THE CRACKS IN PUBLIC EDUCATION: A FRAMEWORK GUIDANCE TO INCREASE GRADUATION RATES WITHIN TIER 3, ALSO KNOWN AS AT-PROMISE STUDENTS

A Project

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

In

Education

By

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2023
COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

PROJECT: THE CRACKS IN PUBLIC EDUCATION: A FRAMEWORK GUIDANCE TO INCREASE GRADUATION RATES WITHIN TIER 3, ALSO KNOWN AS AT-PROMISE STUDENTS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank God for allowing me to get this far in my education. Education is the social equalizer in our society. Education liberated me from the streets into a higher education path. I wouldn’t have made it this far without my faith and dedication.

To my wife, Isela, your uprising, compassion, and unconditional love that you have shown me have motivated me to do my best in my field and leave a legacy to our future children and all the children who have lost their families and are in the streets hopeless. You are my light when time gets dark, my water when I thirst, and overall, you are the rock I can lean on when I can’t take it anymore. I am grateful to have you as my partner; I love you.

To my daughter, hi baby, Daddy is here, and yes, this might be boring to you, but it is a need, not a want; soon, you will be old enough to understand that all my life, I have sacrificed to be successful in school, work, and overall as a father. I hope one day when I’m old and gone, you can read this and remember what your father was about, and you can pick up where I left off. Put your mind and heart into whatever you want to accomplish, and you will succeed. We still don’t have a name for you, but whatever your mother decides, I will second it. Love you, Princess.

To my family, thank you, Mom and Dad, for bringing me into this world. We have had ups and downs, but nothing in life is perfect. Dad, I forgive you and love you; Mom, because of you, I decided to do my best and work my hardest.

To my two little brothers, hey, I did it. This shows you that nothing is impossible if you set your mind to it. I apologize for not being the best brother growing up and trying to play father roles. All I ever wanted was the best for us. You two are why I wake up every morning, and I
know that one day, you will surpass my accomplishments because you are intelligent, hard
workers and amazing people. I love you both with all my heart.

To my mentors, some of you are like my second father, aunts, brothers, and sisters, and
you are people I admire for your accomplishments. They say great minds think alike, and I hope
to one day be in the position that most of you are in. I want to thank you, Dr. Ricardo Quintero,
for being a spiritual father figure I never had; Father Ranford Reese, you are a male figure I look
up to for your passion and dedication; Eric Vasquez, you’re like a big brother—I will never have
enough to thank you for showing me a new perspective of life that I was never exposed to. I
cannot forget all my great professors from the history department at Cal Poly Pomona, and above
all, Mr. Eduardo Serna. Eddie, it is because of you that I could graduate high school. Thank you
for understanding me as a Tier 3 student and believing in me. You are the best high school
teacher; thanks for being human and genuine. I appreciate you all.

To Dr. Pataray-Ching, thank you for all the knowledge and wisdom you have shared
with me these past few months. Professors like you inspire me to move forward. Overall, I
enjoyed learning from and interacting with you as a professional and human. I hope this inspires
you to help and teach more students like me. Blessings!
ABSTRACT

All students in our public education face daily obstacles as teachers are only aware of or care about the in-school ones, not those at home or in the streets. Students also learn through different methods, and as teachers, we need to know how to modify our teaching pedagogy to fit each of our student’s needs. According to Child Welfare Attendance Tier 3, students who have severe chronic absenteeism are the ones who suffer the most and do not end up graduating. According to the Center of PBIS website, Tier 3 students receive more intensive, individualized support to improve their behavioral and academic outcomes. Tier 3 strategies work for students with developmental disabilities, autism, emotional and behavioral disorders, and students with no diagnostic label (Center on PBIS, 2022). This thesis project is to guide and help teachers on how to work with Tier 3 students. Some Tier 3 students are also known as “at-risk,” now called “at-promise.” Many students have been system-impacted; most are raised in toxic environments and come from dysfunctional families, especially Tier 3 students. This project is a model to help teachers increase awareness of building stronger relationships with Tier 3 students and increasing the graduation rates in our public education system, especially with our at-risk Tier 3 students.
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CHAPTER 1: CONTEXT OF THE PROBLEM

The Problem

Education must be equally distributed in all public schools and for all students, especially the ones with which all teachers have the most challenging time. Equity is critical regarding teaching Tier 3 students, also known as “at-risk” students but referred to here as “at-promise” students, at a macro level. At-promise Tier 3 students are not equipped with rigorous assignments, passionate teachers, and supportive parents, making it much more complicated for those to graduate and be ready for higher education (Oakes, 2003). If high school students or teenagers are illiterate and decide to drop out of school, though, it negatively impacts the socioeconomic system in our entire country. Our society has developed under the fundamentals of education to improve individualism. For instance, students become more successful after graduating high school and earning a college degree. Cheng et al. (2021) argued that with higher education, students are more successful: “For instance, a college degree can promote individuals a chance of overcoming institutional barriers surrounding occupations and moving into higher-earning occupations, which grants them better career prospects than their peers without college degrees” (p. 1). This study aims to guide high school teachers with a Restorative Justice philosophy to help improve the graduation rate of at-promise Tier 3 students.

In the public education system, schools are influenced by the school’s climate, teachers, administrators’ pedagogies, the community’s culture, the housing market, and the type of people that reside in the neighborhood. It is evident that not all schools have the best public education in urban cities due to high crime rates in underserved communities; the higher the crime rate, the more likely students can be tempted to get involved in a crime, which can lead them to drop out. It is an issue for many students, especially those at-promise Tier 3 who endure more obstacles,
including personal problems, mental health issues, and drug addiction. A typical dilemma that an at-promise Tier 3 student may face is living with a single parent, gang-affiliated family, drug addiction lineage, or stable housing.

Any student considered at-risk Tier 3 can be system-impacted, homeless, low-income, undocumented, lacking self-awareness, and perhaps gang-affiliated. Most of these students are unsuccessful for a different reason and face more obstacles than the average middle-class or upper-class high school student. As a result, for these students, absenteeism tends to be a significant contributor to dropping out and being unable to graduate. Not having stability and emotional support at home is one of the primary reasons why many students end up falling into the cracks of the education system and end up in the Tier 3 category. Often, when students are not being motivated or supported, their self-esteem decreases, and their confidence drops. In this case, students need to receive social and emotional learning. This will not only boost their confidence but also motivate them to do better as students and young adults, regardless of whatever tier they are categorized in. Social emotional learning is highly encouraged for teachers to adapt and implement into their classroom. According to research, SEL also benefits students outside of the classroom. A 2016 report from the Brookings Institute suggested that students with well-developed SEL skills were more likely to achieve long-term economic success as adults (Gale, 2021). Self-awareness is a core competency of social and emotional learning, and every student should be taught to be more prepared to face the world after high school. Social-emotional learning will help students become civically engaged and remind them of the importance of making ethical decisions and participating in our democracy.

According to this website Los Angeles Almanac’s (2023) Poverty and Lower Living Income Level Guidelines, a person is considered low-income if they earn $66,750 or less yearly.
According to the Pomona California demographics data, the average family in Pomona, California, makes $62,407 per year, meaning they fall under low income. Growing up in a low-income family, education was not the priority; working to pay the bills was the priority. I remember many of my low-income friends also would not care about school and would find any opportunity to leave the street and make money, legally or illegally. Many died due to gang violence and criminal activity. Some ended up incarcerated. High school dropout rates correlate with crime rates across the city, state, and country. In low-income communities, there is a higher chance of a Black or Latin/x student dropping out of high school, committing a crime, and getting institutionalized in prison. Today, these students are more likely to be your school’s at-promise Tier 3 students.

Many at-promise students decide to drop out of school by age 16 and get a job to help their families financially, not by option but necessary. In Pomona, I have had the privilege of working with multiple high schools in town. One common factor that at-promise youth have is that they are the primary breadwinners of the home and, at any chance, would work and earn money to help their family instead of completing high school and earning a degree. Another common factor that I witness is that many students become gang-affiliated and consume drugs, nicotine, or alcohol as young as 12 years old. One of the main reasons why students end up being at-promise is the need for love and unbreakable habits from home. Many of these habits tend to be followed by parents who do not graduate or show interest in education, are divorcees, use drugs at home, suffer from unemployment, and many other detrimental factors.

From my own experience as a Tier 3 student who lacked mentorship, compassion, understanding, and love, I gave up on the school system at one point and was close to dropping out. After getting kicked out of two high schools, I built a relationship with Mr. Serna at
Abraham Lincoln High School. It was because of Mr. Serna—in particular, his actions and the opportunities he provided—that allowed me to graduate. While other teachers were sending students to the dean’s office, suspending them, kicking them out of their classrooms, and ignoring them, Mr. Serna would open his doors to his classroom at early hours, during lunch hours, and even after hours for mentoring support. He would also provide snacks and allow us to be ourselves and, at the same time, correct us when we are wrong. He showed us unconditional love and provided a sanctuary for us to utilize his classroom as he taught his objectives.

While teachers’ jobs are to ensure that students meet the California content standards and get an education every day, they must first understand how and why it is essential to gain their trust as people. Graduating from high school is the beginning, and preparing students for a vocation or higher education is the second objective. Most students who reside in communities like Pomona go to school bringing with them negative energy and toxic baggage from their community into the classrooms. Teachers must focus on gaining students’ trust so they feel safe to open up, seek help, and build relationships, especially in crises. Making the same type of relationship with the family is essential as well. Once students understand and see that their teacher and parents are working collaboratively, students will be more cooperative and willing to learn. This will motivate Tier 3 students to come to class with someone they enjoy being around and who understands their struggles versus going to the streets and giving up on school.

