College-Ready Writers Program

Writing Task

**Day 1 Reading Packet E**

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| **Redesigning High School for Career Success?** |



Gabriella Demczuk/The New York Times

Student first name: Student last name:

Teacher name: Class period:

Grade level:

8th 9th 10th

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| **PROMPT FOR WRITING** |
| **E. Redesigning High School for Career Success?**  Some politicians and educators say that we should change high school so that young people are better prepared for work. What do you think your state’s Department of Education should do about changing high schools to prepare young people for work? Why?  Write an argument. Use ideas and evidence from the reading packet to support your argument. Use what you have learned about citing and quoting sources in your writing  The audience for your argument is the Director of your state’s Department of Education. |

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| **DIRECTIONS** |
| * This packet is part of a two-day writing task. * Today you will analyze the readings to learn about different opinions on this topic. On Day 2, you will write an argument that supports your opinion in response to the prompt above. * Use the space provided in the margins to take notes on the readings. * On p. 13, you will find definitions for vocabulary words. These words are ***italicized*** in the text. * Use the space on p. 14 to plan your argument for Day 2. |

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**Reading 1**

**Background Information: P-Tech High School**

Some politicians, business people and educators think that high school needs to prepare young people for the workplace. In January 2013, President Obama mentioned one high school in New York City, Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-Tech), as a model for how high schools could prepare young people for work.

Students attend P-Tech for six years, beginning in 9th grade. After six years, they can earn a high school diploma and an ***associate’s*** degree in applied science in computer systems technology or electromechanical engineering technology for free. P-Tech students take courses in English, science, mathematics, and the arts. The school advertises that its graduates will be first in line for a job at ***IBM***.

P-Tech involves collaboration between the public schools in New York City, two New York City colleges, and IBM. In addition to their high school courses, students take courses at one of the colleges free of charge. IBM provides mentors to students, offers information about job trends and desirable workplace skills, and helps lead hands-on learning opportunities (for example, building and launching balloon-powered rockets). The school, which has 300 students, is just three years old and, therefore, no students have graduated yet.

***Source:*** Information gathered from the P-Tech website, <http://www.ptechnyc.org/ptech>, April 7, 2014.

**Reading 2**

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**Obama, at Brooklyn School, Pushes Education Agenda**

By Al Baker

Published: October 25, 2013, Excerpts

President Obama on Friday visited the innovative Brooklyn high school he praised in his State of the Union address this year, to deliver a message about the urgency of education reform in the global economy.

Mr. Obama, dressed in shirt sleeves, was showered with cheers by the visibly energized students and a ***cadre*** of New York politicians as he took the podium at Pathways in Technology ***Early College High School***. “Hello Brooklyn,” he said, before starting into his argument for creating more schools like the one he was visiting, casting them as essential in preparing the next generation for competition in a shrinking world marketplace.

“This country should be doing everything in our power to give more kids the chance to go to schools just like this one,” the president said, calling the school, known as P-Tech, a ticket into the middle class.

“In previous generations, America’s standing economically was so much higher than everybody else’s that we didn’t have a lot of competition,” he added. “Now, you’ve got billions of people from Beijing to Bangalore to Moscow, all of whom are competing with you directly. And they’re — those countries are working every day, to out-educate and out-compete us.”

Mr. Obama’s wish list included preschool availability for every 4-year-old in the United States, access for every student to a high-speed Internet connection, lower college costs, redesigned high schools that teach the skills needed in a high-tech economy and greater investment in teachers. Some said they heard in his words a boost for the new, more rigorous academic standards that have been adopted around the nation, known as the Common Core, as he praised Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo and others as having courage for raising standards for teachers.

“We should stay at it,” he said.…

In his [2013] State of the Union address, Mr. Obama had said, “We need to give every American student opportunities like

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this.” It was a reference to the way P-Tech’s students are given both high school and college curriculums in a six-year program that is tailored for a job in the technology industry.

