

CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

Poughkeepsie City School District

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CHAMPIONS FOR CHILDREN

Truth Students are Engineers in the Making!

Fourth and fifth grade classes at Sojourner Truth engaged in an engineering activity with Library Media Specialist Casey Elmendorff. Students in Ms. Mongroo's class built Lego cars that had to have a protective restraint for their egg so as not in damage or break it while moving. Ms. Lee's fifth grade class designed and built devices to protect their egg from a high drop. Students experimented and took note of their progress, learning about engineering and science while engaging in hands-on activities and collaborative group work.



Did something awesome happen in your classroom or school?

Please share it with us! We'd love to showcase the hard work of our students and staff! Email jbisti@poughkeepsieschools.org with a brief description and an image or two if available.

Calendar Reminders

Give Back Days:

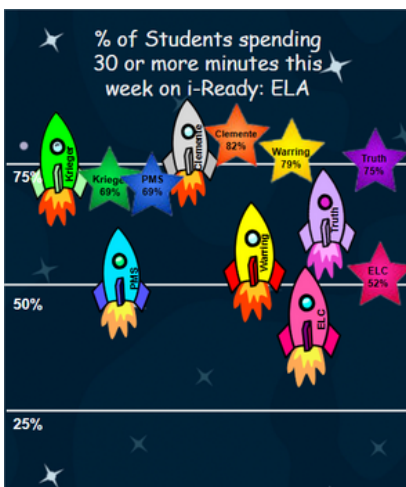
April 21, May 23, May 27, May 28

Spring Recess:

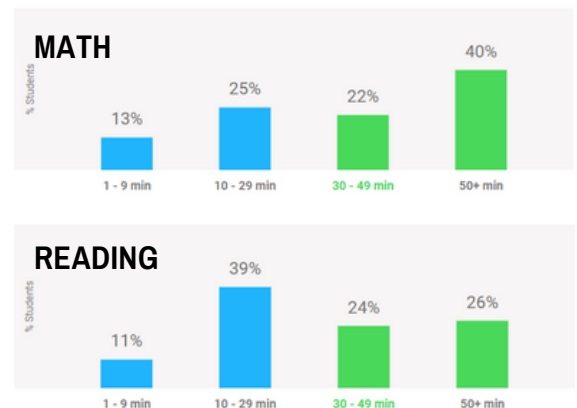
April 14-April 21



i-Ready Independent Pathway



i-Ready Pro



Elevating SUCCESS

From Standard to Standout Learning

<https://ascd.org/el/articles/from-standard-to-standout-learning>

Jennifer Gallagher, December 1, 2022



Photo above: Marine science high school students harvest kelp grown in their school's pond.

Over the last few decades, educators have increasingly questioned traditional models of schooling: The teacher as dispenser-of-knowledge, desks in rows, siloed curricula, and assessments of trivial knowledge. They know the best schools should work to closely involve families and communities, to give all students access to a variety of postsecondary options, and to awaken the joy of learning. But that last part—joy—has been an undervalued and overlooked part of school evaluation and practice, particularly at the secondary level. To bring joy back, leaders will need to nurture significant change.

When we are young children, for most of us, joy is abundant. Curiosity and questions abound. And as adults, we often love to learn things we are interested in; learning is connected to our lives, our jobs, our hobbies. Somehow, though, in between early childhood and adulthood, we extinguish the joy of learning and replace it with drudgery. We replace curiosity with “standardization.” We give students fewer choices about what they study, insisting instead that they all master the same material at the same time. We reward compliance more than creativity. The worst part is that we often accept the absence of joy as a necessary evil of schooling.

A Growing Problem

I see this lack of joy up close as a superintendent: In my district in Long Island, New York, joy is mostly absent in high school students who are taking diploma-required classes that don't seem relevant to them. I see the most engagement among students who are studying topics that interest them—in orchestra classes, science-research programs, the auto shop, and the art room. I can tell from their enthusiasm which students love history and which mathematicians-in-training see beauty in numbers, but in core classes, student engagement is low.

Part of the problem of lackluster student engagement stems from standardized testing. In New York, this year's Earth Science exam, for example, started with the question: “Which two characteristics classify Jupiter as a Jovian planet?” Even if questions like this are answerable, why are they necessary and what makes them relevant to students today? Not only have these exams driven the definition of student success, but they have also been part of our teacher evaluation systems. Teachers who stray from the rigid curriculum and let students have more voice and choice in their learning risk both students' success and their own careers.