Rationale

Since its founding, our country has been operating with a penal system, and students living in low-income communities have been the target of victims and labeled “at-risk” students. At-risk students include students in the following groups: homeless children and youth, dropouts, returning dropouts, and potential dropouts. The students labeled at-risk tend to do risky activities
because that is how they are being defined. Instead of expanding and processing their academic cognition in school, they are dropping out of school and increasing their chances of incarceration. As teachers, we aim to help students graduate and succeed after high school, and we need to prepare them to follow the law and be productive members of our society. Many of us did not get the privilege of being raised with both parents, taught proper manners, etiquette, or the importance of showing respect to elders. As educators, we must be prepared to teach the subject, ensure students learn, and ultimately prepare them for success after high school, regardless of how much discipline a student needs.

When society labels a group of people, it is easy to manage, manipulate, oppress, and control that specific labeled group, making them more vulnerable. For a moment, we referred to Tier 3 students as at-risk students. Eventually, students started doing at-risk activities because that was all they knew, as mentioned earlier. Replacing derogatory terms such as “at-risk” with “at-promise” gives hope to students and traditional-aged youth versus considering them at-risk. This is something that all educators should apply in their schools, and I will further discuss it in more detail in the upcoming chapters.

From personal experience, I know that at-promise students commit crimes because they are emotionally unstable, do not receive or understand emotional intelligence, and make the wrong decisions. An at-promise student can be clueless about showing respect, sympathy, or empathy to people trying to help them, such as teachers, counselors, administrators, and any other positive adult figure, because it was never shown to them.

**Thesis Statement**

The way public schools receive funding is complex. Ed 100 (2023) stated that “funding for public education comes from a combination of state taxes, local taxes, and some federal
money” (para. 1). Public schools report the population of students and keep track of data on attendance, and it helps them allocate money from multiple resources. On special occasions, like during the pandemic and after we started resuming back to school, many public schools lost funding but, most devastatingly, lost students’ engagement in learning. The way most students, especially at-promise Tier 3, have been impacted by the pandemic resulted in a drastic two-year loss in education with all students, including Tier 3 students. Many did not know how to cope with home-based teaching and learning via Zoom. This past academic year is the first time students are returning to the class setting. It has been a complicated transition for teachers and students alike. Many students need more than a year of in-person education, scheduling, discipline, Restorative Justice, social and emotional support, and mentoring. The more the student misses’ school, the more students will not value education and will not be prepared to have a successful life, and the dropout rates will increase. All students nationwide should have an equitable and safe educational system, a positive community climate, and enough resources for any circumstances, especially the at-promise Tier 3 student population because they need it more than others. With this project, I aim to help all teachers help at-promise Tier 3 students thrive and flourish, increase graduation rates, and prepare them for the future.

**Overview of Culminating Experience**

Following this project will provide opportunities to help teachers be more Restorative Justice experienced, and they will be able to integrate into their curriculum by practicing and applying the resources I will be provided within this project. This will help guide at-promise students to become strong leaders and, eventually, better people. I will give a step-by-step guide called A Self Development At-Promise Tier 3 Student Plan, with three different scenarios when working with at-promise Tier 3 students that teachers might encounter.
A structured framework will help teachers reach at-promise Tier 3 students’ hearts and minds. Often, teachers are unsuccessful in teaching because they focus on teaching subjects and not connecting to students’ hearts. When teachers guide the nature of students, their minds will follow next. Then, those at-promise Tier 3 students will have a chance to drive in academically rigorous avenues, leading them to graduate from high school and have a successful future. In addition, a structured framework will increase attendance rates and high school graduation and help build strong leaders in our cities. This will also benefit the high schools by getting more funding and providing more opportunities to not only at-promise students but to all in general. For teachers, it will help them by being more Restorative Justice trained.

**Concluding Thoughts**

The hurt tends to hurt others. As teachers, we should prepare our students to be college-bound, but in the process, we should mentor them and help them heal any broken wounds they might have or suffer from emotionally. In *Subject Mentoring in the Secondary School*, educational researchers for college-bound students write, “Students’ learning is strongly tied to the expectations of those around them and the quality of their opportunities to learn. Minority students, in particular, perform poorly when their teachers do not believe in their abilities” (Arthur et al., 1997, p. 2). From personal experience, I have noticed that at-promise Tier 3 students suffer from trauma and tend to have a harsher uprising, leading them to struggle with discipline and respecting teachers and positive figures. My goal with this project is to help teachers inspire the most broken and hurt students in their classrooms and inspire them to pursue higher education to be better people in the world.

I will start by providing research on why or how a student becomes an at-promise Tier 3 student. I will also offer personal experience and how to deal with promising Tier 3 students. For
my project, I will explain in detail how teachers can follow a procedure to meet and work with a Tier 3 student on a path toward graduation. I will provide worksheets, templates, and some scenarios as well. This should help any teacher or administrator improve their relationship with at-promise Tier 3 students.
CHAPTER 2: INTRODUCTION

At-promise Tier 3 students are as important as the 4.0 GPA high school students, and teachers must start investing in them. As mentioned in the previous chapters, at-promise Tier 3 students are more challenged to adapt to high-achieving settings due to the daily obstacles and stresses they bring to school. Implementing Restorative Justice into our public education curriculums will help teachers connect with those at-promise Tier 3 students and guide them toward graduation. In the following sections, I identify the inequalities experienced by at-promise Tier 3 students. Finally, I recommend how teachers should approach them if they want to gain their trust.

In addition, this chapter focuses on several factors that identify issues in the public education system that affect at-promise Tier 3 students. I will explain the process of working with these types of students. I will also explain how the tier system works in public education based on a review of literature on research-based strategies that define what a Tier 3 student is. Secondly, I will review the importance of the Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) and Restorative Justice in our public school system by identifying the 5 Rs in Restorative.

The At-Risk Tier 3 Student

At-risk Tier 3 students need extra intervention and support from teachers to excel in academia, graduate from high school, and become productive citizens of our country. According to Lane et al. (2014), “Tier 3 efforts are more ideographic and intensive in nature, such as functional assessment-based interventions, 1:1 reading interventions, wraparound services, and family-based supports such as multisystemic therapy” (p. 2). An at-risk Tier 3 student is much more complicated to teach due to the additional support they need and desire. It takes passionate teachers to be able to reach at-risk Tier 3 students. When students are identified as at-risk, the
aftermath is that students show risky behavior because of that label. As a result, this label has made it more convenient for teachers and administrators to identify all Tier 3 students with no expectation, apply a punitive system by sending them to the dean’s office, suspend them, or kick them out of school. The negative side to this penal system is that kicking students out of school can easily lead them to trouble with the law and unmotivated them to return to school and graduate (Sanders, 2013; Vang, 2005).

From At-Risk to At-Promise

As previously mentioned, as time has passed, the term at-risk has changed to at-promise. Educational agencies and community leaders have invested in research and agreed to change the word “at-risk” to “at-promise.” Replacing derogatory terms such as at-risk give hope to students and transitional-aged youth versus considering them at-risk. In Children and Families “At-Promise,” Swadener and Lubeck (1995) asserted, “When at-risk discourse is used, victims are blamed, and the social, economic status quo is easily legitimized” (p. 23). The reason at-risk students continue to commit crimes and do not focus on graduating is that they are emotionally unstable and do not receive or understand emotional intelligence. In Merrill’s Strong Kids—Grades 6-8, Carrizales-Engelmann et al. (2016) explained:

Thus, it is essential to monitor students’ progress and assess whether students are At-risk or experiencing significant difficulties. Identifying at-risk students for learning, social-emotional, and behavior difficulties is critical for comprehensive prevention efforts. (p. 26)

Emotional intelligence is the ability to focus and make the correct decision during crucial times and under pressure, and for an at-promise Tier 3 student, it is not easy; this is based on my personal experience. Most of these students have no clue how to show respect, sympathy, or
empathy to people trying to help them, such as teachers, counselors, administrators, and any other positive adult figure, and that is why they are called at-risk for doing risky behavior that will cause them to get into trouble. Suppose teachers will help these students improve their social-emotional behavior. In that case, it will help these students to make wiser decisions and be cautious about their actions, and as a result, they will become better students.

Instead of creating terms and labels such as at-risk students, we should focus on training teachers to work with students with post-trauma issues, gang affiliations, drug addictions, homelessness, and any other category an at-risk student might fall under. From personal experience, I have noticed that many teachers find it easier to send the at-risk Tier 3 student to the dean’s office or principals and not put up with them versus taking one minute and investing time to help them improve. This can be from a lack of knowledge or not knowing about social-emotional learning. Incorporating a positive behavior intervention that helps with self-awareness can increase the student engagement rate and help cure the wounds from the at-promise Tier 3 students.

