

How do I know what job is right for me?

In our diverse economy, there are many ways to achieve workforce success, and they don't all follow the same straight or orderly path. Employers in Southwest Minnesota now provide nearly 173,000 jobs and the state has nearly 3 million jobs, so it can be hard to know which one might be right for you.

Assessments and career exploration are a great way to help students and jobseekers make the best possible choices. What things do you like to do? What's your personality style? What skills and abilities do you have? There are a variety of free career assessments available online at sites including CareerOneStop (careeronestop.org), O*NET (www.onetonline.org), and DEED and CareerForce MN (CareerForce.MN.gov) that can help.

Knowing more about yourself is critical to career planning. People choose different jobs at different points in their lives, and for very different reasons, but no one can do it for you.

You are in charge of your career planning process!



How much education or training will I need to get that job?

Graduating from high school is an important first step, but from there the path to success can go in many different directions. For example, students and jobseekers can go straight to work, into the military, on to college, start an apprenticeship, or something else, depending on your career goals.

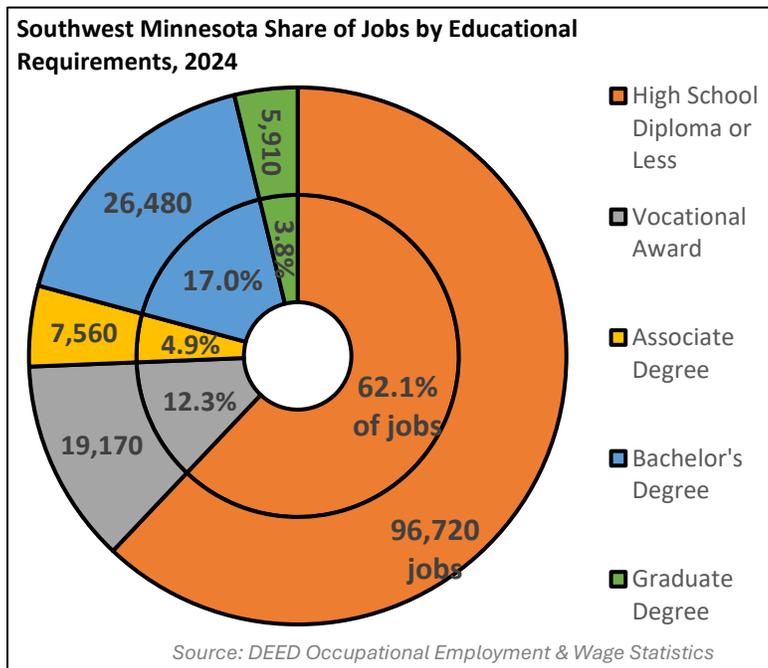


In other words, there are many pathways into the labor market. Some are short-term solutions, while others are long-term decisions. There are costs and benefits to every approach, and there are practical steps that students and jobseekers can take to make the most out of their career planning and educational investment.

It's best to pick something that you enjoy doing, and that matches your skills and personality. Once you've found something you like, it's important to know that every occupation requires some training, ranging from short-term to long-term. **Whether you go to college or not, on-the-job training and continual learning is critical to your career success.**

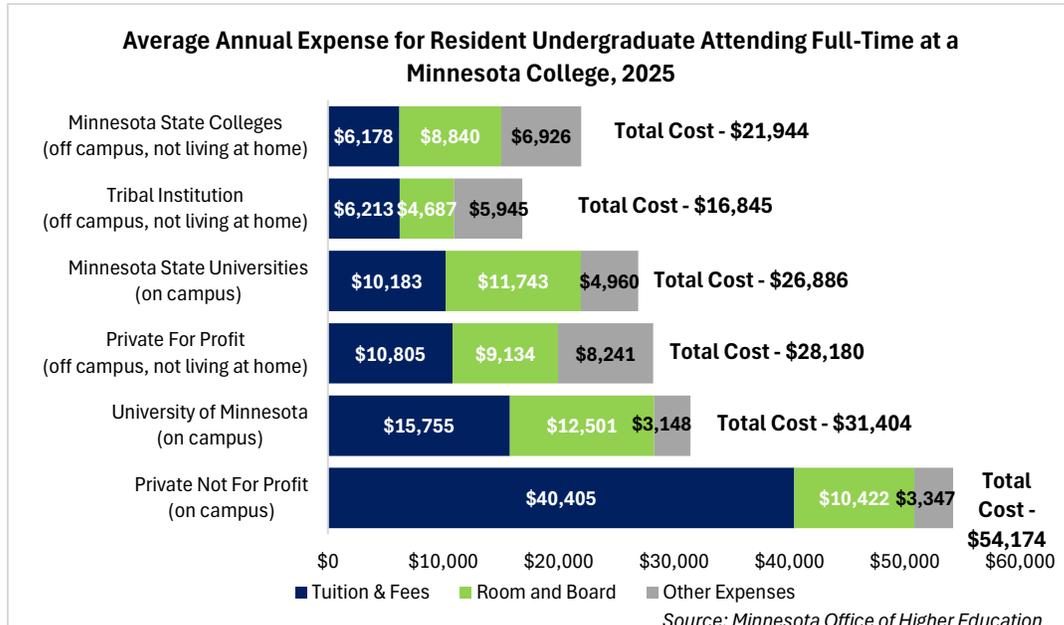
Do I need to go to college?

