

# Promoting Student Success through Self-Regulation and Work Habits

Promoting Academic and Personal Behaviors at  
School for Classics: An Academy of Thinkers, Writers and Performers  
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## Academic Behaviors Guides: An Introduction

In the 2012-13 school year, the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) laid out, for the first time, a set of academic and personal behaviors critical for New York City’s public school students to be college and career ready. Based on a growing body of research that demonstrates the critical nature of a set of skills and mindsets to successful learning, the NYCDOE identified persistence, academic engagement, communication and collaboration, work habits and organization, and self-regulation as key to student success.

In addition to identifying the importance of these skills and behaviors, the NYCDOE committed to exploring how its schools are developing effective resources and scaffolds to address them. Working with Eskolta, the NYCDOE launched the Academic Behaviors Pilot with five schools—two middle schools, two high schools, and one transfer school. These schools engaged in an inquiry process whereby they simultaneously studied their existing efforts to promote academic behaviors and set out to deepen those efforts through new practices.

From this work, the NYCDOE and Eskolta jointly published a series of four guides. Each guide highlights a set of practices at one school: a student “desktop rubric” at School for Classics; a system for assessing and giving feedback on key student behaviors and mindsets at Soundview Academy for Scholarship and Culture; lessons that integrate writing and exploration of self-identity at New York City Lab Middle School; and a series of activities for students to reflect on off-site internships at Flushing International High School.

This publication shares resources and materials from School for Classics: An Academy of Thinkers, Writers and Performers. It is designed to highlight specific steps and materials that the school has used in its efforts to promote academic and personal behaviors, making these accessible for other schools and educators to adapt to their needs. Each guide also provides background context on the school to help readers understand the way in which school structures and culture enabled the effective development and deployment of the work.

In sharing these resources, we hope to further reflection on and discussion of the academic and personal behaviors and their critical role in our schools. We welcome educators’ comments and feedback on this important work for New York City’s children, and look forward to much-needed attention to these critical skills and behaviors in our public schools.

Sincerely,

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## Academic and Personal Behaviors: Self-Regulation and Work Habits

The NYC Department of Education has identified five key academic behaviors critical to college and career readiness: persistence, engagement, communication and collaboration, work habits and organization, and self-regulation. At School for Classics, staff are working to promote self-regulation and work habits as supports for student success in academia and life. This guide provides detailed information about an in-class rubric designed to help students monitor their own habits and practice active self-control strategies as they work.

Harvard University researchers Mandy Savitz-Romer and Suzanne Bouffard (2012) draw on the principles of developmental psychology to consider how schools can better support adolescents in developing the academic and personal behaviors critical to success in college and career. Their research highlights the importance of creating opportunities for students to develop self-regulatory skills, such as managing feelings and impulses, and using time effectively. These skills are critical for managing the competing demands of college life and overcoming obstacles. This emphasis on self-regulation maps onto the New York City Department of Education’s focus on the academic and personal behaviors of **work habits** and **self-regulation**.

Students with strong **work habits** are able to work independently and organize their time and effort effectively. At School for Classics, the Student Success Rubric explicitly references these skills, prompting students to reflect on whether and how they are managing their time,

<b>This Guide focuses on two of the five NYC Department of Education Academic and Personal Behaviors</b>
Persistence
Engagement
Collaboration & Communication
<b>Work Habits &amp; Organization</b>
<b>Self-Regulation</b>

According to NYCDOE:  
**Strong work habits** and organizational skills support successful navigation of college and careers.

**Self-Regulation** is key to resiliency. Students must develop coping skills, self-control, and confidence to work through challenges.

interacting with their peers, and working on their own.

**Self-regulation**, more broadly, entails cultivating the self-control and confidence necessary to work through challenges. Students with self-regulatory skills are able to problem-solve when working alone or in a group, control strong emotions, and behave appropriately in a variety of situations. Research suggests that a critical component of self-regulation is the metacognitive awareness necessary to reflect on and critique one's own behavior. At School for Classics, the Student Success Rubric prompts students to reflect on their in-class behavior and problem-solving, thereby ensuring self-regulatory skills are a constant focus of students’ in-class experiences.

