follow a college prep program in high school. Students who want to go to a four-year college will also need to take the ACT college entrance exam in their junior year (which all students in the State of Michigan do as part of the Michigan Merit Exam).

Most four-year colleges want their students to receive a broad-based education, as well as an education in a specific subject area, or major. Therefore, most four-year colleges require all students to take a number of general education, or core curriculum, courses like English, math, science, and history. Students who go to college without having chosen a major can use their first year of college to take many of their required courses. This gives them time to consider all of their options, before deciding on a major.

Most colleges recommend students take the following high school courses (at minimum): 4 years of English, 4 years of math (including Geometry, Algebra 1, and Algebra 2), 3 years of science (with laboratory experience), 3 years of social studies, 2+ years of the same foreign language, and 1 year of a fine or performing art. The Michigan Merit Curriculum that all of our students are required to take meets/exceeds these criteria.

College entrance requirements vary greatly. Colleges that have an open admissions policy accept most high school graduates who apply. Highly selective colleges, on the other hand, usually only accept students who have high college entrance exam scores, high grade point averages, and have taken rigorous high school courses. In order to be accepted to any college, students must complete the required forms and take the right tests. College bound students should take the SAT and/or ACT test in the spring of the junior year. College applications should be completed in the fall of a student's senior year, typically online. College applications generally require that a high school transcript be submitted. The transcript will list the student's high school courses, grades, credits, GPA, and class rank.

Students hoping to receive an athletic scholarship need to meet with their counselor as early as possible to discuss requirements and to make sure they're taking the right courses. Students who have the potential to receive an athletic scholarship at a Division I or II college can obtain information on NCAA eligibility requirements at <http://www.ncaa.org/student-athletes/future/eligibility-center>.