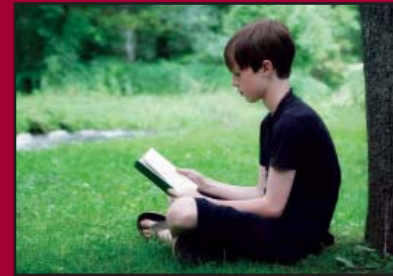




Skills for a Lifetime

Teaching Students the Habits of Success

By Gene Bottoms and Ione Phillips



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Michael F. Fitzpatrick, Katharine Gray, Nancy Harper, Janet Smalley, Charity G. Young and Grey M. Young developed the chapters found in Section 2 of this publication. SREB thanks them for their willingness to tell their schools' stories and for providing concrete examples of how the habits of success can be implemented effectively in a variety of forms.

Kenna Barger and Donna Farmer provided mathematics instructional expertise in the development of this publication, particularly in Chapter 10.

The following SREB staff members also contributed to the production of this publication: Mary Johnson, former director of communications and publications for *HSTW*; Lisa Johnston, associate director of communications; Emily Kagey, chief editor for school improvement; Allison Timberlake, director of assessment and evaluation for school improvement; and Leonard Wandu, graphic designer for school improvement.

The development of this publication and related research were supported by the Goldman Sachs Foundation. The findings and recommendations are solely those of the authors.

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FOREWORD

For almost two decades, our schools and classrooms have been operating under the assumption that higher standards, more assessments and more reports of results will reduce dropout rates and raise achievement; and, nationally, we have not seen the improvements or results that we expected. During this same time, we have had little conversation about *what students need* from our schools and classrooms in order to find both a purpose for staying in school and the motivation to succeed.

Through its own data, field experiences and research, *High Schools That Work (HSTW)* has found that students in high-performing schools are more likely to take charge of their own learning. They do this because their teachers, counselors, advisers and school leaders created a school culture that provided them with opportunities to enroll in intellectually demanding courses, taught them the *habits of success* to succeed in such courses, and expected them to apply these habits to their learning and their personal lives. Low-performing schools, in contrast, are much more likely to blame poor achievement on students' lack of ability or parents' lack of support, rather than giving students access to courses taught to higher standards, taking the time to understand the types of learning experiences that motivate students and teaching students how to improve their own achievement.

The reality is that too many students do not understand *how* to succeed and — worse yet — too many do not understand *why* they should put forth the effort to succeed in the middle grades and high school. A list of standards is not enough to prepare students for the real world, and it certainly is not enough to motivate most students to make the effort needed to succeed in challenging high school courses.

We cannot simply teach the course content and expect students to translate that information into success in careers and postsecondary studies. We must provide students with the tools and support to develop their own independent learning skills. **If we want more students to succeed, we must begin to focus more attention and time on building students' capacity to improve their own future.**

This publication is designed to help schools develop a culture that results in more students becoming motivated, responsible students — a culture in which *all* students can acquire the habits of success that they will need in high school, postsecondary studies, advanced training and careers.

As you read this book, consider the steps your school still needs to take to ensure more of your students know how to become successful students, workers and citizens. SREB is prepared to work with schools through the following process to develop a school-specific approach to teaching students the habits of success:

1. **Identify the problem.** This includes taking ownership of the problem and making a commitment to address it. Specificity is key when defining the problem. For example, having “a ninth-grade student achievement problem” is too broad. Instead, perhaps low achievement is the manifestation of the underlying problem — ninth-grade students lack the habits of success necessary for the more independent learning required in high school.
2. **Identify possible causes.** Commonly known as root-cause analysis, this step involves identifying all of the factors that might contribute to the problem as well as highlighting those factors that are the principal causes. Perhaps students lack the habits of success because few parents spend quality time working with their students on school work, or perhaps teachers do not explicate and emphasize these skills in assignments. Maybe classroom instruction and assignments are not sufficiently challenging or engaging and therefore do not require students to build and utilize those habits.
3. **Set goals.** Once the problem has been clearly identified and the possible causes have been detailed, it is time to set goals for what you want to accomplish. What outcomes do you want to achieve? How will those outcomes be measured? Continuing our example, a school may want to set a goal of ensuring that ninth-grade students with weak study, goal-setting and relationship skills are exposed to the habits of success during their freshman year.

