

SHOULD SCHOOLS PROVIDE LIFE SKILLS CLASSES?

DONALD HARRIS

INTRODUCTION

During early childhood, there are not many things kids have to worry about. One of the only things young kids may worry about is picking their outfit for the first day of school. As people grow out of their youth and go on to high school, they start facing responsibilities and start maturing. This is all part of the growing up process, but a lot of kids are struggling with being able to handle everything going on in their lives. That is because this age is where kids go through many good and bad times. As all these emotions pile up, kids must face the reality of the real world where there are not many options. The majority of students either ends up in the workforce or goes to college to obtain a degree. This change is extremely challenging on students because most just aren't ready. This should be alarming to parents because the realities of Millard Public High Schools are frail. At such a young age, it is hard to adapt because kids don't have proper guidance to prepare themselves for the future.

THESIS

Millard Public High Schools should require students to pass classes in 'adulting' and offer better preparation for the future.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Millard Public High Schools are not preparing students enough for the future. Out of 165,000 surveyed students around the country, only 45% felt ready for their future (Leal). This is a generalized statement but these numbers are too low. Dropout rates in the United States are also soaring at 1.2 million students per year (DoSomething). High school dropouts are typically not people who change the world, rather people who commit crimes. Although Millard's graduation rate is at an average of 91 percent, from personal experience, Millard mostly talks about preparing for college and careers but never actually does (US News).

The curriculum at MPHS' is one that is not very promising. Courses that are offered are simply general education, foreign language, and electives. Now, most high schools are structured like this, but some schools such as a

school in Kentucky, have created seminars in which students can participate in to learn about taking care of future responsibilities (Holohan). The support the school received from hosting the seminar was extremely positive. Millard can act in similar ways or by incorporating courses to prepare students for the future better.

A big factor that can benefit Millard's students' success is being active with counselors and staff. Friendships in high school, whether it's with students or teachers can be beneficial to teens mental health (Monroe). High school is a time where teenagers go through many emotions, some they may not have felt before, and being able to vent to someone is crucial. With negative emotions at youth, academics and involvement in school tend to go down (Valiente). Without friendships during these years, students will struggle all around. Another factor that can affect this is the teacher's involvement in the class. If teachers are incorporating students into the curriculum properly, they will feel better about their involvement and performance.

SOLUTIONS

Add Classes to the Curriculum

Millard Public High School's curriculum could be changed in ways that will benefit the student more for the future. It is time for a change because MPS has not seen a change like this ever. Millard should add courses that revolve around 'adulting' to the curriculum so that can students can be better prepared for the future. Adding classes such as banking, saving, college preparatory, ownership, moving out, retirement and workforce would benefit students a lot. Creating courses revolving around money would be one of the more important ones because, in 2018, approximately 69 percent of students graduating took out loans, and their debt averaged at \$29,000 per student (SLH). That is why being able to learn and retain this valuable information that is relevant to student's lives would be superb at this age level. Millard would have to replace some courses for this, but that shouldn't be a problem as some of the courses taught seem to be unuseful. Another good way to promote success in the future is to set up events about career opportunities. As mentioned earlier, a high school in Kentucky has done this and folks loved it (Holohan). Setting up the events wouldn't have an impact on other events the school already has planned for the year.

Have Counselors and Staff Be Active in the Students' Lives

On top of adding classes to the curriculum, Millard should have high school students meet regularly with their counselors. Students would be able to talk about anything from personal life to their goals for the future. A guidance counselor can be a great resource for all your school needs (Mearsheimer). Examples of ways counselors can help are writing letters of recommendation, ACT prep, college prep, scholarships, AP courses, improving academics, solving conflicts, making decisions, venting, and so much more. The best part of it all is that they don't tell the students' parents about anything. Throughout the four years of high school, students go through whirlpools of emotions and being able to reach out to an adult is helpful. Obviously, bad moods correlate with poor performance. Fifty percent of all mental illness cases begin at age 14 (Youth). With numbers that low, counseling should be a requirement at MPHS.

