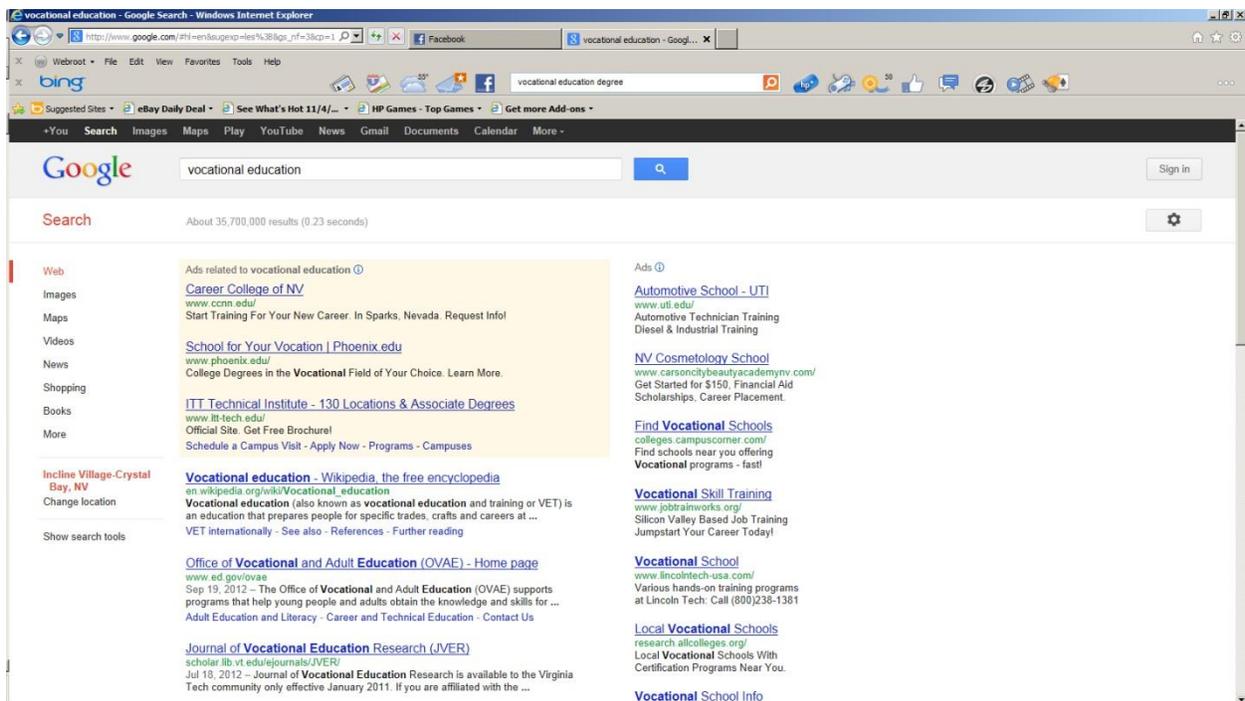


VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
(Challenges, Reinvention, Integration, and Implementation)