4. **Select strategies to implement in an effort to achieve the stated goals.** What strategies are available? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each? What are the obstacles and solutions? What resources are required? What would ideal implementation look like? Considering these questions will help you assess each strategy and select strategies that, given all information available, are most likely to result in a successful outcome. This publication provides three very different schoolwide strategies, along with model lessons and activities for teaching students the habits of success. Studying these examples can provide insight for designing a program for your school.
5. **Take action, assigning tasks and responsibilities as necessary.** Few problems are owned by only one individual or a few people. The school community must work together to solve its problems. Implement the selected strategies and document that implementation to determine whether strategies were implemented as intended. In our example, the school may decide to create and implement a course that exposes ninth-grade students to the habits of success and other information and skills necessary to be successful in and out of high school.
6. **Evaluate results.** Review the data you have collected and determine if the goal was achieved. Were the desired outcomes obtained? For our example, did the course teach students the habits of success? Are they utilizing these skills in other classes? Did the course enable more students to succeed in a college-ready academic core? Has it allowed students to complete in-depth study in an academic or career area of interest? Have attendance, course grades and assessment scores improved? If goals have not been met, start the process over by re-evaluating the problem and making changes in each step along the way.

The temptation with large, comprehensive materials such as this publication is to let them sit on the shelf, unused. I urge you to not let that happen. Instead, form a study group by asking a team of teachers to examine this publication to see if the ideas presented would assist your school in improving graduation rates and increasing the number of students who graduate with adequate preparation for the future.

This book can serve as a useful document in helping a faculty think through a process for ensuring more students become independent, successful learners. Accomplishing this goal, however, requires a willingness **to hold teachers and school leaders accountable** for teaching the habits of success and **to hold students accountable** for practicing and developing these habits — and a critical step in that process is to teach more students *why* they should succeed and *how* they can be successful students, employees and citizens.

Students need opportunities to discover their interests, to develop long-term goals, to understand linkages between education and career goals, and to develop the habits that will allow them to achieve their goals. When more students see high school as an avenue toward their goals, more students will graduate, and they will graduate prepared for success in postsecondary studies, careers and life.



Gene Bottoms
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INTRODUCTION

Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.

— Aristotle

The *High Schools That Work (HSTW)* initiative of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) is grounded in the belief that students need a rich blend of cognitive, academic, personal, social and career skills to succeed. Almost all high school students can complete a challenging academic core when they are supported by opportunities to develop meaningful relationships with adults and to learn deeply through authentic projects that allow them to apply their knowledge, discover their talents and strengths, and experience the world beyond the classroom. These opportunities help students understand that, with smart effort, they can meet high expectations. The 10 Key Practices and six Key Conditions on which the *HSTW* improvement framework is based are designed to help schools achieve excellence by encouraging smart, effective habits and providing a sound education to all students.

***HSTW* Key Practices for Improving Student Achievement**

HSTW has identified the following Key Practices to boost student achievement and provide direction and meaning to comprehensive school improvement and student learning:

- **High expectations** — Motivate more students to meet high expectations by integrating high expectations into classroom practices and giving students frequent feedback.
- **Program of study** — Require each student to complete an upgraded academic core and an academic or career concentration.
- **Academic studies** — Teach more students the essential concepts of the college-preparatory curriculum by encouraging them to apply academic content and skills to real-world problems and projects.
- **Career/technical studies** — Provide more students with access to intellectually challenging career/technical studies in high-demand fields that emphasize the higher-level mathematics, science, literacy and problem-solving skills needed in the workplace and in further education.
- **Work-based learning** — Enable students and their parents to choose from programs that integrate challenging high school studies and work-based learning and are planned by educators, employers and students.
- **Teachers working together** — Provide cross-disciplinary teams of teachers with time and support to work together to help students succeed in challenging academic and career/technical studies. Integrate reading, writing and speaking as strategies for learning into all parts of the curriculum and integrate mathematics into science and career/technical classrooms.
- **Students actively engaged** — Engage students in academic and career/technical classrooms in rigorous and challenging Proficient-level assignments, using research-based instructional strategies and technology.
- **Guidance** — Involve students and their parents in a guidance and advisement system that develops positive relationships and ensures completion of an accelerated program of study with an academic or a career/technical concentration. Provide each student with the same mentor throughout high school to assist with understanding postsecondary options, setting goals, selecting courses, reviewing the student's progress and suggesting appropriate interventions as necessary.
- **Extra help** — Provide a structured system of extra help to assist students in completing accelerated programs of study with high-level academic and technical content.
- **Culture of continuous improvement** — Use student assessment and program evaluation data to continuously improve school culture, organization, management, curriculum and instruction to advance student learning.

