

# Educational and Career Interests

## Overview

Students need guidance in developing educational and career awareness and self-understanding about their post-secondary choices. This lesson is designed as a series of class discussions to help students think about their future.

### LESSON OBJECTIVE

In this lesson, students will discuss the range of options and decisions that come with entering the post-secondary world.

### CONCEPTS

- Recognizing the importance of post-secondary goals
- Understanding the importance of graduating from high school
- Knowing what educational options are available after high school
- Recognizing the requirements of various post-secondary options
- Identifying career options available after high school
- Understanding the nature of a job
- Matching interests and abilities with career choices
- Understanding work ethics

### ALIGNMENT WITH TRANSITION SKILLS INVENTORY

- **Primary:** E-1, pages 136–139; E-2, page 141; E-3, page 142; and E-4, pages 143–144 in the *Transition Skills Inventory*.
- **Secondary:** H-4, pages 242–244; R-3, page 509; and R-4, page 510 in the *Transition Skills Inventory*.

### CONNECTIONS TO OTHER LESSONS

- “What Kinds of Jobs Interest You?” see *Using a Community Agency*.

## Vocabulary

- Associate’s degree
- Bachelor’s degree
- Career
- College
- Community college
- Distance learning
- Employment
- Expenses
- Income
- Job requirements
- Occupation
- Tuition
- Vocational

## Discussion Questions

These questions are meant to introduce, at a high level, topics that will then be discussed further using the discussion sessions that follow. These high-level questions will help your students start thinking about what they see as their post-secondary options. Emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers and that this is a time to think about what they want for the future.

- Why do you think it is important to finish high school?
- What would you like to do after you graduate from high school?
- Would you like to continue school, get a job, or do both?
- What occupation(s) interest(s) you?



# Discussion Topics

## Discussion Topic 1: Why Is It Important to Finish High School?

### Objective

- Explore the benefits of finishing high school

### Questions for Students:

- Why can dropping out of high school seem appealing?
- If you did not finish high school, what would you do?
- What kinds of jobs do people you know have who've not finished high school?
- What would you like to be doing ten years from now?
- What do you think you need to do between now and then to make that happen?

### Get Your Students Thinking:

One study shows\*:

- High school dropouts are more likely to be unemployed than people with four or more years of college. Why do you think this is the case?
- People who don't graduate from high school earn less during their lifetime than those with a high school diploma. What do you think this means about the kinds of jobs people without a high school diploma find?
- Dropping out of high school will affect how you live for the next 50 years of your life. If you do not earn a diploma, how could this affect your life?

\*Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the U.S. 1972–2008. NCES

### Engaging Your Students:

- Have the students work in small groups to brainstorm things that a person might miss out on by not finishing high school.
- Ask each student to make a list of life goals, which should include career as well as personal goals. Discuss with the students individually or as a group how achieving each goal could be affected by a decision not to finish high school.
- Have the students list the names of people they know who have appealing jobs or careers. The students may then interview some of those people to learn about the educational requirements for each kind of work.



### Check for Understanding

- Does the student recognize the importance of finishing high school?
- Can the student understand the implications of how not finishing high school could impact future goals?

## Discussion Topic 2: What's Next for You—School or Work?

### Objective

- Examine the options available after high school

### Questions for Students:

- What job opportunities are available in our area for a high school graduate?
- What educational options are available after high school?
- What is involved in getting into (a vocational school, community college, four-year college) after high school?
- What is involved in getting a job?
- What things should you consider to decide between more school or starting work?

### Get Your Students Thinking:

- There are many places in school and the community where people can go to explore jobs, like the Career Center. Where would you go to learn more about jobs available to high school graduates?
- Where would you look for information about educational options available to you?
- Which choice—school or work—better supports your goals for the future?
- If school is of interest, how would you pay for school?
- What are the admissions requirements for the schools you are considering?

