

# Valuing Hard Work, Team Effort, and Academic Achievement

## Chapter Six

- I. Begin with a Shared Academic Vision
- II. Select Your Messages
- III. Reinforce Your Messages Over Time

### Introduction

Recall the vignettes from the introduction to this text:

*"...if the field trip lasts all day, we're going to miss all our learning time...can we at least bring flashcards on the bus?"*

*Demanding 100 percent mastery communicated the value of persistence and the primacy of our academic skills. Best of all, with all of the different ways to earn status at school, I was thrilled it was cool to be an expert.*

*Some students who had passed the quiz already would come to the GOAL sessions in order to help their peers...It was pretty powerful. Students would correct each other's mistakes and gently encourage their peers to stay positive when frustration would set in.*

This chapter addresses the final piece necessary to create a culture of achievement in your classroom, the ultimate "end" of classroom management as discussed throughout this text. Effective teachers like those highlighted in the introductory vignettes take "classroom management" a step beyond establishing rules, consequences, and procedures. They consider classroom management to be much more than responding to misbehavior. And they go beyond meeting students' needs for acceptance and group membership by creating a respectful and supportive classroom community. Indeed, it is entirely possible to create an environment in which students behave and feel respected and valued by others – and yet aren't especially motivated to work hard or achieve significant academic goals.

Teachers who effectively motivate their students to work hard and to achieve at high levels realize that within the four walls of their classroom they get to determine what they and their students will value. They are purposeful about the ideals they promote to their students, and they determine ways to package those ideals in ways students will understand. They also recognize that they have the opportunity to set up structures in their classroom that reinforce what they value.

Teachers who lead their students to significant academic gains do so by convincing students – and reinforcing whenever possible – the following three values:

- Academic achievement is highly valuable
- Hard work leads to academic achievement
- Academic achievement requires a team effort

This chapter aims to help you think systematically about how to relentlessly value academic achievement, hard work, and team effort with your students. First, we will examine the ways in which you can develop an ambitious academic vision for your students to get them inspired to achieve at high levels. Then, we

## Valuing Hard Work, Team Effort, and Academic Achievement

will explore how to select the explicit messages and values that will help students believe that they can attain your shared goals. Finally, we will outline concrete steps to ensure you are “walking the walk” and that your classroom reinforces your values. Those steps are to model your messages in your interaction with students, to develop class “policies” that reflect what you value, to establish motivating academic destinations, and to implement systems that reward achievement or progress toward your values.

### I. Begin with a Shared Academic Vision

In order to establish a culture of achievement in your classroom, your students must yearn for more than simply passing your class. They must develop a desire to gain enough knowledge and skills to catapult them onto a new track of academic possibility and opportunity. Students need to view academic achievement as valuable and with inherent purpose. You can foster this attitude by articulating a clear, ambitious goal toward which your students will work during the year.

The *Teaching As Leadership* book outlines how you can develop a specific Big Goal in your classroom, based on the grade level and subject area you teach. Each child in a second-grade classroom could rally around the goal of gaining two grade levels of growth in reading, which would give students access to whole new shelves in the library. Each student in an A.P. Calculus classroom could rally around scoring a 3 or higher on the Advanced Placement examination, which would open both college’s and employers’ doors. By communicating this goal to your class and consistently conveying how your daily work is making headway toward that vision, you can foster a sense of purpose, excitement, hope, and self-determination among your students.

The seventh graders in Sara Wernick’s (Bay Area ’02) writing class are working toward the Big Goal of developing a high-school level, five-paragraph response to literature that uses both direct and paraphrased evidence from the text. Sara posted a ladder on one of her bulletin boards, placing an objective leading to this goal on each rung; once students master how to use evidence effectively, they can learn how to cite sources, for example. Throughout the year, Sara refers to the class’s ladder as both an explanation of her daily instruction and a rallying cry for her roomful of scholars:

When I introduce each unit, or if we hit a confusing place in the unit, I can point to the ladder and explain how what we’re doing is relevant to reaching our Big Goal. The students are excited about the fact that we’re doing high school level work, and they’re even pushing themselves (and me!) to reach our Big Goal by April rather than June. Although the “ultimate result” of the goal is yet to be seen, I know that having added a Big Goal to my classroom this year has instilled a sense of urgency and necessity in everything we do. Rather than the students feeling as if their lessons are coming out of left field, working towards our Big Goal has meant a sort of continuity embedded into our curriculum that simply demands on-task behavior and a desire to achieve.

