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An Open Letter to High School Students- “When are we ever going to use this in real life?”

As a recent high school graduate who participated in five AP courses and a multitude of academic clubs at Bishop Connolly High School, I have overheard this disparaging phrase from fellow students far too often. In our educational culture, many teenagers reject any concept in the classroom that seems too abstract, too obscure, or too laborious to be applicable in their daily lives. In my experience, this shortsighted view on learning is the antithesis to the entire purpose of higher education. High school, even in its grueling and seemingly meaningless moments, is designed to enhance our understanding of ourselves, the world around us, what has already happened and what we can do to shape the future. You get out what you put in; information cramming and selecting a class because it sounds easy will produce lackluster results, while taking the time to fully appreciate a subject can lead to a more complete understanding outside of itself.

No, my five page criticism of Teddy Roosevelt’s foreign policy most likely will not get me a job at Burger King. No, I did not unlock an Xbox achievement for getting an A on an algebra test. Yet, the importance of high school learning goes far beyond trivial applications and letter grades. Looking back on who I was as a middle school student and comparing that person to who I am today, the contrasts are stark and obvious. While life experience has played a large role in this metamorphosis, the time I have spent learning in school has exponentially increased my capacity to make educated decisions.

“Education” is not about getting a good test grade or hanging up a diploma. Education is a mindset which must be acquired, cultivated, and applied. Education gives meaning and beauty to the simple or ugly things in life. Education is every trigonometry formula and every Spanish conquistador and everything you learn about yourself memorizing seemingly useless factoids. Education is what makes me feel smug when I watch Jeopardy and I know the answer to a question that dumbfounds the contestants. Education is why I spent hours studying for biology tests and applying for scholarships this year. Education is the reason I am studying engineering at Northeastern University this fall. Education is what drives local businesses and organizations to eagerly invest in area youth. And, perhaps most importantly, education is the key to a better future.

So, current students, recent graduates, teenagers with dreams and ambitions for the future, I ask you in these first few days of summer to reflect on this past school year in a positive light. Recall the person you were at this time last year; ask yourself how you have changed, for better or for worse, due to your time in the classroom, because then, perhaps, you will see just the importance of the things you struggled to comprehend the first time you heard them.

About EdUp

The EdUp Campaign is a production of the Education Committee of the Fall River Area Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Inc. EdUp strives to grow individual and community aspirations through a sustained and multidimensional outreach to students, parents, and other stakeholders throughout the Greater Fall River Area, and by demonstrating the power of education to change the future of the region and each of our roles in it. For more information about the Chamber and the Education Committee, please visit www.EdUpFallRiver.org or www.FallRiverChamber.com or call 508-676-8226.