

# OUR VIEW: 3 Ways to Improve School

## Teacher Report Cards

### Allow Students to Grade Teachers

By Marcella Hubbard-Brucher  
Staff Writer

Students are graded on almost everything they do in school. Many students, including myself, feel we should be able to grade our teachers back. Sometimes teachers may not realize that something they are doing is negatively affecting their students. Having a way for students to express their concerns to teachers would allow teachers to realize any mistakes.

Walking through the halls of my school I often hear students complaining about too much homework or poor teaching. These students often do not feel they can express their concerns to their teachers because they do not feel comfortable doing so. In the article “Should Students Evaluate Their Teachers” by Thuận Sarzynski, the author writes, “On one hand, the students may become more motivated and then may engage and listen more carefully during the class. On the other hand, they can develop criticism which is today a vital skill in a world overwhelmed by information.” It is true that students, including myself, often lose interest in what they are learning if their teachers are not teaching well. If teachers were made aware of these issues then they would have a much easier time figuring out ways to fix them. This would also strengthen the relationships that students have with their teachers and in the long run benefit both.

In college, professors are evaluated by their students. Typically, students fill out a form and put it in an envelope, which is sealed and sent to the dean of the university. This method could also be effectively

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## More Real-World Skills

### Add Classes that Offer Life Lessons

By Cameryn Dacy  
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As many high school seniors get ready to enter the college life, some are finding they are not prepared for many real life situations and skills, including how to cook, get health care and health insurance, or how to handle money.

Learning things such as how to cook and prepare food is crucial for moving into adulthood and living on one’s own. Home economics is a class taught at some high schools, but it is not taught here at Triton. Home economics teaches the basics of cooking food, food portioning and preparation, and safety and hygiene. Learning more about these skills



Round Rock (Texas) Independent School District offers “Adulting” classes to its high school students (courtesy WBNS-CBS TV station).

not only would be fun, but could lead students to a healthier lifestyle. Instead of wasting money on fast food, or quick unhealthy foods, they could take the time to prepare a nice healthy meal at home.

Health care and health insurance may be something

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## Mental Health Days Off

### Give Brains a Break Like the Body

By Kyle Noonan  
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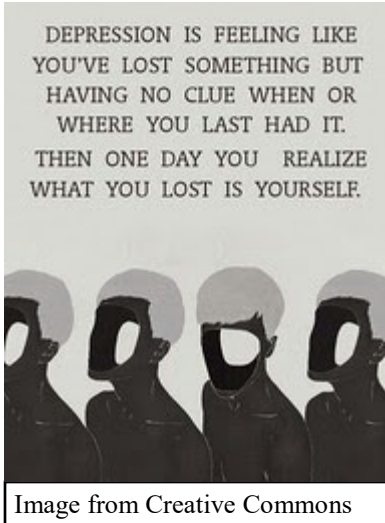
Mental health problems are on the rise among teenagers in America.

According to the World Health Organization, mental health issues account for 16 percent of the global burden of disease and injury in people, ages 10 to 19. With mental health problems burdening teens in their prime development years, it is time they got some help. In an effort to help students with mental health problems, Oregon and Utah are allowing schools to give students mental health days off from school. With a lot of stress and pressure on teenagers in America, the federal government should pass laws to give students mental health days off in every state.

With mental health and stress from life, society, and politics, schools need to be able to accommodate students appropriately to deal with their stress and anxiety and give them the opportunity to get help so that they can focus on their future. In a time when teenagers joke about suicide and death, it’s time states buckled down and got serious about teenage mental health. The best place to start is in the schools is something simple like mental health days off.

States such as Colorado, Florida, and Washington are considering laws to allow students to take mental health days off from school but are having trouble from opposition telling students to “toughen up” or that the absences will affect graduation rates, but that shouldn’t matter if the student is

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# VIEWPOINT: Social & World Issues

## The Gay Best Friend

### & the Epidemic of Casual Homophobia

By Andrew Babine  
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On June 16, 2015, the Supreme Court voted to legalize same sex marriage in all fifty states. The fight to get to that point had begun in the 1960’s and 1970’s, when LGBTQ people finally began fighting for their rights, such as during the 1969 Stonewall riots, which was one of the first known instances of LGBTQ people fighting for their rights.