### Develop Motivating Academic Destinations

In addition to the Big Goal that serves to encapsulate all of the work that your students accomplish during the year, you may find it effective to develop shorter-term “motivating academic destinations,” or authentic tasks, as discussed in the *Instructional Planning & Delivery* text. Two essential characteristics of authentic tasks are that:

1. The end result is something that excites students, and
2. Students must utilize the academic skills and information they have gained throughout the unit, or the year, to produce the end result.

By establishing a motivating academic goal in your classroom, you are communicating a very important message about high expectations; you are saying that you believe in your students so much that an ambitious destination is worth pursuing. Danielle Neves (Los Angeles '99) shares how she bundles the knowledge and skills from her middle school social studies and language arts class into a motivating academic destination:

I always try to provide a culminating unit activity in which students can use the skills and information they've learned. For example, the first unit we do is called "Why Study History?" I tell students that they are the superintendent of schools, and that their social studies teachers are arguing over the curriculum – some think teaching history should be stopped, others think it must continue, and other can't decide. As the superintendent, they must decide and present their argument at a press conference. We then research and discuss arguments for and against studying history. They write their speech in the form of a 5-paragraph essay because that is what they are learning in English. They work in groups to rate each speech against a rubric and the most persuasive from each group is read before the class. Everyone dresses up for the "press conference" and we videotape the speeches.

One of the most difficult hurdles to jump as a teacher is convincing your students that the hard work they put into these authentic tasks actually matters – that the problems they solve, the writing they draft, or the issues they research have a purpose beyond your grade book and the abstract "Future" to which you keep referring. "Who cares if it's spelled correctly?" a child may say. "It's only *you* reading it."

But quicker than you can say, "gee, thanks for the ego-boost," you can create authentic tasks that open students' work up to a broader audience. This goes beyond the traditional art project on the bulletin board and into the realm of writing letters to city council members, companies, or school officials; making price comparison guides for families; developing a lesson to teach younger students; or producing a play or video that illustrates key concepts from recent lessons. Students are much more likely to invest time and care into their writing, for example, when they know that someone else is going to view it. If you can develop ways for your students to "go public" with their assignments, you will find them more conscious of their presentation – and more apt to see the connections between what they do inside school walls and beyond.

One way to go public is to pursue a "service learning" project, in which you link your academic objectives to an initiative that meets a need of the community – such as establishing a garden that helps students see botany at work, creating a soup kitchen that requires students to maintain inventory, interviewing senior citizens to capture the unsung voices of the Great Depression, teaching civics to immigrants preparing for citizenship exams, or drafting and mailing brochures that highlight a community problem. Each of these projects requires academic objectives to complete – and allows students to see themselves making a difference with the knowledge and skills they've acquired.

*I published books with my students on the history of our town during my first year and on hate crimes after September 11 during my second. Those projects required my students to learn all sorts of researching and writing skills, and my students were very motivated because they knew others were going to be reading and using their work!*

**Andrew Mandel, Rio Grande Valley '00**  
**Vice President, Interactive Learning & Engagement**  
**Teach For America**

## Valuing Hard Work, Team Effort, and Academic Achievement

### II. Select Your Messages

Once you have established and outlined a clear and ambitious vision for your class, you need to confront the fact that your students come to you with their own beliefs about learning and their ability or inability to succeed. As explained in the *Teaching As Leadership* text, the self-fulfilling prophecy of high expectations, the two contrasting theories of intelligence, the influence of personal biases and societal stereotypes, and the effects of poverty have a significant impact on student motivation. In some cases, students have internalized low expectations that society has had for them. They have become convinced that intelligence and academic success are traits that one either has or doesn't – and that they don't. Some of the students you will teach may have adopted this theory of "fixed intelligence" and therefore don't believe that intelligence and academic success are accessible to them through hard work.