When the first of those students graduate, in 2017, they are expected to have associate degrees in applied science, computer information systems or electromechanical engineering, having followed a course of studies developed in consultation with ***IBM*.**

In 2012, five P-Tech-styled schools opened in Chicago, in collaboration with companies like Microsoft, Motorola and Verizon. This year, two more schools modeled on P-Tech opened in New York City, with three more expected to open next year.…

Hours later, at a fundraiser in Manhattan, the president was still talking about his afternoon at P-Tech and the optimism he saw among the students. “That’s what Washington should be about every single day,” he said.

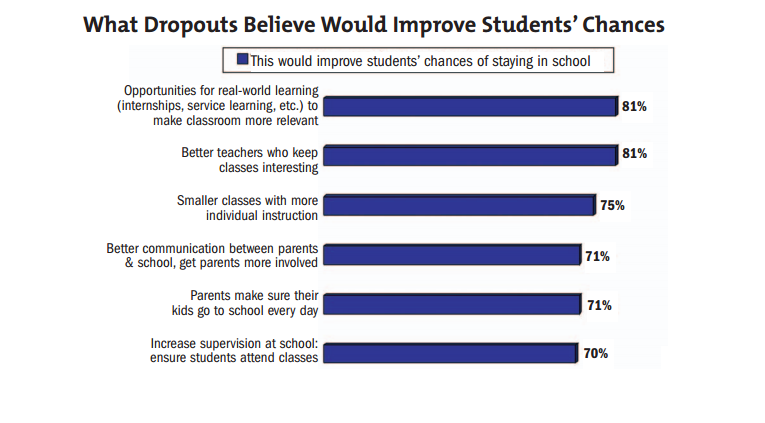
***Source:*** Baker, Al. “Obama, at Brooklyn School, Pushes Education Agenda.” *New York Times.* N.Y./ Region, 25 October 2013. Web. 20 March 2014.

***About the author:*** Al Baker is a public education reporter at The New York Times, metropolitan desk.

**Reading 3**

**What Dropouts Believe Would Improve Students’ Chances**

This graph is from a 2006 study of students who dropped out of high school, about what would help them stay in school.

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***Source***: Bridgeland, John M., John J. Dilulio, Jr., Karen Burke Morison. *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts. A report by Civic Enterprises in association with Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. March 2006. Web. 20 March 2014.*

**Take notes below:**

What does this graph suggest about how to change high school?

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**Reading 4**

# Real-World Skills in the Classroom

By Amanda Ripley

It’s not about time; it’s about relevance.

Each year, nearly [one in four](http://www.oecd.org/edu/eag.htm) American teenagers drops out of high school. Twenty other countries now have higher high-school graduation rates. This makes no sense. Of all the countries in the world, the United States is one of the worst places to be a high-school dropout. The [unemployment rate](http://www.bls.gov/news.release/hsgec.nr0.htm) for recent dropouts is 50 percent. Without a diploma, you can’t work as a garbage collector in New York City; you can’t join the Air Force.

So why do so many American kids *still* drop out of high school? One reason is that they don’t see the point. In one [large survey](https://docs.gatesfoundation.org/Documents/TheSilentEpidemic3-06FINAL.pdf) of high school dropouts, about half cited uninteresting classes as a major reason for their decision. Four out of five said they wished they’d had more opportunity to do real-world learning in high school.

After spending a year following three American teenagers who had a chance to attend high school in countries with much higher graduation rates, I have started to think that we could do a better job of getting our kids to buy into the ***premise*** of school. But it’s not about how long school lasts. It’s about how challenging and relevant school is on a daily basis.

What’s compelling about P-Tech is that school is tied directly to an interesting job. Graduates are first in line for jobs at IBM. Students can move at their own pace, and many are on track to graduate with an ***associate’s degree*** in fewer than six years. Teenagers, like adults, are motivated by the chance to prove their mastery of a subject or skill — and move on.

By contrast, most American kids experience a very slow, expensive and turbulent transition from high school to a job. Very few of them, compared with students in other countries, attend high-quality ***vocational*** programs tightly aligned with industry needs. Vocational students in America spend [less than a quarter](http://www.oecd.org/education/innovation-education/learningforjobs.htm) of their time in actual workplaces — while their peers in Switzerland, Norway and Denmark spend half to three-quarters of their schooling in work placements.