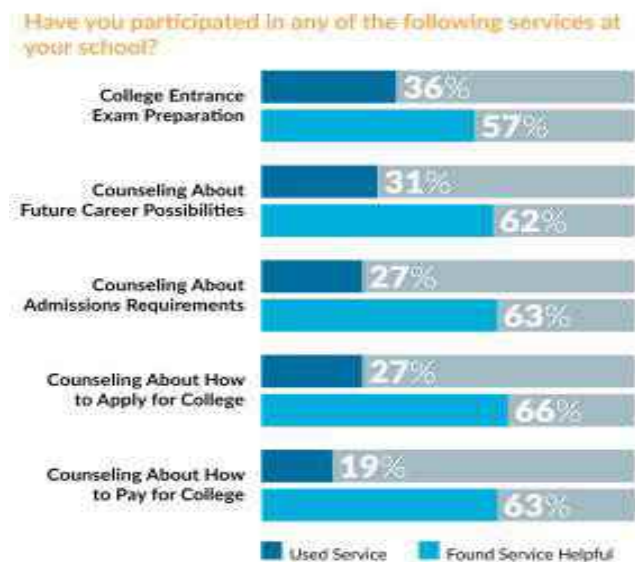
Have Teachers Engage Students More

Teachers at MPHS should make classes more meaningful by engaging students more. Out of 777 students surveyed for a study, over 90 percent of students admitted to using their cell phones for material that didn't involve the class during class (Jaschik). Ninety percent does sound accurate when thinking about the new generation of youth. Technology is distracting in this new era, but cell phones should not be allowed to be used during class time. A Millard West High School counselor once said at a lecture: "Technology will be the cause of death for some children because they can't seem to stay away from it" (Hancock). Some ways that teachers can structure classes to engage students are having mind warm-ups, use movement, collaborating with other students, learning about the students, and integrating technology. These types of engagements are ones that will help students challenge themselves. Students will be paying more attention to the teacher which will create better bonds between the two.

SUPPORTING ARGUMENTS

High school students are constantly growing and changing. Their age is relevant because high school is a prime time for kids to mature and grow up. Mature students are more ready to learn and have a drive (Collins). Students are moving out after HS, joining the military, or even starting their career. These are big changes in people's lives but isn't as relevant as it should be. Adding certain 'adulthood' courses to the curriculum will benefit students because it can teach them about being responsible and self-care.

Another reason why MPHS should prepare students better is because it will help them succeed better after high school. Kids who have some sort of guidance or plan are more likely to accomplish more than that student.



Without most students who have used counseling for college or future career possibilities

Found it useful based on a survey (Fig. 1.). This is a prime example of why meeting regularly with counselors or having strong relations with teachers will benefit students more because then it is made sure students are helped.

As known from earlier, only 45 percent of 165,000 students surveyed felt ready for their future (Leal). This ratio is clearly saying that a good portion of high school students nationwide are unprepared for what the future has in store for them. Also, with high dropout rates in the United States, success is certainly affected by this.

Fig. 1. The chart is showing the number of students who used their counselors for help relating to college (under 40%). Over 50% of the students who used it found it useful (Stringer).

Teenagers and their mental health is also an additional reason why Millard should try to prepare their students better. Everyone who has gone to high school knows that high school is a time where teens go through a ton of emotions and dealing with them may not be easy. Talking about mental health in high school is super important because approximately 1 in 5 children have a diagnosable mental health concern (ACMH). Having a mental health disorder is very challenging at a younger age because students will have more to worry about than just school. The most common symptoms of mental health disorders are depression, mood swings, anxiety, and ADHD.

Nowadays, it seems that a good portion of high schoolers are taking classes just to get by and get a grade. By doing this, obviously little to nothing is being retained which won't help students for their future. College classes are much more challenging than high school classes. If students plan on going to college, they could struggle intensely and may be forced to drop out. Instead of making grades the end goal for certain students in high school, make classes more reviving and valuable. Also, Millard does a good job of letting students have a great amount of free time. At one particular Millard high school, Millard West High School, students can choose to be there for half the day if they wish. Free time is always good but too much of it can be damaging. Millard needs to make classes for their upper-class more difficult so students aren't struggling in the future.

As I mentioned earlier, good bonds and friendships can lead to better performance and more engagement. For a high school student to have their counselor be there for them, especially during their upper-class years, is a big advantage. High school counselors can give academic support, parental support, and individual support (Pannoni). In addition to this, MPHS has poor classes on teaching about the real world. These few courses are also taught in early grades, which makes it very easy to forget. Some graduating kids don't know anything about insurance, credit cards, banks, how to write a check, and even rent.