The Supreme Court's same-sex marriage decision seemed like the battle had been won, homophobia had been defeated, and there were no longer any problems for gay people. However, the epidemic of casual and underground homophobia continues.

According to a study by the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, “antigay bias declined at a steep rate,”

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## Australian Fires Are Out

### What’s Next?

By Holly Harris  
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Millions of acres burnt to a crisp, twenty-four lives lost, and nearly a billion animals dead. Australia is living proof that climate change is real and here to stay. The message is that change needs to happen, and soon.

There are many proposed solutions that can help fight climate change: forgoing fossil fuels, funding an infrastruc-



Rescue workers hustle to run an injured koala to safety during the recent wildfires in Australia (BBC photo).

ture upgrade, consuming less, stopping deforestation, being more efficient, and even having fewer children. There are everyday ways to help the fight against climate change such as using efficient light bulbs, removing the use of plastic from your everyday life, and walking instead of driving.

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## No, We Won't Give You a Smile: Catcalling & Sexual Harassment

By Kyla Prussman & Julia Casaletto  
Staff Writers

It’s not a compliment.

“Mmm, look at you! How much, \$200?”

“Say hi back. I said say hi back!”

“You’re just asking for it, aren’t you?”

“Come over here, come sit on my lap!”

“Give me a smile!”

Those are all statements that have been said to women who were just trying to go about their day. Instead, simply being a woman brings about what seems to be an open invitation to degrade and harass. But because sexual harassment is so normalized in today’s society, some people believe that catcalls and other sexual harassment should be seen as a compliment. Some even believe women should appreciate it. Why can’t you compliment someone if you think they look nice? You can, 100 percent. However, sexually harassing someone on the streets or in the workplace is no compliment. For many generations, women of all demographics have been oppressed and degraded in one way or another. Catcalling and sexual harassment is just the 21st Century way to do it.

Those who haven’t experienced sexual harassment frequently or ever, may not be aware how many women have been affected by it. Although 81 percent of American women have experienced sexual harassment, according to a survey conducted by the nonprofit, “Stop Street Harassment,” not enough people are spreading awareness of the frequency of sexual harassment against women.

Many people wonder, “if there are so many women that

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used in high schools. Some may argue that certain students may not be mature enough to give accurate evaluations of their teachers and may not take it seriously. However, the administration often has an idea of the students who may do this, and not every student in the class will be this way.

There are also websites such as ratemyprofessor.com and a company called Panorama that have begun allowing students to rate their teachers in a controlled way. As reported by Farhad Manjoo of the *New York Times*, in the article “Grading Teachers, With Data From Class” it states, “The company, which is run by two 23-year-old Yale grads with a penchant for computers and data crunching, has run surveys in more than 5,000 schools, and it has been adopted by some of the largest school systems in the nation, including the Los Angeles Unified School District and schools in Connecticut.” Programs such as this, designed to use specific information, will allow for the administration to see exactly how their teachers are performing.

Some may say that the administration’s assessment of their teachers as well as standardized test scores are enough to accurately decide whether teachers are performing well. However, the administration cannot always see everything the teachers are doing and they are not attempting to learn the material like students are. They may not see something the teacher is doing that negatively affects students.

For these reasons, I believe students should be allowed to assess their teachers and report their opinions to the administration. However, this should not be the only way that teachers are assessed . Instead all three methods of student grading, standardized tests and administration observations should be used to create an accurate assessment of a teachers performance.

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students hear their parents talking about sometimes, but have no idea how it works. Health care and health insurance can be very complicated and are always changing, so it would be very beneficial teaching students more about it.

Another one of the biggest life skills is how to handle money, something you have to know how to do for the rest of your life. Although many schools have a variety of business, finance, and even accounting classes, there isn't really any class that teaches the basics of how to save money and what good and bad credit are. After high school, many students end up thousands of dollars in debt from loans and other costs. Since students are no longer living with their parents, they can't rely on them for money or get nagged on to get a job, so having a basic class to handle money could really save kids in the future.

Although having more of these classes would be beneficial to students, some may say that you just need to let students go off to get their own taste of the real world and learn as they grow, or to learn from their mistakes. Some people say students need to hit rock bottom before realizing they need to change. However, for others when they hit rock bottom, they will completely give up. Why let it get to that point when high schools could prevent this for students in the future?

