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SHOULD SCHOOLS HAVE A VOCATIONAL TRACK?

Word Generation - Unit 3.13

Focus Words

vocational | inherent | exceed | equivalent | focus



WEEKLY PASSAGE

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?

Should schools have a vocational track?

FOCUS WORDS OF THE WEEK

vocational : (adjective) involved in training for a skill or trade

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

focus : (noun) center of activity or interest

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

inherently : (adverb) built-in, belonging by nature

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

exceed : (verb) to be greater than

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

equivalent : (adjective) alike or equal

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

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PROBLEM OF THE WEEK

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 car 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. 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) 24
- B) 65
- C) 20
- D) 104

| Subject | Credits |
|---------------------|---------|
| English | 8 |
| Math | 8 |
| Science | 5 |
| Social Studies | 3 |
| Physical Education | 3 |
| Vocational Training | 32 |
| Other | 3 |

Option 2: Ms. Wilson agrees that **vocational** schools should focus on skills that students will use in the workplace. However, she also thinks that academic classes like math and English are **inherently** valuable. She thinks that the number of required academic credits should at least be **equivalent** to, or even **exceed**, the number of vocational credits.

Blue Hills Regional Technical School. (n/d). Program of studies. Retrieved on August 20, 2008 from <http://www.bluehills.org/visitor/view/blue-hills-program.html>

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)

Math 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 have even less need of science and social studies than traditional students. After all, how will learning about China or plant cells help students fix cars or teach preschool? At Blue Hills, the required credits in English and math **exceed** the required credits for science and social studies by 100%. Do you agree with this focus on math and English? Why don't science and social studies get **equivalent** respect?

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THINKING SCIENTIFICALLY

The students in Ms. Kahn’s class were talking about how education affects job opportunities. “I think it makes sense to be able 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 Haley. “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 who has only a high school diploma or the **equivalent**, like a GED.”

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

➔ Two days later Haley and Daylen presented their findings based on data from 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 31% (or 960,000) did not go to college.
 - about 28% (or 870,000) enrolled in a 2-year college.
 - about 41% or (1,270,000) went to a 4-year college.
- Median wage for a full-time fast food worker in the U.S. was less than \$25,000 per year.

| Fastest Growing Occupations For High School Graduates and Dropouts | | | |
|--|---------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Occupation | Typical minimum education level | New jobs 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 | |

Refer to the information that Daylen and Haley found to answer these questions.

1. What are the fastest growing jobs in America that require a high school diploma?
2. Which evidence supports Haley’s hypothesis that there aren’t enough well-paying jobs for students who only have a high school diploma?
3. Which evidence does not support the hypothesis?
4. What additional information may be required to fully answer the question of how important a high school diploma is for job seekers?

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DEBATING THE ISSUE

I. Get ready...

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

A All high schools should offer a vocational and a college-preparatory track. This means all students can choose to focus on what is most important to them.

B All high schools should prepare students for college. Offering vocational classes exceeds the schools' responsibilities. Students who want jobs can enroll in special classes after graduation.

C High schools should prepare all students for college, but should offer vocational classes as electives. Students who take these electives can learn about a job as they prepare for college.

D There should be different high schools for students who want to go to college and for students who want immediate employment after graduation.

E _____

GO!

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

...because...

I disagree with part of that...

An example might help convince me. Can you give me an example?

What part of the passage makes you think that?

2. Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:

