STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING ACADEMIC EFFICACY

Academic efficacy reflects the beliefs that a child has about their own ability to learn and be successful academically (Doll, Brehm & Zucker, in press).

EXAMPLES OF MICRO-CHANGES IN ROUTINES AND PRACTICES

- Deliver 'strong praise' to students several times a day: One sentence describing what the student did; a second sentence saying why it mattered; and a third sentence stating how much you appreciated it.
- Coach students to use 'strong praise' with each other. Begin by giving students small tokens or chips for a job well done; then, let students take over responsibility for awarding tokens to classmates when they catch them being great. Make sure the tokens reward effort, diligence, careful work, and helpfulness – not just success. Script some words that classmates will say to each other as they award the tokens.
- Provide prompt, accurate, and specific feedback to students about their successes on classroom work.
- Teach a 'strategy of the week' that students can use to succeed on schoolwork. Give each strategy a name, model it, have the students practice it three or four times on simple tasks, and then prompt them to use the strategy several times a day. At the end of the week, add the strategy to the classrooms 'book of learning tricks' and periodically review previous strategies.
- Use a 'task ladder' to teach unfamiliar tasks by first discussing a model of a completed task; then assign a task for two or three students to complete together and then check against a key; next assign a task for students to complete independently and check against a key; and finally assign a task for students to complete independently and turn in.
- Guide students through step-by-step planning for large assignments: Break the assignment down into six or eight steps; Complete one step at a time; Review and check the whole assignment; Track their progress over time while they work through the assignment. And always, always 'pat themselves on the back' as each step is done.
- Identify times and places that students can use to get extra help if they need it: A twenty-minute lunchtime openhouse; a bit of 'catch up' time carved out of class; or a half-hour 'think about it' time after school. Students who are caught up can use that time to earn extra credits by showing a classmate.
- Immediately and forcefully confront any shaming, embarrassing, or cajoling comments about students by classmates or others.

EVIDENCE-BASED INTERVENTIONS

Evidence-based interventions that address academic efficacy generally incorporate efficacy units into larger multi-unit programs to strengthen their overall autonomy and social competence:

- Positive Action Program (Flay, Allred, & Ordway, 2001). This is a wellness-oriented program that teaches students in kindergarten through twelfth grade to self-assess, set, and work towards self-improvement goals. Some of the units foster students' sense of efficacy. At each grade level, there are scripted classroom units and a manualized intervention for school mental health professionals to use with students at greater risk. Evidence suggests that this program strengthens students' social emotional skills.
- Unique Minds School Program (Stern, 1999; Linares et al., 2005). This manualized curriculum provides lessons for kindergarten through fifth grade students to enhance their self-efficacy, problem-solving, and social-emotional functioning.
- Strong Kids (Merrell, Gueldner, & Tran, 2008). This curriculum provides classroom teachers with 10-12 half-hour lessons on diverse topics related to social emotional learning. As part of its broader target of strengthening social emotional competence, the program includes several units addressing students' recognition of their personal strengths and success. Versions of the Strong Kids curricula are available for preschool, early elementary, late elementary, and middle school grades. Improvements in social emotional competence are modest but significant, and the program is easier to implement than many therapy-based interventions.

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