

Under Pressure

- Dan Rosenberg

The biggest problem facing high school students today is not one that's visible. It's not the large workload, it's not the social conflicts, it's not even the stress the intense competition between students to outwork and out-achieve fellow classmates. These just contribute to a much larger problem that encompasses and defines our lives as students.

The pressure put on many students is something that can not only lead to social and personal problems, but physical health problems. Now, I'm not a social scientist or a doctor, so I cannot speak on the biological effects of pressure. However, I am a student, and everyday I not only experience the intense pressures of high school, but I also see the effects these pressures are having on my classmates and peers, so I can speak on what I see and I see something that is quite scary.

As a student, the pressure exerted on one by teachers, classmates, and parents is immense. Everyone knows what's required to get into top colleges and constant reminders from peers and elders just reinforce the intense pressures exerted on students. There's a reason after every test and quiz, students incessantly compare and discuss grades, and it's because they feel the only way to succeed is to beat each other.

As a student in honors and AP courses, I see this frantic comparison and discussion almost daily, and I see the effect it has on students. Because of the pressure to succeed, kids aren't sleeping, they're eating less, and they look haggard and exhausted. And, while it's a very

important contributor, it's not just the workload that's doing this to students. It's the idea of the future, the pressure and stress of searching for colleges, sports, and extracurricular activities that basically overload many students. And eventually, somewhere down the line, it catches up with each and every one of us.

The reason pressure is such a problem, more so than any other problems students might have, is that the immense stress that pressure causes has a rippling effect throughout a student's life. It's not just a problem in relation to school. I've seen pressure create rifts in friendship, because students are so worn thin that they just cannot keep up the pretense of normality in their social lives. I see everyday students dealing with six or seven hours of homework, plus extracurricular activities and sports. The pressure and stress this creates not only causes internal problems, but in turn the student begins to perform poorly in school, or in sports, because they just can't keep up with everything.

Just a couple weeks ago, I had an experience that showed me just how intense the pressure of school can be. One of my friends, who'll remain unnamed for posterity, came in and showed me his first gray hair. At 17 years of age, someone was already going gray.

Working hard in school is necessary. School itself is educational, useful, and an integral part of our society. Parents, teachers, and students themselves need to take a step back, however. It's not only important to look at grades; the toll pressure takes on students and its effects should be monitored just as closely as academic performance.

© 2011-2012 Headlight
You may not copy use or
distribute without
permission from the
author of this piece and
from the Headlight
newspaper editor.