

DOINGWHATWORKS



Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Placing Value on Doing Well Academically

Crossland High School, Maryland • March 2010

Topic: Helping Students Navigate the Path to College
Practice: Prepare Students Academically

Highlights

- The principal at Crossland High School talks about the strategies that were implemented to establish a college-going culture.
- The school requires all students reading at grade level to enroll in at least one honors class. Juniors and seniors at grade level are expected to take at least one Advanced Placement class. The teachers believe that all students can do the work but may lack the motivation to learn.
- After each grading period, the school holds an Honor Roll Assembly where students are recognized for their academic achievements. Parents are invited to join in the celebration.
- Because the school emphasizes and celebrates academic achievement, students consider it “popular” to get good grades.

About the Site

Crossland High School
Temple Hills, MD

Demographics

89% Black

8% Hispanic

2% Asian

1% White

66% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

7% English Language Learners

8% Special Education

Crossland High School is a comprehensive public school that serves predominantly African American students and students from low-income families. Several key components drive the school's success, including:

- Offering a rigorous, traditional comprehensive program along with a technical academy;
- Collecting and reviewing achievement data to make student-level decisions;
- Communicating frequently with students, parents, and staff;
- Providing students with a disciplined and safe learning environment;
- Implementing a college-going culture and providing supports to help students attend and succeed in college; and
- Providing direct assistance to students and their families in applying, being accepted, and transitioning to college.

Full Transcript

Charles Thomas: My name is Charles Thomas, and I am the principal here at Crossland High School.

We have had to convince our teachers that we have to teach our children how to be honors students. We have to teach them how to be AP [advanced placement] students. We have to teach them how to be IB [international baccalaureate] students. They haven't had those experiences in the past, and if we don't teach them how to be good students, they may never become good students. But the bedrock belief is that the children do have the ability to learn, and the only thing that may have been missing or the only thing that might be missing right now is the motivation to do the work.

Classroom teacher, to students: Excuses are?

Students: Excuses are monuments of nothingness. They are the bridges that lead to nowhere. Those people who use these tools are incompetent and masters of no one.

Thomas: If a kid comes to me and they are already reading on grade level, I want to challenge them and I want to challenge them as much as I can. So I have many ninth graders taking honors classes. When they become tenth graders, eleventh graders, and twelfth graders, if they are still reading on grade level or if

they are taking an honors class, then I ask them to take an Advanced Placement class. Right now, we have 1,400 students and we have over 700 kids taking honors classes. I think that that has become something that has become a badge of pride for our students.

At first, a lot of our students were afraid to take honors classes. A lot of their parents were afraid to have them take honors classes because they were afraid either that the kid couldn't do it or they were afraid that it would hurt their grade point average. But I think that now that's all changed because our kids have taken the challenge, they have embraced the honors classes, they have embraced the AP classes, they are even embracing the IB classes. And I think that the more that we are able to have these children succeed, the other children that are watching them, the other children outside the school who are coming in, they are beginning to believe that they too can do it as well. The fact that the kids have had an opportunity to participate, whether or not they did make the honor roll, and I think when they saw the value that we placed on doing well academically, it became more and more popular, popular with the students and it became popular with the parents as well.

One of the problems that we had had at the school prior to 2004 was that parents did not come to the school to celebrate anything. Usually, when they did come to the school, it was to complain about something, and that adversarial relationship that the school had with parents was part of what had to change. And I knew that parents like to hear good news. They don't always want to hear bad news. So I wanted to make sure that we told parents when their kids did well and that we showed parents how much we appreciated it when their kids did well. So whenever we gave out the report cards, we would also send along a letter to the parents that said, "Your child made the honor roll. We are going to have an Honor Roll Assembly; we want you to come."

Thomas, to students in assembly: I know that your parents are proud of you. I know your teachers are proud of you. And you better believe your principal is proud of you.

I think that was one of the important things that we did from the start, to say to everybody—all of our stakeholders—that it's okay to make good grades and it is not okay to denigrate good grades. That is not what we do here. We are going to try to be successful; everybody is going to try to be successful. When our kids make 4.0 grade point averages or higher, and we introduce them at the Honor Roll Assembly, first of all, we do it separately. Second, we enunciate exactly what that grade point average is, if it's 4.0 or if it's 4.75, and we give them engraved plaques because we believe that that type of extraordinary effort requires an extraordinary response.