

My 5 Takeaways from *Most Likely to Succeed* (continued)

We have conditioned our kids to think in a certain way.

As a society, we must reflect on the message we are sending to kids. We champion the idea of being accepted to a four-year college. Students are told to take the SAT and the ACT to prove they have what it takes to attend college. We reward students who have the highest GPAs and test scores with scholarships and highest honors. These kids succeed because they are compliant and play the game of school extremely well. They are memorization machines, but how often have they been challenged to solve problems that have no specific solution? When they enter the 'real world' they will no longer be judged by their scores, but by their actions. We have to recondition our students to operate in environments where thinking matters and failure is a normal part of learning.

Skills are more important than content.

Our teaching is based on content standards that require students to remember lots of information. While understanding of conceptual themes is essential, we are still more concerned with facts than with these themes or with skills. As Tony Wagner points out, content is all around us. It is accessible on any device connected to the Internet. Students no longer need to retain a myriad of facts that they can recall to complete tasks. Mastery of a skill, however, cannot be downloaded from the Internet. While students might watch a YouTube video on how to fix a car or build a piece of furniture, they will not master their craft without their own practice, experimentation, and decision-making. Complex problems that require students to assess situations and work towards viable solutions should be the centerpiece of our classrooms.

We are betting on education.

The changes I've suggested above may sound innovative and represent a recent trend in cutting edge schools like High Tech High, but we are not yet sure that they will work. Are we sure we know which skills students will need to be successful in their world? In jobs that do not yet exist? There is risk associated with this uncertainty, yet we can't afford to keep doing what we have always done. I for one am willing to take that risk with my own kids. We shouldn't settle for good enough when it comes to our children. They deserve extraordinary!

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