

# Excellence in Education: Insights from Both Sides of the Classroom

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What makes a great teacher—and a motivated student? Educators and learners share their stories of inspiration, challenges, and the drive to succeed, revealing what truly shapes success in education.

## Memorable Teachers: The Catalysts for Growth

For many students, the most memorable teachers are those who go beyond the curriculum to show genuine care. **David**, a high school student, recalls his 7th-grade English teacher, who was always willing to help, even with matters unrelated to her class. “She was really nice and would help in any way she could,” he says. Similarly, **Alana Woods** fondly remembers her 2nd-grade teacher, Miss Mormon, who baked banana bread for her students and even hosted a pool party for a few at the end of the year. “Teachers that care about their students make them memorable,” Alana reflects.

**Syou** credits her first-grade teacher, Mrs. Diaz, for building her confidence and making her feel understood. “She was like a second mom to me,” Syou says. **Brian Garcia** remembers Mr. Vaughan, who was always available to help. “Whenever I had questions, he’d make sure to help me,” Brian shares.

Teachers, too, emphasize the importance of building relationships. **Joe Mac Sellers**, a CTE-Metals teacher, believes that caring for students on a personal level is key. “I try to care more about the kids than about test scores,” he says. “It’s all about relationships.” This sentiment is echoed by **Mr. Marco Real**, a Spanish teacher, who notes that connecting with students on a human level is what makes teaching meaningful. “Students learn best from teachers they trust and like,” he says.



## The Highlights of Being a Student: Friendships, Growth, and Freedom

For students, the highlights of school often extend beyond the classroom. **Syou**, a senior, cherishes the friendships and memories made during her time as a student. “Hanging out with friends, making the most of my senior year, and learning along the way—it’s been a fun and meaningful experience,” she shares. **Leslie** values the opportunity to build relationships. “I get to meet people and have more connections,” she says.

For some, like **Star**, academic achievement is a source of pride. “I have all A’s right now,” she says with a smile. Meanwhile, **Elijah** finds joy in the simple act of showing up every day. “Just being there,” he says, “that’s the highlight.” **Pablo Cruz** enjoys the social aspect of school. “Being with a bunch of other students around your same age and learning new things—that’s what I like,” he says.

Teachers also find fulfillment in watching their students grow. **Mr. Bo Sellers**, a CTE-Metals teacher, takes pride in seeing his students develop skills. “Watching them start from nothing and build something by the end of the year—that’s the highlight for me,” he says.

## Defining Success: More Than Just Grades

Success means different things to different students. For **David**, it’s about achieving goals and staying on the right track. “Passing with good grades and overall going in the right direction,” he explains. For others, like **Elijah**, success is about happiness. “You don’t gotta be rich to be successful,” he says. “You just gotta be happy with yourself.”

**Pablo Cruz** defines success as being proud of what you’ve accomplished. “It’s about being happy in life and proud of what you’ve done,” he says. **Gladis** ties success to hard work and good grades. “Getting good grades and doing your work—that’s success to me,” she explains.

Teachers also emphasize the importance of personal growth over perfection. **Mr. Daniel Wexelblatt**, an English teacher, believes success lies in perseverance. “The great student is the one who bangs their head against the proverbial wall until they figure it out,” he says.

### Motivation: What Drives Students to Excel?

Students cite a variety of factors that motivate them to go above and beyond. For many, like **Syou**, it’s passion and support from teachers and peers. “Having people who believe in you makes all the difference,” she says. For others, like **Brian Garcia**, it’s the promise of a brighter future. “Knowing there’s more after you reach your goal,” he explains.

**Pablo Cruz** credits enthusiastic teachers and supportive friends for motivating him. “Teachers who get along with students and friends who push you—that’s what helps you succeed,” he says. **Gladis** is motivated by her parents. “They really push me to do my best,” she shares.

Teachers play a crucial role in fostering this motivation. **Mr. Bo Sellers** focuses on instilling a strong work ethic in his students. “I teach them how to use tools, set things up, and develop a work ethic,” he says. “That’s what will help them succeed in life.”

### The Challenges of Education Today

Both students and teachers acknowledge the challenges facing modern education. For many teachers, like **Mr. Robert Munson**, apathy among students is a significant hurdle. “If students don’t care, it’s hard to engage them,” he says. Others, like **Mr. Greenside**, a PE teacher, point to attendance issues. “If we can get them to school, we can teach them,” he says.

Students, on the other hand, often struggle with distractions, particularly from technology. “Phones are a big problem,” says one anonymous student. “It’s hard to focus when you’re constantly comparing yourself to others on social media.”

### The Bigger Picture: Education as a Journey

At its core, education is about more than just academics. It’s about building relationships, overcoming challenges, and discovering one’s purpose. As **Mr. Wexelblatt** puts it, “The most beautiful thing about teaching is watching students develop a more complex understanding of the world and themselves.”

For students like **Pablo Cruz**, success is about pride and happiness. “Being proud of what you’ve done and being happy in life—that’s what success means to me,” he says.

In the end, whether through a memorable teacher, a supportive friend, or a hard-earned lesson, education shapes not just minds, but hearts. And as both students and teachers remind us,

### Handling Failure: Lessons in Resilience

Failure is an inevitable part of the learning process, and both students and teachers agree that how one handles setbacks is what truly matters. **David** believes great students learn from their mistakes. “By understanding what went wrong, they can improve,” he says. **Gladis** echoes this sentiment, advising students to “keep pushing and keep going.”

**Pablo Cruz** views failure as an opportunity for growth. “You learn from your mistakes and improve from there,” he says. **Jazmine** adds that great students “push through challenges and take them as lessons.”

Teachers, too, emphasize the importance of resilience. **Mr. Griffin Peralta**, an English teacher, encourages students to view challenges as opportunities for growth. “Great teachers inspire students by doing their personal best all the time,” he says. “When students see that, they’re motivated to do the same.”

### Advice for Future Students and Teachers

For students looking to excel, the advice is clear: start small, ask for help, and stay consistent. **Syou** suggests focusing on what interests you. “Don’t be afraid to reach out to teachers or counselors,” she says. **Pablo Cruz** recommends talking to peers and staff for guidance. “They can help you figure out how to excel,” he says.

For aspiring teachers, the message is equally straightforward: care deeply about your students and your subject. **Mr. Munson** advises, “If it’s not a passion, you’ll burn out.” **Ms. Nancy Galt**, an English Language teacher, emphasizes the importance of building trust. “Students need to feel loved and accepted,” she says.

