

This week's issue:

SHOULD SCHOOLS HAVE A VOCATIONAL TRACK?



Jimmy is in the **vocational** track at his school. This means all his classes are geared toward preparing him to get a job after high school. In English class, he learns how to give a convincing job interview. His math class **focuses** on the ways businesses manage money. Jimmy wants to be a mechanic. His favorite class is auto shop. In auto shop, students fix cars and learn how to work with tools.

Jimmy attends a comprehensive high school. The school offers different programs for different types of students. Some students are preparing for college. Others, like Jimmy, learn about different kinds of jobs such as hair styling, child care, woodworking, and cooking. Graduates like Jimmy can get jobs in their field right out of high school. Previous graduates are working as hairstylists, plumbers, electricians, or medical technicians. These jobs do not require a college education, but they may require high-level math, reading, and writing.

Some people think comprehensive schools are **inherently** better than college preparatory schools. They think high schools should prepare students for whatever they want to do. People who support comprehensive schools point out that not everybody goes to college. These people believe that students who want to work right after they graduate might be more motivated to **exceed** expectations in school if they can take classes that will help them learn job skills. Vocational classes also let students experience different careers. Then students can decide what is right for them.

Other people think high schools should prepare all students for college. They worry that students in vocational classes are getting a watered-down education and won't be able to get into college if their career goals change. People who support college preparatory schools believe that all students should have an **equivalent** education.

In addition, supporters of college preparatory schools say that vocational classes often require expensive equipment. They point out that high costs for equipment means there is less money to pay teachers or buy textbooks for other subjects, like English or math. They suggest that perhaps students who want vocational training should take special classes after high school to prepare for the jobs they want.

Should high schools prepare everybody for college? Or should students be able to enroll in a vocational track?

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vocational | inherently | exceed | equivalent | focus

USE THE FOCUS WORDS *and alternate parts of speech

vocational (*adjective*) related to a skill, trade, or occupation

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Jimmy is in the **vocational** track at his school, so all his classes are geared toward preparing him to get a job after high school.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** What kind of **vocational** program would interest you most: child care, auto repair, woodworking, hair styling, or plumbing?

inherently (*adverb*) naturally, belonging to the basic nature of something

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Some people think comprehensive schools are **inherently** better than college preparatory schools.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Do you think people are **inherently** selfish? Explain.

exceed (*verb*) to be greater than; to go beyond

➡ **Sample Sentence:** People who support college preparatory schools believe that the value of an academic-focused education **exceeds** the value of job-focused training for high school students.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Which musical artists or sports teams **exceeded** the expectations of their fans this year?

equivalent (*adjective*) alike or equal

➡ **Sample Sentence:** School segregation ended when lawyers proved that schools serving black and white students were not providing students with **equivalent** educations.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Which TV show does the best job of giving **equivalent** representation to people of different races?

focus (*noun*) center of activity or interest

➡ **Sample Sentence:** The **focus** of his math class is the way that businesses manage money.

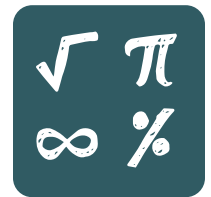
🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Do you think schools need to change their **focus** from academics to real-world skills?

***focus** (*verb*) to direct attention to

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Simeon decided to **focus** on studying instead playing video games so that he could improve his grades.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Do parents **focus** too much, or not enough, on manners? Explain your answer.

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DO THE MATH

Option 1: Blue Hills Regional Technical School is a **vocational** high school. **Vocational** education is **inherently** practical. Students **focus** on job training in programs like auto repair or education of young children. They earn a degree **equivalent** to a high school diploma. The table below shows the credit requirements at Blue Hills according to their website. Students must meet or **exceed** the requirement in each subject to graduate.

How many credits in math, English, science, and social studies do students need to graduate?


- A. 20
- B. 26
- C. 65
- D. 104

Subject	Credits
English	8
Math	8
Science	6
Social Studies	4
Physical Education	4
Vocational Training	32
Electives	2

Option 2: Ms. Wilson agrees that **vocational** schools should **focus** on job-related training for skills that students will use in the workplace. However, she also thinks that academic classes like math and English are **inherently** valuable, even though they do not always focus on direct connections to a career. She thinks that the number of required academic credits should be **equivalent** to, or even **exceed**, the number of **vocational** credits.

If v = the number of **vocational** credits, and a = the number of academic credits, write an inequality that shows the proper relationship, according to Ms. Wilson, between academic and **vocational** credits.

