

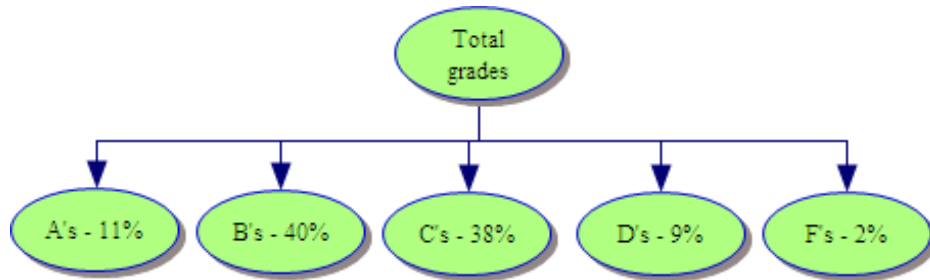
LETTER TO PARENTS REGARDING MY TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

I've always believed that one of the most important parts of being an effective teacher is having the ability to mix things up. You cannot allow students to become bored or have activities become routine. Now entering my fourth year of teaching, upon reflecting, I have noted that many of my practices have changed, but my approach has always been the same.

One of my philosophies (which may be considered radical) is that I teach all of my classes the same material. In short, every class is treated as an honors class: same types of tests, assignments, etc. Parents of students in my "regular" classes may be a little unnerved at this approach. Please allow me to explain. It is my belief that more than ninety-nine percent of students have the *ability* to perform at or beyond honors level. Without getting too political, I feel safe in saying that our standards of excellence have dropped over the last fifty years, while our expectations for excellence have risen. The United States is no longer in the top ten among the world's countries when it comes to education. I believe this puts all of our children in an unfair position. Ask any of my former students(or parents of) and you will find that I am the antithesis of unfair. So what is to be done? Shall we lower our expectations, and accept these lower standards of excellence. I say no!

I expect the *best effort* out of every single student whose educational well-being is placed in my care. Your thoughts at this point may sound something like, "well, that is all well and good, but how is my "regular" child supposed to succeed in an honors class." The answer is very simple. They will succeed because it is expected of them. Perhaps many of these kids have had too many teachers who would look at a class of "regular" kids and think, "oh boy, here we go again." If the teacher doesn't expect the best, then they will rarely receive it.

To make things fair for my classes which are not labeled as honors, these students will receive a curve on almost every test and assignment done in this class. By doing this I can challenge students while still keeping the rules of assessment fair for all. At this point you may be leaning to my side a little more, but I'm sure you would like some actual proof. I'm glad you asked. In two years of following through on this plan of action, more than 240 students have passed through my doors. In that span of time only four students failed English I. These four students (may a higher power bless them) did not exactly have school anywhere near the top of their priority list (to put it mildly). It would not matter if I put a work of Shakespeare in front of them, or the most basic reading material for ninth grade students. In this time I have encountered one student who honestly tried their very best, but could not succeed (hence my 99%). Due to their diligence, work ethic, and positive attitude, this student ultimately left with a C. To breakdown the grades earned by percentages. (and I don't grade on a bell curve-very unfair! - see the letter on assessment)



As you can see, A's are less frequent, but more than possible. B's are plentiful and C's are well represented as well. Overall, we see an 89% success rate and a 98.3% pass rate. Some might think by looking at these numbers that my class is "easy". I can only say at this point to either have your child speak to a former student or look over some of the work we will be covering this year. Hemmingway, Poe, Shakespeare, Washington Irving, and Harper Lee look like names you might find on a college syllabus, yet you have just seen how students have fared when faced with the challenge.

I would like to close by reciting a true story a man named Steve Barclay told at a seminar in 2004. He spoke about an experiment that was performed in Anytown, U.S.A. A teacher was given five classes of fifth graders. Each class was no more advanced than any of the others (according to standardized test results and past performance). However, the administrators of this little experiment failed to mention that to the teacher in question. They went even further by outright lying to the teacher, in telling her that three of the classes were "regular" classes. They also said that one of the classes were filled with honors students and that the final class was littered with students of extraordinary talent. The only stipulation they gave the teacher, was that she was not allowed to call them "gifted" or "honors", etc. I'm sure you can fill in the blanks to the rest of the story at this point. The three "regular" classes performed how one would expect them to. A few standouts here and there, but nothing remarkable on the whole. The honors class performed at a higher level, but the gifted class was absolutely "phenomenal" according to the teacher. They were enthusiastic about learning, answered questions, never missed assignments, and returned dazzling test results. This teacher received excellence because (without knowing) she simply expected it of them.

Many of you may have been annoyed at my repetitious use of quotation marks around the word regular throughout this letter. My apologies, but these uses have been thrust at you repeatedly to make a point. In my mind, there are no "regular" students, only "regular" teachers.

-Anthony Cangemillo