
Preface

I am writing this book to ensure that the voices of students who are at risk of school failure do not go unheard. These students' needs must not get lost in our nation's narrow focus on test preparation and results-driven performance expectations. School leaders and support teams must make certain that caring relationships are established between adults and students. In addition, students need to be engaged at the school and classroom levels so they take ownership of their learning to increase their academic outcomes.

The purpose of the book is to offer classroom practitioners, support team specialists, and all levels of classroom and school leaders practical strategies and plays for their playbooks. They can then productively coach school teams and establish a full-court press on diverse student populations who have the largest number of risk factors.

There continues to be a need for a distinctive and more student-centered approach because current practices, policies, and structures have not adequately raised the achievement of disenfranchised students. In fact, the need has never been more momentous. Our troubled economy requires our future leaders and members of the workforce to be more specialized and adept at their crafts. Our students must develop unique skill sets that set them apart as innovators in extremely competitive applicant pools. In addition, despite countless local, district, and state measures and initiatives, our current systems fail to give students the scaffolded support they need to bounce back from risk and adversity. Educational leaders and support teams need to utilize more empirical and low-cost strategies to close achievement gaps and to allow students to rebound from risk.

This book will provide those concrete strategies that have been proven to be successful in schools across our country. In schools where resilience is fortified through caring relationships and engagement, students grow socially, emotionally, and academically. Their risk factors will still be present because there are many parts of a child's life that we cannot control or

influence. However, educators can use structures and supports to ensure that all students, including those who are at risk, experience turning points in their classrooms and schools. It will not only detail school structures to boost achievement but will also describe the classroom benefits of implementing the strategies that forge strong adult–student relationships. Educators will improve their pedagogical practices as they learn ways to ensure that student participation is meaningful and connected to their lives.

All members of a school staff have to execute their revitalized game plans so that they will keep high levels of risk from sidelining players who belong in the starting lineup. Readers will finish the book armed with an arsenal to wage war on the achievement gaps in their classrooms, schools, districts, counties, states, or nation.

“The inspiration to dream and an abundance of hope cultivated by caring adults will together determine the endurance of a child’s heart.”

—Gabe Simon, EdD (2012)