

Don't Give Up On Them

By Terry Bradley

“Hi Mrs. Bradley. I don't know if you remember me, but....”

If only Liam knew that I've thought about him many times over the years, wondering what became of him since I last saw him at school. Liam was a gifted student who had troubling family issues, was very disengaged in school, and his parents divorced and they both moved out of state his senior year of high school. He stayed in CO, and slipped further and further away, and into a corrupt lifestyle. School and its requirements were not of value or importance to him during his high school years. But I didn't give up on him. We had frequent meetings because I cared about Liam's well being, and I wanted him to know I was an adult he could talk to. Our common ground, and a topic we defaulted to was an interest in music.

“When I was in Fairview, you were my greatest ally among the staff, and your resourcefulness and dedication to the well being of your students are why I thought you should be the recipient of this email. I hope you are well, thank you :)”

Sometimes you think you're not taking a difference, but you are. Some days you feel like your advice and suggestions to a student are going in one ear and out the other. You wonder how you can better connect with someone to make them see the value in passing a class, or caring about getting a high school diploma.

Schools want their students to succeed, so we provide opportunities for success such as: credit recovery, partial credit, second and third chances on assignments, allowing students to turn in summative assignments and not formative ones, giving extra time, offering online class options, allowing them to take a class over, making ourselves available during office hours or after school... all options to basically push them across the finish line.

These are very helpful to many students. But not to all. Not to Liam. Not to a student who doesn't want to help themselves. We can't always save all of our students, and they just have to save themselves. When they're ready. In their own time.

“I am reaching out to you because I'm in college now at Front Range, where they divide calculus into three semesters of work, and after my first semester I decided that I wanted to skip the other two.”

Liam got his GED, cleaned up his lifestyle, got a job making honest money, moved in with a friend who had also cleaned up his act, started taking classes at a Community College. He contacted me to see if I had any suggestions of how he could test out of a year of Calculus, as he read ahead, and was already a year beyond the others in his class. My school agreed to let him take the Calc test with our current students.

His goal is to move to Germany, where education is free, get his degree in math or computer science, and then get a job. The fact that he has goals at all is such a change from the high school version of who he was. That Liam hated school, didn't see the value in an education for himself, rebelled against the system, and was an angry young man who self-medicated to escape all the pressures put on him.

“Since beginning to study the textbook two weeks ago, I am almost done with the required material for calculus part II out of III, and will be more than ready to take an exam by the first of next month.”

Many of our gifted kids are capable of doing this in areas of interest. They can compact the curriculum and work far ahead of others in the class. It often becomes a situation of providing the opportunities they need and removing any barriers that would keep them from their goal.

“There is, unfortunately, no placement test or other means by which to skip even a single semester of calculus provided by front range, so the mathematics supervisor (chair, director?) advised me to take an AP test. I neither know whether it would be possible to attempt such an exam at Fairview, nor whom to contact in order to make an appointment.”

I contacted the people in my school that could make this happen for Liam, and they did. I was so glad that this unusual request could be granted for Liam.

“I would always like to catch up. I don't really have any guidance to speak of at the moment save my own intuition and meager experience, so a chat would be very refreshing, wherever your schedule permits of course :)”

moral = don't ever lose hope in students that come into your life. You may think they're wasting your time, total slackers, or entirely disengaged in school, but you just never know what may come of the time that you spend with them.