

The Case Against Grades

Editor's Pick. Written by Alfie Kohn.

By now enough has been written about academic assessment to fill a library, but when you stop to think about it, the whole enterprise really amounts to a straightforward two-step dance. We need to collect information about how students are doing, and then we need to share that information (along with our judgments, perhaps) with the students and their parents. Gather and report — that's pretty much it.

You say the devil is in the details? Maybe so, but I'd argue that too much attention to the particulars of implementation may be distracting us from the bigger picture — or at least from a pair of remarkable conclusions that emerge from the best theory, practice, and research on the subject: *Collecting information doesn't require tests, and sharing that information doesn't require grades.* In fact, students would be a lot better off without either of these relics from a less enlightened age.

Why tests are not a particularly useful way to assess student learning (at least the kind that matters), and what thoughtful educators do instead, are questions that must wait for another day. Here, our task is to take a hard look at the second practice, the use of letters or numbers as evaluative summaries of how well students have done, regardless of the method used to arrive at those judgments.

Read the full thing at AlfieKohn.org »