



Should schools have a vocational track?

GETTING ORIENTED

The weekly passage introduces issues related to academic tracking. Here is some information that might be helpful to students less familiar with the topic.

Comprehensive High Schools

Most public high schools in the United States are comprehensive high schools. Students at these schools can take classes to prepare for college or get a job after high school. Comprehensive high schools also have sports teams and music and arts classes for students. The United States has some vocational high schools for students who want to work with computers, in hospitals or in agriculture. Most job training in the United States happens after high school.

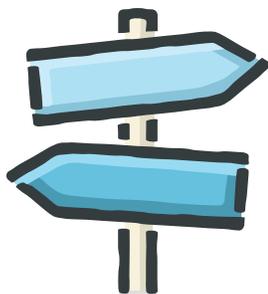


Vocational High Schools

In other parts of the world, like Europe, students choose a career or job before they go to high school. Sometimes, they take a test that shows them which career is best for them. In vocational high schools, students take many classes related to their future career or job. They begin working instead of going to college.

College-preparatory High Schools

In college-preparatory high schools all students take classes that get them ready for college. In some schools, graduation requirements are the same as the requirements for getting into college. Students take classes in many different subjects instead of focusing on one topic or subject.



Tracking

“Tracking” in US high schools happens when students take only one kind of class. A “college” track prepares students for college. A “career” track prepares students for a job after high school. Most of the time, students in one “track” can’t take classes in the other.



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EVIDENCE AND PERSPECTIVES

	<i>Some may have this view:</i>	<i>But others may think:</i>
Student	Students might stay in school if they feel they are learning something they are interested in doing as a job.	Students want to be ready for college even if they choose not to go right after high school.
Parent	If parents can't afford to send a child to college, they might want the child to be prepared for a specific job.	Parents want their children to be ready for college or a job.
Employer	Some employers want workers with specific skills. They need workers who can design video games or who have learned how to weld. They think schools should prepare students to be ready for these jobs when they graduate from high school.	Some employers want employees who can learn new skills as they work. They think college helps students develop the critical thinking skills that are required for many different tasks.
College Admissions	Most colleges want to see that students have experience in many different subjects.	College professors want students who are ready for the demands of college classes. They think that students need to spend more time in math, science and English classes in order to prepare for college classes.

- In 2009, 13% of all credits earned by high school students were in vocational education classes (National Center for Education Statistics).
- In 2004, 68% of all high school graduates who did not enroll in college had jobs (National Center for Education Statistics).
- “If I can give my child an edge through vocational training, she can become a chef not a waitress when the economy falters. If my daughter learns to repair cars, she can earn more than working in retail.” (Saunders, Anne. “The Argument for Vocational Education: College Degrees Have Lost Some of Their Value.” *The Concord Monitor*. July 20, 2011).
- Saunders, Anne. “The Argument for Vocational Education: College Degrees Have Lost Some of Their Value.” *The Concord Monitor*. July 20, 2011.

Additional Resources for Teachers:

- The Practice of Tracking in Schools
http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_Other_Side_Tracks/
- The Future of Vocational Education
http://www.nationinstitute.org/featuredwork/fellows/2692/the_future_of_vocational_education
- Too Narrow Too Soon? America's Misplaced Disdain for Vocational Education
<http://www.economist.com/node/16380980>
- Should All Students Aspire to Go to College?
<http://www.teachforamerica.org/blog/should-all-students-aspire-go-college>
- Why College Might Not be the Best Choice for Your Education Dollar
<http://www.dailyfinance.com/2012/08/09/college-vs-vocational-education-better-wages-less-debt/>
- Some Students Choose Early-career Training Over College-prep Courses
<http://www.9news.com/news/article/294102/188/Some-students-choose-early-career-training-over-college-prep-courses>
- How College Prep is Killing High School
<http://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2011/11/20/how-college-prep-killing-high-school/94mGUe6o9InIEuO9oMhnzJ/story.html>



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ANNOTATIONS FOR TEACHERS

Features of Academic Text: *Many words for “say”*

One feature of academic writing includes more formal word choice, many of which are familiar to most students but underused. These academic words and phrases are more precise and appear more in writing than in speaking.

*When speaking, we might say “Jimmy **goes** to a comprehensive high school. The school **has** different program for different types of students.”*

In schools, we talk about student “attendance” and “course offerings.” This is the language that schools use. Since this writer is talking about schools, it makes the writer seem more believable since she uses the language of schools.

Ask students who like basketball if they would trust a writer who says “The player was bouncing the ball” vs. “The player dribbled...”

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 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, wood working, 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 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 and that the risks of having a vocational track **exceed** the benefits.

In addition, supporters of college preparatory schools remind us that vocational classes often require expensive equipment. High costs for equipment means there is less money to pay teachers or buy textbooks for other subjects, like English or math. Supporters say 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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GENERATING WORDS

The root *equ-*

One of the focus words this week is **equivalent**. It means *alike* or *equal*. The author of the weekly passage says that some people don't support vocational school because they think students won't get an education that is *equivalent* to that of college prep students. They think that vocational school is not *equal* to college prep.

You may notice that the word *equivalent* and *equal* both have *equ* as part of the word. When you see a word that has *equ* in it, it usually has something to do with the word *equal*.

Here are some examples of words with the root "equ" and their definitions. See if you can complete the definition for the word *equator*.

Word with "equ"	Definition
equivalent	equal, alike
equality	everyone has equal opportunity
equation	a mathematical statement that says two amounts or values are equal (2+2 = 4)
equator	the imaginary line that _____ _____.

Practice:

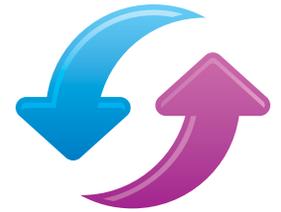
Using your new word knowledge, see if you can figure out the meaning of the words **equitable** and **equidistant** used in the sentences below:

People are concerned that there will not be **equitable** funding for schools that do not prepare students for college.

I think equitable means _____.

Seven-Eleven and Circle K are **equidistant** from my apartment; I can get to either one in the same amount of time if I need a bottle of water.

I think equidistant means _____.



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DEVELOPING DISCUSSIONS

Prepare an Interview

Procedure

1. In pairs, you consider the different sides of the argument for whether or not all public schools should include a vocational track.
2. Write a script for an interview between a school official who wants to include a vocational track and a reporter who doesn't. The reporter should ask questions that show his or her opinion. Use the focus words: *vocational, inherent, exceed, equivalent, focus.*
3. Every question should connect to something that the official said in the previous response.
4. After you write the script, prepare to act out the interview in front of another pair of students. You should act it out without reading directly from your papers.



Sample Interview Script

Reporter: Hello Ms. Harper. I was wondering what your position is on having a vocational track at your school.

Ms. Harper: I believe it is important to let students choose what they learn for their future. I believe that it is an inherent right to be able to choose one's future.

Reporter: Well, do you think students at age 15 are ready to choose what they will do?

Ms. Harper: For many students, being able to focus on one area is helpful. They get more motivated.

Reporter: What about the students who aren't ready to focus on one subject? Don't you think that many students will miss the chance to go to college?

