teen ink

By teens, for teens

THE COLLEGE ISSUE

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DREAM BIG!

Growing up is a part of my life that has changed my perspective on it time and time again. It has made me question things like what I want to do when I'm older and how I am going to accomplish that for myself. At a young age, this isn't the easiest to find, but it has given me motivation to create a plan for my future. That being said, my biggest fear is being unsuccessful in life which is why I've set goals for myself to become successful.

I've already completed some goals such as challenging myself with harder classes in school and saving money responsibly. I used to want to achieve more than my parents but with some aspects, I already have so I've decided to set even higher goals for myself. This is why I've decided to go to college to gain an even higher education to prepare me for my future career.

At first, college never crossed my mind, but after maturing, I became more open to the idea and gained a new understanding of what I wanted to do with my life. Something clicked in my head, pushing me to start planning out ideas so I could succeed and have an easier life later down the road. It happened out of nowhere, but I think what triggered this was fear.
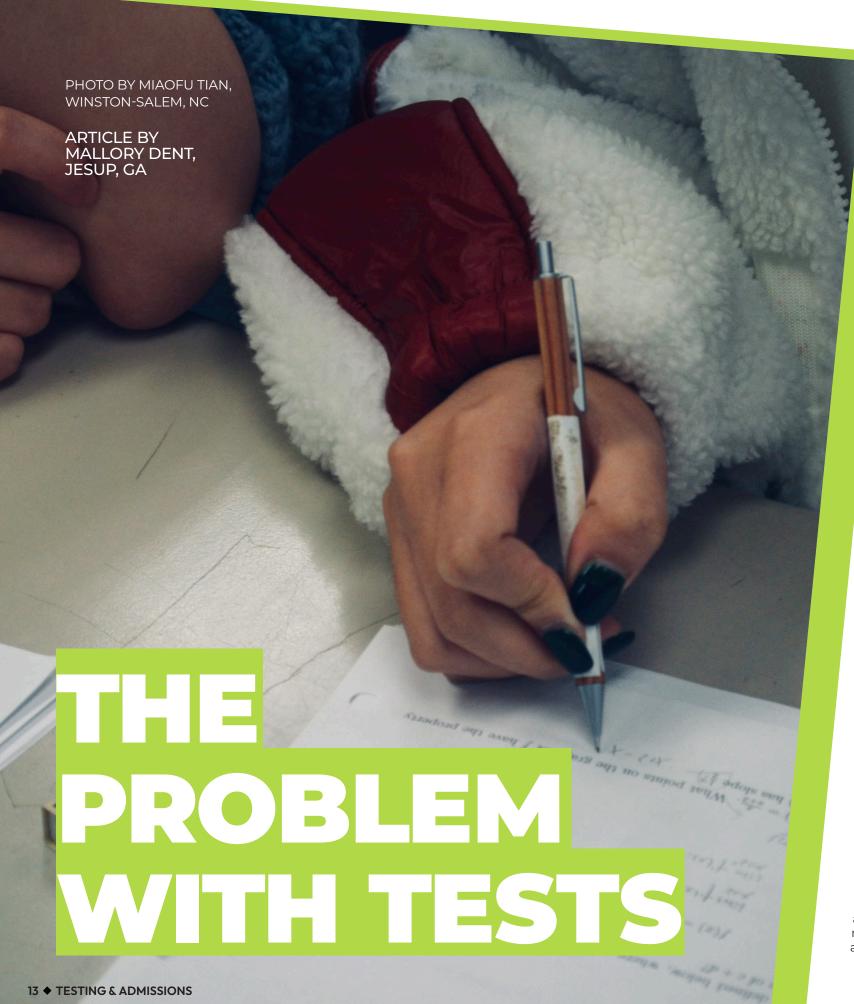
The thought of struggling again, as I've seen it happen first-hand, helped to change my mindset. It motivated me to pursue what I wanted. I believe anything is possible if you put your mind to it, and I plan to keep that mindset.