To counter these beliefs, you must celebrate and value effort, growth, collaboration, and other behaviors that support your goals of effecting significant gains in student achievement and of building a culture of achievement in your classroom. To do this you must first package what you value in language that your students will understand and be able to internalize – essentially manifesting those values in clear, comprehensible "messages."

In selecting your messages, identify the fundamental ideas you believe will help your students succeed in your class and ultimately in school and in life. While it is important to ensure that the messages you develop are appropriate for your particular group of students, this text and others have shown us the general importance of the following ideas that might serve as a useful starting point:

#### Value #1: Academic Achievement Is Highly Valuable.

- In order to help students realize the value in academic achievement, you might communicate that **Academic Achievement = Opportunity**.
- At KIPP Academies, students believe that academic achievement now will result in improved educational opportunities later, as they **Climb the Mountain to College in 200X**.

#### Value #2: Hard Work Leads to Academic Achievement.

- The *Teaching As Leadership* text explains why the most successful students are those who recognize that academic success does not come easily. True achievement requires hard work. Consequently, you might want to promote the message **Effort Breeds Success**.
- Another subset of the "hard work" message is the notion that **Mistakes are Learning Opportunities**. It is essential that students interpret errors not as a sign of personal weakness but rather as an inevitable part of reaching their goals and an opportunity to deepen their understanding.
- It is important that your students understand that they have the ability to succeed. You might consider conveying some form of the idea **You Have the Ability to Excel**, which KIPP Academies do with the message **ALL of us WILL Learn**.

#### Value #3: Academic Achievement Requires Team Effort.

- Effective teachers testify to the power of developing a sense of inter-dependence among students and of communicating the idea that **We Succeed Together**.
- At KIPP Academies, every student has internalized the notion that **Team Beats Individual**. As a result, students are inclined to monitor, push, protect, and collaborate with their peers. Jaime Escalante used similar messages to make his students understand that each *individual's* goal is to have the *whole class* succeed.
- Several corps members have cited the success of the message **Together Everyone Achieves More** (which has the very convenient acronym, TEAM).

Valuable, too, are the suggestions of Jon Saphier, author of *The Skillful Teacher*. He recommends that three short messages pervade every teacher's classroom, regardless of grade level. They are: "This is important! You can do it! I won't give up on you!"<sup>26</sup>

In order to create a classroom culture in which students truly *want* and are *driven* to achieve, messages such as these will help you break through what many students currently believe about themselves and their potential. These messages will help to communicate your high expectations, instill the theory of malleable intelligence, and convince students that hard work will, in fact, lead to success and greater opportunities.

But even if you know you want to instill the mantra "effort breeds success" in your students, how do you actually convince Theodore that if he worked harder, he would be able to master the addition of fractions with unlike denominators? How do you get students to reply, "From now on I'll remember the difference between 'there' and 'their'!" How do you get Francisco and Rosalyn – two students that resist working in cooperative groups – to realize that together they *will* achieve more? Your students won't change their beliefs and celebrate and value what you do if you merely share your messages with your students. Rather, you will need to think of yourself as a marketer.

### III. Reinforce Your Messages Over Time

In this section, we turn to several strategies for ensuring your classroom reflects the messages you are trying to send. Those strategies are to:

- Model your messages in your behavior around and interaction with students
- Market your messages
- Develop class "policies" that reflect what you value
- Implement systems that reward achievement or progress toward your values

#### Model Your Messages

If you want students to believe that hard work leads to success, you need to model hard work yourself. That might mean making yourself available before school and for after school study sessions, or by using every second of class time productively (by refraining from "filling time" with games of Tic Tac Toe or Seven-Up, for example). Students need to see you working hard and feel your sense of urgency in your interactions with them.

For students to believe that mistakes are an opportunity for growth, you need to show that *you* believe that as well. Avoid simply telling a student that his answer is wrong, or even quickly giving him or her the correct answer. Instead you might ask, "What led you to that answer?" or "How do you know that is a good answer?" Use the mistake to explore the student's thinking and eliminate the source of the confusion. If you make a mistake when grading a test, writing on the board, or responding to a question, admit it and model how you plan to avoid that same mistake in the future. In response to her own spelling mistake (spinal *chord*), Margaret Cate (DC '98) thanked the student who noted her error and later posted the piece of paper on which she wrote the proper spelling twenty-five times. She explained to her students that looking at and writing the word multiple times helped her internalize the proper spelling for the future. In sum, you need to practice what you preach.