Moving forward, it would be better to practice referring to students who are considered at-risk as at-promise. Serving and teaching social-emotional learning to at-promise students with dignity, empathy, and respect will allow these students to put their guard down, build trust, and eventually increase their chances of graduation. As mentioned, studies show that students who are socially and emotionally taught have a higher chance of having a successful life. Once at-promise students feel loved and have a sense of belonging, they will begin to appreciate their wrongs and put effort into improving their behavior, increasing graduation rates. To accomplish this, it takes passionate teachers willing to take the extra step and develop strategies to help the school’s culture be dynamic for every student, including the at-promise ones.
Additionally, it should also be noted that just because one term gets replaced by another does not solve the issue. Society will benefit by seeing them thrive and flourish, decreasing the crime rate. As Thompson (2012) stated, “When individuals are publicly labeled, they are assigned certain negative qualities and forced into the deviant role” (p. 159). In society, labels identify individuals and categorize them into groups. Labeling people leads to negative behavior, especially if it is a derogatory term. In this case, labeling students at-risk can lead them to keep doing risky behavior. Labeling can also limit an individual’s capacity to grow intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and in many more ways. All students, including at-promiss youth, should be allowed to expand their knowledge academically as citizens. By labeling them, we limit them to what they can accomplish. Being labeled has a long-lasting trauma effect that mentally stays with a person and restricts them from improving their performance as a student. In this article, Thompson argued:

Therefore, the whole process of identification, classification, and placement in a special program of exceptional students, and consequently labeling them according to their disability, seems like a public announcement of a current disability of the student, and thus impacts their self-esteem. (p. 162)

The research that leads Thompson to this conclusion is that, as educators, we advocate for students. Understanding the physiological and educational aspects of labeling and stigma can help educators not label students. This quote mentions the aftermath of labeling; I agree that labeling can affect an individual’s self-esteem. In addition, it prevents the person labeled from succeeding. Self-esteem and emotional awareness are among the main components to help improve any individual, special at-promiss Tier 3 students who have been ignored, pushed away, and discarded all their lives. In general, increasing students’ self-esteem enhances their
confidence, which will result in performing better as a student and can lead to the student becoming a student leader.

We have operated under a punitive and penal system for many years, and many low-income students have been the target and labeled *at-risk*. According to the Department of Education of California, an at-risk student is any identified student from a disadvantaged background. At-risk students include students in the following groups: homeless children and youth, dropouts, returning dropouts, and potential dropouts. These students who are labeled at-risk tend to do risky activities because that is what they see themselves as. Instead of expanding and improving their academic cognition, they are dropping out of school and increasing their chances of incarceration. Practicing and replacing terms such as *at-risk* with *at-promise* will not solve the issue, but it will sound less harsh when referring to a student under this category.

**Labels**

One dangerous obstacle in our society is labels. People have become comfortable with labeling and categorizing individuals. Many do not realize that when we label students or people in general, it is much easier to manipulate and oppress them based on their titles. For many years, the public education system has benefited from labeling students with learning obstacles as unique. Current labels are learning disabilities, English Language Learners, Undocumented, Foster Student, GATE, McKinney Vento, Tiers 1, 2, and 3, Special Ed, and many others. Yes, each label helps get government funding, but the money is not worth the labeling. It is a shame that labeling students is the way to get more funding from the government to fund schools, and the aftermath is students living with a stigma for the rest of their first-level education.

As mentioned earlier, labeling at-risk students has only perpetuated their risky behaviors, mainly because they are identified as dangerous. Also, many educators disagree with the term
At-risk. In *Schooling Students Placed at Risk*, Balfanz et al. (2013) reflected, “It became increasingly clear that the label at risk may place students more at risk than internal and external factors” (p. 3). As time has passed, educational leaders, teachers, and community leaders have replaced the term with *at-promise*. This transformation has occurred because, as previously mentioned, the word perpetuates students to keep doing *at-risk* activities and are seen as students doing at-risk behaviors. I argue that one label can replace another label, but at the end of the day, it is still a label, and it can create segregation, stigmatization, and long-lasting trauma. In my opinion, I would recommend calling any students by student and dropping the at-risk or at-promise term. For this project, we will focus on improving our relationship with this type of student. Labeling students is something to keep in mind.

**Multi-Tier System**

Labels can cause long-lasting trauma effects on individuals, make them emotionally unmotivated, and can damage their academic journey. History has shown that when you label a group of people, it is easy to manage, manipulate, oppress, and control that specific labeled group, making them more vulnerable. Balfanz et al. (2013), “Unfortunately, use of the risk paradigm in the educational setting has engendered more victim blaming and labeling as it relates to poor and minority children” (p. 5). In public education, we currently have The Multi-Tier System of Support education system is presented as Tier 1: Universal core or core instruction, which focuses on the overall education learning methods and principles on an applied universal level to all students; Tier 2: Target or strategic instruction/intervention specific particular group of students, mainly “at-promise,” and lastly Tier 3: Intensive instruction/intervention, explicit for high at-promise students—contemporary research models, including statistical methods by the California Department of Education. For instance, in the
Following diagram, I have included a Response to the Instruction and Intervention Framework that has been data-driven by the Common Core State Standards to explain the three stages students fall under. In this case, we are focusing on the Tier 3 students.

Figure 1. Three Stages of Students Under the Public Education System.

Note. Adapted from Kearney and Graczyk (2014).

A multitiered System of Support consists of the following tiers. Tier 1: Schoolwide and class-wide approaches, Tier 2: Targeted Small group and individual interventions, and Tier 3: Intensive Function-Based Interventions.

Steps

When working with at-promise Tier 3 students, multiple locations may take months or years to gain their trust. This process varies depending on the tier of the at-promise Tier 3 student. Some students may be more reachable than others; some might be more conservative and isolated. Students express themselves based on historical background, trauma, system-impacted experience, substance abuse, dysfunctional families, gang affiliation, homelessness, and foster youth.
A second stage component to teaching and reaching the hearts of at-promise Tier 3 students depend on teachers’ experiences with these students. In the mid-1990s, educational theorist Gloria Ladson-Billings introduced the term Cultural Response Teaching. There are three main focuses when applying culture response teaching in a classroom setting. New America’s “Understanding Cultural Response Teaching” website mentions the three main focuses in culture response teaching:

First, teaching must yield academic success. Second, teaching must help students develop positive ethnic and cultural identities while helping them achieve academically. Third, teaching must support students’ ability “to recognize, understand, and critique current and social inequalities.” (Ladson-Billings, 2023, p. 2)

In other words, as teachers, we should observe and use data to distinguish the students that are thriving and the ones that are struggling. These three main principles will reach the students’ hearts and help them develop and train them to become better people in society. Training teachers to understand the culture of the students is known as Cultural Response Teaching. Depending on the background of the teachers and any similarities that the teacher might have, it can help them empathize more with the students by understanding each other’s culture. As a result, the more the student finds similarities, the greater the student’s success rate.

I would also state that when a student relates to a teacher or finds similarities, they are more likely to behave and try their hardest to learn in class. Some teachers are gifted and talented in connecting with students, and others are not. When a teacher comes from a disadvantaged background, students will recognize it and empathize with the teacher and vice versa. This will give a higher opportunity for that at-promise- Tier 3 student to succeed and graduate. Abacioglu et al. (2020) found that applying culture response teaching in low-income public schools will
help increase the connection between teachers and at-promise Tier 3 students. Abacioglu et al. argued:

Advocates of CRT have therefore argued that academic knowledge and skills should be connected to students’ personal experiences and frames of reference within a supportive and cooperative environment. This way, learning becomes more meaningful and engaging. (p. 2)

For instance, a history teacher or English teacher can post posters of any celebrity or musician, and students who know those artists will instantly connect with the teacher. This will motivate at-promise and Tier 3 students to attend class and the higher the graduation turnout rate. In this situation, teachers must be prepared when welcoming students into their classrooms.

**Holistic Pedagogies**

Holistic pedagogies focus on not just the students’ academic aspect but the students’ overall mental health and well-being. Implementing positive language will create a positive school climate in the classrooms. Many schools implement a new holistic pedagogy approach, Positive Behavior Intervention Support, introduced in the early 1990s by reauthorizing the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1997. The U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs and the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESTE) initiated the term. The primary focus of why this term came into play was to support the public education system, schools, and districts to apply a Restorative Justice system in schools and end a penal system. A restorative system is a peaceful way to deal with behavior issues or a crime that has been committed. I will go further into detail regarding Restorative Justice in the following chapter. PBIS also focuses on helping the multitiered approach to help all students with social,
emotional, and behavioral support. As a holistic approach, PBIS focuses on improving all students’ social-emotional and academic improvement, including those with disabilities.

PBIS aims to help students improve their behavior as they progress and age. Many schools are certified in PBIS and have shown a typical pattern of better student behavior and higher graduation rates. All schools should implement PBIS into their mission and vision; this will help all at-promise Tier 3 students improve their behavior. PBIS is an evidence-based three-tier framework to enhance and integrate all data, systems, and practices affecting student outcomes daily. This will help students grow academically and spiritually as well. PBIS should be incorporated into all public-school systems not to train teachers to handle at-promise Tier 3 students’ behaviors.

**They Are Implementing PBIS**

Applying positive behavior interventions and support (PBIS) into our curriculum or allowing PBIS-certified educational agencies to collaborate with our public schools will help improve teachers’ relationships with Tier 3 students and increase graduation rates. An essential component that completes this framework system is allowing other educational agencies to support public schools by allowing them to come into schools and interact with students during nutrition, lunchtime, and even after school. Educational agencies like Upward Bound, AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), and many others have been great contributors for many years to help students value education and graduate. They have helped students finish the academic year, but unfortunately, they have not benefitted 11% of students who come back into schools as Tier 3 or at-promise and do not graduate. One organization that has contributed to helping Tier 3 and at-promise students is Just Us 4 Youth. Whether they are from low-income communities or level 3 students does not matter. All of them deserve a second chance. This
organization specializes in Restorative Justice, goes out to public schools, and provides healing circles to any student who has been a crime suspect or victim. Their goal is to restore the relationship. Their target students are the at-promise Tier 3 students, and they help them heal and grow. Their vision is to focus on the 3 Cs—Campus, Carceral, and Community. This is an example of an educational agency that focuses on helping at-promise Tier 3 students graduate and supports these types of students in making ethical decisions for a bright future.