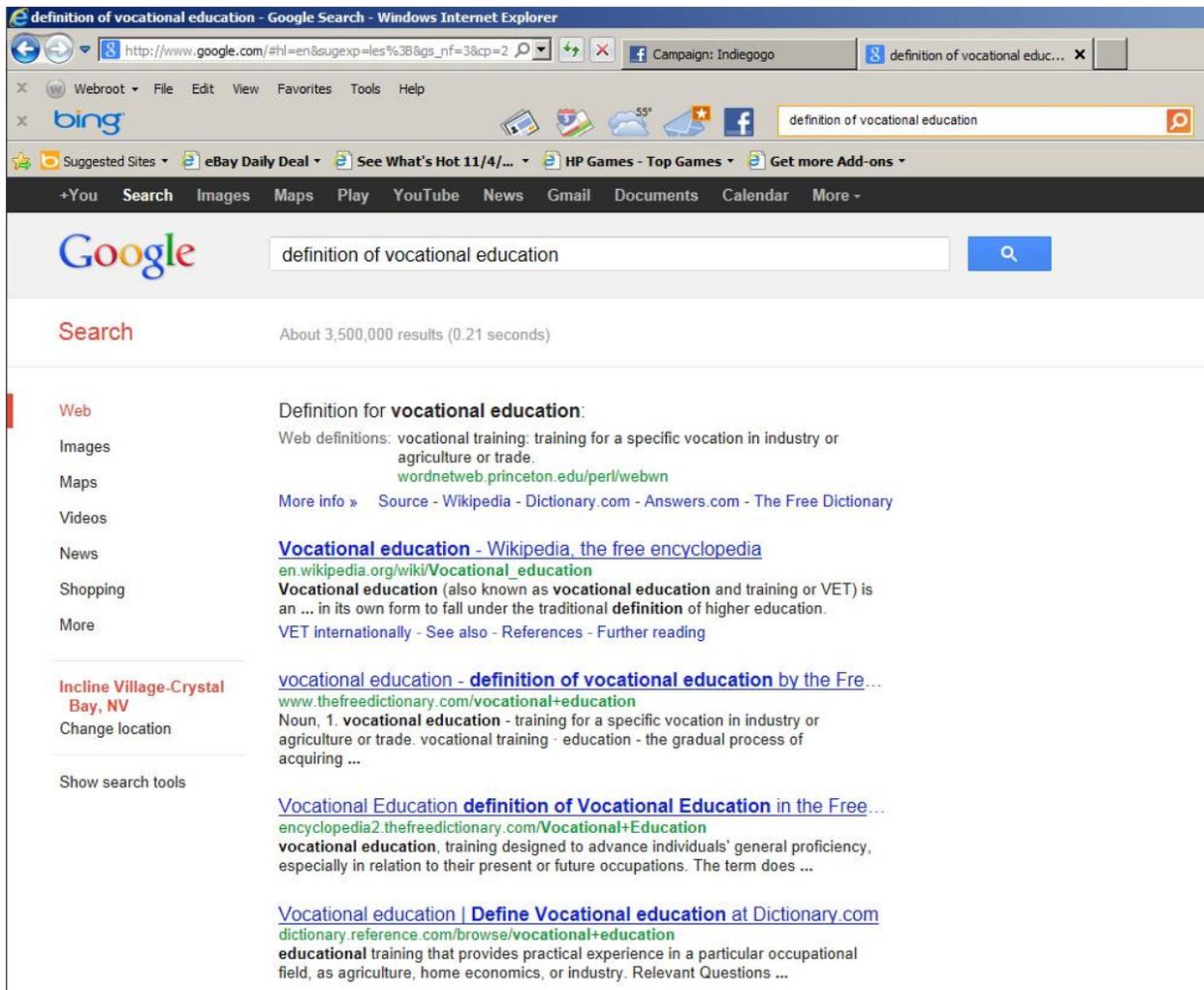
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INTRODUCTION:

President Bill Clinton bolstered our economy and changed our educational system through vocational education. However, in the 20 years that have passed since his time in office, very few people in today's world can clearly define what vocational education actually is. For example, "vocational education" researched on Google will not provide impressive or very descriptive results:



