



Friday Focus

Carter County Schools

No Child Left Behind

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Deborah Ruf, author of *Losing Our Minds: Gifted Children Left Behind*, says the average first-grade classroom can have as many as 12 grade-equivalencies and an IQ range of up to 80 points. As teachers we have all taught in classrooms where some students struggle with content while others have mastered it and quickly become bored with the day's lesson. This can become a frustrating scenario for teachers and students alike unless we equip ourselves to address the needs of all students in our classrooms.

Every child in our district should be achieving at his or her highest level, all the time. Of course, that's easier said than done. "We need to figure out a way to challenge kids, not just move them along because they're at grade level," says Mary Kay Sommers, President of the National Asso-

ciation of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). However, research shows that many schools are consistently failing to provide that challenge to the top students. The ramifications of this reality can be devastating. We must start rethinking our methods for reaching our high achievers.

According to an article from the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, 28 percent of students from low-income families are in the top quartile in first-grade classes; yet by fifth grade, nearly half of those students have fallen from that rank in reading achievement. The Jack Kent Cooke Foundation went on to find that while 90 percent of high-achieving high school students attend college, regardless of income level, lower-income high achievers are less likely to graduate. Sadly, though, it's not just low-income students who are at

risk. Another study suggests that 70% of high ability students are low achieving! (Rider University)

The necessity of addressing the needs of the high achiever is so imperative that we must act quickly. Studies show that with lack of challenge in the early grades, high-achieving students begin to view school as something that is easy and therefore not worth the effort.

Academic rigor is a hot topic these days. Rigor must be provided for low-achievers as well as high-achievers. This simply means that when students are in your classroom they are highly engaged, thinking critically, and being stretched to achieve at their greatest potential. It is easy to see why one of the greatest challenges for educators today is creating engaging lessons for ALL students.

Teachers Set the Tone

Whitaker's next round of effective teacher wisdom is about setting the tone in classrooms and schools. He says, "We are very fortunate to work in education; sometimes we just forget how blessed we are. By consistently filtering out the negatives that don't matter and sharing a positive attitude, we can create a much more successful setting."

Whitaker says that teachers are the filters for the day-to-day reality of school. When students overhear adults whining and complaining about something, their negative actions will rub off on the attitude of the children. Perceptions can become reality. If we think of our current group of students as "the worst/lowest group we have ever had" soon everyone starts to believe it. On the other hand, if we have good relationships and a positive attitude, students work to please us. Students come to class each day wanting and expecting us to set the tone. If the tone we establish is positive and professional, they'll match that tone.

There are many factors we can't control in education today—amount and type of state testing, curriculum requirements, parent involvement, teacher salaries, etc. However, we are in control of high expectations, culture, challenging students, day-to-day instruction with rigor and student engagement, and doing whatever it takes to make each child a success.

What makes a successful student...a successful school...a positive learning environment?

TEACHERS! TEACHERS! TEACHERS!