HSTW Key Conditions for Accelerating Student Achievement

HSTW believes everyone — teachers, the school, the district, and local and state leaders — must work together to align policies, resources, initiatives and accountability efforts to support high schools and middle grades schools as they adopt and implement comprehensive school improvement designs to accelerate student achievement. The HSTW Key Conditions include the following:

- **A clear, functional mission statement** — Schools need a clear, functional mission statement to prepare middle grades students for challenging secondary studies and high school students for success in postsecondary education and the workplace.
- **Strong leadership** — Each district and school needs strong and committed leaders to improve, align and benchmark curricula to high standards, to improve the quality of instruction and to raise student achievement in grades six through 12. Each high school and middle grades school has a leadership team consisting of the principal, assistant principal and teacher leaders.
- **Plan for continuous improvement** — District and school leaders create an organizational structure and process that ensures continuous involvement with faculty on what to teach; how to teach it; what students are expected to learn; how to assess what they have learned; and how they relate to each other, to the students, and to the home and community.
- **Qualified teachers** — Middle grades and high school teachers have in-depth knowledge of their subject areas and of teaching strategies appropriate to students' grade levels. Middle grades teachers lacking majors in their subject areas are supported by the district to acquire them. The school and district employ teachers who have depth in their teaching fields and support them in learning how to teach well.
- **Commitment to goals** — School leaders and teachers are committed to achieving the HSTW Goals and implementing the Key Practices. School boards are committed to having all students complete a demanding academic core and either an academic or a career/technical concentration. Continuous review of local policies and practices ensures that a strong message of high expectations is sent to both the high schools and the middle grades.
- **Flexible scheduling** — School superintendents and school boards permit high schools to adopt flexible schedules, enabling students to earn more credits.
- **Support for professional development** — District and school leaders provide teachers with instructional materials, planning time and professional development for implementing new curricula and research-based instructional methods.

While the Key Practices and Conditions are the two most critical parts of a comprehensive school improvement framework, there is a third. Through more than two decades of field- and research-based experience in improving high schools and middle grades schools for all groups of students, HSTW and *Making Middle Grades Work (MMGW)* leaders also have identified the key characteristics of successful students. These characteristics — or *habits of success* — represent **skills that all students need** in high school, postsecondary studies, advanced training and careers.

The Six Habits of Success

1. Build and maintain productive relationships with peers and adults.
2. Organize, manage time and develop study skills.
3. Develop strong reading and writing skills.
4. Develop strong mathematics skills.
5. Set goals and make plans to reach them.
6. Access resources needed to achieve goals.

Organization of This Publication

The purpose of this publication is to assist educators and school leaders in examining the habits of success and discovering new ways to help more students reach their full potential. The publication is organized into three sections to meet three key goals:

- Explore ways schools can develop the talents and interests of each student, resulting in greater motivation and desire to do well in school, and show the relationship between students' application of the habits of success and their achievement in the middle grades, high school, further education and the workplace.
- Offer in-depth information on successful strategies for integrating the habits of success into classroom instruction.
- Provide a series of model lessons designed to teach the habits of success.

Section 1: The Case for Teaching Students the Habits of Success

This section explores many research findings that demonstrate why schools need to help students connect their learning to their lives and develop the habits of success.

Chapter 1 explains how helping students understand their talents and natural abilities can motivate them to approach their studies with a greater sense of purpose and a willingness to develop habits that will help them succeed.

Chapter 2 defines each of the six habits in greater depth, citing research-based evidence of the importance of these habits. This chapter addresses the frequent disconnect between students' goals for postsecondary studies and careers and their preparation as they leave high school. It also relates the guidance standards developed by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) to the six habits and to preparing students for the future.

Chapter 3 examines how changes in the job market — particularly the increased demand for employees with more education — will require students to pursue higher levels of education and training to qualify for good jobs. Despite the demand for education beyond high school, many students do not receive the preparation they need in high school to be ready for the next step. This chapter includes a number of recommended actions that schools can take to help students prepare for the future.

Section 2: Approaches for Teaching the Habits of Success

This section presents three *HSTW* schools' approaches to teaching the habits of success, in their own words. The models are designed to help others learn from the experiences of colleagues as they develop their own designs. These outstanding programs can be — and have been — replicated in schools across the nation.

Chapter 4 describes **Fort Mill High School's** *High School 101* class. Located in Fort Mill, South Carolina, this school has been instrumental in teaching students the habits of success as they begin their high school careers. The *High School 101* class focuses on team building, study skills, time management and organization, relationship development and goal-setting to equip students with skills that will help them during the remaining three years of high school.

