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Building a Culture of Hope: Enriching Schools With Optimism and Opportunity

By Robert D. Barr and Emily L. Gibson

Study Guide

This study guide is a companion to the book *Building a Culture of Hope: Enriching Schools With Optimism and Opportunity* by Robert D. Barr and Emily L. Gibson. Building on research that shows children living in poverty require not just academic instruction but an atmosphere of hope to succeed, the authors offer a blueprint for turning our schools into Cultures of Hope.

This guide is arranged by chapter, enabling readers to either work their way through the entire book or to focus on the specific topics addressed in a particular chapter. It can be used by individuals, small groups, or by an entire team to identify key points, raise questions for consideration, assess conditions in a particular school or district, and suggest steps that might be taken to promote a healthy school culture.

We thank you for your interest in this book, and we hope this guide will serve as a useful tool in your efforts to create a healthy culture in your school or district.

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Chapter 1

Poverty is No Excuse

1. What is the “apartheid of ignorance” described by the authors, and how is it dividing the world?
2. How has a Culture of Hope emerged in some high-poverty schools? What plan does your school have in place to support students from low-income families?
3. Are attitudes of learned helplessness apparent in your school or classrooms? What strategies have you employed to overcome them?
4. How can classroom values, language, and behavioral expectations clash with the values some students are taught at home?
5. Despite arriving at high school better prepared than ever, why do some students from low-income families become disconnected from their education?
6. What is *lost talent*, and what factors cause it?

Chapter 2

An American Tragedy: High School Dropouts

1. According to the authors, why are U.S. high schools a special tragedy?
2. Why is middle school referred to as the “Bermuda Triangle” of K–12 education? What primary factors can predict that a student will drop out?
3. What problems in many high-poverty schools’ structures or policies prevent them from being high performing? Are these present in your school? If so, how are they being resolved?
4. What are the common characteristics of high-performing, high-poverty schools?

Chapter 3

Cultures of Hope

1. What is institutional culture? What impact does your school's institutional culture have on students?
2. What are the benefits of schools built on the concept of hope?
3. What factors characterize resilient poverty-level students?
4. List and explain the four components of a Culture of Hope.

Chapter 4

An Atmosphere of Optimism

1. What roles do learned optimism and hope play in students' long-term success? How can you make instilling these characteristics a unified, sustained, schoolwide effort?
2. What is the “gold standard” for school atmosphere? What can you do to promote this and emphasize success?
3. How can you ensure that communitywide events at your school are authentic and reflect positive feelings from the school staff?

Chapter 5

A Sense of Belonging

1. Why is developing a sense of belonging in school a critical part of students' emotional health and academic success?
2. How has the digital revolution affected the education of students from low-income families?
3. How do schools promote a sense of low self-worth among students? How can you correct or prevent this in your school?
4. How do student's social networks actively enhance learning?
5. According to the authors, what are some ways schools can help students find a sense of place?
6. What are the characteristics of teachers in Culture of Hope schools? How do they show students and families that they are interested in their well-being?
7. How do Culture of Hope schools cultivate students' talents and interests? How do they build a surrogate family among teachers, students, and staff?

Chapter 6

Feelings of Pride, Self-Esteem, and Self-Confidence

1. While building a Culture of Hope, when should schools address the need for self-esteem?
2. According to the authors, students benefit from assuming responsibilities within the school, not just the classroom. What are you doing to give students responsibilities in their school community?
3. What role do students play in their learning? How does giving students power over their own learning especially benefit students with attitudes of learned helplessness?
4. How can you use talent development to promote high academic success?

Chapter 7

A Sense of Purpose

1. What is the connection between -poverty, high-performing schools and their students' sense of purpose and direction?
2. What are the four categories of students? How do you address the need for a sense of purpose for each of these groups?
3. What are FedEx days? How can they be used to foster autonomy?
4. What do researchers describe as the most powerful and fulfilling type of motivation?
What are you doing to foster it in your students?
5. What roles do mentoring and counseling services play in Cultures of Hope?
6. How do you engage students in reflective inquiry? How do learning options engage students and parents in decision making?

Chapter 8

The Power of “We”

1. Why is a Culture of Hope essential for teachers in high-poverty schools?
2. What conditions must be in place to implement and sustain a collaborative school?
3. What beliefs make up the Power of We? What strategies can be employed to promote this concept?
4. What are the best tools for gathering data to support teachers’ work?
5. What family stress factors hinder parent involvement? What can you do to engage parents?

Chapter 9

Implementing a Culture of Hope at the High School Level

1. The authors list supporting students as a strategy for implementing a Culture of Hope.
What forms can this strategy take at the high school level?
2. What is personalized learning? How is it reflected in your school or district?
3. What responsibilities should student advisory groups have?
4. What actions has your school or district taken to prepare *all* students for post-secondary success? How can you use the authors' recommendations to strengthen or improve these actions?
5. What tools and resources do students need to transition to post-secondary school? How can you support this transition?
6. What recommendations do the authors offer for merging voc/tech and college preparatory curricula?

Chapter 10

Hope Fulfilled

1. What effect does the American “melting pot” system have on Native American and immigrant students?
2. How have the requirements for attaining the American Dream changed?
3. What is the developmental aspect of education? Why does graduating from high school not in itself guarantee students a good life?
4. Compare the recommendations of Building a Grad Nation and Pew’s Economic Mobility Project for transforming high-poverty, low-performing schools. Which recommendations are already in place in your school or district, and which does your school or district need to adopt?
5. How can educators build a Culture of Hope while fulfilling the responsibilities of their jobs and working within budget restrictions?