---

<sup>26</sup> Saphier, Jon and Robert Gower. *The Skillful Teacher: Building Your Teaching Skills*. Acton, MA: Research For Better Teaching, 1997.

## Valuing Hard Work, Team Effort, and Academic Achievement

### Market Your Messages

Marketers spend their time thinking of ways to get their audience to internalize the desired message and act accordingly. They think of clever slogans and visual images, plan events and rituals, develop promotional contests, create symbols or mascots to give personality to their messages, and so on. You're the chief marketer in your classroom, and you'll want to think of every creative way possible to reinforce what you value and want to celebrate with your students.

The following strategies, while no means comprehensive, give some starting ideas. You will need to think about what makes the most sense given your content, grade-level and community.

### Establish a Class Name, Theme, or Motto

Class names, such as "The A+ Class" (which reinforces the value of achievement) or "The Helping Hands Classroom" (which emphasizes collaboration and teamwork) allow you to shape your class identity as a whole. As a way to communicate that your students have the potential to go to college while also encouraging hard work, you might name your room "The College Prep Class." You might invest students (especially very young students) in a class name by allowing them to brainstorm and vote on a name, even if their choice doesn't convey a specific identity, such as "The Super Sonics." You can later guide students to delineate the characteristics that are true of a "Super Sonic," such as perseverance, a positive attitude, and respect for others. Danielle Neves (Los Angeles '99) thought her middle school students would recoil at a classroom name but established "Excellence" as her classroom theme. At the beginning of the year, she and her students talk about what excellence is and looks like in the classroom – considering everything from interaction between students to the quality of finished assignments. They write down what excellence will mean in their class throughout the year, and constantly refer to their "Excellence is..." poster at the front of the room. Class mottos, such as "There are no shortcuts" can be written on every assignment, test or quiz. Brent Maddin (South Louisiana '99) has his high school students write "No Excuses" as part of their heading on every paper.

*I decided to call my students "scholars" because the word embodies what I want my students to be. I call them scholars all the time. When a student turns in an excellent piece of work, I say, "Now this is work from a scholar." When a student misbehaves, I say, "Remember, you're a scholar. Scholars interact respectfully with their peers." I decided what I was going to value and celebrate in my room, and I constantly use the term "scholar" to reinforce that.*

**Preston Smith, Bay Area '01  
CAO, Rocketship Education**

### Implement Class Chants

Although most common at the elementary level, class chants are another effective way to market your messages. Preston Smith (Bay Area '01) reinforces the message that mistakes are learning opportunities by teaching his first grade students the following class chant, "\_\_\_\_\_ made a mistake, but that's ok, because as long as he learns from it, we say hurray!" Sara Cotner (South Louisiana '00) uses a teacher-student call and response. Teacher: *A+ Attitude*. Students: *Work Hard. Get Smart*. Sara also has her students recite the A+ Class Pledge every morning in unison. That class pledge reads as follows: *I pledge allegiance to the A+ Class at J.A. Hernandez. I will do my best at all times. I am here to learn and get smart. I will make myself, my family, and my teacher proud. I will always be respectful, responsible, and ready to learn for my sake and for the sake of those around me.* Rachel Schankula (Delta '98) now the Vice President of Program Design at Teach For America, had her students recite the following class creed:

I believe in myself and my ability to do my best.  
I am intelligent. I am capable of greatness.  
I can learn. I will learn. I must learn.

Today, I will listen. I will speak. I will see.  
I will think. I will feel. I will reason.  
I will read, and I will write.  
I will do all these things with one purpose in mind: to do my best.  
I am too smart to waste today.

