

School Grades

I still have my U.S. high school report card from 1954-55, my senior year, upon which are listed the following “six levels of credit-earning achievement:” “95 Superior; 90 Excellent; 85 Good; 80 Fair; 75 Low; 70 Just Passing; 60 (in red) Failure.” Letter grades were A, B, C, and F.

When I started teaching in the Continuing Education program of Vancouver Community College in 1975, I noticed that another level of “achievement” had been added to the grading system. Whereas in my high school everything above 70 marks was passing, students attending VCC had to achieve a grade above 60 to pass. Everything lower than that was failure. Letter grades were A, B, C, D, and F.

When I taught at Ryerson Polytechnic Institute (later Ryerson University), in Toronto in the mid ‘90s, grading systems had changed yet again. Ryerson students had to achieve higher than 50 to pass, and an excellent student achieved a grade higher than 79 (only “fair” in my high school days). The de facto passing grade was actually 45, since anything between 46 and 49 was adjusted upward, deemed to close to passing to fail.

According to “Homework Policy Sent for Approval,” National Post, April 3, 2008, Toronto public school policy is set to reduce the amount of homework which students are assigned because of “the wide array of family obligations experienced in our society today.” The less-homework policy “will give students more time to play outside, and thus combat childhood obesity,” and will allow families to “have dinner with each other and catch up on the day.”

Is there a conspiracy to persuade our children that acquiring knowledge is not really important?

Ted Scott, April 2008