Secret Student Survey

Quarter:

☐ 1<sup>st</sup>

☐ 2<sup>nd</sup>

☐ 3<sup>rd</sup>

☐ 4<sup>th</sup>

Teacher's Name

Class Name

Directions:

On a scale of 0 – 5, rate your answers to the following questions.

	No					Yes
1. Does your teacher treat you fairly?	0	1	2	3	4	5
2. Does your teacher treat you with respect?	0	1	2	3	4	5
3. Does your teacher answer your questions well?	0	1	2	3	4	5
4. Is your teacher consistent in how he/she teaches and relates to you with or without an administrator present?	0	1	2	3	4	5
5. Do you behave in class?	0	1	2	3	4	5

Directions:

Answer the following questions by being specific, honest, and detailed.

1.

What difference in the teacher's behavior do you notice when an administrator is present in the classroom?

2.

How could you and/or the class have acted differently in order to help the teacher do his/her job more effectively?

3.

Give your teacher a letter grade and explain how he/she earned it.

In Palm Beach, Florida, the school board proposed the above “Secret Student Survey” be administered to students in the district (image courtesy [palmbeach.k12.fl.us](http://palmbeach.k12.fl.us)).

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struggling. The most important thing is the student’s well-being, and in order to be well students need to take care of their mental health. A mental health day off might not be a solution to fix mental health problems, but it does open the door to talking about it and finding help for those in need.

People opposed to mental health days off are also concerned that students will just abuse the law to skip school. But if no time off is given, those who really need the help will pretend to be sick, avoiding the true problem and solutions. Taking a mental health day will at least give the student the ability to inform school officials and parents so that the student can get proper help. At the same time, students abusing the law is a sacrifice we should be willing to make if it means improving or saving the life of even one student. A law might not be a cure for mental health problems, but it will help raise awareness and get teenagers talking about their problems and getting the help they need and deserve.

A failure to act could have dire consequences. In one example, Chloe Wilson, a 14-year-old-girl, pretended to be sick because she was getting bullied after coming out as bisexual. She ended up committing suicide in 2018. “Because she lied to get her absences excused, we didn’t get to have those mental health conversations that could have saved her life,” her step-mother, Roxanne Wilson, told The Associated Press.

Our society has made it so students are scared to come forward about their mental health problems. Some would rather lie or say they are sick. It is time to change the way mental health is looked upon in this country and it should start in the schools where people get most of their social interaction before they become adults. Mental health days off are a great way to make students feel safer and more comfortable coming forward about their problems.

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have been sexually harassed then why don’t they report it?” Unfortunately it’s not as simple as that. Many women who report sexual harassment are shamed or report it, so most women don’t bother to do anything about it. According to a study conducted by The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, “...women typically avoid the harasser, deny or downplay the gravity of the situation, or attempt to ignore, forget, or endure the behavior.”

Sexual harassment doesn’t only occur out on the streets. Someone can be a victim of verbal harassment at school or in the workplace as well. When women are addressed by an employer, customer, or peer in a crude, objectifying manner, it can create a hostile environment which can affect their education, work ethic, and mental health. According to the article “Survey: Nearly Half of Students Sexually Harassed in School” by Jason Koebler, of *U.S. News*, “Fifty-six percent of girls said they were sexually harassed at least once in the past school year..” and, “...According to the report, 87 percent reported detrimental effects from the harassment.” In addition, “The American Association of University Women” reported, “Some 48 percent of middle and high school reported being targets of sexual harassment, with many not wanting to go to school, feeling physically ill, and having trouble studying and sleeping.”

Some people who haven't felt the fear of being sexually harassed may say, if you don't like it, just ignore it, they’re just statements. Some of the statements said can be uncomfortable, but harmless and nothing more. However, it's not uncommon for the statements to be

acted upon. According to, “A College Student Was Killed by a Man Whose Cat-calls She Tried to Ignore, Prosecutors Say,” by Julie Bosomean of *The New York Times*, in November, a young woman named Ruth George was murdered by a man who had cat-called her earlier, and, when she didn't respond, the price was her life. Now, to answer the question of why don't women just ignore the statements, that’s why. The result isn’t always harmless.

Some claim that women twist innocent compliments into harassment claims. Others have wondered, why don’t women want to be

‘admired’ and ‘appreciated’?

