



Educators must better identify students' motivations

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“When it comes to the best way to measure a student’s academic progress, there aren’t a lot of easy answers,” Aaron Mudd noted in Sunday’s Daily News.

I could not agree more. And while I applaud the ongoing efforts to improve our schools, I continue to believe we are overlooking the most important consideration in determining success.

See if you can relate to this:

Several years ago, I was sitting at the kitchen table helping my oldest son with his homework. I distinctly recollect having to show him where Brazil was on the same map three times over the course of an hour.

I also remember thinking to myself, “This is pretty straightforward stuff; why can’t he seem to grasp it? Hmmm ... maybe there is something he’ll be able to do some day.”

In short, I had concluded my son wasn’t very smart.

It did not take me very long, however, to figure out that I was wrong. After we had finished his homework, he asked me that proverbial question, “Can I play my video game now?”

Well guess what? Within five minutes, he was on Level 15. He knew what was behind every rock and tree on the screen and he could recall how far he got the last time he played this particular game – which was over six months ago.

He even knew something called “cheat codes.”

In short, my son now seemed like a genius. I clearly remember thinking “med school.”

So what had changed? Had his IQ really gone up that much?

Of course not. The only thing that had changed was his attitude and motivation.

Until educators get a better handle on how to measure this critical variable, I’m afraid we’ll never be able to significantly improve student and institutional outcomes.

And it can be done.

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