

Great Expectations

The Great Expectations Foundation was founded in 1991 by Charlie Hollar, a retired insurance executive from Ponca City. Great Expectations dedicated itself to developing a teacher training model and disseminating this information to teachers throughout Oklahoma. To sum up the Great Expectations philosophy about children, education reform, and the program itself, the Foundation adopted a slogan: "*Transforming Lives Through Education.*"

Great Expectations is research-based and multiple studies have demonstrated that full implementation of GE results in increased academic performance and attendance, and in a reduction of discipline referrals. Oklahoma City Public Schools selected Great Expectations as their school reform model and over 1,625 OKCPS teachers have attended GE Methodology since June of 2010. The first 28 schools to receive the GE Intervention demonstrated academic and behavioral gains after only one year of implementation. In addition, Dr. Ron Ferguson, Harvard researcher, is conducting two studies on the impact of GE training on teachers' perceptions and actual practices in the classroom. Three additional research projects can be found on the GE Website.

During the program's first six years, enrollment grew steadily to 775 participants. Workshops were free, funded through private donations. By 1998, the Great Expectations Board of Directors had convinced state legislators of the program's merit. Subsequently, they appropriated funds for Great Expectations scholarships. Even though the scholarships were limited, enrollment increased to 3,135 with institutes on two Oklahoma college campuses, Northeastern State University in Tahlequah and the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond. The next year, teachers and administrators lined up before dawn at the State Department of Education building vying for the coveted \$1,000 scholarships.

The Oklahoma legislature has continued to support the program on a limited basis; however tremendous program growth can be attributed more to the successes that teachers and students experience as the result of Great Expectations and the word-of-mouth advertisements of these successes. As of January 2011, 38,150 Oklahoma teachers have attended Great Expectations training.

Great Expectations is a professional development model founded on the fundamental beliefs that education is the key to solving the problems of our society, educators want to become more skilled in their quest to educate students, and students want to learn. The founders of GE believe, while there is ample talk of educational reform, not enough is being done to positively affect student achievement.

The main objectives of GE are to increase students' self-esteem, intellectual knowledge, and social competencies. To accomplish this, GE focuses on the transformation of educators (through training) and the transformation of schools (through organizational change). GE strives to help educators re-examine their teaching methods and interactions with students as well as to assist them in redefining their values and beliefs about student learning.

GE training provides educators with the skills needed to create harmony and excitement within the school atmosphere- elements that are basic for inspiring students to pursue academic excellence. With a focus on the human quality of teaching and learning, GE provides renewal and inspiration for educators who may have lost their way and forgotten why they became an educator in the beginning.

Drawing from many effective, time-honored principles and learning theories in the education of students, training is grounded in the belief that all students can learn, no matter what labels are placed on them. Rather than teaching WHAT to teach, GE methodology focuses on the learning climate and the HOW of teaching.

GE training helps educators understand that their attitude creates the "weather" in their classrooms. GE trains educators to accept the responsibility to find a way to reach every student. GE also helps educators understand that building self-esteem and motivation are the keys to helping students believe they are capable of learning.

GE trains educators to set high expectations for students, and to intrinsically inspire and motivate students to reach upward to attain them. A climate of mutual respect must be established that empowers students to take necessary risks to grow academically and to be willing to make a few mistakes in order to do so. Mistakes are regarded as opportunities to learn in a GE classroom, and students' ideas and efforts are valued and appreciated.

Great Expectations Methodology is taught in four-day training sessions called GE Institutes. The Summer Institutes are for elementary educators and for middle and high school teachers. Multiple sessions of these Institutes are offered throughout the state of Oklahoma and throughout the months of June and July. In January and February of 2011, a Winter Institute was created for 350 OKCPS teachers. Fall Institutes are utilized to teach newly hired teachers.

In addition to training, other GE program elements support implementation efforts. These include eight full-time mentors who work with schools to facilitate application, follow-up training sessions during the school year, and opportunities to communicate and interact with like-minded educators across the state. GE also offers Leadership Development Training for school and district leaders. This 8-day training can be brought directly to the school district to allow large teams of district leaders to experience the training together. Great Expectations Regional Conferences are also held in the fall and in the winter/early spring.

Great Expectations is a research based professional development program that provides educators with the tools to transform the delivery of instruction. Great Expectations is truly "*Transforming Lives Through Education.*"