### **Create Visual Displays**

To communicate the importance of respect and collaboration with others, you might create an Acts of Kindness Wall or a T.E.A.M. (Together Everyone Achieves More) display where you post supportive things you've seen your students doing or assignments where students have collaborated to produce a high quality product. To communicate that success is achieved through hard work, an elementary teacher might create a big red train engine on one of his walls where he hangs up pieces of work that represent tremendous effort and accomplishment under the title "The Engine That Could." You might hang banners that present your messages in catchy slogans such as "There Are No Shortcuts," "Team Beats Individual," or "Work Hard. Be Nice." (All three of these are slogans utilized in the KIPP Academies.) You may recall that Jaime Escalante paced a large sign in his classroom that read "DETERMINATION + HARD WORK + DISCIPLINE = THE WAY TO SUCCESS."

We asked Mike Feinberg (Houston '92), who co-founded KIPP, to reflect on the rationale and success of KIPP's use of these "messages" with students:

Students need to be set up for success before we place high expectations on them and hold them accountable to meet those expectations. Whether it is an academic skill or a preferred behavior, we need to reverse engineer from the goal to uncover all of the ingredients necessary to achieving the goal. Then we must ensure that all of these ingredients are present in our teaching.

At KIPP, the teachers have realized that before students can DO the actions we want them to do, they first have to be able to SAY those actions. Therefore, those actions and expectations need to be taught, explained, and constantly reviewed in our classrooms. By saying the actions and expectations, the students acknowledge the existence of this particular expectation, buy into the fairness of its existence, and realize their responsibility to maintain it. At KIPP, this translates into "Say it, do it."

Now, saying an expectation such as "work hard" or "be nice" is a great starting point. Getting students to agree with the importance of those phrases is another important step. As we've learned in our professional development efforts, however, teaching a concept one time to children does not guarantee mastery. We need to reach and teach from many different angles, and we need to review previous work in a spiral form to ensure long-term mastery. This is why KIPP has plastered its campuses with various sayings, slogans, values, rallying cries, and expectations. It is our assurance that all of our children are constantly bombarded by our positive expectations and values throughout the day – they hear it in class and they see it wherever they happen to look (even when they're off task 😊). On day one each year, we begin teaching such concepts as:

1. Team always beats individual.
2. There are no shortcuts.
3. Work hard. Be nice.
4. Climb the mountain to college in 20XX (XX = the graduation year)
5. Focus.



## Valuing Hard Work, Team Effort, and Academic Achievement

6. Be the constant, not the variable.
7. Actions speak louder than words.
8. Time and Place.
9. If you can't run with the Big Dogs, stay on the porch!
10. ALL of us WILL learn.

...and many more to create productive classroom environments. These slogans and expectations are on the walls in our classrooms, are painted onto our sidewalks in between our modular buildings, hang from the ceiling over our covered walkways, decorate the windows in our front entrance, are on our letterhead, are on our bumper stickers, are on the students' uniforms, and if I could hire planes to sky-write these slogans, I'd do that, too 😊. Children at KIPP are expected to learn, understand, and always remember what we ask them to do, and when they do the right thing, good things happen. A daily reminder is one small way that we as teachers make sure our students are set up to succeed.

The KIPP Academies would be the first to admit the danger of class names, slogans, or visual displays that have no reality behind them. If students in the "Helping Hands Classroom" never work with a partner or in collaborative groups, or are never affirmed for supporting their classmates' achievement, that class name will probably ring false to students. Imagine if you hang a banner that reads "Try, Try, Try Again: Effort Breeds Success" and yet when Chantelle asks to retake the test on which she got 62%, you respond flatly, "No. What you got is what you got. You'll just have to study harder for the next test." Translating your values into messages and packaging them in a way that students can understand is one thing. Securing the reality behind those messages is another key piece. As any good marketer will tell you, you can't send messages effectively unless there is a reality behind them – you must "walk the walk."

*Every mistake a student makes HAS to be fixed so that the student learns from it. Nothing is "done" until it is perfect. Even in first grade, I'd just hand it back with a circle around it and the students would have to figure out how to fix it. In my grade book, I'd keep track of the first and last attempt.*

**Justin May, Greater New Orleans '00  
Second Grade Teacher,  
Addison Northeast Supervisory  
Union**

### Develop Policies that Reflect What You Value

Here's how to walk the walk. If you want students to see mistakes as opportunities for improvement, you should allow, if not require, students to retake an assessment on which they did not demonstrate adequate mastery of the objectives. This assessment should address the same objectives but in a slightly different way. You might also create a "Mistakes Wall" in your classroom where students can post their imperfect work with notes about what they learned from those mistakes. To show students that hard work does lead to success, you should ensure that your grading system includes the higher grade on a re-done assessment or incorporates homework completion as part of an effort grade.

