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The Global Search for Education: How Should We Measure Success?

Posted By C. M. Rubin on Dec 2, 2015

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"We see far too many kids who suffer from debilitating health issues, such as depression, eating disorders, perfectionism, severe sleep deprivation, and anxiety. We know parents may be worried about stepping off the fast-track, but we urge them to consider the big picture and the ultimate health and well being of their children." — Dr. Denise Pope

"Overloaded and Underprepared: Strategies for Stronger Schools and Healthy, Successful Kids," is written for teachers, school leaders, parents and students interested in shifting the paradigm towards a healthier, better prepared and more productive life for our children. The book is timely given all the media focus on the pressures students everywhere are under as well as the mounting evidence that despite the ever-increasing homework load, kids are still not learning the important 21st century skills they need to succeed in the world – skills such as resilience, creativity, collaboration and critical thinking. The authors of the book, Denise Pope, Maureen Brown and Sarah Miles, share their extensive research from schools across the country as well as proven strategies and practical suggestions which communities can easily implement to create better learning environments.

We welcome back to *The Global Search for Education* author Dr. Denise Pope. Denise is a Senior Lecturer in the Stanford School of Education and co-founder of Challenge Success, a research and intervention project that aims to reduce unhealthy pressure on youth and champions a broader vision of youth success.



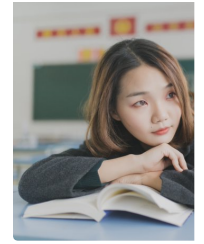
"Challenging the status quo as an educator is not easy, but it can be done! The trick is to start slowly, choose one area of focus, and then begin a dialogue with at least one other educator at your school so you don't have to face the task alone."— Dr. Denise Pope

Denise, Challenge Success has always promoted balanced learning environments. What were the most surprising things you learned in doing the research for your new book, *Overloaded and Underprepared*?

Since we have been working with schools for over a decade to promote healthy, engaged learning, we weren't surprised to see that many of the students in K-12 schools in the US are disengaged – going through the motions of learning, "doing school," or opting out of the system altogether. Many more are anxious, stressed, and lack positive coping mechanisms. We know that many of these kids are not learning the important 21st century skills they need to succeed – skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, communication, creativity, and resilience. What surprised us was that we have good data to show the benefits of a number of educational policies and

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practices that help kids gain these skills and become more motivated and engaged with learning, but relatively few schools in the US use these policies or practices. In the book, we summarize the research behind each of these effective strategies, such as healthier schedules, alternative assessments, and wellness initiatives, and then offer practical case studies and tools to help educators make changes that will help their students thrive.

What is your message for parents who may want to pull their children off the fast-track but believe they just can't; i.e. they're concerned about how their kids will remain competitive if they challenge the status quo?

We see far too many kids who suffer from debilitating health issues, such as depression, eating disorders, perfectionism, severe sleep deprivation, and anxiety. We know parents may be worried about stepping off the fast-track, but we urge them to consider the big picture and the ultimate health and wellbeing of their children. To help parents, we offer a three-part plan, based on the research around protective factors for kids, called PDF. The P stands for playtime – a time each day where your child can engage in freely selected, child-driven play activities. This may include some structured extracurricular activities, but “playtime” should also include unstructured time for imaginative and social play (which for teens is often time to “play” with friends, either in person or via social media). The D stands for downtime which includes sleep (8-10 hours for teens and 9-11 for elementary school children), as well as time for reflection, introspection, and self-relaxation and restorative practices, such as reading for pleasure, playing or listening to music, yoga, etc. And the F stands for family time – a critical component for healthy child development, where the majority of the family spends time together eating meals, doing service, checking in and loving one another unconditionally. PDF is hard to fit in every day, but the research shows these activities are crucial to the long-term health and wellbeing of our kids. The irony is that if we want our kids to be truly successful (happy, healthy, fulfilled, and prepared for life outside of school), we need to challenge the narrow conception of success as solely related to grades, test scores, and educational credentials, and we must focus on these other critical components.



“Just as we try to convince kids not to engage in risky behavior simply because it is “cool” and everyone else is doing it, we take the same approach to challenging success. We share positive stories about students who have chosen alternate paths.”– Dr. Denise Pope

What is your message for educators who are faced with challenging the status quo?

Challenging the status quo as an educator is not easy, but it can be done! The trick is to start slowly, choose one area of focus, and then begin a dialogue with at least one other educator at your school so you don't have to face the task alone. Our book offers tips for teachers who want to make small but powerful changes to their own classroom policies, such as changes to the kind of homework assigned and how much it is worth, test correction and revision policies, incorporating more real-world, project-based learning and authentic assessments, and how to foster more positive teacher-student relationships. We also offer concrete suggestions for educators who want to implement bigger changes at their schools, for example, changing from a traditional to a block schedule, creating an advisory program, developing a wellness curriculum, or reimagining grading practices and report cards. We summarize the research behind each change and offer practical suggestions from over twenty different schools. We find that teachers and administrators appreciate that they don't have to reinvent the wheel. They can learn from the mistakes and advice of those who have recently gone through the school reform process. Finally, we urge educators to work together with parents and students to achieve the necessary buy-in and goodwill to foster successful and long-lasting change.

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What is your message for students who are faced with looking like failures to their peer group if they choose to take a different path and challenge success?

We know that parents and kids face peer pressure to conform to traditional and narrow visions of success – especially academic success. Much of this pressure stems from misconceptions about college and career paths. Just as we try to convince kids not to engage in risky behavior simply because it is “cool” and everyone else is doing it, we take the same approach to challenging success. We share positive stories about students who have chosen alternate paths. We describe extremely successful kids who took gap years before deciding what they wanted to do, kids who chose to go to community college or trade schools, kids who chose not to over-enroll in AP or honors courses because they were sufficiently challenged and excited by other courses or teachers or activities and knew that they couldn’t do it all and still get the sleep they needed. We know that one size does not fit all, and that there are many, many paths to success. We remind students that they have one body and that they need to care for themselves physically and emotionally and to make healthy and authentic choices that will pay off in the long run. After all, success isn’t measured at the end of a semester, but over the course of a lifetime.

What progress are we making in better preparing our students for today’s world? What would be your priorities in reforming the predominant conventions you are concerned about in education today?

We are definitely making progress in terms of incorporating social and emotional learning into the classroom, integrating technology, learning from recent research on the brain, and recognizing the importance of the school-family connection to better prepare our students for today’s world. That said, too many of our schools still rely on traditional notions of teaching and learning that prioritize lectures, tests, memorization, and ranking and sorting students. If we want our students to be prepared for the world, we need to organize our schools and classrooms to operate more like the out-of-school world where folks work together on projects, use multiple resources to gather and analyze information, brainstorm ideas, prototype and iterate, seek feedback from a wide range of sources, and ultimately share their finished products with real audiences. By doing this kind of work, students hone their interpersonal and collaborative skills, stretch their imaginations, acquire key content skills and knowledge, and engage in rich, fulfilling experiences that benefit the larger community. Challenge Success helps educators incorporate more of these “work” world strategies into their curricula, creating an environment where students are motivated, engaged, and more likely to retain what they learn.



C. M. Rubin and Dr. Denise Pope

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(All photos are courtesy of Stanford University School of Education and Challenge Success)



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C. M. Rubin is the author of two widely read online series for which she received a 2011 Upton Sinclair award, "The Global Search for Education" and "How Will We Read?" She is also the author of three bestselling books, including *The Real Alice in Wonderland*, is the publisher of *CMRubinWorld*, and is a Disruptor Foundation Fellow.

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