The Case Against Grades (##)
Teachers also report a variety of reactions to de-grading not only from colleagues and administrators but also from the students themselves. Some teachers, for example, note that students who are used to receiving grades may find it difficult to adjust to a system where they are not evaluated based on numerical scores. However, many students do eventually come to appreciate the benefits of this approach, such as a greater sense of autonomy and freedom to pursue their own interests. In some cases, students have even expressed a desire to continue using such systems even after they have returned to schools with traditional grading systems.

One student said that he feels more in control of his own learning with grade-free education. "I remember the first time that a grading rubric was attached to a piece of my writing," he said. "Suddenly all the joy was taken away. I was writing for a grade — I was no longer exploring for me. I want to get that back. Will I ever get that back?"

Another teacher, a grade-free high school graduate, says that she finds the lack of grades to be a liberating experience. "When I was in high school, I was always focused on getting good grades," she said. "I never really thought about what I was learning or why I was learning it. Now I realize that I was just doing it for the grades and not for the knowledge."

The lack of grades also allows teachers to focus on the process of learning rather than the outcome. "When I was teaching in a traditional classroom," one teacher said, "I was always looking for ways to improve my students' grades. Now I can just focus on their learning and how they are progressing."

However, some teachers do find it challenging to adjust to a system where they are not evaluating students based on numerical scores. "I don't think it's fair," one teacher said. "I think students need to know where they stand and what they need to improve on."

To address one common fear, the graduates of grade-free high schools are indeed accepted by selective private colleges. In fact, some of these students have even been accepted to Ivy League institutions. "I was surprised when I got accepted to Harvard," one student said. "I didn't think that was possible without grades." This suggests that the lack of grades does not necessarily hinder students' chances of gaining admission to top universities.

Research on the effects of grading has slowed down in the last couple of decades, but the studies that are still being conducted suggest that grades may have a negative impact on students' motivation and learning. For example, one study found that students who received grades tended to focus more on the end result rather than the process of learning. This can lead to a lack of interest in the subject matter and a decrease in motivation overall. In addition, some students may feel pressure to achieve certain grades, which can lead to increased levels of stress and anxiety. This can be counterproductive and may actually hinder students' ability to learn and achieve.

A well-meaning teacher may promote a system of feedback that includes grades, but this can have unintended consequences. "If I'm right — more to the point, if all the research to which I've referred is taken seriously — then the absence of grades is not just a matter of doing away with a system. It's a substantive change in the nature of the educational experience," one teacher said. "We need to move beyond grades if we want to truly engage students and help them learn."
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