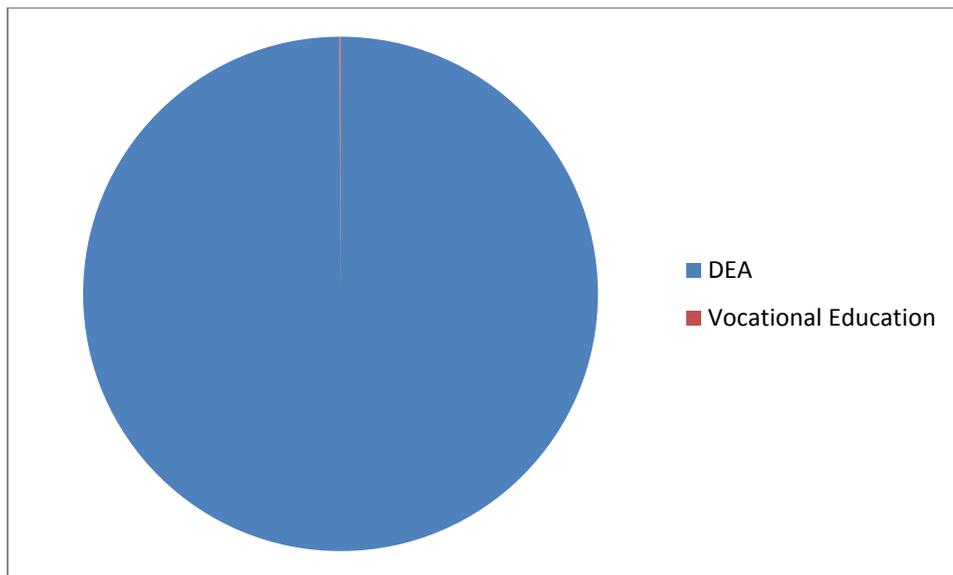
Further, here's what happens when the phrase, "definition of vocational education," is typed into Google:



Since Google does not clearly define vocational education, and the term is not recognized in the great and powerful Webster's dictionary, one cannot fully begin to intellectualize the concept of vocational education, let alone comprehend its clear significance and relation to the advancement of American prosperity without some guidance.

For the purpose of this introduction, let's conduct a little research effort. Let's propose we look to the US Department of Education for an answer. If we do, we'll certainly find a miscellaneous, nearly unmentioned page on their website indicating that vocational education is a form of education where, "...All students acquire challenging academic and technical skills

and [are] prepared for high-skill, high-wage, or high-demand occupations in the 21st century global economy.” (US Department of Education. Web). This is a fair enough definition of vocational education. It clearly states what the intention of vocational education is according to the USDE, Further, it reassures us that the government is looking after vocational education. Why, they’ve even created a special office for this very purpose. But is this really what we are looking for? Although it sounds like the government has a vested interest in making vocational education a priority, one only needs to view the simple pie chart below and compare the number of dollars spent on vocational education to the number of dollars spent on the Drug Enforcement Agency to see a *very* different picture.



See that little pink sliver in the middle of all that blue? That’s how much the US government is interested in helping people get back to work through vocational education. (\$1.735 million). (US Vocational Education Budget. Web). Now compare that to their desire to fight illegal drugs (\$2.5 Billion). (US DOJ. Web).

But... What if the US government took all the money currently used to fight drugs, and instead, invested in vocational education? What would happen to our economy if people were able to go to a vocational school instead of jail? Think about how different our country would be if we gave people the skills they needed to get back to work? What would happen to our overcrowded jail system? Would people still feel helpless? Would they still *want* to do drugs? Would we even need a Drug Enforcement Agency?

This essay will dive into the heart of these questions by discussing what the current challenges of vocational education are, provide solutions and suggest how we can fix the issues, and how we can get people back to work through the reinvention, integration, and implementation of vocational education as the core curricula for high school education.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
(Challenges, Reinvention, Integration, and Implementation)

Vocational education (often referred to as technical education or occupational education) is on the decline after taking a severe financial and public beating by the George W. Bush *No Child Left Behind* educational policy. Marsha Tejada (a teacher at Incline Middle School in Incline Village, Nevada) explains:

“Over my 34 years of teaching, I have seen vocational education basically disappear. The focus now is on sending each and every child to college whether or not he or she is "cut out" for college. I think this is a mistake. Many will do well in college and, as is widely known, those who do attend college tend to earn a higher overall (lifetime) wage. However, there are those students who prefer to work in areas for which college is not a prerequisite. I think it's a mistake to funnel these students to a college track.”

