

GRADES

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easier books, sign up for easier classes with professors who are less challenging or choose to do a project on a familiar topic. Students make this choice rationally, in order to minimize the chance of a poor performance. With fewer students willing to take risks in their education, the personal evolution that comes along with learning new things and taking on new challenges goes by unnoticed.

During grade school and college, students learn to analyze different perspectives and apply newly learned theories to real-world experiences. By focusing so much on a final grade, students quickly forget what they learned in class, ready to move on to the next assignment, the next test and the next class.

Success does not solely come from the "A" received in a quantitative mathematics class. Success also comes from the ability to remember what was learned in statistics and having the ability to apply those lessons to everyday life.

Students with lower grades also tend to have lower self-esteem, according to several studies published by the National Institute of Health.

Consistently low scores lessen overall motivation, creating the impression on the student that they are not smart, not hard-working and incapable of performing as well as their peers, according to the study.

The amount of emphasis placed on grades in the American educational system pushes many students to a point where they forget grades do not define them.

Learning in school has lost its appeal to students. The purpose of a college education now seems to be a simple prerequisite for a stable job and income. Everyone wants a good job and the ability to support their families, but some students have forgotten most future employers will not care what grade they earned for humanities.

Instead, students must remember self-definition comes from any process undertaken, including education.

Self-definition remains one of the most undervalued goals in a college education. Value now comes from the number of "A's" achieved, the diploma and the amount offered in the paychecks following college.

Working hard will inevitably produce good grades, but what is learned during the hard work put in for those good grades can produce a feeling of accomplishment that lasts a lifetime.

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Everyone wants a good job and the ability to support their families, but some students have forgotten most future employers will not care what grade they earned for humanities. Employers want to know what challenges you faced in school, how you managed those challenges and what experiences changed, or identified, you as a person.

College profoundly affects personal development

and growth, according to a psychological report published by the Education Resources Information Center.

Students, develop competence, personal integrity and wholeness, establish identity and purpose, learn to manage relationships and emotions and even develop spirituality during college. None of the accomplishments found in the report had anything to do with grades.

Good grades should not be viewed as the foundation for a successful future. Rather, students should acknowledge the challenges they faced during college and recognize the valuable lessons they learned by facing those challenges.

Avoid getting stuck in the self-defeating cycle believing good grades enables passing classes, which leads to a diploma, which leads to a good job. Instead, understand while hard work does create good grades, hard work more importantly improves upon the self.

Improving the self is truly the ultimate goal of college and life.

SODA

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argue for enormous corporations that market unhealthy products to a wide audience that includes children. But soda consumers cannot remain so lackadaisical about their responsibility. The companies should not be punished because their customers have chosen to consume their product in excess.

Their goal has always been selling as much soda as possible, but their tactics have never been malicious. It is the consumers who, out of laziness, have convinced themselves it is OK to drink entire 2-liters in one sitting or have a Pepsi at breakfast.

Instead of resorting to drastic measures, schools and parents should begin teaching their children better dieting behavior as early as possible, and adult consumers should make conscious efforts to make soda an occasional treat instead of a dietary staple.

To continue the way things are going now will only raise a generation of victims when we need a generation proactive enough to make lasting change.

MINORITY

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tion of schools in the 1960s to the fight of human civil rights, all the way to the failed war on drugs and public schools damaging "zero-tolerance policy," the tragic national trend refers to a systematic failure of public school curriculum and political legislation, focusing on criminalizing rather than educating.

The American Civil Liberties Union, a human rights organization, targets schools that enforce a "zero tolerance policy," or when law enforcement instead of administrators handle school misconduct, resulting in the rise of suspensions, expulsions and school-based arrests.

Suspension or expulsion of a student may put that student at high risk. Many come from single-parent homes and live in poor social climates.

Students are then at-risk and more likely to end up in jail or prison. Due to lack of money from the increasing privatization of prisons, education for juveniles could be cut out of jail budgets.

In the 2012 fiscal year, the North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is facing \$15.5 million in spending cuts, a 10 percent decrease from its current \$151 million budget. These budget cuts could hurt the allocation of money for education, treatment and mentoring.

Race and juvenile detention

- 84 percent of African-American students say they are more fearful in schools with armed security guards.

- African Americans make up only 20 percent of the total U.S. population, but more than 13 percent of prison populations.

- The NC Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency faces more than \$15 million in spending cuts for the 2012 fiscal year.

Information courtesy of Youth Society, the U.S. Census and N.C. legislature

Students of color, typically African-American students, are more likely to be suspended or expelled, even arrested. In 2003, African-American youth made up 16 percent of the country's overall juvenile population, yet made up 45 percent of juvenile arrests according to the ACLU.

Everyone must combat the school-to-prison pipeline. Teachers, parents, students, education advocates, state and federal governments as well as local school districts should be the foundations for change.

In one Mississippi school district, 33 of every 1,000 children were either arrested to sent to juvenile detention centers, according to a recent report made by the Advancement Project. Only 4 percent of those law enforcement referrals were for felony-like behavior. The majorities were for "disorderly conduct," such as not adhering to a school's dress code.

Political legislators as well as state governments should be mindful of bringing in armed security to public schools where education has been pushed aside for safety.