Many Tier 3 students struggle differently and face other obstacles such as homelessness, falling under McKinney-Vento qualifications, teen pregnancy, and substance abuse. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento Act) (42 U.S.C. § 11431-11435 section 725) is federal legislation that ensures the educational rights and protections of children and youth experiencing homelessness. This McKinney Vento Act targets Tier 3 students, at-promise youth, foster care students, and any student with unstable housing. It helps by providing additional resources to these students under critical situations and eliminating barriers to empower children experiencing homelessness in certain districts. Not having stability only makes students’ learning engagement even worse. The more obstacles’ students face, the higher the possibility of dropping out of high school, eventually leading to students committing crimes, being incarcerated, being under house arrest, and getting deported. If politicians are not investing or considering educational frameworks like these to educate teachers on such terms and varied factors that students face, then as a country, not only are we failing in the education ranking system, but we are also failing our nation’s future leaders.

Statistics

As of 2022, according to Pomona California Education data for research, 11% of 18–24-year-old residents still need to obtain a high school diploma. This means that 11 percent of the
population in Pomona is more likely to live in poverty, which can lead to early death and incarceration and contribute less tax revenue. Jessie Romero (2014) explained the correlation between high school dropouts and incarceration in “The Dropout Dilemma”:

High school dropouts also have a much higher probability of ending up in prison or jail.
Eighty percent of all prisoners are high school dropouts or recipients of the General Educational Development (GED) credential. (More than half of the inmates with a GED earned it while incarcerated. (p. 1)

It is common sense that someone without a high school education tends to care less and not be motivated to do good for their community which will lead them to get into trouble. The United States of America is one of the countries with a higher population of incarcerated individuals and a high correlation with high school dropout rates.

Project

This project offers a framework for the public school system, mainly for teachers and administrators, to help increase graduation rates and decrease dropout rates for at-promise students. The framework will consist of a “101” tutorial on what to do when meeting an at-promise Tier 3 student for the first time for teachers and administrators to gain trust and, as a result, increase attendance, academic, cognitive learning, and graduation rates. In addition to the tutorial, I will include a self-development at-promise Tier 3 student plan for teachers and administrators to have access. It will help teachers and administrators by educating them on Restorative Justice and gaining the trust of at-promise Tier 3 students. Every other year, WASC (Western Association School and College) inspects each school. This framework will help administrators improve their school climate and meet their goals concerning graduation rates.
My goal with this project is to provide it to the public school systems to help increase at-promise Tier 3 students’ graduation rates and prepare them for a vocation or higher education. I believe that millions and even billions of dollars have been misused in our public education system, and it is devastating to see all that money fall into underserving pockets. Instead, money should be invested in educational agencies that practice Restorative Justice and teachers and administrators that genuinely care for our student’s education. I will provide the step-by-step process for helping at-promise students failing all classes to help them get better grades and be engaged in school and several scenarios that will help when teachers are in these types of situations with at-promise Tier 3 students. The goal is to help increase the graduation rates in our public school system and show hope to all Tier 3 students.

Next, I will examine the obstacles that at-risk students face while trying to graduate from high school. I will also discuss current efforts on how schools and districts can implement Restorative Justice practices and strategies to help at-promise students succeed in their academics and personal lives. I will also focus on other topics that complete a formula to find the solution to help at-promise Tier 3 students.

**Restorative Justice**

The Restorative Justice System is now being practiced in multiple schools in k-12 public education. Restorative Justice allows trained and certified staff to educate and implement a solution to a general problem or conflict with at-promise students and all students and people. Restorative means to restore and, in many cases, fix a broken relationship between two people. The goal is to help students understand why they got in trouble in the first place and know how they could have avoided getting in trouble. Secondly, Restorative Justice focuses on reacclimating them back to academics versus punishing them and suspending them from school.
The reality is that most low-income families are also considered at-promise. A low-income family struggles because of a lack of resources, immigration background, cultural barriers, gangs, drugs, lack of education, and asking for help knowing and fearing requesting assistance. Speaking from experience, many of the oldest siblings in a low-income family are the ones that end up becoming the leading providers (breadwinners) alongside their mother or father. This can diminish many opportunities for at-promise students because instead of focusing on graduation from one grade to another, they are worried about how to survive daily and earn money.

As mentioned earlier, my parents never helped me invest in my academics, far less helping me with my homework. I was bright and emotionally intense, which helped me graduate. Still, some of these at-promise Tier 3 students need to gain the skills or be emotionally weak, and they end up making a decision that gets them into trouble, and parents cannot support or help. If my parents had graduated from college, had a successful career, and invested in my education, I would have been a doctor or lawyer and not be writing or working on this project. My point is that many underserved communities need more resources and professionals with experience to understand how to cope and deal with an at-promise Tier 3 student.

**Five Rs in Restorative Justice**

With equity, there are plenty of restoratives involved. Restorative Justice not only restores a relationship with any student but especially with at-promise students and guides them toward success. Restorative Justice focuses on five subtopics: Relationship, Respect, Responsibility, Repair, and Reconciliation. Restorative Justice is a new vocabulary term that is being introduced to the public school education system. Restorative Justice is a holistic approach that focuses on improving a negative situation, such as students’ behavior, and helping improve
students’ behavior. In *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*, Howard Zehr (2016) introduced Restorative Justice in the early 1970s; he believed both the victim and the offenders needed healing and reconciliation, and both should be considered, not exclusively the victim. The Restorative Justice movement was concerned about “needs that were not being met in the usual Western justice process” (Zehr, 2016, p. 11). Restorative Justice’s crux is not to punish the offender but to help the victims and offenders reconcile at peace and move on. The norm in the public education system is to punish the offender without understanding why the student did what they did. Here, I will explain the 5 Rs that make Restorative Justice and what teachers should focus on with their students, especially the at-promise Tier 3 students.

**Relationships**

I will focus on relationships among teachers and at-promise students for the first R. For at-risk students, their willingness to get help may be impossible for multiple reasons. It can be pride, substance abuse, gangs, lack of interest in education, or lack of trust. Most at-promise Tier 3 populations need extra time lowering their guards to one teacher, far less than 5 or 6 teachers. All teachers must be trained to build a universal teaching style for all students to feel welcome and loved. In “Teacher–Student Relationships and Students’ Engagement in High School,” Martin and Collie (2019) urged, “Positive teacher–student relationships are important for students’ academic development. Students in many secondary schools have multiple teachers throughout the day and may have various relationships with each of them” (p. 59). The relationship between teacher and students can be more complex if there are no signs of communication, similarities, or correlations of interest. Having all teachers follow the 5 Rs in Restorative Justice and implement them in their classroom can help students and teachers build a stronger relationship.
In *Building Bridges*, Parker (2019) encouraged, “When students find themselves in challenging situations and come to us for help, we must grab them and say, ‘Let’s go fishing!’” (p. 102). Going fishing is an example of how doing a fun activity with nothing to do with school can help improve the relationship with at-promise Tier 3 students. Sometimes, having to take that extra step and getting permission from family and administration to do such activities will improve and enhance relationships and increase the chances of having that student graduate. In a regular public school, there are, on average, 1,000 to 1,500 students; out of all those students, only about 25% of administrative, including teachers and counselors, build a relationship with students and families. The premise is that after reading this thesis project, teachers should know how to increase that 25% to 100%. Many teachers will build the best relationships with only a few students. When looking at this, we should think of quality over quantity and try to make the most connections with every student in every classroom.

In “Teacher Wellbeing,” Spilt et al. (2011) assessed, “The study of interpersonal relationships with students as a source of fulfillment of the need for belongingness, could, thus, aid our understanding of teachers’ work motivation and wellbeing” (p. 463). Teachers must be able to build relationships with 150 or more students. If teachers are not well rested, mentally healthy, and physically, it will be a significant obstacle to building relationships with all their students. Relationships are crucial in building trust with students, especially at-promise students (Tier 3). We function the most when we have a happy relationship with each other. The same goes for classrooms.

In *Good Teacher-Student Relationships: Perspectives of Teachers in Urban High Schools*, Wilkins (2014) remarked, “Teachers interact with students daily, and these types of relationships they have with them directly impact students’ social, emotional, and academic
experience at school” (p. 52). The most successful classrooms are the ones that have the best relationships between students and teachers. In *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*, Zehr (2016) summarized

The problem of crime, in this world view, is that it represents a wound in the community, a tear in the web of relationships. Crime represents damaged relationships: damaged relationships are both a cause and an effect of crime. Many traditions say that the harm of one is the harm of all—charm such as crime ripples out to disrupt the whole web. (p. 18)

Most of the time, teachers and administrators are unsuccessful in helping students graduate because of the lack of relationship, trust, and similarities that at-promise students have with teachers and vice versa.

Teachers must ensure they meet and follow the California Content Standards and the Common Core that the states require for all students to learn in the academic year and build relationships. Teachers must ensure that all the necessary material and topics are covered, but focusing on gaining students’ trust is essential and equivalent to building a relationship and bonding (Hamre & Pianta, 2006). Often, a teacher loses their temper and notices unlawful behavior with a student. In that case, they automatically kick them out of the class, call security, or send them to the dean’s office. When this occurs, there is a high probability that the student will either (a) not care and will get unmotivated for the rest of the day and eventually get suspended, or (b) will humbly do as told and then come back bothered that they got sent out. If option one occurs, where the student gets suspended or expelled, there is a higher probability of being vulnerable to criminal activity, especially if they are considered at-promise youth living in low-income communities. During crucial moments like these, teachers must be able to multitask and be trained to deal with any at-promise student; instead of kicking the student out, teachers
should build more assertive communication and improve that relationship. While building a relationship, teachers should learn about their at-promise Tier 3 students’ learning styles and understand how to teach in a more relatable way.