(Tejada, E-mail Interview).

Although the *No Child Left Behind* policy is being reworked by the current (Barak Obama) administration, vocational education is still not considered to be a central part of the administration's mission for student success. As a result, teachers like Marsha Tejada are feeling that *No Child Left Behind* is limiting our students. Yet, teachers like Marsha and employers like Russ Lesser (President, Body Glove International) are beginning to voice that there must be an alternative approach to education that marries vocational education and the no child left behind policy.

“I think a vocational education is great for some people who may not want to, or be geared for a traditional college education. We need high skilled plumbers, electricians, mechanics, etc. A good vocational skill can get you a job that pays better and is more satisfying than working at a McDonalds.” (Russ Lesser. E-mail Interview).

Changing our national education policy is not easy, but it can be accomplished. The most logical pathway to do this is by creating a *cooperative* education initiative that bridges the gap between vocational education and the *No Child Left Behind* policy. Further, balanced education and cooperative teaching techniques that are centered around, and move through, vocational education will most likely bolster the economy, provide students with a chance to learn a trade, and help students seamlessly enter the workforce.

The US office of Vocational Education (OVAE), describes its mission as being, “...responsible for helping all students acquire challenging academic and technical skills and be prepared for high-skill, high-wage, or high-demand occupations in the 21st century global economy. (OVAE, web). Although this is a broadly stated mission that encompasses several types of programs, vocational education courses are commonly taught through Regional Occupational Programs (ROP’s) such as Southern California Regional Occupational Center in Torrance California (to find out more about SCROC visit www.scroc.com).

ROP’s are designed to teach students a trade, however, these schools - with the exceptions of on campus instruction - are often reserved for students that are underachievers, or in some cases ordered by courts to attend. As a result, there is a stigma attached to ROP programs that has altered how the atypical student feels about them. Generally speaking, most

students feel like attending these programs will hurt their chances to get into a good college. Therefore this stigma has resulted in the need for more off-campus programs. However, these off-campus programs face several unique challenges.

The logistics involved in bringing students to an ROP campus are profound. Transporting students from one school (or in some cases several) to an ROP campus is both expensive and labor intensive. To combat this expense and logistically intensive exercise, most ROP programs provide campus instructors or programs (or both) that travel to (or are based on) high school campuses. These programs and instructors are called *campus and community programs/ instructors*. Campus and community programs have proven to be effective, yet, the funding sources for these programs and instructors are not highly valued by federal, state, and local officials. Even worse, they are completely devalued by policy makers. Yet, the requirement for an on campus programs is simply to provide a space for instruction to take place. Nonetheless, *No Child Left Behind* has left a void in available classroom space, and created a vacuum with which school administrators are helpless to fill. But, let's rewind a bit. In order to answer provide solutions to these problems, we must first dive into a bit of the origins of vocational education.

Vocational education dates as far back as 1860 with the institution of the Morrill Act. The Morrill act was intended to create educational opportunities to future farmers, and was one of the first pieces of public legislation intended to further education. However, "Early in the twentieth century, vocational education was a prominent topic of discussion among American educators as schools struggled to meet the labor force needs consistent with the shift from an agrarian to an industrial economic base. In his 1907 address to Congress, President Theodore Roosevelt urged major school reform that would provide industrial education in urban centers

and agriculture education in rural areas. A powerful alliance supporting federal funding for vocational education was formed in 1910 when the American Federation of Labor (AFL), who had long opposed such programs as discriminatory, lent its approval to the National Association of Manufacturers' (NAM) promotion of trade instruction in schools.” (Castro. Web). Later in the twentieth century, the Future Farmers of America (FFA) began to cultivate the system that we now know as vocational education. The FFA began creating a series of farming courses for students that essentially taught students how to work their parents land. Through these FFA courses, students and teachers realized that they needed to create additional courses that supplemented farming curricula. These courses eventually gave way to manufacturing, welding, and several other related courses. In urban settings, however, educators began to see the value in auto mechanics and other farming related courses and began offering these courses to students.

