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OPEN FORUM

Students can still learn in age of AI

Schools need to teach kids to think for themselves

By Amy D. Love
CONTRIBUTOR

My 13-year-old daughter tore open the envelope from the Comprehensive Testing Program, scanned her results and set them down on the counter without much ceremony. She had scored 9s across the board, the highest possible score on the standardized assessment, and I waited for her to smile, to show a hint of happiness or pride.

“No one else sees that,” she said dismissively. “They just see your class grades.”

Those scores showed mastery, I countered. She shrugged and walked away.

A few days later, the news broke that more than 1,400 University of California faculty members were urging the system to bring back SAT and ACT requirements, particularly for applicants planning to major in science, technology and math. A 2025 report from the UC San Diego Academic Senate found that the number of incoming freshmen testing below high school math levels rose nearly 30-fold in recent years, forcing professors to teach remedial content in university-level courses. Grade inflation and artificial intelligence-assisted work, faculty argued, had made high school grade point averages an unreliable signal of whether students were actually ready.

I knew my daughter’s shrug was a much bigger story; I talk about it often with parents.

The truth is, grades have been losing their meaning for a long time.

At Harvard University, for instance, A’s climbed from 24% of final grades in 2005 to 40.3% in 2015 and then to 60.2% by spring 2025, according to a recent piece in Harvard Magazine. Strip out pass-fail courses, and nearly two-thirds of all letter grades at Harvard are now A’s.

When everyone gets the same top mark, the mark no longer tells you anything. When A’s are everywhere, you don’t feel successful for earning one. You feel exposed for not having one. The grade shifts from being proof of achievement to being a floor you can’t afford to fall below. One Harvard dean described it as “the most stressed-out world of all.”

My daughter feels a similar pressure at Stratford Middle School in San Jose. Parents feel it at the kitchen table. It



Kentaroo Tryman/Getty Images

Grade inflation and artificial intelligence-assisted work make high school grade point averages an unreliable signal of whether students are actually ready for college, experts say.

has soaked into the whole system. And though AI didn’t create this problem, it has made it much, much worse.

Ashanty Rosario, a senior at a public high school in New York, wrote about this recently in the Atlantic. She watched a classmate discreetly prop a laptop on a crossed leg during a class discussion of “Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass” and paste an entire chapter into ChatGPT. Annotations generated, discussion joined, assignment submitted. In Algebra II, she saw a peer photograph a worksheet and upload it for step-by-step solutions before the period ended.

Her concern wasn’t just cheating. It was that nobody seemed to think twice about it anymore.

“Many of us are so accustomed to outsourcing,” she wrote, “that we’re dulling the very instincts that we need to prevail in life: grit, critical thinking, and the ability to function smoothly under stress.”

Harvard’s own faculty subcommittee has proposed capping A grades at 20%

of students per class. It’s not a radical idea. When I attended Harvard Business School, the highest grade you could earn was a 1, representing the top 5% to 10% of the class; 80% of students received a 2.

A 1 meant something because not everyone could have one. That friction, that honest differentiation, is part of what makes an evaluation worth anything.

What worries me most isn’t the grade inflation itself. It’s what gets lost when we stop expecting students to prove what they know. The ability to sit across from someone, explain your thinking and hold up under a follow-up question — that matters enormously.

My daughter’s test scores told us something real: that she has absorbed the material and is not just managing her grades. Yet she walked away from those results feeling like they didn’t matter.

That gets the whole thing backward. The question for parents now is not

whether to allow AI or ban it. These tools are already everywhere and are not going away. The question is what kind of people we want our kids to become in the age of AI. From my perspective, that means tailoring an educational system that produces students who can think, who can struggle with something difficult and come out the other side with real capability. Who can walk into a college interview, a job or a hard conversation and show what they actually know.

T.S. Eliot, one of the great American poets of the 20th century, received a B on a paper in his first-year writing class at Harvard. An honest, uninflated B. His grades were not the end of his story.

Neither are your child’s.

Amy D. Love is the founder of *Discovering AI*, a nonprofit focused on helping families navigate AI and raise future-ready kids. She is the author of “*Discovering AI: A Parent’s Guide to Raising Future Ready Kids*”

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR Submit your letter at SFChronicle.com/submit-your-opinion

Towers not the right housing for Oakland

Regarding “She’s pushed to build more housing across California. Now there’s a NIMBY fight in her backyard” (Joe Garofoli, SFChronicle.com, July 19): Joe Garofoli’s column trivializes the issue of building towers that are vastly out of scale with Oakland’s Rockridge neighborhood by focusing on the loss of a Trader Joe’s rather than the loss of local control over building.

Recent California housing laws disempower local residents and bypass the important environmental regulations in the name of creating new housing.

Furthermore, according to Garofoli, those of us who oppose the project are likened to the proponents of racial covenants, which he describes as the “roots of NIMBYism.”

