

Believing in students so they believe in themselves

A familiar face held his right thumb out as he searched for a ride to school. Although I don't up hitchhikers, I decided to stop and offer this former student a ride. As I pulled over to stop, he looked over his shoulder taking notice of the ride he scored. Running full speed ahead, this young man opened the car door and expressed his gratitude once he realizes who stopped for him.

This student once sat in my classroom more than three years ago. I taught him in both the seventh and eighth grades. He struggled with many challenges as a learner, constantly experiencing inconsistency in his ability to succeed academically. Failing classes became commonplace. This student did not believe he was capable of learning, until he proved to himself that he could.

Success in stability

There were points in time when he completed his work to the best of his ability, did very well, and earned good grades. I took these moments as monumental, and made a big deal about the success earned. Unfortunately, these occasions were few and far between. Trying to keep my expectations high proved easier said than done. The commitment to academic and personal success faded in and out on an inconsistent basis.

The environment where a stu-



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dent lives can determine who they are and commit to being. Living with instability makes finding success difficult. Sadly, this was the case for my former student.

Since attending my class as a middle school student, the first time I saw him was last sum-

mer. He did a double-take, turned around and exclaimed, "Hey! You're Vicki! You used to be my teacher! How are you? Are you still teaching?"

Surprised that he remembered and stopped to have a conversation, I said, "Yes, I'm still teaching. Are you still learning?"

He hung his head low for a moment and explained that he had become a "bad kid" and was now

at the probation school until he graduated. Without finding out details, I reminded this student that he is capable of learning and was sorry to hear about his current situation. Wishing him well, I only hoped he would find a good place for himself in this world.

Back in the car

After buckling his seat belt, he inquired about where and what I was teaching. He informed me

that he needed to be dropped off at the probation school. When I asked why he didn't have any books with him, he explained that he leaves them at school because he gets all of his work done before the day ends. He mentioned that he might want to go to college, and may have some available funds from family members to help him. I smiled, and told him he should go and make the most of his experience. I asked him to continue his education, in whatever form it takes, and always remember that he has the potential to be a "good kid."

The car door opened and closed as he expressed his appreciation again

for the ride. I smiled, and still continue to hope that a good environment and better life captures this young man.

Providing encouragement is the least that can

be done to help keep students on a positive track. The minute we stop believing in them, they stop believing in themselves.

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