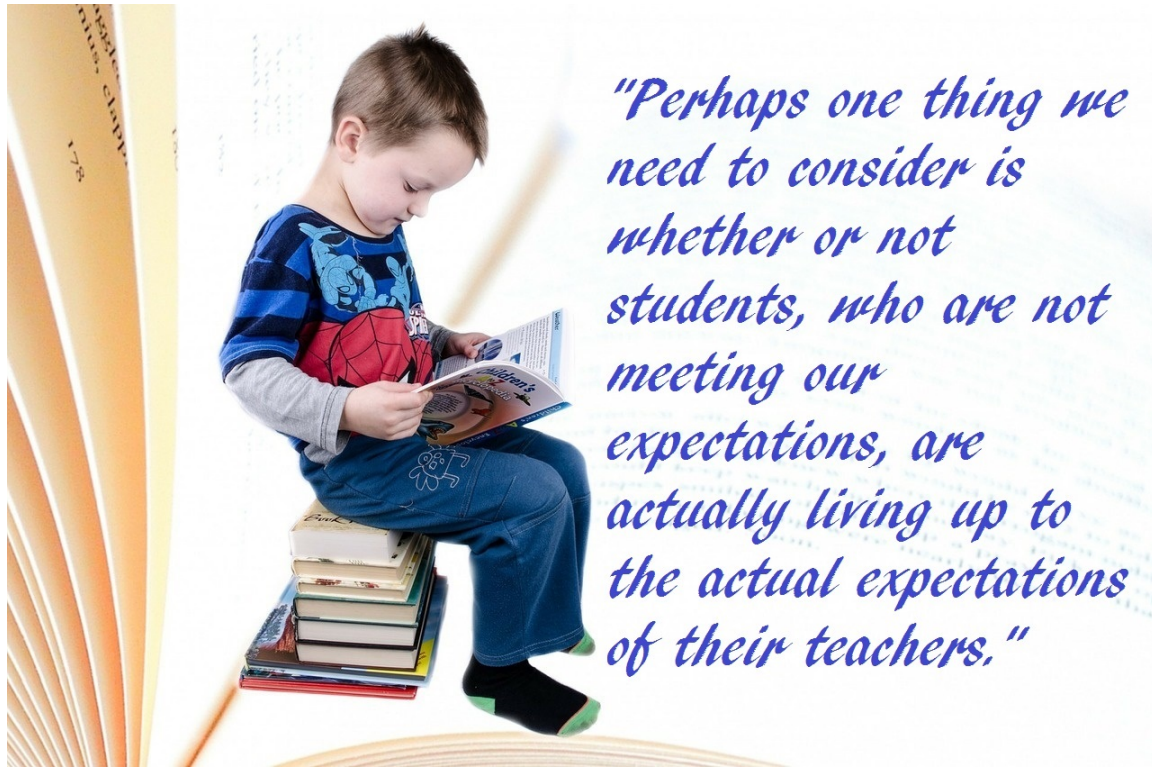


From *Education Follies: four decades of tilting at windmills for no apparent reason*  
by Jeff Lee Byrem, (c) 2016



*"Perhaps one thing we need to consider is whether or not students, who are not meeting our expectations, are actually living up to the actual expectations of their teachers."*

## *Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement*

Let's consider two experiences:

- In *A Vision for Wilmington Schools*<sup>1</sup> (Delaware), Matthew Albright of the News Journal reported that a redistricting proposal "...drew outrage from teachers -- who felt they were being blamed for poor performance, when poverty was the real issue..."
- At the conclusion of a Mastery Charter School (Philadelphia) faculty meeting, I observed what I was told was the traditional way that such meetings concluded: the assembled faculty and administrators raised plastic cups filled with sparkling

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<sup>1</sup> <<http://www.delawareonline.com/story/news/education/2015/03/06/vision-city-school/24534621/>>

cider, repeated the Mastery Mission Statement (with zest), and then shouted, “No Excuses!”

You may find it interesting that the disadvantaged students of the outraged teachers have consistently failed to show sufficient progress on Delaware State Testing Program exams, while the Mastery teachers’ students (from the most economically-challenged neighborhoods in Philadelphia) are continuing to show significant growth on Pennsylvania System of School Assessment exams.

I posit that the underlying and most significant reason for the difference in these students’ performance is teachers’ expectations.

The relationship of teacher expectations to student achievement has an intuitive feel to it: if you were a parent in an economically-challenged neighborhood (heck, in your economically-challenged world), who would you want to teach your child, a teacher who proclaims they’re not responsible for your economically-disadvantaged child’s performance, or a teacher who proclaims, “no excuses!”

I would not be writing this if I had simply intuited the relationship between expectations and achievement; I’m writing it because that relationship has been one of the most intensely studied and verified phenomena in classrooms (since 1964!).

If I’ve piqued your curiosity, I strongly encourage you to visit the following links:

- An NPR, Morning Edition story presents the evidence and a research-supported approach to changing teacher expectations: [\*Teachers’ Expectations Can Influence How Students Perform\*](#)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> < <http://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2012/09/18/161159263/teachers-expectations-can-influence-how-students-perform>>

- A [Wikipedia entry for Jane Elliott](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jane_Elliott)<sup>3</sup>, the teacher who explored how expectations related to racism can influence student behavior, and [The Eye of the Storm](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0WamPOPjd_E)<sup>4</sup>, which documents Elliott's experiment.

If the relationship between teacher expectations and student achievement is such a well-documented phenomenon, you may be asking yourself, why aren't educators doing what needs to be done to change their own expectations? I refer you to this quote from Francis Cummins Lockwood (1913):

*We must review with profound respect the infinite capacity of the human mind to resist the introduction of useful knowledge.*

Another more important reason is that changing expectations must occur by changing teacher behavior. There are countless ways a teacher interacts with students every day, and each nuanced way can convey expectations. As the *Morning Edition* story explains, just *telling* professionals about the link between expectations and achievement does not change teacher behavior. What is required is an involved, supported, self-analysis by teachers of their daily behavior. I suggest that school districts and state departments of education have demonstrated, thus far, that they do not have the organizational will and/or understanding needed to pursue something that is known to be the “thing” most likely to improve student achievement. (Note: the L.A. County Office of Education, the originator of TESA or [Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement](http://www.lacoe.edu/Home/CommunityServices/ParentCommunityServices/TESA.aspx)<sup>5</sup> training is a notable exception.)

Concern for students within the Wilmington, Delaware, city limits has prompted politicians to respond to voices in the community that decry student achievement that does not meet expectations. A major caveat related to the concern is that student

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<sup>3</sup> < [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jane\\_Elliott](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jane_Elliott)>

<sup>4</sup> < [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0WamPOPjd\\_E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0WamPOPjd_E)>

<sup>5</sup> < <http://www.lacoe.edu/Home/CommunityServices/ParentCommunityServices/TESA.aspx>>

achievement is measured by standardized tests that have no business being used for that purpose, but putting that aside, it appears that leaders believed redistricting would provide an opportunity to take better advantage of school district, community, and parental support for what has been a divided city educationally since a [1978 desegregation decree](#)<sup>6</sup>. It didn't work in 1978 and it will not work now.

It would be my hope, as someone who served as a teacher and leader in Delaware beginning in 1974, that the citizens of New Castle County and elsewhere will come to realize that simply drawing new district lines and reassigning leadership will not bring about improved student achievement.

Perhaps one thing we need to consider, before anything else, is whether or not students, who are not meeting our expectations, are actually living up to the actual expectations of their teachers.

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<sup>6</sup> < <http://colossus.mu.nu/archives/221158.php> >