# Supporting Students with Self-Regulation and Work Habits with an In-Class Rubric

## Supporting Students with Self-Regulation and Work Habits

### Objectives

This manual offers ideas to create a rubric so that:

1. Teachers have established clear norms for in-class behavior for students.
2. Teachers have a clear routine in place for supporting students' focus on key academic behaviors and redirecting behavior as needed.
3. Students know the behaviors that lead to success in class.
4. Students develop self-regulatory skills by consistently and frequently referencing and reflecting on those behaviors, both in the moment and through written reflections.

### Key Academic and Personal Behaviors

1. Self-regulation
2. Work habits

**A tool for both students and teachers.** To succeed academically, students need to have the ability to check in on their focus, effort, and behavior in class. In addition, to manage their classrooms, teachers need convenient tools to help them monitor and provide feedback on student behavior.

At School for Classics, the Student Success Rubric scaffolds students' development of self-regulation, providing clear guidelines for student behavior in class and simple mechanisms with which teachers and students can check in on behaviors. By creating a tool

#### Introducing Classics:

School for Classics, which serves 323 high school students in the East New York section of Brooklyn, opened in 2009. The school's full name is the "School for Classics: An Academy of Thinkers, Writers and Performers." In keeping with this title, the school's mission asserts that it seeks to support students in becoming critical thinkers; writers equipped to express themselves with logic, clarity, and precision; and speakers able to express themselves eloquently and articulately.

In support of this mission, School for Classics offers extensive opportunities for students to engage in the performing arts, as well as rigorous academic coursework, including Advanced Placement classes. In a testament to the school's commitment to the arts, all students take introductory theater classes in their first year, and every student participates in yearly dramatic productions.

that both teachers and students use, School for Classics helps students improve their self-regulatory skills with external supports and internal reflection.

**Developing the Student Success Rubric.** In the 2010-11 school year, staff at School for Classics created what they termed the “desktop rubric.” “We were interested in coming up with something school-wide that we could use to help the kids self-assess” and self-regulate, Jennifer Goldberg, School for Classics’ in-house Staff Developer explains. “It was evident with the Danielson [*Framework for Teaching*, a research-based rubric for assessing teacher development] we would need something like that in place” to ensure students were monitoring their own learning, she adds.

With this in mind, Goldberg and her colleagues created a rubric that prompted students to reflect in class on their completion and understanding of their work, as well as their ability to explain key concepts to others. During the 2012-2013 school year, Goldberg, along with the principal and two teachers, engaged in an inquiry process to further refine the rubric. They discussed the importance of asking students not only to monitor their learning, but also to assess whether their academic and personal behaviors were facilitating success. They worked together to revise the rubric and test it in their classrooms, including experimenting with the rubric as a tool for student self-assessment.

**Assessments suggest students at School for Classics are developing strong study skills, but need improvement in other areas.** During the second half of the 2012-2013 school year, the school administered the Engage assessment with a group of its students. Engage is an online assessment developed by the American College Testing organization (ACT) to assess students' self-reported psychosocial attributes as indicators of college readiness. The high school version of the assessment asks students to respond to approximately one hundred brief questions and provides nationally norm-referenced scores on ten behaviors: academic discipline, general determination, goal striving, commitment to college, study skills, communication skills, social connection, social activity, academic self-confidence, and steadiness.

The students at School for Classics scored above average for study skills (with 65% of students scoring above the national average), reporting that they possess the skills necessary to assess an academic problem, organize a solution, and successfully complete academic assignments. Students also scored higher than average for goal striving, with 60% of students scoring above average for this indicator. These results suggest that surveyed students have begun to develop the work habits that will support them in college. At the same time, surveyed students appeared to experience comparative difficulty with steadiness, communication skills, and social activity.

This suggests the importance of improving students' self-regulatory skills to in turn improve their ability to work in groups and manage conflict. The Student Success Rubric is intended to serve as a simple tool to help students manage and develop their work habits and ability to self-regulate. The lessons learned from the work at School for Classics are presented here.

