Debate continues about the appropriate role for vocational education at the secondary level. The many educational reform reports issued during the early to mid-1980s initiated a reexamination of the role of secondary vocational education. As a result of the reform reports, high school graduation requirements in academic areas have increased, and the amount of time left for vocational education courses has been reduced. The amount and type of vocational courses needed has become an issue, with one faction calling for increased academic requirements for noncollege-bound youth and the other calling for increased job-specific training to prepare noncollege-bound youth for entry into the work force. The increasing numbers of at-risk youth have intensified this debate because secondary vocational education programs can provide an avenue to a productive life for many members of at-risk populations. Proponents who argue that vocational education should focus on general employability believe that specific skill training is best left to employers. Opponents to a focus on general employability training argue that high school may be the only opportunity for many youths to acquire job training. (A 25-item list of print resources and resource organizations is included.) (MN)
THE ROLE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL

An Overview of Trends and Issues

Debate continues about the appropriate role for vocational education at the secondary level. Should it provide specific skill training, or should it prepare individuals for employability in a more general fashion? Although vocational education at the secondary level was largely ignored by the many educational reform reports issued during the early to mid-1980s, those reports initiated the reexamination of the role of secondary vocational education.

As a result of the reform reports, high school graduation requirements in academic areas have increased, and the amount of time left for vocational education courses has been reduced. The amount and type of vocational courses needed have become an issue. Proponents of increased academic requirements argue that because many noncollege-bound high school students may eventually attend college, a broad background in basic skills is required. Opponents to this perspective counter that raising high school academic requirements deprives noncollege-bound students of the time needed for specific job training to prepare them for entry into the workforce.

The growing numbers of at-risk youth have intensified this debate because secondary vocational education programs can provide an avenue to a productive life for many members of at-risk populations. Proponents who argue that secondary vocational education should focus on general employability believe that specific skill training should be left to the employer or be acquired at the postsecondary level. Those who favor specific skill training at the secondary level feel that high school may be the only opportunity for many youth to acquire such training.

This Trends and Issues Alert contains a number of resources that provide information about the role of vocational education at the secondary level. Included are print resources as well as organizations that can be contacted for further information.

Print Resources


Resource Organizations

American Vocational Association, 1410 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22314 (703/683-3111).


ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, 1960 Kenny Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1090 (800/848-4815 or 614/486-3655).

Southern Regional Education Board, 592 10th Street, NW, Atlanta, GA 30318 (404/875-9211).

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