

News Debate: Sew Long?



home economics class in 1941

Students debate the merits of home ec courses.

Home economics courses have been sliced and diced in recent years, as school districts search for ways to reduce their budgets. Some schools have replaced home ec courses with classes in other subjects. For example, this year, schools in Maplewood and South Orange, N.J., traded their home ec classes for a new computer technology program.

For much of the 20th century, home ec courses were devoted to teaching girls to sew, cook, and run an organized household. Over the years, the courses began welcoming both male and female students. They also came to include a wider range of topics, such as personal finance.

Even though home ec courses have evolved, some argue that their content is either outdated or common sense. They believe that schools should instead focus on subjects such as science, math, and social studies. Others think home ec classes should remain part of school curricula. They argue

that the skills taught in home ec help prepare students for adulthood.

Should schools teach home economics courses? *Current Events* student reporters Peter Brosnan and Elizabeth Duis each served up a side.

Keep Cooking

Home economics classes are key ingredients in the recipe for well rounded, independent students. "Home economics is more than the stereotypical courses of cooking and sewing," Michele Brophy, a home and career skills teacher at Mildred E. Strang Middle School in Yorktown Heights, N.Y., says. "Home ec teaches today's youth how to make good choices in all aspects of their daily lives."

Home ec courses can also stir up student interest in nutrition and healthy eating. Learning to prepare healthy food can help address the obesity problem facing teens. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 18 percent of teenagers qualified as obese in the 2007-2008 school year.

Finally, many students do not have the opportunity to learn such skills at home. Parents who work full-time jobs, for example, often struggle to find time to teach their kids the skills taught in home ec classes. Susan Gilberti, another home and career skills teacher at Strang Middle School, says, "These are skills we all need for the rest of our lives."

For The Dustbin

I agree with the decision to do away with home economics programs. First of all, it's the parents' responsibility over all others to teach their children the basic skills taught in home ec classes. Cooking, cleaning, sewing, and managing finances can be learned around the house and do not need to take up classroom time.

Second, because the skills that home ec courses teach are no longer as important as they once were, schools could save money by cutting the programs. Kelly Gruhn, a former math teacher at Watseka High School in Illinois, agrees. "[Home ec courses] cost schools too much extra money that schools nowadays can't afford," says Gruhn.

Last but not least, our country should be devoting resources to subjects such as math and science. Students in the United States lag behind students in many other countries in those areas. Focusing our attention on educating students in subjects of worldwide importance would be a good decision for all of us.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. How have home ec courses evolved over time?

- A. They are now open to both female and male students.
- B. They now include a wider range of topics.
- C. Both answers A and B
- D. Neither answer A or B

2. In presenting both sides of the argument, the article makes which of the following statements about home ec?

- A. Home ec can increase student interest in nutrition and healthy eating.
- B. Home ec should be taught at home by parents.
- C. Schools could save money by cutting home ec courses.
- D. all of the above

3. One reason presented for cutting home ec is that our country should be devoting more resources to studying math and science. What can you infer from that argument?

- A. American students are the best in the world at math and science.
- B. American students are not as successful as they should be in math and science.
- C. There is already plenty of money and time spent on studying math and science in the United States.
- D. There is enough time and money for students to study anything they want.

4. Read the following sentence:

"For much of the 20th century, home ec courses were devoted to teaching girls to sew, cook, and run an organized household."

In this sentence the word **devoted** means

- A. religious
- B. committed
- C. helpful
- D. designed

5. What would another good title be for this passage?

- A. Bring Back Home Ec!
- B. How to Sew in School
- C. Send Home Ec Home!
- D. Home Ec: Up for Debate

6. What was the main goal or purpose of home economics courses during the bulk of the 20th century?

7. Why might a school eliminate their home ec courses and replace them with a computer technology program?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Jake's mother first made him take a home ec course _____ she let him use her fancy sewing machine.

- A. before
- B. after
- C. whenever
- D. so

9. Which picture below most likely represents a place you would visit to manage your

finances?



10. Some people have jobs as Financial Planners. Based on what you know about the definition of finance, what do you think a Financial Planner might do for work?
