

Grade point average affects student motivation

As an integral part of high school, there is continual discussion around the value of one cumulative number representing success across students' classes. While some view GPA as a necessary part of education, others find it stifling in the greater learning process.

Grace Hamilton | Culture Editor: Online

Grade point average, or GPA, is a cumulative numerical value indicating how well a student performed throughout all four years of high school. GPA is calculated on an unweighted scale of 1.0 to 4.0, with the latter signifying the overall mean of an A to A+.

GPA is primarily used as demonstration of academic achievement on college applications as well as honor roll, National Honor Society, class ranks and even applications for other jobs and programs.

Emma Symonds ('23) joined ASL in Grade 9 and experienced the GPA system for the first time.

"In my old school, we never had a GPA, we just had a report with both letter grades and effort grades," she said. "It is nice to have one number GPA that shows all your work overall throughout the year."

This numerical value is typically referred to as an indicator of a student's

ability to meet a certain academic criterion. For some, GPA is a necessary tool for measuring academic success. On the other hand, some view GPA as a false representation and detractor from students reaching their full potential.

Symonds said although GPA provides an easy method of determining one's academic standing, it is not an accurate measurement of student potential, and does not take into account learning differences among students.

"If someone has the potential to do well, I think that should be between them, their family and their teacher," she said. "You can't have one number to prove every single student because everyone's different."

Math Teacher Tony Bracht echoed Symonds and said GPA embodies the traditional learning environment of schools, but that is not necessarily a positive characteristic.

"It reinforces the transactional nature that a lot of students treat school,"

he said. "It reinforces students' incorrect focus on grades over learning."

However, Bracht said he acknowledges that students need GPA because it serves as motivation to engage in the learning school requires.

Saskia Whitmoyer ('22) also said she thinks GPA does not reflect what a student could achieve in future because every student differs in the strengths and weaknesses they bring to each academic component of their lives.

up being their own downfall because they get so distracted by the grade that they're not doing a good job learning."

Symonds said the prospect of college and her GPA is always at the forefront of her mind.

“When I do any test, any homework, anything, I’m always thinking about what grade I am going to get because whatever grade I get will then be reflected in my GPA.”

Emma Symonds ('23)

"If students or maybe human beings are naturally transactional, without the GPA, do students engage as much?" he said.

Moreover, Symonds said GPA is unrepresentative and "having a number to show how academically advanced you are is a bit ridiculous."

"I don't think that grades are representative of a student's ability or what they can do," she said. "Obviously, everybody has different strengths. I know that school and classes that some people are taking just don't come naturally to them."

Bracht said assigning one numerical value to a student is not entirely representative of their identity, and that students do not stand out from other students on the basis of GPA but rather through their interests as well as intellectual stamina and curiosity.

"Students distinguish themselves by learning how to think and reason, learning how to problem-solve, to be critical in social justice matters and have a global perspective, be aware of what is important in this world and try to move beyond the self and then beyond the community," he said.

Bracht's belief that learning takes precedence over grades is reflected in his teaching style, where he said he prefers to focus on the learning process rather than the grades.

"As a teacher, I under-emphasize grades, and I try to remind kids that grades are a natural result of learning," he said.

Whitmoyer said in her experience, GPA is discounted and feels like "teachers never emphasized it all that much."

Furthermore, Bracht said a successful high school student is not defined by their GPA but rather is someone that "learns how to learn, is engaged in the learning, enjoys the learning, assesses themselves well and tries to strengthen their strengths and improve on their weaknesses."

While Bracht said he chooses not to pay as much attention to grades and instead strives to draw attention to the learning, he said he understands why students value their grades and are concerned about the impact of a grade-focused mindset on their learning.

"What I worry most about with the students at ASL oftentimes is that the GPA is connected with getting into university," he said. "They're stressing out so much about GPA that it actually hinders their success. Students end

"Thinking that whatever homework assignment you're doing is going to affect what college you get into is absurd," she said. "When I do any test, any homework, anything, I'm always thinking about what grade I am going to get, because whatever grade I get will then be reflected in my GPA."

Therefore, Bracht said some students may become held back by GPA, hindering their overall performance in classes and preventing them from achieving a growth mindset.

"Kids need to be careful about the narrative," he said. "They label themselves as bad math students, or say 'I am bad at this,' or 'I'm not good at this,' when in reality, you can always get better, right?"

Symonds said despite the disadvantages she sees in using GPA, she said she thinks it is a necessary part of the school system. However, she believes other methods of grading could be used to accompany the GPA in an attempt to encourage more representative indicators.

