



# Be the Change You Want to See in Your School!

By Susie Dahlmann, Executive Director of Reaching Higher, Inc.

Thinking back to college, I remember that pivotal day when I said to myself, “I want to be a teacher.” For many of us, the choice to become an educator was a calling—a desire to pour into the minds and hearts of kids and make an impact on the world in our own small way. I pictured myself surrounded by happy children, sitting in a bright and shiny classroom, exploring the world with wonder and awe.

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What I didn't fully picture were limited resources, increased pressure to meet testing standards, and influences from outside the classroom that affected so many classes. So many kids today are fighting personal battles; they struggle with tough situations that impact their ability to learn and grow, and also influence the culture within a school. I, like many others, quickly discovered that teaching is one of the toughest professions out there, but it's one of the most rewarding as well.

I work with a number of districts, both private and public, and meet countless teachers who maintain a sincere desire to inspire and uplift kids, yet feel the pressure of working in a difficult environment. In our Reaching Higher classes, we mentor young adults on goal setting, managing stress, overcoming limiting beliefs, making positive life choices and more. We teach social and leadership skills to help prepare kids for a healthy future. But having a solid curriculum is just the “what;” equally important is the “how.”

The principles that we practice in the Reaching Higher classroom can



Recent Graduates of Reaching Higher at Brighton High School

be used in any school to help inspire staff and students and foster a more positive learning environment. GOOD NEWS! These principles are easy, applicable to all ages and subject matter, and they won't cost you a cent!

## 7 simple steps to Creating a Positive Learning Environment

**1) Start with a smile:** It's easy for teachers to become focused on preparing for class in the minutes before the bell rings. Encourage them to make a conscious effort to be at the door of the classroom, rather than at a desk, to greet kids with a warm smile.

**2) Take a sincere interest:** Ask, “What's the best thing that's happened to you since I've seen you last?” Some students will quickly

have great things to report, while others may simply say “nothing.” These are the kids that need us the most! Through gentle coaching, we can help them discover the everyday blessings that surround us all, even in what they perceive to be a tough circumstance. Get interested and listen! Showing sincere interest in another human being is the greatest gift we can give one another.

3) **Use uplifting words:** Program yourself to constantly **look** for what others are doing right, and tell them about it! Praise, like a shower, is something humans need every day – once in a while is not enough. No one can give or receive too much encouragement.

4) **Make a “sunshine call”:** Do something unexpected. Leave an encouraging note on a student’s desk, send an inspiring message, or call their home when they miss class. Do something they don’t expect to let them know how much you care.

5) **Use stories to inspire.** Every motivational speaker knows the value of a great story. Consider opening your class or

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## Nine Weeks To Success! The Reaching Higher Curriculum

### 1. You Are A Miracle

Explore our miraculous and unique nature and create a positive community among peers.

### 2. Remembering

Identify negative messages that we have 'learned' over time and re-discover the precious parts of who we are.

### 3. Purpose In Life-Setting Goals

Look at our unique gifts. Explore how to set and attain realistic goals in school, relationships, and other pursuits.

### 4. Managing Stress

Learn techniques for impulse intervention and healthy methods to relieve stress.

### 5. Changing Limiting Beliefs

Identify our negative self-beliefs and replace these falsities with positive and productive images.

### 6. Fear to Freedom

Explore the impact of fear in our lives & learn productive methods to release it.

### 7. Positive Life Choices

Hear personal testimony of poor life choices and learn the process and discipline of making good choices.

### 8. Happiness Through Giving and Loving

Learn, give to, and empower one another through kind action and communication.

### 9. Graduation

A community celebration of student accomplishments featuring stories of struggle, hope, and victory.

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school meeting with a quick story (2 minutes or less). The right story touches our hearts and inspires us to learn more.

**6) Offer help.** Many people mistakenly believe that only the weak ask for help. Let students and staff know that **it's ok** to ask for help; in fact reaching out to others shows strength. For students who are struggling academically, offer extra help or additional resources to help them thrive.

**7) Continue to believe!** Most of us can relate to a time in our career when we lost some of our faith. Never doubt yourself! Working in academia is the most noble profession. It takes true character, compassion, and courage to do this work, and your contributions will impact generations to come. As Margaret Mead once said, "Never believe that a few caring people can't change the world. For, indeed, that's all who ever have."



*Susie Dahlmann is Executive Director of Reaching Higher; a nonprofit organization based in Brighton that partners with schools to provide leadership training for youth. The 9-module curriculum models all principles above, while delivering a strong social skills development program. To find out more, please visit Reaching Higher at [www.reachinghigherinc.com](http://www.reachinghigherinc.com), or call (810) 220-8812.*

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