

Comparing higher education choices

Students explore higher education options by comparing similarities and differences between two colleges near where they live.

Learning goals

Big idea

Learning about the higher education options in your community can help prepare you to continue your education after high school.

Essential questions

- What education choices are open to me after high school?
- How can I compare different higher education options?

Objectives

- Identify higher education options in your community
- Compare and contrast higher education options

What students will do

- Review a web-based slideshow to learn about different types of colleges.
- Use the College Scorecard website (<https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>) to find schools to explore.
- Choose two colleges to compare and contrast.

KEY INFORMATION

Building block:

- Financial knowledge and decision-making skills

Grade level: Middle school (6–8), High school (9–12)

Age range: 11–19

Topic: Earn (Making money), Spend (Paying for college)

School subject: CTE (Career and technical education), Math, Social studies or history

Teaching strategy: Competency-based learning, Cooperative learning, Personalized instruction

Bloom’s Taxonomy level: Understand, Evaluate

Activity duration: 45–60 minutes

STANDARDS

Council for Economic Education
Standard II. Buying goods and services

Jump\$tart Coalition
Spending and saving - Standard 4

Preparing for this activity

- Print copies of all student materials for each student, or prepare for students to access them electronically.
- Review the College Board's "Types of Colleges: The Basics" slideshow at <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/find-colleges/college-101/types-of-colleges-the-basics>.
- Become familiar with the search function on the U.S. Department of Education's College Scorecard website at <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>.
- Obtain a computer with Internet access and a projector or a large monitor.
- Secure computers or tablets with Internet access so students can conduct research.

NOTE

Please remember to consider your students' accommodations and special needs to ensure that all students are able to participate in a meaningful way.

What you'll need

THIS TEACHER GUIDE

- Comparing higher education choices (guide)
[cfpb_building_block_activities_comparing-higher-education-choices_guide.pdf](#)
- A computer with Internet access and a projector or a large monitor
- The College Board's "Types of Colleges: The Basics" slideshow at <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/find-colleges/college-101/types-of-colleges-the-basics>

STUDENT MATERIALS

- Comparing higher education choices (worksheet)
[cfpb_building_block_activities_comparing-higher-education-choices_worksheet.pdf](#)
- Computers or tablets with Internet access
- The U.S. Department of Education's College Scorecard website at <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>

Exploring key financial concepts

There are a lot of options for continuing your education after you graduate from high school. One option is to attend a two-year or four-year college or university. These can be either public or private institutions. Public colleges and universities get money from a city or a state to help run the school. Private colleges and universities don't get public funds and can include not-for-profit schools and

schools associated with religious organizations. When you begin to plan your education after high school, it's important to determine if a school is the right fit for you based on what career you'd like to pursue, how affordable the school is for you and your family, the number of students, the value of your degree, and more.

Choosing what type of institution to attend can have a lasting impact on your life and your future. The U.S. Department of Education's College Scorecard (<https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>) can help you get the information you need to compare your choices and make an informed choice.

TIP

Because higher education costs and other details change, students should be encouraged to always look for the most up-to-date information.

Teaching this activity

Whole-class introduction

- Ask students to share their ideas about higher education and education beyond high school.
- Ask them to list examples of higher education options they're aware of in their community.
- To give them a basic introduction to the options available, show them the slideshow at <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/find-colleges/college-101/types-of-colleges-the-basics>.
- Be sure students understand key vocabulary:
 - **Public college or university:** A higher education institution whose programs and activities are operated by publicly elected or appointed school officials and which is supported by public funds.
 - **Private college or university:** A higher education institution that is primarily supported by private funds. Private institutions include not-for-profit and for-profit schools, as well as schools associated with a religious organization.
- Explain that students will use the U.S. Department of Education's College Scorecard (<https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>) to compare nearby schools they can consider after high school.
- Show them the website and conduct a sample search.
 - Be sure students understand how to use the search filters.
 - Start by filtering by your state to show what results you'll see.

TIP

Visit CFPB's financial education glossary at consumerfinance.gov/financial-education-glossary/.

- Be sure students understand how the College Scorecard defines the following terms before they use this online tool:
 - **Average annual cost:** The average annual net price for students after school, state, and federal financial aid is applied. For public schools, this is only the average cost for in-state students. An in-state student is a legal resident of the state where they go to school and may pay less in tuition than students from outside the state.
 - Be sure to make it clear that because this is an average cost and because students receive different amounts of financial aid, the cost that College Scorecard shows might not be the cost students ultimately pay.
 - **Graduation rate:** The percentage of students who graduate within 8 years of entering the school for the first time.
 - **Salary after completing:** How much people will earn on average at their jobs a year after graduating.
 - This is determined by taking the midpoint of many undergraduate students' earnings a year after graduating. An undergraduate is a college student who is working toward an associate's or a bachelor's degree.
 - This information only includes students who received federal financial aid.
- Distribute the "Comparing higher education choices" worksheet and review the directions with the class.

Individual or group work

- Students can work individually or in small groups to complete their worksheet.
- Students will use the College Scorecard (<https://collegescorecard.ed.gov>) to find colleges and universities near them.
- Students will click "Custom search." Under "Location," they'll choose "Zip Code" and enter their zip code.
- Students will enter 100 in the "Distance in Miles" section.
 - If students live in remote or rural areas, they may need to use a larger search radius (100-200 miles) or search by state instead of zip code.
- They'll click the "Find schools" button at the bottom of the page.
- Students will select two schools from the search results to compare.
 - If possible, encourage students to select one public and one private school. Tell students to look at the building icon under the school's name to determine whether a school is private or public.

- You can also encourage students to compare a community college with a four-year school. Tell students to look for the “2-year” icon (for community college) or the “4-year” icon under the school’s name.
- To compare schools, they’ll click the plus sign next to each school’s name.
- Then they’ll click the bar at the bottom of the page that says “Schools to compare and share” and then click the “Compare schools” button.
- To find the schools’ student population sizes, students will click the “College Information” menu, and look under “School Information.” The school’s population is described as small, medium, or large and includes the number of undergraduate students.
- To see the schools’ test scores, students will click the “Test Scores & Acceptance” menu.
- Students will fill in information about the two schools in the table on the worksheet.
- Students then will answer the reflection questions.

Wrap-up

- Bring the class back together to discuss what they learned about the different costs, sizes, and other features of the colleges they explored.
- Ask for volunteers to share their responses to the reflection questions.
- You also might consider encouraging students to research additional schools on the College Scorecard site during their free time.

Suggested next steps

Consider searching for other [CFPB activities](#) that address the topics of earning, including making money, and spending, including paying for college. For grades 6–8, one suggested activity is [“Preparing to pay for education after high school”](#). For grades 9–12, suggested activities include [“Understanding ways to pay for education after high school”](#) and [“Exploring community colleges”](#).

Measuring student learning

Students’ responses on their worksheets and during discussion can give you a sense of their understanding. **Keep in mind that students’ answers may vary, as there may not be only one right answer.** The important thing is for students to have reasonable justification for their answers.