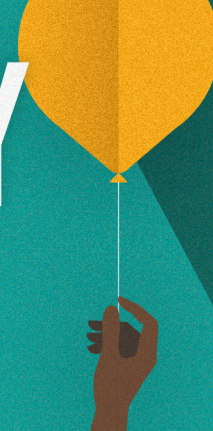# THE OPPORTUNITY MYTH

Action Guide: Teachers

As a teacher, you have the opportunity to change the life trajectories of students. Ninety-three percent of students we surveyed believe their teachers expect them to learn a lot. But with this incredible power to affect students' lives, you're also under incredible pressure. Many of the challenges we identified in The *Opportunity Myth* are the responsibility of school and system leaders to address, from providing strong instructional materials to supporting teachers to use those materials effectively with all students. None of that is on teachers' shoulders alone. But there are also steps you can take as a teacher—even in the absence of other stakeholders—that will go a long way toward improving students' daily experiences.

Here are some tools to get there, and more. This is not a checklist. Rather, it is a collection of resources to support doable change in your practice, classroom, and school environment as you work to implement *The Opportunity Myth's* recommendations:

RECOMMENDATION 1:
Ask students and families directly about their goals and school experiences; listen to what they share; and then act on what they tell you.

Develop a process to learn about your students' academic and career goals and proactively discuss these goals with your students' family members. Regularly reference these goals throughout the year and be prepared to speak to students and their families during parent-teacher conferences about whether they are on track to reach their goals. If you aren't supported in doing so, talk to your administration and other educators, including your union, to advocate for the resources to do this effectively. Here are some examples of schools doing this well using doable structures.

Improve transparency with students and families about academic progress. In addition to grades, offer your students and their parents clear information about how those grades reflect students' mastery of grade-level standards. This might mean working with your school leadership and parent representatives to pilot new report cards, or using parent-teacher conferences to explain how on-track students are (even in the younger grades) to graduate from high school ready for college and careers of their choice.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Make access to grade-appropriate assignments an urgent priority for all students, no matter what their race, income level, or current performance level.

Build your knowledge of grade-level standards (as well as those in the grades above and below yours) and look at high-quality examples of student assignments, either independently or with your peers. These content guides are a useful resource, as is our student work library.

Assess how your current assignments stack up. Collect at least a week's worth of assignments from your classroom, compare these to benchmarks for each grade level using a tool like our student work protocol and student work library, and then assess how much time your students are spending on grade-appropriate work.

Consistently provide your students access to grade-appropriate assignments. To get there, use our instructional materials decision guide to determine the quality of your current materials and the best way to make sure your students consistently receive grade-appropriate assignments in your classroom.

Continue to assess the quality of assignments your students are experiencing to make sure you're providing all students with grade-appropriate assignments on a daily basis. Our student work protocols and student work library can help you continue to monitor this progress throughout the year.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Give all students, especially those who are behind grade level, access to instruction that asks them to think and engage deeply with challenging material.

Assess how your current instruction stacks up. Use our observation protocols as a reflection tool, asking yourself how often your students do the thinking—or try TeachFX or another free app to track how often you are talking in class compared to your students.

Ask your students to fill out a brief engagement survey. Use this survey to collect information on students' levels of engagement during lessons every day for a week, then reflect on what that data tells you about how engaged your students are in your classes.

Set up a safe, motivating classroom culture. Work to create a motivating classroom culture where students feel like they belong, have a sense of purpose and relevance, and believe that mistakes are opportunities to learn and grow. Make sure that you have set clear expectations to create a classroom where students are respectful, active, and

collaborative. Provide students with tasks and leadership opportunities that encourage them to build connections between content and their own experiences, and work to ensure that they build the learning mindsets they need to be successful throughout their school experiences.

Focus on delivering lessons in a way that puts most of the thinking work on students. Use the strategies in our toolkit to get started.

Proactively prepare to support your students who are behind in accessing grade-level content. Supporting students who are behind grade level to engage with grade-level content is incredibly challenging, and we know that teachers often don't have the tools or support to do so. Rather than giving these students below-grade-level content, use these scaffolding strategies to support all your students in accessing grade-level content.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Ensure educators have high expectations for student success by seeing firsthand that students are capable of succeeding with more rigorous material.

Reflect on your expectations for student success. Use this reflection protocol to explore where you might be inadvertently lowering expectations for some students.