

*“Deep down I am begging you to teach me  
To learn and create—not just  
to memorize and regurgitate.  
I’m asking you to help me find my own truth.  
I’m asking you to help me find my own beauty.”*

S. T., student, Arlington High  
School, Indianapolis, Indiana 2001



*“External interventions need to address  
systemic issues that can hinder implementation,  
such as lack of teacher capacity to undertake the  
designs, lack of principal leadership, and lack  
of a coherent district infrastructure.”*

“Looking Back over a Decade of Whole-School  
Reform,” Berends, Bodilly and Kirby, *Phi Delta  
Kappan*, October 2002

## QUALITY COUNTS, BUT JUST COUNTING DOESN'T REVEAL ALL THE QUALITIES THAT COUNT

**T**here remains no more important issue to address in this country than the tenacity of low expectations for particular groups of children and youth. The Achievement Gap marked by race, ethnicity, social class or gender is a tear in the fabric of America.

Policymakers are demanding rigorous standards, high cut-scores and content mastery, but behind the classroom door it is the expectations and dispositions of teachers, and their specific expertise with the students in their classrooms, that animate learning. And in the school office, over at the District headquarters and in homes and neighborhoods, expectations emanate from bedrock beliefs about human potential—both through nature and nurture. Beneath and beyond rhetoric and policy that “every child can learn” personal beliefs and expectations drive the transactions of real learning.

**There will be no more fundamental factor in the nation’s success or failure to “leave no child behind” than the deep beliefs of educators, parents, communities—and students themselves—about each person’s potential to achieve at high levels.** Low expectations and their supporting beliefs are often unconscious, and too often unchallenged, like an undertow negating the progress of a swimmer struggling toward shore. They sap the strength of high

standards, equity in finances and facilities, curriculum designs, instructional schedules, teaching techniques, performance incentives and high hopes. Positive beliefs are sources of individual dispositions to strive, of trust that binds communities and of the resolve that shapes constructive systems.

### **We have all heard:**

- Those kids just don’t have the wherewithal to achieve at high levels
- It’s unfair to push those kids hard—it just pushes them out
- We have limited resources and have to put them where they get the greatest return
- Some cultures just don’t value education enough
- If the family doesn’t care, what can a school do in six hours a day?
- We can’t get better without more...

All these attempts at sharp economics and soft sociology are provocative, and flawed. Such “beliefs” sometimes are the byproduct of latent racism. Sometimes they fill the earnest chasm between the “mainstream” culture and marginalized (though not marginal in numbers or potential) American communities. They can be misdirected attempts to cushion—rather than confront—the blows of poor health and housing, of dire family straits or poor adult behavior. Such beliefs can mask evasion of responsibility. When held by others

they can provoke outrage at being on a short leash while being shortchanged. Lack of belief in everyone’s high potential, and low expectations of performance corrodes a foundation of the American system—social justice through fair opportunity.

**What will it take to secure and sustain elimination of the achievement gap?** It will take individuals, communities and systems vigorous and disciplined in their faithfulness to belief in the potential of all students. Neither shortsighted simplicity in programs nor unsustainable complexity in process hit the mark. Coaching, not catcalls, and detailed demonstrations, not shrill demands mark the way. Educators, and the communities and systems that support them, must examine their driving beliefs; they must reinforce their skills and will to reach every student; they must recognize that high expectations, an enriched curriculum and challenging instruction are not rewards to the few for past achievements but are resources for future achievements of all students.

**BELIEVE IT!  
LIVE IT!**

**For more information on the NUA and on school systems committed to an irrefutable belief in the capacity of all students, visit:  
[www.nuatc.org](http://www.nuatc.org)**

### THE NATIONAL URBAN ALLIANCE BELIEVES...

... in the potential—and the right—of every student to strive and to succeed in a rich and rewarding academic curriculum

... in the potential—and responsibility—of those who accept the call to the profession of teaching to draw out that potential from every student

... in the potential for all students through teaching that capitalizes on the strengths of the American culture and of the diverse cultures of our nation

... in the potential of teachers who believe in their students and who provide an accelerated and enriched curriculum to build confident learners who achieve



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