

# Family Firsts

**Just because you didn't go to college doesn't mean your children can't.**

When your children are the first generation in your family to consider college, you may be both pleased and concerned. It's a big step. College will provide opportunities and experiences to your children that you never had. How do you advise them? This brochure can help. It will tell you:

- **Why** your child should go to college
- **What** you can do to support your child
- **Where** the money will come from



*"Neither my husband nor I went to college, but we always believed in education. We knew our children were intelligent and that education would give them a better future."*

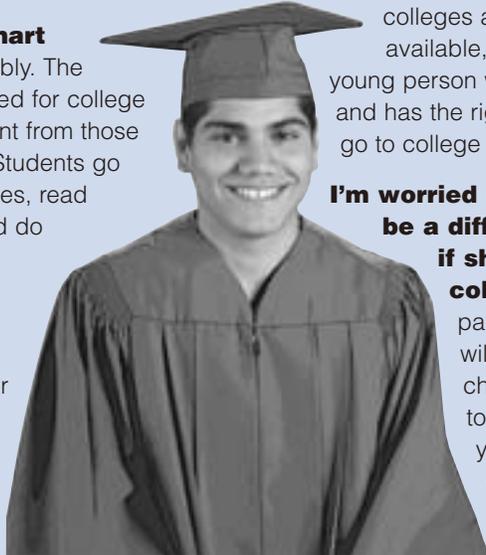
—Maria Irene Rodriguez, with her daughter Noemy, who was the first in her family to attend and graduate from college.

**ACT**<sup>®</sup>

## But what about . . .

**Parents of first-generation college students often wonder about questions like these:**

**Is my child smart enough?** Probably. The basic skills needed for college are not so different from those for high school. Students go to class, take notes, read books, study, and do assignments. If your child needs additional help, colleges offer tutoring and other support. Most students who work hard will do just fine.



**Isn't college just for privileged kids?** No. Today, a college education is a necessity.

And with such a variety of colleges and universities available, nearly any young person who works hard and has the right support can go to college and do well.

**I'm worried my child will be a different person if she goes to college.** Many parents fear they will "lose" their children if they go to college. But you can be part of this new stage

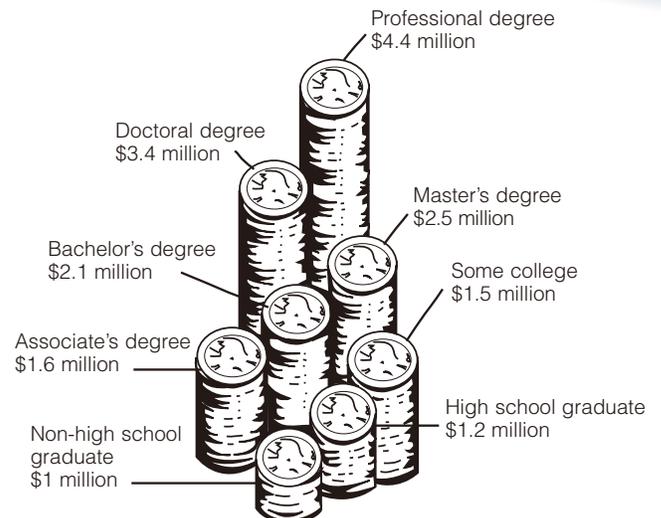
in your child's life by being involved as your child chooses a college and begins studying there. Encourage your child to choose one that welcomes families and makes them feel comfortable. Visit the campus with your child and ask a lot of questions.

**How can we get along without our child?** Many young people work to help support their families. It may be a great sacrifice to do without that income. Some parents point out that full-time college students miss four years of paid work experience. This is true, but a college graduate's earnings can be much higher than someone with just a high school diploma.

## Why your child should go to college

- 1. The financial rewards.** A college education is more important than ever. College graduates make a lot more money than high school graduates, and have more job opportunities. Over a lifetime, a person with a 4-year degree will make nearly \$1 million more than someone with only a high school diploma. And some benefits of college come right away. Fresh out of college, first-generation graduates get the same jobs and earn the same income as graduates whose parents went to college.
- 2. The jobs available to them.** College opens the door to more pleasant working conditions. Many of the jobs open to college graduates are in offices. College graduates can find new jobs more easily than nongraduates. And studies have shown that college graduates are healthier, live longer, are smarter consumers, have more varied interests, and have higher status than those who don't go to college.