In the article, “The Importance of Teachers-Student Relationships,” Spilt et al. (2011) explained:

Models of interpersonal relationships are explored to understand the value of teacher–student relationships for teachers. More specifically, it is suggested that teachers have a basic need for relatedness with their students and that they internalize interpersonal experiences with students into mental representational models (i.e., internal working models) that contain sets of beliefs and feelings regarding the self, the student, and the self–student relationship on different levels of generalization. (p. 457)

The more relatable a teacher can be with at-promise Tier 3 students’ culture, learning styles, and mindsets, the higher the chance the relationship between student and teacher will be. In the public education system, alternative understanding is essential, especially for at-promise Tier 3 students with circumstances and specific needs in comprehension. Many students learn through hands-on experiences; some are auditorial learners, others are visual, and some are kinesthetic learners. Offering different learning avenues to at-promise Tier 3 students will help improve student engagement with academics, build a relationship between teacher and student, and result in a higher graduation rate.

Unfortunately, many teachers are not trained to perform or provide a positive behavior intervention system or a therapeutic Restorative Justice circle session with students. Many teachers tend to rely on counselors for this type of training. This results in an overwhelming situation for counselors. On average, regular public high school has roughly 1,000 students.
Among these 1,000 students, there are only four to six counselors available. Realistically speaking, 250 students per counselor is a hectic ratio, and students need the complete counseling services they should be granted. Overall, relationships need to be built with counselors rather than with teachers exclusively. Training teachers to provide Restorative Justice sessions and positive behavior interventions in their classrooms will lift a ton of weight off the counselors, and help increase graduation rates and build those relationships. Counselors or teachers are often trained to provide such services, and schools must invest in partnering with educational agencies and certified staff to help cultivate positive behavior intervention systems and Restorative Justice circles in all public schools. It is important to note that many kids are used to being punished at home, so it is easy for them to shut down during class activities because of the trauma they might have when they notice the teacher is pointing them out. This is speaking from an at-promise Tier 3 student perspective.

In the article, “Association Among Parent–Teacher Relationship, Autonomy Support, and Career Development of High School Students Across School Types,” Xu et al. (2022) shared the position that “A positive parent–teacher relationship reflects trust, mutuality, affiliation, and support between parents and teachers, creating a harmonious, consistent social climate for student development” (p. 155). Teachers should communicate with parents and update them on the Restorative Justice system, and they can also apply it at home with their children. Any new learning strategies we are implementing in our classrooms and schools are for improving our pedagogy and for parents to get educated. This will show students that teachers and parents are on the same team. This brings me to the second subtopic, Restorative Justice.
Respect

Respect is demonstrated in multiple ways in the public education system. It can be seen in two ways: Staff should never judge or disrespect students based on their status, label, or situation. Students tend to learn more when they feel respected. In the article, “Teacher Influences on Students’ Attachment to School,” Hallinan (2008) assessed:

students who perceive that their teachers care about them, respect them, and praise them are more apt to like school than are those who do not, but that teachers’ expectations for students’ achievement have a negligible effect on whether students like school. (p. 271)

Students can sense when a teacher is being respectful towards them and when the teacher is being genuine in their actions. If teachers meet the contact standards and genuinely care for their students, they should not get students’ respect. In Building Bridges, Parker (2019) summarized, “Experience has taught me that there is no better way for students to learn respect by role-modeling respectful and respectable behavior. Stay consistent. Do what you say and say what you do” (p. 46). All students should be seen equally and treated respectfully. Often, these students do not have parents who care for them and would like to see and feel that unconditional love from their teacher.

In “Making Your First Year a Success: A Classroom Survival Guide for Middle and High School Teachers,” Wyatt and White (2009) counseled: “Remember that if your students were your child, you would want the best education possible for him. If you can remember, making accommodations and concessions seem less inconvenient” (p. 24). When teachers show students how to advocate for themselves and allow their input to be considered, it increases respect among students and teachers. In the article, “Learning from Differences: A Strategy for Teacher Development about Student Diversity,” Messiou et al. (2016) shared, “So that these students
would feel truly involved, the teachers respected their choices regarding the subtopics and accepted their suggestions for activities to be used during the lessons” (p. 45). When teachers can imagine their students as their kids and treat them respectfully, it improves the classroom culture.

Teachers should take at least the first week of school getting to know and understand what their at-promise Tier 3 students like and don’t like and what their best learning methods are. Most of these students can get triggered, and they can lose control and ruin the vibe of the classroom unless the teacher understands the student. Doing so will allow them to control their classroom completely and calm the students. Students always come first, and public-school staff should consistently demonstrate respect to gain respect back. Communicating with about six teachers regarding their child is stressful for a parent. It is equally challenging for an at-promise student to respect all six teachers mutually. In the article, “Building Trust and Respect,” McKinney and Berube (2018) discussed, “Teachers who leave an impression on the lives and hearts of students have a special gift for developing a meaningful relationship with them, based on trust and respect” (p. 55). If, at the very premise, Tier 3 students do not feel respected by their teachers, they won’t go to their classroom and maybe even stop going to school. This means that the average daily attendance in the public education system is decreasing, students are not getting an education, and as a result, schools will get a red flag; parents can get fined. As mentioned, at-promise students who are considered Tier 3 students come from a home setting where they are in control of the households and their parents are not; no respect is given or shown, which means that they are not used to listening or following instructions and less from providing care to a teacher, a teacher must first give respect to earn respect, and then they might increase their probability of graduating.
Students who miss school increase their chances of trouble with the law. As a result, students will begin building a system-impacted record, and the teacher might be at fault to a certain extent. This is a global issue among at-promise Tier 3 students residing in at-risk communities. Respect is essential, especially when working with a Tier 3 student. When meeting, working with, or teaching a Tier 3 student, one should be ready with scaffolding strategies, confidence, patience, and humility to understand that specific student and what they are going through. Typically, Tier 3 students build a wall as they trust the other person or teachers. This means they will gradually start bringing the wall down depending on whether the trust is being built correctly or will not be genuine in your actions. Then, they will keep their distance. As community leaders, public education administrators, teachers, police officers, parents, and even mentors, we all should collaborate to show the students that we are on the same team as the parents. Then, the students will see they cannot win or think we do not care. This will show the at-promise Tier 3 students that they are the ones who need to understand and be open-minded for change to work as a team in the process.

Responsibility

The third R in Restorative Justice is Responsibility; responsibility is not a common trait many humans have. In many cases, being unresponsible may be the norm for at-promise Tier 3 students. Teachers must be responsible for keeping up with each student, especially with at-promise Tier 3 students. In “Exemplary” Chicago Public School Elementary-School Teachers’ Stories of Helping At-Risk Students Learn: Implications for Educational Leadership, Flores (2002) recommended, “Schools must recognize their responsibility and adapt their practices to solve the learning problems of the ever-increasing number of at-risk students, regardless of a student’s starting point or the circumstances surrounding their lives” (p. 18). It is easy for
teachers to not put up with the at-promised Tier 3 students, and rather kick them out of their class; in this case, they are not only failing the student but also failing as teachers, as a public school, and over failing in society as well.

In “Rethinking Teachers’ Professional Responsibilities: Towards A Civic Professionalism,” Kennedy (2005) described:

Teachers have a responsibility to ensure that civic learning opportunities for students—either as part of the formal or informal curriculum—will equip them with knowledge and skills that will enable them to be discerning about the actions and issues in their community. (p. 12)

It is parents’ responsibility for their kids to attend school regularly; unfortunately, in many cases with at-promised Tier 3 students, they don’t have parents, and if they do, they do not prioritize their children’s education. Most At-promised Tier 3 students do not live with their parents, making the situations much more complex, and sometimes their parents can be too busy in their own lives and don’t care to put interest in their children’s education. In “Perspectives of Suburban Public School Teachers on the Characteristics of At-Risk Students,” Bridgeland et al. (2009) explored why students are dropping out. For instance, Bridgeland et al. identified that insufficient support from home was the top response when asked to identify why students drop out of high school. In this case, teachers should be more prepared to play a parent role for these students, help them become more responsible and civilized citizens after high school graduation, and help them become independently accountable.

In “Effects of a Tier 3 Self-Management Intervention Implemented with and without Treatment Integrity,” Lower et al. (2016) summarized, “The first challenge is to progressively turn over to students the responsibility of using notes and views to create a valuable shared
knowledge resource for their community” (p. 494). Teachers should help students how to become more responsible with their priorities. Many of these students were not taught about responsibility from a young age, so to them, it is new. Helping students become more responsible and taking pride in their work is a massive responsibility for teachers to focus on. Students are considered severe chronic absenteeism if they missed 16 days or more, and at this point, all it takes is one phone call from a teacher to parents and for the teacher to connect with the counselor and seek information for the student.

A teacher’s primary responsibilities are to gain students’ trust, educate them, motivate them, and guide them on a path that will lead them toward higher education or a vocation. Students observe the energy from the teacher, and it is the teacher’s responsibility to be highly motivated during lectures and motivate students. In “Teacher Interaction: Motivating At-Risk Students in Web-Based High School Courses,” Lehman et al. (2001) reported, “Both motivation building and personal investment were important to at-risk student engagement, but motivation building appeared to be more robust” (p. 15). Motivation-building interactions may also be more effective because they “tend to contain more content-oriented feedback than personal-investment interactions” (p. 15). One factor in helping build students’ social responsibility and motivation is that it will improve their cognitive behavior in a classroom and make them more engaged in the subjects being taught. This will be more likely to increase their grades and lead to a graduation path. Many students deal with issues, trauma, and anxiety. This causes students to isolate themself and often not even attend class.

In Professionals’ Ethos and Education for Responsibility, Weinberger (2018) explained:

Social responsibility, by contrast, refers to a general form of professional accountability.

