

I-2: Convince students that they want academic success (“I Want”)

Strategies for Connecting Students’ Academic Success with Life Options

Teachers must help students understand the tangible impact of reaching academic goals on their future lives by telling, showing and convincing students that they will have more choices in life if they do well in school.

Strategy	Example
<p>Use statistics with your students to graphically illustrate the effect an education can have on their lives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 29% of Americans graduate from college (bachelor’s) • Bachelor degree holders earn on average double the annual salary of someone with high school diploma • High school grads earn lifetime average of \$1.2 million • Associate degree holders earn lifetime average of \$1.6 million • Bachelor’s degree holders earn lifetime average of \$2.1 million • High School dropouts more than 3 times as likely to be unemployed as college grads: unemployment rate for high school dropouts is 8.5%; for high school grads it’s 5%; for college grads it’s 2.7% • High school drop outs are three times as likely to smoke cigarettes as college graduates (and therefore have lower life expectancy) • College grads less likely to be in jail: Percentage of people in jail with at least some college experience is only 25% the rate of those with only a high school diploma • Those with some college live an average of 4 years longer than those with no college
<p>Be transparent about the enhanced life options a college degree presents</p>	<p>Leslee Bickford (Philadelphia ’03, 6th Grade Math & Science) faced tremendous investment challenges at the beginning of the year. She recalls, “I needed to find a way to make my students see this as something that is relevant to their lives and something they should want to do.”</p> <p>In order to invest her students, Ms. Bickford called a community meeting in her class. She began by laying out the reality that in a class of 25 students in Philadelphia, on average, two students will go to college, three will go to jail or end up in the criminal justice system, four will drop out of high school, and 16 will end their schooling with a high school diploma and enter a low level job. Then she and her students engaged in a discussion. They talked about people they knew who had taken each path. They talked about parents who worked two jobs each because they didn’t have the education to get a higher-paying position, they talked about cousins in jail or on probation, and they talked about siblings who had graduated from college. Ms. Bickford discussed with her students the powerful forces of institutionalized racism they were confronting but also the power of individuals and communities to overcome these statistics.</p>

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	<p>At the end of the meeting, Ms. Bickford asked her students what they wanted for their lives. All of them said they wanted to attend college or have the ability to choose their careers after high school. They concluded by talking about what choices they’d have to make inside and outside the classroom to create the lives they envisioned for themselves. After the meeting, she placed a sign that read “Defying the odds!” underneath their class goal of 90% mastery. From then on, whenever someone would get off track she would point at the sign hanging above the door and say “it’s your choice.”</p>
<p>Actively “market” the value of academic achievement</p>	<p>Visual displays, mottos or chants convey that academic achievement is highly valuable. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climb the mountain to college in 20XX (XX = the graduation year) • Academic Achievement = Opportunity
<p>Show your students how to succeed in the outside world</p>	<p>Help students learn the steps they need to achieve their dreams by exposing them to:</p> <p><u>Successful older students</u> Invite stellar students from a few grades above yours to speak to your students about why success matters and their reasons (and rewards) for working hard.</p> <p><u>Competitive high schools</u> Educate students about high school options that might be available to them. Teach them about the application process and requirements. If possible, invite alumni of your school who have attended these schools to speak to your students.</p> <p><u>The college admissions process</u> Take college tours with students. Teach them about financial aid programs. Show them sample college entrance exams. Invite college students to come speak in your classroom.</p> <p><u>People from different professions</u> Invite a variety of guests to share how they reached their positions.</p>
<p>Make connections between class material and future careers</p>	<p>Help students make connections between their dreams and the concrete skills needed to make them a reality.</p> <p><u>Elementary School Example:</u> We talk a lot in my classroom about what we “want to be when we grow up.” I always try to make connections between reading and writing and math skills and being able to function in the world. We have a</p>

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will display on what students want to be when they're older. Each month they come up with something different and we update it. On a little worksheet I give them they fill-in-the-blanks: "To be a _____, I need to know how to _____." I need to learn _____." Then I post the sheet to the display. It helps them start making connections between dreams and skills. Each month I go over all the new listings and we talk about them as a class. Once a week, I'll read a book to them about a profession that someone has listed. The books reflect their interests and stimulate good conversations about the skills they will need and how those skills relate to the work we do in school.

Middle School Example: One 6th grade teacher in Atlanta knew that to invest students in improving their writing, she had to communicate its importance to their lives. She presented her class with two writing samples, one with high-level vocabulary and perfect grammar and one with numerous errors and poor word choice. Then she asked her students what they thought about the writers of each essay. Her students' observations about the education level and life options of each of the authors were surprisingly acute. In their discussion, Ms. Groves made a clear connection, for her students, about what messages their writing, good or bad, would send to the outside world.

High School Example: I really wanted my students to understand that they will need to read for whatever job they ultimately choose. I want them to make very concrete connections between the work they do in my class to improve their reading skills, and the work they will ultimately do later in life. So each month I choose four students in each class to collaborate to come up with different jobs that interest them—and they have to research these jobs and come back and make a little presentation to the class explaining the different ways this job requires reading. And each month I assign the task to another three students and we switch the list.