

Views from VanDeWalle

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The Importance of Career Exploration

College and career readiness have definitely become a trending focus in many school systems, often starting exposure to college and career options in elementary school. Waiting to have conversations about higher education and career options in high school is now considered to be an old adage. While school systems are beginning this focus earlier and more often through their formal and informal opportunities with students, it's also imperative for parents to understand the importance of introducing college and career readiness options to their youth. Basic conversations about the importance of going to college and the reason of going is linked to learning skills and knowledge to prepare them for a future career.

College may be daunting or intimidating, particularly if no one else in the family is attending. It is important to explain that college can mean different things for different people. Consider using the word "college" to be an easy way to explain that some people can go to college for a short term to do a certification program, a two-year college or a four-year college and beyond. Explaining the general options is a good way to make college seem more achievable to youth unsure if they have what it takes to be successful in higher education.

Many times budding athletes have the desire to play their favorite sport professionally. While there is a balance of encouraging your youth to work diligently to pursue their dreams, it is also important to have realistic conversations about goals of this nature. An additional misconception is that college athletes are actually studying the sport they are playing. Explaining that college athletes are studying a certain subject or area is an important step for youth to realize that academics are important and career options must be considered.

Here are some ways to introduce potential career paths to youth:

- Enroll your youth in out of school time organizations such as 4-H, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts or a similar organization. They typically incorporate career exposure through skill development or activity-based learning.

- Knowing a youth's interest areas early can enable parents to encourage students to focus on doing well and understanding concepts learned in school. For example, if a youth is interested in becoming a doctor, encourage them to take and challenge themselves in courses such as biology and math. Intentionally attempt to match youth interest to a specific career field, if possible and opportunities are available in your community.

- If age appropriate and accessible, arrange for a tour of a local business that focuses on the career field your youth is interested in.

- Download the Nebraska 4-H Career Explorer website or app. This can be downloaded onto a mobile device or viewed online at careexplorer.unl.edu. This is a good resource for basic career exploration.



Career exploration can become a purposeful conversation with your youth as early as elementary school. Encouraging youth to think about future career paths and what challenges they want to solve in their future will be time well spent!

This article comes from a series of resources developed by Nebraska Extension, 4-H Youth Development Professionals. Learn more about 4-H at 4h.unl.edu. For more information, contact the author – Jill A. Goedeken (jgoedeken2@unl.edu), Extension Educator in Platte County.