

https://santamariatimes.com/opinion/columnists/kevin-g-walthers-think-college-is-expensive-try-not-going/article_29a8e324-d1cc-580c-b4dc-b25d3374928f.html

Your Community College

Kevin G. Walthers: Think college is expensive? Try not going

Jun 4, 2023



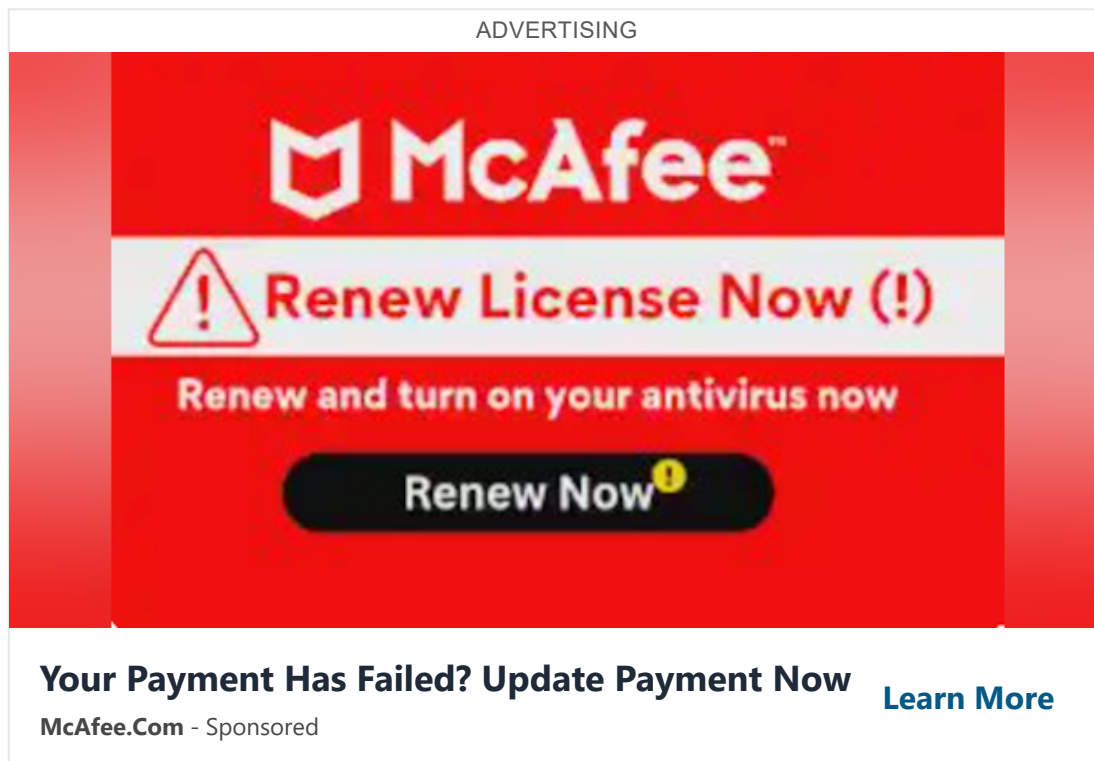
Kevin Walthers
Contributed

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

“College is too expensive. Kids would do better if they just got a job.”

That's the story that more and more Americans are telling themselves. Unfortunately, the narrative is gaining a foothold in the national psyche, and it's increasingly reported as fact by media outlets across the spectrum.

Just this week, a headline in The Wall Street Journal proclaimed "More High School Grads Forgo College in Hot Labor Market," citing data that college-going rates have not recovered from pre-pandemic levels. The article goes on to laud high school grads who are forgoing college and entering the workforce, particularly in leisure and hospitality that leads all sectors in employment growth.



These jobs typically don't require any higher education and, according to the reporting, can see median wages of \$14-an-hour — "nearly double the federal minimum wage."

Count me among the unimpressed.

The troublesome reporting does not end there. The article goes on to say that many blue-collar jobs such as machining and carpentry are also easily obtainable and pay well. What they conveniently leave out is that skill-based jobs such as

these require additional training, apprenticeships, and credentials that are offered through — you guessed it — local colleges.

It's worth noting that that article's author, Harriet Torry, earned bachelor's and master's degrees. It's safe to say that most reporters receive college degrees, which provide living proof that colleges and universities offer worthwhile post-secondary experiences that lead to good-paying professions.

Curiously, The Wall Street Journal's own polling showed that two groups of Americans still see value in college degrees: those who are college graduates themselves and those making at least \$100K per year (more than triple the \$14-per-hour hospitality job pay rate).

This makes perfect sense: high paying, stable careers still require college degrees, and those who take that path to success know the tangible value that a college degree provides. And facts don't lie: since the Great Recession ended in 2009, the U.S. economy created 11.6 million new jobs and 11.5 million of those went to individuals with at least some college.

The question is not whether college is worth the cost or not. The question is how do we maximize opportunities for young people to advance their economic mobility?

Michael Itzkowitz, who founded the educational research agency The HEA Group, provides extensive data showing that the subject matter studied is far more important than the place of study. Time after time, articles focusing on student debt include stories of young people who take out loans to attend expensive, second-tier private institutions where the return on investment is often negligible or non-existent.

Itzkowitz notes that half of community college graduates nationally make more than \$40K within four years of graduating and more than 80 percent earn in excess of \$30K. Hancock grads, on average, see a \$9,000 increase in wages in just the first year after completing school.

More importantly, these credentials lead to a lifetime of opportunity and increasing income that many entry level hospitality jobs do not.

This is how Allan Hancock College is changing the odds. The Hancock Promise is transforming northern Santa Barbara County by creating a college-going culture where students can attend Hancock without accumulating suffocating levels of debt.

We offer amazing transfer opportunities, educate our community's nurses and first responders, and provide certificates and degrees in high-wage careers such as machining, automotive, computer networking and welding.

Unfortunately, opportunities to continue beyond Hancock are essentially non-existent in our service area. To address this, Hancock faculty and administrators are developing an application for our first baccalaureate program designed to serve local students that the UC and CSU will not.

Economic mobility is driven by higher education, and discounting the value of completing college is a short-sighted narrative that will leave our population ill-prepared for a life of learning and prosperity.

Hancock is dedicated to changing the odds for all our local students by providing opportunities and access to the credentials needed for higher paying jobs, the certificates and degrees needed for transfer, and — ultimately — a bachelor's degree right here at home.

Kevin G. Walthers, Ph.D. is the superintendent/president of Allan Hancock College. Research from The HEA Group is available at www.theheagroup.com. For more information about the Hancock Promise, visit www.ahcfoundation.org.

Tags

[Opinion](#)[Commentary](#)[Kevin Walthers](#)[Student Debt](#)[Allan Hancock College](#)[Ahc](#)[Hancock](#)[Guest Commentary](#)