### Engaging Your Students:

- Arrange an opportunity for one or more students to interview a human resources staff member from a major employer in your community—one where students might be interested in finding a job. Have them ask about jobs available to high school graduates and jobs that require special training or a college degree. The students may report what they have learned to the rest of the group.
- Have the students search for jobs using the online version of your local newspaper. Have them read the qualifications for the jobs and note which jobs require a high school diploma and which jobs require a higher level of education or training.
- Have students talk with parents and caregivers about the options that are open to them and ways that their parents can support them through the transition process.



#### Check for Understanding

- Does the student understand the post-secondary options open to him/her?
- Does the student recognize that some jobs have educational requirements?

### Discussion Topic 3: More Education—What Are the Options?

#### Objective

- Recognize options in post-secondary education

#### Questions for Students:

- What is a community college?
- What is a vocational school?
- What is an example of a career that a vocational school could prepare you for?
- How are community colleges alike and different from vocational schools?
- What is the relationship between community colleges and four-year colleges?
- What is an example of a career goal that would require a degree from a four-year college?
- How would you pay tuition for the school that you want to attend?

#### Get Your Students Thinking:

- There are different types of schools with many different programs to help students succeed in life. What are some reasons people choose to go to one type of school over another?

If you wanted to be trained as one of the following, where do you think you could get the training/education you would need?

- A veterinarian's assistant
- A hairstylist
- A kindergarten teacher
- A teacher's aide

(Add additional careers based on your students' interests/ability levels.)

## Engaging Your Students:

- Help the students research and make a list of all the post-secondary schools in your area that interest them—within a radius of 25 miles (or other stated distance) from their home. Have them classify the schools by type: community college, vocational school, four-year college.
- Have the students work in small groups to list jobs that they see performed in their community. Guide them in doing research to discover the education/training required for each job that interests them.
- Arrange for someone who has completed a career-training program at a local college to speak with the students about the program and the job it prepared them for.



### Check for Understanding

- Does the student recognize the different options for post-secondary education?
- Does the student recognize that different careers require different kinds of education and training?
- Does the student understand the idea of tuition for all post-secondary education options?

## Discussion Topic 4: Is Vocational Training for You?

### Objectives

- Understand what vocational training is
- Explore the occupations that require vocational training

### Questions for Students:

- What is vocational training?
- How is vocational training different than attending a community college?
- How is vocational training different than a four-year college?
- What areas of vocational study are interesting to you?

- What vocational programs are located in our area?
- How would you pay the tuition for vocational training?
- What are the admissions requirements for the vocational school that interests you?
- What would attending a vocational school be like?
- What are apprenticeships and internships?

### Get Your Students Thinking:

- Vocational training is any educational program designed to teach skills for a particular kind of work. Programs may focus on many different career paths (e.g., culinary arts, medical assistance, automotive repair, web design, and more). What other careers require vocational training?
- Vocational programs differ. Some are offered by school systems and other public agencies; others are run by for-profit vocational schools. Community colleges also offer vocational programs, as do some four-year colleges. What type of vocational program would you consider?
- Graduates of vocational programs may receive a certificate or license, an associate's degree, or a bachelor's degree. What jobs do you know that require a specialized license?
- Many vocational programs offer distance learning and online courses. What are some pluses and minuses of going to a "virtual school"?
- Apprentices and interns learn by working at real jobs, though they may get little or no pay during the training period. What are the advantages and disadvantages of these positions?

### Engaging Your Students:

- Take the students on a tour of your community. Select a commercial/business district. Point out and discuss specific businesses along the way—for example: a car dealership, an office building, a library, a medical building. Talk with the students about the jobs done by people who work in each building and think

about the kinds of training needed to get these jobs and to maintain their level of skill.

