

PARENTS TALK BACK

The year I quit looking at my kids' grades

I cared about my grades as a student. My parents did too, although not oppressively so. I learned early on the positive attention that came along with A's. Once they knew I had internalized their expectations as my own, they focused on all the other things they had to worry about while raising six children.

My parents assumed I would try my best in school, because, why wouldn't I?

They relied on twice-a-year report cards and occasional progress reports to reaffirm this belief.

My relationship with grades became more complicated when it was my children being assessed. After elementary school, not a single paper report card comes home.

Like students across the country, all of their grades are accessible through an online portal. The portal for our district is called Infinite Campus. Even the name sounds ominous. So vast, those grades — creeping into every corner of time, space and existence.

Teachers are expected to post every homework assignment, quiz and test result. Some schools send notifications with each update. Some parents download the portal app on their smartphones and check the updates hourly. I never became that involved, but during the first year of this transition to online grades, I paid close attention to my daughter's marks. If I saw a score that seemed lower than usual, I would urge my child to take the retest. If an assignment appeared to be missing or incomplete, I'd suggest she talk to her teacher or turn it in for partial credit. I would remind her and follow up frequently.

It took me a year to realize that so much information can quickly go from blessing to burden. I wanted her to do her best, but not because I had a hawk-eyed focus on her scores.

I can be a slightly obsessive, competitive workaholic, and worry about my children being too similar and feeling so much pressure. But then I also worry about them not being motivated and competitive enough. I recognized this impulse and wanted to check it before I made all of us miserable. Up-to-the-minute, 24/7 access to their grades isn't the best thing for my mental health, or my relationship with my children.

I also didn't want to become a crutch for her academic achievement. If there is a missing assignment, let her figure out how to make it up.

Easy access to every grade can flip a free-range parent into a hovering helicopter. One parent posted a question on the Free Range Kids website which asked: Are hourly report cards a good idea?

Parents have to figure out where their child thrives and struggles, and decide how to help them grow in the areas they need extra support. Some kids need additional academic help. Others need to grow emotionally or to learn independence.

I decided that by taking responsibility for my child's work, I was robbing her of the opportunity to do so on her own.

This year, I never logged into the online portal. I asked regularly about what she was learning in her classes, which books she was reading and how the tests were going. If she was struggling with a subject, we helped her or found a tutor who could. I talked to her about her presentations, group projects and class discussions. I responded promptly to any teacher email and attended all the conferences. I volunteered for field trips but stepped aside from school projects.

As an Asian-American mother, I may be parenting against type by opting out of hypervigilant grades monitoring. For children of immigrants, there can be a culture of high academic expectations. I don't have the will (or energy, frankly) to be a Tiger Mom, but I lean in that general direction.

Even with this hands-off approach, I knew I had a safety net.

My husband kept tabs on her progress through the website. He is much more laid-back about all aspects of parenting, so perhaps it makes more sense for him to keep an eye on the online grade book.

I asked her if she noticed that I hadn't checked in on her specific grades this year. "Not really, because Dad was stalking my grades, like, every week," she said. (He looks at her grades every few weeks.) It's kind of like role reversal, she added, that her father would ask about assignments.

I explained to her the difference between internal and external motivation.

"I want you to learn to do well for your own satisfaction — not to please your parents or teachers."

"I do everything for myself, anyway," she said.

Were truer teenage words ever spoken? I asked her how she ended up doing this year. Just as good or slightly better than last year, she said.

Bonus: I had nothing to do with it.

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AISHA SULTAN
Parents talk back

Report: Segregation in education on the rise

By JENNIFER C. KERR
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Six decades after the Supreme Court outlawed separating students by race, stubborn disparities persist in how the country educates its poor and minority children.

A report Tuesday by the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office found deepening segregation of black and Hispanic students at high-poverty K-12 public schools. These schools often offered fewer math, science and college prep classes, while having disproportionately higher rates of students who were held back in ninth grade, suspended or expelled.

"Segregation in public K-12 schools isn't getting better. It's getting worse, and getting worse quickly," Rep. Bobby Scott of Virginia said. The analysis, he said, confirmed that America's schools are largely segregated by race and class, leaving "more than 20 million students of color now attending racially and socioeconomically isolated public schools."

