Student Beliefs And Student Achievement

Last week I had the opportunity to return to the Pride Academy in East Orange, NJ and spend time with staff as they prepared for the start of a new school year. Last year the Pride Academy received an Effective Practice Incentive Community (EPIC) Silver Gains Award for Driving Dramatic Student Achievement Gains.

I've worked with the school for the past four years continually identifying the changes needed in "what students do" to raise achievement and the changes in "what teachers do" that promote the students' efforts. See February's school blog.
In this session teams set student achievement goals for the school year and analyzed student behaviors that would be needed to get those gains. We explored how collaborative inquiry and project based learning could assist in generating the needed student behaviors.
I added a component asking the teaching teams to consider the student beliefs that would encourage the desired behaviors.
A recent online publication in **Education Week Teacher (Polling Group: Student Success Linked to Positive Outlook)** provides some interesting data concerning three positive traits closely linked to academic success.
Roughly half of American students today are **hopeful** about their futures.
Two-thirds of students are **engaged** in their learning.
Two-thirds have **high well-being**.
The data was reported by Gallop Inc. Quoting Shane Lopez, a senior scientist , *"The finding on student hope is significant because, according to the organization's meta-analysis of studies linking hope and achievement, hope accounts for about 13 percent of the variance in students' academic success (defined by markers such as attendance, credits attempted and earned, and graduation). That's a significant chunk."*
Lopez said hope means students *"believe the future will be better than the present, and that they have the power to make*

it so.” Surprisingly, he noted, hope among students has almost no correlation to family income (in contrast to findings on hope for the nation as a whole).

With the staff at the Pride Academy I used this video clip of Will Smith to trigger thinking about helpful student beliefs.

Here are some beliefs the teachers identified as important:

Where I am is not where I need to remain.

Making mistakes is not only ok but often an important part of learning.

Developing a skill takes repetition and practice.

I am capable of mastering things I’ve failed at before.

We then examined ideas for providing students collaborative inquiry activities around such beliefs. Getting the kids to research, reflect and present to their classmates rather than the teacher telling them.

What role does practice play in developing skills?

How common is it for people to experience failure before success?

One teacher had the idea that each group of students could explore a different belief and include in their presentation to classmates a banner to decorate the room.

I’m thinking that getting students to reflect on their beliefs might help focus the needed learning behaviors.

One last quote from Shane Lopez: *“There are some things you can do as a principal [to increase student engagement] but the number one thing you can do is make sure your teachers are engaged.”*