**It’s All Worth It**

It’s a lot of work and money, but most parents and students I know feel that a college degree is well worth the effort. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, young adults between the ages of 25 and 34 with a bachelor’s degree had average earnings of more than twice as much as those who didn’t have a high school diploma ($48,500 vs. $23,900) and 62 percent more than those who completed high school ($48,500 vs. $30,000).[[1]](#endnote-1) In addition, students often find that attending college helps them learn important critical thinking and life-management skills that are just as important as what they take away from classroom instruction. Parents can feel comfortable knowing that their son or daughter has the information and skills necessary to make wise choices in life.

I encourage you to spend some time discussing the financial aid process with your high school student and talking about all the aspects of attending college, including the financial components. You might be surprised at the insights your child has, and it’s entirely possible that you may learn from each other.

Keep calm, and don’t let fear get the best of you. Millions of people have been through this process and survived! Knowledge and information are your friends. That’s why you’ve turned to me. I’m going to help you take one step at a time, and keep asking questions until you have the answers you need to make the choices that are best for you.

I also invite you to visit my website—CollegeFinancialAidAdvisors.com—join our mailing list, and keep in touch with me there. As financial aid programs and policies change, I’ll continue to bring you the latest information to make the process less confusing.

Now, let’s demystify a few of those “secrets.”

1. <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cba.asp>

   **Chapter 1**

   **Yes, It Starts in Middle School**

   My friend, Jim, sounded exasperated. He had just gotten the tuition numbers for the private middle school his son wanted to attend. He was a longtime friend and called me for some advice about whether it was “worth it.”   
     
   His son, Jeremy, was an average student and was having some difficulty fitting in at his school. The combination led Jim and his wife, Sarah, to wonder whether Jeremy would be better off at the Thornton School, a private middle school in a nearby town. Thornton would give him the support he needed to achieve more academically—and it would get him away from some of the social issues he was facing at the public school. But then Jim said what was really on his mind.  
     
   “I never thought I’d be paying this kind of tuition for middle school. Then, he’ll probably go to private high school. How am I supposed to afford to save for college?”

   What Jim didn’t realize is that wherever there is a tuition payment, there is usually financial aid available. As we chatted on the phone, he found a flyer in the information package that explained how to apply for financial aid at the school. He had been too upset to notice it before. As he read it, he had more questions. Last year, both he and Sarah worked full time. But a few months ago, Sarah lost her job. The financial aid form required last year’s tax returns, which wouldn’t be accurate for evaluating their current financial situation.

   Jim’s concerns were real and all too common among parents who are thinking ahead about their children’s education. While I don’t like to see anxious parents, it’s a sign that these are people who are thinking ahead and trying to make the best financial decisions for their families. There is no answer that is right for everyone, but there is an answer that is right for you. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)