

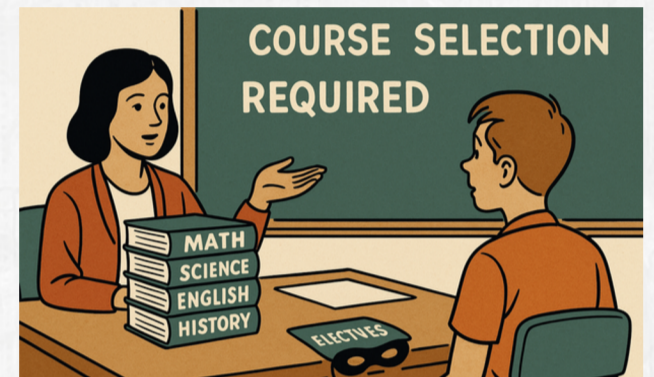
# “ELECTIVE COURSES”: A SUBTLE SHRUG, A SUBVERSIVE SIGNAL

Imagine sitting in a high school scheduling meeting. Math, science, English, history — all the **requirements** are laid out, heavy with importance. Then comes the moment of choice: “Now, let’s pick your electives.”

The room changes. The weight lifts. Counselors call them “**electives**”, academic teachers call them “**fun classes**”, and parents call them “**extras**.” Tragically, administrators reinforce these views when they question the outcome if any student happens to fail a CTE class...as if there is no rigor in our subjects, aghast that there is accountability and standards in these “fun & extra” classes. What do you think happens when students hear this word? They hear a term that screams: **optional, less important, disposable**. They think to themselves, if this class were important, my counselor would have picked it for me!

The phrase “elective courses” lands like a sigh, akin to the dessert tray after you’ve already eaten the meal. Nice if you can afford the calories, but certainly not a main course...in fact, you’ll look refined if you skip it!

And just like that, with words and influenced perceptions, the system signals — and not so subtly — that entire industries of learning are second-class.



## Semantics That Sabotage

The word elective is a linguistic sleight of hand. On paper, it simply means “student choice.” In practice, it establishes a pecking order:

- required = important
- elective = expendable.

Here’s the problem: the so-called “expendable” courses are often the very ones tethered most directly to careers, skills, and economic value. Welding, healthcare, cybersecurity, digital media, automotive technology — none of these are electives in the professional world. They are essential. They are livelihoods. They are billion-dollar industries running in every community.

Yet inside schools, they are linguistically downgraded before a single student even walks through the door, and once something is labeled “second-tier,” we shouldn’t be surprised when it’s underfunded, undervalued, and under-enrolled.

## Prestige Doesn’t Pay the Bills

<b>TRANSCRIPT A</b> AP Mathematics AP English AP Chemistry  To Parents: <b>PRESTIGE</b>	<b>TRANSCRIPT B</b> Construction Engineering Architecture Entrepreneurship  To Employers: <b>VALUE</b>
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## A Tale of Two...Transcripts

Imagine two transcripts:

- Transcript A is stacked with AP classes. To parents, it screams prestige. To colleges, it whispers ‘readiness’. To students, it represents “rigor.”
- Transcript B is stacked with “electives”: construction, engineering, architecture, and entrepreneurship. To employers, it screams value. To the economy, it shouts relevance. To students, it represents employability.



And yet — which transcript gets the applause? Which gets the raised eyebrows?

The answer exposes the sabotage. Words have framed the second transcript as the weaker one, when in fact it is the one closest to putting food on the table.

## Neutral Language Dangerous Frame

This isn't just semantics for the sake of argument. Calling something an "elective" doesn't just shape perception; it shapes opportunity. When students are nudged away from electives because they "don't matter as much," we cut off pipelines to careers that:

- Employ millions.
- Pay wages that support families.
- Drive regional economies.

And ironically, they're often the very industries begging for skilled talent. This is the pain point!



Every time a student gets quietly steered away from a CTE course, **a career pipeline narrows.** Every time a CTE course is shrugged off as being merely an 'elective' or 'fun' class, **an industry loses potential talent.** And every time a budget trims "the electives," **an entire community's workforce solution is diluted.**

## Burn the Word. Build New Frames.

If words frame reality, then maybe it's time to retire electives. What if we called them what they truly are?

- Career Courses — because they connect directly to pathways beyond school and point toward work that sustains lives.
- Applied Courses — because they prove that learning doesn't end in theory and can be applied in practice.
- Talent Pathways — because they reveal and refine what students can actually do. They aren't side dishes, they're highways into the future.
- Gateway Courses — showing that they open doors into industries, not just "extras."
- Practical Courses — meant to oppose the idea that they're just "fun."
- Skill-Building Courses — highlighting the competency aspect.

## Closing Bell

The word 'elective' is not neutral. It is a quiet, corrosive bias dressed up as choice. It trains students to dismiss skills, trains parents to underestimate industries, and trains schools to cut opportunities when the budget knife comes out.

Education consistently emphasizes its goal of preparing students with 'career readiness'. Yet as long as we dismiss entire industries of learning with the shrug of "elective," we're sending a different message, that these courses don't really count.

It's time we stopped sabotaging students with semantics.

Because here's the truth: there's nothing optional about the workforce.

