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

Blue = stay,

Yellow = move

Green = change

Pink = remove??

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 grades, the numerical encapsulation of students and how we should not solely focus on grades but instead appreciate all forms of intelligence.

Take an individual that is unordinary good at taking multiple choice tests but has abhorrent social skills that prevents them from succeeding in an interview. Take another individual who has a very hard time taking multiple choice tests but given the chance can convince even the harshest critics of their position. Which one is smarter and will be more successful? If you ask their schools, the former. If you ask their future employers, the later. *The intelligence measured by grades is by no means the only type of intelligence or even the most important one*.

Just last year I was taking an AP European History course with a peer. By all obvious metrics she was more knowledgeable about European history than me. Before a test she could list all the important people and events, connect them to events from other timeframes, and explain the cause and effect of all major developments for the time period. I, on the other hand, could usually only recite the basic overview of the chapters we were studying. But, when the test scores would come out, I regularly received better grades than my peer. Why? Simply, it is because I am better at taking multiple choice tests. Am I really smarter in European History than my peer? If we focused solely on the grades of primarily multiple-choice tests, true intelligence is left behind. Instead, let us focus on what a student could do with their knowledge. Teachers, should a student who could take part in a college level discussion about the effects of <Some history term> on <some modern thing> be “graded” lower than someone who is simply good at chosing the right circles to fill in? Parents, should you put more importance on what letter is on a piece of paper than how your student is using their knowledge of history to support their side in dinner discussions about current events? If we assume grades will capture a true image of intelligence than we leave many of the smartest students behind. Let’s look past grades.

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?

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? I know the good hearted and loving parents of our modern world want to see the growth and intelligence of the next generation. 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, but that doesn’t mean we can’t do anything to help the next generation be all that it can be and show it too.

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

Rationale

My angle of approach for this work was to appeal to the common goal all students, teachers, and parents have of wanting education to be the best it can. I worked to try not to sound accusatory at all or to apply any blame and instead focused on an improvement mentality <need to do more of this>. When I was portraying grades, I used the frame that each individual student is unique and special in their own way and said that grades strip down this specialness and reduce all their uniqueness to a number. Parents and teachers are predisposed to thinking their students are special and individuals rather than numbers so they will be naturally inclined to believe in that point. While students should know that they are more than just a number, it seems that many are starting to think that they are just their grade, that these few numbers are all that matters which is what inspired me to write about this topic. Grades are useful and necessary but the importance being placed on them is causing great harm to students. I had to work on keeping this letter from sounding anti-school because I love school and all it does, I just want it to be better.

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.