Some elementary teachers have their students develop "I Can" cans (simply a decorated coffee can). When students master a skill, they write that skill ("I can multiply fractions" or "I can write a friendly letter") on a strip of paper and put it in the can. Later, if students are struggling to master a new skill, the teacher can say, "Remember when you couldn't add, subtract, or multiply fractions? Now look in your "I Can" can! Soon you'll be adding strips about how you have mastered decimals."

To reinforce the idea that student inter-dependence will lead to greater achievement for everyone, you might have students work in collaborative groups where everyone is responsible for one piece of a complete project. As Kristin Bourguet (South Louisiana '99) related, you might keep a large chart of your learning goals and cross off the goals once everyone in the class has demonstrated mastery of the



objective. If you wanted to demonstrate how each student can contribute to a collective goal, consider doing some sort of play or performance as a class. Debrief afterward, highlighting the importance of each character and stagehand.

### **Implement Systems That Celebrate What You Value**

As we discussed in chapter two of this text, *Creating and Implementing Effective Rules and Consequences*, students need to know when they are meeting the desired expectations. Then, it was in the context of how to give positive reinforcement for appropriate behavior. Here, we discuss positive reinforcement in light of how students are internalizing and manifesting the values of hard work, team unity, and academic achievement.

*I have tracking charts for everything – fluency, mastery of multiplication, addition, subtraction, number of books read, attendance, homework completion, etc. I did it because I wanted my students to be constantly aware of their progress. I talked with individual students about putting in more effort to improve certain areas. When their hard work led to success, I made sure it was well documented as proof.*

**Jenny Tan, Los Angeles '00  
Elementary School Principal,  
Clark County**

Because most students do not have the maturity or self-discipline to work entirely from intrinsic motivation, teachers often integrate various extrinsic reward systems into their classroom. Realize that relying *solely* on extrinsic motivators sends students the message that tangible rewards are the ultimate goal, not the academic achievement. If you discover that you are relying solely on extrinsic rewards – that students are only on task if you tempt them with a cookie or more points in the class challenge – you should reflect on whether your values really permeate your classroom through effective marketing, modeling, and motivating instructional strategies. Essentially, teachers should view extrinsic motivators as a bridge to intrinsic motivation.

With the above caveat in mind, here are some basic, but not necessarily obvious, rules for establishing and maintaining systems of extrinsic rewards:

- First, ensure that students are working towards a reward that is motivating to them. While the examples of positive reinforcement in the following table are a good starting point, it is often helpful to *ask* students what they would find exciting. They are sure to have lots of good ideas for what would motivate them to work hard! “If we had a party, what kind of food would you be most excited to have at the party?” “If you could spend 30 minutes on Friday afternoon doing exactly what you wanted to do, what would you do?”
- Next, create a system with a positive, rather than negative, root. For example, a system where students achieve X reward after earning Y points for being on task is infinitely more successful than a system where students achieve X reward for wasting less than Y minutes over the course of a month. The former allows you to “catch students being good,” while the latter system sets up a divide between you and the students because you are keeping track of what they are *not* doing well.
- Then, establish a system that allows every student, group or class to receive recognition for reaching a certain threshold. Do not pit students or classes against each other when competing for the reward because some students might give up easily.

## Valuing Hard Work, Team Effort, and Academic Achievement

- Finally, and most importantly, execute these reward systems flawlessly. If you have determined that every Monday morning you will read the list of “Top Dogs” (students who completed all of their homework from the previous week) with great fanfare from the colorful list posted on the door, you must make that colorful list and read it, every Monday morning, with just as much fanfare each time. If you decide that anytime you put students in collaborative groups for an extended period you will pick a “star group” at the end of the activity and the rest of the class will do a special cheer for that group’s effective collaboration, you need to identify your most effective group and lead the class in that cheer each time. If you determine that you will send home a positive note or call parents every time a student receives a 100% on a test, you need to do that...you got it, every time. You must never miss an opportunity to celebrate the success you told your students you valued; failing to celebrate a level of success you told students was celebration-worthy or neglecting to laud a specific behavior that you told students was laudable will quickly wilt your students’ desire to achieve those levels and exhibit those behaviors.