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That kind of vivid experience helps kids see into the future; they can connect the dots between what they are doing in school and how interesting their lives can be. As one American exchange student to Finland told me, “I got the feeling that Finnish students saw school not as something to endure, but something from which they stood to benefit.”

America abandoned ***vocational*** high schools for good reason, decades ago: too many were second-rate warehouses for minority and low-income kids. But now that all decent jobs require higher-order skills, there's an opportunity to get this right. American employers want higher-order skills, and American teenagers want more interesting work. The sooner they get together, the better.

***Source:*** Ripley, Amanda. “Real-World Skills in the Classroom.” *New York Times.* New York Times, 22 January 2014. Web. 20 March 2014.

***About the author:*** Amanda Ripley, a journalist and an [Emerson fellow](http://www.emersoncollective.com/), is the author of "[The Smartest Kids in the World -- and How They Got That Way](http://www.amandaripley.com/books/the-smartest-kids-in-the-world)."

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**Reading 5**

**Start It Earlier, and End it Earlier**

By Leon Botstein

President Obama’s praise for the six-year high school in Brooklyn, known as P-Tech, is welcome, because our nation sorely needs educational innovation. Still, a word of caution is in order. The school, to its credit, offers a two-year college degree at the end of six years. But why follow an outmoded high school model and keep students longer in a structure that is failing?

The school Obama singled out is unabashedly ***vocational***, designed and supported by IBM. It follows a model pioneered in Europe for ***apprenticeship***-style vocational education. The larger problem, however, is that our capacity to predict the future of jobs, particularly in information technology and health care, is poor. America seems not to be able to maintain a stable ***manufacturing base***. The pace of technological change is rapid, rendering the competitiveness of skills taught even in our finest undergraduate engineering schools valid only for a short period. The jobs may be there for recent graduates, but what will happen when their skills become ***obsolete*** in a decade? Will the graduates of this extended high school be able to adapt and remain employed?

No doubt P-Tech is an improvement on the largely ***dysfunctional*** character of most urban high schools. But to lift the educational level of students of high school age, we must change much more.

First, high school should start and end earlier. Middle school and junior high school need to be discarded. All high school education should start in the seventh grade and end at the completion of 10th grade. We waste our adolescents’ time in school. Properly structured and taught, much more could be accomplished in less time.

Second, the curriculum that begins in the 11th year, which should be the first year of post-secondary education, needs to be taught not just by teachers but by professionals: biologists, physicists, mathematicians, computer scientists and the like, just as is the case in our universities. A ***vocational*** focus is laudable, but the curriculum needs to stress the most long-term useful education: a fundamental understanding of science, exposure to the works of the imagination and training in the

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varied skills of critical analysis. These enable graduates to adapt to new ideas and practices.

Furthermore, schooling should not be linked to corporations, or to a single employer or current technology, even if the sponsor is IBM or Google. They too, like General Electric and Kodak before them, will downsize, disappear and be replaced.

High school is perhaps the most troubled and poorest-performing sector in American education, as declining rates of completion suggest. It needs to be shortened, not lengthened. Adolescents today mature physically and socially sooner than in previous generations. We must open educational opportunities for 16-year-olds that are designed for adults, from which they themselves can choose. These need to stand apart from high schools. They can be colleges or high-level ***vocational*** programs that combine work experience with classroom learning. At 16, not 18, our young adults need to study with highly trained professionals in settings free from the restrictive and ***infantilizing*** culture of our high schools.

***Source:*** Botstein, Leon. “Start it Earlier, and End it Earlier.” *New York Times.* New Your Times Room for Debate, 29 October 2013. Web 20 March 2014.

***About the author:*** [Leon Botstein](http://www.s9.com/Biography/Botstein-Leon), music director and conductor of the American Symphony Orchestra, is the president of [Bard College](http://www.bard.edu/).