- Have the students use the Internet to investigate vocational schools. They can explore the variety of training programs offered, as well as identify vocational schools in your area.
- Have individual students interview a graduate of a vocational school that offers a program of interest. Help the student prepare targeted questions, including questions about how successful the program's graduates are in finding work.
- Guide the students to community college websites so they can learn about vocational programs offered, which may include support programs for special needs students. Typical categories of vocational study include health sciences, business and information technology, industrial technologies, agricultural sciences, hospitality, communication/media, and human services. Have the students focus on one or two programs that seem most interesting. Also guide them to information about financial aid.
- Apprenticeships are common in the construction trades. Direct the students interested in working in these fields to the Occupational Outlook Handbook, which is available at the library, or online at [www.bls.gov/oco](http://www.bls.gov/oco). Have them investigate the job descriptions and read details about "Training, Qualifications, and Advancement."
- Remind the students that some vocational schools are run as a for-profit business. As part of their research, have the students explore the Better Business Bureau website ([www.bbb.org](http://www.bbb.org)) to investigate the consumer history of the institution that interests them.



#### Check for Understanding

- Can the student identify why a vocational program may be relevant?
- Can the student identify what kinds of careers vocational training can prepare him or her for?
- Can the student identify schools that offer vocational training?
- Does the student understand the entrance and tuition requirements of a vocational school?

## Discussion Topic 5: Is Community College for You?

### Objectives

- Understand what a community college is
- Explore the programs offered at community colleges

### Questions for Students:

- What is community college?
- How is a community college different from a four-year college?
- What community college(s) are located near you?
- What careers would the programs at a local community college prepare you for?
- What are the admissions and tuition requirements for a community college near you?
- What would attending community college be like? (Encourage the students to discuss the academic demands, the social environment, and the financial requirements of attending community college.)

### Get Your Students Thinking:

- While community colleges are usually located in the community you live in, they are not always as accessible as going to high school. If you choose to go to the local community college, and it is not close to your home, how would you commute?
- Think about each aspect of your day attending high school—from coming to school in the morning, going to classes and having lunch, and going back home in the afternoon. For each aspect of the school day, how would going to community college be different?
- Going to community college is different than high school, with new sets of challenges and opportunities. Is the idea of going to a community college exciting or scary? What makes it exciting? What makes it scary?

- Community colleges have resources to support students who need accommodations. Think of the accommodations you have now in your general education classes. Which of those accommodations would help you succeed in community college classes?
- Community colleges also have resources to support students who would like help with a class or need support in other ways. For instance, many community colleges have health services, tutoring, and language labs. Who would you go to if you needed help in a class?
- Your parents or caregivers have experience in life and want to ensure the best experience for you no matter what you decide to do. What do your parents or caregivers think about the opportunities open to you at a community college?

### Engaging Your Students:

- Arrange for the students to visit and tour your local community college. If a trip to the college isn't feasible, invite an admissions representative to speak to the students at school and answer their questions.
- Provide the local community college's course catalog and have the students study it independently or with a partner. Encourage them to choose a program that interests them and then identify the classes that they would be taking in their first semester. Help them create a week's schedule based on those classes.
- Have the students explore the website of your local community college. Encourage them to look for information that can help them imagine what it would be like to be a student there—for example, information about student life and campus activities. Have them also check out the requirements for admission and information about financial aid.
- Most community colleges now have departments for Disability Services. Have a representative of Disability Services speak to the class about the services they offer.



### Check for Understanding

- Can the student identify why he or she might go to a community college?
- Does the student have an understanding of the experience of going to a community college?
- Does the student understand the entrance and tuition requirements of a community college?
- Does the student know what support services are available and how to get access to these services?

## Discussion Topic 6: Is a Four-Year College for You?

### Objectives

- Explore reasons to go to a four-year college
- Investigate careers that require a four-year degree
- Consider the challenges of attending a four-year college

### Questions for Students:

- How would going to a four-year college be different from going to a community college?
- How is a four-year college different from a vocational school?
- For what careers do you need a bachelor's degree from a four-year college?
- What four-year colleges do you know of that are located in your state?
- Would you rather commute to college or live on campus? Why?
- What are the admissions requirements for a four-year college?
- How would you pay for college tuition?
- Why do people consider the expense of college a good investment?
- What are some ways to pay for college expenses, which include tuition and possibly room and board?

(Encourage the students to discuss the academic demands, the social environment, and the financial requirements of attending a four-year college.)

