

How Can Grades Help At-Risk Students?

Grades can be motivators or demotivators. When a student feels that s/he can succeed, s/he often tries harder. If a student believes that there is no possibility of success, s/he stops trying. So, take the mystery out of grading. Share with students how their grades are derived – not just the grading scale, but what is graded, how it is graded, the impact missing assignments have on their final grade, how tests are weighted, and anything else that may impact their grade.

Grade only academic achievement. Leave attitude, behavior, and other items not related to academic success out of the grading. Tardiness, organization, participation, donations to the classroom are examples of items not to grade.

Don't use grades as punishment. When teachers do this, what they are teaching is that they have the power and control in the classroom and that the student may or may not succeed regardless of his/her efforts.

Do not use grades as rewards. By rewarding students with good grades for behaviors that you approve of, you are sending the message that only one type of student will succeed and that is usually one that is the least at risk.

Encourage at-risk students by showing them the improvement they are making, by sharing their grades with them often, giving opportunities to turn in late and missed work without punishment, and by allowing them to try again on an assignment that they were not successful on the first time. Give plenty of time and opportunities to learn skills before assessing the accomplishment of the learning.