In this regard, teachers are supposed to support and encourage students, to foster their
learning process and to try to motivate them to help each other and to participate in the class community, etc. (p. 25)

If higher education is not their priority, then a vocation should be. As teachers our goal should be to aim and prepare students to meet California Content Standards, graduate, and prepare them for college or a vocation. Having all students, especially at-promise Tier 3 students, be responsible, professional, and civilized community citizens should be the aftermath.

In our history of public education, our goal has been to help students develop their full potential, creativity, comprehension, and literacy level. This should apply not just to schools but to homes as well. Unfortunately, not all students are exposed to understanding what it means to be responsible. Most students, especially Tier 3 students, don’t live with both mother and father and lack responsibility, which is not their fault. In other instances, parents are uninterested in their children’s educational progress. Teachers should aim to build a relationship with students and family, which can lead to gaining respect from family and students. At this point, responsibility can come into play. As a teacher, you should never directly mention to students that they are irresponsible, especially in building relationships and gaining. The care will be lost and might take longer to make.

Representing by example is the best way to show students responsibility. For instance, being responsible towards them and working with them during their high school days will show them how reliable you are. In “Scaffolding in Teacher–Student Interaction: A Decade of Research,” Van de Pol et al. (2010) offered, “While fading the support, the teacher can also transfer the responsibility to the student so that the learner will take more and more control over his/her learning” (p. 274). Once the relationship is built and the respect is acknowledged, the at-promise Tier 3 students can now be held accountable, which will help them grow in
responsibility in their lives in school and even outside of the school. In “Effective Curricula for At-Risk Students in Vocational Education: A Study of Teachers’ Practice,” Fix et al. (2019) detailed, “Teachers working in this curriculum see their role as being a coach and point out that coaching at-risk students means challenging students to make their own decisions and taking responsibility for these choices” (p. 5). Providing tasks to Tier 3 students can help their responsible character grow and hold them accountable. Rewarding students for being responsible is a great strategy to help overall students, especially level 3 students, be more accountable and keep practicing their responsibility skills. Lastly, showing compassion, care, and unconditional love will build an at-promise Tier 3 student into a responsible student leader.

**Repair**

The fourth R in Restorative Justice is repair. Repair means fixing or restoring distrust or a broken relationship between the at-promise Tier 3 student and the teacher. Patience is key in the role of a teacher. In “The Impact of Education Support Advisors on the Attendance, Discipline, and Achievement of At-Risk Students,” Townsend (2010) examined how a “restorative process helps students and staff resolve issues and restore positive relationships. The greater emphasis becomes focused on repairing the harm, rather than punishing the offender” (p. 38).

Understanding that relationships and personal feelings will be broken is essential, and teachers need to be prepared and ready to act and repair them optimally. This section also focuses on repairing students’ confidence and self-image and having them transition from negative to positive images. Teachers need to understand that to repair a relationship with an at-promise Tier 3 student, sometimes a meeting with the student and family will need to occur. From experience, this might take multiple tries for various reasons. It can be from lack of care or interest from the student or family, family too busy, or simply family does not care.
In “The Inventory of Teacher-Student Relationships: Factor Structure and Associations with School Engagement Among High-Risk Youth,” Pham et al. (2022) summarized, “Meetings between teachers and students to establish relationships, the use of praise to maintain relationships, and a restore phase to repair relationships following a conflict” (p. 415). Teachers must not give up on the first attempt when reaching out to family and should try to be more persistent, even if it takes multiple attempts. Teachers must be cautious with their strategies to repair an at-promised Tier 3 students’ image. Many of these students can take any little judgment personally, especially if the relationship between you and the students has not been built. In the article, “Relational Underpinnings and Professionality,” Frelin (2015) explained:

In the initial phase of the teacher-student relationship, the main purpose of the activities is to establish trust and repair the students’ self-image so that they can view themselves as successful learners. This requires professional closeness and the teacher distancing herself from a stereotypical teaching role to display humaneness and empathy. (p. 1)

For instance, many at-promised Tier 3 students are stigmatized by how they speak and dress and by the students they hang out with and socialize with. When students get into trouble and do risky activities, teachers consider them red flags and deem students at-risk. As a result, if they break the rules, trust, and relationships and even stop attending school, it will be much more complicated for teachers to repair their relationships. Teachers must try their best to help all students, especially at-promised Tier 3 students, repair their brokenness and any past trauma history, such as negative behavior habits that they might have in school.

In addition, any educational agencies that support and understand at-promised Tier 3 students tend to be successful in helping these students improve. In “The Role of Positive Youth Development Practices in Building Resilience and Enhancing Well-being for At-Risk Youth,”
Sanders et al. (2015) assessed, “When services are respectful and provide opportunities for at-risk youth to exercise agency, better outcomes are achieved than when these characteristics are not features of professional practice” (p. 43). Mutual respect and resources are key to gaining at-promise Tier 3 students. There are multiple ways of giving and getting respect besides being punitive; planning must occur regardless of the teacher’s strategy. In “From Punish and Discipline to Repair and Restore,” Lawrence and Hinds (2016) cautioned, “Students are going to misbehave. Plan for it by anticipating behaviors, teaching positive behavior, and cultivating restorative practices to repair harm and restore relationships” (p. 22). Teachers must plan for the worst and expect it because if teachers don’t, it can ruin the atmosphere of the entire class from prospering and meeting the learning objectives for the day. For instance, if a student fights with another student, getting their families involved in a peaceful and respectful meeting is essential to discuss the incident and have both students overcome their problems by reconciling and repairing their relationship. This is where Restorative Justice starts. Having family and students face each other to overcome any obstacles and personal issues they are facing that interfere with their education is gold. If there is no communication with students, though, teachers will struggle to repair any problems or obstacles with the students.

In Students’ Self-Repair in EFL Classroom Interactions: Implications for Classroom Dynamics,” Beshir and Yigzaw (2022) suggested, “To help teach and develop students’ communication skills, teachers should be aware of the repair techniques employed and interaction breakdowns” (p. 3). Repair is part of the process to help at-promise Tier 3 students graduate from high school. Many at-promise Tier 3 students, regardless of how mean and disrespectful they seemingly are, want an adult figure they can fully trust for support and motivation. In Supporting At-Risk Students with Emotional Intelligence, Kiani (2016) described,
“At-risk students want their teachers to foster an emotional connection with them, care about them holistically, and repair their trust and confidence” (p. 16). At-promise Tier 3 students often seek love and compassion because they have not received it, and many hope to find it in school. Teachers must be prepared to take the initiative and embody attributes of a father or mother figure to their at-promise Tier 3 students if they care about positively changing these kids’ lives.

**Reconciliation**

The final R in Restorative Justice is reconciliation. To reconcile with someone, there must be a broken relationship; once reconciliation has occurred, both parties can move forward and build a relationship if they desire. In “‘That Teacher Likes Me’: Student-Teacher Interactions that Initiate Teacher Expectation Effects by Developing Caring Relationships,” Johnston et al. (2022) still reads, “Reconciling with teachers expectations was constructed to explain how the students experienced their teachers’ expectations of them. Students’ experiences of “caring relationships” (p. 4). Any student can immediately pick up on a teacher who does not care about their relationships or the broken relationship that they might have with that student. In this case, it will be much more challenging to help an at-promise Tier 3 student be successful in class. Not only would they be disrespectful towards this teacher, but they would stop showing up to class. Reconciliation is challenging for most at-promise Tier 3 students to undertake. Many students have not been exposed to loving or carrying relationships, especially rebuilding one in school with a teacher. In “Unsettling the Settler Within,” Regan (2010) suggested that people can “learn to live together about difficult histories, envisioning reconciliation as a liberatory form of non-violent resistance. Thus, as one form of peace-building education, treaty education opens such possibilities” (p. 241). Inspiring at-promise Tier 3 students that violence is not the solution to problems will allow them to put down their guard, humble themselves, and be open to
reconciling relationships. Many reasons why at-promise Tier 3 students suffer in isolation and hate are because of their past. Instead, they would stick to themselves, not caring to reconcile any broken past relationships, versus learning how to forgive and communicate as humans to reconcile a relationship.

Feeling loved and cared for is strange to them, and they don’t know how to react when given and often refuse to accept it. Both parties must be healed mentally, emotionally, and spiritually to reconcile with the other person. It can get awkward and messy if both parties are not entirely healed and prepared to face each other. In “The Possibilities for Reconciliation Through Difficult Dialogues: Treaty Education as Peacebuilding,” Tupper (2014) noted:

- The use of qualifiers to identify the strengths and weaknesses of an opposing argument.
- The third strategy consists of providing students with guidance to keep both parties (i.e., the students taking, respectively, the affirmative and negative positions) on the same discussion topic. It can be used to assist teachers with forming broad questions that prompt students to conduct deeper discussions. (p. 480)

Before a teacher personally reconciles with a student, they must be prepared to have some loving, genuine, and caring questions that will not trigger the other party during the confrontation. Even the tone of the voice can ruin the reconciling process. It is easy for a teacher to shatter or break a relationship with a student instantly and might not get a chance to reconcile with the student and vice-versa.

Sometimes, teachers do not have the patience or time to reconcile with that at-promise Tier 3 student, parents, or caregivers. Teachers must make time and be confident and bold enough when hosting reconciling sessions with both parties. As an at-promise Tier 3 student, holding grudges is much easier than facing the person who caused or has been harmed. All
students considered that youth and even transitional-age youth from ages eighteen to twenty-four must be shown unconditional love. The teacher must first understand them so they can love them enough to reconcile any broken relationship and distrust. This will help teachers make students feel welcome in their classroom without judgment. In “What Makes a Star Teacher,” Hill-Jackson (2019) posited, “Star Teachers consciously create opportunities to demonstrate to the students ‘this is your class, your work, your effort’ (p. 112). Using the I statement is an excellent way to begin. Making comments such as “I was wrong and did not mean to say what I said,” “I understand we disagree,” “Please respect my decision as I respect yours,” and “But I want to let you know that I still care and I am here to support you,” or even “No matter what happens between us just know that I care about you and want the best for you” etc. These statements will help heal students, especially an at-promise Tier 3 students, and allow them to reconcile.

