



RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

Importance of High Expectations

High expectations for students is one of the “defining” characteristics of all comprehensive school reform programs. When teachers have high expectations for students and provide tasks that are engaging and of high interest, students build self-esteem, increase confidence and improve academic performance (Brophy, 2008; 2010). Student confidence is critical because it is linked to student’s willingness to tackle challenging learning activities.

A Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

A teacher’s expectations, either high or low expectations, become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Students perform in ways that teachers expect. Teachers’ beliefs about student potential are particularly powerful for students of color and students from poor families (Ferguson, 2002).

High Expectations and Motivation

Many scholars report a link between expectations and motivation (Alexander, Ryan & Deci, 2000; Meece, Anderman & Anderman, 2006). Students’ intrinsic motivation is evident when they desire to learn simply because it interests them or they recognize the importance of learning. Extrinsic motivation is a response to either incentives (points, prizes) or disincentives (threats, punishments). Intrinsic motivation has a greater impact on student learning than extrinsic motivation (Deci, Koestner & Ryan, 1999; Kohn, 1994).

Elements of Motivation

Blackburn and Armstrong (2011) describe two components of motivation---value and success. Students are more motivated when they see the value of learning. For example an English teacher might ask students to identify similarities between themselves and a character in something they are reading. Or a history teacher might ask students to interview a family member about a topic being studied in class.

When students experience success they are also motivated. Every lesson should have opportunities for every student to be successful. Rather than calling on individual students to answer a question, a teacher might ask students to share their answer with another student. This allows every student to be involved and engaged. Self-reflection is another way to build success. Students can maintain a journal or make comments on a note card that they share with their teacher in a non-threatening way.

Expectations and Support

Essential to a culture of high expectations is providing students with high levels of support. To merely increase expectations without helping students achieve success almost always leads to frustration and failure (Williamson & Blackburn, 2010). Support includes scaffolding within lessons by using graphic organizers and chunking information, incorporating motivational elements in the lesson, identifying strategic knowledge in the lesson, and having a plan to provide students with additional help and support including especially during the school day (Blackburn, 2008; 2012).



Resources

Selected online and print resources about this topic are available on page 2.

What Do “High Expectations” Look Like

Most educators recognize the importance of high expectations. Creating a classroom where high expectations permeate the culture is more challenging. The key is recognizing that “high expectations” is both a belief about student capability and specific actions undertaken to make those beliefs a reality. Teachers who demonstrate the highest expectations show their students that they expect rigorous, challenging, high quality work.

The Southern Regional Education Board (www.sreb.org), home of *High Schools That Work* and *Making Middle Grades Work*, two of the most respected school reform programs, identified 10 strategies present in a culture of high expectations. They include

1. Developing, communicating and implementing classroom motivation and management plans in every classroom.
2. Implementing instructional plans for bell-to-bell teaching.
3. Organizing and arranging classrooms to spur productivity.
4. Establishing high academic standards.
5. Communicating expectations to students and their families.
6. Actively engaging each student in instructional tasks.
7. Keeping students on target by using tasks that are of interest and of high value.
8. Providing timely, relevant and specific feedback about progress to students to encourage their continued success.
9. Adopting grading practices that communicate high expectations and reduce frustration.
10. Dealing with severe behavior immediately. Be proactive and have clear policies.

Specific examples for how to implement each of the ten strategies is available from the SREB website (www.sreb.org) and from this SREB PowerPoint (<http://www.connectionsproject.ilstu.edu/HSTWresources/04-ia-highexp.pdf>).

The Principal’s Role

In a culture of high expectations, the role of the principal is to remove barriers to success. An effective principal understands the importance of high expectations and is committed to working collaboratively with their staff to make needed changes. He or she is an advocate for changing instruction. They lead the conversation with their staff. Most of all, they are comfortable challenging long-standing beliefs and norms about schooling. They focus intently on student learning and make every program, policy and practice at their school convey to students that they are expected to achieve at very high levels and that they will be successful.

Resources

Online Resources

Setting Higher Expectations: Motivating Students to Succeed – A Research Summary

<http://www.amle.org/Research/ResearchSummaries/Motivating/tabid/2635/Default.aspx>

The Power of High Expectations: Closing the Gap in Your Classroom

http://teachingasleadership.org/sites/default/files/Related-Readings/Diversity_CommunityandAchievement_Chapter2.pdf

High Expectations: A Key to Success for All – A College Readiness Brief from the Pathways to College Network

<http://www.pathwaystocollege.net/pdf/highexp.pdf>

<http://www.educationpartnerships.org>

Addressing Racial Disparities in High-Achieving Schools – A North Central Regional Educational Laboratory Report by Ronald Ferguson (2002)

<http://www.ncrel.org/policy/pubs/pdfs/piv0113.pdf>

Print Resources

Blackburn, B. (2008). *Rigor is NOT a Four-letter Word*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

Blackburn, B. (2012). *Rigor Made Easy*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

Blackburn, B. & Armstrong, A. (2011). *Motivation: It's All About Me*. Momentum, Feb/Mar 2011.
Available at

http://www.eyoneducation.com/bookstore/client/client_pages/pdfs/blackburn_momentum_article.pdf

Reynolds, M. (2003). *Ten Strategies for Creating a Classroom Culture of High Expectations*. Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Education Board. Printed copies available for \$2.

(http://publications.sreb.org/2004/04V03_Ten_Strategies.pdf)

Williamson, R. & Blackburn, B. (2010). *Rigorous Schools and Classrooms: leading the Way*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

E P I: Developing successful, long-lasting business and education partnerships with a positive impact on America's youth.

www.educationpartnerships.org

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The Fine Print

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