### Get Your Students Thinking:

- College does more than just train you for a career. People often say that college develops your ability to think critically and learn about the world around you. What are some other experiences that college provides?
- Four-year colleges are increasing their efforts to make learning accessible to students with special needs. When you think of the accommodations you have now in your general education classes, which of those accommodations would help you succeed in a four-year college?
- A four-year college would be an experience where you would be living more independently and possibly farther from home. How would your experience differ from high school? What makes this exciting or might create some anxiety?
- Four-year colleges also offer a range of support services for students. What are some of the support services you would need to succeed both socially and academically?

### Engaging Your Students:

- Most colleges have graduates in different parts of the country who serve as college recruiters. Identify such a person in your community and invite that person to speak with your students. Let the recruiter know in advance that your class has a particular interest in knowing about the school's efforts to accommodate and ensure the success of learners with special needs.
- The entrance exam is a likely part of enrolling in a four-year college that can be stressful for students. There are several examples of college entrance exams online that can be used with students to prepare. After the students take the exam, discuss how they did and identify areas where they need support and guidance.

- If possible, provide a copy of the course catalog from a nearby college or university. Allow the students to browse through the catalog, find a department that interests them, and identify courses they would like to take.
- Invite the students to explore the websites of colleges and universities that interest them. In addition to checking out the courses of study and entrance requirements, have the students search each site for "special needs learning" to assess the school's commitment to educating diverse populations.
- Encourage the students to talk with a representative of Disability Services from a local college. If possible have a representative speak to the class.



### Check for Understanding

- Can the student identify careers that require a bachelor's degree/four-year college education?
- Does the student recognize four-year college as a viable option for post-secondary education?
- Does the student understand the entrance and tuition requirements of a four-year college?
- Does the student know what support services are available and how to get access to these services?

### Discussion Topic 7: What Is a Job?

#### Objectives

- Understand the nature of a job
- Recognize the benefits of a job

#### Questions for Students:

- How would you define a job?
- How is working on a job different from things people do for recreation and things they do to care for themselves and their homes?
- Why is a job necessary?

- What would having a job allow you to do?
- What does it mean to earn a living?
- What are some ways that having a job can give a person a feeling of worth?

### Get Your Students Thinking:

- The difference between having a job and recreational work is whether or not the activity is a source of income. For example, planting a vegetable garden in the backyard is recreation; growing vegetables to sell to others is a farmer's job. What is another example of an activity that can be either a job or recreation?
- To live independently, a person must make enough money from a job to meet all of his or her expenses. What are some expenses you see for yourself?

### Engaging Your Students:

- Have the students brainstorm examples of situations when people are paid for jobs and when they are not. For example, when a housekeeper mops the floors in a hospital, that's his job and he is paid. When he mops his own kitchen floor, he is not paid.
- Provide the students with a list of terms connected to earning a living: job, hourly wage, salary, overtime, benefits, income, and expenses. Go over the meanings of the terms with students. Have each student prepare a short talk to explain his or her work goals and preferences.
- Have the students make a list of all the jobs people have at your school. For each worker, have them tell what the person does and what would happen if that person was not there to do his or her job.



### Check for Understanding

- Does the student recognize when activities are considered a job and when they are not?
- Does the student understand what it means to earn a living and why it is important?

## Discussion Topic 8: What Kinds of Jobs Interest You?

### Objective

- Think about personal interests and preferences as they relate to a job/career



### Materials

- Student Book, page 7, and a pencil

### Questions for Students:

- Why is it important to have a job that interests you?
- Why is it important to have a job you are good at?
- What might happen if someone has a job he or she does not like?
- What might happen if someone has a job that he or she is not qualified to do?
- How can you predict if you'll like the career you choose?

### Get Your Students Thinking:

- Deciding on a job can be overwhelming for students. Many people feel insecure about making the wrong decision. A great way to find a job that suits you is to research occupations that you are curious about. What are some ways that you can learn more about jobs and careers that you know nothing about?
- It is helpful to remember that a job can grow out of an interest a person already has or even pastimes. How could your hobbies and interests—the things you do for fun—be useful in a job or a career?
- Sometimes we make decisions that are not right for us. Not every job is going to be the perfect fit for you and your needs. If you end up working at a job you don't like, what should you do?