OPPOSITION

One reason why Millard would not be able to accomplish offering better preparation for the future would be timing. Staff at MPHS may not have the time to incorporate every student into counseling. Although most teachers may agree with this because they are very busy, schedules can be trimmed and time can be freed up. Forty-hour work weeks are possible if teachers plan well (Watson). Another opposition to why Millard would not be able to do this is that it would increase costs on their schools' budget. Simply swapping out the old classes for new ones that relate to 'adulting' would not impact the budget so much. Yes, it would cost more for materials for a new class, but it would go the same way if the district were to change the curriculum of a class as they do often. With all that being said, the opposing arguments would not play a big enough impact to override a change in Millard.

CONCLUSION

To wrap things up, Millard should change up the way they operate their high schools. Millard Public High Schools should offer better preparation for the future and require students to pass classes in ‘adulthood’. As of now, the district does not do a sufficient job on getting students ready for the future. Kids being unprepared for what the future holds can lead to being unsuccessful and struggling. Millard has multiple ways to overcome this. The district can simply add classes to the curriculum, have counselors meet with students regularly, and have teachers be more engaging. By doing this, students would be more ready for graduation than ever because they will have so much more knowledge about the future. If Millard Public Schools wants to be a better district, they need to make few changes in their high schools.

WORKS CITED

1. “11 Facts about High School Dropout Rates.” DoSomething.org, www.dosomething.org/us/facts/11-facts-about-high-school-dropout-rates.
2. “20 Life Skills Not Taught In School.” Successful Student, 24 Apr. 2019, successfulstudent.org/20-life-skills-not-taught-in-school/.
3. Collins, Amanda. “The Top Reasons Why Mature Age Students Excel at Study.” More than Motivation: Study, Career and Life Inspiration, 5 June 2017, www.opencolleges.edu.au/blog/2016/11/14/mature-age-students-excel-studies/.
4. Holohan, Meghan. “Kentucky High School ‘Adulthood’ Class Teaches Love, Taxes and More.” TODAY.com, 29 Mar. 2019, www.today.com/parents/adulthood-class-kentucky-high-school-teaches-crucial-life-skills-t151240.
5. How We Rank the Best High Schools. “Millard Public Schools Public Schools” | Nebraska | U.S. News & World Report, www.usnews.com/education/best-highschools/nebraska/districts/millard-public-schools-109587.
6. Leal, Fermin. “Survey: Most High School Students Feel Unprepared for College, Careers.” EdSource, 3 Aug. 2015, edsources.org/2015/survey-most-high-school-students-feel-unprepared-for-college-careers/83752.
7. Mearsheimer, Julia. “How Often Should I Meet with My Guidance Counselor?” CollegeVine, 12 Apr. 2019, blog.collegevine.com/how-often-should-i-meet-with-my-guidance-counselor/.
8. Monroe, Jamison. “The Importance of Teen Friendships.” Newport Academy, 2 July 2018, www.newportacademy.com/resources/empowering-teens/teen-friendships/.
9. Pannoni, Alexandra. “3 Ways High School Counselors Can Help Students, Parents.” U.S. News & World Report, 2 Feb. 2015, www.usnews.com/education/blogs/high-school-notes/2015/02/02/3-ways-high-school-counselors-can-help-students-parents.
10. Prevalence | Youth.gov, youth.gov/youth-topics/youth-mental-health/prevalence-mental-health-disorders-among-youth.
11. “Problems at School: Association for Children’s Mental Health.” ACMH, www.acmh-mi.org/get-help/navigating/problems-at-school/.

12. Stringer, Kate. "When It Comes to College, Only Half of America's High Schoolers Say They Feel Prepared, Survey Finds." *The 74*, 7 Aug. 2017, www.the74million.org/article/when-it-comes-to-college-only-half-of-americas-high-schoolers-say-they-feel-prepared-survey-finds/.
13. "U.S. Student Loan Debt Statistics for 2019." *Student Loan Hero*, 4 Feb. 2019, studentloanhero.com/student-loan-debt-statistics/.
14. Valiente, Carlos et al. "Linking Students' Emotions and Academic Achievement: When and Why Emotions Matter." *Child Development Perspectives*, vol. 6,2, June 2012, pp. 129-135. doi:10.1111/j.1750-8606.2011.00192.x
15. Watson, Angela. "Can a Teacher Work a 40-Hour Week and Still Do a Good Job?" *The Cornerstone For Teachers*, thecornerstoneforteachers.com/truth-for-teachers-podcast/can-teacher-work-40-hour-week-still-good-job/.
16. Youth Truth Learning, Education Week, youthtruthsurvey.org/wpcontent/uploads/2016/01/YouthTruth-Learning-From-Student-Voice-College-and-Career-Readiness-2016.pdf.