"It's important that we do keep the GPA just because it's the standard grading that like happens in all schools," she said. "But you could have an effort grade as one and then the actual grade as another, which shows that you're trying your hardest because some kids are naturally smart but they don't try."

Bracht said students all experience their learning differently, and therefore are the best judges of their own progress and academic achievement.

"Students are on their own unique journey, and no label or anybody should tell them otherwise one way or the other," he said. "The biggest downfall of the GPA is it feels like an external judgment on yourself, on you."

Ultimately, Bracht said he hoped to see students take charge of their own learning and assess where they are on their individual "journeys."

"And really, I want students to be their own judge, I want students to feel their own way in life and give themselves the GPA," he said. "The ultimate desire for me is where students see themselves."

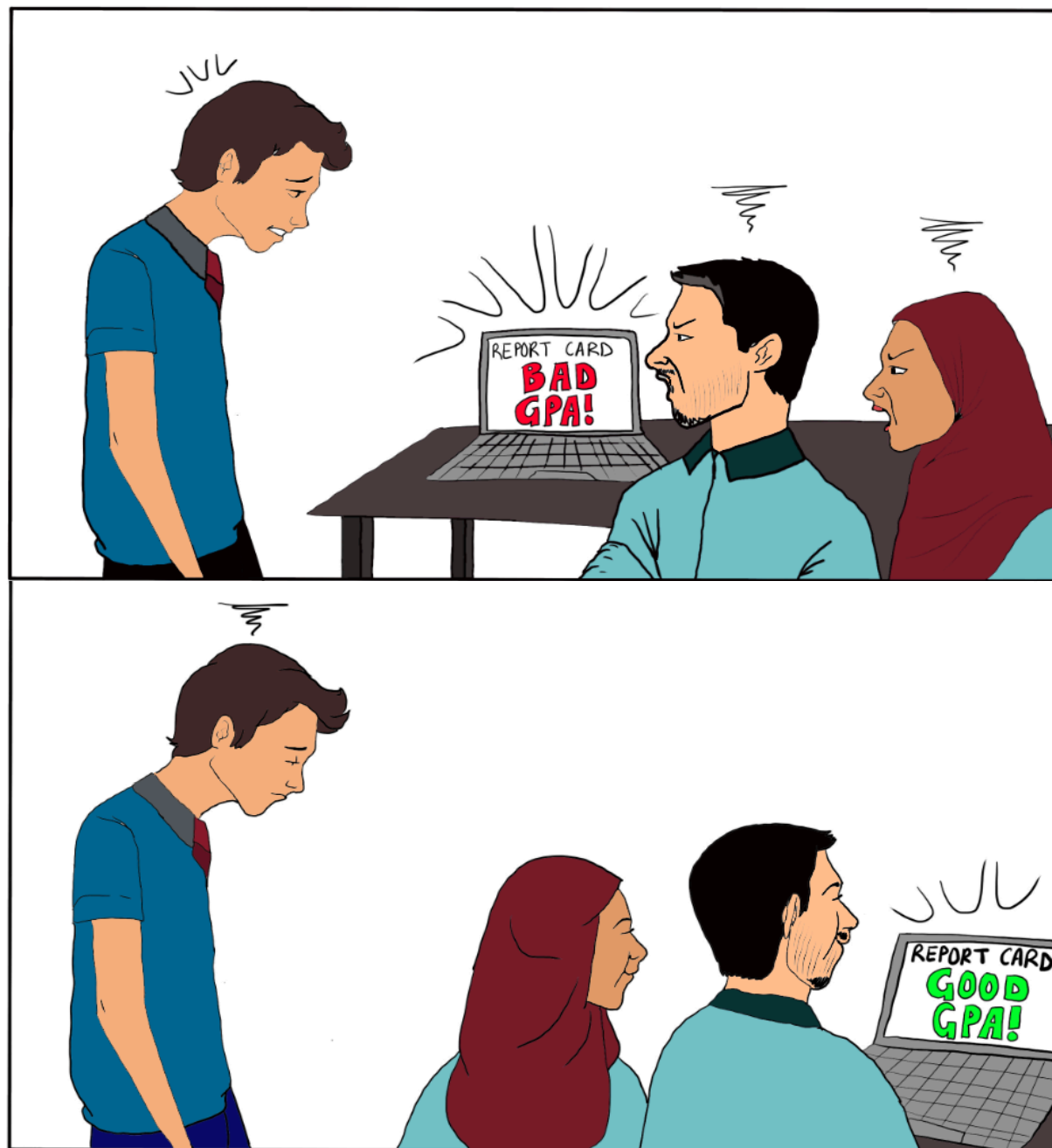


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