Flirting and compliments are usually respectful, kind, and light-hearted while catcalling and other forms of verbal harassment are much less humanizing. They are demeaning, degrading and objectifying to women’s physical appearances. Flirting is consensual and equally acted out by both parties, while catcalling is about dominance over the victim.

Wanting to compliment someone is not an excuse for sexual harassment. Being ‘complimented’ and sexualized on one's physical appearance by someone who you have no interest in is not only unwanted, but uncomfortable and degrading to one’s self esteem.

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The Australian wildfires are just one instance where climate change has already affected us to great lengths. “Climate change is increasing wildfire risk in Australia, by lengthening the fire season, decreasing precipitation, and increasing temperature,” according to the Australian Bureau of Meteorology.

Climate change may not have ignited the fires, but it allowed them to turn into catastrophic blazes. The increasing temperatures, dry vegetation, and less water availability due to evaporation are all caused by one thing: climate change.

Some argue that climate change isn’t real. For example, some may claim that climate change is part of a natural cycle. However, scientists have proven that human fingerprints on climate change rule out natural cycles. According to Green-Facts, natural cycles are “a natural process in which elements are continuously cycled in various forms between different compartments of the environment (e.g., air, water, soil, organisms)” Examples include the carbon, nitrogen and phosphorus cycles (nutrient cycles) and the water cycle. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s Fifth Assessment Report, “Human emissions and activities have caused around 100 percent of the warming observed since 1950.”

Still, false reports about the fires and climate change continue to circulate. A headline on the website of a conservative columnist and radio show host, Todd Starnes, declared: "The Australia Bush-fires Have Nothing to Do With Climate Change; It Was Arson." This is yet another misguided claim. The post was flagged as part of Facebook’s efforts to combat false news and misinformation on its News Feed but the claim still reached many. This claim is dramatically false. Yes, there have been people arrested for starting and being suspected of starting fires. However, the human set fires are not the only reason for the blazes. Australia has natural wildfires that start in the dry seasons of April to September. Due to the climate change already taking place, the increasing temperatures and less water availability caused by all of the evaporation, has turned the dry Australian brush into literal fuel for the fires.

Climate change is not fake. Climate change is not a myth. Climate change has been proven to be real by scientists. Climate change **is** real and we can stop it in its tracks.



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following the legalization of gay marriage. On all graphs and charts, homophobia has been in decline for the last several years. However, there are some glaring outliers, such as the rise in hate crimes against LGBTQ people internationally, and religious outcry after the same sex marriage ban. Still, generally speaking LGBTQ people are not as hated as they once were.

However, another kind of bigotry has replaced flat-out homophobia, something known as casual homophobia. Some examples of this type of underlying prejudice would be wanting a “gay best friend,” the continued use of gay slurs in sporting environments, and the outing (coming out is the process of one telling people that they are gay, bisexual, transgender, etc.) of LGBTQ people against their wills. Another issue is the “othering” of LGBTQ people, which is when someone is not explicitly homophobic, but would rather not have gay people around them or their family, especially if they “act” gay. Essentially, they are okay with gay people as long as those gay people do not act like their true selves around them.

According to *Out on The Fields*, a study conducted on homophobia in sports in 2016, 84 percent of Americans surveyed witnessed or experienced homophobia in sporting environments, and 78 percent believe sports are not as safe of an environment for queer youth compared to non-queer youth.

Though homophobia has diminished significantly in other popular environments like schools and workplaces, homophobia in sports remains all too common. Even though you can find many out and proud LGBTQ athletes in professional sports today, such as Michael Sam, Gus Kentworthy, and Megan Rapinoe, homophobia remains one of the areas where homophobia is not hard to find.

“I have heard people say they would not be comfortable with a gay person in the locker room,” said Triton junior Joshua Plummer.

Some might say that it’s perfectly reasonable to not want to share a locker room space with a gay person because it makes them uncomfortable. However, they fail to realize that the gay person likely feels far more uncomfortable being in an environment full of straight people knowing that they are not wanted, and would much rather just avoid the situation entirely by not playing sports. Some people just want to play sports, it has nothing to do with sexual or romantic attraction.

Though leaps and bounds have been made for LGBTQ people in the United States in the last decade, and it is important to acknowledge how far we have come, it is also important to acknowledge how much further we have to go.