



**TRUE LEARNING**

Riley Carpenter (11) understands the value of school, but he also understands a balance is needed to be successful, intelligent in books and intelligent in life. "The true representation of who you are will be seated in your ability to learn and adapt," Carpenter said.

photo by anna wexler



# THE REAL REASON TO STRIVE FOR SUCCESS

Riley Carpenter discovers a new perspective on grades, test scores, and GPA's through self realization

Success can be measured by many different mediums, each with a different goal in mind. Perhaps one of the most common of these scales would be the grade system. A's, B's, C's, and so on can become completely consuming for many students who view this as their main form of validation. For me, this has been a constant struggle as I have attempted to strive to succeed beyond just the grade. Even in second grade, I desired to excel academically, finding validation in my performance on assignments or tests. From this early age, I first began to experience the effects of perfectionism in grades and found it to be the main force behind my motivation towards success. Very quickly, my vision of success was narrowed into a very thin and predefined cone with only one goal in mind: grades, SAT scores, GPA, college. And although I wanted to believe that this gave me motivation, that this gave me happiness, I soon discovered that such a hope was completely ill-founded.

When I reached middle school, the stressors associated with perfectionism began to catch up with me. Although my grades didn't reflect any struggle, my mental state quickly declined. The only remaining motivation for me was to maintain my intellectual status. I found value in being called the 'smart kid' and thought that could be a valid form of happiness. I was very wrong. I was diagnosed with Generalized Anxiety Disorder and Depression in those years, both of which soon became defining factors in my overall life. These diagnoses, in society, have very negative connotations and stigmas surrounding their taboo nature; however, they are real parts of my life and ought to see the light of day so that those stigmas may pass for any who are diagnosed. In front of these medical struggles, I maintained a facade of contentment as a motivated scholar at school. I would sacrifice my wellbeing to keep up a positive image of how my academics would be viewed by others.

To fail an assignment was an idea worse than death in my confused and dark mind. Rationally, such a mentality was absolutely absurd to me, with no reason for such a fear to be real. But my fear of failure remained very potent in the irrational depths of my mind. For years and years, fear served as the main influence on my choices, with happiness being pushed away as an insignificant component of my life. Fear of failure, although effective, lacks a

growth mindset. Lacks positivity. Lacks hope. Instead of striving for happiness, I would only strive to maintain my social standing amongst my peers; a standing that was honestly a currency that had no value and massive inflation since every day I had to be better than before to maintain an 'edge' over myself.

Eventually, I realized that there was the potential for true success and the motivation to maintain it without all of the conditions associated with my prior methods. Such a new mentality depended on focusing on the purpose of trying. In the end, grades really don't define a person. In five years, no one will care about my high school GPA. That's not what finds you a job. Not what finds you friends. And not what finds intrinsic happiness. In this past year, I have been forced to put a great amount of thought into this concept. College is just around the corner for many of us, representing the process of becoming adults. College is an amazing learning opportunity where our passions can truly be revealed and where the future can be realized. But even so, college isn't the goal either. In 15 years, no one will care what college you attended or why you got in. School is only a substrate upon which a person's personality is cultivated. In 25 years, we can look back and see all that we've achieved and how we became who we are now. These achievements don't have a numerical value like grades do now, making it imperative to learn to create motivation without grades as a rating system.

In 100 years –when practically all of us are gone– the memories that others carry on as our legacy, as the legacy of the students' of Monarch High School, will not be about grades, SATs, tests, scholarships. Our legacy will be based on achievement. On success. If you were to ask me what the greatest motivation for achievement was, my answer would be simple: the motivation to achieve is the motivation to be effective in your own life. Now what that means to you is dependent on what is effective for you. Despite being a succinct answer, achieving the contentment of an effective life is practically impossible. I doubt I will ever reach such an ideal life; however, knowing the goal is half the battle. The other half is striving for it.

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