



TEACHER ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE STANDARD 8: Academically Challenging Environment
Teacher Quick Guide

HOW DOES AN ACADEMICALLY CHALLENGING CLASSROOM IMPACT STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT?

Learning can be viewed as a cognitive development process in which individuals actively construct systems of meaning and understanding of reality through their interactions and experiences with their environments. In the cognitive development process, a quality learning environment is crucial to students' learning and effective teachers create conditions that permit students to explore new ideas and take academic risks in their learning.

Classroom learning environments are associated with students' academic behaviors and academic achievement. Academically challenging classrooms provide learning activities that have a rigorous instructional focus with clear and well-structured procedural rules, together with opportunities for active participation and engagement. Holding high performance expectations has an important

"Students typically don't exceed their own expectation, particularly with regard to academic work. But students will go beyond what they think they can do under certain conditions, one of which is that their teachers expect, challenge, and support them to do so."

Kuh, G. (Change; 2003; Vol. 35, No. 2)

impact on teachers' instructional practices and is often reflected in the degree of teachers' expectations for student performance. Teacher perceptions and expectations are expressed through the goals teachers and assist students in setting. The beliefs that teachers have about their students and their ability to learn can positively or

negatively impact their actual learning. Student perceptions of teachers' expectations are especially important to the academic engagement. Students are more engaged with their learning when they receive high expectations and believe that being in school will enable them to do something positive in their lives.

There are different ways that teacher expectations influence student achievement. Effective teachers create academically challenging classrooms by maximizing instructional time, protecting instruction from disruption, orchestrating smooth transitions, assuming responsibility for student learning, setting high (but reasonable) expectations for all students, and supporting students in achieving them. They use effective questioning, critical thinking, challenging tasks, and interesting activities to increase student engagement and accountability in the learning process.

ACADEMICALLY CHALLENGING CLASSROOM:

Attributes of an Academically Challenging Classroom:

- Active engagement
 - Students are directly involved in actions that support intentional learning
- Authenticity and relevance
 - Students see the relationship between the curriculum and their lives
- Collaboration and community
 - Noncompetitive social interaction of students with others about the content
- Learner Autonomy
 - Student has some degree of control over methods of learning
- Multiple Perspective
 - Experiences allow students to see the same information in different ways
- Self-regulation and metacognitive awareness
 - Students are involved in identifying strategies to increase their learning and take responsibility for their own learning
- Transformation
 - Students are expected to use insights gained to reorganize, synthesize, or transform information into new forms
- Productivity
 - Students are expected to do something with the knowledge acquired

Strategies to establish and maintain an Academically Challenging Classroom:

- Establish clear academic focus for each lesson
- Provide explicit learning objectives
- Create meaningful learning lessons and experiences
- Monitor student behavior. Take preventive rather than reactive management actions.
- Build cooperation among yourself and your students
- Determine the appropriate level of task difficulty for students