

The case for community college

By Josh Sanburn, Time

Riley Anderson was a C student in high school, bored by the work and driven partly by a desire to stay on the football team. In 2015, he graduated 25th in his class—of 31 students.

Without a particular career in mind, Anderson enrolled at Lake Area Technical Institute (LATI) in Watertown, S.D., a relatively inexpensive two-year college 30 minutes from his home. There, his classrooms were hangar-size spaces filled with wind turbines, solar panels, ethanol distillers and miniature hydroelectric dams. It seemed more like his dad's garage, where Anderson would spend hours tinkering with his 1971 Chevrolet pickup, than a place to learn math. But trigonometry began making sense when you used it to fit together piping systems. Basic computer code seemed worth learning when you could program an assembly-line robot.

The former C student soon started making straight A's. He graduated in May with a 4.0 gpa and, most important, a job lined up. Two years after squeaking by in high school, Anderson is set to become a maintenance technician at 3M. His annual starting salary is \$60,000. The South Dakota median is a little over \$53,000.

LATI is a model for the growing number of politicians, CEOs and academics who believe that community colleges have the potential to become much needed engines of economic and social mobility.

The value of an associate's degree has never been clearer. Currently, the median salary for someone with only a high school diploma is \$36,000. For those with a community-college

degree, it's \$42,600.

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