I am even setting goals after college to apprentice under different electricians and master the field I'm best suited for. Then, I can use what I learned in college with a business degree to further that profession and own my own business one

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day. After that, I can pay others to do the job for me while running it from behind. I'm always thinking ahead along with the importance of my future and career.

However, while I devised a plan and stuck to it, it didn't come easily. It took a lot of time and effort to put this plan together. I took time to gather income, pay college requirements, and achieve good grades on time so I could make college and life in general much easier down the road. Needless to say, it was all well worth it as I am about to graduate and enroll in a brand new school in the fall. It's an exciting experience to look forward to, but not something to take for granted, and I know that I will be fine as long as I stay motivated and continue with the same mindset I had in the beginning. ◆
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ARTICLE BY
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THE PROBLEM WITH TESTS

Whether it be the testing of a squire's bravery and skill in battle during medieval times to become a knight, or our now standardized tests such as EOCs, SATs, and ACTs, tests have always been an integral part of our societies. According to the College Board, over 1.7 million people from the class of 2022 alone took the SAT. Knowing this, you would think that tests, in general, would just be another thing in life we have to get through. And, in most cases, they are.

For me personally, I have always had this love-hate relationship with tests. I never disliked them because I was a bad test taker. I am an arguably good one. I've never hated a test because of what's on it. Well... maybe that's not entirely the case, but Pre-Cal tests almost belong in their own category. It's more so what all tests bring no matter what subject, no matter if it's five or 20 percent of my grade. With just the word "test" suddenly anxiety and fear become the lead roles at the forefront of my mind. The problem in itself was never the chance of making a bad grade or even feeling awkward with a teacher because they, too, know you made a mistake. The real problem was that if I made a mistake, I suddenly felt less. Less intelligent, less capable, less me. It never mattered if it was a spelling error or a completely miscalculated math problem, to me they still read the same, "mistake."

I remember one night vividly when I was doing one of the quizzes in Pre-Cal. For reference, quizzes in Pre-Cal were both a quiz in itself as well as a way to study for the upcoming test soon after. I was sitting at our dining room table, my laptop open to the quiz, and a large notepad filled with synthetic division as I tried to find the upper and lower bounds of the equation on my screen. Every time the equation didn't work out and I would again end up with a wrong answer, all I could think about was how bad I was going to do on the test. Once you go down that rabbit hole of defeat, you eventually come to the realization that the light seems further away the more you sink into it. On this night, every wrong problem took a shred of confidence with it, and with that shred of confidence also went my ability to calculate the problems accurately.

The problem with tests, or school in general for that matter, is that neither can ever truly measure a student's intelligence. Tests in school are by definition supposed to "measure proficiency or knowledge," but the problem lies with what tests will never be able to account for. It's the off days, the test anxiety, and the spiraling. During a test, a student is more likely to make a mistake. This is purely because, as research proves, stress increases the likelihood of a mistake. There are plenty of highly intelligent students that are just bad test takers. These students are then seen as 'less intelligent' or 'less smart' based purely on a few one-time grades that happen to account for more of their overall grade. Based on our current school system you can be a wonderful student who does all of their work on time and puts in the extra effort, but in the end, it comes down to those moments when your anxiety is high and your brain is blanking.

To top it all off, schools have these wonderful things called "rankings." In these rankings, the tests are what matter, where your stress levels are high and you are statistically more likely to make mistakes because of it, they are what matter. The school's system of intelligence then becomes a measurement of low-performance anxiety rather than a true measure of how proficient a student is in a subject. The problem arises when students get too caught up in their rankings and begin to believe they are less intelligent or believe they are defined by them. The idea that you are less than your peers or the pressure of maintaining your current rank can be detrimental to a student. This pressure can then affect their performance in school, causing a downhill spiral. It may start with a bad test grade, but the lack of confidence gained from that one experience could lead to a 'bad' average or rank overall. Intelligence, in schools, is not true intelligence no matter how much we get caught up in the idea of grades and rankings.

It is the students who ultimately suffer the consequences of how we are ranked in school. It is the system of how our grades are measured that has distorted society's interpretation of intelligence for young minds. This system encourages the need for something within young people that is essentially impossible, perfection. This idea that perfection is the best way to succeed has only led to lower self-esteem when students, being the humans they are, inevitably make a mistake. The system has fed into the idea that mistakes make you less, rather than the idea that mistakes, no matter if they are on math or history tests, are what undeniably make us human.