- 3. Their own sense of accomplishment.** College provides the satisfaction of personal growth. Students can explore new subjects, meet many different people, and participate in activities they might not otherwise experience.



### Expected earnings over a lifetime

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

# How do you find the right college?

**By junior year of high school, students should develop a list of schools they might want to attend.** How do they do that? How do you help? The choices can be overwhelming! Focus on finding the best fit, a place where your child will feel comfortable and supported. If possible, visit campuses as you help your child decide.

## Students should ask themselves:

- Urban area or rural?
- Large school or small?
- Two-year or four-year program?

## Students should ask colleges:

- What majors and activities are available?
- Do most of the graduates get good jobs?
- What is the faculty-to-student ratio and what is the average class size?
- What academic and social support is there for first-generation students?
- What programs are available for parents?
- Do most first-generation students graduate?
- How will the costs be paid?

# What you can do to support your child

**A first-generation college student needs a lot of support. You can help. In fact, you can help make the difference between success and failure.**

- Don't forget that you are part of the team that will work to get your child into and graduated from college.
- Get involved in your school's parent-teacher organization.
- Talk with high school counselors, teachers, and the principal about your child's college plans and how to support them.
- Speak up for your child. Be sure he or she takes the classes in high school that are needed for success in college. The courses required to graduate from high school usually are NOT enough to prepare for college.

- Help your child find a quiet study area with a chair and desk.
- Find after-school or summer enrichment programs your child can attend. Look for services in your area designed to help first-generation students go to college. Ask counselors and college admissions officers about tutoring, counseling, mentoring, and other kinds of support your child may need.
- Help your child find a mentor—someone to take a personal interest in his or her success.
- Offer encouragement and support.
- Try not to make demands that interfere with your child's school work.
- Help your child learn about colleges, how to apply, and how to get financial aid.



# Where the money will come from

**Some parents believe they can't afford to send a child to college. Though college can cost a lot, help is available.**

Don't let the cost of a college keep your child from applying. Financial aid programs are set up to help students who can't pay the full cost. Help your child concentrate on being admitted, and then on finding financial aid. Most students get some sort of

**Remember: You should never have to pay for financial aid services or scholarship searches. There are plenty of scams out there, so if you have any doubts about a program, talk to your child's counselor, teachers, or principal for guidance.**

financial aid. Aid is not a handout—it's an investment in your child's future.

The federal and state governments offer many loans, grants, and scholarships. Colleges have scholarships, other sorts of aid packages, and work-study programs. Community groups, churches, and enrichment programs offer scholarships, too.

Start reading and asking questions about financial aid. Talk to your child's high school guidance counselor and with the admissions offices of the colleges you're interested in as soon as your child begins applying for admission.

Be sure you understand the terms of any loan before you sign.

## Here are some websites that can help you learn about paying for college:

**[www.studentjobs.gov/e-scholar.asp](http://www.studentjobs.gov/e-scholar.asp)**—

A list of federally funded scholarships, fellowships, grants, and internships geared to high school, undergraduate, and graduate students.

**[www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)**—The Free Application for Federal Student Aid website. This is where you start when you are ready to apply for financial aid.

**[www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org)**—Features a free scholarship search as well as information on loans, savings programs, and military aid.

**[www.act.org/fane](http://www.act.org/fane)**—A financial aid need estimator.

***If you don't have a computer at home, use one at your public library or your child's school.***

***For more information, visit the ACT website at [www.act.org](http://www.act.org).***

**[www.hsf.net](http://www.hsf.net)**—A Hispanic Scholarship Fund website that features scholarships for Hispanic students and research reports on the education of Hispanic students.

**[www.studentaidalliance.org](http://www.studentaidalliance.org)**—Student success stories and descriptions of need-based financial aid programs.

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