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**Reading 6**

**School is Crucial, but Keep It Broad**

By [Zachary Hamed](http://zhamed.com/)

I began programming in fourth grade when my father, a computer engineer by trade, took apart a computer and explained how it worked. Most of my weekends thereafter were spent building computers and creating websites for small businesses in Brooklyn. I discovered my [passion for programming](https://medium.com/who-i-am/f2bc274d318b) almost entirely outside the traditional classroom.

Schools that focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics [like P-Tech] are certainly necessary to train students for a rapidly evolving work force. Yet aiming at a moving target like the job market is dangerously short-sighted. Education in the world of [***Moore’s Law***](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/18/technology/18moore.html)must teach you how to think critically and adapt swiftly, rather than prepare you for a particular software engineering job.

The goal of education, then, should be to develop breadth across many areas, with depth in a few. At Harvard, students are required to complete a class in each of eight academic areas, like physical sciences and ethical reasoning. This cross-pollination of ideas has exposed me to people with creative, interdisciplinary solutions. Fonts on the personal computer exist because [***Steve Jobs*** took a calligraphy class](http://news.stanford.edu/news/2005/june15/jobs-061505.html). ***Bill Gates*** met ***Steve Ballmer***[in an economics class](http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2013/09/dawn-of-a-revolution/) at Harvard. Had he been confined to only computer science classes, the Microsoft we know today might not exist.

Only the first step of computer science learning can happen in the classroom; any programmer will tell you that the inevitable bugs and challenges must be worked out while walking home or talking about something unrelated — not in front of the computer screen, and not in the classroom. My best projects, and many of the ideas I hope to work on in the future, developed from summer internships, liberal arts classes and observing problems in the world around me. Computer science and programming both require a level of creativity and problem-solving that schools, at least in their current incarnation, cannot adequately teach.

If our goal is to lift students from poverty to high-paying programming jobs, this school’s [P-Tech] curriculum is admirable. However, it is unlikely to produce the next Steve Jobs, someone to transform an industry through unlikely connections. Without ***entrepreneur****s* like Jobs, we don’t need

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programmers — and an ***entrepreneur***i***al*** education should not be confined to the wealthy.

Computer science should be taught in every school alongside English, social studies, and other subjects that can develop a student’s passions and future profession. We stymie that freedom when we decide in eighth grade that students must study computer science for six years. Without exposure to other academic areas or real-world experience, students are not scientists. They’re simply computers.

***Source:*** Hamed, Zachary. “School is Crucial, but Keep it Broad.” *New York Times.* New York Times Room for Debate, 29 October 2013. Web. 20 March 2014.

***About the author***: [Zachary Hamed](http://zhamed.com/) is a senior studying computer science at Harvard University and will take time off to work on a start-up. He is [on Twitter](https://twitter.com/zmh).

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**Vocabulary**

***apprenticeship:*** time during which someone is being trained by a skilled professional.

***associate’s degree:*** a two year college degree

***Bill Gates:*** founder of Microsoft

***cadre:***group

***dysfunctional:*** not performing as expected.

***Early College High School:***a school that is designed so that students can earn a high school diploma and an ***associate’s degree*** at the same time.

***entrepreneur:*** a person who starts new businesses.

***infantilizing:*** treating someone as though he / she is childish or immature.

***IBM*:** International Business Machines is a large, international company that produces technology.

***manufacturing base***: the part of the economy that relies on producing goods (e.g., tires, cars, furniture, clothing).

[***Moore’s Law***](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/18/technology/18moore.html)***:***Gordon E. Moore's, the founder of Intel, a technology company that manufactures computer chips, wrote an article “predicting that the number of transistors that could be placed on a silicon chip would continue to double at regular intervals for the foreseeable future.” (<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/18/technology/18moore.html> )

***obsolete:*** outdated

***premise:***an idea from which a conclusion is drawn

***Steve Ballmer:***former Chief Executive Officer of Microsoft

***Steve Jobs:*** founder of Apple

***vocational:*** job-related

**Planning Your Argument**

Some politicians and educators say that we should change high school so that young people are better prepared for work. What do you think your state’s Department of Education should do about changing high schools to prepare young people for work? Why?

Use this space to:

* Write your claim.
* Select and organize evidence from the readings that you will use to write your argument on Day 2.