

Gifted Gram



Why Smart Kids Get Poor Grades

All teachers have had a student who does not live up to his potential in the classroom. We read test results or previous grades and marvel that these scores could have been made by that infuriating little person in the back of the classroom who never turns in his assignments. While poor teachers may choose to blame the underachievement on the student, most effective teachers search for reasons and methods to reach these “little challenges”.

This is not a small problem. In our country, 40% of students who graduated in the top 5% of the class do not graduate from college. Ten to twenty percent of high school dropouts test in the superior range of intelligence. It is a much debated and frustrating problem that has no easy answers.

One strategy that seems to be having success with underachieving students is mentorships. We often provide mentors for our at risk students, but seldom think that our gifted students may benefit from this strategy. We all know of students who are motivated by their coaches, special area teachers, older students or other interested adults. Gifted underachievers also benefit from having a mentor to talk and plan with.

Providing challenge for these students is often touted as the cure for underachievement. This does work for some students, but not others. Most underachieving students will not immediately fall to their knees and say thank you to their teachers for giving them more complex, challenging assignments. Moaning and whining are more likely the students' answers to these efforts. Why don't these students respond to these challenges? Many times it is fear. Gifted students, like all of us, do not like to fail or be shown to be not as smart as their test scores indicate.

One way to counteract this fear of failure is to make sure students have support through challenging activities. Underachieving gifted students need to struggle to feel successful, but they also need to know it is OK to fall down along the way. Monitoring student progress during challenging assignments, and praising small victories works for gifted students, as well as it does for struggling students.

The most important strategy for working with underachievers is to continue to believe in them. It is very hard not to give up on someone who seems to be “throwing it all away.” Keep your high expectations for these students. Try to get to the root of their underachievement. Ask for help from gifted teachers, coaches, mentors and parents. As infuriating as they may be, underachieving gifted students are in desperate need of your expertise and your support. The key to unlocking a bright child's potential may lie in your hands.

More ideas: http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content/underachieving_gifted.html