"This report is a national call to action," said Scott, the House education committee's top Democrat and among the lawmakers who requested the study. Its release coincided with the 62nd anniversary of the Brown v. Board of Education ruling, which declared segregated schools unconstitutional.

"While much has changed in public education in the decades following this landmark decision and subsequent legislative action, research has shown that some of the most vexing issues affecting children and their access to educational excellence and opportunity today are inextricably linked to race and poverty," the report said.

GAO studied three school districts in the South, Northeast and West. Each took steps to increase racial and economic diversity in the schools but were hampered by transportation issues and getting support from the parents and the community.

In a separate paper, the Civil Rights Project at UCLA said New York and Illinois have been "at or very near the top of the list" of states where African-American and Latino students have been most severely segregated. It found that "residential resegregation" in some parts of Maryland spilled over into the schools and that in California, the percentage of Hispanics was increasing as the overall school population declined.

"We need to create schools that build a society where the talent of all is developed and students of all races-ethnicities are prepared to understand and live successfully in a society that moves beyond separation toward mutual respect and integration," the group said.



AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais

Pre-K teacher Epernay Kyles, center, holds Jenny Rivas, left, and Linden Videnieks as she talks about the day's class activities with her students at Garrison Elementary in the Logan Circle neighborhood of Washington, May 17. Six decades after the Supreme Court outlawed separating students by race, stubborn disparities persist in how the country educates its poor and minority children.

The GAO report found that in the 2013-2014 school year, 16 percent of the nation's public schools had high concentrations of poor and black or Hispanic students, up from 9 percent at the start of the millennium. The student body at these schools were at least 75 percent black or Hispanic and poor — and in some cases 100 percent. The findings were based on an analysis of Education Department data.

These schools tended to provide fewer math courses, with calculus and seventh and eighth grade algebra seen as particularly lacking. In science, they had less biology, chemistry and physics courses than their more affluent counterparts with fewer minority students.

Less than half of the mostly poor, mostly minority schools offered AP math courses. Looking at all public schools, low-income and minority students were far less likely to enroll in these more rigorous courses.

Hispanic students at these schools tended to be "triple segregated by race, income and language," according to specialists and educators who were interviewed by the GAO.

Education Secretary John B. King, Jr. said one big reason for the disparities is money.

Inequitable resource distributions "are shaping inequitable opportunities for students," King said after the report was released. He said President Barack Obama has

asked for more education dollars, including money for grant programs to support districts with community-developed plans that increase socio-economic diversity in schools.

Nancy Zirkin, executive vice president and director of policy at The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights said, "We must focus on fixing resource disparities that have plagued students of color and low-income students for generations."

Other findings:

- Students at these high-poverty minority schools were 7 percent of all ninth grade students in the country, but were 17 percent of all students held back that grade.

- Students at these schools accounted for 12 percent of all students nationwide, and represented 22 percent of all students with one or more out-of-school suspensions and 16 percent of all students expelled.

- In the 2013-14 school year, Hispanic students were the largest minority group in schools — 25 percent Hispanic students, compared to 16 percent black students. Both groups have poverty rates two to three times higher than the rates of white students.

The report recommends that the Education Department more routinely analyze its civil rights data to identify disparities that need to be addressed. At the Justice Department, the GAO auditors suggested more monitoring of open federal desegregation court cases.

OUT OF THE VAULT

Truck-train collision spurs crossing closure

A coalition of representatives of Umatilla County, Oregon state, Union Pacific Railroad and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation was scheduled to meet May 19, 1994, to discuss the closure of a dangerous unmarked railroad crossing in front of Pendleton Readymix near Mission due to safety concerns — and almost too late. Two hours before the scheduled meeting, a collision at the intersection demolished a Gordon's Electric pickup and injured two employees. Miraculously, neither man was seriously hurt.

Employees of the concrete plant who witnessed the crash at 12:02 p.m. said it was a



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Out of the vault

miracle the men survived at all. The train, traveling eastbound, hit the back of the pickup and spun it around. One of the men was thrown through a window. The pickup was dragged by the

train 72 feet down the track from the crossing, according to Tribal Police Chief Leonard Cardwell.

Employees of Pendleton Readymix and Pacific Power rushed to provide aid until emergency services could arrive.