*Students would stop by my room first thing Monday morning to see if I had put up the Top Dog list yet. I would often see students standing in front of the wall, counting the number of lists they were on for the quarter, pointing out their names to friends, and encouraging other classmates to “get their names up there too.” At the end of the year, I was just going to throw the lists out, but the students wouldn’t let me. We actually had to raffle them off. Making that Top Dog list was on my to do list every single weekend.*

**Margaret Cate, DC ‘98**  
**Selection Associate, Teach For America**

The following table lists some examples of how you might motivate your students and celebrate their success:

Strategy	Explanation
<b>Class Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many teachers recognize exemplary student behavior, participation by usually shy students, dramatic improvement on tests, and 100% homework completion with class points. These systems harness the power of adolescent peer pressure. “Well, if it’s for points, I’ll share...” “I don’t want to let my team down, so I’ll stay up and complete the homework...”</li> <li>Set a threshold that the class must meet within a certain time frame (six-weeks, for example) and then celebrate success once the threshold is reached.</li> <li>This basic strategy works equally well for elementary teachers with a self-contained class and secondary teachers with multiple classes of students.</li> </ul>
<b>The Peace Pole</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To reinforce students as they interact respectfully and peacefully with each other, you can add a block to the “Peace Pole” for each consecutive day without tattling, fights, disrespectful comments, etc. Once the pole is 25 blocks high, you can celebrate with a predetermined reward.</li> </ul>
<b>Earn a Class Pet</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have students brainstorm possible class pets and then vote, in the beginning of the year, on whether they want fish, a hamster, a turtle, etc.</li> <li>Once students have reached the goal that you have set for them (perfect homework completion from everyone for fifteen days, bathroom breaks that take 5 minutes or less for 3 weeks, etc.) you and a few students can take a trip to the pet store.</li> <li>You might find that the local pet store is willing to give you the pet and starter supplies for free or at a discount.</li> </ul>

Strategy	Explanation
<b>Guest Speakers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider the reflections of secondary science corps member Kristen Bourguet (South Louisiana '99): "Creating a positive rewards system that aligned with my belief that all students can continue their education after high school was very important. Often I would reward students with candy, but I realized I was not showing them the opportunities that awaited them outside our fence. Using a guest speaker from a local program was an excellent way to show them both my appreciation for their hard work and an opportunity that they could experience post-graduation."</li> </ul>
<b>Build a Bookworm</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create book report forms in the shape of a large circle (you might have a space for title, author, publisher, number of pages, description of main character, basic conflict in the story, and resolution). Every time a child reads a book, he or she should complete a form and have an interview with the Bookworm monitor (either yourself or a student who has been taught to ask questions about the book).</li> <li>After the interview, the Bookworm monitor tapes the form to the growing "Bookworm" on the wall. As soon as the Bookworm's tail comes around to touch his head, the class earns a pre-determined reward.</li> </ul>
<b>Popcorn Party</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A popcorn party is a very inexpensive way to celebrate student success, and early elementary corps members report the effectiveness of this strategy.</li> <li>Similar to the class challenge, the teacher places a few kernels of popcorn in a jar as recognition of, for example, excellent behavior and respectful, encouraging comments during a community meeting. Once the jar is full, the class has a popcorn party.</li> </ul>
<b>Class Feasts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At the end of each unit, Cecily Feltham (Los Angeles '99) and her third grade students throw an "Authentic Feast, _____-style" (the style being Egyptian, or Mesopotamian, or whichever culture they had been studying).</li> <li>Any student who passes the end-of-the-unit exam and submits an excellent "If I Lived in _____" project can attend the feast, where they have a party the way that civilization would have. At their Egyptian-style feast they listened to Egyptian music, ate Egyptian food, wore Egyptian clothes, and played Egyptian games.</li> </ul>
<b>Paper Chain</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To motivate students to follow the class rules even when not in the classroom, Crystal Taylor-Perry (Atlanta '00) adds a link to a paper chain that hangs from the ceiling every time her class receives a compliment or good report when they are away from her (for example, at a special or at lunch). Once the chain reaches the floor, the class has a pizza party.</li> </ul>
<b>Student of the...</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Although you want to emphasize teamwork and group success, it is also important to offer individual recognition. You might have a Student of the Week for any student who completes all of her homework and never has to change her color card.</li> <li>In Sara Cotner's (South Louisiana '00) class, students who hold on to their 100 points for the entire week (90 points come from behavior and 10 from homework completion) are Star Students for the week, and they earn one Dazzling Dollar that can be used to purchase things like Line Leader for the Day, a maze worksheet, five minutes of show and tell, etc. One student is selected to be the Special Star Student of the week. At the end of the month, she takes the four Special Star Students out for ice cream.</li> </ul>

