

Student Motivation: The Biggest Problem in American Education and What We Can Do About It

Too many U.S. young people don't seem to come with batteries included for school. As an extensive review of the scholarly literature recently concluded, "Children's interest, enthusiasm, and intrinsic motivation for learning in school deteriorate continuously from their entry into kindergarten until they complete high school (or drop out), with striking losses during the transitions to middle school and high school. The erosion of motivation is especially severe for boys and for students from low socioeconomic, minority, and immigrant backgrounds" (Skinner et al., 2012).

It is not surprising, then, that researchers have found that lack of interest in school is a major problem for the great majority of American teachers. In one recent nationally representative survey, 69% of U.S. teachers reported that low academic motivation is a problem. Indeed, teachers cited low motivation to learn as the number one problem they face in their classrooms (Yeager et al, 2014).

Over the past three years, Search Institute, a non-profit applied research organization based in Minneapolis, has developed the REACH Process, a new resource for strengthening the motivation to learn. The REACH Process helps schools measure student motivation and put in place research-based strategies for strengthening it. The letters in the acronym REACH summarize the components of this promising new model: Relationships, Effort, Aspirations, Cognition, and Heat.

Over the past thirty years, many important steps have been taken to improve the educational performance of American students, from raising academic standards to instituting new tests to strengthening teacher quality. Those and other initiatives have moved the field forward, but to date we have failed to adopt policies and practices that will help *all* young people put forth the effort that is necessary to take advantage of those educational opportunities.

At the Yale Club luncheon on March 16, the President and CEO of Search Institute, Dr Kent Pikel, Y'90, will describe how the REACH Framework can help to balance America's school reform equation and equip young people with the drive they need to succeed in school and beyond.