The stopped train blocked the intersection and the cars were not

separated, so EMTs had to lift the injured men between two rail cars. Gordon's employee Ivan Nicley, 33, of Milton-Freewater suffered extensive facial injuries and was admitted to St. Anthony Hospital for surgery. His partner, H. Tom Thompson, 29, of Helix was treated and released the same day.

Readymix employees expressed frustration over the crossing, which they said didn't afford good visibility for oncoming trains that were usually moving at a good clip at that point. "We sit there every day and watch as one after another almost gets hit," said Readymix employee Jane Clarke. "And then the sickening sound. ... It was just a nightmare

seeing people hanging out the front of the pickup," she added.

The accident did have one upside: Officials at the meeting had a first-hand account of the danger posed by the crossing. Work was slated to begin as early as the following summer to close the crossing and another in front of Hall's Trailer Court, and build a new crossing about halfway between the two with a frontage road alongside the railroad tracks to access the two businesses.

Renee Struthers is the Community Records Editor for the East Oregonian. See the complete collection of Out of the Vault columns at eovault.blogspot.com

ODDS & ENDS

Texas woman sells 'housebroken' bison she let wander inside

ARGYLE, Texas (AP) — A 1,000-pound "domesticated" bison that was allowed to roam in her owner's Dallas-area home has moved on to pastures new.

Bullet the bison was transported Saturday from Karen Schoeve's home in Argyle to her new home, which she will share with two cows, 15 miles away in Flower Mound.

Schoeve says she was struggling to balance work and looking after Bullet and her two paint ponies, so she sold off the horses and two months ago advertised Bullet for sale on Craigslist for \$5,960. She tells *The Dallas Morning News* she received several offers.

Schoeve describes Bullet as house-trained, although she sometimes tracks mud inside. She says the bison is "good hardy stock, but "not scary" and that she has "a great personality."

Nebraska man insists he's not dead yet

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A Lincoln man says he's not dead, despite what the Social Security Administration has said.

Chuck Zellers, 73, learned of his demise in March after his Social Security deposit was removed from his bank account while he and his wife, Alice,



Vernon Bryant/The Dallas Morning News via AP

Bullet walks through the hallway of her owner Karen Schoeve's home in Argyle, Texas on May 13. Bullet has been sold, and was transported May 14, from Schoeve's home in Argyle to her new home, a pasture which she will share with two cows, 15 miles away in Flower Mound.

were in Arizona, he told the *Lincoln Journal Star*.

They talked to a woman at the Social Security office who checked her computer and told him, "Oh, by golly, you are dead," Zellers said.

"She told me it could be a funeral home declared you deceased; or that someone just put in a wrong keystroke or something like that," he said.

So, he's spent the past few weeks going from agency to agency, business to business, proving with various documents that Charles Richard Zellers II, of Lincoln, Nebraska, is not dead yet.

He retired from his computer job at Unisys in 2000, and since

then his pension and Social Security checks have been his main source of income. He hadn't received either check in over two months.

Luckily, when he cut his Arizona trip short and returned home, his local Social Security office paid him what he was owed after they saw him alive.

Man attempts robbery with potato chip bag

ROHNERT PARK, Calif. (AP) — Authorities say a man tried to rob a car wash in Northern California with an empty potato chip bag and an alleged handgun.

Rohnert Park's Department of

Public Safety says in a statement that the man entered KaCees World of Water car wash Friday night and dropped an empty potato chip bag on the counter.

He told the cashier to fill it with money, warning that he had a gun. The man gestured that the weapon was in the empty bag, but the cashier saw it held only a piece of cardboard and called a co-worker for help.

Police say when the other employee approached, the suspect fled on foot.

Lawsuit: McDonald's toilet paper dispenser caused eye damage

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — A northern New Mexico woman is suing a Santa Fe McDonald's franchise after she said a toilet paper dispenser fell off a bathroom stall door and slammed into her face.

The lawsuit filed last week in Santa Fe District Court alleges that the 2013 public bathroom mayhem left Veronica Espinoza with a damaged retina.

According to the lawsuit, Espinoza reached for toilet paper in the "usual, common manner" when it "came crashing down" on her face, causing damage to her nose, face and eye. The lawsuit says the dispenser was attached to a bathroom stall door.

Espinoza is seeking an unspecified amount in damages and medical bill.