



# THE HUMAN RESTORATION PROJECT

Inspired by the writings of Alfie Kohn, who stated:

“the idea of supporting such educators by convening a brain trust of leading theorists, researchers, and practitioners to create — and then disseminate — concise defenses of various features of progressive education. I imagined a set of handouts, each consisting of a single (double-sided) sheet that responded to a common question. The idea was to lay out the case briskly, making liberal use of bullet points and offering a short bibliography at the end for anyone who wanted more information.”

Our “Why Sheets” are concise explanations of implementing progressive practice into a school or classroom. If you’d like to modify this document (as this is for an entire school, or you’d like it to be more personalized), a [Google Document is available here](#).

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# Gradeless Learning

Dear families,

This year, no grades will be given in this class. All students will automatically pass. We believe that this will effectively prepare students to be lifelong learners, rather than set a limiting benchmark on their worth. To support this shift, we will work diligently to supply ample feedback that helps your child realize their potential. Below we have laid out substantive research supporting this change. We can't wait to see your child rediscover their love of learning.

## Reasoning and Research

Grading causes distress amongst our students. Although assumed to be beneficial for competitive gains and something to strive for, issuing a grade often hampers learning. Because our children aim for an extrinsic motivator of an "A", they ignore the process and opportunities that surround each assignment, instead solely focused on the end result. Therefore, they are not reaching their true potential.

Likely, you have seen this behavior unfold with your child. A joy of reading is killed by the introduction of rewards. We used to read because we loved reading; now we read because we want something in return. This shift, which occurs across most schools, destroys that joy we deem most important to our children's futures.

Overwhelming research by leading child development psychologists supports these claims:

- **Students don't achieve as much with grades.** Dr. Ruth Butler, a prominent researcher surrounding the benefits of feedback, issued an assignment to three groups of students. One group received solely a grade on their assignment. Another obtained a grade and feedback. And the last, only feedback. Even when this process was replicated across multiple studies, it was universally found that students showcased more motivation toward learning when only given feedback. Students performed better when not issued a grade.<sup>1</sup>
- Those focused on achievement overstress. In 1991, Dr. Hall Beck demonstrated that students who had a "grading orientation" - those who cared primarily about their grades - struggled academically, socially, and emotionally compared to their peers. Those with a "learning orientation" - who wanted to discover and explore - came out on top.<sup>2</sup>

## Further Reading

The Case Against Grades by Alfie Kohn.  
*Available free via Web.*

TeachersGoingGradeless.com. A collection of works surrounding a movement away from grades.

## Citations

1. Task-Involving and Ego-Involving Properties of Evaluation: Effects of Different Feedback Conditions on Motivational Perceptions, Interest, and Performance. Butler, Ruth. Journal of Educational Psychology. 1987.  
  
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Response to Assessment Feedback: The Effects of Grades, Praise, and Source of Information. Lipnevich, Anastasiya. Smith, Jeffrey. ETS. 2008.
2. The Relations of Learning and Grade Orientations to Academic Performance. Beck, H. P., Rorrer-Woody, S., & Pierce, L. G. Teaching of Psychology. 1991.
3. Do Grades Shape Students' School Engagement? The Psychological Consequences of Report Card Grades at the Beginning of Secondary School. Poorthuis, Astrid et. al. Journal of Educational Psychology. 2015.
4. Grading Hampers Cooperative Information Sharing in Group Problem Solving. Hayek, Anne-Sophie et. al. Solvay Brussels School Economics & Management. 2015.
5. Competitive Grading Sabotages Good Teaching. Krumboltz, John. Yeh, Christine. Phi Delta Kappan. 1996.



- Those who struggle academically don't catch up. Dr. Astrid Poorthuis found that when issued a midway report card with a low grade, students rarely did better the following semester. In fact, the majority of students did much worse.<sup>3</sup>
- Grades cause less cooperation. Dr. Anne-Sophie Hayek performed a series of tests that highlighted how people working together were less likely to share information when knowingly assessed. In other words, by not being assigned a grade, students were more open to sharing their ideas.<sup>4</sup>
- Grades make school feel unsafe. The number one indicator of success at school is how safe a child feels. When constantly marked and pitted against a threshold, this diminishes safety. Dr. John Krumboltz outlines how grades cause unneeded stressors in a child's development.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, this does not mean we will not be pushing your child to succeed. In fact, we'll be more focused on ensuring that every child walks away with a future-ready education. Grades are often used as a shortcut for feedback. If we aren't issuing grades, that means we'll be focused even more on quality, substantial feedback on all of your child's assignments.

However, given this research and the overwhelming negative impact that grading entails, we will no longer issue a grade. Our primary goal is to develop a safe, nurturing learning environment, and we will work tirelessly to ensure that happens.

Gradeless learning will shift how we value assignments. You can expect the following changes:

1. **Purposeful Work:** If students aren't motivated by grades anymore, it is our challenge as educators to issue assignments worth doing. That means that we'll need to double down on providing relevant, engaging materials that all students will want to do. That's right, our goal is for students to want to attend school everyday.
2. **Individualized Assessment:** While providing feedback, we will be able to develop activities that foster growth for each learner. Unlike rote assessment, where every child is expected to perform the same, we will demonstrate development through a variety of means.
3. **Constant Dialogue:** Due to the conversational nature of gradeless learning, we will be in constant contact with you and your child. We want to communicate the amazing work that's being done here.

These shifts are a result of our overwhelming desire to do what's best for your child. We don't want anxiety-ridden "A-students" chasing Valedictorian, who sacrifice their emotional well-being and time to be a kid. We don't want to constantly penalize students who struggle with certain forms of assessment. We simply want students to come to school, energized and ready to learn, and will enact any policy possible to make that happen.

## Questions and Concerns

We would love to meet with you in person to discuss our decision to stop issuing grades. Please reach out to us and schedule a meeting or phone call.

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