

Race To Nowhere Paper

2 ½ pages = B; 3 pages = B+; 3 ½ pages = A-; 4 pages or more = A

NOTE: If you are saying something negative about a teacher, please do NOT mention the teacher's name. If you are saying something positive about a teacher, go ahead and mention his or her name. These people are my colleagues and friends and I am not interested in obtaining negative "gossip" or giving an assignment that hurts their reputation. Thanks!

1. Levine, in her book The Price of Privilege, talks about high school kids she sees as a therapist in an affluent community. She talks specifically about kids who seem completely fine, in fact, great, on the outside. They show none of the traditional signs of depression or other disorders. They are doing very well in school, are often very successful at a sport and / or other extracurricular activities, are popular, etc. And yet they are sad, miserable, angry, and "empty" underneath. To what extent is this what we see amongst students at CCHS? How many students are there like this here, and how unhappy are they? Are there telling examples (without specific names of course) worth sharing here? Can you personally relate to this? How so? If this is a problem is prevalent here, what is causing it? What needs to be done to make this situation better?
2. To what extent does the "Race To Nowhere" exist here at CCHS? What aspects of this overachievement culture described in the film do you feel most apply to students at CC and the culture of the towns we live in? How so? Or least apply? How so? And what are the biggest negative consequences of this "Race To Nowhere" for students at CC?
3. Write a "Race to Nowhere" autobiography, where you discuss your personal experience as a student and a kid, and tell about the experiences that you feel best exemplify, or refute, the ideas discussed in Race To Nowhere.
4. What, exactly, are the expectations that are placed on CC students? As a student and beyond? To what extent are these expectations realistic, healthy goals that allow you to reach your full potential? To what extent are these expectations unhealthy? Too much / unrealistic? Leading you in the wrong direction at this stage in your life?
5. To the extent that the "Race To Nowhere" exists here for students at CC, who's fault is it? Is it teachers and this school? Parents and the pressure they place on their kids? Is it students themselves and the pressure they place on themselves and each other? Colleges and the requirements of admissions? Some combination?

6. What are we REALLY teaching you here? To what extent have you REALLY learned here? What IS learning, in your opinion? What classes or educational experiences provided by this school are genuinely powerful and meaningful learning experiences? By contrast, to what extent is succeeding here NOT about true learning? Various points were made in this movie about what high school students are really learning and what success is really all about: "High school is about learning how to pass tests." "High school is only about memorization." "I am teaching myself to live without sleep to live without eating to follow orders from some bald jerk telling me what to do." "You need to learn how to cheat and to cut corners." "College is the place where I will really learn." To what extent do you agree with any of these statements?

7. Reflect on the issue of homework and your experience with homework. When did homework start to feel like too much? How much homework is a reasonable amount to give high school students? Why? To what extent has homework felt like a worthwhile and meaningful part of the learning experience, and to what extent has it felt like pointless busywork? To what extent has the amount of homework you have been given affected your life and development, for worse and/or for better?

8. Have you ever had the experience where ONE course has completely become the bane of your existence? Where you are spending a ridiculous amount of time on it at the expense of everything else? Where no matter how hard you try you cannot do well? A course that completed affected your view of yourself and your ability as a student? Talk about this experience and how it affected you...

9. If there were one or two realistic changes in the way that this school does business that would make this school a better place for students, what would these changes be and why?

10. Describe the **best** educational experience that you have had over the last 4-6 years. What made it Powerful? Engaging? Why did you learn more? How did it feel different for you in comparison to the majority of your educational experience?

11. Reflect on one or several of the following quotes / ideas from the movie:

- "I can't remember the last time I played in the backyard."
- "I only see my kids for 20 minutes a day at dinner."
- You are constantly being told that you have to worry about the NEXT STEP (in middle school it's all about high school, in high school its all about college, etc.).
- Parents are competitive themselves; they want to talk about where their kids are going to college.
- Education today is the quest to "further roboticize" kids, to make them "competitors and producers," to turn them into "little professionals."
- "Some day these kids are going to sue us for stealing their childhoods."
- "High school is about learning how to pass tests."
- "You shove as much into your brain as you can, and then forget it all."

