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Justin Pineo 4-23-12 ENG-1052 Getting Rid of Grades If there is one thing that all students can relate to, it is grades. They are used throughout numerous countries, although each country has a slight difference in grading systems. Grades are a tool to measure how well a student is doing academically. But the real question is " Do they work? " The answer is no. Getting rid of the grading system currently in use in schools across the nation would benefit students, allowing them to really succeed by understanding and becoming involved in what they are learning, as opposed to spending more time worrying about grades. Grades have been noted as what could be keeping kids from doing well in school. Many claim that grades are necessary to motivate students, but what really happens is that the students become less interested in learning and doing the work. They feel that if they are being graded on a task, it feels like more of a chore and therefore they do not want to do it. But who can really blame them? Grades only tell how well one met the criteria for an assignment. As Alfie Kohn, an author of multiple education and parenting books, wrote in his essay " From Degrading to De-Grading, " " Students are brought up in a place where grades, not intellectual exploration, count. " As a well-known critic of the education system in America, he would most likely have no problem removing grades from schools. There have been several studies done about how grades affect a student's approach to work. It appears that students who are given grades were significantly less creative than students who received " qualitative feedback" (Buchs, Butera, Pulfrey 683). And the more a task required a student to use creative thinking, the worse they performed. The highest achievements happened only when students received the

feedback (Buchs, Butera, Pulfrey 683). But what happens when students stop trying on their own, when they realize they can use other people's answers. This is otherwise known as cheating. Brigid Schulte, a journalist for the Washington Post, wrote an article about a teacher's class in Maryland where every student in the class turned in a similar version of a paper they had to write. What this showed was that the students didn't really want to think about the questions asked for the paper; they only wanted the answers. This brought them to the website known as Spark Notes, which gives summaries of hundreds of books. It is a place where students can find information very easily and very quickly without having to read the book. It is as much of a useful tool for students as it is a burden for their teachers. According to a study from Donald McCabe, the Rutgers University Center for Academic Integrity President, cheating has begun at a much younger age (Schulte 327). And by the time students reach middle and high school, cheating typically becomes an everyday thing. The reason for students cheat is because they believe they need to do whatever they can to succeed. Unfortunately this happens because students are given the impression that if they receive poor grades in school, then they will never amount to anything and will lead a terrible life. But this just isn't true. Today, traditional grades are not required for admission into college. In fact, even if someone wanted to get into college without high school grades, they could. Kohn made a very good point in his essay saying " It takes more time... for admissions officers to read meaningful application materials than it does to glance at a GPA or an SAT score. (Kohn 294) Interestingly enough, there is a new form of grading which is in use by the Western Governors University. Western

Governors University is an entirely online-based college education where students are prepared for a “ series of high-stakes homework assignments” designed by professional test-makers (Young 1). What makes this school’s grading system different is that the professors who grade the assignments don’t know the students. This makes it impossible for them to alter the grades based on personal biases. There are also several other schools which are beginning to use different grading systems. For example, the University of Central Florida now sends essays to computers which then grade them. One of the professors at UCF claimed that having the computers grade essays has made the grading more fair and balanced because computers have no emotional biases (Young 1). All of this talk about changing grading systems and outsourcing assignments to computers can bring up a lot of questions, such as: Are teachers really that bad at grading? Surprisingly, yes they are. A study from July 2011 in the journal “ Teachers College Record” showed that professors do not score well when it comes to grading. The study used decades’ worth of grades from 135 different colleges, and what was found was very interesting. Over the past 30 years, an A has become the most common grade, and grades have been rising regularly. This is known as grade inflation, and it is the reason that some colleges are starting to use different grading systems (Young 1). Western Governors University’s ideology is that if students can do well and show that they understand the material, then they deserve degrees (Young 1). It doesn’t matter if they’ve never been in a classroom or listened to a lecture from the professor. WGU refers to this as “ competency-based education” (Young 1). I believe that WGU and UCF are on the right path to changing how the grading system in

America should work. But they aren't the only ones trying to change how grading works. Timothy Quinn, an author of several essays and articles in Phi Delta Kappan, has also come up with a new idea for grading. He suggests that teachers use a very clear rubric that gives specific feedback on student performance, although the rubric would only work if there were no final grade given on the assignment. But as Quinn says, " As if a single letter or number could really sum up everything a student did well or poorly on a given assignment. " The rubric would have a different grade for each area it assesses. So now instead of a student thinking they got a B and that their paper was, in general, good, now they can see what they need to improve on in order to do better. The teacher could also write a short comment on the assignment, but this doesn't guarantee that the student will read it. The rubric allows the teacher to save time while grading, and it gets the point across to the student. I believe this would be another effective way of grading because it forces students to look at their work and understand what they need to improve on. These two examples of replacing grades would work well. Not only do they allow a fair form of grading, but they also give students a chance to understand what they need to improve on. If a student is only given a grade, then they have no idea what they need to improve on. Feedback on rubrics and from " professional graders" will enlighten the students and they will be able to realize what they need to spend more time learning. Even if the grading system our nation uses doesn't change, I believe that just talking to the students and telling them not to worry about grades would help immensely. What I believe needs to happen is to at least remove the importance of grading, and make sure students know that the

material they learn is what's most important. Students can't go on thinking only grades matter, because if that's the case, they may not really be learning the necessary material. With that in mind, take a moment to reconsider how efficient grading really is. Students may not really be learning the material, teachers have become inefficient at grading properly, and grades don't always reflect the students understanding. This is why the two proposed ideas may benefit our educational system. Grades do not work, so it's time to finally change how students learn by either having the schools get rid of grades teaching the students to not worry about grades and worry more about what they're learning. That is what's really important.

Works Cited: Buchs, Celine, Fabrizio Butera, and Caroline Pulfrey. Why Grades Engender Performance-Avoidance Goals: The Mediating Role of Autonomous Motivation. Rep. 2011. Web. 5 Apr. 2012. . Erickson, Jeffrey A. A Call to Action: Transforming Grading Practices. Rep. Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2011. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ916325. Web. 5 Apr. 2012. Kohn, Alfie. " From Degrading to De-grading." Acting Out Culture. Ed. Leasa Burton. Bedford/St. Martin, 2011. 294. Print. Quinn, Timothy. A Crash Course on Giving Grades. Rep. Phi Delta Kappan International, 2011. Web. 5 Apr. 2012.