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School: The Game

When you think of school, you think of grades, ranks, and APs. In the hallways, all you hear is who got the highest-whether it is the highest grade, rank, or score. It is an endless competition to get into the best college or job. While our school system praises being equal, it is not. This is a competition in which some have a headstart while others start behind. Social mobility-preparing students to get the best high paying jobs in the future- in schools makes it so that the amount of money in your pocket determines your quality of education-and in turn your credentials. To keep it simple: it's a money game. It's a game in which the prize is being the most better off in life, with a lot of money and a good job. The concept of competition in school is a direct impact and sign of this. In order to do away with this system and give equal opportunities to all, one must rethink the concept of competition in public schools in the US.

A lot of people believe that money dominates our society and in a lot of ways it does-especially in our schooling system. As education has become more common in the US, “the children of the higher social classes have increased their schooling the same proportions as children of the lower social classes have increased theirs;” (Labaree) Since the higher class had a significant population in schools to start with, as the ratios have stayed the same, the higher class still has more schooling in comparison to the lower class. Overall this creates a schooling system

in which the higher class has more access to schooling, meaning that the lower class is at a major disadvantage when competing for jobs in the future. The amount of money also plays a significant role in this imbalance. In general, the higher social class has a better economic standing than the lower social class. With more money, students in higher classes have more opportunities to do costly extracurriculars that look better on resumes. For example, band or sports are not cost effective and commonly come out of the pockets of the parents-money that lower class students may not have. Not only this, but higher class students can afford tutors that can help them with grades if they are struggling. Money causes “some students [to receive] more than others” (Labaree) in terms of credentials, which overall plays a huge part into getting into a good college, which then plays a part into getting good jobs. Lower class students don't have the funds to pay for these opportunities and credentials. This unbalance in schooling is partly due to the discrepancy between the social classes, which limits the lower class from getting the opportunities they need and want overall.

With its ideas of grades and ranks, school lacks the ability to actually prepare us for the workforce. See, school commonly puts a high emphasis on “Ranking students and pitting them against each other” (Bishop). This concept is motivated by who gets the highest grade or who gets into the better college. This creates an atmosphere of competition, which causes young people to not “[develop] important social skills and awareness.” (Bishop) When it comes to life anyone can tell you that it's not about the big promotion or the job you have, it's about expressing yourself. You could be the smartest person in the room, but if you don't have the social skills to back it up, then there's no way to effectively express your ideas. This is the idea that schools are forgetting about. School puts such a big emphasis on being the best and solving problems

individually, however, real-world problems from “climate change to global inequality” (Bishop) need to be solved collectively-which means social skills are very important.

This overall idea of competition forces students to think solely about getting a good grade instead of doing the work with passion or using creativity, which often leads to “business leaders crying out for employees who can think creatively and challenge the status quo” (Bishop). With grades and ranking, students just memorize and spit out facts rather than learning to think and use their own talents to apply them to the workforce or their future careers.

Life isn't all about competitions and we should teach our students that.

With the problem of discrepancy between economic classes, the main way to solve this problem is to provide programs that enable students to get the same opportunities. Though of course, no one would want an increase in taxes-so the challenge becomes how could we do this?

Well, there are different ways to fund our school system other than our current model. Currently in the US, the government uses our taxes to pay for school-which causes a problem if the choice to increase educational spending is made. In general other countries and states depend on the government rather than direct taxes (these direct taxes depend on property taxes, which is why there are certain schools with better funding). For example, in other states such as Texas and Colorado, “lower property tax rates. . . Texas, Colorado intends to use state money to make up some of the difference.” (Phillips) They decrease property taxes (which usually decreases funds for school due to more demand in higher profit areas) and rather increase government dependency. This system does increase funds for schools, though because it is government money, it could have discrepancies in where/how it is being spent- which may still cause differences between educational opportunities in lower and higher classes. Whereas in Finland, they “[borrow] the best from both capitalism and socialism. The government pays from the tax

system.”(Hertz) This system enables the money to be split evenly, meaning that everyone, whether rich or poor, has the same access to opportunities, and also leaves parents' bad influence out of the equation. I'm not suggesting that we should follow capitalist and socialist systems, though we should have a set way of distributing wealth in a way that equally gives opportunities-without tax-payer intervention.

With the issue of competition in schools, obviously the grading and ranking system has to change in order to let schools focus less on competition and rather on cooperation. While there could be a sort of grading system in order to understand where a student is at, society should focus less on grades and more on growth. In Finland they “prepare children to learn how to learn, not how to take a test,” (Hancock) In this way, not only is the stress of getting the perfect grade gone, but a student is able to thrive in an environment that builds them up rather than praying for their downfall. We could overall focus less on test scores and more on collaborative projects, which not only enable students to be creative-which was a problem with our current system-but also enables them to develop social skills-helping them in the future with sharing ideas.

While this idea is good in retrospect, there are certain students who will seem to excel in this system and then get bored, contributed by the “consumer-minded parents or students [who] also demand a structure of education that offers qualitative differences between institutions at each level.” We should be focusing on cooperation, yes, but there could also be materials, or a system in place for a student to keep on growing and learning. For this system, rather than having grades set on different age groups, in which a student is forced into every year, students should be able to go to the next grade when they are prepared. This enables students who are ahead to keep learning and students who need help to focus on getting better. Following the model of Finland, in the US, “teachers [should be] trusted to do whatever it takes to turn young

lives around.”(Hancock) In general, zero parent intervention (money wise) would be ideal in order to keep opportunities between every student just and equal-to let our teachers teach.

Obviously this concept comes with the concern of whether or not this notion is actually preparing students for the workplace. The workplace is not all about competition, though for some cases it is. In certain workplaces, “competition can motivate employees, make them put in more effort, and achieve results”(Steinhage). Though, a problem with this system is that it can also “elicit fear and anxiety, because they [employees] focus on the threat of being laid off, losing income, or being publicly humiliated.” This is similar to the system in the environment created in school due to competition. In order to adapt schools to align with the workplace further, yes, we should be focussing on cooperation, but also on mental health. Healthy and supportive competitions could be put in place in order to motivate students and prepare them for the workforce. This can be seen as games in the classroom-with no real repercussions to not put anyone down or cause anxiety. To accommodate for preparing students mentally with the stress of competitions in jobs, we should give them resources to manage stress and anxiety. Overall, in the students best interests we would be helping them in the workforce and getting used to the atmosphere while still building them up.

Therefore, not only is social mobility in schools a problem, but we should focus on changing the system in order to better accommodate preparing students for the future. We overall must do away with competition and money intervention in our school system to give everyone equal opportunities. With this system, we would be able to build everyone up, and ensure that every single student reaches their true potential.

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