

# Students Set Academic Goals for the First Time

K.O. Knudson Middle School,  
Clark County School District,  
Las Vegas, Nevada

## Demographics

- Urban middle school
- 1,259 students
- 62% Hispanic
- 20% White
- 10% African American
- 73% free/reduced lunch
- 7% special education

## Challenge

K.O. Knudson Middle School is a combined magnet and “zone” school with a creative arts and technology focus, serving primarily low-income students in Clark County School District. “In the past, low self-esteem and low self-confidence prevented many of our students from setting goals and achieving academic success,” said Stacey Sussman, eighth grade teacher and student council advisor.

In the fall of 2011, when the district area academic manager heard about student improvement in another district using *Success Highways*, administrators gave the *Success Highways* resiliency assessment to every eighth grader at selected schools. “We wanted to find out if students thought they would graduate and if they had the tools to graduate,” said Ms. Sussman.

The *Success Highways* social-emotional data profiles showed that many students were at risk of academic failure, and the school decided to implement the *Success Highways* curriculum in the spring of 2012.

## The Six Resiliency Skills

Assessed and taught  
by *Success Highways*

**Valuing education**  
**Academic confidence**  
**Connectedness**  
**Stress management**  
**Health and well-being**  
**Intrinsic motivation**

## Implementation

After winter break, ScholarCentric consultants trained five teachers on *Success Highways*. In order to complete the full-year curriculum in one semester, teachers covered two lessons each week, with students separated into two groups by gender. “The students showed growth, and I was excited about teaching *Success Highways* again over a full year instead of just one semester,” said Ms. Sussman.

In the fall of 2012, every Knudson eighth grader took the *Success Highways* resiliency assessment again. The report showed that 20-25 students were seriously at-risk. Based on these results, counselor input, and students’ grades and behavior, a group was selected to participate in *Success Highways*. “We wanted to bring in the students who felt there was no hope for them,” said Ms. Sussman.

**“When I shared the difficulties I’ve dealt with, following *Success Highways* guidelines, students felt empowered to deal with struggles in their own lives.”**

**Stacey Sussman, Eighth Grade Teacher,  
K.O. Knudson Middle School**

“And we also included a few straight-A students who suffered from poor self-esteem because they were pushed hard by family and over-scheduled.”

Ms. Sussman worked with a class of girls, and John Isola, the school PE teacher, worked with a class of boys. Ms. Sussman’s class took place once a week during a 50-minute advisory period. She set the tone in the first week of school, explaining that the *Success Highways* class would be a safe place where students could get help and where no judgments would be made.

Following the *Success Highways* lesson model, Ms. Sussman shared experiences from her own life. “Most students avoided thinking about the future because they thought they could never achieve what they wanted,” she says. “So I told my own story. I talked about different jobs I’ve had, changes I’ve made to protect my well-being, and my plan to go back to school to get a doctorate. When I shared the difficulties I’ve dealt with, following *Success Highways* guidelines, students felt empowered to deal with struggles in their own lives.”

Students opened up more and more over the course of the year. They began to see that learning is a lifelong process, that long-term goals would position them for future success, and that motivation could help them out of bad situations. For students who felt that college was not financially viable, Ms. Sussman talked about scholarships and encouraged them to believe there was a way to achieve their dreams. They responded positively and enjoyed their *Success Highways* class time.

## Results

Students began to look to the future for the first time and discuss careers and salaries. “Students started to understand that their grades would affect their high school options. They began to set goals and see the big picture for the first time,” said Ms. Sussman. “It was a transformation to hear them talk about believing in themselves and speaking up for themselves. Now they understand they are not defined by their families. They see the opportunities out there, and they believe they have the skills to make it happen.”

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At the end of the 2012-13 school year, 83 percent of students reported improved motivation, and 81 percent reported reduced stress. Seventy-three percent said their academic confidence had increased and they felt more connected to others, 61 percent said that education was more important to them than before, and 60 percent reported improved feelings of well-being.

### **Success Highways Resiliency Post-Test, Spring 2013**

