

RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE  
Importance of High Expectations  
Education Partnerships Inc.  
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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).

### **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 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](http://teachingasleadership.org/sites/default/files/Related-Readings/Diversity_CommunityandAchievement_Chapter2.pdf)  
<http://www.educationpartnerships.org>

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NY: Eye on Education.