



The Future of Education

By: Cynthia Luong
Features Editor

BEYOND THE LETTER 'F'

Imagine never receiving an 'F' again. Imagine a future where scholars always succeed.

At West Potomac High School in Alexandria, Virginia, the standard mark for 'failure' has been eradicated since November of last year. Instead of receiving an 'F' on their quarter reports, students at Potomac are given a second chance with the 'incomplete mark.' These students are given the opportunity to advance their understanding of school subjects before receiving an actual letter grade. At the end of the year, they would be presented with a grade of attainment.

However, Potomac is not alone. Other schools like Stanford, Yale and the University of California, Berkeley all believe that grades are a somewhat hindering point to many students' achievement and would rather employ an unconventional form of grading to ensure their graduates' proficiency. High rates of college graduation, along with soaring standardized test scores, were the results.

Consequently, some concerns have arisen as new methods of encouragement and motivation are applied. Proponents question how pupils would view education now that these atypical techniques are enforced. Many see these approaches as defaming education and the learning process, as well as annihilating students' intrinsic ability to learn.

Some have compared the latest policy to a driving test. "If a teen failed a driving test, their instruction toward getting a license would not be over," Peter Noonan, Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services at Fairfax County Public Schools said. "School should be the same."

If this policy were ever to be put into play, it would occur in the near future. Our society is revolutionizing and transforming to its latest technology and ideas each day; who knows what tomorrow holds.

"This would be a good policy to implement into our school because it gives students the chance to work harder," sophomore Iris Luong said.

THE FADING TITLE OF VALEDICTORIAN

Valedictorian.

A title that many seek and fiercely compete for during their years in high school. The student with the highest GPA (grade point average) throughout the course of their high school years is given this honor.

The word "valedictorian" is derived from the Latin phrase valedicere, which means "to say farewell." Historically, the valedictorian gives the closing statement at the graduation ceremony.

However, a growing trend among high schools is to do away with the title altogether. School officials across the country feel the title creates negative competition among students. Additionally, the aggressive drive to have the highest GPA sometimes leads to multiple tying for the title. The push for the honor of being named valedictorian can also affect academic processes; for example, students could attend schools with easier classes or drop normal classes in favor of Advanced Placement classes, which have a higher weighted GPA than normal classes. Sometimes, the difference between the top student and the next-ranked student is in the hundredths of a point.

"Having a valedictorian creates a lot of tension and conflict between friends," junior Esmeralda Flores said. "It's a lot of trouble for such a thing."

To replace the title of valedictorian, some schools have designated a certain standard – for example, getting a GPA of 3.80 or above that needs to be met in order for a student to be recognized. Another option that schools have adopted is the cum laude system used in colleges. In this system, the top five percent of students are designated cum laude (with honor), the top three percent as magna cum laude (with great honor) and the top one percent as summa cum laude (with highest honor). This allows for more students' academic achievements to be recognized.

While many schools have kept the valedictorian position, others are moving away from the tradition. High competition and skewed academic results have driven many school systems from the tradition.

By: Shannon Li
Staff Writer

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graphics by
Sharon Trang

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By: Katherine Ong
Staff Writer

OBESITY ON THE RUN

Recess is a significant part of a child's life in elementary school. It gives them time to release their energy, play and interact, or simply unwind after a tiring lesson. Most importantly though, is the effect recess has on physical fitness. Without recess, children lack a time to exercise, especially if PE classes are held only once or twice a week.

Schools in Atlanta, Georgia have banned recess, planning to put the extra time into educational studies to improve testing scores and avoid lawsuits for playground injuries. Consequently, new schools in Atlanta have been built without playgrounds and students are sitting inside classrooms for more hours than they are accustomed to.

The benefits of cutting recess and PE are simple: the time is reverted to studies, and students have more time to learn in their normal curriculum. Additionally, it reduces chances of injury and truancy; the idea is for less distraction and, therefore, better test scores.

Some schools across the United States have looked into cutting physical education and recess from their curriculums, which could result in less active kids and an increase in obesity rates. Also, removing PE might actually create the opposite effect of its original intentions. "Regular physical activity has been statistically proven to improve test scores and academic achievement," PE teacher Tracy Fredell said.

Fortunately, schools in New York have found a way to counter this problem. New York Road Runners (NYRR), an organization that creates youth programs to promote physical fitness, has become involved in New York City schools' physical education programs. Prior to programs set by NYRR, schools followed the state's mandate for 120 minutes of PE a week for sixth graders and 90 minutes a week for seventh and eighth graders. With the NYRR operating in 450 schools within New York City, children are encouraged to run and are provided prizes based on how many miles they log.

One such program is Mighty Milers, which is designed to be integrated into a typical school day. Schools and community centers give students time to run or walk the distance of one to four marathons over the course of the year. As a result, the kids get to set goals for themselves, earning prizes as incentives along the way.

With these innovative methods of keeping students physically fit, perhaps schools that are looking for new ways to encourage exercise can follow the example of NYRR and lead future generations into a healthy lifestyle.

By: Diana Li
Staff Writer

SUN, SUMMER, SCHOOL

For many students, summer break is a breath of fresh air from the stress and pressure of their academics, not to mention the large amount of homework. While some students choose this time to lounge for hours at a time, others choose to capitalize on their free time by being productive. However, because a majority of their minds are focused on everything but school, summer break is the time when most of the content learned in class is lost. As a result, when the next year rolls around, students must spend the first few weeks of school reviewing the material they have forgotten; this takes valuable time away from students which could be spent focusing on new material. Although many may oppose the idea of cutting summer break, year-round schooling has grown in popularity since 1986.

One benefit of year-round schooling is a decrease in "summer learning loss" which occurs when there is no incentive to practice the material learned from the previous school year. With a steady stream of assignments and application of learned material, students can spend more time absorbing new material rather than reviewing what they have already learned. Another benefit is that with more frequent breaks, students have more chances to recuperate from school work on a timely basis.

In comparison to America, other nations have more school days and spend more time instructing students in a class. In response to these differences, President Obama suggested cutting summer vacation and extending the school day in order to improve the American education system.

However, cutting summer vacation is not without its drawbacks. Going to school day after day can be draining even with frequent weeklong breaks. Those three months of summer vacation serve as the ultimate reward for having endured long hours of hard work and is the ideal time for students to focus on something other than their studies. Students can find summer jobs, work on summer projects or go on family vacations that give students the opportunity to enjoy their youth. Also, the administration would struggle to cover the costs of running its institution throughout the year. Considering the government's recent sacrifices regarding education budgeting and the additional costs of year-round schooling, extracurricular activities such as sports and arts would be further cut. It is also possible that the costs of running the facility year round might be too great and the quality of education would deteriorate, ultimately hurting the students.