Fast forward a bit, to 1992 when President Bill Clinton instituted a public education policy that championed and encouraged the creation of vocational education courses. President Clinton – a firm believer in building the middle class – began the widespread approval of grants and public funding for vocational schools which led to the creation of ROP programs. Fast forward to 2012. *No Child Left Behind* was instituted and maintained by both the W. Bush administration and (although refined) the current (Obama) administration. With the passage of *No Child Left Behind*, funding for vocational education virtually stopped, and several programs were either shut down, or forced to charge high enrollment fees. As a result, today’s schools have few – if any – vocational education courses on-campus, and ROP programs are looked down upon by educators and students alike.

Nevertheless, as the US economy hovers in a state of near desperation, there is a growing need for ROP programs in schools. In fact, the concept of school based enterprise clearly defines

why we need to create more vocational education programs, ROP campuses, and school based enterprise programs. “We can define school-based enterprise (SBE) as any activity through which students produce goods or services for sale to or use by people other than themselves. For example, high school students build or rehabilitate houses, staff childcare centers, fix cars, run restaurants, raise crops or livestock, and create clothing.” (Castro. 3). With this understanding of a school based enterprise, we can see how integrating curricula for these classes/ programs can lead to future economic prosperity and freedom for any student who participates in them. Simply put, these courses teach students how to work, solve problems, and better prepares them for college. The problem, however lies within the matter of creating and instituting curricula.

Although there are a few exceptions, vocational educators and administrators are either retired experts in their field who have chosen to give back to their community by becoming educators (or mentors), or people who have for one reason or another chosen to leave their profession in order to teach. Therefore, “One ubiquitous problem is the absence of ready-made curriculum or text for each program. Instead, the small group of teachers running the enterprise have to develop the whole scope and sequence of what students are expected to learn – a nearly impossible task.” (Castro. 140). This daunting task is at the core of why ROP programs, and the vocational education system has generated the terrible stigma attached to it. In other words, vocational educators are under qualified for teaching, overqualified in their given profession, and under qualified in creating a reasonable system for evaluating student outcomes. These issues contribute to a significant lack of vocational education funding.

In any field, pay is a motivating factor for achieving gainful employment. The field of education is widely known as being a very low reward, high pressure, big responsibility field. Unfortunately, people who may otherwise be interested and qualified to teach vocational

education courses are provided little motivation to leave their profession. More often than not, their field of expertise has higher pay, lower pressure, and less responsibility. As a result, vocational educators end up having less professional knowledge, or are highly motivated but lack the necessary skills to create curricula and institute reasonable student outcomes from which they can assess and evaluate students.

A lack of funding has also created several other issues within the vocational education system. Too often vocational programs are piecing together their funding from several different sources. Their funding sources include federal, state, and local funding, as well as public funding, grants, and private donations. Grants, of course, require full time paid grant writers which, in and of itself, requires additional funding. Additionally, vocational education is competing with science, math, and language funding, as well as funding for the arts, and sports programs on the federal, state, and local level. As a result, there are several innovative programs that have tried, successfully, to integrate vocational education into other programs that are community based. One such program is the I-BEST program in Washington State. “This program, developed by the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges and launched in the spring of 2004, was designed, ‘to provide educational access and support for adult basic education (ABE)/ English as a Second Language (ESL) students to progress further and faster along career pathways.’ It helps often underserved populations gain the skills necessary to earn a livable wage.” (Hyslop. 1). This innovative approach to funding both vocational education and ESL highlights exactly how innovative and resourceful vocational education administrators must be to utilize every dollar of their funding.