Many of us in the old neighborhoods of Oakland are in favor of building more housing but doing so intelligently, not just selling off random parking lots to the highest bidder who will extract value from our neighborhoods, but not add any.

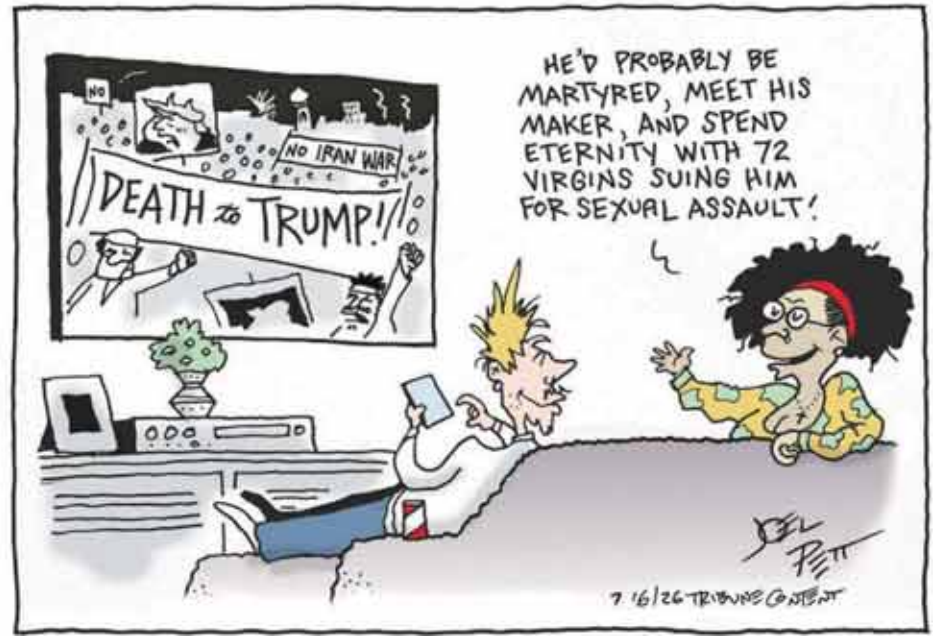
Eileen Flanagan, Oakland

Solution for sex trafficking

Regarding “A rescue on ‘the Blade’: Can Oakland take back a neighborhood from sex traffickers?” (East Bay, SFChronicle.com, July 13): Increasing police powers against street-based sex workers will not stop prostitution or trafficking.

And, reinstating the state loitering law is a big mistake. The law was repealed because a sex worker-led movement showed that it was enforced in a sexist, racist and homophobic way.

Police crackdowns push street workers into more isolated and remote areas,



Joel Pett/Tribune Content Agency

making them more vulnerable to rape, other violence and exploitation.

The mostly women and girls of color end up at the Blade because of a lack of money. It’s distressing to see the young woman in handcuffs because arrests do nothing to alleviate her poverty.

We at the US Prostitutes Collective suggest a humane, effective solution — guaranteed care income. We ran a pilot providing money for 10 low-income single mothers, some of whom had turned to sex work to feed their families. The results were transformative and have been replicated with other pilots.

Women could make choices, feed, clothe and protect their children from being taken by child welfare. Why not roll out this program statewide? Young

women desperately need resources beyond socks and snacks. They need cash.

Rachel West, founder,
US Prostitutes Collective, San Francisco

Cohabitate with wolves

Regarding “Study reveals what California wolves are eating. And it’s not good” (California, SFChronicle.com, July 8): Facts and values are important, but sometimes one masquerades as the other. The study described appears to be purely fact-based, indicating that two California wolf packs primarily eat cattle.

But values are there, too, hiding until unstated assumptions are uncovered, along with questions not asked.

The study states, “Systematic extirpa-

tion resulted in (wolves) near-complete elimination from the contiguous United States by the mid-1900s.”

Translation: There was a deliberate, federally funded campaign to eliminate wolves in the U.S. in the early 1900s. That attitude — seeing wolves as interlopers to be destroyed — forms the backdrop for today’s attitudes about wolves.

It is not surprising to learn that the study was funded by rangeland and cattle money.

Are the public lands that host cattle being put to their best use? Can we reduce our reliance on cattle for food and find better strategies for living with wolves?

We treat wolves as intruders rather than members of our community when we focus only on their actions and not our own.

I have no quarrel with the facts of the study, but its values deserve a second look.

Roberta Millstein, Davis

What’s with the clock?

The World Cup was a lot of fun. But as a non-football/soccer fan, I am often confused about what’s going on, especially why time is kept so mysteriously.

In other timed sports, the clock is a key consideration. Fans know how many seconds are left and sweat every one of them. A score with 50 seconds left is not as dramatic as one with five seconds left.

That’s democratic. Everyone knows the stakes and shares the drama equally. In soccer, it’s none of your business. The ref will let you know when time’s up. That feels authoritarian.

Why do soccer fans put up with this?

Greg McVerry, Albany