

In the summer of 2010 I took a three-week trip to India to visit family in Delhi and Calcutta. After I came back to the United States, I started to review the notes I'd jotted down from conversations I had with Indian students and parents on their frustrations with school. That September I started as a sophomore at Syosset High School. For many years, my family and I had planned on moving into a community where there were high-ranking schools. But after weeks of nudging myself through school days, I was feeling very dissatisfied with my experience.

My unhappiness surprised me since I'd been the driving force behind my family's move to a better district. Like most kids, I thought intelligence was defined by immaculate report cards and scholastic awards. My obsession over the holy Newsweek high school rankings—Syosset is ranked highly—was just one sign of how deeply I believed that the way to achieve success was to go to a high-ranking school and jump through all the scholastic hoops. That's the dogma our society has fed me since I was little.

However, every single subject in school felt like a complete waste of time. I wasn't learning anything that applies to what occurs in the world. Outside of school, I was self-directing my education by engaging in politics, current affairs, and discrete mathematics through books, lectures, and online classes. I certainly heeded the words of Mark Twain, "I have never let my schooling interfere with my education."

Then one day my issues with school, my conversations in India, and my thoughts about success in the world clicked. I was wrong about everything. What separates the great from the average in the world is not high grades and scores, but curiosity, grit, passion, and drive. I wondered, is this just happening to me? Are there other students around the world with similar sentiments as mine?

After conversations with countless numbers of high school and college students from California to London, I determined that I wasn't alone. Millions of young people are being told to shut up, sit down, and listen each and every day. I decided that I would not be silenced any longer. Enough was enough. I realized that I was onto something and that's when I decided to write my book.

A few weeks ago my book was published. It's been received fairly well by education experts, parents, students, administrators, and teachers.

So why am I here today? What I'm here to inform you all today is that our schools are screwing our kids. They are setting them up to fail

later in life.

This past year, Governor Andrew Cuomo called for schools to approve the Annual Professional Performance Review designed to evaluate teachers by value-added assessments. What this means is that every single teacher will be forced to give their students a test on the specific subject. It doesn't matter if you're a gym teacher or an art teacher. Test after test after test. At the end of the year, the teacher would need to give the same test again. Then, through an absolutely ludicrous formula, a teacher's effectiveness to raise test scores will be determined. It's flawed. It's dangerous. It's absolutely inappropriate on so many levels. It'd be easier to flip a coin.

I've spoken with art teachers that are feeling demoralized and beaten down. Some have never given a test to their students in their entire teaching careers. I was forced to take a multiple choice test in gym class. Are you kidding me?

The point of teacher evaluation is to improve, not to prove. Evaluation is not a spreadsheet. It is a conversation. The point is not to stamp a teacher with a number. You can never bully a teacher into caring for children. The problem arises when we label teachers as "good" or "bad" by their students' ability to fill in bubbles. That's not learning. Teachers are much more than that. As William Johnson, a public school teacher in Brooklyn, said, "When reformers focus solely on quantifiable outcomes like test scores and "value added," they are truly missing the forest for the trees."

I mean really -- who do education policymakers think we students are? I'm not a machine that was born to pump out good test scores. I'm not a number in a spreadsheet. I'm a happy, motivated, and passionate human being. I want to stay that way.

This "drill kill bubble fill" high-stakes testing regime is literally squashing the creativity and happiness and life out of children. Creativity scores are at historic lows. Studies like the Breakpoint and Beyond study found that only 2% of students after post-secondary education tested at the highest level of divergent thinking.

My generation has been tested to an extent that is unprecedented in the history of our education system. Enough is enough. We have phenomenal authentic and performance assessments that measure 21st century skills, creativity, and passion at our fingertips. We have portfolios to document student work over time. Time and time again, our politicians ignore everything. Stop kowtowing to corporate

interests. Pearson or the College Board should not be running the show.

Tell it how it is. You can fire my teachers. You can close my school. You can break up my community. You can kill the love of learning in our kids. But don't tell me in words of William Johnson, that it's because you want the best for me. I'm not stupid little kid. Do you hear me?

We will stand up. We will not be silent.

Nikhil Goyal Bio:

Nominated for the U.S. Secretary of Education by Diane Ravitch and lauded as an “emerging voice of his generation,” at age 17, Nikhil Goyal is the author of *One Size Does Not Fit All: A Student’s Assessment of School* by the Alternative Education Resource Organization. His work has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Fox and Friends*, *Fox Business: Varney & Co.*, *NBC Nightly News*, and *Huffington Post*.

Nikhil has spoken to thousands at conferences and TEDx events around the world from Qatar to Spain and has guest lectured at Baruch College in New York.

He is leading a Learning Revolution movement to transform the American school system. A senior at Syosset High School, Nikhil lives with his family in Woodbury, New York.