Dear parents, teachers, students, and all involved education,

I write to you hoping that together we can accomplish a collective goal we all share. Whether you are a parent of students, a teacher, a student yourself, or someone interested in education, we all have one thing in common: we want to see students learn and be taught to the best standard possible. While we may disagree on what exactly the best standard entails and what should be included in the curriculum, we still agree that the more we can improve our approach to education and learning the better off we are. Now, the majority of the hard structure and policy concerning education is out of most of our influence, policy is not everything. What is within our influence is the attitude and approach we have towards learning. I want to discuss an aspect of our approach to education that, no matter whether you think school should be harsh and demanding to prepare students for the real world or nurturing and help students grow to their fullest potential, is currently detrimental to students’ education and that we can make better. That aspect is our over focus on numerical representations of students.

Success as a number

Currently, traditional success in school is defined in the grades a student receives. A set of numbers meant to encapsulate each individual’s skill into a simple, ubiquitous form. A set if numbers boasted about by proud parents. Numbers that can determine whether that individual gets into college. Numbers that determines if that student is intelligent or not. Now ask yourself, where do these numbers even come from? Do they REALLY represent your child, your students, or you? Can you yourself be fully and fairly described as a number?

The intelligence measured by grades is by no means the only type of intelligence or even the most important. An individual may be unordinary good at taking multiple choice tests and but have abhorrent social skills that prevents them from ever succeeding in an interview. Another individual may have a very hard time taking multiple choice tests but given the chance to explain their position on a topic can convince even the harshest critics. Which one is smarter and more successful? If you ask their schools, the former. If you ask their employers, the later. What about the student who can doodle a drawing that strikes at the heart of its audience’s emotions. Would their grades represent their future success as an advertising director? Or the student that can fix anything that’s broken from staplers to computers? Is there a grade for the skills of a future IT professional? School and numeric grades measure a certain type of intelligence that is certainly important and useful, but it is far from everything.

So now, in a world filled with so many diverse jobs and pathways to success, why is it then that this measure of a singular type of intelligence is, for most students, the only one that determines if their parents are going to ground them or reward them? Why is it that we restrict ourselves to a narrow band of vision and refuse to see the beautiful intelligence found outside standardized tests and rigid rubrics? Because grades are the easiest representation we have and our system is, and will continue to be, based on them. The core of how our educational system is here to stay for a while yet, but that doesn’t mean we can’t do anything about it.

Parents, when your child’s report card comes in the mail don’t assume that they are fully represented upon that piece of paper. They are beautiful and intelligent and inventive in their own way, whether they’ve found it or not. Help them build their own special set of skills that will truly help in the wide, wide world that is eagerly awaiting them.

Teachers, your students are all so individually creative and diverse and you can help them reveal their potential. If everything is about the grade, then all students will do is what they need for the grade and never take advantage of the learning opportunities you provide them with. I know, I speak from experience. Too many times have I forgone a really intriguing idea or take upon an assignment that I would have flourished in seeing realized because it wouldn’t get me the same grade.

And finally fellow students, you are more than just a grade. Please, please don’t think that just because you didn’t get that A or B or C you needed on that one test that you aren’t smart and won’t be successful. You may not be shown as the beautiful being you are by our grading system and they may keep you from showing who you really are through grades, but they can’t keep you from learning. Prioritize your passion, make that thing you are interested in into your focus. If grades won’t show you as smart, make yourself the best you can and show them wrong. We are more than just numbers.

Sincerely,

Student 136029

There is one thing that, no matter race, no matter language or affluency, no matter political stance or character, that vital for youths to do, and that is learn. The details, what to learn, how long to learn for, who to learn from, all vary greatly but the core idea remains transcendent: society needs to teach students to the best possible standard. There is no rational debate that student shouldn’t learn to the best standard, the debate is what the best standard actually is. But that is not what I want to talk about today, it is irrelevant whether all students should be taught the minutia of multivariable calculus or just the four basic functions, or what books students should read in English, or any other detail of the curriculum. What I want to discuss here is not what the best is, but how to reach the best whatever it may be. <MOPRE APEAL TO TYPES OF PEOPLE>

On what metric do we define success in learning?

There is a singular, all encompassing, trend in defining a student’s knowledge and intelligence in today’s school system: reduce students down to a number. Class grades, a student is from 0 to 100. GPA, somewhere from 0.00 to 5.00. ACT, between 1-36 most around 20. SAT is from 400 to 1600. With a GPA and either an ACT or a SAT number, you can get into college. Two numbers. Yes, the top tier colleges require more than just good numbers, but for the majority of students, the entirety of who they are is reduced to a few numbers.