
MUSICAL MOTIVATION FOR TEST-TAKING

Hardy Elementary School Chattanooga, Tennessee

Artists in the local music industry lent their talents and inspiration to motivate students at Hardy Elementary School to aim high on the state standardized tests. They created a song that became such a hit that it had to be shared with the ten other underperforming schools in Hamilton County.

A study of Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program scores released a year ago showed that Hamilton County students declined slightly in the areas of reading, language, science, and social studies over a three-year period. Sixth graders posted lower percentile scores in every subject than they had as fourth and fifth graders. Reading scores dropped in every grade level with nearly all falling below the national percentile median. The 1999-2000 Terra Nova test revealed Hardy Elementary was 1.5 to 2.5 years behind in reading and language.

To combat test anxiety a slogan, chant or song was suggested to rally the students, parents and teachers toward a common goal of student success during Terra Nova state testing. Mr. Valitus F. Edwards Sr. coined the phrase, “We Won’t Stop (Until We Get to the Top),” to get the process started. In addition to being the Curriculum Support Specialist at Hardy, Mr. Edwards sings with a group called Love, Peace & Happiness. The group’s guitarist, Frederick McIntosh, transformed the mental vision into a musical interpretation. From there the keyboard player, David Woods, added his musical genius to make the crude lyrics appealing to both students and parents. Mr. Woods was able to cut production costs seventy-five percent by doing a lot of the recording in his home studio. Ralph Chislom, who owns RC Recording and Production Studio, took a substantial cut from his usual charge to polish up the song and give it commercial appeal. The vocalists for the group, Lutrell Brown, Kenneth Parks, and Mr. Edwards performed the vocals under the direction of Mr. Woods.

Hardy’s principal and several teachers received a copy of the CD. They enjoyed the song so much that they asked Mr. Edwards to perform the song during a school program. The school provided a CD of the song and a lyric sheet to all of the teachers at Hardy with instructions for them use it in the classroom as a motivational tool.

Hardy's business partner, Palo Duro Records agreed to offer each Hardy student a free CD. Even more, they gave free CDs to all students attending the other ten underperforming schools in Hamilton County. Palo Duro Records duplicated 5000 free CDs and distributed them to students before the state testing.

It was hoped that a song with a positive message could be acted out in a positive way. "We Won't Stop (Until We Get to the Top)" was written to motivate students to look inside themselves to define their personal success. The song states, "You want to be the best that you can be, ... look inside yourself, motivation is the key."

A first-grade teacher at Hardy said, "I discussed with my students the meaning behind the song. As a team, students and staff aren't going to stop giving their best until we raise our test scores. We played the CD to get us motivated and 'pumped.'"

Woodmore Elementary School principal described, "We planned an entire week of motivational and inspirational activities to encourage our students to open their full reservoir of energy and knowledge. The CD, "We Won't Stop (Until We Get to the Top)" was played daily during our pretest time. The students loved it! Parents came to school commenting on how their children were never before so motivated for the test. They informed me that everyone in the family was singing "We Won't Stop." We expect to get to the top. We want to adopt the song as our school song."

Woodmore Elementary had a writing contest about what the song meant to the students. Students wrote:

- "I like the song, and my family too. I especially liked it during Terra Nova because it got me motivated. It gets my mom ready for work in the morning. Every morning I wake up the first thing I hear is... "We Won't Stop!" It's a real heart warmer and motivator."
- "Mr. Edwards, I admire that song to death. I listen to it just about every day. It encourages me to go to school and work hard, and get good grades."
- "My goal for me is to make my family proud. The top for me is to become what I want to be without having to do wrong things in my life."

According to one Hardy Elementary student, “I might not be the best, but I can try. When we were taking the Terra Nova test on mathematics I thought about this song and it made me feel good. If you hear this song it will make you feel like your life got easier.” Parents saw the changes: “The CD affected my two children. Instead of the tension that can go with testing, they were filled with a sense of achievement and accomplishment.”

“We Won’t Stop (Until We Get to the Top)” is an innovative communication tool that connects students, teachers, and parents around the common goal of raising test scores. The motivational music creates positive feelings towards assessment and achievement.

Note: CDs may be purchased by sending a \$10 check or money order to: We Won’t Stop Fund, 3511 East Crest Drive, Chattanooga TN, 37406.

Valitus F. Edwards, Sr., Curriculum Support Specialist
(423) 493-0301

“We Won’t Stop (Until We Get to the Top)”

By Valitus F. Edwards and David Woods

Chorus:

We won’t stop, we won’t stop,
We won’t stop until we get to the top.
We won’t stop, we won’t stop,
We won’t stop, until we get to the top.

1st Verse:

Now don’t you ever stop, until you reach the top
Keep this notion with your motion
Don’t you ever let it drop.
I know you want to be the best that you can be,
Let me tell you from the start
Motivation is the key.
Just keep the faith inside you, control your destiny.
Take advantage of your chances and every opportunity.
You want to know what you can do
To make your dreams come true?
Keep your head up to the sky
And it will come to you.

Chorus:

2nd Verse:

Now don’t ever let them tell you - what you can never be.
Don’t ever listen to any negativity.
There are those in darkness who think that they are lost.
There are those who say a bridge cannot be crossed.
Some will often tell you what you can never achieve
Don’t you ever pay them no mind as long as you believe.
I know you want to be the best that you can be
Let me tell you from the start,
Motivation is the key.

Chorus:

Bridge:

You can be anything you want to be
Don’t limit yourself to any small degree
Just be determined, when you make up your mind.
Success is waiting for you,
Success is what you’ll find.

Narrative:

You want to be the best that you can be,
Then make be what you want to see.
What you need, if you’re asking me.
Look inside yourself
Motivation is the key.
You want to know what you can do,
If you want to make all those dreams come true.
You can control your destiny
Look inside yourself
Motivation is the key.

Chorus:

Fade.....