



Friday Focus

Carter County Schools

FALL HAPPENINGS

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- Nov 16 3-5 Academy
- Nov 16 East End Academy
- Nov 18 West End Academy
- Nov 25-27 Thanksgiving Break



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

["Be Sure To" Goal Setting Strategy](#)

[20 Ways to Make Your Students' Day](#)

[Encouraging Student Debate](#)

[Inquiry Based Learning](#)



Empowering Students to Learn

What do they want from me? Have you asked yourself this question? I remember wondering if standing on my head and reciting the times tables in a British accent would do anything to help my students remember their facts! Some days I would have done *almost anything* to motivate my kids to learn. There has been a great deal of research on the topic of empowering students. How do we tap into the innate desire of children to wonder, work, and solve problems? Here is what the students tell us.

Take Me Seriously

Kyleen Burke, a 12th grader, reports speaking in front of her district's board of education. She remembers how carefully she chose her clothing and her shoes. The outfit had to convey the message, "Take me seriously."

"As I walked down the hallway to the meeting room, my heels clicked like a teacher's. I took my place behind my nameplate at the table where the board sat. As the meeting began, I waited nervously for my turn to speak. When it came, I spoke honestly and watched as the adults in the room considered what I said. That newfound respect enabled me to be productive and in charge in a new way for the rest of the year."

Challenge Me to Think

Sima Dajani, grade 11, tells about a substitute teacher he had for US History who took the class by storm when he provided them with opportunities to discuss and debate.

"He focused on the big picture of topics and the lessons we could derive from them. For instance, we talked about the causes of the Vietnam War

and its results—an unhappy America, the formation of a whole new cluster of people known as "hippies," and a president frightened to run for reelection. We discussed the insight that people often rise up against wars that seem to have no clear purpose.

He printed out primary documents to illustrate every new era or issue we tackled. For example, we read two letters—one written by Booker T. Washington and the other written by W. E. B DuBois—that showed how their ways of thinking differed tremendously and sometimes split African Americans apart.

He made room for debate in class. We debated such topics as the different plans to revise the Articles of Confederation and Barack Obama's speech on Reverend Wright."

Because of the chance to exercise his critical thinking skills, Sima was engaged in a class that had previously left him bored and disengaged.

Point Me Toward My Goals

Never forget the power of goals. Listen as 12th grader, Andrea Heyden, explains the impact making a connection between school and the future can have on student engagement.

"I understand about learning for passion rather than just for grades. I often experience this phenomenon when I see an article as I'm surfing the Web. I'll read it and look up additional information if I'm

interested, even if it has nothing to do with any of my other obligations.

Let's face it, high school is just a means to an end; it's a stepping stone to something bigger. Every student is always in charge of his or her learning. How hard we work in school, how much we take charge of our learning experience, depends on our goals in life. Those students who want to be doctors and lawyers have to work very hard; those who have no dreams tend to slack off. We never learn in school purely for the enjoyment of learning but for the promise of enjoyment that will come later when we attend a university and enter a fulfilling occupation. We inspire ourselves, and we make our learning experience into whatever it is, be it positive or negative."

Teachers can learn a great deal from Andrea's powerful insights. Every opportunity must be seized to make learning meaningful for our students. The message must be: How can this work today move you closer to your goals for tomorrow? Students crave success and any movement toward a goal will cause them to work harder toward more goals.

Make Me Feel Important

Everyone wants to be appreciated, to be needed, and to feel important. Want to win over your kids? Give them an opportunity to do something special.

"Helping out with the younger kids and teaching them to read made me feel good because I could tell that us bigger kids were making them more comfortable than when they went with the adults. I remembered how stressful it can get to not know how to pronounce words or letters. After we had been working for a couple of days, they were getting the hang of it. They finally whizzed through a whole little five-page book, and we all got so excited. I would never have thought in a million years that I would help someone do something as special as that. I will never forget that moment." (Brittany Noye, 5th grade)

Building a climate where kids feel empowered has the potential to create life long learners!