### Engaging Your Students:

- Have the students break into two groups and brainstorm possible job and career choices. Have the students research a job they have chosen on the computer making a "Pro and Con" list of what they find.



- There are great tools to help students think about career interests and choices. School counselors are trained to administer interest inventories, which can guide the students to careers that match their interests. Have a school counselor administer interest inventories for each student and use this to start a discussion on different career choices.
- Give individuals or partners specific career research assignments. These can include finding library books about career choices and writing brief reviews, printing out online articles about interesting careers, and collecting fliers or other information from the school guidance office and from the Career Center in your community or school. Use the materials to set up a “Career Center” classroom display.
- Arrange for students to do a “job shadow” for a day with an occupation that interests them. Have the students compare their skills to those they found are required of the job. Then talk with students about how they can acquire the skills for that job.
- Have the students work in small groups taking turns talking about something that they enjoy doing. Have each group brainstorm and list jobs that might suit someone with that interest. Then review the lists together and discuss whether or not each is a realistic job possibility.
- Have the students write their career goal at the bottom of a sheet of paper. Then have the students list the steps involved in reaching that goal, starting at the top of the page. Talk with the students about what the realistic steps are that are needed to reach their goal.
- Have each student explore skills, interests, and related work, by making a two-column chart with the headings “Things I Like to Do and Do Well” and “Jobs.” After the students list everything they can think of in the left column, direct them to list all the jobs they can think of in the right column. Then, using their left-column entries, circle each job that is a match with their skills and interests.
- If you are using the Student Book, go to page 7. Follow the directions to have the students expand on the above activity. Have the students pair up and discuss what they have written.



### Check for Understanding

- Does the student recognize the importance of matching a job to his/her interests and abilities?
- Can the student identify ways to learn about career choices?

## Discussion Topic 9: What Qualities Do Workers Need to Perform Well on the Job?

### Objective

- Understand the traits and abilities that are required for success in the workplace



### Materials

- Student Book, pages 8 and 9, and a pencil

### Questions for Students:

- What qualities make someone excel on the job?
- What are the characteristics of someone who succeeds at the work he/she does?

### Get Your Students Thinking:

Have students think about the qualities an employer wants in the people they hire. Have students think about the talents they have in the classroom. Both sets of qualities match up to a good worker. Students should think about their own skills and how they can best meet an employer’s needs.

- An employer wants employees who are hardworking. How have you shown that you are hardworking?
- What is reliability, and why is it important in the workplace?
- What is a positive attitude, and how do people show it?
- Why is being on time so important at work? What might happen if someone arrived late or left early on most days?
- What does it mean to be a responsible and trustworthy worker?

- Everyone makes mistakes at work. What are the best ways to deal with mistakes?
- Why is it important for a worker to know how to handle criticism? What is the best way to respond to criticism from a supervisor?

### **Engaging Your Students:**

- Have the students role-play work situations to illustrate Do's and Don'ts of being a successful worker. During the role-play, partners can take the roles of a worker and boss or a pair of coworkers. They may first show what not to do and then demonstrate the preferred alternative. Possible scenarios to role-play include:
  - 1) The manager of a clothing store talks to an employee about a customer who couldn't get any help and left the store. The employee blames a coworker for the problem.
  - 2) The employee at a bank calls in sick to the manager because he or she stayed up too late and is now tired.
  - 3) Two workers are supposed to share the task of photocopying and collating papers. One of the workers is having a private cell phone conversation instead.
- Have the students list their own traits and abilities that make them desirable employees, such as "honest," "hardworking," "reliable." For each description, have students write an example from their own experience to illustrate that trait.
- If you are using the Student Book, go to page 8. Have the students build on the above activity by using the page to explore their own qualities associated with workplace success.



### **Check for Understanding**

- Can the student identify positive traits and qualities that employees should demonstrate in the workplace?
- Can the student give examples of behaviors shown by successful workers?