

Oak Park Elementary School District 97  
Oak Park, Illinois

March 29, 2014

## High Expectations Teaching

### **Overview**

This report provides information about the District's plans to implement High Expectations Teaching in our classrooms. High Expectations Teaching is what teachers do to create an atmosphere in which high expectations are communicated clearly and convincingly to all students, not just some. It represents a philosophy and set of teaching practices that has been communicated to us by the Research for Better Teaching organization.

### **Background**

Research for Better Teaching (RBT) is an educational consulting organization in Acton, Massachusetts founded by Dr. Jon Saphier in 1979 and dedicated to the professionalization of teaching and leadership. Since founding the organization, Dr. Saphier and his RBT colleagues have taught in-depth professional development programs based on their extensive research into the qualities that define excellent teaching to educators throughout the United States and internationally. Along with twenty-one senior educators who have extensive experience in teaching and leadership, RBT works closely with more than 100 school districts across the United States each year. RBT offers nationally recognized programs that develop teacher evaluation systems; train data coaches and data teams; develop leadership skills for strong school culture and build in-house professional development capacity to ensure skillful teaching.

John Saphier notes that there is a real knowledge base about how to get low-performing, discouraged students to exert effective effort. These skills are teachable, learnable and indispensable to eliminating the achievement gap.

High expectations teachers do set high standards for students. They do substantially more than enable students to meet them. High expectations teachers convince their students, especially those who are behind and discouraged, that ability is malleable and that they can increase their ability in a subject where they may have given up. Jon Saphier states, “Smart is something you can get.” High expectations teachers not only convince students they are able, they also convince them that effective effort, not innate ability makes the difference.

High expectations teachers explicitly teach students how to exert effective effort through the following tasks:

- Specific interactive skills in everyday classroom situations
- Explicit teaching of effective study strategies
- Surrounding students with structures and practices that relentlessly communicate three key messages: “This is important; you can do it, and I’m not going to give up on you.”

Now in its fifteenth year, RBT has trained more than 700 teachers. District 97 has engaged the services of Research for Better Teaching to help our teachers and administrators improve our skill set in nurturing motivation through our own High Expectations Teaching course. This course is designed to examine at a drill-down detail level what high-expectation teachers do. The instructor for the course is Renee DeWald who has worked with RBT for many years. She is also the RBT instructor with Evanston Public Schools.

Forty staff members, including administrators and teachers from each building and the central office have been participating in a high expectations teaching course for most of this school year, learning how to:

- Increase student motivation
- Teach students to work harder and more effectively
- Send consistent messages to children that:
  - What we are doing is important
  - You can do it
  - I’m not going to give up on you - even if you give up on yourself
- Help students link effort to success
- Apply theories of malleable intelligence and academic ability
- Apply the concept of rigor and the meaning of high standards

- Design classroom structures and procedures to support students' belief in "effort-based ability"

Strategies have been presented that a teacher should use to maintain an effective environment for learning. Teachers have learned how to design and evaluate their lessons and how to organize their classroom. Research has been shared that shows a high correlation between teacher expectation and student learning.

Through videos of classroom teaching, readings, and discussions, teachers and administrators have been expected to apply the skills of the course in their own classrooms and report on progress during the course. Throughout the year, teachers and administrators have shared what they have learned with their colleagues during staff meetings and other professional development opportunities. There have been homework assignments, presentations and experiments to ensure that everyone is involved and gets the most out of each session.

The class has met in the Board Room from 8:30-3:00. Only one class remains from this original series:

November 15 – 1:00-4:00

December 5

January 16

February 6

February 27

March 20

April 17

May 15

## **Next Steps**

**Parent Meetings:** Superintendent Roberts and I are working with RBT and Renee DeWald to create a series of high expectations classes for parents. The goals of the classes are to teach parents some of the high expectations strategies that they can use with the students at home. This will allow an avenue for students to hear the same effective effort messages at home and at school.

**Current Cohort:** We are also working to offer follow up sessions for the teachers and administrators who are currently in the High Expectations class. These sessions will occur once per trimester.

**Next Cohort:** We are in the process of planning a High Expectations class next year for teachers who may be interested.

**School Extension:** Superintendent Roberts and I are in discussions with Renee Dewald to develop a mechanism to systematically share key aspects of the High Expectations framework with staff.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Felicia Starks Turner  
Director of Administrative Services