Regardless of its limitations, vocational education provides several benefits to students. For example, vocational education programs are providing students with a curriculum

that is designed to stimulate entrepreneurial thinking. Additionally, vocational education produces students that are immediately ready to enter the workforce straight out of high school. Further, the vocational education curriculum inherently produces collegiate thinkers. Finally, the vocational education curriculum creates and promotes cooperative education. Entrepreneurs and small businesses are the backbone of the American economy. Therefore, vocational education will essentially stimulate the economy by creating entrepreneurs and students who are immediately ready to enter the workforce. Because vocational education inherently produces collegiate thinkers, students who enter ROP programs or vocational education courses are more prepared to think critically, and are more prepared to take college courses. Cooperative education is highly touted as the most effective form of education for secondary students because they are immersed in their studies in a comprehensive curriculum. Vocational education stimulates this type of learning, therefore, students are not just memorizing answers for a test, they are learning while retaining information. Therefore, students become well-rounded life-long learners that are willing to, and capable of, adaptation to the changing world.

Radically changing the vocational education system is a challenge that has not yet been effectively realized. However, there are several private and public initiatives that are attempting to accomplish this rather daunting task. Cooperative education has been attempted in Montessori, charter, and private schools across the nation. Seamless transitions from one class to another is the key to successfully integrating vocational education into traditional secondary education, and through cooperative curriculum, teachers will be able to work together to provide a well-rounded educational experience to students. We can further accomplish this by generating a community learning environment whereby teachers, administrators and parents take

responsibility for student outcomes. This educational guideline will ensure that vocational education can be prominent in a system that actually works.

Balanced education, therefore is one of several solutions that will marry vocational education and the *No Child Left Behind* policy for nationalized education. This means that education must move toward and through vocational education using a total immersion and cooperative approach. Cooperative education is an educational strategy whereby teachers, administrators and community members work together (cooperatively) to create a comprehensive educational plan that immerses students in several subjects. As Alyssa Aninos (Manager, Dress The Part(y), Incline Village, NV) pointed out during an E-mail conversation, “When it is a mandatory part of a student's curriculum, it ignites their imagination and produces the desire to learn more. At the very least, it gives them a grasping of something to hold on to for future knowledge. Taking that a step further, the potential outcomes could range from having more American based manufacturing methods to more independent business owners supplying their own trades and good at a higher competitive/ quality level.” (Aninos. E-mail). Getting the community involved in vocational education courses can help students connect with a real, actual, tangible job. In addition, the community can connect with students. Students who work with community members like Alyssa, gain valuable hands on work experience which helps them transfer knowledge from one situation to another... That is, from work to school, and school to work. In addition, students who gain work experience in their local community have a better chance of getting hired upon completion of their respective program. To that end, the employers that they are working for are more likely to hire the students they have trained.

Using a block system to create a commonly themed core curriculum is another step educators can take to mainstream vocational education. Block systems work with vocational

education in this way: In a semester block, a curriculum theme is determined and collaborated upon by administrators and educators. This theme might be as simple as Valentine's Day. In this instance, English teachers would base their curriculum around reading and writing about Valentine's Day, or read poetry about love, writers, or great people in History who spoke about love. Whereas, Geography students would learn the geography of the world by learning about where Valentine's Day began geographically, where St. Valentine lived, and try to locate historical Valentine geography throughout the world. Vocationally, a welding class would learn about how to weld creating shapes that looked like great hearts. And this would continue throughout the course of the semester. The key to making it work, is getting teachers to work together, to welcome cooperative education techniques.

