

The pressure to get into a prestigious college

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In American society, the college one attends often defines their credibility when they are applying for jobs. However, this belief needs to change because it is putting excessive amounts of pressure on students who just want to be successful. The American education system is an archaic symbol of the past, and must change with the ages and the growing anxiety issues of our current generation. By forcing students to try to obtain this 'image of success,' it is causing us to suffer from anxiety and depression.

To get into highly regarded colleges, high school students often take as many honors-level and AP classes as they can so they can look good on their college applications. They fill their schedules with higher level classes and do extracurricular activities so they can seem like the perfect candidate for their desired college. Having a busy, difficult schedule leads to excessive amounts of stress; so excessive that even those who are not experiencing it first-hand are able to notice it, "School, homework, extracurricular activities, sleep, repeat — that's what it can be for some of these students," said the study's senior researcher Noelle Leonard, a scientist at NYU's College of Nursing, in a press release. "We are concerned that students in these selective, high pressure high schools can get burned out even before they reach college" ("School, Study, SATs: No Wonder Teens Are Stressed"). Students are trying so hard to get into their desired schools that they are flooding themselves with difficult classes and activities.

These students are constantly drowning in their assignments, unable to escape due to their daily routine of stress, put upon them by their desire to attend a prestigious college. Likewise, as seen secondhand by Jodi Edmunds,

director of counseling services at Walter Johnson High School, "...a lot of students have this idea they have to be perfect to get into a school.

.. Everyone is trying to keep up with each other. They're not really doing what's right for them'" (" The Pressure to Get Into College"). Here, it is noticed that students are taking many higher-level classes in order to seem like the perfect candidate for colleges. The issue is that the competition levels are way too high, which makes the majority of students overwork themselves, just to be able to be an option for these overly-selective colleges.

It is argued that competition is good because it shows which students deserve to go to certain colleges. However, too much competition is detrimental to the students themselves because it causes them to overwork themselves in attempt to be a good candidate, ultimately hurting themselves in the end. This excessive amount of stress is also seen by high school students themselves. They understand these struggles the best because they have experienced the pressures of getting into a good college themselves, " Walter Johnson senior Jeffrey Cirillo says there's a sense among students that taking anything less than an honors-level or AP course in a given subject would make it appear that they're not smart enough to get into college" (" The Pressure to Get Into College"). This reveals how high the competition levels really are and how students feel like they need to take harder classes in order to keep up and be accepted into a good school. This pressure put upon them by college standards heavily contribute to their excessive amounts of stress due to the large quantities of assignments given to students every day.

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Some may argue that tremendous amounts of homework is good because it serves as extra review for the students. However, in fact, it is not good because the overwhelming amount of work causes students to stay up and work during the unholy hours of the night, ultimately affecting their sleep, as well as their performance the following day in class. Likewise, as said by student, Emily Truong, “ Suddenly, my goal of maintaining my sanity during senior year seems a lot more difficult, especially considering the fact that I’m taking four AP classes this year, including AP Calculus (possibly the most frustrating, incomprehensible class ever) and AP English Literature and Composition, which (surprise, surprise) requires me to write an essay every week” (“ Mission: Sanity”). Truong states that because of the difficult classes she is taking to look qualified for college, she is losing her sanity. This first-hand account reveals that the stress put upon her by her classes causes her to lose her mind, showing that the excessive amount of stress is detrimental to her health.

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, stress is defined as, “ any environmental or physical pressure that elicits a response from an organism” (“ Stress.” Encyclopedia Britannica Online). The source also states that if there is too much stress, death or disease of the organism may occur. This parallels to student life where if a student cannot handle the obnoxious amounts of stress put upon them, the result may be disease. In the case of students preparing for college, this disease can vary, but in most cases it is anxiety or eating disorders.

Usually stress is made out to be something minimal, something that one can easily get over. Surprisingly (not surprisingly), stress can actually be

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extremely detrimental to one's health, both mentally and physically.

Statistics show that " Nearly half (49%) of all students reported feeling a great deal of stress on a daily basis and 31 percent reported feeling somewhat stressed...Grades, homework, and preparing for college were the greatest sources of stress.

.. A substantial minority, 26 percent of participants, reported symptoms of depression at a clinically significant level" (" NYU Study Examines Top High School Students' Stress and Coping Mechanisms"). Students force themselves to push through the stress of grades, homework, and preparing for college in order to get into their desired school. Doing so made some students acquire symptoms of heavy depression, revealing that the stress of college preparation is mentally deprecating to students' health. Shockingly, the impact of the stress gets worse, " At the extreme — we're seeing more kids who are engaging in self-mutilation," Ginsburg says.

"[It's] a way of taking control over their life when they feel their life is out of control. And I see quite a few kids with eating disorders. It's kids who just feel like they can't handle everything they're doing" (" School, Study, SATs: No Wonder Teens Are Stressed"). Self-harm and eating disorders are essentially coping methods for the overwhelming amounts of work these kids put into their classes so they can get into good schools. Some may argue that these students do not have to take harder classes and can easily prevent health problems.

Yet, some kids are forced into these classes by their parents and some kids are forcing themselves so they can be successful in life. The idea that you

need to graduate from a prestigious college to get a good occupation needs to be ended because it is harming kids who just want to do well in the future. In conclusion, the pressures of getting into a prestigious college is way over the normal amount of stress. This is due to students who force themselves into taking higher-level classes in order to feel adequate in college competition. It is also revealed that overwhelming amounts of stress is detrimental to students' mental and physical health, proving that the competition and pressures of college preparation needs to have lower standards. Ultimately, by seeing that American colleges are willing to put high school students through stress, as well as both mental and physical illnesses, it is clear that the American education system must be changed because it values intelligence over the health of their students.