- “You are all expected to be superheroes.”
- “You have to be able to do EVERYTHING.”
- “Kids who look terrific on the outside and horrible on the inside.”
- We are creating “unprepared, disengaged, exhausted kids.”
- You forgo taking care of yourself and your basic needs in order to succeed – no eating, no sleeping –THIS IS NEGLECT – it’s a form of ABUSE.
- You are doing this all for people (college admissions) who will NEVER EVEN MEET YOU.
- Why am I doing this? If I am “successful” but a depressed and anxious and unhealthy person, what’s the point?
- How much homework makes sense? When is it too much? Per class? Overall?
- A teacher cuts the amount of homework in his class in half and AP scores go UP.
- “3-4 hours a night after soccer practice and everything is on the line. This is NOT learning.”
- The countries who outperform us give LESS homework – homework doesn’t improve performance.
- Why should schools have control over all of your time outside of school? Your time with your family?
- At what age were you when an educational experience taught you that you were not good at something (whether or not this was actually true)? I am thinking of the boy who in 4th grade didn’t get his math homework and “learned” that he wasn’t good at math.
- Teachers have to give HW to cover all material
- “Things that get kids to think and care are pushed aside.”
- “We are teaching all kids as if they were in the top 2%”
- Now every kid is expected to be extremely smart – this is impossible
- We are ignoring the kids who are not super-achievers by forcing everyone to be this way
- “Perform produce perform produce” – this leaves out processing
- This is what you learn – how to play the system - how to cheat – How to cheat is like another course that kids take in high school – you MUST LEARN how to cut corners to survive.
- “Less than 5% of students have NOT cheated in high school. Is this true at CCHS?
- Can you survive and be a top student at CCHS if you do not cheat?
- The point should be to LEARN, not to MEMORIZE.
- You learn how to not sleep not eat and how to handle some bald guy yelling at you about what you have to do.
- Teachers cannot cover all of the material that they are required to. How do you? You “go as fast as you can” and give more homework.
- A student says after taking AP French exam – “Thank god I never have to speak French again.” Is this how students feel after finishing a class at CCHS?
- “I am not thinking about the meaning of what I am learning – I am just thinking about how to get it done.
- Students need to know exactly what is going to be on the test, and not have to think beyond that - like a script – no development of the ability to deal with unique situations or be creative.
- Kids need unstructured time – the need for play – instead of drawing on the sidewalk with chalk kids are inside doing homework.

- Kids are not being given the chance to find out what they really like.
- “We don’t have TIME for you to be a child – this is a business.”
- “The world is run by C students.”
- Most kids have to retake high school math in college because they don’t remember any of it or they cheated their way through it.
- “College will be the place where I START learning.”
- “My kid’s a good kid.” “No your kid is a good performer. You don’t know if your kid is a good kid.”
- “There is no measurement of artistic knowledge – no standardized tests for art.”
- Hard to see the problems that kids have today – they are trained to say that everything is going great.
- “I think about all of this school I have ahead of me and all the stress... and I don’t want to live anymore.”
- “If you’ve always had A’s there is only one direction to go – down.”
- Devon – the girl who committed suicide – the mom – “Everything seemed so normal.” “I really thought I knew my daughter.” “A stupid math grade is what killed her.”
- A mom who fights the race to nowhere – “We don’t ask about homework. We don’t ask about grades. We have family dinners every night.”
- “Why can’t we have kids love school all the way through 12th grade? Why can’t level of happiness be as important a measure as their level of reading?”
- Sitting for 6 hours a day, hands folded, looking out – how stupid is this? This is so antiquated.
- “Kids come with all of this creativity and desire to learn, let’s just not take this away from them. HOW ABOUT THAT?”
- Should we eliminate all AP courses?
- Should we stop grading the kids?
- We have to get off this treadmill together
- “If every day there wasn’t homework, I would love school.”
- Focus on the right fit for college rather than the best college.