EDUCATION EQUITY

The Deficit Model Is Harming Your Students

Raise your underserved students' expectations by raising your own, and create a series of reachable, data-based goals, scaffolding your instruction and mitigating their fear of failure.

By *Janice D. Lombardi*
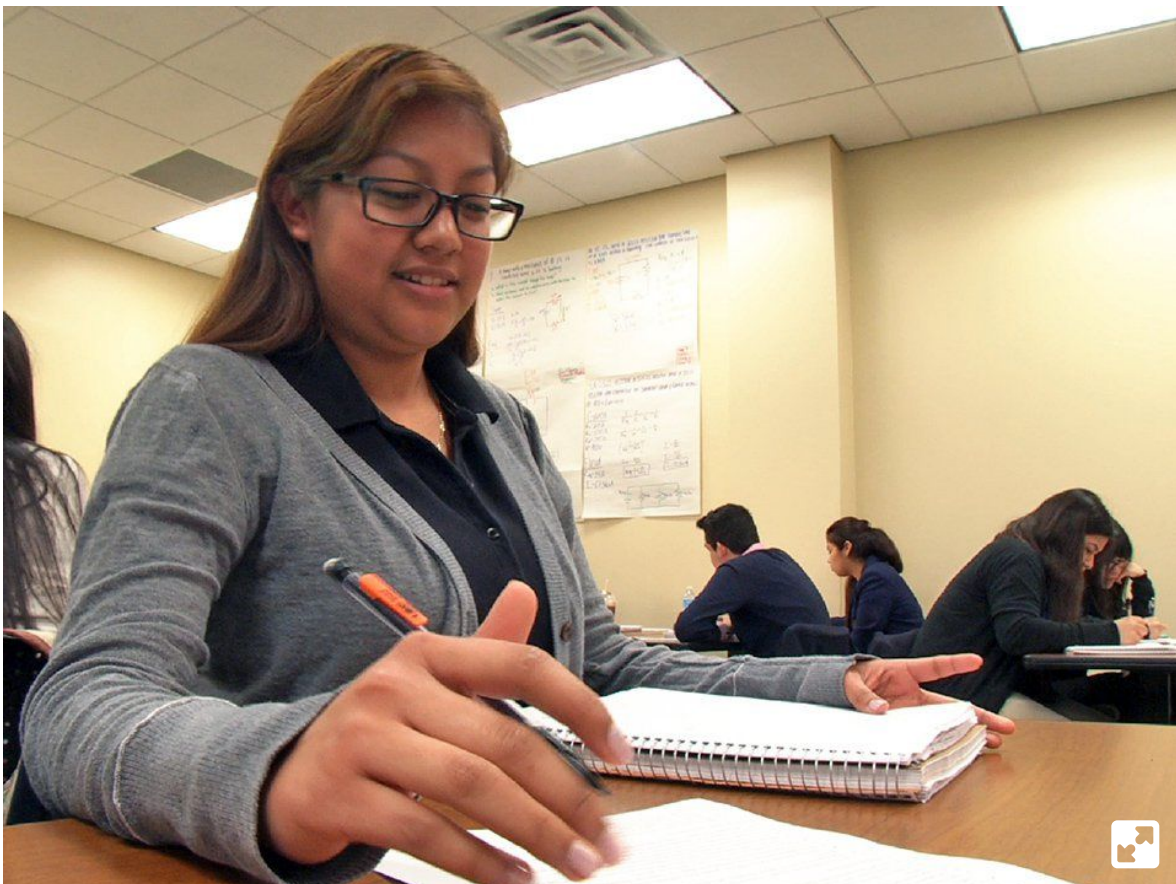
June 14, 2016

Photo credit: Edutopia

Believe That Your Students Can Learn

Students know their shortcomings, and so many -- especially minority males -- act up, act out, or drop out to rebel against the prevailing, unsubstantiated notion that all one has to do is *work harder*.

An article from *The Atlantic* related a study where *white college students were surveyed* (http://spq.sagepub.com/content/78/4/399) about their perceptions of their non-white peers. Their perceptions of Hispanic and black urban students: They *"do not work hard enough to improve their life circumstances."* (http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/01/white-college-students-buy-in-to-stereotypes-of-minority-peers/426813/)
This belief isn't limited to students; it impacts teachers as well.

Unfortunately, some educators work from this deficit model, which means they believe that if underserved students worked harder, they would achieve. This is a problem. According to a National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) study, teachers' expectations impact student success more than a student's own motivation. Stated in their study, *tenth-grade students whose teachers had high expectations of them -- compared to poor expectations -- were three times more likely to graduate from college* (http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/teachers-expect-less-students-color-study-shows/).

Students of color and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are at a disadvantage when it comes to teachers' expectations. According to a *2014 Center for American Progress report* (https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/report/2014/10/06/96806/the-power-of-the-pygmalion-effect/), high school teachers believe that high-poverty, black, and Hispanic students are 53, 47, and 42 percent less likely to graduate from college compared to their white peers.