(Hint: You will use one of these four symbols: $>$, \geq , $<$, or \leq)

 **Discussion Question:** Some people think that English and math are **inherently** more important than science and social studies. High-stakes tests across the country **focus** on English and math. And some people feel that **vocational** students need science and social studies even less than traditional students. After all, how will learning about China or plant cells help students fix cars or style hair? At Blue Hills, the required credits in English and math **exceed** the required credits for science and social studies by 60%. Do you agree with this **focus** on math and English? Why don't science and social studies get **equivalent** respect?

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THINK SCIENTIFICALLY

The students in Ms. Kahn’s class were talking about how education **inherently** affects job opportunities. “I think it makes sense to **focus** on job skills I’ll be able to use right out of high school,” said Daylen.

“Preparing for college is more important,” said Tamara. “Having a college degree gives you an inherent advantage in looking for good jobs later on. **Vocational** high schools only prepare students for low-paying jobs, like flipping burgers. Anyway, there aren’t enough jobs for everyone with less than a college education.”

“I disagree,” answered Daylen. “There aren’t enough workers for many types of jobs in the U.S. With just a high school diploma or **equivalent**, like a GED, you can make a salary that **exceeds** fast food wages.”

“Could the two of you research the questions you’ve raised?” asked Ms. Kahn. “Are there enough jobs for America’s high school graduates? Are they well paid? What fields of work are in the greatest demand in the United States?”

Tamara and Daylen shared their findings based on data gathered in 2011 by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

In 2011:

- About 370,000 American students dropped out of high school.
- About 3,100,000 Americans graduated from high school. Of these high school graduates:
 - about 32% (or 990,000) did not go to college.
 - about 27% (or 840,000) enrolled in a 2-year college.
 - about 41% (or 1,270,000) enrolled in a 4-year college.

What are the fastest growing jobs in America that require a high school diploma?

What evidence supports Tamara’s hypothesis that there aren’t enough well-paying jobs for students who only have a high school diploma?

What additional information may be required to fully answer the question of how important a high school diploma is for job seekers?

Fastest Growing Jobs That Require Less Than a College Education

Occupation	Typical minimum education level	New jobs projected in next 8 years	Median salary for experienced workers
Home health aides and personal care workers	High School dropout	1,300,000	\$20,000.00
Food service workers	High School dropout	400,000	\$20,000.00
Cement workers	High School dropout	50,000	\$45,000.00
Total	High School dropout	1,750,000	
Information clerks	High School	725,000	\$30,000.00
Equipment operators, mechanics, and truck drivers	High School	375,000	\$45,000.00
Customer service workers	High School	340,000	\$30,000.00
Bookkeepers	High School	260,000	\$30,000.00
Sales representatives	High School	250,000	\$30,000.00
Carpenters, electricians, plumbers, and welders	High School	230,000	\$45,000.00
Medical secretaries and assistants	High School	75,000	\$30,000.00
Coaches and trainers	High School	75,000	\$30,000.00
Retail sales workers	High School	70,000	\$20,000.00
Pharmacy technicians	High School	50,000	\$30,000.00
Police officers	High School	50,000	\$45,000.00
Total	High School	6,000,000	

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DEBATE THE ISSUE

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A

High schools should prepare all students for college.

OR

B

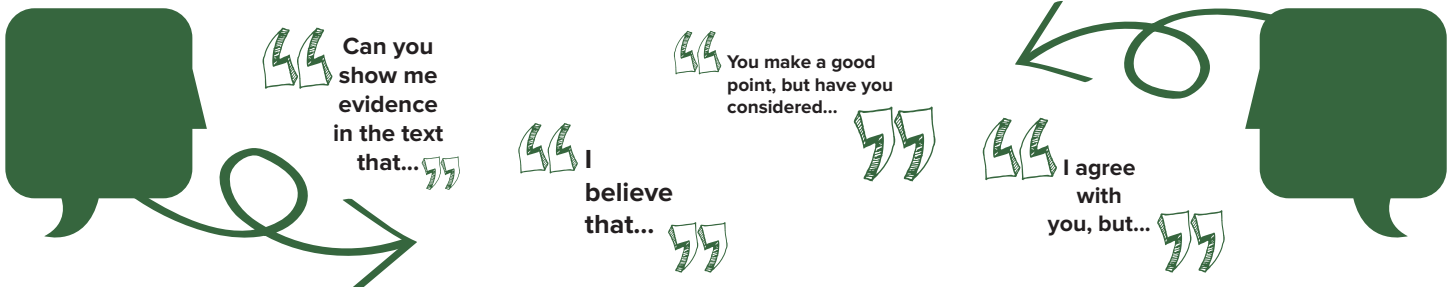
High schools should provide **vocational** training for students who know they do not want to go to college.

OR

CREATE YOUR OWN

Jot down a few notes on how to support your position during a discussion or debate.

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these:



““ Can you show me evidence in the text that...””

““ I believe that...””

““ You make a good point, but have you considered...””

““ I agree with you, but...””

