What's your plan after high school? It's a question that almost every junior and senior seems to wrestle with, for a select few the answer comes easy. They have known what they wanted to do or be since they were three years old. However, for many students, there is uncertainty in their answers.

In 2018, both CNBC and NPR published articles detailing the importance of technical skills. CNBC's article focused on the World Economic Forum and two major claims; first, that 65% of children who are entering elementary school will work in jobs that don't yet exist. And second, that a new, nontraditional educational model will be needed to meet the needs of that workforce. CNBC's writer makes the point that more and more companies are focusing on skills rather than degrees to hire employees. NPR's article focused on the number of technical skill jobs that go unfilled each year. NPR makes the point that these are not just jobs they are high paying careers that don't require a bachelor's degree.

At the Gordon County College and Career Academy, we want students to understand the options available to them, to have the skills needed to succeed in college or career, and to graduate with a plan in mind. With that in mind, we focus our programs and pathways around both college and career prep. We offer dual-enrollment opportunities for students to pursue college-level course work while in high school and offer valuable industry certifications like OSHA to ensure that students who want to enter the workforce have the skills to set themselves apart in their careers. At the GCCCA we offer Welding, Mechatronics, Industrial Maintenance, Graphic Design, Business, Information Technology, and Engineering, Drafting, and Design.

Welding
In the Welding program at the GCCCA, our students learn the basics of many of the processes and skills welders need to have a long, profitable career. However, our welding program goes beyond the basics. Our students can earn Dual-Enrollment credit in Welding through GNTC and an American Welding Society certification after they complete their pathway. These two opportunities prepare our students to enter the workforce and out-earn students from other programs; or to jump right back into their education and earn a technical degree. Either way, our welding students are ready for college and career.
Mechatronics and Industrial Maintenance

Engineering is one of the highest paying fields around. Mechatronics, Electrical and Mechanical Engineers can make up to $61,000 in their first year right out of college. However, a four-year degree isn't the only way to make money with those skills! There is a high demand for people who can enter the workforce right out of high school, or with a two-year technical degree and become Industrial Maintenance Technicians. According to salary.com Industrial Maintenance Technicians can make anywhere from $40,000 to $68,000 a year.

At the GCCCA our Mechatronics and Industrial Maintenance programs are teaching students the keys of electrical, hydraulic and pneumatic systems, PLCs, troubleshooting, safety, and general maintenance. These skills will serve them well, whether they intend to complete a four-year engineering degree, a two-year technical certificate or entering the workforce straight out of high school.

Graphic Design

Nearly everything we look at in media has been touched in some way by a graphic designer. Students at the GCCCA, who enter the graphic design pathway, learn the skills needed to begin working towards a career in graphic design. According to salary.com, the average base pay for a freelance graphic designer is $16 an hour or more than $33,000 a year. That career path doesn't require students to pursue a college education; rather just to have a passion, be willing to work hard and develop a portfolio of work to show clients. If students choose to continue their education through college study they could make over $55,000 a year.

Because of the GCCCA's location in Gordon County, we are in a position to allow our students to stay close to home while they pursue their next step in a Graphic Design Career.
Business

Business is changing at a rapid rate. The influx of technology into the business world has changed the way products are developed and produced, it has changed the way people interact with one another, and it has changed the way companies and customers interact with each other. According to Forbes, two of the most important skills students will need to have to enter the work-force in the next ten years are Data Literacy and Tech Savviness. Data literacy is the ability to gather, understand and use all of the information that comes from the technology around us, from search engine results to consumer spending habits, to logistics and production. Tech Savviness deals with a person's ability to remain on-trend in an ever-changing technological environment. At the GCCCA, our business classes are built to help students master those two skills. Students in our business courses are asked to utilize and interpret google analytics in their projects to learn how to turn raw data into

Information Technology

According to Forbes, five of the fastest-growing technical skills are in the IT field and many of them are focus on programming and understanding different programming languages. Google and Apple announced in 2018 that they would no longer require employees to earn a four-year degree. Rather, they would look at the experience in coding and programming in real-world settings. Not only are IT fields some of the fastest-growing technical fields, but they are also one of the highest paying with an average salary of around $78,000 a year. (According to payscale.com) Students at the GCCCA, are learning these programming languages and familiarizing themselves with computers in our Information Technology Pathways! Our students are preparing for high demand jobs and life-long careers every day!
Engineering, Drafting and Design

Computer-Aided Drafting has changed the way people design products, draw blueprints and improved the way businesses operate. CAD is part art and part science and requires a person who can view problems in creative ways. Students at the GCCCA have the opportunity to earn the Certified Solidworks Associate (CSWA) certification. This certification would prove to potential employers that our students have mastered the program. Nationally, the average salary for a CAD Designer is over $64,000. With starting wages between $15-$20 an hour this is a great career field for students to enter straight out of high school. Many companies in Northwest Georgia are looking for CAD designers and operators and will hire high school graduates or students with a two-year technical certificate.

We hope that you and your students will consider the courses offered at the GCCCA. The skills you learn here will help you moving forward no matter what path you choose to take. There are many high-paying careers for students with these skills right out of high school, with a two-year degree or with a four-year degree. We hope to help you develop a plan for your next step after high school, so you can enter college or career with purpose!