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Ty Marking

1526 Ruth Lane

Newport Beach, CA 92660

Ann Haley

Daily Pilot Online Editor

10540 Talbert Ave., Suite 300

Fountain Valley, CA, 92708

Dear Mrs. Haley:

I write to the parents, teachers, and students of Newport Mesa Unified School District in hopes that together we can reach forward towards achieving a collective goal we all share. Whether you are a parent of a student, a teacher, or a student yourself, we all have one thing in common: we want to see students learn and be taught to the best possible standard. No matter whether you think school should be harsh and demanding to prepare students for the real world or nurturing and designed to help students grow to their fullest potential, there is an issue that is currently is currently incumbering many of the brightest students that we all want to see succeed and hiding their spark of genies under a cover of inadequate numeric calculations. This issue is the over-focus we have on grades instead of appreciating all the forms of intelligence that are present in students. If we expand what can contribute to these encapsulations of students’ intelligence and pay attention to non-numeric representations of intelligence, we can let some of the brightest students shine their true light that has been masked by our current approach to grades.

Take two individuals, one unordinary good at taking multiple choice tests but has abhorrent social skills and another who has a very hard time taking multiple choice tests but given the opportunity, they 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. By increasing leniency in grades and diversifying what contributes to student’s numeric representations more thorough and real learning can be accomplished.

Just last year I was taking an AP European History course with a peer who was by all obvious metrics more knowledgeable about European history than me. Before every test, she could list all the important people and events, connect them to events in other timeframes, and explain the cause and effect of all major developments of the time period. I, on the other hand, often could 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 was better at taking multiple choice tests. If our grade included discussions about the content and active contribution and involvement in the class, I have no doubt that the grades would better represent the actual intelligence of my peer and place her at the top of the class where she belonged.

In classrooms there are more opportunities to learn beyond what is required than anywhere else. Unfortunately, grades do not reward taking advantage of opportunities that incite learning outside the base curriculum. With every student being graded on the same test and rubric, there is no room for students to show their extra knowledge in a way that impacts their grade. School today, as I am sure you know, is beyond stressful for students. Since the present social atmosphere places grades as the primary indication of intelligence, their grade is where students direct all their effort to. If we start to acknowledge unique demonstrations of prowess or knowledge in addition to grades, then students will be able to devote some of their precious mental energy to going beyond what is required and make themselves stand out in their area of interest. Students will be able to look past the next test and take a wider view of their education, taking advantage of the wonderful opportunities caring teachers and schools provide. Without the weight of being forced to chase a grade, students will be able to reach towards enlightenment in what interests them and develop skills that will set them apart in the real world. So much can be gained if we stop pretending a letter or number is the most important thing in the world.

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 yet 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; you can help them reveal and develop their potential. If all learning is about the grade, then all students will do is what they need for the grade and never take advantage of the true learning opportunities you provide them with. I know, I speak from experience. Too many times have I myself forgone an intriguing idea or twist upon an assignment that I would have flourished in seeing realized because it wouldn’t get me the same grade. Provide leniency in your grading systems, encourage special projects or individual twists on assignments and your students will flourish like the first snowdrop paving the way for spring.

And finally, fellow students, you are more than just a grade. 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 you may be kept from showing who you really are through these grades, but you can’t be kept from learning. Prioritize your passion, make turn the thing interest you into your focus. If grades won’t show you as smart, make yourself the best you can and show how wrong grades can be. We are more than just numbers.

Sincerely,

Ty Marking

Rationale

As my purpose was to help shift the overall view of grades away from them being the near sole determining factor of intelligence in society’s eye, my audience is the three groups that interact with grades: teachers, students, and parents. The best way to address as many of these people as possible is through an open letter to the editor of a local paper such as the *Daily Pilot*. The individuals reading a local paper are also the ones who are likely to be interested in making changes for the better. Unfortunately, not that many students are likely to read a letter to the editor published in a paper so most of my focus was on the parents and teachers.

The one unifying value teachers, students, and parents share is the desire to see students succeed and this is what I based most of my entire appeal off. The main issue I had to avoid while constructing my frame was sounding like I was attacking education in any way as that would drive away my audience due to the very value I was trying to appeal to. As such, I used words and phrases with improvement orientated connotations and took a “building on the current system” approach.

I used phrases such as “encapsulations of students’ intelligence” and “numeric representations” to make the reader feel as if grades were holding back and confining students. This is especially aimed at progressive parents who have the “nurturing parent” viewpoint as they would like to see their students grow and develop without bounds and would, therefore, be averse to the current limiting grade system.

I also emphasized how if grades were made to be more inclusive and if less importance was placed on them that students would be able to develop their individual skills and have a chance to put themselves ahead of the rest in their own unique way. I did this to appeal to those with the “strict father” viewpoint who likely believe that the world is harsh and a student needs to pull ahead of the pack in order to succeed.