The **Classroom Management & Culture Toolkit** (found online at the Resource Exchange on TFA.Net) has examples of positive reinforcers (p. 60) that can serve as rewards for individual students or the whole class. ✖ As you consider how you might implement these motivational systems, keep the following caveat in mind: a good teacher thinks of *specific* things that will motivate *specific* children. An effective coach knows he sometimes needs to deliver slightly different pep talks to each key player in order to spur them to strive tirelessly in the big game. A strong political leader knows and appeals to the values, feelings, and interests of her constituencies when crafting new legislation. And a successful teacher

## Valuing Hard Work, Team Effort, and Academic Achievement

constantly discovers more and more of what makes each student “tick” and uses that information to draw out and motivate him or her. You discover that Ayodele eats up the *Animorphs* series and that Kenneth could spend days drawing cartoon characters. You learn that Sheldon is the star of the basketball team and has a deep respect for his coach.

What do you do with this information? You use it. You read *Animorphs: The Pretender* and you discuss it with Ayodele after reviewing spelling words with her after school. You help Kenneth improve his paragraph writing by asking him to write about the pictures he draws. You meet with Sheldon’s coach and invest him in your academic and behavioral goals for Sheldon. In a nutshell, you determine the interests, values, fears, dreams, and influential relationships of your students and you differentiate your motivational techniques for each student in your class. This isn’t an easy task. Getting to know what makes a student tick takes time. One of the best ways to get a jumpstart on finding out what students are interested in, whom they admire, and what tangible reward they might be willing to work towards – all insights you can utilize to motivate them to work hard – is to administer a student survey at the beginning of the year.

Just as we ended your *Instructional Planning & Delivery* text with a message of differentiating your instruction to meet the needs of your students, we cannot overstate how critical it is to remember that we teach individuals. Building a culture of achievement involves managing group dynamics, but it also requires serving the needs and desires of every student in the room. By taking the time to listen to your students, you can develop a stronger grasp of how you might tap into your students’ experiences and opinions to develop in them an infectious desire to reach new academic heights.

### Conclusion and Key Concepts

Throughout these texts, we emphasize the direct correlation between leadership skills and teaching. Teachers are leaders, of their classrooms, their schools, and their communities. As a strong leader moving your students toward the class’s ambitious academic goals, you should think of every way you can to rally and motivate them.

- First, **develop an academic vision** for your classroom to help students see what they will accomplish during the year. Excellent teachers develop motivating academic destinations throughout the year that require students to use many of the competencies they’ve developed.
- In order to convince students that they can achieve the yearlong vision, **reflect on what you will celebrate and value in your classroom**. It is especially important that you help students realize that hard work will lead to success and the importance of collaboration in reaching your class goals.
- You should then translate these values into **clear, recurring messages** that are reinforced through class names, themes, mottos, chants, or visual displays. You must think of yourself as a marketer and maximize every opportunity to convey your values.
- You must ensure that **your classroom reflects and reinforces your values** – that your students experience a reality behind your messages. To do that, you should model your messages in your interaction with students, develop class “policies” that reflect what you value, establish motivating academic destinations, and implement systems that reward achievement or progress toward your values.