Saying this, I still become attached to my class averages, test grades, and ranking. Tests, whenever I get a good grade, still make me happy. I am not saying that studying is not important and it cannot help your grade, because it can. But I am saying that off days and stress exist and your grade and confidence can be affected by them. I am also not saying that I have a better option for the way our intelligence is measured in school because tests do inevitably reveal if you know a subject well or not in that one given moment. I do, however, believe that the current system cannot measure true proficiency because of the anxiety and stress that a test will never be able to account for. I also believe that this system pushes aside its fundamental purpose in favor of a 'perfectionist' agenda. ◆

MY CAREER OR MY PARENTS'?

ARTICLE BY MATTHEW ACEVEDO, MANCHESTER, CT

ARTWORK BY LYDIA VAZ, SAN JOSE, CA

I can remember the wince in my mother's face and the tone of disappointment in her voice when I told her that I wanted to change my major from sports management to secondary education. "Yikes, you really want to go into education? I liked sports management better," she said and then proceeded to explain why. This statement comes from my mother who doesn't know much about either of those fields of study and also never went to college for her profession. Even with that in mind, her disgusted-sounding comment alone made me second guess changing my major to something I actually want to do as opposed to what she thought sounded better.

My mother isn't much different from many other parents when it comes to their children's future and career choices. Many parents have a preset notion of what a successful child looks like — good grades in school, going to college, getting a degree, and having a high-paying job. The problem is that in this path of success, some parents tend to not take into consideration what their child wants or what will make them happy. This doesn't mean parents want their children to be miserable and rich; they just want the best for their children. Therefore, parents will naturally want to influence their child's decisions into their idea of good and bad. Even seemingly harmless remarks and input, like my mom's, can sway children into feeling obligated to make certain choices.

The sense of obligation to fulfill our parents' expectations is not uncommon. In high school, we often feel pressure to go to college and meet their definition of success, or risk being seen as a disappointment to them. Forbes did a recent article covering a Joblist study that analyzed the extent of parent influence on careers. The study revealed that 58 percent of Millenials and 57 percent of Gen-Z respondents reported that they felt their parents forced them to attend college. Naturally, as teenagers in high school, we hate going to school, so the thought of four to six more years of education isn't the greatest sounding idea; but in the eyes of our parents, college seems like the only option or else we are going to disappoint them. While they were pushing us to be college scholars, they were also unknowingly doing us a great disservice as student loans are America's fastest-growing category of debt with a staggering $1.57 trillion and counting according to Forbes.

The authoritative influence our parents have goes beyond just making those major higher education decisions. Fresh out of graduation we are already pressured to get a career and make the decision of what we'll do for the rest of our lives. Parents continue to behave in ways that make us feel we don't have many options for our careers. In their efforts, parents again pressure their kids on career choices. The study unveils that 40 percent of all respondents felt pressured by their parents to enter their current career, according to *Parents Magazine*. The same joblist study then measured that a quarter of parents used guilt to influence their child's decision. Whether it be about higher income or just wanting their child to go into the same field as them, it is blatant manipulation to guilt someone into a career.

PARENTS SHOULD ASK THEIR CHILDREN WHAT THEY ARE GOOD AT TO ENSURE THEY WILL BE SUCCESSFUL IN THEIR CHOICE

These parents in this study are not bad parents. In fact, their intentions make them somewhat great parents because all they ever want is for their children to succeed. This should not fully discourage parents from being a part of their child's future, but there are better ways to be involved. Parents should ask their children what they are good at to ensure they will be successful in their choice. Then, they should put their own personal wants away, and ask them what they want instead of just telling them what they should and making them feel like a disappointment for wanting something different.

Look at the title. The answer is simple: It's not my parents' career; it's mine. ◆

INTERESTED IN FLIGHT?

