



Should schools have a vocational track?

GETTING ORIENTED

The weekly passage introduces issues related to vocational tracks at school. 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 to get a job after high school. Comprehensive high schools also have sports teams and music and arts classes for students. Most job training in the United States happens after high school.



College-Preparatory High Schools

In college-preparatory high schools, all students are expected to attend college. Students take classes in many different subjects, instead of focusing on one topic, and sometimes even earn college credit before they leave high school. Students also do other things to prepare for college, like make college visits, work on college essays in class, and participate in advisory groups to learn about different majors. Many other high schools may do these same things, but at college-preparatory high schools they are the core focus of the 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. The United States has some vocational high schools for students who want to work with computers, in hospitals, or in agriculture. After they graduate high school, they begin working instead of going to college.





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EVIDENCE AND PERSPECTIVES

	<i>Some may have this view:</i>	<i>But others may think:</i>
Student	Students who aren't interested in going to college might be more likely to stay in school if they are learning something they are interested in doing as a job. They may be concerned that they will need to get a job right after high school and will not have the skills to get a good job.	Some students feel they should be ready for college even if they choose not to go right after high school. They may want to be sure they are getting a broad and challenging education, no matter their career plans right now.
Parent	Some parents can't afford to send a child to college or worry their child will not be interested in college. They might want the child to be better prepared for a specific, more skilled job after high school.	Some parents want their children to be ready for college regardless of whether their children say they want to attend college after high school. They may not feel their children are mature enough to decide on a career and may want them to have options.
Employer	Some employers want workers with specific skills, rather than college degrees. They need workers who understand plumbing 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 especially want employees who can learn new skills as they work. They think college provides important higher-level skills and knowledge. However, they also believe it helps students develop the critical thinking skills that are required for many different tasks and to learn new things quickly.

Additional Information

- ✓ 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)

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>

How College Prep is Killing High School

<http://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2011/11/20/how-college-prep-killing-high-school/94mGUe6o9InEuO9oMhnzJ/story.html>



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ANNOTATIONS FOR TEACHERS

Features of Academic Text: *Formal language*

One feature of academic writing is more formal choice of words, 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 informally, we might say, “Jimmy **goes to** a comprehensive high school. The school **has** different programs for different types of students.”*

However, in academic writing about schools, we talk about student “attendance” and “course offerings.” It makes the writer seem more believable when he or she uses the more precise academic language for talking about schools.

Ask some of your students who like basketball if they would trust a writer who says “The player bounced the ball” vs. “The player dribbled the ball.”

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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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 schools 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:

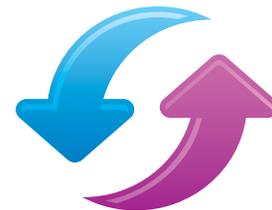
Using your new word knowledge, see if you can figure out the meanings of the words **equitable** and **equidistant**, used in the sentences below:

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

I think **equitable** means _____.

The grocery store and the convenience store 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, consider the different sides of the argument for whether or not all public schools should include a vocational track.
2. Write a script on the lines to the right 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 from the reporter 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?

Topic: Should schools have a vocational track?