Chapter 5 describes an employability class developed and taught by guidance counselors at **Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School** in Upton, Massachusetts. The curriculum was designed to address national guidance standards as it effectively incorporates the habits of success. The class is closely aligned with the school's career focus.

Chapter 6 explains how to develop a teacher-adviser system that emphasizes the habits of success and provides adult mentors for students throughout all four years of high school. The approach is based on a system used at **Walhalla High School** in Walhalla, South Carolina — one of the original *HSTW* sites. Although the teacher-adviser system has been affected by scheduling changes in recent years, it remains a blueprint to follow in establishing a teacher-adviser system to teach students the habits of success.

Section 3: Model Lessons and Activities for Teaching the Habits of Success

Each chapter in this section is devoted to one of the six habits of success. The chapters present a wide range of model lessons and activities from which educators can pick and choose to integrate lessons on the habits of success into their own curricula.

Chapter 7 — Habit 1: Build and maintain productive relationships with peers and adults. This chapter emphasizes the critical lifetime skill of communicating effectively with others.

Chapter 8 — Habit 2: Organize, manage time and develop study skills. Students who acquire these skills accomplish more and are better prepared to succeed in all of their courses.

Chapter 9 — Habit 3: Develop strong reading and writing skills. This chapter offers strategies for teaching these essential lifetime skills in every class.

Chapter 10 — Habit 4: Develop strong mathematics skills. This chapter offers ideas for teaching mathematics in a way that relates to real-world problems. It includes suggestions for integrating mathematics into other classes.

Chapter 11 — Habit 5: Set goals and make plans to reach them. Students who have developed solid goals for the future take their high school studies more seriously. This chapter contains ideas for helping students set goals and explore options for achieving them.

Chapter 12 — Habit 6: Access resources needed to achieve goals. This chapter lists a wide range of resources available to students and tells how to help students use technology to gather information.

HSTW and Middle Grades Assessment Data

The habits of success and strategies in this publication are drawn from a number of data sources, including SREB's biennial *HSTW* Assessment and Middle Grades Assessment. These two assessments, given to 12th-graders and eighth-graders in *HSTW* and *MMGW* schools, include five parts: subject tests in reading, mathematics and science, based on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) frameworks; a student survey; and a teacher survey. Participating schools assess either all or a random sample of 60 or more 12th- or eighth-graders. All academic, fine arts and career/technical teachers participate in the teacher survey.

Finding the Best Strategy for Your School

There is no one-size-fits-all strategy for teaching the habits of success. Some schools, such as Fort Mill High School (described in Chapter 4), have chosen to offer separate classes to teach the skills. They most commonly offer the instruction to eighth-graders preparing to make the transition into high school or to high school freshmen as they embark on a four-year journey to high school graduation.

The employability classes taught by guidance counselors at Blackstone Valley Tech (Chapter 5) represent another way to incorporate the habits of success into a course that specifically connects academic and career/technical education.

Many schools have chosen to teach the habits of success through a teacher/mentor advisement system that includes regular advisory classes. The curriculum for these classes is grade-specific and includes lessons tied directly to the habits of success. Walhalla High School (Chapter 6) uses this approach.

Some schools combine the habits of success into instruction in exploratory classes. These classes typically are designed to allow students to explore a variety of options for a high school concentration connected to a future educational and career goal. The classes are found most often in schools that have been organized into career-themed academies or small learning communities.

The habits of success can be integrated into summer bridge programs to help rising ninth-graders make the transition to high school as independent learners. These summer programs not only help prepare students for high school but also provide skills and tools needed throughout high school to find a niche and plan for the future.

No matter which strategy is chosen to teach the habits of success, the school must take steps to integrate these vital lifetime skills into the curriculum for all courses. The importance of such integration is a theme repeated throughout this publication, emphasizing the critical role high schools and middle grades schools play in helping students understand the applicability of their courses to the real world and to their own educational and career goals. **These skills cannot be taught in isolation; instead, they must be woven throughout the curriculum so that students will learn how to apply the habits of success in school and beyond.**

Teacher teams that use this publication as a basis for studying how to integrate the habits of success throughout the curriculum will see a number of positive results. Academic achievement will increase. Discipline problems will decrease. Students will feel a greater sense of belonging. Graduates will be more successful in further education and careers. Educators' jobs will be easier as more students realize that what they are learning today is preparing them for the future and take their schoolwork more seriously. The payoff is clearly worth the effort.