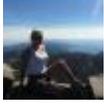
There are numerous undiscovered ways to integrate vocational education into the core principles of *No Child Left Behind*, however, there are many obstacles that policy makers will have to overcome. From budgets, to changing the collective consciousness, the task of making vocational education the centerpiece of the American educational system is no easy task. Yet there are possibilities that ignite the minds of vocational educators and core curricula educators alike. Regardless, there is clearly a need to institute a public and national movement for change. During this current economic crisis, it is apparent that we need vocational education because it trains future employees. In this consumer based nation, we need workers to manufacture goods, educators that can teach them how to do it, and sustainable long term careers that result from outcomes derived in the basis of vocational curricula. When we have workers, we have contributing members of society. Contributing members of society reduce the national debt by increasing revenue derived from taxes, which bolsters the economic outlook and prosperity of our nation, which generates national pride, which creates power, which creates wealth, which

inevitably generates domination, which is ultimately what American's want to be as a collective. That is... Dominant, powerful, prosperous, and well educated. Therefore, balanced education and cooperative teaching techniques that are centered around, and move through, vocational education will most likely bolster the economy, provide students with a chance to learn a trade, and help students seamlessly enter the workforce.

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E-mail Interviews



9:08am

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Alyssa Aninos

1) what, if any, is the value of voc. Ed from your perspective?

* Diversity. Expanding the mind to absorb and become aware of information that will benefit lives from either a consumer's or producer's perspective.

2) How do you feel No Child Left Behind has affected vocational education?

* Limits the accessibility to the power of knowledge.

3) How can voc ed be improved?

* When it is a mandatory part of a student's curriculum, it ignites their imagination and produces the desire to learn more. At the very least, it gives them a grasping of something to hold on to for future knowledge.

4) If voc ed was mainstreamed into core curricula, what do you feel the outcomes would be?

*Please see previous answer...Taking that a step further, the potential outcomes could range from having more American based manufacturing as a result of improved manufacturing methods to more independent business owners supplying their own trades and goods at a higher competitive/quality level.

5) What do you feel some of the major challenges of vocational education faces?

*It is viewed more as a hobby related sphere rather than a potential livelihood and income producer. It is not considered a necessary part of college acceptance and therefore not viewed as important. However, if people took in to consideration the number of jobless college graduates, vocational ed might be viewed as a more important source of income.

6) do you have a personal experience with vocational education? If so, describe it, and what was good about... What was not so good?

*I was very excited to have the opportunity to learn on the vocational-ed wheel....however, i soon realized that somewhere along the line parents/students/teachers did not feel these classes were heavily weighted and therefore the not as disciplined as to how it was approached.

To: JarrettGrimes

From: Russ Lesser, President, Body Glove International. (russ@bodyglove.com)

Jarrett,

I think vocational education has suffered as more emphasis has been placed on "college prep" courses. When I was at Mira Costa we all took some kind of shop class (wood shop, general shop, auto shop, etc) our first year or so. To answer your questions,

1) I think a vocational education is great for some people who may not want to, or be geared for a traditional college education. We need high skilled plumbers, electricians, mechanics, etc. A good

vocational skill can get you a job that pays better and is more satisfying than working at a McDonalds. I have a nephew who was just not succeeding in college, but went to a school to become a photographer and is doing great.

2) Not sure, but would guess it has hurt it, as I believe the standardized testing is on the traditional math and language skills.

3) Recognize the important need it fulfills and encourage students that want to go that route to go there.

To: Jarrett Grimes

From: Marsha Tejada

Over my 34 years of teaching, I have seen [vocational education](#) basically disappear. The focus now is on sending each and every child to college whether or not he or she is "cut out" for college. I think this is a mistake. Many will do well in college and, as is widely known, those who do attend college tend to earn a higher overall (lifetime) wage. However, there are those students who prefer to work in areas for which college is not a prerequisite. I think it's a mistake to funnel these students to a college track.

NCLB has focused on testing and, therefore, teaching to the test. While it is essential that every student read, write and compute competently, regardless of their chosen profession, it has sapped resources and time from other programs, including vocational education.

I hope that in the future, voc ed programs will become more widespread again. If I've learned anything in my 34 years of teaching, it's that things eventually come around again!

Hope this is at least a bit helpful.

M

Marsha Tejada, Faculty
Incline Middle School
Lake Tahoe, Nevada