The educators' expectations are nuanced to exclude students who may not have the advantages of the middle class. These intangible middle class advantages include such things as a computer with internet access at home, a quiet place to study and complete homework, working parent(s) above the poverty line, no pressure to get a low-level job in high school to help pay the rent or support the family, and no fear of the streets upon which they live.

Carlos Nava, a Trinidad Garza alumnus (/blog/how-i-broke-the-cycle-of-poverty-carlos-nava), almost didn't graduate. We set high expectations and believed that he could achieve them. Now he's applying for graduate school. He wants to become a history professor, and he will.

Convince Your Students That High Expectations Are Attainable
Trinidad Garza Early College High School (ECHS) exemplifies the adage that "all students can learn." This is true for underserved urban youth who may be the first in their family to attend college or to graduate from high school. Garza ECHS is an exemplar of the oft-stated and sometimes overused buzzwords high expectations. Everyone in education claims to have high expectations, but not everyone strategizes to convince the students that those expectations are attainable.

Create Reachable, Intermediate Acceleration Goals With Your Students

Simply placing a high standard for students is not adequate. Those standards and expectations must have reachable, intermediate acceleration goals for students. The expectations must be realistic and recognized by the students. This is the connection between high expectations, optimism, realistic hope, and student achievement.

Help Your Students Mitigate Their Fear of Failure

Garza ECHS doesn't throw students in the deep end of the pool and expect them to swim. First, we mitigate their fear of failure, and then gradually plan for short-term successes. By building faculty-student relationships through knowing students' names, strengths, and challenges, the faculty can begin building the trust that makes it OK to fail forward.

Instead of focusing on our students' perceived deficits, we focus on what they can do. The Garza Intervention Team (GIT) -- a solutions-focused faculty committee that meets weekly to provide individualized interventions -- assigns mentors (sometimes teachers, sometimes upperclassmen) to encourage our students toward success. We set up mandatory tutoring with teachers during study hall and after school to bridge any gaps. One student with home

circumstances that might limit most has been tutored in Algebra 1 for almost the entire year. He's persevered and, in his words, is finally "getting it."

We recognize that there may be numerous short-term plans -- some successful and some perhaps not. The setbacks aren't losses; they're learning events. We go back to the overall plan and strategize alternate ways. The main point is that we never give up on creating short-term wins. We teach that failure is not the ending -- it's the beginning.

Use Data to Foster Short-Term Wins

Like any high-performing educators, we strive to competently use data for short-term wins and next-goal planning. To accomplish those wins, we've become "data geeks." We triangulate the data from reading inventories, state accountability measures, and national college readiness exams. Our faculty has become knowledgeable with blueprints, curriculum documents, interim assessments, and formative assessments. However, first and foremost, we realize that each data point is a student -- a real person, not just a statistic. As we use the data to plan short-term goals, we work with students so that they also *own* their achievement.

The GIT and the instructional roundtables that follow are the most important ownership interventions. Each student, as well as his or her parents, is integral to the roundtable where solutions are decided with the student's input. They have to own the solution:

- Will they attend tutoring?

- Who would they like as a mentor?

- What do they need from us to help them own their learning?

- How does their time management impact their performance?

Their voice and participation in the planning for success have a huge impact on their motivation to participate.

Scaffold Instruction and Goals

The *Jobs for the Future* (http://www.jff.org/initiatives/early-college-designs) website states:

> Early College high schools replace remediation with acceleration, engaging instruction, and individualized supports to prepare all students -- particularly those traditionally underserved -- for college and careers.

At Garza ECHS, we scaffold the accelerated learning experiences from the known to the unknown -- based on data. We ask:

- What do you know now?

- What do you need to know for our next goal?

These questions for students and teachers are the beginning point.

We can give hope to a student who may enter our Early College reading at the third-grade Lexile. We facilitate the pathway to achievement as we expect them to be college-ready. We communicate through our words and actions that we're there with him or her along the entire pathway on this journey of short-term wins. The faculty strategizes attainable, immediate goals until the student reaches the ultimate goal of college readiness. *Garza counselors support students' socio-emotional fears about rigor.* (/blog/counselors-role-scaffolded-support-jazmin-greenwood) Scaffolding these goals helps to convince students that they *can* attain, that they *can* be college-ready. Short-term wins matter.

High expectations are not illusory. They are real in a culture of achievement and collaborative teamwork. After all, as John F. Kennedy said, "A rising tide raises all boats."

Trinidad Garza Early College High School

(/school/trinidad-garza-early-college-high-school)

Grades 9-12 | Dallas, TX

Enrollment
419 | Public, Urban

Per Pupil Expenditures
$11,766 District • $10,177 State

Free / Reduced Lunch
84%

DEMOGRAPHICS:
87% Hispanic

11% Black

1% White

1% Multiracial

Demographic data is from the 2014-2015 academic year. Fiscal data is from the 2015-2016 academic year.

FILED UNDER

Education Equity   College Readiness

Administration & Leadership School Culture 9-12 High School