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Education Commission of the States Releases Brief on How Teachers’ Expectations of Students Can Affect Student Achievement

Negative expectations are estimated to account for 5% to 10% of the variance in student achievement.

DENVER—Teachers are the single most important in-school factor that affects student achievement. As such, policymakers and education leaders have placed more attention on evaluating and improving the effectiveness of teachers.

One seemingly small facet of teachers’ behavior—their expectations of students—can have significant implications for student outcomes.

Several studies show teachers’ positive and negative expectations of students can be based on race, ethnicity, income, and past performance. Negative expectations are estimated to account for 5% to 10% of the variance in student achievement and may explain a small part of the country’s achievement gap. Effects on individual students can be great and might explain their lack of academic gains over the course of a school year.

Research findings point to several solutions:
- Teacher preparation – Ensure the right people enter the teaching profession
- Teacher professional development – Raise teachers’ awareness of their biases so behavior can be changed
- Teacher evaluation systems – Use measures that identify teachers’ expectations and perceptions of students
- Preparation for the Common Core or other state standards – Ensure teachers expect all students to meet new, higher standards.

Teacher Expectations of Students, the latest Progress of Education Reform brief, can help policymakers and education leaders close the achievement gap by making sure every classroom has a high-quality teacher who sets high expectations for every student.

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