## The Student Success Rubric

### Student Success Rubric

Skills for Success	Right now, I am...
<b>Completing the Task with Focus and Effort</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> I am focused on the task and working to the best of my ability. <input type="checkbox"/> I am listening to and following instructions. <input type="checkbox"/> I am supporting classmates if <u>needed and appropriate</u> .
<b>Understanding and Explaining the Concept</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> I understand the concept, <i>or</i> I have asked for help if I need it. <input type="checkbox"/> I am participating in class discussion and group work/activities. <input type="checkbox"/> I can think of ways to explain this concept to others, and apply it.
<b>Making Positive Choices</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> I am ready to learn and to work. <input type="checkbox"/> I know what I am expected to be doing right now. <input type="checkbox"/> I am respecting the learning of others.

## Strategies for Using the Student Success Rubric

### Strategies for Using the Student Success Rubric

The Student Success Rubric lists a few clear, critical academic behaviors. For the rubric to be an effective youth development tool, it should help students internalize the expectations it sets forth and embody its behaviors. At the same time, the rubric's presence in the classroom should help teachers routinely communicate the importance of these core academic behaviors and provide a common language for talking about the behaviors. To support student internalization and teacher communication, staff at School for Classics recommend that other schools use the following strategies.

**Devote time at the beginning of the year to introduce the rubric in the context of your class.** For students to internalize the language of the rubric, introduce it in on the first day of class within the context of each individual class. When introducing it, engage students in thinking about three things.

- **How the various indicators differ from each other.** Students may initially struggle to understand that the various indicators—such as “I am ready to learn and to work” and “I am respecting the learning of others”—represent discrete skills within each domain. Helping students unpack the difference between the different indicators engages them in reflecting on the indicators and how they look in class. Ask students to offer examples of different indicators; for example, you might ask students to compare what “supporting classmates if needed and appropriate” looks like with “participating in class discussion and group work/activities.”

### Considering Variations

If you like the idea of the Student Success Rubric but want to consider other indicators or skills to measure, consider incorporating the following indicators into a rubric. These are based on questions used in psychometric studies in the fields of human development and psychology.

#### Persistence

- I'm sticking with work even when it is hard.
- I'm finishing every assignment.
- I'm working as hard as possible.
- I'm working on things until I get them right.
- When something is difficult, I'm putting in extra effort.
- I'm improving my ability through effort.
- I'm trying problems I don't know how to solve.
- I'm doing more than is expected.
- I'm sticking to the goals I set.
- I'm re-reading if I need to.

#### Engagement

- I'm starting every assignment right away.
- I'm trying to answer all of the questions asked in class.
- I'm working on improving my skills in class.
- I'm trying to learn everything I can.
- I'm thinking about what others say.
- I see how our learning fits with the real world.
- I'm having fun.
- I'm asking myself questions to help with my learning.

#### Communication/Collaboration

- I'm asking for help when I need it.
- I'm asking questions when I don't understand.
- I'm encouraging my classmates to work.
- I'm doing my part in group work.

- I'm disagreeing well with others

#### Self-Regulation

- I have enough energy to get work done.
- I completed yesterday's work.
- I know what I have to do for tomorrow.
- I'm finishing work outside of class.
- I'm solving problems that come up in class.

#### Work Habits/Organization

- I'm double-checking my work before handing it in.
- I'm breaking down difficult problems into manageable tasks.
- I'm taking good notes on readings or lecture.
- I use information resources.
- I have a plan to get my work done.

#### Making Visual and Verbal References to the Rubric

In Sarah Billings-Wheeler's dance class, a large, laminated copy of the rubric is posted on her wall. Sarah's class is dynamic and engaging, with students frequently working in small groups to choreograph or practice dance steps. As students make the transition from warm-up activities to group work, Billings-Wheeler is able to reference the rubric. "Remember, I expect you all to be supporting each other with this project," she says, gesturing toward the poster. "That means staying engaged and focused on developing your choreography."

- **How the various indicators "look" in the context of your class.** Different behaviors look different in different contexts, and often with good reason. In a science lab class, for example, "participating in class discussion and group work/activities" will likely look different than in a discussion-based English class. Helping students see what each indicator looks like in a given classroom will give them the context necessary to reflect on how behavior should change in unique environments. Use modeling or role play to make these classroom expectations real and memorable for students.

