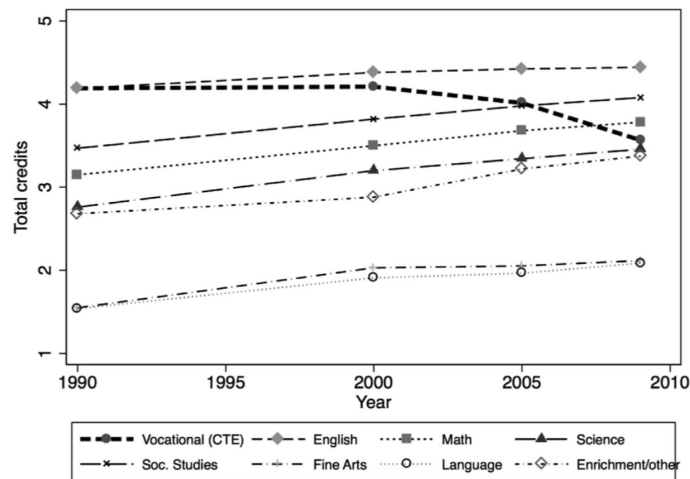# EFP Takeaways

Vocational Education in the US – Value of Depth over Breadth

Background

This century, high school students have increasingly enrolled in academic courses at the expense of enrollments in vocational courses (see the figure below).

Vocational education is a key part of the high school curriculum. However, little is known about what factors drive enrollment in vocational courses, and the effects of enrollment on early careers. A new *EFP* article by researchers at Georgia State University and the University of Michigan addresses this gap.

The Study

The authors utilized data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth to develop a framework to understand how high school students make curriculum choices. The model accounts for both ability and preferences in academic and vocational work.

The final analysis utilized data from over 4,000 individuals to understand how students made high school curriculum choices, and the consequences of these choices.

Findings

Results suggest positive outcomes related to vocational coursework:

- Additional vocational courses at most marginally reduce college enrollment and have little relationship with graduation.
- Higher earnings are observed amongst those students that take more upper-level vocational courses. Each additional specialized vocational course yields a 2% wage increase, though no wage gains accrue from general (or introductory) vocational courses.
- Further, the benefits of vocational coursework accrue to those individuals that focus on breadth, rather than depth.

These findings suggest that policies aimed at limiting vocational enrollment may not be welfare-enhancing.

For more details:
- View the full issue.
- See the full article in Education Finance and Policy.
- Sign up here to receive future *EFP Takeaways*.
- Summary of:
  Kreisman, D., & Stange, K. (2020). Vocational and career tech education in American high schools: The value of breadth over depth. *Education Finance and Policy, 15*(1).