By going the extra mile, teachers can even do a home visit, try to make peace in the students’ environment, clarify how they feel, and tell them directly that they would like to reconcile with students or the parties that have caused or been harmed. This will show care from the teacher, love, and compassion towards the at-promise Tier 3 students. All students are different and have their unique strengths and struggles. In “The Ones that Care Make all the Difference,” Guzzardo et al. (2021) advised, “Using an ethics of care approach, the professor should be committed to the success of the relationship as well as to each individual, understand the student as a unique individual, and respect each one” (p. 46). Students will recognize the extra step teachers take and respect that you care about reconciling with them. It will increase the chances of the student wanting to fix the relationship. Applying the 5 Rs in Restorative Justice towards the at-promise Tier 3 students will take unconditional love, patience, encouragement, and empathy.

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System-Impacted Students

A second chance is a new term for formerly incarcerated inmates and is being incorporated into our society. Only a few ex-inmates are content with the word second chance because we all have received multiple options, whether incarcerated or not. A second-chance person can be referred to as a returning community member from the carceral system to the community or, in this case, a returning system-impacted student. Many high school students have been incarcerated and are now system-impacted, reside in underserved communities, and go to nearby public schools exposed to higher crime rates. This can mean a student has been referred to the Department of Child Family Services with the involvement of police and juvenile system impacts such as group homes, house arrest, and probation (Lange, 1998). As mentioned in relatable articles by Leone and Drakeford (1999), Many system-impacted high school students return to the carceral system if action is not taken. Once a student gets system impacted, there is an above-average probability that they start to ruin their record and make the wrong decision, such as dropping out or picking up an addiction.

Teachers need to understand why at-promise Tier 3 students are in their situations and try to help them with their obstacles. Once teachers in the public education system understand why at-promise Tier 3 students behave the way they behave, it will help create trust, increase graduation rates, and decrease dropout rates.

This chapter focused on explaining the process of working with at-promise Tier 3 student population, the effects of labeling students, the multi-tier system in public education, Restorative Justice, and the importance of respecting and valuing returning system-impacted students.

I hope that all teachers learn from what has been posited in this chapter and help invest in those couple of students in their classroom who are considered at-promise Tier 3 students to
create interventions to prevent them from getting more in trouble and instead guide them towards graduation. At-promise Tier 3 students are as intelligent as the 4.0 honor students but in their own unique ways, and we need to try our best to find their uniqueness and support them in their journey toward success.
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

This project aimed to guide high school teachers on Restorative Justice pedagogy that challenges punitive discipline and helps improve the graduation rate of at-promise Tier 3 students. This project also provides a step-by-step process of a self-development at-promise Tier 3 student plan for teachers to access while helping their students improve academically and professionally throughout the school year. I include three crucial scenarios with at-promise Tier 3 students to help teachers respond if this case arises while they are working. The goal is to motivate teachers to not give up on these students, and instead to encourage them to graduate and prepare them to pursue a vocation or higher education.

Target Population

Most at-promise Tier 3 students are from underdeveloped communities, where education is inequitable and schools are negatively impacted by neighborhood policing that profiles for gang affiliation, prostitution, crimes, and narcotics. These activities are exposed daily to children as young as 11 years old. Many students have not even hit puberty and are already exposed to dangerous and inappropriate circumstances at home. Secondly, the housing market is a challenge for many at-promise Tier 3 students; they are considered low-income families, and most of the time, they are raised by single or no parents.

In the public education system, a student jumping from house to house who lacks stability—or a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, lives in an abandoned building or parked car, or even lives in a motel is considered to qualify under the McKinney Vento Act (Section 725). Some low-income neighborhoods in Los Angeles County are Pomona, Compton, South Central, East Los Angeles, Pacoima, and others. These demographics have a high percentage of at-promise Tier 3 students. The majority of their parents are considered
undocumented, homeless, gang-affiliated, and with high poverty levels, which increases the chances of the at-promise Tier 3 student dropping out of school and continuing the cycle. The type of students that will benefit the most from this project are disadvantaged students who need support, love, or understanding. Most situations are that students’ parents do not prioritize their children’s education, and students end up not valuing education and losing motivation to even go to school. I have created a student development plan and three scenarios so teachers can access them to help them with their at-promise Tier 3 students. My goal is to help all public schools in low-income communities increase their graduation rates and not lose hope in broken and struggling students.

Most at-promise Tier 3 students are from underdeveloped communities: the culture of the community is toxic, non-educated, and negatively impacted, gang-affiliated, prostitution, crimes, and narcotics, which heavily influence these neighborhoods. These activities are exposed daily to children as young as 11 years old. Many students have not even hit puberty and are already exposed to dangerous and inappropriate circumstances at home. Secondly, the housing market is a challenge for many at-promise Tier 3 students; they are considered low-income families, and most of the time, they are raised by single or no parents. Most at-promise Tier 3 students are from underdeveloped communities: the culture of the community is toxic, non-educated, and negatively impacted, gang-affiliated, prostitution, crimes, and narcotics, which heavily influence these neighborhoods. These activities are exposed daily to children as young as 11 years old. Many students have not even hit puberty and are already exposed to dangerous and inappropriate circumstances at home. Secondly, the housing market is a challenge for many at-promise Tier 3 students; they are considered low-income families, and most of the time, they are raised by single or no parents.
**Materials**

This project provides insightful knowledge of experience regarding what identifies an at-promise Tier 3 student and how to support them in their high school journey by providing instructional strategies that a teacher can implement into their lesson—such as, social and emotional learning and the Positive Behavior Intervention System, as well as the tier system in our public education. I also provide the principles of Restorative Justice, which will help teachers implement strategies into their pedagogies and help them improve their relationships when dealing with a case involving any students who have been harmed or have harmed another. Lastly, I have provided a product called a self-development Tier 3 student plan. This worksheet offers a step-by-step plan to help all teachers when working with those at-promise Tier 3 students in their classroom throughout the school year. This material aims to allow teachers to improve their relationship with the most challenging students: the angry, the lost, the disrespectful, and the confused.

**Procedures**

At the start of this project, you will see the model of the multiple-tier system in our public education. This is to help identify the new and upcoming teachers regarding what a Tier 3 student is, and they can do further research. In many years of experience, I have realized that 90 percent of at-promise Tier 3 students lack love, respect, and compassion in their personal lives. By applying and showing students what they are missing, teachers have a greater chance of rescuing the at-promise Tier 3 student and helping them graduate. You can assess this outcome by noticing how students will become more engaged, start coming to school more, and be more respectful towards the teacher. From experience, many of the at-promise Tier 3 students I have
worked with have been seeking what parents don’t provide them—essentials such as love, respect, compassion, understanding, recognition, and support.

At the start of this project, you will see the model of the multiple-tier system in our public education. This is to help identify the new and upcoming teachers regarding what a Tier 3 student is, and they can do further research. In many years of experience, I have realized that 90 percent of Tier 3 students lack love, respect, and compassion in their personal lives. By applying and showing students what they are missing, teachers have a greater chance of rescuing the at-risk Tier 3 student and helping them graduate.
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

This project was a compilation of primary and secondary sources from passionate higher education researchers and teachers who identify the struggle of disadvantaged students. This project is guided and based on my experience working with at-promise Tier 3 students in underserved communities. The project’s primary goal is to educate teachers on what an at-promise student is, how to gain trust from at-promise Tier 3 students, and how to guide them toward graduation, vocation, and higher education. In this project, I provide three live scenarios that can help teachers with a tough time dealing with an at-promise Tier 3 student and a self-development, at-promise Tier 3 student plan for teachers to access through the academic year and complete for at-promise Tier 3 students. The overarching goals of this project is to increase graduation rates of at-promise Tier 3 students, help teachers build a relationship with these types of students, and make underserved communities safer for families to live in by building the next generation of leaders.

Limitations

The resource I provided is focused only on students who have lost hope and respect for education. Many more resources can help many kinds of students that should have been mentioned here.

The spectrum that I chose to focus on was the at-promise Tier 3 population. These students have missed multiple school days, are failing most classes, do not have a positive role model, and seemingly have no life purpose. Consequently, this project is intentionally designed for the public schools surrounding low-income neighborhoods. In other places, many teachers might not have to have any students dealing with these obstacles, so that this project will be
useless. Many public schools in higher-income and upper-class suburbia would not benefit from this project.

**Conclusion**

This project was designed to improve our graduation rates in our underserved neighborhoods, in any public school with a population of at-promise Tier 3 students. I have been eager to reach every at-promise Tier 3 student, but it is impossible for one person alone. Hopefully, this project will help other educators reach these types of students. It is devastating to see young and transitional-age students lose their lives to peer pressure, alcoholism, gang-affiliated activities, and even drug overdose.

