THE OPPORTUNITY MYTH

What Students Can Show Us About How School Is Letting Them Down—and How to Fix It

#THEOPPORTUNITYMYTH

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Participants in this Session

Talking about Students Who

At the heart of this report are real students, their aspirations and dreams, and how school sets them up—or doesn’t—to reach those goals.
Here’s what we found:

1. Students have big, clear plans for college and career.

2. Most students do what they’re asked in school—but are still not ready to succeed after school.

3. Students spend most of their time in school without access to four key resources: grade-appropriate assignments, strong instruction, deep engagement, and teachers with high expectations.

4. Students of color, those from low-income families, English language learners, and students with mild to moderate disabilities have even less access to these resources than their peers.

5. Greater access to the four resources can and does improve student achievement—particularly for students who start the school year behind
Almost all of them—regardless of who they are—intend to go to college or beyond.

Seventy percent of high schoolers aspire to careers that require at least a college degree.

SOURCE: Student background surveys
Students expect that school will set them up to meet their goals if they do what's asked of them—and they generally do just that.

- **88%** of the time, students are working on activities related to class.
- **71%** of the time, students met the expectations of assignments they're given.
- **83%** earned As, Bs, and Cs in English language arts.
- **78%** earned As, Bs, and Cs in math.

**SOURCE:** Student surveys (for time on task); Student work samples (for meeting assignment expectations); District extant data (for grades)
But even when they do what school asks, they’re not set up for success to reach their long-term goals.

**Students succeeded on**

71% of their assignments

**They met grade-level standards on**

17% of those exact same assignments

Even though most students are meeting the demands of their assignments—and many are earning As and Bs—they’re not prepared for college-level work.

SOURCE: Student work samples
Even in classrooms where students did have grade-appropriate assignments, we often saw students missing out on strong instruction—particularly opportunities to "do the thinking" in their lessons.

Of the nearly 900 core lessons...

only 295 had grade-level content...

and only 74 had grade-level content and asked students to do the thinking.

SOURCE: Observations
Low expectations contribute to a mismatch between grades students receive and their actual readiness to meet their long-term goals.

Among B students in math and English courses...

- **65%** were not at grade-level on grade 3-8 state tests. 94% of C students and 29% of A students were not at grade-level.
- **52%** did not meet the ACT or SAT’s benchmark for college readiness. 77% of C students and 18% of A students did not meet the benchmark.
- **80%** did not pass the AP test. 91% of C students and 50% of A students did not pass the AP test.

*Source: District-provided grades and assessment scores*
All students tended to succeed on grade-level work, but many students of color were denied any opportunity to even try it.

Success rates on grade-level work were similar...

- 56% Success rates on all grade-level assignments from classrooms with mostly students of color
- 65% Success rates on all grade-level assignments from classrooms with mostly white students

...but 4 out of 10 classrooms with a majority of students of color never received a single grade-level assignment.

- 38% Percent of classrooms that had no grade-level assignments in classrooms with mostly students of color
- 12% Percent of classrooms that had no grade-level assignments in classrooms with mostly white students
These four resources make a difference. When students get greater access to them, their outcomes improve.

In our sample, all students made:

- 1.7 months more months of academic progress when they had access to **better assignments**.
- 0.2 months more months of academic progress when they had access to **stronger instruction**.
- 2.5 months more months of academic progress when they reported being **more engaged in class**.
- 4.6 months more months of academic progress when their teachers had **higher expectations**.

**SOURCE:** Value-added models
...That's especially true for students who started the year below grade-level.

In our sample, students who started the year performing substantially below average made:

- 7.3 months of academic progress when they had access to **better assignments**.
- 6.1 months of academic progress when they had access to **stronger instruction**.
- 0.9 months of academic progress when they reported being **more engaged in class**.
- 7.9 months of academic progress when their teachers had **higher expectations**.

**SOURCE:** Value-added models
Dig in and learn more about real students we interviewed or explore resources from TNTP’s Student Experience Toolkit online at: https://tntp.org/student-experience-toolkit.
We’re asking all adults whose choices affect students’ experiences to make two big commitments—and follow through on them.

**EVERY STUDENT SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO...**

...grade-appropriate assignments, strong instruction, deep engagement, and teachers with high expectations, every day, in every class—regardless of their race, ethnicity, or any other part of their identity.

We will continually investigate the extent to which our students receive this access and report on our progress.

**EVERY STUDENT AND FAMILY IS...**

...an authentic partner and should have real opportunities to shape the experiences students have in school, receive accurate and accessible information about their child’s progress, and have a legitimate role in decision-making.

We will continually seek feedback from all students and families about whether we’re living up to this commitment.
Upholding those commitments in practice means undertaking five major actions.

1. Ask students and families directly about their goals and school experiences; listen to what they share; and then act on what they tell you.

2. Make greater access to grade-appropriate assignments an urgent priority for all students, no matter their race, income level, or current performance level.

3. Give all students, especially those who are behind grade level, access to instruction that asks them to think and engage deeply with challenging material.

4. Ensure educators enact high expectations for student success by seeing firsthand that students are capable of succeeding with more rigorous material.

5. Conduct an equity audit to identify school and district-level decisions—from the diversity of staff at all levels to which students are enrolled in honors courses—that give some students greater access than others to key resources.
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Explore *The Opportunity Myth* online, add yourself to the map, and request a personalized action guide.

tntp.org/studentexperiencetoolkit
Browse resources designed to help educators, policymakers, and families improve students' daily experiences in school.
Please share feedback.

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