

Essay

Please write and title a 500-700-word essay on the following theme:

Looking back over your high school career, what would your message to your School Board be on improving the education of those who follow you?

Looking Back: Thoughts on Improving Education from a High School Senior

Looking back--Well, over the almost 13 years of education I've received in Montgomery County, I feel my experience has been overwhelmingly positive. I guess that's why this question stumped me at first. When you ask how you could improve the education of those who follow after me, I'm assuming you'd really like some concrete ideas. So, after much thought, there are two areas I feel could have been improved in my education: The effectiveness of the grading system at the middle school, and the amount of cheating at the high school.

As a young student, I really struggled with the abstract grading system at the middle school. I've always been a very competitive student, however, I was unable to motivate myself to work past the 3 grade. The 3+ grade seemed very elusive. Without percentages attached to the number grades, I felt the grading was subjective, based on the teacher's opinion. Therefore, I lost my drive to compete in the classroom. I've often thought my middle school years were a waste. Now, obviously, I know this is not true. And I do take some ownership in my apathy toward improving. My class was one of the first to use the numeric grades. My hope is that the system has improved.

The second area I've really struggled with is the amount of cheating that occurs in the classes at the high school. Again, because I'm highly competitive, it's frustrating to study for a test and have other students find a way to cheat and get the same grade as me. I have expressed my concern about the cheating to teachers. However, I understand the predicament they face trying to catch cheaters. I wish there was a more aggressive punishment when cheaters are found.

Ironically, I feel there is something that could possibly help both the lack of motivation at the middle school and the cheating. Let me explain, until this year high school students, overall, didn't have the best access to computers. The only computers were in the labs and some classrooms. Most of the time these were occupied by classes and not available to individual students. This year, each individual student was issued a Chromebook. With this, the teachers

are now able to implement the one-to-one teaching system. In the one semester the system has been up and running, I've already noticed vast improvements in the classroom. Each student has ready access to resources needed for assignments or classwork. Also, there are efficient online teaching platforms such as Google Classroom and Hapara. These allow teachers to supervise and manage students' work during class hours. Because teachers have more access to students' work, it enables teachers to prevent cheating more effectively.

I think expanding the one-to-one system, including Chromebooks, to the Middle School would also enhance the classroom culture for those students. With the one-on-one system, I would have been better able to gauge my progress. And teachers would have been more in touch with where I was in my classwork. With more immediate feedback, I might have been more motivated to push for the 3+, or 4 instead of settling for the 3 grade.

I know making changes in a school district is a difficult process. I also know my opinions are not universal. Hopefully my thoughts will, at least, spark some interesting school board discussions. No matter what changes you make in either the middle school or high school, I believe that education is a personal choice. I feel my education has been largely positive because I've *chosen* to learn. I hope my suggestions will help you; thank you for the opportunity to be heard.