

# The Sad Truth

## About Why College Degrees Have Become More Valuable

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I discovered this in an unpublished manuscript at my annual economics conference:

“According to [Harrigan and Davies](#), between 1987 to 2007, 90% of the increased comparative value of a college degree came from the declining performance of high schools rather than the increasing performance of colleges; in essence, higher education has become more valuable because high school education has become exceedingly less valuable by comparison.” And that is despite the tripling in per pupil spending, adjusted for inflation, in the last fifty years. Students and families now need to spend big bucks on higher education to get them just past where they could have been with high school effectiveness at the ‘[Nation at Risk](#)’ level of the early 1980’s!

Most of the publicized test score data is for 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, which prevents widespread recognition of the biggest problem of all; the failure to engage near-adults in high value academics at high rates. Many schools are dysfunctional, but the larger problem is the schools that are reasonably good at what they do, but what they do is not a good fit for a lot of the children trapped there by the public school monopoly on public funding. Ending the officially sanctioned discrimination against students that are a poor fit for the mainstream instructional approaches – school choice on a level playing field between public and private options – is the exit strategy from this expensive, growing disaster.