**Recommendations**

As a firm believer in education, I am a prodigy of how education has saved my life; I focused on getting evidence-based a similar mindset to scholars. I have found that most of my experiences have been from working in low-income neighborhood high schools with a high population of at-promise Tier 3 students who identify their schools and neighborhoods as “Ghetto” or make statements such as “My parents do not care about my grades or even if I come to school.” I have collaborated with educational agencies to help these students find a mentor that matches their character, and they can save them; other times, all it takes is to invite struggling students to play basketball, work out, or go for a thirty-minute hike to be able to gain their trust. Another strategy is asking these students out for lunch, like a $10 meal from McDonald’s, with the school administration’s and family’s permission. These small things in life have helped at-promise Tier 3 students bring their guard down and trust me in assisting them in developing their academic and professional goals.
Most of the time, as a teacher, we are overwhelmed with so many students, and the last thing we want to do is pay extra attention to the most disruptive students in our class. These students are the way they are because they seek attention and need someone to understand them; they do not want to be told what to do but instead to be supported in their decisions. They seek to be heard. We must guide them to make wise decisions that will help them and not break them. I have strategically formatted my research in the specific topics for all teachers to follow along and implement my project into their pedagogical practices to guide all at-promise Tier 3 students towards a graduation path and not lose hope. By building relationships with the student’s family, it will be beneficial to see the big obstacle and understand why the student is struggling from a parent’s perspective. We must consider what happens in their daily lives and what trauma these at-promise Tier 3 students carry with them at school and home. There is an innovative, passionate, intelligent, and loving student deep inside all at-promise Tier 3 students, and our goal is to help them embrace it.

I want to challenge teachers—next time a student disrespects their classroom rules, take an extra step and reach out to family, even do a home visit if needed. This will help teachers understand why students are the way they are. Teachers must know that we are not alone and have support from other educational agencies, afterschool programs, mentoring nonprofit educational programs, and community organizations.
REFERENCES


https://doi.org/10.1177/08948453221123629

PART II: SELF-DEVELOPMENT STUDENT PLAN FOR AT-PROMISE TIER 3

By

Luis Antonio Pachecano
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INTRODUCTION

To all teachers. Here you will find a template with multiple forms and examples that you can utilize when working with an at-promise, Tier 3 student. I recommend taking time reading over the research before going over the project. A second recommendation is building relationships with educational agencies to be able to get additional support such as a mentor for the student that can work closely with you during the process of guiding the at-promise tier 3 student. My goal with these examples, forms, and templates is to help all teachers reach to the unreachable students, those that the majority of teachers do not want to deal with because of their behavior issues, rough backgrounds, lack of motivation, low self-esteem, and more. I consider the “diamonds on the rough.”

Please consider the scenarios I have provided. From my own experience, personally and professionally, most at-promise, Tier 3 students tend to fall under these categories.
SELF-DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR AT-PROMISE TIER 3 STUDENTS

To further the teacher’s personal growth, skills, and classroom management, the teacher shall begin by personalizing a self-development plan for their at-promise Tier 3 students.

The teacher should have time to complete this before, after school, or during prep time with each student under the at-promise Tier 3 category.

Self-Development Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students Name:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Start Date:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Check-in Intervals:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The scope of this project consists of a personalized student plan, which should include three focus areas to improve students’ character in a holistic approach.

Three focus areas are:
Health and Physical Wellness, Education, and Personal.

Recommended time to check with students:
(Twice a week/Check-in) It varies for each student.

1) Health & Physical Wellness

- Physical Activities promote healthy academic habits and a healthier mindset, improving graduation chances.

- Optimistic and open-minded to try new challenges.

Teachers should identify any special needs or modifications the student might need. The teacher will do research within educational agencies, after-school programs, and non-profit
organizations that will support these personal and emotional modifications that students might need and build a relationship with them.

Then, students can attend mentoring sessions such as one-on-ones or in-group sessions with an experienced mentor/staff member who can support the student and motivate them to change and improve from any educational agencies mentioned. A teacher must make connections, ensure the student attends sessions with the educational agency’s partners, and communicate with the student’s mentor and parent/legal guardian.

Connecting students with an educational agency that promotes physical wellness, such as sports or workout activities, will increase students’ interest in reconnecting back to school. By keeping the students occupied during and after school hours in activities such as working out, students not only clear their minds but also release all that negative energy and reframe their mindset to an optimistic one. Workout activities such as hikes, mile runs, marathons, sports (Basketball, Soccer, Baseball, etc.) and other physical activities can help kids gravitate more toward education and less toward dropping out.
**GOALS**

*Provide details below (collaboration with an educational agency):*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher/Comments</th>
<th>Start Date</th>
<th>Schedule</th>
<th>Mentor/Comments</th>
<th>Additional information/</th>
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</thead>
</table>

*This is a sample table that a teacher can create with the educational agency partners and counselor of the student and should remain confidential!*

Actual date enrolled:

- Teachers should Identify two (2) tangible short-term (2–4 weeks) goals and one (1) long-term (90+ days) plan.

  *Goals should be related to health and wellness.*

**Goal #1**

Sample: *How fast do you plan to run a mile? Or how much weight do you plan to bench lift or squat by the end of the month?*

When is this goal expected to be completed?

*(No longer than a month)*

**Goal #2**

Sample: *What basketball league would you like to join, and how can we assist in making sure you attend practice and games and commit to finishing the basketball game season?*

When is this goal expected to be completed?
(This can be a quarterly goal or semi-year goal.)

Goal #3

Sample: You want to complete a 5K or 10K marathon. How do you plan to prepare for it? (Here, teachers can get creative with the educational agency and perhaps train with students, such as running every Saturday for one hour, perhaps with parents’ or guardians’ consent, of course.)

When is this goal expected to be completed?

(This can be a quarterly goal or semi-year goal.)

Educational/Learning Goals

- Ex: Educational tech classes
- Saturday school
- Evening make-up credit events
- After-school tutoring

Students are working to improve proper heading in assignments, improving schoolwork ethics, and making up credits.

Provide progress details below (Shared with the Teacher, Counselor, and Mentor):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of check-in w/ mentor</th>
<th>Progress / Challenges</th>
<th>Priority assignment</th>
<th># of hours dedicated to this goal?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Discuss with the teacher plans/activities to improve writing, reading, and critical thinking skills.

One question to keep in mind. Will students be pursuing higher education (college)? Is the student interested in a vocational training program? Would the student have some interest in joining the army?

Provide details below (*Shared with the Teacher, Counselor, and Mentor*):

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**Personal**

- Identify any personal needs and how those needs will be met or what support system students will need and have access to.

Teachers should be able to work with students to comply with a list of current needs, beginning with items/areas.
<table>
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<th>Emergency Needs?</th>
<th>Supports to be provided</th>
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Describe any barriers prohibiting the student from obtaining goals (Shared with Teacher, Counselor, and Mentor): _____________________________________________________________

Student Signature: __________________________________________
DATE:

Teacher Signature: __________________________________________
DATE:

Parent Signature: ___________________________________________
DATE:
TIER 3 STUDENT SCENARIOS

At-promise Tier 3 student scenarios

Student A:

The student’s parents are divorced, and student A lives with their mother, a struggling addict. Student A has no stability or support at home, constantly moving from one house to another and even staying at hotels with their mother. Mom is a single parent and struggles with drug addiction. Student A has a deep father wound and does not have a positive male figure in their life.

Student A Possible Solutions Scenario:

First, trust needs to be built between the teacher and the student. Then, the student must rely on the teacher, and then they can openly express emotions and explain their situation to the teacher. The teacher can then help show students compassion, respect, and love. By applying this during or after school hours in a safe environment, students will feel that this teacher genuinely cares. Providing support will boost students’ engagement and interest in school and improve the graduation rates among at-promise tier 3 students.

Student B:

Student B lives in a gang-affiliated neighborhood, decides to get associated with the gang culture, and starts losing interest in school. Student B starts picking up habits such as constantly coming high or intoxicated into school. Student B stops showing up at school.

Student B Possible Solutions Scenario:

The teacher should contact the counselor and request a parent meeting with student B. The goal is to utilize the self-development Tier 3 student plan. In addition, they are referring students to a drug treatment organization that provides coping mechanisms and strategies to reduce drug consumption, such as therapy sessions, extracurricular activities, and student jobs (requiring drug
testing every other week). The goal is to have parents aware of the situation and find possible resources to reduce or eliminate drug abuse.

Another Scenario will be connecting students with an organization that specializes in working with these types of students and matching the student with a mentor. The mentor then can take the lead and work with this student throughout the school year. Of course, sharing case notes will be required between the teacher, mentor, and counselor.

**Student C:**

Student C’s mother has passed away, and Student C has lost her purpose in life. Student C decides to give up on schoolwork and stop attending school. The Father of student C is working full time to pay the bills and has no interest in keeping up the child’s education and would instead students drop out of school and get a job.

**Student C Possible Solutions Scenario:**

In this case, the student needs a lifelong term mentor. The teacher will need to play a partial role as a parent figure and connect the student with a partner education organization that will play a big brother or sister role in her life—connecting students to volunteering opportunities and educating students to learn how to cope with pain wholly and positively. Having student C stay busy and apply the reward treatment will allow the student to not get into a depressed mode and give up on life. Building positive relationships in Student C’s life will increase the chances of Student C graduating and pursuing a career or higher education.
CONCLUSION

I hope this project was helpful. Please share and pass on to others. Remember that the majority of the responsibilities as teachers falls on us. We need to reflect and ask ourselves, what is wrong with the way I am teaching and how can I improve my pedagogy in order to help all students, how can I help them trust me and open up?

Remember that you are not alone and whatever you think you are lacking as a teacher, many others are as well. Please keep reaching out and continue the research. I did this from my heart and years of my own experience as an at-promise Tier 3 student and working in the field for many years. I am a student that got to prove the statistics wrong, and it was because of a teacher like yourself that took time and spent the effort to improve and understand students like me. Thank you to all teachers and educators that have made a difference and inspired and motivated me to not give up.

Blessings,

Mr. Pachecano