- **How the rubric can serve as a tool to self-assess.** Provide examples of how students will use the rubric to assess their own understanding, behavior, and focus in that particular class. For example, in a science class, a teacher might point out that the rubric is a tool for groups to use during lab projects to assess whether they are staying on-task. A math teacher might highlight how the rubric can help students monitor their own understanding and focus during individual work on math skills.

#### Reinforce use of the rubric daily through visual and verbal reminders.

After introducing the rubric at the beginning of the year, it is critical to continue its use in conversations with students. By making it easy to regularly refer to the rubric, you enable students to gain familiarity with its expectations through repetition. Over time, this leads to internalization.

- **Post a large version of the rubric on the wall**

and refer to it when establishing expectations for group or independent work. For example, when facilitating transitions from one activity to the next, reference the rubric by saying, "Make sure you're all making positive choices as you move into your groups."

- **Post laminated copies of the rubric on students' desks** to serve as a constant visual reminder of expectations. Students can then refer easily to the language of the rubric and use it for individual communication with the teacher.

- **Reference the exact language of the rubric verbally** (whether posted on the wall or on students' desks) when conferencing with or cueing students. For example, if individual or small groups of students appear to be struggling to stay on-task, circulate to them, refer to the rubric, and ask, "Are you ready to learn and to work?"

#### Reinforce use of the rubric daily through targeted planning and modeling.

In addition to using the rubric as a visual and verbal reminder, plan lessons in ways that incorporate these skills. Treat the rubric as a set of standards for instruction that are taught and assessed in class.

- **Provide specific praise when students exhibit the skills in the rubric.** The rubric calls out behaviors that demonstrate focus, effort, a growth mindset, understanding of the concepts being taught, and positive decision-making. When teachers see examples of these behaviors in class—such as students collaborating especially well in a group or several students staying attentive and engaged during individual work time—they can highlight these behaviors, relate them to the rubric, and make note of them.

- **Create opportunities to practice the skills in the rubric by planning frequent collaborative activities.** While the rubric can apply to individual or group activities, some indicators relate specifically to collaboration and communication. For students to practice those skills, they need opportunities to engage in complex projects with their peers. It is important to recognize that these skills do not come naturally, and thus need to be taught. Carefully build in scaffolding to practice skills such as asking peers for ideas, explaining concepts to peers, reviewing instructions with peers, and staying focused in groups.

#### Use the rubric as a tool for formative self-assessment.

Using the rubric for student self-assessment demonstrates that these skills are integral to students' academic experiences and affords students the opportunity to reflect on their development of those skills. Students can use this self-assessment to communicate their need for assistance to the teacher.

### Integrating the Rubric into Classroom Management

Nicole Tancredi, a social studies teacher at School for Classics, has built the rubric into her approach to classroom management and teacher-student communication. At each group of desks, students have access to a supply box that includes laminated circles with the numbers “1” through “4” written on them. If students find they are struggling to understand a concept during classwork, they will pull out a “1” or “2” and place this next to the rubric row for “Understanding and explaining the concept.”

“At this point, I don’t even need to prompt the kids to use it to reflect on their comprehension,” Nicole explains. “They just know that if they’re having a hard time, they can indicate that with a number and I’ll come over and see what they need.”

- **Explicitly reflect on skills.** With exit tickets or as a one-minute formative assessment during class, ask students to engage in metacognitive reflection on the skills. For example, ask them to check off which indicators they think they met that day, to grade themselves in one (or more) of the three areas, or to select one indicator in which they excelled that day and one that was a challenge and justify their response.

- **Use the rubric to request assistance.** Some teachers at School for Classics use the rubric as a tool for students to signal their need for assistance or guidance from teachers. The teacher provides each student or group of students with cards numbered 1-4 (or simply three colors: red, yellow, and green) and at the beginning of the course introduces how to use the cards. Students can use the number cards to non-verbally signal the need for assistance in a specific area by placing an appropriate number or color (such as “1,” “2,” or “red”) in the applicable row of the rubric. Such a system creates a non-disruptive mechanism for students to ask for help and provides communication options for quiet students.

### Works Cited

Savitz-Romer, Mandy, and Suzanne Bouffard. *Ready, Willing, and Able: A Developmental Approach to College Access and Success*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2012.