

## How Your Student Can Become a High Achiever

### ***A brief summary***

*All parents want the best for their children, especially when it comes to school and the careers to follow. But what are the best ways to help your students achieve academically and to set themselves up for successful futures? Research shows a focus on the learning process over learning results (like grades) is a good place to start in helping your child find success. Research also shows that it's important for parents to give praise sparingly and to let their children fail — and learn how to overcome those failures. Programs that engage children in science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects (better known as STEM subjects) are ideal for helping young people focus on process over results, as well as for helping them discover how to overcome challenges and learn from their failures.*

All parents dream big dreams for their children. This starts early as parents dream of their students finding success in school, which will then lead to successful careers.

But there's nothing parents can do to force their children to become high academic achievers. Students must discover their own passion for

learning. But there is one thing parents can do to help their children academically: They can create an ideal learning environment both inside and outside of the home.

Here's a look at the five things parents can do to help their students find success at school and in their careers to come.

### **1. Focus on Process Over Results**

We have a tendency to see high achievers as "smart." But it's important that we recognize high achievers are also hard working. High achievers typically learn from their failures and overcome challenges to achieve their goals. No one becomes a high achiever just because they were born with natural intelligence.

According to a highly respected science journal called *Scientific American*<sup>1</sup>, it's dangerous for young students to see themselves as smart. When students see themselves as smart, they actually become "vulnerable to failure, fearful of challenges and unmotivated to learn." Why? Because a focus on intelligence alone leaves out the need for hard work.

Other studies have found that there's no such thing as being born smart. These studies indicate

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<sup>1</sup> Dweck, Carol S. "The Secret to Raising Smart Kids." *Scientific American*. 18 Dec. 2014.

that IQ exams and similar tests are misleading as measures of natural intelligence<sup>2</sup>.

Rather than focusing on your student's natural intelligence, focus on a learning process that includes hard work and persistence in overcoming failure and challenges. Parents often look at grades as a measure of their students' successes, but it's far more important to look at a student's learning process. Is your student working hard? Is he or she facing challenges without giving up? Those are characteristics that are much more likely to lead to high achievement than natural intelligence.

## 2. Make Learning Fun

Many students see learning and time spent at school as boring. They see time in the classroom as something they have to do. But it's important that students discover fun in learning and that they begin to see time in the classroom as something they want to do.

Parents can help create a fun learning environment at home. Games like chess, Monopoly and Scrabble are educational and entertaining. The same is true of Lego bricks, which promote creativity. Even a trip to the grocery store can be fun and educational if you ask your children to keep track of costs and help you stay within a set budget.

What is your child passionate about? If he or she loves sports, dive into statistics and let your child help you analyze why some players and teams do better than others. If your children love to read, choose to read a book with them so that you can

talk about the characters and the plot. Do your children look forward to vacations? Put them in charge of the map when you're traveling in different areas, or ask them to serve as street sign translators when visiting a foreign country.

All of these ideas add an element of play to learning. And each can help engage your children in a way that will help them become high achievers.

## 3. Let Your Student Fail

It sounds counterintuitive, but it's important as a parent to let your children fail. When young people are protected from failure early on, they end up feeling helpless when they face true failure at higher school levels or in the work world. Failure is inevitable, and it's important that students learn how to deal with it at a young age.

Recall that it's important to focus on the learning process over learning results. When students are focused on the process, they also learn how to weather challenges and overcome failures. In short, a focus on the learning process rather than learning results turns students into problem solvers who are capable of learning from failure — and who will someday become high achievers in school and in career.

MacArthur Fellowship grantee Angela Lee Duckworth is an expert on the importance of failure. She calls the ability to overcome failure "grit." She says that grit is "the disposition to pursue very long-term goals with passion and perseverance, sustained over time." In her studies, she found that the concept of grit correlated strongly to high achievement in different environments like the United States

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<sup>2</sup> Heckman, James J. "Lessons From the Bell Curve." *The Journal of Political Economy* 103.5 (1995): 1091–1120.

Military Academy and the Scripps National Spelling Bee.

#### 4. Give Praise Sparingly

Here's another counterintuitive idea for helping your child become a high achiever: Give praise sparingly. It's always tempting to tell a child how smart he or she is after doing something successfully. But calling a child "smart" is focusing on learning results rather than the learning process.

Rather than saying how smart your child is, focus on how hard he or she worked. Here's a brief example of restrained praise for a high-achieving student:

Kwasi Enin, a high schooler in New York, earned 2250 out of a possible 2400 points on his SAT. He is a member of the track and field team, and he plays viola in the school orchestra. He also gained acceptance into all eight Ivy League schools: Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Columbia, Penn, Dartmouth, Brown and Cornell<sup>3</sup>.

When asked about his achievement, Kwasi said it was "never an intention" to get into all eight Ivy League schools, but rather he simply focused on working hard in hopes of getting into one or two.

His father, who came to the United States from Ghana in the 1980s, didn't lavish praise on Kwasi after his son's accomplishments. Instead, he simply said: "We have been encouraging him to be an all-around student. So far, he has proved himself."

This type of focus on process over results and giving restrained praise are key parts of developing high-achieving students.

#### 5. Engage Your Student in Robotics, Coding and Other STEM Programs

It's only natural for students to want to focus on subjects that feel most comfortable. Many students avoid STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) because they feel like subjects for gifted and talented students<sup>4</sup>.

This goes against the idea of focusing on the learning process over learning results. When you focus on the learning process, there's no such thing as a gifted and talented student. Instead there are only students who worked hard enough to achieve.

Students can challenge themselves by embracing subjects that don't feel comfortable, and they also put themselves in a position to fail — and to learn from that failure. Students who embrace STEM subjects because they feel like a natural fit are also students who will feel helpless when they ultimately meet failure.

The same is true outside of school. Process-based learners who have met failure and overcome challenges are the ones who excel in the workplace. They thrive in communicating with others and developing strong relationships. Process-based learners get into the best colleges, and they also secure the best jobs upon graduation.

STEM subjects are perfect for challenging your students for other reasons, too. Research shows

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<sup>3</sup> Dowdy, Zachary R. "Shirley Student Accepted at All 8 Ivy League Schools." *Newsday*. 31 Mar. 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Meyrick, Kristy M. "How STEM Education Improves Student Learning." *Meridian K–12 School Computer Technologies Journal* 11.1 (2011).

that STEM programs enhance problem-solving skills and student motivation. When students learn a process for solving problems, the most difficult of challenges begins to feel more manageable. And when challenges feel manageable, students are more eager and motivated to find other challenges to overcome.

### **In Summary**

We believe all students can be high achievers, no matter their ages, their genders or how innately intelligent they consider themselves. Our coding programs tie together many of the concepts and tasks that promote high achievement, including:

- **Experience:** Our programs use an experiential approach that brings to life what students learn in the classroom.
- **Fun:** We designed our labs to be creative and modern environments that promote the “play” aspect of learning.
- **Independence:** Students discover persistence and innovation as instructors follow a hands-off philosophy.
- **Opportunity:** Your child gets the opportunity to fail and to learn from failure — a key component in developing the beneficial “grit” mentioned above.
- **Process:** Learning is a process at UCode, one that your child can apply toward high achievement in all walks of life.