HOW YOU CAN PREPARE FOR A CAREER IN AVIATION

ARTICLE BY MICHAEL VELLUCCI, EAST GREENWICH, RI

For as long as I can remember, my head has been in the clouds. I grew up listening to thrilling stories of my dad's adventures on the Air Force's Special Tactics Team. One day, he'd be cascading out of a plane to rescue a fallen member of the military. On another, he might be racing across state borders to assist a citizen in need.

My dad's anecdotes always captured my attention, but I learned early on that I wanted to be a commercial pilot, and his work was far more specialized. Unfortunately, there are not a lot of resources available to teens looking to make sense of the wide world of aviation. Just think of the array of careers available in this line of work, from a pilot, of course, but also air traffic controllers, airplane mechanics, aerospace engineers, and members of the landing crew. The reality, though, is that while all of these careers require baseline knowledge of how a plane functions and sky conditions, these lines of work are actually quite different.

I found it difficult to identify a mentor who could help me figure out the right way to pursue my interest in becoming a pilot. I talked to the parents of friends who worked in the industry, and I scouted out opportunities to make new connections through those I knew from flight training school. However, I recognized that much of what I know about this field comes through self-study and informal networking.

Recently, I created the organization Fly High as a resource for other teens looking to learn more about aviation. But I want to share what I've learned a bit more widely, which is why I am writing this article.

We're currently in the midst of a major pilot shortage, and I can't help but wonder, does some of this have to do with the fact that so many teens simply aren't exposed to this career path and don't know the options available to them in this industry? Researchers from the firm Oliver Wyman indicated that airlines in North America, in particular, will need approximately 30,000 more pilots by 2032 in order to maintain the transportation standards we have become accustomed to in our lives (Schonland). If we can't garner student interest in this topic, it's unlikely we will be in the position to meet the industry's needs ten years or so from now, and part of this work involves making sure that students with a burgeoning passion for aviation know the paths available to them to prepare for this career. Despite the country's emphasis on STEM education, only 240 high schools in the United States include aviation in their programming (Camera). From personal experience, I know that some states likely provide opportunities to learn this material more often than others. But how can someone interested in aerospace engineering, for example, actually propel themselves toward success in this field if high school STEM programs largely exclude these topics from their curriculums?

While I can't offer a comprehensive list of how to prepare for a career in aviation, given that the field is so varied, here are a few more things students can do to cement and narrow their interests:

If you are interested in aviation, there are a lot of digital resources available to you right now — at no cost. For example, CNBC and Epic Flight Academy have both released detailed video guides explaining how to become a pilot. These resources give students a close look at United Airlines' simulation technologies and detail the steps involved in pursuing a pilot's license and completing the FAA's written exam ("What It Takes to Become a Pilot" and "How To Become a Pilot"). There are also a ton of interesting podcast series that shed an insider's look at the industry, such as Airline Pilot Guy and AvTalk.

Some states in America offer flight training schools, though there aren't as many as one might hope. The first step toward pursuing a career in aviation is to research the on-the-ground and in-the-air training opportunities in your state. When I decided to take flight classes, I was surprised by the cost of these programs. Fortunately, with a bit of planning, it's possible to secure scholarships to cover the cost of flight training. Companies like FedEx and UPS invite scholarship applicants for flight training each year, and regional organizations, like Aero Club of New England, also host such programs. Many flight training schools themselves, such as AirVentures, publish resources on ways to cover the cost of this training. While opportunities tend to vary by state, another option would be to look at organizations that cater to specific demographics, like Women in Aviation and Black Aerospace Professionals.

As I've learned firsthand, it's possible to cover a lot of ground with a little initiative. Don't be afraid to set up a conversation with a pilot you've encountered in the airport on a family trip or to reach out to local mentorship organizations about roundtables or other series they might be hosting. Try to connect with friends, relatives, and peers to see if anyone in their social circle works in aviation. Speaking with these individuals will likely expose you to more opportunities than you can find just by Googling.

So if you're curious about aviation, it's worth taking a deeper dive into these programs and materials. After all, there's a pilot shortage and a general need for employees in this industry, and it's a career path where you're sure to make a lasting impact. ◆

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