College is an excellent way to move up career ladders and open windows of opportunity to fields that would otherwise be closed, such as nursing or engineering. Many of these occupations offer high wages and are in high demand in the marketplace. Certain careers – such as dentists, lawyers, and schoolteachers – require a college education, while other jobs – including cost estimators, sales representatives, and correctional officers – do not. **Students and jobseekers might be surprised to learn that over three-fifths of all jobs in Southwest Minnesota can at least be started with a high school diploma or less, and only a quarter require college.**



How much does college cost?

While education is typically a worthwhile investment, **college can be expensive** – with average annual expenses ranging between \$16,850 and about \$54,000 per year in Minnesota. An associate degree at a state college in 2025 cost roughly \$26,200 (\$13,100 x 2 years) while a four-year bachelor's degree at the University of Minnesota passed \$125,600 (\$31,400 x 4 years). The Office of Higher Education provides a list of tuition and fees for every college in Minnesota (www.ohe.state.mn.us).



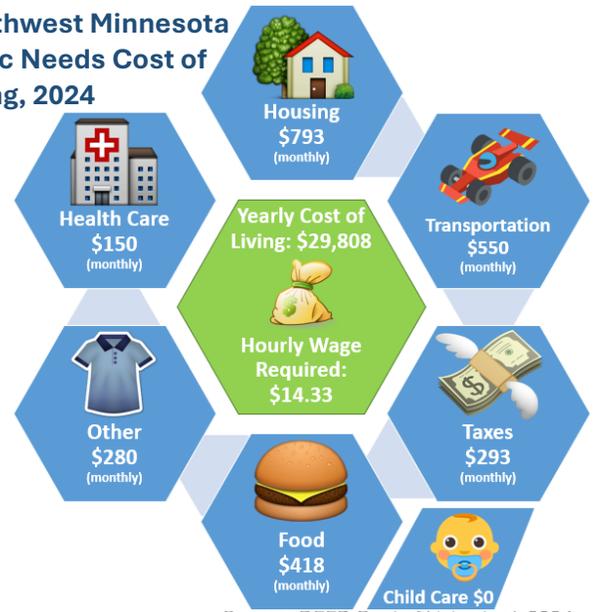
For those who go to college, your **choice of major matters** – different programs lead to different jobs that earn different amounts of money. For example, students who graduated from a Minnesota college with an associate degree in Registered Nursing were earning over \$82,750 within 2 years of graduating working full-time, year-round; while students with a 4-year bachelor's degree in Parks, Recreation & Leisure Studies working full-time were earning under \$40,900. DEED's [Graduate Employment Outcomes tool](#) can help potential students compare the costs of college with the typical earnings of graduates from programs at every Minnesota postsecondary institution to determine if their chosen major makes financial sense.

How much income will I need to make?

DEED's [Cost of Living tool](#) provides a yearly estimate of the basic needs cost of living in Minnesota, for individuals and families, by county, region, and statewide. The tool uses federal and state data to examine monthly living costs in seven categories: food, housing, health care, transportation, child care, other necessities, and net taxes.

According to 2024 estimates, the basic needs cost of living for a **single person** in Southwest Minnesota was **\$29,808**, which would require an hourly wage of **\$14.33** over the course of a full-time, year-round work schedule (2,080 hours). The highest costs were for housing and transportation, but of course both of those are greatly impacted by where you choose to live. Other costs would also vary based on your lifestyle, family size, and work status, and can go up or down based on your choices.

Southwest Minnesota Basic Needs Cost of Living, 2024



Source: DEED Cost of Living tool, 2024

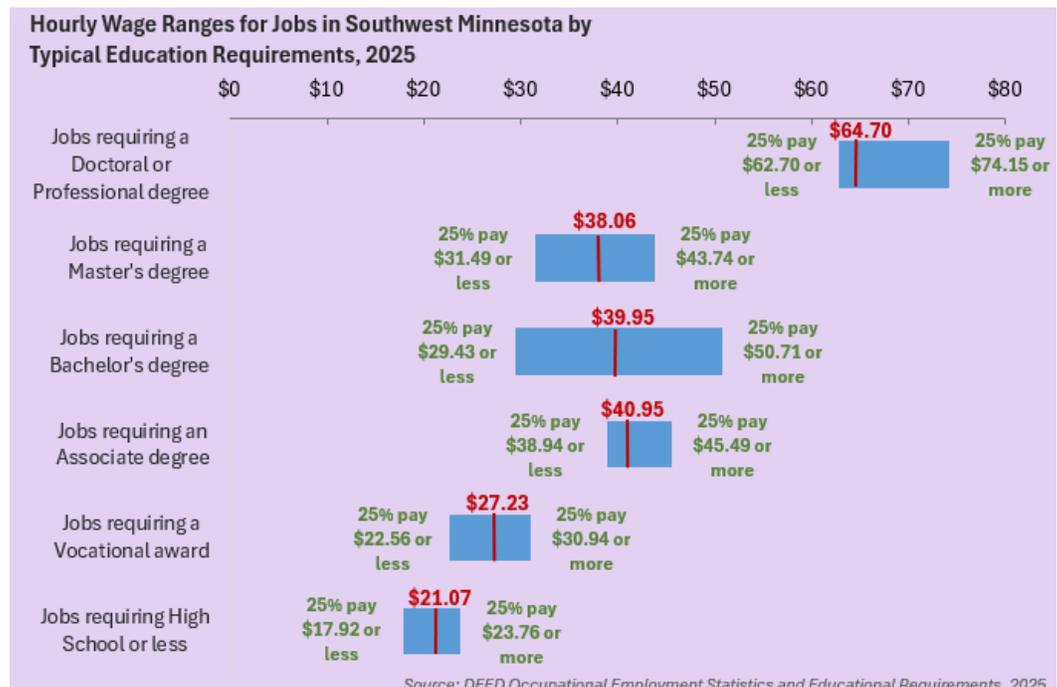
How much income will I actually make?

