



High Expectations Communicate Respect

As a new school year begins, educators need to set and communicate expectations to the students in their classrooms. When identifying expectations, teachers often struggle deciding whether expectations are too high, too low, realistic, and uniformly applied. Popular research continues to indicate that setting high expectations leads to better results than setting moderate or low expectations, because students feel respected as participants in the classroom community.

While the classroom teacher is responsible for communicating and enforcing the rules, some expectations can be determined collaboratively among teachers of the building. Examples of collaboratively set expectations may include: descriptions of student success at achieving the prescribed curriculum, student behavior in common areas within the school or playground areas, lunchroom behaviors, or limits to absences or tardiness. However, there are also classroom expectations that must be set and applied within the classroom that are not dependent upon how the other classrooms operate. High expectations for demonstrating responsibility, courtesy, cooperation, clear communication, and honesty represent each classroom individually and demonstrates respect for each student as an individual within the classroom community.

In a 2010 edition from *FORBES Media*, Sangeeth Varghese, a business consultant for the corporate world, identified several characteristic actions that increase the success of expectations. These characteristics are found to push individual employees to build confidence and strive for excellence. Those same characteristic actions apply to classrooms and could be used to demonstrate the relationship between learning in the classroom and success in the “real world.” Varghese’s recommendations include:

- **Declare very high expectations.**
Sometimes seemingly impossible goals are the most likely to be met. Ordinary expectations can be self-defeating because people realize such goals won’t be hard to accomplish, so they don’t try very hard. Thus you should set goals that will at first provoke the response that they can never be attained. Be clear that you are expecting something truly out of the ordinary. As you declare and continually reinforce what you’re hoping for, those from whom you’re desiring it will start working toward it with
such a focused effort that the ball should quickly start rolling toward the goal.
- **Communicate your expectations clearly.**
Make sure that there is no ambiguity about what is expected. Describe what you’re aiming for fully and in a positive way. There should be no confusion in anyone’s mind about what you’re demanding. If your goals and priorities are clearly articulated those who will execute them will be able to focus all their effort on attaining them.

- ***Make sure those expectations fit their recipients.***

A leader should make sure that he declares the right expectations to the right people. He should consider his audience's backgrounds, abilities and circumstances before setting expectations. There is no point in setting a goal that's far removed from what someone has any experience and expertise in. Only establish expectations that have a real, strong chance of succeeding—even if they do sound impossible at first.

- ***Communicate your expectations at every level.***

A leader must reinforce his expectations consistently, in both personal and public

settings, formally and informally, inside and outside the organization. Every moment you spend with a person should confirm your trust that he will grow to the level you expect. At the same time, you should also make sure your high expectations for that person are reinforced by being conveyed to others inside and outside his immediate milieu.

- ***Reconfirm your expectations constantly.***

Do not be discouraged when someone doesn't immediately grow to fit your expectations. Rather, continue to encourage by being clear that those expectations persist.

While following the guidelines for establishing expectations in the classroom, we have found that teachers struggle with the temptation to lower expectations for some students out of compassion or simple inconsistency. Students with identified learning needs must have academic expectations that are realistic with their need, but expectations for behavior and participation should be uniformly applied in order to extend to students the challenge and respect that is necessary to grow as successful citizens. When expectations are arbitrarily applied, students to whom the expectations are not applied feel that they are not worthy of the challenge/disrespected and students to whom the expectations are applied may feel that they are being unfairly challenged.

Teachers must guard against the risk of “selling students short” by lowering expectations for “some” students to avoid being perceived as unfair or not respecting all students’ ability to learn and work together.

At the Curriculum Leadership Institute, we believe all students deserve the respect of high expectations!