

As a general rule, I would say graduates in the top quarter of their class at a high-quality high school should go on to a four-year degree program, while those in the bottom quarter of their class at a high school with a mediocre educational reputation should not (opting instead for alternative methods of credentialing and training).

Those in between should consider perhaps doing a two-year program and then transferring to a four-year school. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule, but it is important for us to keep in mind that college is not for everyone.

Opinion

Actually, College Is Very Much Worth It

by Andrew J. Rotherham, May 19, 2011

Lately it's become fashionable—especially among the highly credentialed—to question whether it's really “worth it” to go to college. A recent report from the Harvard Graduate School of Education proposed deemphasizing college as the primary goal of our education system in favor of “multiple pathways” for students. Earlier this month, *New York Magazine* devoted almost 4,000 words to profiling venture capitalists (and college graduates) James Altucher and Peter Thiel and their efforts to convince Americans that they'd be better off skipping college. Thiel is even creating a \$100,000 fellowship for young people who agree to delay going to college in favor of an internship.

Make no mistake, there is widespread dissatisfaction with higher education. According to a new survey released by the Pew Research Center, only 40 percent of Americans felt that colleges provided an “excellent” or “good” value for the money. At the same time, 86 percent of college graduates still felt the investment was a good one for them.

To understand these competing views, you have to juggle a few different ideas at once. First, there are plenty of problems with higher education—poor quality, even at brand-name schools, and out-of-control costs are two of the biggest. College presidents themselves shared some of these concerns and others with the Pew researchers. Second, it's true: College isn't for everyone. There are plenty of rewarding and important jobs and careers that do not require college. And due to the sluggish economy, there may in fact be more graduates than the current job market needs, or a temporary “college bubble.” Jobs for recent grads are harder to find, and salaries are lower, but that won't last forever. And in spite of all of this, the data make clear that getting a college education is still a good idea—college graduates earn more, and are more likely to have a job in the first place—and is especially important for some Americans.

My Notes

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

What background details does the writer provide to set up the claim?