While income isn't the only thing that matters when choosing a career, everyone wants and needs to make money. In general, the job you choose determines the amount of money you're able to make over the course of your lifetime.

Data show that hourly wages rise for each additional level of education completed; however, it's important to see that **there are**

opportunities for jobs that provide livable wages at every level of education, including many that boast strong current and future demand in your region of the state.

Put simply, **not all great jobs require college, and not all college graduates end up in great paying jobs**. You can find state and regional wage information for about 800 occupations in Minnesota using DEED's Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics tool (<https://mn.gov/deed/data/data-tools/oes/>).



Source: DEED Occupational Employment Statistics and Educational Requirements, 2025

What jobs are in demand in my region?

According to DEED's [Occupations in Demand tool](#), there are more than 220 occupations showing high demand in Southwest Minnesota, with training and education requirements ranging from short-term on-the-job training to postsecondary education to advanced degrees:

Regional Occupations in Demand & Median Annual Wages, 2025			
Southwest Minnesota			
High School or Less	Vocational Training	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Cashiers \$29,957/yr	Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers \$56,626/yr	Registered Nurses \$87,199/yr	General & Operations Managers \$83,095/yr
Home Health & Personal Care Aides \$37,313/yr	Nursing Assistants \$42,326/yr	Police & Sheriff's Patrol Officers \$77,653/yr	Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education \$62,582/yr
Fast Food & Counter Workers \$30,720/yr	Licensed Practical & Licensed Vocational Nurses \$60,328/yr	Dental Hygienists \$96,312/yr	Secondary School Teachers, exc. Special & Career/Tech. Ed. \$63,481/yr
Retail Salespersons \$34,590/yr	Bus & Truck Mechanics & Diesel Engine Specialists \$60,377/yr	Industrial Engineering Technologists & Technicians \$60,463/yr	Accountants & Auditors \$75,070/yr
Janitors & Cleaners, Except Maids & Housekeeping Cleaners \$37,684/yr	Bookkeeping, Accounting, & Auditing Clerks \$49,699/yr	Occupational Therapy Assistants \$61,484/yr	Substitute Teachers, Short-Term \$42,191/yr
Stockers & Order Fillers \$37,463/yr	Substance abuse, behavioral disorder, & mental health counselors \$62,197/yr	Detectives & Criminal Investigators \$83,721/yr	Sales Representatives, Wholesale & Manufacturing, Technical & Scientific Products \$106,848/yr
First-Line Supervisors of Food Preparation & Serving Workers \$44,165/yr	Farm Equipment Mechanics & Service Technicians \$62,029/yr	Radiologic Technologists & Technicians \$79,581/yr	Financial Managers \$129,957/yr
Teaching Assistants, Except Postsecondary \$36,766/yr	Automotive Service Technicians & Mechanics \$50,172/yr	Mechanical Drafters \$67,942/yr	Special Education Teachers, Secondary School \$63,516/yr
Laborers & Freight, Stock, & Material Movers, Hand \$45,638/yr	Emergency Medical Technicians \$41,569/yr	Agricultural Technicians \$63,397/yr	Middle School Teachers, Except Special & Career/Tech. Ed. \$63,878/yr
Food Preparation Workers \$32,590/yr	Industrial Machinery Mechanics \$61,914/yr	Physical Therapist Assistants \$63,751/yr	Physical Therapists \$99,992/yr

Source: DEED Occupations in Demand

Who can help me with my job search?

There are a lot of people and resources that are willing and able to help you find a job or plan for your career, but it is up to you to reach out to them and put their advice into action.

The sooner you get started forging your path, the better!

CAREER INFORMATION RESOURCES IN SOUTHWEST MINNESOTA:

Southwest MN Private Industry Council

Youth & Young Adult Team

Office: 507-476-4040

Web: www.swmnpic.org/services/youth-and-young-adults/

South Central Workforce Council

Youth Council

Office: 507-344-2622

Web: www.workforcecouncil.org/youth-council/

DEED Regional Analysis

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