Another way student disengagement shows up is in attendance. There are many reasons why students don't come to school, but we should recognize lack of meaningful learning as a contributing factor. Even prior to the pandemic, roughly 16 percent of the nation's high school students were considered chronically absent, according to the U.S. Department of Education (Attendance Works, 2023). The pandemic accelerated this dramatically. If schools don't teach things that matter, students will increasingly decline to connect.

School leaders need the courage to look for real solutions that reinfuse student joy and curiosity into learning at the secondary level. We would be wise to consider new directions in making school matter to students.

1. Identify an essential core of knowledge that all high school graduates need to know well.

Until 1900, human knowledge doubled every 100 years or so, according to Buckminster Fuller's theory of the knowledge doubling curve; now theorists estimate human knowledge doubles about every 12 hours. As our knowledge base expands so quickly, what is considered essential or practical knowledge today may be replaced by new information tomorrow (Chamberlain, 2020).

Schools need to be cognizant of these changes and shift the core body of required knowledge to a much more basic one. For example, I would argue that successful adults need to:

- Be able to read, write, and speak effectively.
- Be fluent in basic math (many adults don't use trigonometry or calculus in daily life).
- Have a big-picture view of science and history.
- Be able to find and evaluate knowledge effectively.

Once students master these basics, they should be able to customize their experiences with work that matters to them. Conducting and documenting original research or participating in workplace internships provides in-depth learning experiences that mimic real life. By narrowing what's necessary for students to learn and broadening what's possible for students to explore, we increase the potential for student joy in learning. School leaders need to continue to push for changes and flexibility in local and state knowledge requirements.

2. Revamp curricula to be more relevant.

In history classes, for example, learning focuses largely on ancient times, and students gain only a cursory understanding of how modern governments function. They also have little geographic knowledge—a critical understanding in our smaller-than-ever world as people communicate globally. Students do not need to know from memory who fought Rome in the Punic Wars. They need a big-picture understanding of historical themes and events with a focus on how those events have influenced the modern world. Emphasizing essential questions and overarching themes helps students to see the “why” underlying historical events, which makes learning more relevant and engaging.

Though science instruction, as another example, has made tremendous strides in leveraging hands-on experiments instead of rote memorization, every student should have more chances to conduct original research, analysis, and reporting. Science textbooks are outdated the moment they go to print; let’s get students reading scientific journals and learning about modern scientific developments. In my district, we are planning to build a marine science laboratory on the bay near the school, where our students can conduct high-level experiments with flow-through water tanks, a boat dock, and direct water access.

3. Support postsecondary training and employment as equally as college.

Though college graduation rates vary by state, data from the U.S. Department of Education makes clear that many high school graduates struggle to finish college (Sandoval, 2023). A long list of careers that don’t require a college degree are predicted to remain in demand—electricians, medical assistants, firefighters, wind turbine technicians, and computer technicians among them (Adam, 2024). In my district, leaders have plans for developing alternative models of high school—including more career-preparation program pathways, opportunities for students to choose classes more aligned to their aspiring career goals, and online and evening class options—which hopefully will enable students to see real choices in their studies. This year, we graduated our first 11 students with industry-standard CTE credentials, which will enable them to get a job (and a good one) right out of high school. We also graduated 12 students from our “Twilight” program who had previously not been successful in a traditional model during the day. The program allowed for more integrated, personalized study in the evening. We are also adding more vocational programs in aquaculture and marine technology, which are growing and relevant fields on our barrier island.

By encouraging students to pursue their occupational interests enthusiastically, we can free students (and caregivers) from thinking that the only path to success is a four-year college degree, eliminating the often-exorbitant debt that accompanies that pathway. There is a natural joy that comes with giving learners agency; it’s the joy in seeing students follow their dreams.

Joy Over Compliance

All students deserve voice in what and how they learn and should be able to see that what they are doing from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. matters. By making changes to schools to ensure that students have choices—and, thus, more satisfaction—leaders can support students’ present well-being and future success. Our students need us to be visionary leaders, not reinforcers of a school structure built for a world of the past. As educators, we can replace compliance with joy in learning.

Editors’ note: This article was adapted from [Let’s Bring Joy Back into Learning](#), originally published on the ASCD Blog. Reflect & Discuss



Students hang up the kelp they harvested to use in marine science experiments.